



Establishing a Filipino mother tongue program in Reykjavík

An action research project

Kriselle Lou Suson Cagatin

Lokaverkefni til BA-prófs í alþjóðlegu námi í menntunarfræði
Háskóli Íslands
Menntavísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Leiðsögukenndari: Robert Berman, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Numerous studies verify the importance of bilingual children's mother tongue in their overall development. This research project investigates the establishment of an efficient mother tongue program for Filipinos in Reykjavík, Iceland, which began in spring, 2011 only to stop for a year and recommence in autumn 2012. Philippine-born immigrants made up the largest Asian minority group in Iceland in early 2012, which signifies a huge target group for the program. The study briefly examines: the language environment of Icelandic children who have Filipino immigrant parents, parents' views on their children's bilingualism, teacher's views on the mother tongue program; and organizational strategies for confronting the subsequent challenges and looking into the courses of action within the organization and implementation processes. It came to light that about 80% of the students were Filipino language beginners with Icelandic as their mother tongue, thus teaching Filipino as a second language came to be more appropriate for most students. As a consequence, additional network of Filipino teachers was needed. Incidentally, motivating and educating parents about the importance of their mother tongue also appeared to be essential. Therefore based on the complexity of these circumstances, it became better to formally establish the Filipino Mother Tongue Organization, "Inangwika: Filippseyskt móðurmálsfélagið" to accomplish necessary actions for this target group.

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I. Introduction

I initially became interested in mother tongue teaching for children when I became a mother. During the course of my program, the International Studies in Education, I learned the importance of plurilingualism in thriving in today's diverse and multicultural societies. Knowing this, and the consequences of negative bilingualism, I knew I had to do something about establishing Filipino mother tongue classes in Reykjavík. So I began as a volunteer teacher of Filipino mother tongue language to children in 2011. It soon came to light how much action was needed to be done, including searching for experienced Filipino teachers, informing parents about this project - and of the importance of mother tongue education for their children – and, to motivating students, some of whom tended to have a rather negative attitude towards learning their parents' language and culture.

Due to the nature of these inter-related issues that needed to be faced on all fronts, I recorded and gathered the data to keep track of what had been done and measures that needed to be done better. It wasn't actually until we established the Filipino Mother Tongue Organization or *Inangwika: Filippseyskt móðurmálsfélagið* that I started thinking about formally doing action research on this project, as I had gathered most of my resources.

Some recent events further influenced my research, such as Iceland's new national curriculum guidelines and its mention of the importance of mother tongue for those who speak Icelandic as a second language (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011), and also the recent implementation of Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines wherein they began teaching the eight major Philippine mother tongues in public schools for kindergarten and grades 1, 2 and 3 (Department of Education, 2012).

The aims for this research are as follows:

- To describe and reveal the language environment of students
- To unfold parents' views on their children's bilingualism
- To find out teachers' views on the program
- To analyze my courses of action and strategies for an effective mother tongue program

This project revealed that a Filipino mother tongue and second language teaching program for children was much needed, as was informational coaching and discussion for Filipino parents and their spouses. In addition, teacher seminars proved to be crucial to boost the teachers' performance. It had been a bumpy road as the classes needed to be cancelled towards the end of the second semester, in 2011. The next classes were not organized until autumn of 2012 when the non-profit Filipino mother tongue organization was formally

established. Ultimately, my experiences as the organizer and teacher had been and continue to be very enlightening and educational.

II. Literature Review

A. The target group

Filipino immigrants

There is an estimated 9.45 million Filipinos living outside the Philippines in 2010 (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2010). In Iceland, there were about 1.6 thousand Filipino migrants, of which 60% had either Icelandic citizenship or permanent residence permits in the year 2010 (ibid, p. 3). Currently, this group is the largest Asian immigrant group by country of birth in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2012).

Philippines and languages

Since the Philippines is a multilingual society, the size and location of linguistically and culturally similar Filipinos residing in Iceland can be quite tricky. According to Ethnologue, there are 181 living languages in the Philippines and 171 of these are indigenous languages (Lewis, 2009). However, there are two official languages which are used as media of instruction in Filipino schools namely, English and Filipino (Department of Education, Culture and Sports [DECS], 1987; Department of Education [DepEd], 2006 & 2008). It was not until the year 2012 that the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education was finally implemented in the Philippines (Department of Education, 2012). According to this, there are 8 major Philippine languages which would be used as language of instructions for the school year 2012-2013 in kindergarten and grades 1, 2 and 3. The main objectives (p. 3) are:

- Language development which establishes a strong education for success in school and for lifelong learning
- Cognitive development which prepares the learner to acquire mastery of competencies in each of the learning areas
- Socio-cultural awareness which enhances the pride of the learner's heritage, language and culture

Finally previous and current research on the importance of mother tongue education for a learner was recognized in a country where multilingualism had been for years problematized.

While it is based solely on my experience with members of the Filipino community in Iceland, it appears that most Filipinos, who migrated to the country, speak Cebuano as their mother tongue. This is one of the eight major languages in the country. Other languages

spoken by Filipino immigrants in Iceland include Kapampangan, Waray, Bicolano and Ilocano. The common denominator for these individuals is that they have proficiency—though with varying degrees— in Filipino, the national language and lingua franca of the Philippines, and also Philippine English.

As there are almost 10 million Filipino immigrants living in 239 countries, Filipino is now being endorsed as a Global Language. Filipinos all over the globe communicate through the use of the national language. Yap states that: “Among the most active organizations promoting Global Filipino language & culture is the Advanced Filipino Abroad Program (AFAP), based at the University of Hawaii representing the US Department of Education which serves as the center in the study of Indo-Pacific Languages & Cultures. Other dynamic language organizations are the Council of Teachers of Southeast Asian Languages (COTSEAL) and the Council for Teaching Filipino Language and Culture (CTFLC), based at the San Diego State University in California.” (Yap, 2009, p. 9).

Students who have Philippine mother tongues in Iceland number 110 in pre-primary institution –of whom 81 are in the capital region (Statistics Iceland, 2011a), and 241 in compulsory schools, of whom 150 are in the capital region (Statistics Iceland, 2011b).

