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Do Philippine Higher Education Institutions Speak Multilingual Realities?

Leonardo Daquioag Tejano

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DISCUSSION PAPER

Rewriting the Rules: The Philippine AI Roadmap and its Transformative Implications for Higher Education

DISCUSSION PAPER

Accreditation, Student Outcomes, Continuous Quality Improvement Mechanisms: An Inquiry

Do Philippine Higher Education Institutions Speak Multilingual Realities?

Leonardo Daquioag Tejano[1]

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Key Highlights

- This paper exposes a destructive paradox at the heart of Philippine higher education: the pursuit of internationalization is actively producing graduates who are "globally acceptable but locally insecure," alienating them from the very communities they are meant to serve through a process of linguistic and cultural detachment.

- A fundamental policy contradiction is revealed to sabotage learning: while classrooms adopt flexible, decolonial multilingual pedagogies out of necessity, high-stakes assessments remain rigidly monolingual, functioning as instruments of linguistic gatekeeping and perpetuating systemic inequity rather than measuring professional competencies.

- Academic reward systems are uncovered to perpetuate epistemic injustice. Promotion and publication metrics systematically devalue scholarship in Filipino and regional languages, rendering it institutionally "invisible" and stifling the nation's intellectual sovereignty and development.

Introduction

The Philippines, an archipelago of over 7,000 islands and home to more than 185 languages, presents a complex and dynamic linguistic landscape that has been a central, yet contentious, issue in its educational system for over a century (Nolasco 2008; Metila et al. 2025). While basic education has been the primary battleground for language debates, higher education has maintained a distinct, seemingly immutable trajectory of English dominance. This paper confronts a critical paradox: as Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) celebrate their ascent in global university rankings (e.g., the *Times Higher Education* [THE] and the *Quacquarelli Symonds* [QS]), the nation's basic education outcomes stagnate, and tangible community development remains elusive. This disconnect is not coincidental but symptomatic of a profound "linguistic mismatch" between the monolingual hegemony of academia and the multilingual realities of the nation.

This paper argues that the persistent privileging of English in Philippine HEIs is a direct legacy of linguistic imperialism, a colonial construct that perpetuates a hierarchy of languages and knowledge systems. This ideology, now rebranded under the guise of "internationalization" and "global competitiveness," prioritizes market-driven prestige over local epistemic development, thereby committing a form of epistemic violence against its own people. It falsely equates English proficiency with academic quality, marginalizing students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and devaluing indigenous forms of knowledge. To genuinely address this systemic failure, HEIs must move beyond rhetorical multilingualism toward a radical, structural reform in policy, assessment, and academic reward systems—a decolonial turn that reclaims the university's role as an engine of national consciousness and community welfare.

To investigate this complex dynamic, this study employs a mixed-methods approach. It draws on quantitative data from a national survey of 241 students, faculty, and stakeholders across thirteen regions, and qualitative insights from a thematic analysis of focus group discussions. This evidence-based approach allows for a robust examination of how English-dominant ideologies manifest in policy and practice, and how they are experienced, negotiated, and resisted by those on the ground. Ultimately, this paper challenges the foundational assumptions of Philippine higher education, arguing that its current trajectory, while gaining global visibility, is failing its primary mandate: to serve the Filipino nation. It raises critical questions about the role of HEIs in either fostering or dismantling the colonial structures that continue to stifle the nation's rich linguistic diversity and intellectual potential.

A History of Philippine Language Policies

The contemporary language-in-education debate in the Philippines is deeply rooted in its colonial and postcolonial history. The policies enacted over the last century reveal a persistent struggle between nationalistic aspirations and internationalist pressures, with English and Filipino as the primary contenders for linguistic dominance in the educational sphere.

The American Colonial Period: The Imposition of English as a Colonial Project

The introduction of English into the Philippines was a deliberate colonial strategy. Following the American occupation in 1898, English was systematically promoted as a "civilizing tool" and an integral component of military strategy (Martin 2014). General Arthur MacArthur viewed the extension of educational facilities, with English as the medium of instruction (MOI), as an "exclusively military measure" (UNESCO–Philippine Educational Foundation 1953, 74, quoted in Martin 2014). This policy was institutionalized through the Education Act No. 74 in 1901, which established a public school system with English as the sole MOI (Metila et al. 2025). This act effectively initiated a century-long project of linguistic imperialism, designed to create a compliant, English-speaking colonial bureaucracy.

Throughout the American colonial period, native languages were systematically confined "to outside the territories of schooling" (Martin 2014, 190). This occurred despite a flourishing literary tradition in various Philippine languages that emerged with the newfound freedom of expression after three centuries of Spanish religious domination. The 1925 Monroe Report, a comprehensive study of the educational system, noted that Filipino students had no opportunity to study in their native language and recommended its use as an auxiliary medium of instruction for subjects like character education (Board of Educational Survey 1925, 40). However, American officials insisted on the exclusive use of English, a policy that propelled the language to become, in the words of Renato Constantino, a "wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past" (1970, 12, quoted in Martin 2014), thereby severing the link between education and national identity.

