

POLICY BRIEF: What Languages Do Filipino Students and Teachers Speak?

Wanting to support effective learning in the early grades of school in a linguistically diverse country such as the Philippines it is important answer some basic questions, such as:

- What languages do children come to school speaking?
- Do children have more than one language that they can use when they start school?
- What languages do teachers speak?
- And how well do students' and teachers' languages match?

Data from different sources can begin to provide answers to these questions.

At the national level, the 2020 Census of Population and Housing revealed that no one language is spoken at home by a majority of the Philippine population. About 40% of

Most commonly spoken languages

Tagalog	39.9%
Bisaya/Binisaya	16.0%
Hiligaynon/Ilonggo	7.3%
Ilocano	7.2%
Cebuano	6.5%
Bikol	3.9%
Waray	2.6%
Kapampangan	2.4%
Maguindanao	1.4%

Source: Philippines Statistical Authority

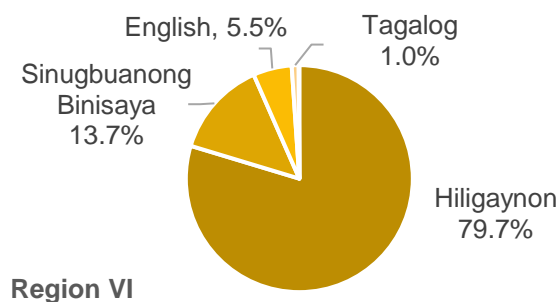
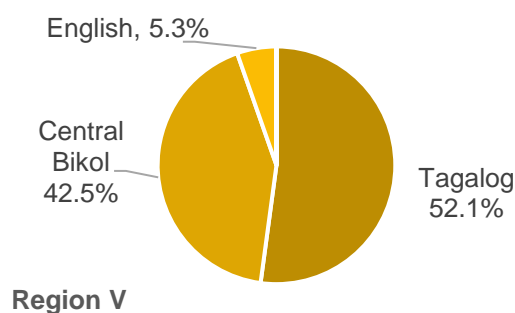
households are reported to speak Tagalog.

Bisaya/Binisaya is spoken in 16% of households. All other languages are spoken by less than 10% of families.

Obviously, these proportions will vary greatly by region, with different language spoken by larger percentages of individuals in different regions. Some additional data can shed light on that.

In Regions V and VI, the Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines Project, ABC+, systematically evaluated the languages that children in primary grades 1 through 3

speak. The charts below reveal the percentage of students speaking different languages.



ABC+ also evaluated what secondary language children are able to speak. Surprisingly, this revealed that **90% of learners do not speak any second language**. Children in the early

years of school speak a language that depends on where they live and their family situation, and almost all children are limited to their one home language.

In addition, ABC+ evaluated the first and second languages of grade 1 through 3 teachers in Regions V and VI. In Region V, 64% of teachers speak Central Bikol, one of the main languages of instruction, as their primary language and 64% were shown to have no secondary language.

Percent of Teachers Speaking Different Languages in Region V

Primary Language		Secondary Language	
Central Bikol	64%	None	64%
Tagalog	34%	Tagalog	28%
Bikol Miraya	1%	Central Bikol	6%
West Albay Bikol	< 1%	Five others, all	< 1%
Northern Sorsoganon	< 1%		

The data for Region VI are similar. The majority of teachers speak the regional language and most common language of instruction, Hiligaynon, followed by Sinugbuanong Binisaya. Similar to Region V, 35% of teachers had Tagalog as a secondary language, but 34% were shown to have no secondary language.

Percent of Teachers Speaking Different Languages in Region VI

Primary Language		Secondary Language	
Hiligaynon	85%	Tagalog	35%
Sinugbuanong Binisaya	14%	None	34%
Tagalog	1%	Hiligaynon	29%
		Sinugbuanong Binisaya	2%
		Kinaray-a Iloilo	1%

The ABC+ data also reveal that in Regions V and VI, 94% of schools are using a language that matches the language of their communities. In 84% of classrooms, the language of instruction matches either the primary or secondary language of the learners.

Another study in four regions in Mindanao conducted by the All Children Reading Philippines Activity in 2020 examined the use of language in kindergarten through grade 3 in schools using Bahasa Sug, Chavacano, Magindanawn, or Meranaw as languages of instruction. The match between teachers' mother tongue and the language of instruction was highest for Meranaw schools and lowest in those using Magindanawn.

Teacher Mother Tongue	Bahasa Sug School	Chavacano School	Magindanawn School	Meranaw School
Bahasa Sug	68%	6%	-	-
Chavacano	13%	71%	-	-
Magindanawn	-	-	56%	-
Meranaw	-	-	1%	98%
Other	28%	21%	43%	2%

That study also showed that teachers used the mother tongue language of instruction during more than 80% of class time during mother tongue language periods. They used Filipino during 72% to 76% of class time in during Filipino lessons. During English lessons, teachers used English 55% of the time in grade 1, increasing to 69% of the time in grade 3. During Filipino and English lessons, teachers code switched into mother tongues to add student understanding on average 23% and 27% of the time (in both cases, switching more in grade 1 than in grade 3).

As part of the 2020 All Children Reading Philippines study, students were asked what language they speak frequently at home.

Student Language Spoken at Home	Bahasa Sug School	Chavacano School	Magindanawn School	Merenaw School
Bahasa Sug	88%	12%	-	-
Chavacano	1%	65%	-	-
Magindanawn	< 1%	-	79%	-
Meranaw	-	-	< 1%	97%
Other	17%	25%	29%	22%

These data show that there is reasonable match between languages students self-report as speaking at home and the language of instruction their teachers are using in school.

The above data show that in the regions included in these studies teachers and students in the majority of schools are using languages that they are comfortable speaking for teaching and learning. There are of course challenges that need to be dealt with for the schools on the margins where the language of instruction does not match the primary (only) language spoken by students when they enter school. But, in general, DepEd has made progress assembling some of the ingredients needed to appropriately accommodate young learners by teaching them in languages that they come to school speaking.