B. Mother Tongue Education

Immigrants and mother tongue

There are more bilingual individuals than there are monolinguals in the world which is especially boosted by migration (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). However, people in general view the bilingualism of young children either as good and beneficial or bad and problematic. Having these conflicting views is called the “bilingual paradox” or “the perception that very early bilingual language exposure is both good and bad for a child” (Pettito, et al., 2001, p. 489).

The first report on this subject was made by Ronjat (1913) and later by Leopold (1939-49) who observed and wrote about their own children’s bilinguality. Both concluded that being in a mixed-language family did not impede the child’s development nor caused any delay as they used Grammont’s ‘one parent = one language’ rule. Incidentally, the first empirical study to validate bilingual children’s language production was by Pettito and her team in an effort to shed light on the bilingual paradox among early exposure on a bilingual environment. They conducted an empirical study on hearing children exposed to sign and

spoken language and hearing children exposed to two spoken languages. They concluded that children's exposure to two languages from birth "does not cause delay and confusion to the normal processes of human language acquisition" (Petitto, et al., 2001, p. 494). Furthermore, in a study by Hamers in 1994 on immigrant children in Canada, it came to light that the "heritage-language maintenance in the home correlates positively with a bilingual or trilingual competence and a multicultural identification" (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 210). More research was then carried out about the advantages of bilinguals, which according to Hamers & Blanc (Ibid, p. 65), suggested that "native bilinguals develop unique strategies both at the cognitive and the social level, and that at a very early age a bilingual speech mode is recognizable." The underlying theme was that parents should use their mother tongue or their best language with their child.

But before internalization of both languages of the child progresses, language socialization must be considered. On the one hand is an example of additive bilinguality, wherein both languages are highly valorized and widely exposed to the child. On the other hand, if bilinguality is not valued properly in the child's sociocultural environment, it can develop a subtractive bilinguality defined by Lambert (1974), as for instance when the parents' mother tongue is devalued in the child's network. This type of bilinguality, according to Hamers & Blanc (2000, p. 100), "develops when the two languages are competing rather than complementary; this form will evolve when an ethnolinguistic minority rejects its own cultural values in favor of those of an economically and culturally more prestigious group."

Immigrant parents are called 'heritage speakers', whose language choice with their children is deeply entwined with their language ideologies. Their children are then called 'heritage learners.' Montrul (2010, p. 4) stated that "heritage speakers are a special case of child bilingualism. Because the home or family language is a minority language, not all heritage language children have access to education in their heritage language." Ultimately, the parents' view and role in their children's bilingual development seem to be extremely significant. Since the child's first network is at home with his primary caregivers, "it is within this context that one can determine the social organization of caregiving, attitudes and assumptions about teaching and learning, and the status and role of the child in that particular society (Schieffelin, 1993, p. 30). In raising children in host countries, immigrant parents have the choice whether or not to teach their language.

Foreign mother tongue in Iceland

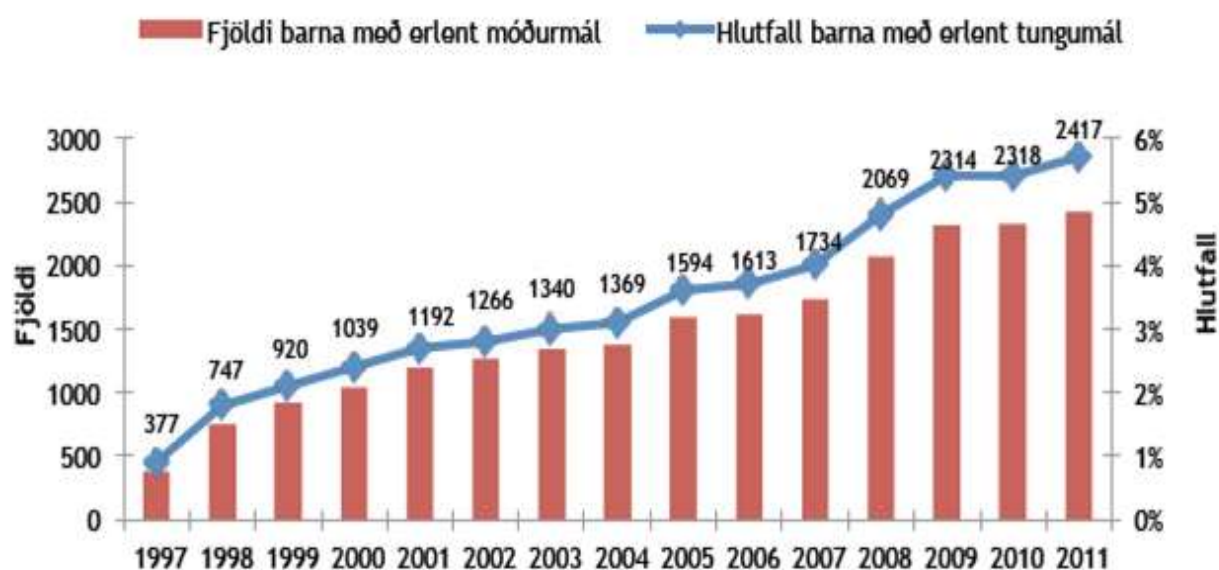


Figure 1 The number (in red) and percentage (in blue) of children in compulsory schools who have foreign mother tongues. (Statistics Iceland, 2011b)

In 2011, there were 2417 compulsory school students aged 6-16 who had foreign mother tongues, which was almost 6% of the total student population (Statistics Iceland, 2011b). In pre-primary institutions, there were 1908 children age 5 or younger who had foreign mother tongues in the country (Statistics Iceland, 2011a).

The Compulsory Education Act (2007) stated that mother tongue learning is not mandatory for all students as it is impractical to have access to all the languages. Students are, though encouraged to learn their mother tongue, at their own expense. Schools must, nevertheless recognize the native language skills and studies of students as part of compulsory education or as one of their electives. The only offer for students who have mother tongues other than Icelandic, according to the National Curriculum Guideline is to have the right to learn Icelandic as a second language and to recognize studies or competence in their mother tongue (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). Consequently, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) suggested that the Icelandic education system should provide better access for pupils to learn their mother tongues (Council of Europe, 2012). ECRI also recommended that native language learning should at least be facilitated among Upper Secondary School students who have a mother tongue other than Icelandic.