The first significant counter-movement came with the establishment of a national language. In 1937, the National Language Institute was created, and in 1939, Tagalog was proclaimed the basis of the national language, which

was later taught as a subject in schools (Martin 2014). However, this did not displace English as the primary language of education, government, and power.

Postcolonial Policies: The Tug-of-War between Filipino and English

After gaining independence in 1946, the Philippines continued to grapple with its language policy. English was maintained as the dominant MOI, while the national language, renamed Pilipino in 1959 and later Filipino in 1987, was taught as a subject (Martin 2014). The 1950s saw a brief experiment with the Vernacular Teaching Policy of 1957, which used major local languages for initial literacy, but English remained the MOI from Grade 3 onwards (Martin 2014).

A major policy shift occurred with the implementation of the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) through Department Order No. 25, s. 1974. Reaffirmed by Department Order No. 52, s. 1987, the BEP aimed to achieve "competence in both Filipino and English at the national level" (Department of Education, Culture and Sports 1987). It mandated a clear separation of languages in the curriculum: English was to be the MOI for English, Mathematics, and Science, while Filipino was designated for all other subjects (Department of Education, Culture and Sports 1987; Gonzalez 1998). The 1987 Constitution solidified this dual-language approach, declaring Filipino and English as the official languages for communication and instruction (art. XIV, sec. 7). Regional languages were designated as auxiliary media of instruction.

However, the implementation of the BEP was fraught with challenges. Studies revealed low proficiency levels in both languages among teachers and students (Besa 2014). Gonzalez (1998) noted that the policy was not seriously implemented, particularly in private schools and at the tertiary level, and that teachers often resorted to code-switching. The policy was criticized for creating a "subtractive" form of bilingualism, where neither language was fully developed (Martin 2014).

The economic pressures of globalization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries led to a renewed push for English. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, citing the need to maintain a "competitive edge" in industries like information and communications technology (ICT) and call centers, issued Executive Order No. 210 in 2003. This order aimed to "strengthen the use of the English

language as a medium of instruction" and mandated that at least 70 percent of instructional time in secondary school be conducted in English (Executive Order No. 210, s. 2003; Department of Education 2006). This move was seen by many as a setback for the national language and was challenged in court by nationalist groups (Martin 2014).

Multilingualism in Practice: The Rise and Fall of MTB-MLE in Basic Education

The persistent poor performance of Filipino students in national and international assessments, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), fueled a reevaluation of the country's language-in-education policy (Martin 2014). The 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) report further highlighted this learning crisis, showing that a significant proportion of Grade 5 students struggled with fundamental skills (UNICEF and SEAMEO 2024). This crisis, coupled with growing evidence from local pilot studies like the Lubuagan First Language Component and international research, led to a paradigm shift towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE).

Department Order No. 74, s. 2009 institutionalized MTB-MLE, citing research that learners "learn to read more quickly when in their first language (L1)" and subsequently learn a second (L2) and third (L3) language more effectively (Department of Education 2009 quoted in Besa 2014). This policy was codified into law with the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533), which mandated the use of the learner's L1 as the primary MOI from Kindergarten to Grade 3 (Metila et al. 2025). This was a landmark policy, making the Philippines a regional leader in adopting L1-based education at a national scale (Jareonsettasin 2016 as cited in Metila et al. 2025).

Despite its strong pedagogical and legal foundations, the implementation of MTB-MLE was plagued with difficulties. A 2019 evaluation found that the policy was often treated as an "add-on" and suffered from chronic gaps in materials, teacher preparation, and coordination (Monje et al. 2019). The country's extreme linguistic diversity, with over 185 languages, posed a significant logistical challenge. DepEd's decision to initially support only 19 languages was criticized for excluding many ethnolinguistic groups (Metila et al. 2025). Leaño, Rabi, and Piragasam (2019) found that even with MTB-MLE, indigenous learners still faced significant difficulties in English semantics due to a lack of vocabulary and opportunities for practice.

Political support for MTB-MLE began to wane under the Duterte administration and eroded further under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who emphasized the economic utility of English (Metila et al. 2025). The policy's opponents framed it as a failure, linking it to poor performance in international assessments and citing persistent implementation issues (Metila et al. 2025; The Manila Times Editorial Board 2023). This culminated in the passage of Republic Act No. 12027 in October 2024, which repealed the MTB-MLE mandate and reverted the primary MOI to Filipino and English from the early grades. This marked a major reversal, ending a 15-year experiment in L1-based education and highlighting the fragility of evidence-based policy under political and economic pressures (Metila et al. 2025).

Language Ideology in Philippine Higher Education: The Primacy of English

While basic education has been a site of dynamic and often contentious policy shifts, Philippine higher education has remained a bastion of English dominance. The language ideology in HEIs is shaped by a confluence of historical prestige, the global trend of internationalization, and powerful economic incentives. This has created a linguistic environment that is often disconnected from the multilingual realities of its students and the pedagogical principles of L1-based learning.

The internationalization of higher education has become a key objective for Philippine HEIs, driven by the desire to attract foreign students, enhance global competitiveness, and align with regional frameworks like the ASEAN integration (Commission on Higher Education 2016). This push for internationalization has reinforced English's position as the undisputed academic lingua franca (Bennett 2013). CHED encourages HEIs to adopt English as the primary MOI, a stance supported by national policies like Executive Order 210 (Besa 2014).

