

THE LANGUAGE VITALITY AMONG THE DIFFERENT ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN REGION XII: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This investigation explores the experiences in terms of language interaction in mother tongue and description of language vitality of the tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students in the selected Higher Education Institutions in Region XII. The primary objectives of the study are to determine the language vitality of the tribal language of the participants and the creation of language policies tailor-fit to the needs of the ethnolinguistic tertiary students. A qualitative-multiple case study design was employed to identify the cases. The sample size are the five cases who were purposely selected from the five major ethnolinguistic groups in Region XII area who are the Blaan from Sarangani, Manobo Arumanen from Kidapawan, Teduray from Sultan Kudarat, T'boli and Maguindanaon from Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. The experiences and the language vitality of the tribal language were examined using the validated in-depth interviews. Triangulation of the gathered data was done in each of the cases by interviewing the teachers of the students to verify and to confirm statements and claims. Data transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis resulting to four emergent themes on their language experiences: difficulty in sharing ideas, enhanced self-dignity, adjustment in terms of belongingness and discrimination of the tribal origin. The emergent themes for the description of language vitality included: maintaining the use of tribal language, intergenerational ethnic transmission, constant practice of ethnolinguistic language skills and acknowledgement of the institution for cultural minority. The similarities and differences of the cases were conducted using a cross-case analysis where it was revealed that the five cases were similar in terms of their difficulty in sharing ideas using their tribal language and the aspect on the enhanced self-dignity. With regards to the description of experiences of their language vitality, three of the five cases signified to have different description of language vitality from the rest of the cases.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistics, Language vitality, mother tongue, multiple case studies, tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students

INTRODUCTION

Ethnolinguistic language vitality is the native group's ability to maintain and protect its existence with a distinctive identity and language. In a changing world, native language has been one of the most affected human tools in communication and cultural heritage. The adverse effect of this change is on ethnolinguistic languages that are becoming extinct (Panague et al., 2021). As time passes by, languages lose native speakers severely and language vitality becomes endangered UNESCO (2010). Villanueva and Baluyos (2014) stated that native groups also preferred to use the majority language for social and economic interactions which makes the use of the minority language decrease in number.

There have been many studies conducted on the teacher's role for student's inclusion in ethnically diverse classrooms (Yip, S.Y., & Saito (2023), Wakat, G.S., Paulino, F.B., Cagaoan, S.T (2023), Johnson, S.H (2023), Yoon, J., & Kim, J. (2024). However, there are only very few studies on the Higher education Institution's role for the inclusivity of the cultural and linguistical diverse students. As the time of this research, there is a limited study conducted focusing on tertiary ethnolinguistic students in the higher education institutions in Region XII which is a home for the indigenous people.

To address this gap, this study focused on the experiences of the ethnolinguistic tribal student's language interaction using their mother tongue in the formal language interaction with their teachers inside the classroom and the casual language exchange and conversation with their peers and other school personnel inside the campus of the higher education institution. This study also sought the support of the academic institution for the linguistic and cultural minorities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language vitality according to SIL (2022) is the degree to which a language is employed as a method of communication in different social circumstances for reasons. The regular use of a language in the home is the key sign of its health. A language with high vitality is one that is widely spoken by all generations, both inside and outside the home, and in most conversational contexts. On a similar view, Helgeson (2022) also stated that language vitality refers to languages and linguistic variants that are known and utilized in a variety of contexts by groups that are continuing to pass the language down to future generations.

In connection to the language vitality of the ethnolinguistic group, Giles et al., (1977) defined it as what makes the group distinct and active in intergroup situations. He further mentioned that if ethnolinguistic minorities have diminished their identity, the group would eventually cease to exist as distinctive groups. For Landweer (2000), ethnolinguistic vitality is directly influenced by geographical, historical, demographic and socio-linguistic factors.

In terms of the socio-linguistic factor, several authors like Giles et al., (1977), Bourhis (2008), Noels (2017), Ehala, Clement and Norton (2020) pointed out that the vitality of a language is a group's ability to maintain and protect its unique identity and language. It involves continuing intergenerational transmission of a group's language and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social institutions, social cohesion and emotional attachment to its collective identity. Noels (2017) converged the ideas of the linguists when he presented that ethnolinguistic identity as a feeling of belongingness within a social group as defined in terms of a common ethnic ancestry and a common language variety. Bourhis (2008) emphasized that the vitality of language communities can affect the quality of intergroup communication between speakers of different language groups. This is the case

where the features of language such as accent, dialect, and language serve as distinguishing factors of ethnic identity.