Considering the number of various foreign mother tongues, Skutnabb-Kangas examined this issue and remarked, “Admittedly, situations of great linguistic diversity combined with meager financial resources are complex - but on the other hand there is ample evidence for Africa and Asia and from multilingual immigrant minority education of the fact that unnecessary **either-or** stances (which the false positioning is often based on) are in the long run both **costly** and **misguided**, and tend to perpetuate elite dominance.” (2007, p. 137). In the Icelandic sample on curriculum policies for bilingual children, the main focus is to teach the child more Icelandic. Skutnabb-Kangas again directed this issue that, “It is the minorities themselves who have to put a strong emphasis on the learning of the mother tongue and demand mother tongue learning as a linguistic human right. But minorities do of course want their children to learn the majority languages fully too. We want our children to become bilingual as a minimum, not monolingual or strongly dominant in **either** of the two languages.” (Ibid, p. 138).

In a longitudinal study by Sigríður Ólafsdóttir and Hrafnhildur Ragnarsdóttir (2010) wherein they investigated the vocabulary size of compulsory school children whose first language was other than Icelandic, one of the results revealed that even though there were additional Icelandic classes for them, there was no significant increase in their Icelandic vocabulary. Additionally, students from Eastern Europe showed a wider range of vocabulary than those whose first language was not European even with similar length of Icelandic classes as the students from other continents. A number of possible factors contributing to this conclusion were mentioned such as the age of arrival, length of stay in the country and similarities of the children’s’ mother tongue, especially the European languages to Icelandic. However, I think one of the major factors for a stronger Icelandic as a second language will be children’s strong heritage language environment. A study on children of Polish immigrant was conducted by Wozniczka and Berman (2011(p. 1) revealed that “parents’ attitude towards Icelandic did not deter their children from achieving L2 proficiency”. Furthermore, the children whose parents exposed them to their heritage language at home scored either satisfactorily or very high in Icelandic. They stated that,

Every child who received a “very high” grade in Icelandic, with [one] exception... also participated frequently in Polish language reading activities, as well as in other parent-child interactions. Moreover, these were also the children with positive attitudes and who expressed interest in such interactions. (Wozniczka & Berman, 2011).

This shows that a rich heritage language environment is a good precursor for learning the second language. Cummins has also stated that,

More than 150 research studies conducted during the past 35 years strongly support what Goethe once said: “The person who knows only one language does not truly know that language”. (Cummins, 2002, p.17)

His research also suggests that bilingual children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. Fundamentally, having an additive form of bilingualism is ideal for children of immigrants.

C. The Starting Point for the project

Plurilingualism in Europe

Europe contains diverse, multicultural societies and increasing numbers of plurilingual individuals. The Council of Europe (2010, p. 16) distinguishes plurilingualism as the “ability to use more than one language and accordingly sees languages from standpoint of speakers and learners” while multilingualism “refers to the presence of several languages in a given geographical area, regardless of those who speak them”.

There are two aims for plurilingual and intercultural education (ibid. p. 18):

1. “It facilitates the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural abilities: this involves adding to the linguistic and cultural resources which make up individual repertoires, using the available means efficiently. Aims differ with learner’s needs, languages and contexts.”
2. “It promotes personal development so that individuals can realize their full potentials: this involves encouraging them to respect and accept diversity of languages and cultures in a multilingual and multicultural society, and helping to make them aware of the extent of their own competence and development potential.”

Furthermore, Philippson et al, argue that:

Linguistic human rights should be considered basic human rights. Linguistic majorities, speakers of a dominant language, usually enjoy all those linguistic human rights which can be seen as fundamental, regardless of how they are defined. Most linguistic minorities in the world do not enjoy these rights. It is only a few hundred of the world's 6-7,000 languages that have any kind of official status, and it is only speakers of official languages who enjoy *all* linguistic human rights".(Philippson et al, 1994, p.2)

Ultimately, the definition and aims of plurilingual education, together with linguistic human rights were more reasons that urged me to create a Filipino mother tongue teaching program.

Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children



The Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children's Parents started informally in 1994 and in 2001, the Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children (MTABC) was officially established. The three main goals of the association are: to support mother tongue teachers, to administer awareness about bilingualism, and to encourage parents who have bilingual children to give them the opportunity to learn about their mother tongue and culture (Cagatin & Peskova, 2012). In the

school year 2012-13, there are 15 languages taught in this association namely: Czech, English, Ewe (and Twi), French, Filipino (and Bisaya), Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Slovakian, Spanish, Swedish and Thai. The association also works with the Polish school (Ibid). The core methodology for mother tongue teaching is theme-based practical language use through role plays, reading, listening, etc. to increase children's vocabulary (Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children, 2010). The classes and schedule are organized by individual groups, most of which teach in Hagaskóli and Hagaborg, while others in a Cultural Center and a church. This year, the association distributed brochures to all the schools in the city of Reykjavík about mother tongue teaching for parents and teachers.

The classes are solely based on parental collaboration as it is an extra-curricular and voluntary activity. Cooperation with and among parents is key to a successful mother tongue class in this organization.

III. Methodology

A. Researcher's role in the group

I, myself, was born in the capital of the Philippines and moved to Iceland around nine years ago. Filipino is my mother tongue although I never formally studied my parents' mother tongue, another Philippine minority language, but through the years I learned to understand it. I consider myself bilingual in Filipino and English while Icelandic and Spanish are my second languages. I am also raising a multi-lingual child who is currently fluent in Spanish (from my husband) and Filipino and getting better at Icelandic. With this, I recognize how necessary it is for parents to be aware of the importance of mother tongue to strengthen the linguistic, social and cognitive development of their children. In 2012, I became a board member of Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children and later established the Filipino Mother Tongue Organization. My cultural, linguistic, and educational background is important in this research in that, I have been exposed to rather similar values and education systems as the students, teachers and parents. I expect that having that background will enhance my rapport with other parents and teachers and will make me more understanding of the data disclosed in order to take constructive actions based on this project's findings.