Recent institutional developments illustrate this continued privileging of English. In 2020, Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) formally adopted English as its medium of instruction and official communication, with then-University President Shirley C. Agrupis—now Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)—framing the decision as a response to "recent surveys and studies which show a decline in the English proficiency of Filipino students" (MMSU 2020). The university justified this policy as essential for internationalization, stating the need to "master the English language as a means to communicate with the world, especially as

we intensify our bid for internationalization" (MMSU 2020). While MMSU clarified that it would continue to support multilingualism through its Center for Ilokano and Amianan Studies and Sentro ng Wika at Kultura, and that individuals remain "free to use whatever language they are comfortable with" outside academic contexts, the formal institutionalization of English as the primary medium signals the enduring ideological weight accorded to English in Philippine higher education.

Similarly, in February 2025, Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, a local government unit–run university in Laguna, implemented an "English-only" policy, mandating that all correspondence and transactions be "conducted exclusively in English, both in written and spoken communication" (Ong 2025). The policy was framed as aligned with the university's "vision of developing globally competitive and world class students" (Ong 2025). However, the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) criticized the policy as counterproductive. KWF Chairman Arthur Casanova expressed that the commission was "shocked and saddened" by the policy, noting that it contravenes Executive Order 335 issued by former President Corazon Aquino, which mandates the use of Filipino in all official government communications (Ong 2025). Casanova argued that students could struggle translating their thoughts from their native language to English, potentially hampering deeper learning, and asserted that "educational institutions, such as universities, should be the first to promote Filipino and other native languages as intellectual languages" (Ong 2025). Pamantasan ng Cabuyao President Librado Dimaunahan later clarified that the policy applies only to "limited engagement"—official transactions, business, and meetings with students—rather than informal interactions (Ong 2025).

However, many universities lack explicit, comprehensive language policies that navigate the complexities of their multilingual student bodies (Cunanan 2013; Vizconde 2018). In the absence of clear institutional guidance, a de facto English-dominant policy prevails. This is visibly manifested in the "schoolscape," where an overwhelming majority of signs, official communications, and institutional markers are in English, symbolically marginalizing Filipino and other local languages (Bernardo 2021). Bernardo's (2021) study of the University of Santo Tomas found that 97.1 percent of 2,410 signs were in English, creating an "English-ized" environment that "othered, silenced, and peripheralized Philippine languages" (1).

Yet, acts of decolonial resistance are emerging from within the higher education sector. A 2024 survey by De La Salle University's newly established language center, Sentro sa Pagsasalin, Intelektuwalisasyon, at Adbokasiya (DLSU

Salita), found that students strongly support the preservation and promotion of the Filipino language. A significant majority (83 percent) believed it was important to actively develop and promote Filipino, especially in a university setting (DLSU 2024). DLSU Salita Director Raquel Sison-Buban articulated the center's mission: "Our goal is to make Filipino a language of aspiration . . . We must move away from the belief that Filipino is inferior to English" (DLSU 2024).

Similarly, student governance bodies have begun to challenge English-only institutional practices. In November 2025, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Open University System Student Council passed Resolution Order No. 003, mandating the publication of all official communications in both English and Filipino "to ensure accessibility and inclusivity" (PUP OUS Student Council 2025). This grassroots policy initiative, termed "Oplan Wikang Atin," represents an emerging counter-discourse to English dominance emanating from students themselves—an act of epistemic disobedience.

This preference for English remains deeply embedded in the beliefs of key stakeholders. A study of university administrators revealed a strong preference for English, driven by perceptions of its global importance (Vizconde 2018). Similarly, Cunanan (2013) found that while stakeholders expressed a desire to maintain Filipino for national identity, they recognized the practical necessity of English for global competitiveness. This creates what Gonzalez (1998) described as a "compromise solution to the demands of nationalism and internationalism" (515). The tension between institutional policies privileging English and emerging grassroots movements advocating for multilingualism reflects the contested terrain of language ideology in contemporary Philippine higher education.

Language Experiences in Philippine Higher Education Institutions: Evidence From Surveys and Focus Group Discussions

To further understand the case of multilingualism in Philippine Higher Education, a mixed-method study was conducted, combining a nationwide survey with subsequent focus group discussions to investigate language experiences. The initial quantitative phase involved the distribution of a survey via social media and email, which gathered responses from 241 participants,

comprising 153 students, 30 faculty members, and 58 stakeholders from 13 regions across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. This purposive selection aimed to include representatives from diverse institutional types, including state universities and colleges, private universities, and local colleges. While the sample size may not constitute large-scale nationwide data, the study's strength lies in its geographic and institutional diversity, capturing the heterogeneity of language policy experiences across different contexts. For the qualitative phase, survey respondents who expressed willingness were invited to participate in focus group discussions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives. Data analysis was conducted sequentially: quantitative survey data were analyzed to identify statistical patterns in language policy awareness, usage, and support, while the qualitative data from the discussions were subjected to a critical thematic analysis to uncover deeper insights into the lived realities of language policy implementation.

