

# BUHAY WIKA: FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF MTB-MLE TEACHERS IN TEACHING THE AYTA MAGBUKUN LANGUAGE UNDER THE IPED CURRICULUM

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## ABSTRACT

*This focused ethnography study examined the experiences of Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) teachers in teaching the Ayta Magbukun language within the framework of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum. This qualitative research employed face-to-face unstructured interviews as the primary data-gathering method as well as fieldwork that involved direct engagement with MTB-MLE teachers in their teaching environments, including classroom observations. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data, enabling the identification of core themes that came up from the participants' responses. In the entirety of the data collection period, strict adherence to ethical principles such as justice, beneficence, and respect for participants were observed. It was revealed that only one MTB-MLE teacher teaching Ayta Magbukun is from the Ayta community and non-Ayta teachers struggle to teach Ayta Magbukun due to a lack of skills and knowledge. There is also a lack of training for teachers on the IPED curriculum as well as limited learning materials to aid the teaching of Ayta Magbukun. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the recruitment of Ayta Magbukun teachers in MTB-MLE programs, provide specialized training for non-Ayta teachers in the Ayta Magbukun language, strengthen training programs for teachers in the IPED curriculum, ensure adequate support and resources for learning materials in MTB-MLE programs, and the conduct of further research with a larger participant group to strengthen findings.*

**Keywords: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Ayta Magbukun language, Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum**

## INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples (IPs) are socially and culturally linked individuals who live in an organized society. They frequently have ancestral ties to the places where they settle, as well as natural resources that the land may contain (World Bank, 2023). The land and natural

resources are intimately connected to their identities, culture, ways of life, and spiritual well-being. Most IP groups have leaders who represent them to society at large. IPs are also recognized for speaking a language that is distinct from the designated official languages of the region or country in which they live. However,

because IPs account for only 6% of the global population, their language is always in danger of extinction. Eviction from their territory, where they commonly spread over a region, relocation, and marrying a non-IP are some of the causes of language loss. IPs speak 4,000 of the world's languages and are already on the verge of becoming 2,100 owing to extinction.

In the Philippines, there are approximately 11.3 million Indigenous Peoples, accounting for 11-12% of the total population (Minority Rights Group, 2020), and the Indigenous Peoples are geographically bounded, with 33% coming from Northern Luzon, 61% from Mindanao, and the remainder from Visayas (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). The Philippines needs to promote the development of indigenous peoples because the Philippine Constitution states that every citizen has the right to an education (Republic of the Philippines, 1987).

Recognizing the critical role of teachers in the successful implementation of DepEd's education programs, the National IPed Policy Framework (DO 62,

s. 2011) emphasizes the importance of strengthening teacher hiring, deployment, and continuous development to support the IPed Program's objectives (Section 15). The IPed Curriculum Framework (DO 32,

s. 2015) underscores the significance of addressing specific difficulties in the deployment of teachers and school leaders in order to enable effective curriculum implementation. These hiring guidelines are promulgated as DepEd Order No. 50 s. 2016, in order to ensure that teacher hiring and deployment, particularly in schools implementing IPed, are responsive to the requirements of the IPed Program and the envisioned quality of culture-based education under the K to 12 Basic Education Program.

Eduardo and Gabriel (2021) also claimed that despite these advancements,

there is still a shortage of educators skilled in the language of IPs/ICCs, as most Mother Tongue-based courses address only local dialects and languages rather than the language of the Indigenous natives. Another issue is that the majority of courses taught in educational institutions necessitate the usage of English terminology in the absence of an ethnic equivalent for foreign phrases that are primarily English vocabulary.

In Bataan Province of Central Luzon, there is an indigenous group known as the Ayta Magbukun. They can be found in the municipalities of Orani, Morong, Limay, Bagac, Hermosa, Balanga, Orion, Abucay, Pilar, and Mariveles, and unfortunately, they are one of the least studied indigenous groups in the Philippines (McHenry et al., 2013). Their language, according to UNESCO, is an unrecognized and endangered community language, as there are only 346 speakers of it, and it continues to decrease among the younger generation. The Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) also conducted a survey among the 383 Ayta Magbukun households around Bataan and they discovered that fifty percent (50%) of them are bilingual speakers. That is, they are not full-time indigenous speakers of the language and use Tagalog more often to communicate.

