



# The Impact of Multilingualism on Social Studies Class and Its Potential to Enhance Social Cohesion

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**Abstract:** This study examines the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of a multilingual approach in social studies classes at Baguio Central University during the short-term school year 2022-2023. It involved a sample of 61 participants who were currently enrolled in social studies classes. This study utilized a survey questionnaire instrument to gather data on students' perceptions regarding the advantages and difficulties associated with the integration of a multilingual approach in their academic curriculum. The aim of this study is to provide valuable insights into the field of multilingual education and its effects on student learning in the context of social studies. Findings demonstrate a significant consensus among participants regarding the superiority of incorporating multiple languages in social studies education, surpassing any possible obstacles. It also acknowledges the challenges associated with limited teacher training in multiple languages yet highlights the resounding endorsement of a multilingual approach by students. The study's results provide support for the incorporation of multilingual methodologies into social studies education, highlighting their capacity to enhance students' cultural awareness and global competency.

## Background of the Study

Globalization, combined with the introduction of the internet and information technology, has profoundly altered the way individuals, groups, and society interact. The ability to converse in multiple languages has grown as a result of the opportunity to connect with people from all over the world (Garca & Li Wei, 2014). This talent is not just advantageous on an individual level, but it also has societal ramifications, particularly in terms of social cohesion. In addition, the relevance of multilingualism in enhancing intercultural dialogue, understanding, and collaboration has been generally acknowledged by the international community (May 2014). As Baker (2011) points out, the increasing diversity of societies has heightened attention in the role of multilingualism in promoting global concord. Given the broad scope of social studies, which aims to provide students with the skills they need to participate actively and responsibly in a democratic society that values cultural diversity, it is critical to investigate the impact of linguistic diversity on this educational domain (Banks, 2004).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization recognizes the potential of multilingualism in building global mutual understanding and tolerance, which in turn helps to the development of peace and social cohesion, according to UNESCO (2003). Multilingualism policies in the European Union emphasize the importance of many languages in strengthening social cohesion and mutual understanding among its diverse member states (European Commission, 2005). Philippines, a nation with a rich tapestry of languages and dialects, provides ample support for the exploration of multilingualism's role in social studies education. A country home to over 100 languages, the Philippines provides a unique context for examining language diversity and its effects on social cohesion (Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino, 2018). Moreover, Gonzalez (1998) investigated the impact of the multilingual education strategy, discovering that the employment of different languages in the classroom led to improved student comprehension of social studies courses. Similarly, Bernardo (2004) discovered that learners' competency in many languages improved their academic progress, even in the subject of social studies.

Villanueva and Saosa (2020) evaluated the effects of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program in the Philippines in a more recent study. They discovered that teaching in the students' home languages increased conceptual knowledge and allowed for more active classroom engagement. Their findings also imply that cultivating mutual understanding and respect among linguistically varied learners can have a major impact on social studies education and enhance social cohesion.

Finally, Tupas (2015) provides persuasive evidence that language diversity and multilingualism can create an inclusive education system. Tupas contends that adopting multilingualism in education, particularly in topics such as social studies, encourages pupils to value their cultural identities while also promoting unity in variety. The significant language diversity of the Cordillera region provides a unique setting for researching the impact of multilingualism on social studies instruction. The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), noted for its indigenous cultures and languages, is made up of seven provinces, each with its unique language and dialect, such as Ibaloi, Ifugao, Kankanaey, and others (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016).

The Philippine Department of Education's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy emphasizes the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the early grades. This has eased the incorporation of local cultures and customs into the mainstream curriculum, particularly social studies, in the Cordillera region (Ocampo & Quimbo, 2018). Martin (2013) discovered that incorporating local languages in instruction boosted students' comprehension and retention of social studies topics in a study done in the region. Martin's study also discovered an increase in classroom involvement, which he attributes to the use of familiar languages. Despite the rising amount of research on multilingual education, there is still a relative scarcity of studies concentrating especially on how multilingualism effects social studies education and its capacity to create social cohesion (Banks, 2004). Furthermore, most research to date has focused on the general effects of multilingual education on academic achievement, with less attention paid to specific topic areas such as social studies (May, 2014). The purpose of this research is to fill these gaps by investigating the direct impact of language variety on social studies education and its role in building social cohesion.