Quantitative Patterns in Language Policy Awareness, Usage, and Support

All three groups demonstrate substantial awareness of language policies, with an overall average of 79.5 percent. Students report the highest level of awareness (81.7 percent), followed by faculty (80.0 percent) and stakeholders (75.9 percent). This pattern suggests that Philippine HEIs have made reasonably effective efforts to communicate their language policies to their key constituencies.

The data reveal strong directional alignment in language usage patterns across groups. English remains the dominant language of instruction, with 100 percent of faculty reporting its use and 67 percent of students indicating regular use for learning. Filipino is also widely incorporated, with 90 percent of students and 87 percent of faculty reporting regular use. With respect to regional languages, the findings indicate converging perspectives rather than identical rates: 59 percent of students report greater participation when Filipino or regional languages are used, 57 percent observe instructors using regional languages during lectures, and 43 percent of faculty report using them in class. Taken together, these results demonstrate that regional languages play a meaningful and recognized—though variably implemented—role in Philippine HEI classrooms.

Across all groups, there is robust support for multilingual policies, though this support is expressed in group-specific ways. Faculty overwhelmingly endorse a balanced language policy that values English, Filipino, and regional languages (87 percent). In addition, 93 percent agree that the use of regional

languages improves equity and access, while 83 percent view code-switching as pedagogically beneficial. Students similarly recognize the value of multilingual approaches: 69 percent agree that multilingual practices enhance understanding, 59 percent report higher participation when Filipino or regional languages are used, and 65 percent indicate that they are allowed to use regional languages in assessments. Stakeholders reinforce this perspective, with 79 percent affirming that the use of Filipino and regional languages improves their access to HEI services.

The most significant concern emerges from stakeholders, 93 percent of whom report that language barriers have reduced their participation or engagement with HEIs. This finding points to a critical accessibility issue that warrants urgent institutional and policy-level intervention. Student concerns are primarily associated with English-medium instruction (EMI): 37 percent report increased anxiety during recitations and presentations, and an equal proportion feel pressure to avoid local languages in academic settings. Faculty perspectives corroborate these concerns, with 67 percent agreeing that prioritizing English may marginalize some students.

The data also shows encouraging alignment between institutional allowances and student experiences. A majority of students report being permitted to use Filipino or regional languages in assessments (65 percent), finding Filipino scaffolds helpful for academic writing (64 percent), and feeling that their linguistic identity is respected in classrooms (62 percent). These perceptions align with observed classroom practices, including instructors' reported use of regional languages during lectures (57 percent). Collectively, these findings suggest that while formal policies may continue to emphasize English, classroom-level practices often accommodate multilingual approaches—an encouraging indicator for future policy reform.

Thematic Insights

Respondents who indicated willingness to participate in focus group discussions were invited for in-depth conversations. Thematic analysis of their responses revealed five major themes.

Theme 1: Internationalization vs. Local Relevance Tension

Respondents articulated a fundamental tension between pursuing global recognition through English-medium instruction and maintaining relevance to

local communities. This is not merely a choice but a conflict between a foreign-oriented "prestige economy" and the nation's own epistemic needs.

> "If universities fully shift to English, they may become globally legible but locally detached."
>
> "I support internationalization, but sometimes it feels like we are doing it for rankings rather than for learning."
>
> "I worry we are producing graduates who are globally acceptable but locally insecure."

The phrase "globally legible but locally detached" encapsulates a core anxiety running through the responses—that internationalization, as currently implemented, may come at the cost of local relevance and identity. The critique that internationalization serves "rankings rather than learning" suggests a perception that language policy decisions are driven by institutional prestige rather than pedagogical effectiveness. The concern about producing "globally acceptable but locally insecure" graduates points to an identity dimension often overlooked in policy discussions: students may gain international credentials while losing confidence in engaging with their own communities. This theme reinforces the quantitative finding that 93 percent of faculty support recognizing regional languages for equity, even as institutions pursue internationalization.

Theme 2: Assessment–Instruction Misalignment

Respondents identified a critical disconnect between multilingual classroom practices and monolingual high-stakes assessments, including board and licensure examinations. This is not simple misalignment but a form of systemic linguistic gatekeeping.

> "Board and licensure examinations are officially content-based, but in practice they are also English proficiency tests."
>
> "I've seen excellent students fail board exams because they misread complex English questions, not because they lacked disciplinary knowledge."
>
> "In teaching, we negotiate language flexibility; in licensure, there is zero negotiation."

This theme exposes a systemic contradiction: classrooms accommodate multilingual practices (as confirmed by the 57 percent of students observing

regional language use in lectures), but assessments remain rigidly monolingual. The observation that board exams function as de facto "English proficiency tests" reveals how language becomes a hidden barrier to professional certification. The contrast between classroom "negotiation" and licensure's "zero negotiation" highlights how students are trained in one linguistic reality but assessed in another. This misalignment has concrete consequences—capable students fail not due to lack of knowledge but due to linguistic barriers, individualizing what is fundamentally a systemic problem.

Theme 3: Linguistic Equity and Access

Respondents challenged the notion of language policy neutrality, arguing that English-dominant policies systematically advantage students from privileged backgrounds while disadvantaging others.

