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Mapping Language Visibility in a Philippine Public Elementary School: A Schoolscape Analysis

G-Yan Dungan Mamuyac *

Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University/University of the Philippines-Diliman

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Abstract: What becomes visible in a school's linguistic environment can reveal how language policies, institutional practices, and everyday communication are materialized in educational spaces. This study examined the schoolscape of a public elementary school in Aringay, La Union, Philippines, focusing on the languages displayed in school signs, their hierarchical representation and spatial distribution, their classification as top-down or bottom-up, and their relationship to the language orientations articulated in DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025. Anchored on Geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Model, and the top-down and bottom-up framework of linguistic landscape analysis (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006), the study systematically documented and photographed visible linguistic signs across accessible areas of the school. Data were gathered through systematic walkthroughs and analyzed using deductive thematic analysis based on predetermined themes corresponding to the research questions. The findings reveal an uneven linguistic distribution, with English emerging as the most visible language, followed by Filipino, while Ilocano had minimal representation. English appeared across instructional, administrative, informational, safety, and achievement-related spaces, whereas Filipino was more selectively represented in practical areas. The schoolscape was also predominantly shaped by top-down signs, demonstrating the significant role of institutional actors in determining linguistic visibility. In relation to language policy, the findings show that English and Filipino are both represented, but their visibility is uneven. Overall, the schoolscape reflects the interaction of language policy orientations, institutional practices, spatial contexts, and communicative functions, while linguistic visibility alone cannot establish policy compliance or language preference.

Keywords: Ilocano, Language Policy, Philippine Education, Public Elementary School, Schoolscape.

* **Corresponding Author.**
Authors' Email Address:
G-Yan Dungan Mamuyac (mamuyacgyand@gmail.com)

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Introduction

Language is used not only for communication inside the classroom but also visibly displayed throughout school environments through signs, posters, notices, labels, murals, announcements, and other written texts. These visible language practices form what scholars call the linguistic landscape (LL) (Landry and Bourhis 1997). Although the public display of written language has existed since the earliest forms of writing, the concept of linguistic landscape was popularized by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who defined it in terms of the languages used in public signs, including road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial signs, and signs on government buildings. Since then, linguistic landscape research has expanded beyond public spaces to examine how the visibility of languages reflects identity, power, ideology, and social relationships. As Spolsky and Cooper (1991) noted, public signs serve not only informative functions but may also symbolize the values and relationships associated with particular languages. Similarly, Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) emphasized that linguistic landscapes bring together language, visual discourse, spatial practices, and sociocultural meanings.

These perspectives are particularly relevant in educational institutions, where language is both a medium of instruction and a visible component of the institutional environment. Brown (2012) introduced the concept of schoolscape to describe the display of languages within school environments and to examine how such displays reflect language practices, ideologies, and educational policies. School signs, classroom labels, bulletin boards, announcements, and other written materials may therefore provide visible evidence of the languages that an institution prioritizes, recognizes, or maintains. Examining schoolscape can therefore provide insight into how official language policies translate into everyday institutional spaces.

This relationship between language policy and schoolscape is especially significant in the Philippine context. As a linguistically diverse country, the Philippines has experienced several changes in its language-in-education policies. The implementation of Department of Education Order No. 020, s. 2025 introduced a significant change by establishing Filipino and English as the primary languages of instruction in basic education, while allowing the use of the mother tongue under specific conditions. The policy took effect beginning School Year 2025–2026, making the period of its initial implementation particularly important for examining how the revised policy is reflected in actual school environments.

However, an official language policy does not necessarily mean the same languages will be uniformly represented in school spaces. Schoolscapes may preserve established practices, local languages, institutional traditions, and community identities even when national policies change. This creates an important research problem: to what extent does the linguistic environment displayed in schools reflect the languages prioritized by current language policy? Although previous linguistic landscape and schoolscape studies have established that visible language can reveal institutional language practices, language ideologies, and the positioning of languages within educational spaces, recent scholarship has expanded this perspective by conceptualizing schoolscapes as socially and pedagogically meaningful spaces that mediate multilingualism, identity construction, language policy implementation, ethnolinguistic vitality, and students' sense of belonging (Bernardo, 2024a; Lestianingsih et al., 2023; Troyer, 2023; Tódor & Vančo, 2024; Cabiles, 2025). Consequently, schoolscapes are increasingly viewed not merely as representations of institutional ideologies but as active agents in shaping educational experiences and language practices within diverse learning communities. Despite this growing body of scholarship, limited research has examined how the recent changes under DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025 are manifested in the linguistic landscapes of Philippine public elementary schools. In particular, empirical evidence is still needed on whether the languages visible in school spaces correspond with, extend, or diverge from the languages promoted by the current language-in-education policy.