Due to the increasing linguistic diversity of classrooms worldwide, it is crucial to comprehend the impact of multilingualism on social studies education. This study provides valuable insights into how language diversity can improve social studies education and contribute to social cohesion. As language is more than a means of communication – it conveys culture, history, and personal identities – its inclusion in social studies can lead to enriched classroom discussions, cross-cultural comprehension, and empathy (Baker, 2011). This research can also be a useful resource for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. It can help educators utilize language diversity effectively to create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. The findings could provide curriculum designers with a new perspective on incorporating multilingual approaches into social studies curriculum design. In the meantime, policymakers may find this study useful when formulating or revising language education policies, especially those pertaining to multilingual education.

It is in this context that the researchers seek to investigate the impact of multilingualism on social studies Class and its potential to enhance social cohesion. Specifically, it seeks to answer the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing multilingual approaches in social studies education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study is based on two influential theoretical frameworks: Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-Cultural Theory and Bourdieu's (1991) Theory of Cultural Capital. These theoretical viewpoints were chosen because they offer useful insights for comprehending the phenomena under research. The relevance of social interactions and cultural background in affecting individual development and learning processes is emphasized in Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital, on the other hand, focuses on the impact of cultural resources and social institutions on people' educational and social outcomes.

### *Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory*

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory proposes that cognitive development is significantly influenced by social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place within cultural contexts and is facilitated by social interactions. The idea of "cultural tools" was also proposed by Vygotsky, who claimed that cultural objects like language and symbols and not just social interaction are what mediate development. He contends that these resources influence cognitive growth and can differ from culture to culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, which emphasizes the significance of social interactions and culture in students' cognitive development, has had a considerable impact on educational methods. Vygotsky's work served as the foundation for other educational approaches, including guided discovery, collaborative learning, and teacher modeling.

### *Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural theory in connection with multilingualism on social Studies Class*

In the context of a multilingual social studies class, Cummins (2000) suggests that students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge about diverse cultures by studying their respective languages. This approach enables students to develop a deeper understanding of cultural perspectives that may differ from their own. The creation of a 'Zone of Proximal Development' through the interaction of students in different languages has been suggested as a means to facilitate cognitive development, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978). The utilization of multiple languages can offer students a rich cultural context, as language itself functions as a significant cultural instrument. Furthermore, the role of language in facilitating learning is a crucial aspect, as emphasized by Vygotsky's work (Vygotsky, 1980). In a multilingual setting, scaffolding can be implemented through the translation of concepts into various languages or through the provision of explanations using examples from diverse cultures.

### *Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital*

According to Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital, the possession of knowledge in multiple languages can be regarded as a type of cultural capital that has the potential to improve individuals' social mobility and cohesion (Bourdieu, 1991). The concept of cultural capital, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, a renowned French sociologist, has greatly enhanced our comprehension of social inequality. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), encompasses a range of symbolic elements including skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, and credentials. It is acquired through membership in a specific social class. The phenomenon of individuals sharing common cultural capital, such as clothing, accents, vernacular, and manners, has been observed to contribute to the formation of a collective identity and the establishment of group positioning. This process often involves distinguishing between an in-group ("us") and an out-group ("them"). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the perpetuation of inequalities is a significant outcome of this phenomenon. The upper classes, leveraging their possession of a larger pool of cultural capital, effectively employ it to uphold their privileged status within society (Bourdieu, 1986).

### *Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital in relation to multilingualism*

The theory of cultural capital, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, posits that specific cultural resources such as skills, tastes, and knowledge play a significant role in facilitating upward social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). When examining the impact of multilingualism on promoting social cohesion, this theory holds profound implications. In Addition, multilingualism can be conceptualized as a manifestation of embodied cultural capital, as it encompasses the acquisition of linguistic abilities and cultural competencies derived from the ability to communicate in multiple languages (Bourdieu, 1986). The possession of this particular form of cultural capital has the potential to confer a distinct advantage in various settings, including international labor markets and interconnected social landscapes characterized by globalization.