B. Anonymity of participants

The participants were students, their parents and the teachers of the Filipino mother tongue program. Verbal consent was given by all the participants in the beginning of the program and consent letters were later signed. A sample of a consent letter can be found in the Appendix. Pseudonyms are used and confidentiality is ensured.

C. Action Research

Since this is a developmental project, I saw it fit to conduct an action research. Action research according to Koshy is: "a constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience. It is a continuous learning process in which the researcher learns and also shares the newly generated knowledge with those who may benefit from it." (Koshy, 2005, p. 9)

Aims of this action research:

I want to organize, collaborate, implement, reflect, and then again organize an improved plan for this project. When I took upon myself this challenge, I knew it was going to be a long road and it is worth recording every step so that previous mistakes can easily be realized and proper actions are made to a more constructive and productive program. Reflection is a necessary precursor for a critical incident. It basically substantiates the awareness of the professional about the criticality of any incident during one's professional life. Cunningham states that a "learning professional is one who seeks out opportunities, within whatever institutional constraints are in place, to *extend* their professional understandings and skills sets, rather than being [restricted]." (Cunningham, 2008, p. 162)

This action research aims to gather data and summarize the process of establishing and enhancing the Filipino Mother Tongue teaching in Reykjavík which is, for now, a fourfold investigation for improvement, about the students, parents, teachers and organizational strategies.

Methods of data collection:

- Surveys of Filipino language proficiency of students in the beginning of the class
- Participant observations on students in class, and on teachers' meetings
- Collection of lesson plans, emails and notifications on Facebook groups for parents and teachers, field diary and notes
- Informal interviews with individual parents and a parent group
- Interview with individual teachers
- Informal interviews and meetings with Filipino teachers as critical friends
- The assistance of teachers and organizers in MTABC as critical friends

Data criticisms

Verbal consent from parents and teachers for recording data were given towards the end of the first Filipino semester in 2011 and in the beginning of the autumn semester 2012. The formal written consent was collected in December, 2012 and January, 2013.

Due to the time-consuming nature of this project, I was not able to keep up with the all the field notes in meetings, classes, visits in teachers' houses, interviews and events, which ideally should be written on the field. In the end, I decided to make notes after the events. Data were collected mainly in my field diary, together with the website and Facebook group

for the organizers and teachers where we exchanged data and discussed issues. This simplified but also limited the collection of data.

Group interviews tended to be incomplete and sometimes rushed due to the number of participants and participants' scheduling issues. Furthermore, the surveys were not completely filled out but by observation and interview, data about the language environment and students became relative to teachers' and my own participant observations.

Some of the data collected cannot be analyzed nor used in this paper as they cover a wide range of foci, and may be unrelated to the limited aims of this research. For example, I consider the volunteer teachers and organizers as my critical friends for this action research and developmental project. Aside from individually talking to them, we also keep a closed Facebook group for teachers and organizers where we communicate, hold votes and so forth. However, I only incorporated the data concerning their views which were relative to the organizational actions we later on implemented or would be implemented.

IV. Findings

A. First steps: The beginning

After learning about the importance of mother tongue education from my course of study, having meetings with the board members of the Mother Tongue Association for Bilingual Children, visiting other language groups' classes, and joining three seminars for MTABC teachers along with three teachers, I began to put together a Filipino mother tongue program. It finally started in January, 2011. I advertised, organized and taught nine Filipino mother tongue classes at a school in Reykjavík on Saturdays from 10 am to 12 noon assisted by 3 three Filipino teachers and three Bisaya teachers. There should have been 10 classes but a class was cancelled because of weather. This was a pilot project and classes were offered free of charge for students.

Finding teachers was a hard task since I was familiar with only a limited number of Filipinos in my network. So there was a lot of information gathering from many people. Teachers were still quite skeptical and did not know what was expected of them and whether they could fulfill the unclear responsibilities. I kept explaining to them that this was an open-ended development project and that eventually there was going to be a better structure as the project progresses. As a consequence of this vague arrangement, I ended up teaching the Filipino group alone for the most part, which was not what I intended to do. Even so, other

teachers were willing to assist— although minimally— and were optimistic that this was only the beginning.

With reference to the curriculum for teaching Filipino and other resources, I put together an informal but theme-based approach to teaching the language. The successful lessons that kept the students' motivated were about playing games, reading simple and colorful story books, singing songs and using other interactive activities. However, it was a challenge to create lesson plans that suited everyone for the following reasons: the students had varied Filipino language proficiency, with most being complete beginners while a few were fluent; they spanned a wide range of ages between 7-12 years old; they had different views on learning Filipino; there was no access to a computer; I lacked teaching experience; and students' punctuality was poor. More information about the teaching was not included in this paper as it is another subject of interest which is not cited in the aims of this study.

For teaching Bisaya, nine theme-based lesson plans was carefully planned by one of the teachers after learning that most of the students were teenagers between the ages 13-15. The other two teachers implemented the classroom lesson plans together.

Consequently, the teachers and I faced several challenges in this first semester but this first step was a success in many senses. During the 9th class, I met with the parents and discussed the project. Meanwhile, all the students were preparing for a show for their parents about what they had learned. After the discussion, students presented songs, drawings and role played for their parents. Then everyone enjoyed the food brought by parents. I think events like these are very healthy and informative for the parents, children, teachers and me.

