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Study Status

In Progress

Study Type

Quasi-experimental Analysis

Sample Size

1.5 million students

The Impact of Native Language-Based Education on Learning in Multilingual Contexts: Evidence from the Philippines

Researchers in the Philippines collaborated with IPA and the Department of Education to evaluate the impact of a nationwide native language-based education policy on students' standardized test scores and longer-term human capital development outcomes.

According to UNESCO, 221 million children worldwide are estimated to speak a different language at home from the language of instruction in their school.¹ This mismatch may create inequalities in access to learning in early childhood, stigma, and marginalization. An increasing number of countries in Asia have started to implement native language-based multilingual education policies to address these issues.² In theory, learning in the native language may facilitate cognitive skills development in early grades, which may in turn improve the learning of a second language and the development of such acquired skills in the second language. However, evidence from Kenya and Ethiopia has shown mixed results of mother-tongue policies on literacy outcomes in students' second language.³

The Philippine Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) was initiated in the 2012-2013 school year as part of the Department of Education's Enhanced Basic Education Program initiatives, shifting schools' language of instruction from a bilingual system of English and Filipino to students' local mother tongue. Under this policy, students learn basic numeracy and literacy skills in their mother tongue from kindergarten to Grade 3 before switching back to the "dominant" languages from Grade 4 onwards. Because the Philippines is a linguistically diverse country—with over 100 languages—a total of 19 languages are

recognized under the MTB-MLE policy implemented by the Department of Education.

Researchers partnered with IPA and the Department of Education to evaluate the impact of the MTB-MLE policy on students' standardized test scores. They measured the differences in test scores between schools whose medium of instruction changed as a result of the policy to a mother tongue by measuring the differences between schools whose medium other than Tagalog and schools in Tagalog areas that did not switch their medium of instruction as a result of the policy.

Researchers collected standardized test score data from grade 3 and grade 6 between 2009 and 2018 (approximately 1.5 million students); data on student characteristics like their mother tongue; and data from a nationwide survey of schools including each's school medium(s) of instruction, and whether or not English, Filipino, or other languages are used as a secondary medium of instruction. To measure the long-term effects of the policy change, researchers collected census data from 2010 (pre-policy) and 2020 (post-policy) to construct measures of completed years of education and grade-in-age progression at the individual level relying on variation in school medium of instruction by birth cohort, municipality of birth and census round.

Results will be available in 2024.

Sources

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Education for all global monitoring report 2010: Reaching the marginalized. Paris, FR: UNESCO, 2010.
2. Malone, Susan. MTB MLE resource kit: Including the excluded: promoting multilingual education. Bangkok, TH: UNESCO, 2018.
3. Argaw, Bethlehem. "Quasi-experimental evidence on the effects of mother tongue-based education on reading skills and early labour market outcomes." ZEW-Centre for European Economic Research Discussion Paper 16-016 (2016).

Piper, Benjamin, Stephanie S. Zuilkowski, and Salome Ong'ele. "Implementing mother tongue instruction in the real world: Results from a medium-scale randomized controlled trial in Kenya." *Comparative Education Review* 60, no. 4 (2016): 776-807.

Implementing Partner



Department of Education of the Philippines (DepEd)