Furthermore, in the realm of social cohesion, the utilization of multilingualism has the potential to act as a mechanism for bridging cultural divides and nurturing mutual comprehension among diverse cultural or linguistic communities. The ability to communicate in multiple languages has been recognized as a valuable skill that can facilitate enhanced and nuanced communication by overcoming barriers. According to Vertovec (2007), individuals

or societies that are multilingual have the potential to serve as cultural mediators, effectively navigating and negotiating diverse cultural environments. This ability can contribute to the development of social cohesion within communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that multilingualism, being a form of cultural capital, can also perpetuate social inequalities. In certain social contexts, there exists a differential valuation of languages, with some languages being accorded more value than others. For instance, English is highly valued in many international business contexts. Consequently, individuals who possess proficiency in these highly valued languages are granted access to a wider range of significant opportunities. This phenomenon serves to reinforce existing social hierarchies, as posited by Bourdieu (1991). Hence, the presence of multilingualism has the potential to foster social cohesion; however, it can also, paradoxically, give rise to social divisions if not approached with a focus on fairness and equality.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

The study employed a mixed-methods research design. This design combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), a mixed-methods research design allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of complex phenomena.

### *Locale and Population of the Study*

The population of this study is consisting of 61 students from the College of Teacher Education at Baguio Central University located in Baguio City, Philippines.

### *Data Gathering Instrument*

Quantitative data will be collected using surveys/questionnaires to gather information on challenges, opportunities, cultural understanding, social cohesion, critical thinking, empathy, and global citizenship. These surveys will employ Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to assess participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Meanwhile, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants. These interviews provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives related to multilingualism and social studies education. Open-ended questions were used to elicit rich and detailed responses.

### *Treatment of the Data*

Upon collection of necessary data, these were automatically tabulated through a spreadsheet. The study made use of descriptive statistics such as frequency count, weighted mean, and ranking was used to discern trends within the results.

## RESULTS

### *Perceived Opportunities in implementing multilingual approaches in social studies class.*

Table 1 presents the perceived opportunities and based on the gathered data, students view that a multilingual approach to social studies enhances students' understanding of different cultures. According to studies, teaching social studies using a bilingual approach greatly improves students' comprehension of various cultures (Ariza, 2002). Students gain unique insights into many cultures that monolingual studies cannot offer by learning and analyzing social issues in a variety of languages (Cummins, 2000). Furthermore, language serves as a medium of cultural expression as well as a way of communication, according to Cummins (2000). Thus, giving students the opportunity to study social studies materials in many languages allows them to have a deeper, more complex grasp of the subject. This viewpoint is consistent with Baker's (2001) research, which contends that multilingualism encourages cognitive flexibility and aids pupils in appreciating the diversity of world cultures. Moreover, Ariza (2002) emphasizes the need of teaching social studies in multiple languages and claims that doing so promotes multicultural awareness. Students get an understanding of the importance and relevance of many languages as well as a respect for various cultures. Furthermore, this bilingual method in social studies is supported by the work of Byram (1997). Byram points out that using a variety of languages in social studies training gives students the critical intercultural skills they need, which in turn fosters a deeper understanding of various countries. So, incorporating a multilingual approach in teaching social studies enhances students' cultural understanding by deepening their

appreciation for global diversity and fostering their intercultural competencies (Byram, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Ariza, 2002).

The overall weighted mean of 3.36 indicates that students strongly believe that multilingual approaches should be used in social studies instruction. This outcome is consistent with multilingual education research (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2000) and suggests that pupils are aware of the advantages of such an approach. Ariza's (2002) research, which emphasizes the value of culturally responsive teaching, resonates with these findings. Her work suggests that students recognize and value the diverse cultural insights that a multilingual approach can offer, hence their positive response in the survey. Furthermore, it supports Cummins' (2000) assertion that multilingual education not only enhances communication skills but also promotes multicultural understanding. The score of 3.36 implies that students are aware of these benefits and agree with the importance of integrating multiple languages into social studies instruction.

Table 1. Perceived Opportunities in implementing multilingual approaches in social studies class.