B. Children's language environment

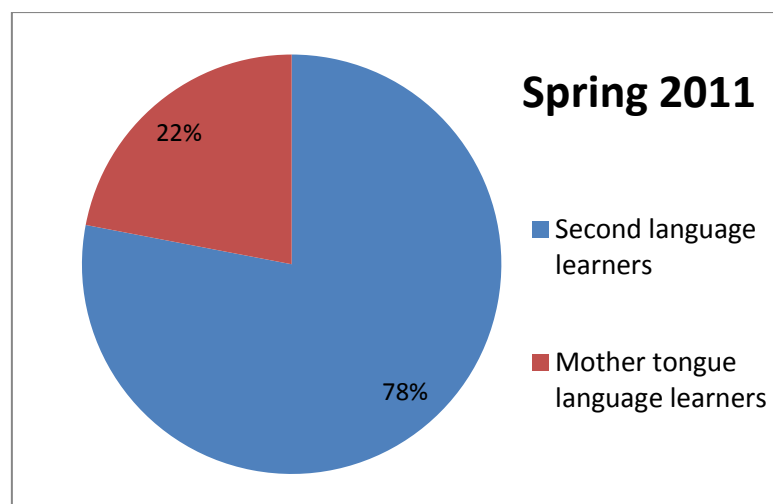


Figure 2: Percentage of students in the first Filipino mother tongue teaching program.

In my discussion with parents in 2011, I learned that 78% of the 27 students were spoken to by their parents in Icelandic, and sometimes English or a combination of both. Some of the parents' statements when asked about the reasons of their language choice include:

Parent 1: "I don't want to confuse my child with more than one language at once."

Parent 2: "Icelandic should be my children's mother tongue but I also want them to understand my language."

Parent 3: "I learn Icelandic through speaking with my children."

I encountered similar views as the statements of Parents 1 and 2 among other parents. Parent 3 further explained the perceived benefit of using Icelandic with children. Other reasons why the parents' language choice at home was not their mother tongue included: it is a part of their obligation and sacrifice, Icelandic should be their children's mother tongue, the parents could practice their Icelandic daily at home, their non-Filipino partners encouraged them to do so, etc.

Although they chose Icelandic, these parents still desired for their children to at least learn their Philippine mother tongue (Filipino, Bisaya or another Philippine language) elsewhere, which was the reason why they enrolled their children to the program. Some of them claimed that they would go to the Philippines for long periods of time (about 2-6 months) so their children would learn the language.

The remaining 22% of the students' parents speak their Philippine mother tongue with them at home. These children were the ones who appeared to have some bilingual proficiency in Filipino and Icelandic but in this case, they are the minority in the classroom. Moreover,

some of the children whose parents spoke to them in their Philippine mother tongue would often reply in Icelandic. Overall, the majority of the students' mother tongue appeared to be Icelandic and not Filipino. I learned that this should be a subject for another bigger research. It would be great to closely observe and investigate the language environment of these students along with the consequences and/or benefits, which both parents and their children feel regarding their home language environment.

It was nevertheless clear to me that there was a need for informing parents about bilingualism. Unfortunately, we were not entitled for financial support from the Philippine government unlike other language groups like Japanese and French, subsidized at least partially by their embassies (according to critical friends). The Mother Tongue Association on Bilingual Children or MTABC was very generous in giving us a starting pack of kr.25.000 to buy materials and they also gave a little financial support of about kr.15.000 per year, which was according to how many was enrolled in the program. But in reality, there were not enough funds even to reimburse teachers.

Consequently, we organized a fund-raising event (through the form of donations) for October which is called "Awareness about Bilingualism" or *Meðvitund um Tvítyngi*. An expert in multicultural issues volunteered to give a talk about bilingualism. Also, the president of MTABC also volunteered to present the Mother tongue Association. For the place, a Cultural Center offered their biggest hall for free. Plus, parents and teachers volunteered to cook Filipino snacks. This intervention was created in an attempt to reach more parents in the community and also to gain financial support for future development. Regrettably, fewer than 50 participants attended in comparison to other Filipino community parties wherein there are usually over 300 attendees. Anyhow, organizing such an event was an experience worth learning from.

C. The second step: The downfall

For the next semester, fall 2011, my priority was to search for qualified volunteer teachers. I managed to find a group of Filipino professionals, most of whom were teachers but only some had teaching credentials in Iceland. There were also other Filipino professionals who volunteered to teach.

The plan for the fall semester was focused on having half the class on Filipino language and then classes about the history and culture of the Philippines with various teachers. One of

the teachers actually specialized in teaching history in the Philippines and it was positive to make use of her expertise.

Unfavorably, there was such a poor attendance of students that we had to cancel the classes by early November. As much as we gained more teachers, it was quite useless without the students. The most common reasons for Filipino parents refusing to enroll their children were: the classes were too far from their homes; they were not entirely familiar with the program; and they had varying views about bilingualism. These were seriously taken into account.

Regrettably, there were no Filipino classes for the spring semester of 2012 either. Part of the reason was the fact that I had been busy with studies and work. Frankly, the results from the second step were too discouraging but I intended to continue this project. To make matters worse, a lot of the volunteer teachers stopped volunteering for similar reasons.

During the spring semester, though, I kept up with meeting with the MTABC heads to improve planning and implementation of the Filipino Mother Tongue teaching. I realized that classes should move to another district where most Filipinos reside. This, in addition to the previous difficulties made it clear that it was essential to create our own organization.

D. The third step: Rising up



Because of the previous circumstances, I knew I had to do something concrete before I could start over again. Thanks to critical friends, I gathered enough initiative to make preparations again. During the spring semester 2012, I dedicated time to discover more willing teachers and visited their homes when necessary to be able to introduce the Filipino mother tongue teaching plan. Finally by collaborating with teachers who knew other teachers who knew other teachers, we ended up with three volunteer teachers who could teach all Saturdays of the semester, and four teachers who could teach part-time. Of those seven teachers, three were accredited teachers in Iceland, one whom had been an experienced secondary teacher in the Philippines but who could only be qualified with a pre-school teaching certificate in Iceland.

The other four had no teaching licenses, two of whom were graduates of Education and had teaching experience in the Philippines. It felt reassuring to create an organization after gathering a group of volunteer teachers.

On July 2012, Filipino Mother Tongue Organization or '*Inangwika: Filippseyskt móðurmálsfélag*' (IFMF) was formally. It was necessary to establish this organization so we could be acknowledged by the Filipino community in Iceland, apply for grants, and the people involved in this project could have clear aims and responsibilities. These include board members, teachers, parents and children.

