

Attitudes toward Mother Tongue and Academic Performance: Evidence from Monolingual Context in the Southern Philippines

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How to cite this paper:

Cahapay, M. B. (2020). Attitudes toward Mother Tongue and Academic Performance: Evidence from Monolingual Context in the Southern Philippines. *International Journal of Language Teaching and Education*, 4(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.22437/ijolte.v4i1.9174>

Received: February 02, 2020

Accepted: May 22, 2020

Published: July 31, 2020

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Abstract

The influence of language attitude on the academic achievement of young children in the monolingual context has not been explored. Thus, this research ascertained the degree of relationship between attitudes toward the mother tongue and the academic performance of the learners. It entailed correlation research design. The respondents were 20 Grade II pupils in a rural public school considered as monolingual in the southern Philippines. The data gathered were treated using frequency distribution, weighted mean, percentage rate, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. It was found out that there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward the mother tongue and the academic performance of learners. Amid the vast body of diverse researches in the area of language education, the present study weaves pieces of evidence that attitudes of learners toward mother tongue are associated with their academic performance in the context of a monolingual environment. It is suggested that such a conclusion should be further tested in other contexts.

Subject Areas

Mother Tongue Education

Keywords

Academic Performance, Language Attitude, Language Education Monolingual Context, Mother Tongue

1. Introduction

Scholars have often extolled, either directly or indirectly, the importance of the attitudes that learners hold toward the mother tongue as a facilitator to increased learning gain. The construct of language attitude, defined as the feelings people hold about a language, is often associated by scholars to different learning outcomes (Carrol, 1964; Gardner, 1985; Crystal, 1997; Dornyei, 2009). It appears, however, that an essential consideration that may have been overlooked in the entire equation of the discourse about the influence of attitudes toward mother tongue on the learning gains is the type of linguistic environment.

Comprehensive scholarly discussions have provided substantial attention to mother tongue education in the context of multilingualism that typically characterizes the communities in Southeast Asia and the Philippines (Teo, 2005; Mohanty, 2010; Tupas, 2015). However, despite the linguistic diversity taken in general and the exposure of learners to different languages, still, some communities as individual units are “almost” monolingual or linguistically homogeneous characterized by the presence of one dominant native language that is highly used by its people.

Moreover, a vast body of recent studies that investigated the language attitudes of learners is either fixed on mother tongue against the background of multilingualism, restricted on the learning of a particular foreign language, or unrelated to the possible learning gains of the learners (e.g. Hohenthal, 2003; Rahman, 2008; Chalak, & Kassaian, 2010; Galloway, 2011; Liu & Zhao, 2011; Bobkina, & Fernandez, 2012; Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, & Hossain, 2012; Yang, 2012; Asmari, 2013; Tahaine & Daana, 2013; Becker, 2014; Beyogle, 2014; Goktepe, 2014; Ahmed, 2015; Samadani & Ibnian, 2015; Agbalu, 2016; Deji-Afuye, 2016; Naima, 2017; Papapavlou & Mavromati, 2017; Salmon & Menjívar, 2017; Tódortodor & Dégi, 2017; Bouhmama & Dendane, 2018; Mäkelä & Posti, 2018; Mbato & Kharismawan, 2018; Teklesellassie & Boersma, 2018; Zebaria, Allob, & Mohammadzadehc, 2018; Dharmaputra, 2019; Nduwimana, 2019; Fischer & Niebuhr, 2020; Orfan, 2020; Tsunemoto & McDonough, 2020; Vennela & Kandharaja, 2020; Yilmaz, 2020).

There is a need to empirically explore how learners feel about their mother tongue and its association with their academic performance that is an immediate practical concern of most education stakeholders. Turning the situation multifaceted is the possible role of the linguistic environment, either multilingual or monolingual, where the mother tongue is being examined (Cholakova, 2015). This subtle aspect has been either disregarded or overlooked in many reviewed studies.