To address this gap, the present study examines the schoolscape of a public elementary school in Aringay, La Union, Philippines, during Academic Year 2025–2026. school was purposively selected because it provides a particularly relevant setting for examining the initial implementation of the revised language policy. It consists of two physically separate compounds serving different grade levels: the East Compound for Kindergarten to Grade 3 and the West Compound for Grades 4 to 6. The study focuses on the East Compound because it serves Kindergarten to Grade 3, making it a clearly defined setting for examining the linguistic environment of the foundational levels of basic education during the implementation of the revised policy. The site is also situated in Aringay, a linguistically diverse community where Filipino, English, and local languages may coexist in everyday communication. This sociolinguistic context makes the school particularly appropriate for examining how a national language policy interacts with locally situated linguistic practices and identities. Limiting the study to the East Compound also provides a manageable and

coherent research boundary for systematically documenting and analyzing the school's linguistic displays.

Guided by Spolsky's (2004) language policy framework, particularly the relationship among language practices, language beliefs or ideologies, and language management, this study seeks to identify the languages present in school signage, examine their distribution across different school areas, and determine how these linguistic displays reflect, reinforce, or diverge from the language orientations established by DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025. By examining actual linguistic displays rather than relying solely on official policy documents, the study provides empirical evidence of how language policy becomes visible at the institutional level. The study contributes to knowledge by extending schoolscape research to the Philippine basic education context during the early implementation of a recently revised language policy and by providing baseline documentation of the linguistic composition of a public elementary school. It also contributes to educational practice by providing school administrators, teachers, and policymakers with localized evidence that may help assess the alignment between language policy and schools' linguistic environments. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how schoolscape can serve as a visible indicator of the relationship between national language policy, institutional language practices, and local linguistic realities.

Research Questions

The study examined the schoolscape of a public elementary school by identifying the languages used on the school signs, examining how these languages were distributed and represented in different areas of the school, and assessing the way these linguistic practices reflect the school's language policy. More specifically, it aimed to answer the following four research questions:

1. What languages are present in the schoolscape of the public elementary school?
2. How are the identified languages hierarchically represented and distributed across various school spaces?
3. What types of linguistic signs are present in the schoolscape in terms of top-down and bottom-up classification?
4. What policy-related linguistic patterns are evident in the schoolscape in the context of DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025?

Literature Review

Schoolscape, Language Ideology, and Language Policy

Recent schoolscape research emphasizes that educational spaces are not simply reflections of language practices but can actively shape language use, identity, learning, and inclusion. Szabó and Brown (2025), in their review of two decades of schoolscape research, identify multilingualism, identity, power, inclusion, and educational design as major themes in the field. Similarly, Tódor and Vančo (2024) show that schoolscapes can support minority language maintenance and ethnolinguistic identity, demonstrating that visible language can contribute to sustaining linguistic communities.

Schoolscapes also serve important pedagogical and inclusive functions. Szabó et al. (2023) found that schoolscape design can create translanguaging spaces where learners use multiple languages as resources for learning. Szabó and Brown (2025) further highlight the role of schoolscapes in social inclusion, particularly when students participate in creating linguistic displays. Malinowski et al. (2020) similarly emphasizes the potential of linguistic landscapes to promote language awareness and critical literacy. Szabó and Laihonen (2025) demonstrated that participatory engagement with schoolscapes can help learners document and interpret their linguistic environment. Their work is significant because it positions students not merely as recipients of institutional language messages but as active interpreters and producers of meaning. Schoolscape analysis can therefore illuminate how learners encounter language ideologies while also recognizing their capacity to negotiate those ideologies.

Beyond the school itself, Liu and Dressler (2025) demonstrate that school signage can contribute to the linguistic landscape of surrounding communities, showing that schoolscapes can influence broader perceptions and practices of multilingualism. Collectively, these studies establish schoolscape as a space where language policy, identity, pedagogy, inclusion, and power become visually represented.

Moreover, recent studies have particularly emphasized the relationship between schoolscape and language ideology, showing how the languages displayed in educational spaces can reflect institutional practices, language policies, language hierarchies, and broader ideological positions (Cabiles, 2025; Troyer, 2023; Bernardo, 2024a). This distinction is important because the presence of several languages in a school does not automatically indicate linguistic equality. Recent research by Lestianingsih et al. (2023) on the linguistic schoolscape of a multilingual school in Indonesia found that different language ideologies

competed within the school environment, with the use of Indonesian, English, and Chinese reflecting ideologies of nationality, globalization, and ethnic identity. Rather than representing a unified set of institutional language values, school signs reflected tensions among national, local, and international languages. These findings suggest that schoolscape analysis should move beyond counting languages and examine why particular languages are made visible, where they appear, and whose interests their visibility serves.