Statements	(4) SA	(3) A	(2) SD	(1) D	TWD	WM	DE
A multilingual approach to social studies enhances students' understanding of different cultures.	26	19	1	0	163	3.54	SA
Incorporating multiple languages in social studies education encourages critical thinking among students.	18	26	2	0	154	3.35	SA
Using a multilingual approach can improve students' communication skills.	20	22	4	0	154	3.35	SA
A multilingual approach contributes to inclusivity and diversity in the classroom.	17	27	2	0	153	3.33	SA
Implementing multilingual approaches can give a competitive edge to students in their future careers.	18	23	5	0	151	3.28	SA
There is adequate institutional support for implementing a multilingual approach in social studies education.	17	27	2	0	153	3.33	SA
Total Weighted Mean						20.17	
Average Weighted Mean						3.36	SA

*Perceived Challenges in implementing multilingual approaches in social studies class.*

Table 2 presents the perceived challenges in implementing multilingual approaches in social studies education. According to the data presented in table 2, the need for more teacher training and proficiency in many languages is a substantial barrier to applying a multilingual approach to social studies teaching (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Indeed, the advantages of a multilingual approach to social studies could be undermined without bilingual professors. Further, Freeman and Freeman (2004) noted that in order to deliver high-quality bilingual or multilingual teaching, educators must be highly proficient in all of the languages being used. Fluency in speaking, reading, and writing are important, but so are cultural sensitivity and knowledge of the subtleties and applications of each language in different contexts.

Additionally, it is emphasized by Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) that teacher training programs frequently do not take a comprehensive approach to multilingual education. These courses ought to cover in-depth cultural studies, multilingual teaching pedagogy, and rigorous language instruction. In order to increase the number of instructors who are multilingual, it is imperative to invest in teacher training programs. Moreover, according to Cummins (2000), teachers need to be well-versed in the ways that students' primary languages and cultures influence their educational experiences. With this understanding, educators may more effectively assist their students' bilingual social studies education while also fostering their cultural identities and linguistic growth.

Table 2. Perceived Challenges in implementing multilingual approaches in social studies class.

Statements	(4) SA	(3) A	(2) SD	(1) D	TWD	WM	DE
It is challenging to find sufficient educational resources for teaching social studies in multiple languages.	7	33	6	0	139	3.02	A
The need for increased teacher training and competence in multiple languages is a significant hurdle.	18	27	1	0	155	3.37	SA
Implementing a multilingual approach may slow the pace of the social studies curriculum.	8	23	15	0	131	2.85	A
Differentiating instruction for students with varying language skills can be challenging.	10	33	3	0	145	3.15	A





There may be resistance from parents or students towards multilingual social studies education.	9	28	8	1	137	2.98	A
Overall, the benefits of implementing a multilingual approach in social studies education outweigh the challenges.	12	29	4	1	144	3.13	A
Total Weighted Mean						18.50	
Average Weighted Mean						3.08	A

Overall, the weighted mean of 3.13 indicates that students agreed that the benefits of implementing a multilingual approach in social studies education outweigh the challenges. The average score is consistent with studies that have shown how much a multilingual approach to education may benefit students. Cummins (2000) asserts that multilingualism fosters multicultural understanding and enhances the educational opportunities for children. It increases the understanding of cultural variety around the world and improves cognitive flexibility (Baker, 2001). The results imply that students are aware of these advantages and prefer them to potential drawbacks. Despite the difficulties that come with implementing a multilingual approach, such as the higher standards for teacher preparation and proficiency (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), the mean score of 3.13 shows that students strongly believe in its significance. This mindset mirrors a wider educational trend that places a greater premium on language proficiency, intercultural ability, and global competency (Byram, 1997).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The study's findings conclusively show that students believe the advantages of using a multilingual approach in social studies instruction outweigh the drawbacks. This steadfast belief is a reflection of students' understanding of the benefits of multilingual education for improving global competency, cognitive flexibility, and cultural understanding. Students continue to believe in the significant benefits of including many languages into social studies curriculum, despite admitting the challenges inherent in doing so, such as the need for more teacher training and language proficiency.

Given the strong belief in the benefits of a multilingual approach in social studies instruction, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Multilingual Curriculum Development: Encourage the development and adoption of a multilingual curriculum in social studies.
2. Invest in Teacher Training: Recognizing the need for teachers proficient in multiple languages, it is recommended to invest in targeted teacher training programs.
3. Research and Evaluation: Continue to conduct research and evaluations to measure the effectiveness of a multilingual approach in social studies education.

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