> "We say language policy is neutral, but it consistently advantages students from elite, English-dominant backgrounds."
>
> "The expectation that students 'should already know English' ignores how uneven that exposure actually is."
>
> "Sometimes students feel intelligent in one language and inadequate in another—and the institution reinforces that hierarchy."

These responses directly challenge the assumption that language policies operate on a level playing field. The critique that policies "consistently advantage students from elite, English-dominant backgrounds" reframes language policy as an equity issue rather than a purely pedagogical one. The observation about "uneven exposure" to English acknowledges the socioeconomic dimensions of language proficiency—students from under-resourced schools or rural areas arrive at university with different linguistic capital. Most poignantly, the comment about feeling "intelligent in one language and inadequate in another" captures the psychological toll of linguistic hierarchies. This connects to the quantitative finding that 37 percent of students feel pressure to avoid local languages and 37 percent experience EMI-related anxiety.

Theme 4: Structural Barriers to Filipino/Regional Language Scholarship

Faculty respondents described systemic barriers that prevent Filipino and regional languages from developing as legitimate languages of scholarship,

including promotion criteria, publication requirements, and funding structures—a process that amounts to institutionalized epistemicide.

> "I publish in Filipino, but those publications don't count for promotion, funding, or recognition."
>
> "When I submit in Filipino, I'm asked to translate; when I submit in English, the language is never questioned."
>
> "If universities never allow regional languages into journals, conferences, and grants, they will never develop academic registers."

These responses reveal a structural paradox: while scholarship in Filipino and regional languages can technically be credited for promotion, academic journals in languages other than English are rare. The asymmetry captured in "asked to translate" versus "never questioned" illustrates how English operates as the unmarked default. Languages develop specialized vocabularies through use, so the scarcity of Philippine-language academic journals creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where these languages remain "underdeveloped" for scholarly purposes—not because faculty are prohibited from publishing in them, but because venues for doing so are limited. This explains why, despite 87 percent of faculty supporting balanced multilingual policies, actual scholarly production remains overwhelmingly English-dominant. As one respondent noted: "Kung talagang sinusuportahan natin ang Filipino, bakit parang invisible pa rin ito pagdating sa promotion at research metrics?" (If we truly support Filipino, why does it remain invisible when it comes to promotion and research metrics?)

Theme 5: The English-Quality Conflation

Respondents critiqued the widespread assumption that English proficiency equates to intellectual ability or educational quality, arguing this conflation obscures substantive evaluation of knowledge and competence.

> "English has become shorthand for quality, without sufficient reflection on what that excludes."
>
> "The problem isn't English itself—it's the assumption that English proficiency equals intellectual ability."
>
> "Here, English is treated as the only language capable of carrying theory."

This theme addresses perhaps the deepest ideological issue underlying language policy debates. The critique is not fundamentally anti-English but profoundly anti-exclusion, as one Filipino response clarified: "Hindi naman anti-English ang usapan—anti-exclusion ito." The conflation of English with quality creates a pernicious circular logic where English-medium education is valued primarily because it produces English-proficient graduates, often irrespective of their mastery in other critical competencies. This false equivalence of language skill with intellectual capability systematically marginalizes students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, who often have less exposure to English outside the classroom. Consequently, a student's potential is judged not on their cognitive abilities but on their linguistic privilege, creating artificial barriers to academic and professional success. The assertion that English is "the only language capable of carrying theory" further reveals a colonial epistemology that devalues knowledge produced and articulated in other languages. Respondents rightly noted that numerous countries have successfully developed their national languages into robust scholarly and scientific mediums, demonstrating that this is a matter of political will and investment rather than a linguistic impossibility. This entire issue is powerfully underscored by the broader finding that 67 percent of faculty agree that prioritizing English may marginalize students—a clear recognition within the academic community that the English-quality equation has tangible and damaging exclusionary effects on social equity in education.

Discussion of Results

The findings from this study illuminate the complex, multilayered realities of language policy implementation in Philippine higher education institutions. Drawing on survey data from 241 respondents and thematic insights from focus group discussions, the results reveal both encouraging patterns of multilingual accommodation and persistent structural tensions that merit critical examination within the broader context of language policy scholarship.

Policy Awareness and the Gap Between Knowledge and Practice

The high levels of language policy awareness reported across all respondent groups—averaging 79.5 percent—suggest that Philippine HEIs have achieved reasonable success in communicating their language frameworks to key constituencies. This finding aligns with Cunanan's (2013) observation that awareness of institutional language policies varies significantly across

Philippine universities, with some institutions demonstrating stronger policy dissemination than others. However, awareness alone does not guarantee alignment between policy and practice. As Symaco (2017, 92) argues, there often exists a “disconnect between policy and community practices” in Philippine language education, where stakeholders may be aware of official policies yet operate according to different linguistic norms in actual practice. The present study corroborates this pattern: while respondents demonstrate awareness of formal policies emphasizing English, classroom-level practices reveal substantial accommodation of Filipino and regional languages—a divergence that speaks to what Tupas and Lorente (2014, 166) describe as the negotiated, contested nature of language policy implementation on the ground.