A study on the possible influence of attitudes toward mother tongue on the academic performance focused on the monolingual context will provide a new perspective of looking at mother tongue education. It may offer a basis to policymakers, curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers, and parents for considering the mother tongue as an effective language of instruction based on a particular linguistic environment. Thus, this study intended to determine the relationship between attitudes toward mother tongue and academic performance of monolingual children.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

The researcher found the correlation research as an appropriate design to accomplish the main purpose of this research. A correlation is a research design that describes the degree of association or relationship

between two or more variables (Creswell, 2012). This design helped this study accomplished its purpose to determine the relationship between the attitudes toward the mother tongue and the academic performance of the learners.

2.2. Respondents

The respondents of this study were 20 Grade II pupils enrolled in a public elementary school in the southern Philippines. They were officially enrolled during the school year 2013-2014, which was the onset stage of the implementation of mother tongue education in the country.

2.3. Setting

This scholarly investigation was conducted in a rural public elementary school in the southern Philippines. Though minimally exposed to second languages through media, the community where the school is located is considered monolingual. The large majority of the population speaks a common mother tongue.

2.4. Data Sources

An effective survey questionnaire formatted on a scale was used to measure the attitudes of learners toward the mother tongue. It was content validated by three experts in language education, elementary education, and child psychology to ensure the appropriateness of the items. A vernacular version was also prepared and furnished during the actual data collection process to ensure dependable responses from the respondents. On the other hand, the grade point average of the learners in the second grading period was collected from the class adviser to serve as data for the academic performance variable of this research. Consent from the teachers and parents were obtained as part of the ethical considerations of the research process.

2.5. Data Analysis

The gathered data for this research were treated using frequency distribution, weighted mean, and percentage rate. The association between attitudes toward mother tongue and academic performance was computed using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Correlation. The test was done at 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

3.1. Attitudes toward Mother Tongue

This study initially attempted to describe the attitudes of the learners toward the mother tongue. The result of the questionnaire survey is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Attitudes toward mother tongue.

Statement	Mean	Description
I like to communicate in my mother tongue every day.	4.60	Strongly Agree
I think mother tongue is superior to other languages.	3.85	Agree
I like to learn the mother tongue as a subject.	4.30	Agree
I am interested to read stories in the mother tongue.	3.95	Agree
I am excited about my mother tongue subject.	4.05	Agree
I believe I will get a good job if I speak the mother tongue.	3.70	Agree
I am proud if I excel in my mother tongue class.	3.85	Agree
I like to listen to mother tongue radio programs.	3.85	Agree
I admire my teacher in the mother tongue.	4.30	Agree
I desire to be in a group that speaks mother tongue.	4.15	Agree
I love to listen to songs in the mother tongue.	4.00	Agree
I believe the mother tongue is an important part of my life.	4.25	Agree
I feel superior when I speak the mother tongue.	4.05	Agree
I love to express my ideas in the mother tongue.	4.25	Agree
I appreciate people who speak the mother tongue.	4.00	Agree
I like to watch television programs in the mother tongue.	3.85	Agree
I am interested to join activities in the mother tongue.	4.30	Agree
I want to live with people who speak in the mother tongue.	4.00	Agree
I exert effort to improve proficiency in the mother tongue.	4.45	Agree
I love to read articles in the mother tongue	4.20	Agree
Overall Mean	4.09	Agree

N=20

As specifically rated by the learners, the data show that they like to communicate in mother tongue every day as manifested by the highest weighted mean it generated, which is 4.60, described as strongly agree. Meanwhile, the learners exert effort to improve their proficiency in mother tongue obtained a weighted mean of 4.45; like to learn mother tongue subject, 4.30; admire teacher in the mother tongue, 4.30; interested to join activities in the mother tongue, 4.30; believe mother tongue is important, 4.25; and love

to express ideas in the mother tongue, 4.25; all described as agreeing.