With the aim of saving the endangered Philippine languages, Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) established "Bahay-Wika" in 2018, at an Ayta village in Abucay, Bataan. Here, teachers and some elders in their community teach Ayta Magbukun children the Magbukun language through oral and written instructions using the same language (Esconde, 2018). Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School in Bangkal, Abucay was also built to cater to the Ayta Magbukun children.

Therefore, the researchers aimed to determine and describe the experiences of

MTB-MLE teachers in teaching the Magbukun language and reach conclusions that served as a basis for the enhancement of the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) in Bataan as well as the consideration of the Magbukun language in the MTB-MLE curriculum.

The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of MTB-MLE teachers in teaching the Ayta Magbukun language at Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How may the profile of the participants be described in terms of:
  - 1.1. ethnicity; and
  - 1.2. language/s spoken?
2. What are the MTB-MLE teachers' backgrounds in the Magbukun language?
3. What are the experiences of the participants in teaching the Magbukun language in the classroom?
4. What insights can be drawn from the experiences of the MTB-MLE teachers in teaching the Ayta Magbukun language?

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data gathering procedure of the researchers consisted of primary data collection at Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School, and the researchers employed a qualitative method of research in this study, which seeks to gain a thorough understanding of human experiences and relies more on observation rather than on numerical outcomes. It involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter.

Focused ethnography was the methodology used in this study, as it served the purpose and necessity to answer the researchers' queries. According to Desmond (2022), focused ethnography involves studying a specific group or community in-depth to understand their behavior, beliefs, values,

and culture. As per Bikker et al. (2017), it is an applied and pragmatic form of ethnography that explores a specific social phenomenon as it occurs in everyday life.

In selecting the sample for this study, the researchers utilized the total enumeration sampling under the non-probability sampling technique. Moreover, The researchers used an unstructured interview as the main instrument for gathering data. Lastly, the researchers used the thematic analysis approach when examining the data gathered for the purpose of determining common themes or subjects that were constantly addressed in the responses of the participants of the study.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study may provide insights that will be beneficial for the current state of our indigenous language teachers in Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School - Abucay District. The researchers selected a total of three (3) participants from each of the three (3) grade levels that teach the MTB-MLE subject. Participants A and B do not belong to any ethnic group and can only speak Tagalog and Kapampangan. They have limited knowledge of the Ayta Magbukun language because of the apparent lack of training and teaching experiences due to their recent appointment in Bangkal. Participant C, on the other hand, is half Ayta Magbukun and Tagalog and has been teaching in Bangkal for ten years now, allowing her to be erudite in Magbukun. All of the participants, however, are completers of the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEE) program.

In terms of teaching the Magbukun language, all of the participants integrate it in other subjects so that the pupils can understand the discussions better as well as for them to become used to Magbukun. Participants B and C also shared that they use tangible teaching materials in teaching Magbukun. Since the two (2) participants,

Participant A and Participant B, are not knowledgeable enough about Magbukun, they sometimes invite elders for assistance in teaching the pupils. They also admit that they ask for their pupils' help, especially those who are fluent in Magbukun when they forgot a word to say. Participant C, on the contrary, employs a student-centered approach wherein she asks questions and lets the pupils explain or share their ideas regarding it. With regards to teaching Aytas whose first language is not Magbukun, all of the participants do not find it challenging because the pupils are fluent in Tagalog which is also a language they speak.

Moving on, Participants A and C claimed that learning the Ayta culture is their initial step in learning the Magbukun Language. Participants A and B, on the other hand, believe that maintaining the community's native language at home is a good way in preserving the language. Participants A, B, and C then agree to include the Ayta Magbukun Language in the languages that MTB-MLE caters to in order to preserve it as well as the community's culture and identity.