The Persistence of English Dominance as Linguistic Imperialism

The finding that 100 percent of faculty report using English in instruction, while only 67 percent of students indicate regular use for learning, reflects the enduring dominance of English in Philippine higher education—a legacy traceable to the American colonial period. Constantino (1970) famously critiqued this linguistic inheritance as central to “the miseducation of the Filipino,” arguing that the imposition of English as the medium of instruction served colonial interests by producing citizens oriented toward American values rather than national consciousness. While contemporary debates have moved beyond simple colonial critique, the structural privileging of English persists. Bernardo (2021) demonstrates this through his analysis of the linguistic landscape at the University of Santo Tomas, where English comprises 97.1 percent of visual signage—a material manifestation of what he terms a “hierarchy favoring English” that marginalizes Philippine languages despite official multilingual policies.

The quantitative finding that 37 percent of students experience anxiety related to English-medium instruction (EMI) resonates with growing international scholarship on the affective dimensions of language policy. Hopkyns, Dovchin, and Sultana (2025, 372) identify what they call “policy distractions” in EMI contexts—institutional discourses that obscure the sociolinguistic complexities and psychological costs of English-dominant education. The anxiety reported by Filipino students mirrors patterns documented across diverse EMI settings, suggesting that the emotional toll of navigating linguistic hierarchies is not unique to the Philippines but rather a systemic feature of English-medium higher education globally.

Multilingual Practices as Pedagogical Resistance

Perhaps the most significant finding is the robust support for multilingual approaches across all stakeholder groups, with 87 percent of faculty endorsing balanced language policies and 83 percent viewing code-switching as pedagogically beneficial. This support, coupled with the observation that 57% of students witness instructors using regional languages during lectures, suggests that multilingual practices function as a form of pedagogical resistance against monolingual policy frameworks. Dafouz and Smit (2016, 3) conceptualize such dynamics through their road-mapping framework, which emphasizes the "dynamic interrelations" between language management, agents, and practices in multilingual university settings. The Philippine data exemplify this dynamism: formal policies may prescribe English, but classroom agents—faculty and students alike—negotiate linguistic flexibility in response to pedagogical realities.

Empirical research on code-switching in Philippine higher education classrooms corroborates these findings. A study of college-based remote learning at a state college in Masbate found that intra-sentential code-switching—shifting between English, Filipino, and the local Minasbate language within single utterances—was the dominant form of language alternation in both synchronous and asynchronous classes (Amarille and Bercasio 2024). Teachers reported using code-switching frequently, with a weighted mean of 3.87 out of 5 for switching from English to Filipino during instruction. Crucially, both teachers and students identified code-switching as beneficial for "making lessons comprehensible, explaining concepts or ideas, emphasizing points, clarifying instructions and directions, encouraging class interaction, easing communication, reducing distance in remote learning, acknowledging bilingualism and diversity, and achieving learning outcomes" (Amarille and Bercasio 2024, 63). The study further found that code-switching "boosts confidence and self-esteem, improving performance and comfort in online interactions" (63)—a finding that directly counters the anxiety-inducing effects of rigid English-only policies documented in the present study.

The finding that 59 percent of students report greater participation when Filipino or regional languages are used provides empirical support for the pedagogical rationale underlying Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). As Monje et al. (2019, 1) note in their evaluation of MTB-MLE implementation, the program's core principle is to "begin where the children are"—building on existing linguistic competencies rather than imposing an unfamiliar medium. While MTB-MLE policy formally applies

to basic education, the present findings suggest that its underlying logic—that learners engage more effectively in familiar languages—extends to higher education contexts as well. The Masbate study's documentation of how teachers strategically deploy code-switching to bridge comprehension gaps demonstrates that this pedagogical principle operates across educational levels, even in the absence of formal policy support.

The Internationalization–Localization Tension

The qualitative theme of "internationalization versus local relevance" captures a fundamental tension animating contemporary Philippine higher education. Respondents' concern about producing graduates who are "globally acceptable but locally insecure" echoes broader critiques of internationalization as currently practiced. The SHARE Programme's (2022, 45) regional report on Southeast Asian higher education acknowledges that while internationalization has expanded access and mobility, it has also generated "disparities" and raised questions about whose interests internationalization ultimately serves. The Philippine respondents' perception that internationalization serves "rankings rather than learning" aligns with critical scholarship questioning whether EMI adoption reflects genuine pedagogical improvement or merely institutional positioning in global rankings systems.

This tension is not unique to the Philippines. Bennett (2013, 170) describes how English has become "the undisputed lingua franca of scholarly exchange," creating pressures on non-Anglophone academics to publish in English regardless of whether it serves their intellectual purposes. The Philippine faculty respondents who report that Filipino-language publications "don't count for promotion, funding, or recognition" are experiencing locally what Bennett terms "epistemicide"—the systematic devaluation of knowledge produced outside dominant (English-language) frameworks. The structural barriers to Filipino and regional language scholarship identified in this study thus reflect global patterns of linguistic inequality in academic knowledge production.