Furthermore, the learners desire to belong in a group that speaks mother tongue earned a weighted mean of 4.15; excited in mother tongue subject, 4.05; feel superior when they speak the mother tongue, 4.05; listen to songs in the mother tongue, 4.00; appreciate people who speak the mother tongue, 4.00; and want to live with people who speak in the mother tongue, 4.00; all described as agree. Moreover, the learners are interested to read stories in mother tongue got a weighted mean of 3.95; proud when they excel in mother tongue subject, 3.85; like to listen to radio programs in the mother tongue, 3.85; and like to watch television programs in the mother tongue, 3.85; all described as agree. Overall, the attitudes of the learners toward the mother tongue garnered an overall mean of 4.09, described as agreeing. This implies that they have a favorable attitude toward the mother tongue.

3.2. Academic Performance

Furthermore, this research attempted to describe the level of academic performance of the learners. The result of the secondary data review is shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Attitudes toward mother tongue.

Grade average	point	f	%	Description
90-100		0	0%	Advanced
85-89		10	50%	Proficient
81-85		8	40%	Approaching
75-80		2	10%	Developing
74 and below		0	0%	Beginning
Overall Mean			83.65	Approaching

N=20

Based on the record of grade point average for the second quarter of the school year gathered from the class adviser, ten learners (50%) got an academic achievement between 85-89, described as proficient. Meanwhile, eight learners (40%) earned a mastery level between 81-85, described as approaching proficiency. On the other hand, two learners (10%) on the record obtained a grade point average between 75-80, described as developing. Overall, the academic performance of the learners obtained an average of 83.65, described as approaching proficiency. This connotes that the learners have an average cognitive achievement.

3.3. Relationship between Attitudes toward Mother Tongue and Academic Performance

This research ultimately determined the relationship between attitudes toward mother tongue and academic performance. The result is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Relationship between attitudes toward mother tongue, and academic performance.

	Attitudes toward mother tongue
Academic performance	(r=0.52) 0.02*

* $p < .05$.

The result of correlation shows that attitudes toward mother tongue and academic performance of learners obtained an r-value of 0.52 with a p-value of 0.02, which is less than 0.05 significance. Based on the interpretation of tabulated values from ± 0.41 to ± 0.70 , this denotes marked correlation. This means that the attitudes of the learners toward the mother tongue have a significant positive relationship with their academic performance.

4. Discussion

The favorable attitudes of learners towards their language can be framed within the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory responds to how social identities of people influence their attitudes toward something in their group. The concept of social identities is believed to be most influential when people view their membership in a particular group to be essential to their identity, and they sense strong relations to the group (Leaper, 2011). Following this theory in the monolingual context of this study, it is expected that the learners who were mostly raised within their cultural group would have favorable attitudes toward their language.

Such propensity of learners to favor their language has been empirically reported in diverse contexts. For example, Liu and Zhao (2011) disclosed that mainland Chinese students considered their native language superior to other languages. On the other hand, Ibarraran, Lasagabaster, and Sierra (2008) revealed that immigrants in Spain, having been exposed to diverse linguistic context, possess attitudes towards their languages most positively. These studies support the result of the current paper, offering a common viewpoint that regardless of linguistic circumstances, there is a propensity for learners to hold desirable dispositions about their mother tongue.

Considering the Philippine context, there seems to be an ambivalent attitude toward the mother tongue when putting into the scene the second language that is part of the curriculum. Javier and Vicerra (2010) put forward that learners demonstrated high favor toward English as it is considered to be the language for economic advancement reasons. Thus, they prefer to get educated in English than in any language. On the other hand, Valerio (2015) found positive attitudes towards a particular language in different domains. While the learners have positive attitudes toward the English language as their second language, they also favored the use of the presumed mother tongue as the medium of communication during class discussions.

Moreover, the aspect of attitudes toward the mother tongue as a factor that influences academic performance contributes to the mentalist theory on language attitude. This theory presents three variables: the affective, the conative, and the cognitive (Lambert, 1967). This theory conceives language attitude as a predictor of behavior (Obiols 2002). Applied in this study, this theory can be reframed to envisage language attitude toward the mother tongue as a predictor of behavior such as performance in school.