A particularly important development in recent scholarship is the recognition that schoolscapes should not be examined in isolation from the broader linguistic environment. Nie and Wang (2025) found substantial differences between the schoolscape and the surrounding publicscape in the Yi Autonomous Prefecture of China. Although schools deliberately increased the visibility of the Yi language within the school environment, the language had considerably less visibility in public spaces, highlighting the challenges of sustaining minority-language visibility beyond the school setting. This discrepancy affected students' perceptions of the language's practical value and their motivation to learn it. The findings show that schoolscape policies can weaken when the linguistic environment outside the school communicates different language hierarchies. Thus, the schoolscape is part of a larger sociolinguistic ecology rather than a self-contained environment.

Recent research has also further complicated the relationship between schoolscape and institutional identity. Thong-anana and Savski (2025), examining an international school in Thailand, found that signage represented competing identities associated with bilingualism, national language policy, and the prestige of English. The schoolscape consequently functioned as a form of discourse management through which institutional actors negotiated competing expectations. This finding is particularly useful for the present study because it demonstrates that visible language choices can reveal tensions between formal policy and broader social expectations.

In the Philippine context, schoolscape research has similarly shown English's continued prominence in educational environments. Bernardo (2024b), for instance, examined schoolscapes in a Philippine university and showed how English was strongly associated with institutional authority, academic purposes, and prestige. Importantly, the study showed that schoolscapes can be used pedagogically to examine Philippine English and how language is represented in educational spaces. However, the university context differs substantially from public elementary education, where learners are at an earlier stage of literacy and language

development and where national language policies on the medium of instruction are directly applicable.

The existing literature therefore establishes three important points. First, schoolscapes are ideological rather than merely decorative spaces. Second, institutional authority, as well as the agency of teachers and learners, shapes linguistic visibility. Third, the relationship between schoolscape and policy cannot be assumed to be direct because official policies are interpreted and negotiated within specific local contexts. These insights provide a basis for examining schoolscapes not only in terms of which languages are visible but also how their distribution may correspond to institutional language policy.

Schoolscape as a Site of Language Policy Implementation

The connection between schoolscape and language policy becomes particularly significant when language policy is understood as more than a formal document. Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Model conceptualizes policy through the interaction of language practices, language beliefs, and language management. Language practices refer to the languages people use; language beliefs concern the values and ideologies associated with those languages; and language management involves deliberate attempts by authorities to influence language practices and beliefs. Although Spolsky's model predates recent schoolscape scholarship, it remains useful when interpreted through contemporary research because visible signs can provide evidence of all three dimensions.

From this perspective, a school sign is not simply evidence of language use. Choosing a language for an official notice may reflect language management, while repeated visibility of that language may reinforce beliefs about its appropriateness or prestige. At the same time, signs created by teachers and learners may show language practices that do not perfectly align with institutional expectations. Schoolscape analysis can therefore reveal the relationship between policy as prescribed and policy as practiced.

Recent language-policy scholarship reinforces this distinction. Shohamy (2025) argues that top-down policies may impose uniform linguistic expectations that do not always correspond to local linguistic realities, while bottom-up practices allow educators and communities to adapt policies to particular contexts. This perspective is especially relevant to multilingual schools because local actors implement national language policies and encounter linguistic conditions that policymakers may not fully anticipate. The schoolscape offers a visible site where these negotiations can be observed.

The distinction between de jure and de facto language policy is therefore useful in interpreting schoolscape data. According to Shohamy (2006), de jure policy encompasses formal legal directives, whereas de facto policy reflects actual language practices observed within the schoolscape (Brown, 2012). A school may formally recognize several languages while displaying predominantly one language in its physical environment. Conversely, a policy may designate particular languages as primary while teachers and students routinely use additional languages to facilitate communication. A discrepancy between formal policy and visible practice should not automatically be interpreted as policy failure; rather, it may indicate local adaptation, ideological tension, or the influence of contextual factors.

This issue is especially important in the Philippine basic education system, where language policy has undergone a significant transition. For many years, the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) positioned the learners' mother tongue as an important medium of instruction in Kindergarten to Grade 3. However, recent research documented difficulties in translating the policy into practice. Oliveros (2023), through a content analysis of studies on MTB-MLE implementation, found recurring concerns regarding the preparedness of actors responsible for implementing the policy. Velasco (2025), meanwhile, demonstrated that teachers' language beliefs influenced how MTB-MLE was implemented in Philippine schools. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of a language policy cannot be evaluated solely by examining its formal provisions. Teacher beliefs, institutional conditions, resources, and local linguistic realities mediate implementation.

Recent Philippine research on translanguaging further supports this complexity. De Los Reyes (2024) found that teachers and learners in multilingual elementary classrooms used translanguaging for multiple communicative and pedagogical purposes. Rather than strictly separating languages, classroom participants drew on their complete linguistic repertoires to explain concepts, facilitate interaction, and support learning. This finding matters for interpreting schoolscape data because visible signs may reflect only part of the multilingual practices occurring within the school. A schoolscape dominated by Filipino or English does not necessarily mean that other languages are absent from everyday communication.