The following core themes evolved from the data analysis on the in-depth interviews with the participants: Ahead in Number: Non-IP Teachers of Magbukun; Dominant Languages: Tagalog and Kapampangan, All BEEed Graduates; 1 Year Versus 10 Years of Teaching, Apprenticeship as a Necessity for MTB-MLE Teachers, Integration As a Better Teaching Strategy, Bahay-Wika as a Home that Hones Early Language Learners, Nature Stimulates Language Learning, Tagalog or Magbukun: IP Learners Require Less Effort to Teach, Elders As Supplementary Teachers, Embracing the Culture as an Initial Step to Language Preservation, Exploiting the Magbukun Language itself, Magbukun Learners: Not Sole Recipients But Also Contributors, The Synergy of the Community is the Key,

Inclusive and Beneficial: Incorporation of Magbukun in MTB-MLE Curriculum, and Insufficient Instructional Materials Call for Support.

## DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The profile of the participants in terms of ethnicity and language /s spoken.

#### a. Ahead in Number: Non-IP Teachers of Magbukun; Dominant Languages: Tagalog and Kapampangan

Being an Ayta Magbukun is an advantage when it comes to teaching the Magbukun language. You have sufficient exposure and knowledge of it so you can teach more to your pupils. However, the majority of the Magbukun language teachers are Tagalog, and the languages they speak are primarily Tagalog and Kapampangan. As a result, they are having difficulty in teaching their pupils.

### 2. The MTB-MLE teachers' background in the Magbukun Language.

#### a. All BEEed Graduates; 1 Year Versus 10 Years of Teaching

The more you teach, the more you will learn. You will gain greater insights about the most effective ways to teach your pupils and you will also develop mastery over what you teach. This can be justified by what the researchers witnessed during the fieldwork. Participant C has better mastery and teaching strategies than the two (2) participants because she has been teaching the language in Bangkal for 10 years now.

#### b. Apprenticeship as a Necessity for MTB-MLE Teachers

Being an apprentice of an experienced teacher or an expert is a good way to gain knowledge about teaching. You will get instructions that will shape your skills and you will also gain insights about effective pedagogy and assessment techniques.

### **3. The experiences of the participants in teaching the Magbukun language in the classroom.**

#### **a. Integration as a Better Teaching Strategy**

Employing the Magbukun language in other subjects is one of the ways that the Participants saw in order to develop the pupils' language competence. Although the pupils use Tagalog as the primary medium of communication, Magbukun is still utilized through greetings and as a mode of instruction for some subjects. Still, the pupils need more exposure to the language as they get to understand the words' meaning but somehow find it challenging to use them in sentences.

#### **b. Bahay-Wika as a Home that Honors Early Language Learners**

Bahay-Wika was built on September 28, 2018. Its main goal is to preserve the Ayta Magbukun language through teaching it to Ayta children ages two to three years old. After graduating from Bahay-Wika, the pupils are enrolled in Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School. Despite not being included in the MTB-MLE curriculum, teachers are finding ways to continue the teaching of Magbukun.

#### **c. Nature Stimulates Language Learning**

Part of the teaching process is the creation of instructional materials. Participants from Bangkal prefer to teach the language using items that are available and visible around them since it is more successful in making the pupils active and the topic relatable. They call this "indigenization."

#### **d. Tagalog or Magbukun: IP Learners Require Less Effort to Teach**

Participants face no difficulties in teaching both IP and Non-IP pupils as they use Tagalog to communicate with each other. However, they claim that IP pupils are much easier to teach because

they already have background knowledge in both Magbukun and Tagalog. Whereas, the majority of the Non-IP pupils can only understand Tagalog. As a result, if the teacher uses Magbukun words during discussions, they struggle to understand them.

#### **e. Elders As Supplementary Teachers**

Elders of the Ayta Magbukun community are more knowledgeable with regards to their language, culture, and traditions. In this regard, they are often invited in the school to teach the Ayta Magbukun pupils.

#### **f. Embracing the Culture as an Initial Step to Language Preservation**

Culture and Language are inseparable. Culture, in particular, tells us how to communicate with people, as well as, it shapes our values and ethics. Language, on the other hand, is a tool used to share our culture. When it is lost, our culture will be lost too.