Upon establishing this organization, the by-laws were agreed upon by all the board members. There was an emphasis on its objectives, and roles of each board member; evidently, I was no longer alone in terms of organizational responsibilities. To be able to form a functional non-profit organization, we then applied for the IFMF social security number, established the IFMF Facebook organizers and teachers' group, the IFMF Facebook group for parents and students and a bilingual (Filipino and Icelandic) website. Additionally, apart from online interactions, regular meetings were organized for teachers and board members, which is a great help. Furthermore, we applied for a municipality grant and are now awaiting their response.

For the fall semester of 2012, we fruitfully moved the Filipino classes into the district of Reykjavík where most Filipino immigrants reside. Fortunately, the district chief or *hverfastjóri* was generous to offer a place for us to teach on Saturdays free of charge. Right away, there was more interest among parents to sign up their children. We divided the 28 registered students into three classes: Filipino for 3-6 year olds, Filipino for 7-16 year olds and Bisaya for 7-16 year olds. There were significantly more students in the Bisaya class rather than Filipino classes, which was a very positive thing as it is generally known by the Filipino community in Iceland that there are more Bisaya-mother tongue speakers than Filipino ones. Although again, based on the surveys we conducted in the beginning of the classes, most students are learning Filipino as a second language in beginner's level.

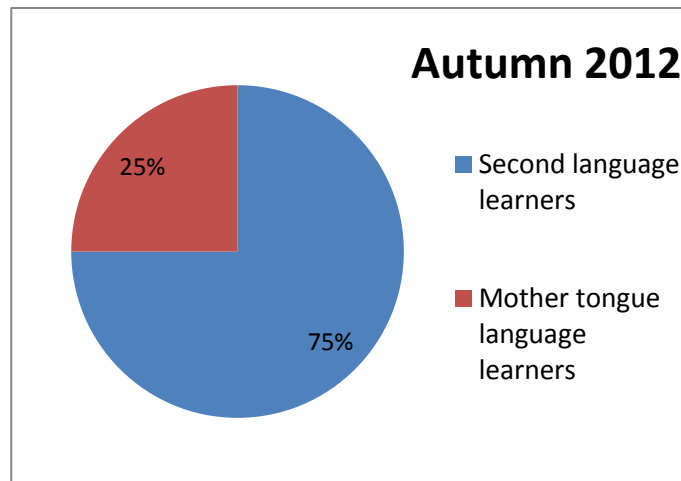


Figure 3 Percentage of students in the autumn semester, 2012

Most teachers resided as well in this same district and it helped them tremendously. And although the teaching was voluntary, I promised that their bills in connection to teaching and meetings would be reimbursed. Our Facebook group was used to exchange useful online resources for teaching Philippine languages for children such as online worksheets in Filipino and Bisaya, theme-based lesson plans, useful and practical Filipino teaching websites and books we purchased last year. For Bisaya teaching, the curriculum development was assigned to one of the teachers in a similar way as the first semester and the other Bisaya teachers worked together to come up with and carry out lesson plans. For this semester, teachers were very much responsible for their teaching and creative in implementing their courses.

Since this was a voluntary work for organizers and teachers, we decided that there should be a small fee paid by the parents for each child with a discount for siblings. This was mainly to reimburse at least some of the bills for teaching materials. Fortunately, in collaboration with the MTABC, parents of children who legally reside in the city of Reykjavík could pay using their children's leisure card or *frístundakort*.

By the end of the semester, the 11th class, we organized and implemented an end-of-term event and the theme was: "It's great to be bilingual!" or *Það er frábært að vera tvítyngd*. There was a short presentation for parents about the organization, student presentations, talent shows and Filipino games with prizes. This time around, unlike the first event, there was a detailed program schedule; the roles (who were in charge of what) were distributed; and everyone still assisted one another to perform our jobs efficiently. This event was more successful than the previous event taking into account the shortcomings of the previous one.

E. Focus group discussion with teachers on December, 2012

The experiences and expectations of teachers were discussed in the final meeting of the semester and field notes were recorded. Four teachers out of seven attended this meeting, so did one teacher out of three future teachers for the next semester. According to them, it was gratifying to teach Filipino and Bisaya to students. Most of them claimed that the informal way of teaching helped tremendously and that it was rewarding to listen to students sing Filipino songs, etc. They faced more difficulties with parents than with students, especially as they were advertising in their circles including relatives, friends and colleagues. Three of the teachers asserted that 70-80% of all the parents they talked to would not enroll their children because of various reasons. Another teacher said that parents were interested but that there were several factors that hindered their attendance such as no access to a car, issues of child custody during weekends, conflict of schedule with other activities, lack of awareness of the leisure card for each child, and so on.

Furthermore, for those parents whose children were registered, the teachers explained that they needed to collaborate more with teachers and value the importance of their children's attendance. A teacher said: "It was frustrating to expect lots of students but they would be absent without letting us know." According to the attendance sheet, only 12 students out of 28 had perfect attendance. It was argued that in the future, we would need to encourage perfect attendance or teachers should be informed before the class about the absence of child.

Their views about the Filipino language and culture event were all positive and that they all agreed that we needed to organize more events like that. We concurred that we would need to send out more positive images of Filipinos and Philippines through such events.

As for teachers' expectations, we all discussed and agreed to hold teacher seminars before the next semester starts. We agreed that seminars should focus on teaching strategies, language teaching and teaching in a multicultural context. Then one meeting could be organized to finalize the plan for teaching, if possible. One teacher stressed the fact that "The teachers on different levels need to be on the same page and collaborate or else there will be competition." She further explained that conflicting or overlapping ways of teaching by different teachers will be difficult for children in the long run.

All of their inputs were highly informative. For the next semester, these views will surely be considered. The next chapter depicts the analysis of the results.

V. Analysis:

A. Students' language environment

A very useful question to ask is this: "How can we best organize ourselves and our resources to meet the needs of ALL students?" (Miramontes, Nadeau & Commins, 2011). One of the aims of his action research was to describe the language situation of the students and how it affected my previous notions for having a Filipino mother tongue program. Both the study conducted on students and interviews with their parents and teachers showed that there is an alarmingly high percentage or about 80% of Filipino parents who tend not to use their mother tongue with their children at home. Therefore, it was necessary to create another option for these students, which is to learn Filipino as a second language and not as a mother tongue.