The key concept of ethnolinguistic vitality is the strength of the life force of a language within a community. Giles et al., (1977) developed a framework for the role of socio-cultural variables in inter-group relations, cross-cultural communication, second-language learning, mother-tongue maintenance, and language shift and loss. In coordination with the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group, it is the determination of how a particular group behaves as a distinctive and active collective entity in a linguistic situation. According to Giles et al., (1977), if ethnolinguistic minorities have little or no group identity, the cohort will experience gradual change leading to the deterioration of the group. Giles et al., (1977) mentioned that status, demographic, and institutional support factors combine to make up the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group. An ethnolinguistic group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas could be evaluated to provide it a rough classification of low, medium, or high vitality. Low vitality groupings are more likely to assimilate other languages and would not be regarded as a unique collective entity. High vitality groups, on the other hand, as indicated in the study of Giles & Johnson, (1987) are more likely to preserve their language and unique cultural characteristics in multilingual environments. Additionally, it is asserted that if a minority group's members have strong community ties and are perceived as having low ethnolinguistic vitality, they may nevertheless develop a viable survival strategy.

At the UNESCO Expert Meeting on March 2003 and cited by Mohamed and Hashem (2012) presented the nine criteria that were used to define for ascertaining the vitality of a language. These factors were used to evaluate the vitality of the language. The first factor is the intergenerational language transmission, the second factor is the absolute number of speakers, the third factor is the proportion of speakers within the total population, the fourth is the trends in existing language domains, the fifth factor is the response to new domains and media, the sixth factor is the materials for language education and literacy, the seventh factor is the language attitudes and policies, the eighth factor is the community members attitudes toward their language, and the ninth factor is the amount and quality of documentation.

Language vitality as elaborated by different scholars is a feeling of being part of a community that unifies and maintains language use despite the threats of other majority languages. As strongly emphasized by Bonifacio et al, (2022), ethnolinguistic vitality is more than a feeling of belongingness but more on the use, protection and pride of the native language. Further, the vitality of a language is classified into objective and subjective vitality.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative multiple case study research design was used to determine the experiences of tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Region XII. Multiple case study is the best-fit design since it gives more comprehensive and intensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It allows deeper exploration of experiences, contexts and comparison of cases which aids in the identification of critical factors, commonalities and unique characteristics. Creswell and Poth (2018) also mentioned that a case study method explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems or cases over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. To comply with the requirement for a multiple case study, five different exemplary cases of students were selected. The participants were officially enrolled in the recognized private or public higher education institutions in Region XII. It included five cases of tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students that belong to the identified tribal community in Region XII. Case 1 or student A is a tertiary Manobo student; Case 2 or student B is a tertiary Teduray student;

Case 3 or student C is a tertiary B'laan student; Case 4 or student D is a tertiary T'boli student; and Case 5 or student E is a tertiary Maguindanaon student.

Maximum variation sampling was employed in choosing the tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal student as respondents of this study. The participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: tertiary student who is officially enrolled in public or private higher education institution for the school year 2022-2023; must have a natural and full-blooded tribal descent; must be living in Region XII for the past 10 years or more; must be proficient in the language skills of the mother tongue.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The demographic summary of the participants presents significant information and details to the five cases of ethnolinguistic tertiary students.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants in the Face-to-Face Interview

ITEM	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
AGE	21	19	19	36	19
OCCUPATION	Student	Student	House Wife/ student	House Wife/ student	Student
TRIBAL ORIGIN	Manobo	Teduray	Blaan	T'boli	Maguindanaon
COURSE AND YEAR LEVEL	BSED-II	BS Dev Com-I	BEED-II	BEED-I	BEED-I
PLACE OF ORIGIN	North Cotabato	Sultan Kudarat	Alabel, Sarangani	Lake Sebu	Lake Sebu
PLACE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	Kidapawan City	Surallah, South Cotabato	General Santos City	Lake Sebu, South Cotabato	Lake Sebu, South Cotabato

In the data analysis, the six phases approach were followed using the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase is familiarization and immersion of data through reading and rereading the transcripts of the interviews. The second phase is generating the initial codes done through the systematic analysis of data through coding. The third phase was searching for themes through analyzing the codes that shifted to themes. The coded data were reviewed to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes. The codes that were generated or constructed themes were those codes that reflected and described a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data. The fourth phase was the reviewing for potential themes. The review of the themes is in relation to the entire data set. This involved one final rereading of the data to determine whether the themes meaningfully capture the relevance of my research questions. The fifth phase was the defining and naming the essential themes that directly addressed the research questions. After the finalization of the emergent themes, a cross-case analysis was done in order to get the similarities and differences of each case.