Assessment–Instruction Misalignment as Systemic Contradiction

The theme of assessment–instruction misalignment exposes a critical systemic contradiction: students are educated through multilingual classroom practices but evaluated through monolingual high-stakes assessments. The observation

that board examinations function as de facto "English proficiency tests" reveals how language operates as a hidden barrier to professional certification—a finding with significant equity implications. The SEA-PLM 2024 Regional Report (UNICEF and SEAMEO 2024, 12) emphasizes the importance of "aligning language policies with students' linguistic backgrounds" to improve learning outcomes, yet the Philippine licensure examination system appears to operate in direct contradiction to this principle.

This misalignment individualizes what is fundamentally a structural problem. When students fail board examinations due to linguistic barriers rather than a lack of disciplinary knowledge, the system attributes failure to individual deficiency rather than policy incoherence. As one respondent poignantly noted, "When graduates fail board exams, the blame is individualized, never traced back to systemic language misalignment." This pattern of individualization obscures the systemic nature of linguistic inequality and forecloses policy-level interventions.

Linguistic Equity as Social Justice

The qualitative findings on linguistic equity reframe language policy as fundamentally a social justice issue. Respondents' critique that policies "consistently advantage students from elite, English-dominant backgrounds" aligns with Dobinson and Mercieca's (2020, 3) analysis of "linguistic racism" in university settings, where monolingual ideologies privilege certain speakers while marginalizing others. The Philippine context adds a postcolonial dimension to this analysis: English proficiency in the Philippines correlates strongly with socioeconomic status, as access to quality English instruction remains unevenly distributed across the educational system. Students from under-resourced schools or rural areas arrive at university with different "linguistic capital," to use Bourdieu's term, yet are evaluated against standards that assume uniform English proficiency.

The psychological dimension of this inequality—captured in the respondent's observation about feeling "intelligent in one language and inadequate in another"—deserves particular attention. Language is not merely a tool for communication but a constitutive element of identity and self-perception. When institutions systematically devalue students' home languages while privileging English, they communicate implicit messages about whose knowledge, whose ways of being, and whose identities are valued. The finding that 37 percent of students feel pressure to avoid local languages in academic

settings suggests that many students internalize these hierarchies, suppressing aspects of their linguistic identity to conform to institutional expectations.

Structural Barriers and the Reproduction of Inequality

The faculty respondents' accounts illuminate a structural paradox: while scholarship in Filipino and regional languages can technically be credited for promotion, academic journals in languages other than English are rare. The asymmetry captured in "asked to translate" versus "never questioned" exemplifies the "unmarked" status of English in global academia. This scarcity of Philippine-language academic venues creates a self-reinforcing cycle: languages develop specialized vocabularies through use, so their exclusion from scholarly contexts means they remain "underdeveloped" for academic purposes—not because faculty are prohibited from publishing in them, but because venues for doing so are limited. As one respondent noted: "Kung talagang sinusuportahan natin ang Filipino, bakit parang invisible pa rin ito pagdating sa promotion at research metrics?" (If we truly support Filipino, why does it remain invisible when it comes to promotion and research metrics?)

These structural barriers extend beyond publication to encompass the broader infrastructure required for language intellectualization. A UP CIDS policy brief identified critical gaps: the lack of government support for translation initiatives, the absence of official translation centers in universities, the scarcity of qualified translators, and the lack of standardized professional fees (Cruz et al. 2020). Furthermore, the brief highlighted the "lack of readership in Philippine languages," observing that failed attempts by local publishing houses to raise readership through translation "demonstrates congruence with the government's view in giving more prestige to English" (Cruz et al. 2020, 3). The Sentro sa Salin at Araling Salin at the University of Santo Tomas was cited as the lone center dedicated to translation studies in the country—a stark indicator of the infrastructural deficit facing efforts to intellectualize Philippine languages (Cruz et al. 2020).

Respondents observed that "other countries have successfully built national and regional languages as scholarly languages." Countries such as Japan, Korea, and various European nations have developed robust scholarly traditions in their national languages while engaging with English-language scholarship. The Philippine case suggests that the underdevelopment of Filipino as a language of scholarship reflects policy choices and institutional gaps that could, in principle, be reformed.

Policy Implications

The findings from this study yield several critical implications for policy reform in Philippine higher education. These implications address multiple levels of intervention—from national regulatory frameworks to institutional practices and classroom pedagogies—recognizing that meaningful change requires coordinated action across the educational ecosystem.

Formalizing Multilingual Pedagogies in Higher Education

CHED should issue a memorandum order explicitly recognizing multilingual pedagogies—including code-switching and translanguaging—as legitimate instructional approaches in Philippine higher education. This directive should require all HEIs to develop institutional language policies articulating how multilingual practices will be integrated into teaching and learning. HEIs should submit these policies to CHED within one academic year of the memorandum's issuance, with compliance monitored through existing quality assurance mechanisms.

Strengthening English Academic Literacy Within Multilingual Frameworks

HEIs should integrate discipline-specific English academic literacy development throughout professional degree programs. General education curricula should include dedicated courses on academic English, familiarizing students with technical vocabulary, discourse conventions, and question formats characteristic of their chosen professions. Faculty development programs should train instructors in scaffolding strategies that leverage multilingual competencies to build English proficiency systematically across the curriculum.