Throughout this project, it was noticeable that some of the children who had no access to learn their parents' mother tongue may have suffered negative consequences, which was affirmed by some of the statements by the students. Some statements by children include:

Student 1: "Why should I learn Filipino when my parents speak to me in Icelandic?"

Student 2: "Sometimes, I don't understand my parents."

Student 3: "All I know about Philippines is poverty."

According to Commins (2012, p. 7), these are common "messages many children receive when their parents do not use their heritage language:

- Adapt to the new culture
- Dominant language is the only one that is important because it is the only one used for instruction
- Who they are, as well as the language and culture of their parents is no longer of value

She then mentioned that this would have negative outcomes (ibid, p. 8):

- Feelings of alienation and not belonging
- Rejection of their home culture
- Loss of their mother tongue
- Loss of communication with members of their family and community.
- Unrest among adolescents and young adults in immigrant communities.

On a positive note, there were other students who were Filipino second language beginners who were optimistic and keen about learning the language. Some students, for example drew several colorful things in an activity wherein they were asked what they knew about the country.

B. Parents' views on their children's bilingualism

The high percentage of Filipino parents who did not use their mother tongue with their children showed that parent education was crucial. Among the interventions organized by IFMF was to create interactive events for parents with their children presenting what they had learned from the program through songs and games, together with other activities targeted for parents such as informative discussions to demonstrate the benefits of bilingualism.

Apparently, by looking at the students' attendance and the discussion with parents, most of the parents still viewed bilingualism as problematic. Evidently, more actions are needed to be done to encourage the interest of Filipino parents whose children are beginners in learning the Filipino languages as much as those whose children are already fluent in the parents' mother tongue. There are more parents who still need to be reached, even in the vicinity where the Filipino mother tongue program is taught, who are unfamiliar, unsure and even misguided by the importance of their mother tongue in their children's lives.

According to Hamers and Blanc: "Language behavior is linked to the [linguistic] market not only by its condition of application (language use) but also by its conditions of acquisition (language acquisition/learning)" (2000 p. 21). Many Filipino parents seem to consider learning the majority language to be so important that their children should sacrifice their own mother tongue. But as a consequence of the national curriculum policies in Iceland, the obligation of demanding and implementing mother tongue lessons for children goes to the immigrant parents or parent communities. And so if the parents are not assertive enough about teaching their heritage language to their children, the children are the ones who miss the opportunities to learn it. It is therefore necessary to educate parents about the importance of children learning both their mother tongue and the majority language, as well as both cultures.

According to Jim Cummins, "When parents and other caregivers (e.g. grandparents) are able to spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed educationally" (2002, p.17). In addition, he writes that language loss of the mother tongue can happen "within 2-3 years of starting school," (ibid, p. 19), which can have detrimental effects on the child, such as "feeling alienated from the cultures of both home and school" (ibid). So the main reason parents need to learn about their role is "to establish a strong home language policy and provide ample opportunities for children to expand the functions for which they use the mother tongue" (ibid).

C. Teachers' views

As mentioned before, teachers were at liberty to employ teaching strategies, lesson plans and methodologies. Although some teachers were more experienced and confident about creating and carrying out their own lesson plans, others were not. So those who were uncertain were paired with experienced teachers. In pairs, they could support and teach each other to generate a learning environment both for them and their students.

The open discussion among teachers was beneficial in that it helped them put on the table their ideas, suggestions and even complaints about the entire program. Creating discussion meetings, having active online discussions, pairing up teachers and in the future, organizing teacher seminars are my attempts to establish a professional learning community of Philippine language teachers. This professional learning community according to Stoll and Louis: “suggests that focus is not just on individual teacher’s learning but on (1) professional learning; (2) within the context of a cohesive group; (3) that focuses on collective knowledge, and (4) occurs within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders” (Stoll & Louis, 2007, p. 3)

D. The organization, implementation and other processes

The organizational structure of the Filipino mother tongue teaching program tended to be a lot better by establishing an official organization with its own by-laws, decision-making power and implementations, which were agreed upon. It came to light right from the beginning how many challenges lay ahead. Among the challenges where: lack of teachers, lack of teaching experience, uninformed parents, students who are Filipino language beginners instead of mother tongue learners, age diversity among students, need for suitable place for teaching, and lack of funding. Therefore, it was useful to apply Cunningham’s (2008) take on these critical incidents which need to be seen as opportunities wherein understanding is key to generate skills sets in order to build ways for learning. So far, my response to these opportunities include: finding teachers, informing parents, establishing a Filipino as a second language class, organizing events and meetings, maintaining information in Filipino and Icelandic and most of all, looking for financial compensations through a fund-raising event, MTABC’s contributions and grant application for reimbursements for teachers. And all this with the help of the net of people I have come to work with along the way. Ultimately, all the feedbacks, reflections and analyses have led to planning the exciting new steps ahead.

VI. Next steps

According to Commins, “Well meaning, yet uninformed, practices and policies can make things worse.” (2012, p. 6). Therefore, since there has not been a formal mother tongue teaching policy nor implementation within the schools, IFMF needs to fill this void, at least for the children of Filipino immigrants. As much as we did everything we could in the past for this project to succeed, the future still looks bright and the next steps are getting clear. For the spring semester of year 2013, the next steps are:

1. Mother tongue teaching program

Advertisements for the next semester are ongoing. We created a short presentation about our organization, IFMF in a big Filipino community Christmas celebration. We hope receive more recognition that we intend to do what is best to help children to be additive bilinguals.

We have organized seven classes for next semester: four groups for Filipino and the rest for Bisaya, all divided by age groups. There are four additional teachers and so we need to move some of the classes into another place as we still don’t have funds for renting an elementary school. One of the teachers fortunately works for a playschool and had confirmed with her principal that we could have the classes for the youngest groups there on Saturdays. The classes for compulsory age groups will continue in the Cultural center.