Cross-case analysis was utilized to have an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases with a view to supporting empirical generalizability and theoretical predictions.

Table 2: Experiences of Tertiary Ethnolinguistic Tribal Students in terms of Language Interaction in the Mother Tongue Language

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Difficulty in sharing ideas	Hard to express feelings Misunderstanding of the tribal intonation Need to translate into a common language Use of hand gesture to express more Language barriers due to vocabulary Being misinterpreted during conversation
Enhanced Self-dignity	Openness to share tribal language Comfortability sharing mother tongue to close friends Willingness to clarify utterances in mother tongue Confirming tribal origin to other people Showing Ethnolinguistic pride to others Being confident in the tribal origin
Adjustment in terms of belongingness	Tendency to shift in majority language Learning the majority language to fit in Using different strategies just to be understood Joining IP and intercultural groups
Discrimination of the Tribal Origin	Being bullied due to ethnicity Treating the native language as second rate Mocking the mother tongue Making the native language a laughingstock

Difficulty in sharing ideas. For this theme, six core ideas were gathered as shown in the table. Each core idea represents each case of Ethnolinguistic tribal students. Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 had their own stories to tell as to the difficulty in sharing their ideas to other people in the higher education institution. Case 1 would express his difficulty in interaction and collaboration using his mother tongue to other people. Case 1 commented:

Uhhh...my experience ahh speaking my mother tongue with other people is that it's hard to share with them your ideas or feeling...how to collaborate with them...ahh...what do you want to explain...but sometimes if they are willing to understand...and you know handle it...or you're going to sometimes if they are Bisaya...you are going to translate in what language what they want to translate it.

Enhanced self-dignity. Pride for one's ethnolinguistic tribal origin is manifested by all ethnolinguistic tribal students which show their self-dignity as a person. This second theme is shared by all of the five cases. Six core ideas were obtained for this particular. In some cases, students use their own native language to thoroughly express their ideas during the in-depth interview. On this regard, Case 4 expressed:

I think it is very interesting and it's very you know...I'm very proud of my language and then I think it's very awesome to speak T'boli.

Adjustment in terms of belongingness. For this theme, four core ideas were gathered. Ethnolinguistic tribal students found it hard to adjust in terms of dealings of other people in the academic institution. Most of the adjustment that they do is on the kind of language that the majority of the people are using. They cannot use their mother tongue in conversation because they felt compelled to speak what the majority are speaking in order to fit in and belong. Case 3 elaborated:

There are times that I cannot use the language because it would depend whom are you with. If I am with my cousin, I will speak my dialect but if I speak it with others, it's as if that they are shocked and mesmerized that's why I do not use the language frequently.

Discrimination of the Tribal language. This particular theme is experienced by the four cases. They felt and experienced discrimination of their tribal origin and their mother language.

Although it was noted that only Case 2 was not bullied in the school, the other four students experienced a certain degree of discrimination and bullying because of their tribal origin and because of their mother tongue. This theme reflects the hard truth and reality that cultural minorities are experiencing in the society. Four students were able to express and sentimentally share their experiences of discrimination and bullying but it is with Case 1 that I felt so much pain with the kind of discriminatory language used with him. Case 1 shared: Yes, I am bullied because of my dialect and I experienced a lot of bullying like Manobo—very black, kinky hair, dumb, pest! I am truly hurt on what they say to me but I learn from those words and I will prove to them in the future that the words they throw on me is not true. I will really show to them that we are IPs (Indigenous peoples) who have the right to study and we have a place in the school.