#### **g. Exploiting the Magbukun Language itself**

When it comes to the execution of Magbukun language learning and the inclination of language users towards it, exploiting the Magbukun Language can have a significant impact. By actively utilizing the language as a routine inside the classroom and using it in learning resources, Magbukun learners and teachers create an environment that fosters effective language learning and teaching that encourages them to embrace the Magbukun Language.

#### **h. Magbukun Learners: Not Sole Recipients But Also Contributors**

This highlights the interactive nature of language acquisition and knowledge dissemination. Instead of a one-sided process of learning where Magbukun learners passively receive knowledge, they have a vital role in actively engaging in the learning process by using their language in their daily interactions where it will allow

them to introduce new words and expressions to others. Also, by utilizing their language in their cultural activities, it will contribute to the preservation and promotion of its cultural heritage. By doing so, these make valuable impacts and

contributions to the enrichment of the Magbukun Language.

#### **i. The Synergy of the Community is the Key**

The acquisition of the Magbukun language and knowledge expansion isn't possible without the collaborative efforts, and support of the community because this involves the shared resources and expertise of IP speakers, educators, and learners. The support and motivation that everyone gets from the community help them overcome challenges and stay motivated. Thus, the collaborative efforts within them contribute to the overall growth of the Magbukun Language.

#### **4. Insights of MTB-MLE teachers on the consideration of Ayta Magbukun in the MTB-MLE curriculum.**

##### **a. Inclusive and Beneficial: Incorporation of Magbukun in MTB-MLE Curriculum**

Incorporating Magbukun into the MTB-MLE curriculum yields a wide array of substantial benefits. First, it enhances academic performance by allowing pupils to learn in their mother tongue, which facilitates better understanding, engagement, and mastery of the curriculum. Second, it contributes to cultural preservation and identity. Third, by embracing and celebrating different languages, the educational system creates a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Pupils from diverse linguistic backgrounds benefit from a curriculum that values their language and culture, fostering social equality. And lastly, the curriculum prepares pupils to be globally aware and

culturally competent individuals.

##### **b. Insufficient Instructional Materials Call for Support**

When it comes to learning a language, having the right materials to guide and support learners is extremely important. However, in the case of Magbukun language learning, there is a shortage of these materials. This means that learners don't have enough resources to help them effectively learn the language. This calls for government assistance in providing instructional materials that are essential for learning progression.

#### **CONCLUSION**

1. Not all MTB-MLE teachers at Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School who teach the Ayta Magbukun language belong to the Ayta Community. Only one out of three MTB-MLE teachers which is Participant C is an Ayta Magbukun.
2. Since the majority of the MTB-MLE teachers, specifically, Participant A and Participant B, are not from the Ayta Magbukun community, there is really a struggle in language teaching. It is hard for them to relay and instruct the IP learners because they are not equipped with the necessary skills or background knowledge in the Ayta Magbukun language.
3. There is an obvious lack of training for teachers with regard to the IPED curriculum. The majority of the participants, who are also not part of the community, have not got any significant trainings despite teaching Magbukun for a year already. Participant A and Participant B said that they do not have any trainings that will prepare them for teaching the Ayta Magbukun language.
4. Aside from flashcards and some storybooks, there are no other learning materials in the school to supplement

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language learning. Participant B showed the learning materials that she uses in teaching the Ayta Magbukun language and it only consists of flashcards and some self- printed storybooks written in the Ayta Magbukun language. There are no textbooks or modules written in the Ayta Magbukun language which makes it difficult for the language teachers.

5. Most IP pupils cannot converse using the Ayta Magbukun language. The sole IP teacher of Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School, Participant C, and the handler of Bahay-Wika's first batch of learners, Participant B, admitted that IP families rarely use the Ayta Magbukun language at home which contributes to the current behavior of IP pupils in the Ayta Magbukun language.
6. There have already been studies done on the Ayta Magbukun's practices, culture, and beliefs. However, a particular study centered on the experiences of teachers in teaching the Magbukun Language is still unexplored. Language is a crucial component of one's culture because it is a means for transmitting it. Along with regular routines, it is equally important to preserve it since if it dies, so would their culture

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