This positive association between language attitude and academic performance has not gained many impressions in other language attitude theories. The construct of language attitude as associated to different learning outcomes has been discussed by Carrol (1964), Krashen (1982), Gardner (1985), and Dornyei (2009) but learning outcomes can be very broad to encompass not only grades, but also motivations, engagements, habits, and proficiency. Most of the mentioned scholars extensively focused on motivation and proficiency in language learning.

Bringing this discussion in language research, the same can be observed. For example, Richards (1998) claimed that the attitudes of learners towards the language itself could shape their motivations for learning. Other studies (e.g., Liu, 2009) have confirmed that positive attitudes towards a language usually lead to increased motivation to learn and higher proficiency in the language. But, once again, these studies do not point out the role of language attitudes to the learning outcomes as grade point average, which reflects many factors of student learning. Furthermore, Oribabor and Adesina (2013) found out that mother-tongue instruction aided learning better than foreign language as a medium of instruction among young learners. This has also been the position of the supporters of the mother tongue as a part of the basic education, claiming that children enjoy greater educational success from mother-tongue instruction (Naique, 2012) and enables them to immediately construct their world and articulate their thoughts (Nolasco, 2009).

In the Philippines, a pilot study on the effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction was reported by Dumatog and Dekker (2003). The results provided evidence on the positive performance of the learners who participated in the program. The learners who were taught in the mother tongue achieved remarkably better in five learning areas than the learners who were not taught in the mother tongue. While this conclusion may hold acceptable in many contexts, it does not explore if the language attitude of the learners, as an internal learner factor, does facilitate better grades in school.

As regards the possible role of the linguistic environment - monolingual or multilingual - in the level of language attitudes of the learners, current theories of language attitude have not explored this possible area. However, emerging theoretical interests have surfaced around this matter. For example, the paper of Jayasundara (2015) examines "the monolingual and bilingual child language acquisition on the theoretical concern and the varied language acquisition processes which reflect in the language competence of both monolingual and bilingual child" (p.31).

On the other hand, related studies have been undertaken to analyze the differences in language attitudes and academic performance with the linguistic environment as an arbitrating factor of interest. For example, Costley, Gkonou, Myles, Roehr-Brackin, & Tellier (2018) matched the attitudes and academic performance of the multilingual learners in the sample with the attitudes and academic performance of the monolingual learners. Their results indicated that the learners held very favorable attitudes towards learning the language. It was noted, though, that the monolingual group illustrated somewhat more variance than the multilingual learners. When it comes to academic performance, learners from both groups appeared to show similar levels of language proficiency. This time, the multilingual specifically displayed greater variance. This study offers a glimpse as to how the linguistic environment intervenes in language attitudes and academic performance of the learners.

Furthermore, Cholakova (2015) carried out an interesting comparative study on the influence of a foreign language in a multilingual and monolingual environment. The major results indicate that in a

monolingual environment, learners use the foreign language as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum and use it just when necessary, such as when they travel to another country. On the contrary, in a multilingual environment, students use foreign language extensively inside and outside the classroom. This study does not directly reveal the underlying attitudes of the learners toward their language, but it demonstrates how learners in a monolingual environment tend to restrict using a language that is not their own.

Weaving the pieces of evidence discussed above, the current body of literature supports that learners generally hold different attitudes toward languages, language attitudes contribute to learning outcomes, and the linguistic environment is an important consideration in language research. Amidst the vast body of diverse researches in the area of language education, the present study provides a piece of evidence that attitudes of learners toward mother tongue are associated with their academic performance in the context of a monolingual environment.

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5. Conclusion

This study showed the relationship between attitudes toward mother tongue and academic performance of learners in a monolingual environment. As a whole, it was revealed that there is a direct positive significant association between attitudes toward the mother tongue and the academic performance of the learners. It should be further noted that this result is gathered in a monolingual context. This work provides evidence to researchers, educators, and parents that young learners can take advantage of the opportunity to benefit from mother-tongue instruction as this provides a strong foundation to sustain their interest in learning, which would ultimately lead to increased academic achievement. As this case may be said in a monolingual context, thus related studies should be endeavored in other contexts to explore how the mother tongue can maximize the cognitive achievement of the young learners.

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