Table 3: Describing the Experiences of Their Language Vitality

Essential Theme	Core Ideas	Challenges
Maintaining the use of tribal language	- Using tribal language to selected persons	Difficult to recognize when to do language shift
	-Speaking the mother tongue to show Ethnolinguistic origin	Feeling of disregard from other people
Upholding the Intergenerational ethnic transmission	- Keep using mother tongue for the next generation -Preserve the value of language	Lack of support the in community
	- Promote the tribal language	Others are not yet open for intercultural communication
Constant practice of Ethnolinguistic language skills	- Listening to tribal songs - Speaking the mother tongue at home	Speaking the mother tongue occasionally at school
	- Reading books and text in tribal inscriptions - Writing using the mother tongue	Lack of instructional materials in tribal language
	-Referring to elders or tribal leaders if unsure with the vocabulary terms and translations	Unavailability and inaccessibility of tribal leaders
Acknowledgement of the Institution for cultural minority	-Attending cultural groups and meetings -Joining cultural events - Benchmarking with other non-government agencies	Lack of support from other School Officials
	- Respect for the teachers for cultural diversity - Support of the administration of cultural groups - Applying different teaching and language strategies	Inability of teachers to communicate using language tribal

Maintaining to communicate using tribal language. For this theme, two challenges were encountered and three core ideas were gathered as shown in the table. Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 had shared their experiences and how they were able to describe the challenges of those experiences. I noted Case 5 who truly detailed how she did her best in maintaining to speak her mother tongue. She expressed:

Maybe, I will rate myself as 10. Yes, why 10? Because I started here, I grow up here. This is my culture. This is my religion. I'm proud of it but I'm giving 10 because it is really very difficult because I've been through a lot of experiences. I'm rating it as 10 because I'm doing my best to express my feelings. It's difficult to really express what you truly want especially for me who is an Islam student but I'm proud of myself and my culture.

Upholding the Intergenerational ethnic transmission. This is the second theme that were generated from the description of language vitality of the students. All cases of Ethnolinguistic tribal students manifested their ethnolinguistic pride and honor for their tribal origin and tribal

language. As a matter of fact, they show who they are even if the majority do not acknowledge them. They wanted to preserve, promote and value their language for the next generation. Case 3 and 4 had a beautiful sharing on this aspect when they mentioned:
 Because speaking your mother tongue is your pride so wherever you go, you must uphold and never forget your own language.

Constant practice of the Ethnolinguistics Language Skills. This is the third theme that was generated from the experiences of the language vitality of the cases. There were five core ideas extracted from the theme which exemplifies the continued practice of the language productive skills to maintain language vitality despite the influence of the majority language in the school. Case 5 shared this statement:

The way we communicate to others in terms of writing, speaking and listening is important in our culture, Ma'am because that is our trademark.

Acknowledgement of the institution for cultural minority. This is the fourth theme that was generated from the two challenges experienced by the Ethnolinguistic tribal students in terms of describing their language vitality. It was noted that the Higher Education Institutions created and allowed support groups for the cultural minority students. As the President of the cultural group, Case 2 proudly said that in their school, they were recognized and acknowledged specifically on the programs and celebration for the indigenous persons. Case 2 shared this to me with a smile:

Umm.. to recognize us as an IP umm...recently, we conducted program which is we celebrate IP here in school umm...all the teachers here are so proud of us because of our performance because of what culture we have, tradition.

Similarities and Differences between Cases

Table 4: Similarities and Differences of Experiences and Description of Language Vitality of Cases

Themes on Experiences and Description of Language Vitality	Case Unit		Remarks
	Similar	Different	
Experiences:			
Difficulty in sharing ideas	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Cases 1,2,3,4 have difficulty in expressing to others their ideas using the mother tongue, but Case 5 transformed this difficulty by learning different languages and becoming a polyglot.

Enhanced Self-dignity	1, 2, 3, 4,5		All students of the 5 cases are open and proud of their Ethnolinguistic tribal origin and mother tongue.
Adjustment in terms of belongingness	1, 2, 3, 5	4	Only Case 4 feels a sense of belonging and does not need to adjust in terms of language use in school.
Discrimination of the Tribal Origin	1,3,4,5	2	Only Case 2 does not experience discrimination in her tribal origin.
Description of Language Vitality:			
Maintaining to communicate using tribal language	1, 2, 3, 5	4	Only Case 4 can freely use her mother tongue during the conversation, and she does not need to shift between languages.
Upholding the Intergenerational ethnic transmission	1,2	3	Case 3 mentions that using her language can help preserve it for the future generation.
		4	Case 4 emphasizes that using her language can help it to be promoted within the family and society.
		5	Case 5 elaborates that the mother tongue is the trademark of any culture.
Constant practice of Ethnolinguistic language skills	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Only Case 5 used her reading and writing proficiency in the context of religion and faith.
Acknowledgement of the Institution for cultural minority	1, 2, 4, 5	3	Only Case 3 has not joined any cultural groups in the school yet.

DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Schumpeter (2006) mentioned that the identity of the interlocutors is inferred from the behavior and the language they speak. Additionally, Mbatha et al., (2023) emphasized this point by stating that a language is more than just a tool for communication; it is also a representation of social or group identity and a sign of a group's unity. This is also in consonance to the research conducted by Landweer (2016) who emphasized that the perception of a group on their language impacts the value of the language.

The adjustment in terms of belongingness came out as one of the themes because the ethnolinguistic tribal students have the tendency to shift in the majority language, they must learn the common language to fit in and use different strategies to be understood. The reality of adjustment is evident also in the research conducted in the context of ethnic diversity. The idea on adjustment is related to the concept of ethnic homophily whereby students prefer to associate with peers who share their race or nationality (Strohmeier, 2012; Bagci et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014). Recent worldwide research also showed that students from ethnic minority groups are particularly vulnerable to isolation and conflict when strong ethnic barriers exist. In matters of the discrimination of the tribal language, Grutter et al., (2021) stated that there is a higher risk of peer discrimination among ethnic minorities. It is a sad fact that ethnic minorities are more likely to become targets of negative peer interactions as mentioned by Hughes et al., (2016). Additionally, as majority group students typically have a better social status than members of minority groups, they have more influence on how interethnic friendships are formed (Verkuyten, 2007; Schwarzenhal et al., 2017). The ideas mentioned are in concurrence in the position given by D'hondt et al., (2021) who mentioned that ethnic composition of the student population is an important contextual variable in relationship to the experience of ethnic discrimination.

In summary, three emergent themes on the experiences of the tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students relate to the problem and challenges the students have experienced in their interaction with other people within the institution. However, with these difficulties encountered and confronted with the vast majority, a relevant theme also arose which exemplified their ability to enhance their self-esteem and dignity being part of the cultural minority.

Conclusions

Considering that all five cases of tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students in this multiple case study find that in terms of experiences, they have difficulty in sharing ideas, adjustments in terms of belongingness and discrimination of the tribal language, school authorities and the teachers may evaluate their student support services and policies, education curriculum and teaching strategies and align it with the needs of the cultural minority students. The intercultural language teaching also must be integrated into the nomenclatures of the curriculum. Higher education institutions that welcome and opens the admission of students from a variety of language backgrounds may offer courses and campus activities to promote intercultural awareness and dialogue. Staff and faculty may also get training and support in instructional programs to be culturally and linguistically open. Appropriate educational programs for indigenous learners may also be given due priority through community-based, bottom-up manner to ensure that infrastructure, pedagogical materials and curricula meet the unique needs of indigenous teachers, learners and their communities.

Ethnolinguistic tribal students have described their language vitality through maintaining to communicate using tribal language, upholding intergenerational ethnic transmission, constant practice of the Ethnolinguistic language skills and acknowledgement of the institution for cultural minority. The opportunity to maintain their tribal language calls for the school administrators to allow a “tribal speaking zone” where tribal students can freely converse using their mother tongue. Moreover, to enrich the evaluation of the syllabus, intercultural communicative competence must be integrated in the lessons, especially in language subjects. Since the school is a haven for culturally diverse students, the use of the mother tongue can occur between speakers with different cultural backgrounds therefore the higher education institutions can propose the concept of cross-cultural experiential learning which allows the learners to have an environment where respect, fairness and equality is given to everyone. In this era of new normal, wherein there are trends and shifts in language education, teachers and administrators should be given training on ethnolinguistics so that they can properly adjust and communicate to different stakeholders in the academe. With the openness and adoption of ethnolinguistic communication, language barriers and interaction will not be a problem. Above all, ethnolinguistic language skills can enrich the learning environment of the culturally diverse students.

Recommendations

This multiple case study explored the experiences and description of language vitality of the ethnolinguistic tribal students. Results revealed that the five cases of the students have experienced similar challenges. However, the result of this qualitative investigation was only limited to the experiences of five cases of ethnolinguistic tribal students who are enrolled in the selected higher education institutions in Region XII. It is recommended that more cases of students be added in another school, especially the state universities and local colleges in the region and in other regions who provide free higher education to students. The variables focused in the study are the experiences in mother tongue interaction and the description of language vitality based on the experiences of the tertiary ethnolinguistic tribal students, it is

therefore recommended that other variables like intercultural competence, cross-cultural communication and critical language awareness may be explored to enrich the perspective of ethnolinguistics in Applied linguistics.

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