Building Infrastructure for Philippine-Language Scholarship

While scholarship in Filipino and regional languages can technically be credited for promotion, the scarcity of academic journals in these languages limits faculty opportunities to publish in them. CHED should address this infrastructural gap by allocating funding for the establishment and sustainability of Philippine-language academic journals, supporting peer review infrastructure, editorial processes, and indexing in recognized databases. Research funding agencies should establish dedicated grant programs for terminology development, translation of foundational texts, and multilingual research dissemination—creating the publication ecosystem that would enable faculty to produce and disseminate scholarship in Philippine languages.

Institutionalizing Translation and Language Infrastructure in Universities

CHED should mandate the establishment of translation and language centers in all state universities and colleges. These centers should develop instructional materials in regional languages, provide translation services for institutional communications and university engagements, train qualified translators, and conduct research on language use in higher education. CHED should provide seed funding and incorporate the presence of such centers into institutional accreditation requirements.

Developing Multilingual Communication Strategies for University Engagements

HEIs should translate key institutional documents, announcements, and public-facing materials into Filipino and relevant regional languages. Extension services, community consultations, research dissemination activities, and all forms of university engagements should be conducted in languages accessible to target communities. Institutions should install multilingual signage and wayfinding systems, and front-line staff should receive training in accommodating diverse language preferences in their interactions with students, faculty, and external stakeholders.

Integrating Language Support into Student Services

HEIs should establish academic language support services incorporating multilingual scaffolding alongside English language development. Counseling and student support services should address the psychological dimensions of language-related stress. Peer tutoring programs should leverage multilingual approaches by pairing students with similar linguistic backgrounds to facilitate comprehension.

Reframing Internationalization Policy

CHED should revise its Policy Framework on Internationalization (CMO 55, s. 2016) to require that internationalization plans include provisions for maintaining local relevance in teaching, research, and university engagements. Metrics for internationalization success should extend beyond English proficiency to include graduates' capacity to engage effectively with local communities. International partnerships and collaborative engagements should incorporate reciprocal language learning rather than defaulting to English as the sole medium of collaboration.

Revising Quality Assurance Frameworks

CHED and accrediting agencies should revise program accreditation criteria to ensure quality assurance frameworks do not implicitly privilege English-medium instruction. Evaluation rubrics should focus on learning outcomes, community impact, and the quality of university engagements rather than the medium of instruction. Accreditation instruments should include indicators for linguistic inclusivity, such as availability of multilingual learning materials, accessibility of university engagements to diverse linguistic communities, and equitable outcomes for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Promoting Critical Language Awareness in the Curriculum

HEIs should incorporate critical language awareness into general education curricula, examining the colonial origins of English dominance, the socioeconomic dimensions of language proficiency, and the relationship between language and identity. This equips students with analytical tools to interrogate linguistic hierarchies and understand language policies as historical and political constructions.

Conclusion

This study asked whether Philippine higher education institutions speak to the multilingual realities of their constituents. The evidence suggests a paradox: while formal policies and institutional structures remain anchored in English dominance—a legacy of colonial history reinforced by contemporary pressures of internationalization—classroom practices reveal a more linguistically flexible reality. Faculty use regional languages to scaffold learning, students participate more actively when local languages are employed, and stakeholders affirm that multilingual communication improves their access to HEI services. Yet this accommodation occurs informally, without institutional legitimacy, leaving multilingual pedagogies vulnerable and practitioners without clear policy support.

The findings expose critical tensions that Philippine higher education must confront. The gap between multilingual instruction and monolingual assessment disadvantages students whose disciplinary competence exceeds their English proficiency. The conflation of English with quality perpetuates inequities rooted in socioeconomic disparities in language exposure. The structural exclusion of Filipino and regional languages from scholarly recognition prevents these languages from developing as vehicles of academic

discourse. And the pursuit of internationalization, when reduced to English-medium instruction, risks producing graduates who are globally legible but locally detached.

Addressing these tensions requires more than rhetorical commitment to multilingualism; it demands structural reform—in policy frameworks, assessment practices, reward systems, and quality assurance mechanisms. The strong support for multilingual approaches documented across all stakeholder groups indicates readiness for such reform. The challenge lies in translating this support into institutional change that aligns practice with principle. Philippine HEIs must move beyond the false choice between global competitiveness and local relevance, recognizing that genuine multilingualism serves both. Only then can higher education truly speak to—and for—the multilingual nation it serves.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. Although the 241 respondents came from 13 regions, the sample is not nationally representative, limiting generalizability. Online survey distribution may have introduced selection bias by favoring participants with better digital access. The uneven composition of respondents, with students comprising 63.5 percent and faculty only 12.4 percent, may have skewed findings toward student perspectives. Qualitative data were drawn from a self-selected group, which may overrepresent more engaged or opinionated stakeholders.

Disclosure of AI Use

The study used Notebook LM to support the literature review process, ChatGPT for paraphrasing and improving clarity of expression, ATLAS.ti for thematic analysis, and Grammarly for grammar and language checking. The AI tools did not generate original data, conduct analyses, or determine interpretations. All substantive content, analysis, and conclusions are the author's own, and the author take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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