2. Teacher training workshop

We need to work with other institutions on curriculum development. The Council for Teaching Filipino Language and Culture (CTFLC), which teaches at all the school levels, is based in United States and they provide a seven-day course every summer for Filipino language and culture teachers. As we apply for our membership and as we intend to go to the summer workshop, our teachers can later qualify to take the California Subject Matter Examination for Teachers: Filipino (CSET: Filipino) so they can be accredited as Filipino language teachers (Council for Teaching Filipino Language and Culture, 2012).

In the meantime, for the month of January right before the classes begin, I have organized mini-seminars with two experienced teachers from MTABC as lecturers and a field trip to one of the other language groups of MTABC. By the end of the seminars and field trip, we will have a group reflection which hopefully will be an informative, collaborative and constructive step towards making our own curriculum and lesson plans for the spring semester.

3. Parent education on bilingualism and programs on parent involvement

In general, immigrant parents need to know about their linguistic human right and that using their own mother tongue with their children is essential for their children's linguistic, social and cognitive development including their identity formation. The parents whose children went to the mother tongue teaching program we had organized had varying language environments but the main reason for enrolling their children was that they wanted them to learn the language. It would be useful to study further their expectations about this program in a more in-depth study than I can provide here. Considering that 80% of them do not use their heritage language at home, it is likely that they need information on why and how their mother tongue can help their children's family life and also to learn the mainstream language. Planning and monitoring informative meetings and interventions should be carefully researched. Researchers and organizers should take into account the diversity of this group. It would be very helpful for example, to conduct a research much like that of Woznickza and Berman (2011) about the home language environment of the students and their proficiency in Icelandic.

However, we should not stop at describing the home language environment among Filipino immigrant children. We have applied for grant from the Developmental Fund for Immigrant Issues in Iceland for finding and implementing ways to effectively inform parents about bilingualism and the importance of their mother tongue to their children. The plan centers on collaborating with experts in the field, creating a better introductory video about IFMF along with the importance of mother tongue, conducting parent interviews, organizing parent meetings, and presenting to social counselors and nurses in the infant and children department.

4. School year 2013–14

For the next school year 2013–2014, in collaboration with MTABC and as teachers hopefully gain qualifications for teaching Filipino as a subject matter at school, we intend to apply for acknowledgment from schools in the capital region to have Filipino at least as an elective for those students who would like to continue with the mother tongue teaching program on Saturdays.

To end this thesis, I want to emphasize aim of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in establishing a plurilingual and intercultural education applicable to the diversity in the continent and especially mother tongue education among the children of minority groups, which states that it is necessary to implement:

A curriculum designed, common to all school subjects, [to produce] critical adults who are **unreservedly open to otherness**: contact with languages and discourse genres in schools must not only give learners the competences they need to live in the community; and they must also show them how these **languages and genres convey and shape** ideas, opinions, information and knowledge, and give them a clear picture of their workings, origins, diversity variability and creative potential; this is thus both a form and condition of **personal development**. (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 19)

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VIII. Appendices

Consent letter

Action research on Filipino Mother Tongue Teaching Program

You and your children are being invited to participate in a research study by Kriselle S. Cagatin under the supervision of Robert Berman from the School of Education at the University of Iceland as part of Kriselle's final undergraduate thesis. Your participation in this study is **entirely voluntary** and the researcher will **ensure confidentiality** as much as possible. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the research is to understand, develop and implement an efficient Filipino mother tongue teaching program in Iceland. The researcher intends to gather data from teacher and board member meetings, informal interviews (on parents, teachers and students) and observations from classes.

Potential benefits and risks

This study will give you and your children the opportunity to share your views, opinions, plans, and implementations throughout the process. Your participation will be valuable in terms of educational purposes in immigrant studies. It will also add to the experience of the researcher in the field. This study is not intended to provoke physical or emotional discomfort. Confidentiality will be respected by using a pseudonym instead of your name and any information that may directly link to you will remain confidential. The materials will be handed to the course instructor and later be destroyed by the end of the project.

Participation and withdrawal

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you and your child/ren volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question as you wish.

If you have any questions and concerns about this research in the future, please contact:

Kriselle S. Cagatin (researcher)– kls5@hi.is

Robert Berman (supervisor, professor at the University of Iceland) – <robertb@hi.is>

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Names of children in the program

**A sample of lesson plan, its implementation and observations in class
(translated from Filipino)**

Fourth class

Number of students who attended: ____ Teachers: _____

1. Introduction and saying hello
2. Filling up their individual (and colorful) attendance sheet
3. Looking back – a short reminder of what was talked about last class
 - a. Feet, knees, shoulder and head (song)
 - b. Ten little fingers (song)
 - c. If you're happy (song)
 - d. Numbers
 - e. Family

Activity #1: Identify which part of the body is... then let the students point to which part of the body is... similar way for numbers ----- evaluating what they know from last classes

Activity #2: Divide the group by 2. Place the piece of paper with a written number on it and apart of the body ----- reminder in a form of game.

4. Recess – short story: *“Sina Linggit laban kay Barakuda”*

Almost everyone listened carefully while eating their food. Several children shared their views about the story, in Icelandic.

5. Animals --- vocabulary on animals, which is also connected to the story about fish.

Answering sheets, they connect the words to the respective picture of animals (dog, bear, fish, frog, snake, chicken, rabbit, sheep, bird, cat...)

Observation – they answered it very quickly as they did the activity collaboratively

6. Game about animals: divide the group into 2, with a representative from each. Those representatives will be secretly given a name of an animal and act it somehow. The rest of the group should guess what animal it is but in Filipino. The group with the most points, win.

Observations:

- They liked the short story as it had a moral lesson in the end.
- The introduction of animals through the short story was effective because it motivated the students to ask more about what kinds of other animals there are, alongwith the discussion about their pets
- The answering sheets were also effective as the first item was done altogether, then they were grouped together to do the rest collaboratively. A lot of them got busy coloring the animals.
- This is the first time everyone liked the game!