

**Researchers**

Thomas Lloyd  
University of Michigan

Dean Yang  
University of Michigan

**Staff**

Karisha Anne Cruz  
Senior Policy and Project Development Associate

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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)**