Language Policy in Philippine Basic Education and the Current Policy Shift

The Philippine language-policy context has recently undergone a major transformation following the repeal of the mandatory Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

framework (Republic Act No. 12027, 2024; DepEd Order No. 020, 2025). Republic Act No. 12027, enacted in October 2024, discontinued the mandatory use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3 while allowing its optional use in qualifying monolingual classes. The law also provides for developing a language-mapping policy to identify learners' linguistic characteristics and determine appropriate language arrangements.

This legislative change was operationalized through DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025, which establishes the policy on the medium of instruction for Kindergarten to Grade 3 beginning School Year 2025–2026. The Order identifies Filipino and English as primary media of instruction in applicable contexts, while regional languages may function as auxiliary media. It also recognizes context-specific scenarios in which learners' first language, or an Indigenous language, may be used as the primary medium. Significantly, the policy requires schools to consider learners' actual linguistic profiles, community language use, teacher capacity, and the availability of instructional materials rather than automatically assigning a single mother tongue.

This policy shift should not be understood simply as replacing one set of languages with another. Rather, it represents a renegotiation of the relationship among Filipino, English, regional languages, and Indigenous languages in Philippine education. The policy formally elevates Filipino and English while retaining space for regional and Indigenous languages under particular circumstances. Consequently, the policy's implementation may produce different linguistic environments across schools, depending on local demographics, teacher practices, available resources, and institutional decisions.

The transition also raises practical questions concerning policy implementation. Earlier concerns about MTB-MLE included insufficient learning materials, limited teacher preparation, and difficulties in implementing a uniform mother-tongue approach in multilingual classrooms. Recent policy discussions have continued to identify expertise, readiness, and instructional resources as important considerations. The EDCOM 2 report, for example, identified lack of expertise, readiness, and learning materials as among the challenges associated with the previous MTB-MLE implementation. The new policy attempts to address some of these concerns by adopting a more context-sensitive approach, but implementation requires schools to conduct language surveys and make decisions based on actual learner profiles.

The transition therefore creates an important research opportunity. Because DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025 became effective only recently, empirical evidence regarding how its language orientations are reflected in the physical environments of public elementary schools remains limited. The schoolscape provides a particularly useful site for examining this transition because signs are relatively stable and publicly visible manifestations of institutional decisions. They can reveal whether Filipino and English have become more prominent, whether regional languages remain visible, and whether school spaces represent multilingual practices.

At the same time, researchers must interpret schoolscape evidence cautiously. A sign written in English does not necessarily prove that English is the actual language of classroom interaction, just as the presence of Filipino or a regional language does not necessarily demonstrate extensive use of that language in instruction. Rather, signage shows the languages institutions and school-community members choose to make visible. When interpreted alongside Spolsky's model, schoolscape data can therefore illuminate the relationship among policy management, language ideology, and visible practice.

Thus, the literature suggests that schoolscapes should be understood as sites where policy is materialized, interpreted, and potentially negotiated. Recent scholarship demonstrates that visible language choices are shaped by institutional authority, teacher and learner agency, local linguistic realities, and broader social ideologies. In the Philippine context, the transition away from mandatory MTB-MLE creates an especially important moment for investigating these processes. Studying the schoolscape of a public elementary school can therefore contribute both empirical evidence to the still-limited Philippine schoolscape literature and practical insights into how national language policy is reflected in everyday educational spaces. Such evidence may help educators and policymakers assess whether the languages made visible in schools support the goals of inclusivity, accessibility, multilingualism, and effective language education envisioned in the current policy framework.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, supplemented by descriptive quantitative analysis using frequencies and percentages to describe the linguistic signs documented in the selected school. A qualitative approach was most appropriate because the

study examines not only which languages are visible in the schoolscape but also how these languages are represented, spatially positioned, and associated with institutional language policy. The meanings and implications of language choices in signs require contextual interpretation that numerical measures alone cannot adequately capture. Examining sign placement, visual arrangement, language hierarchy, and the distinction between top-down and bottom-up signs requires attention to the social and institutional context in which the signs occur.

Basic quantitative techniques complemented the qualitative analysis by systematically describing observable patterns in the schoolscape. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were used to identify the languages present, determine their relative visibility, and describe their distribution across different school spaces and sign types. These numerical descriptions provide an empirical overview of language representation and help identify patterns for further qualitative interpretation. Thus, the quantitative component is not a separate quantitative research design but a supporting analytical procedure within the broader qualitative approach. Integrating qualitative interpretation and quantitative description allows the study to provide both a contextual understanding of the schoolscape and a systematic account of patterns in language visibility and distribution.

Research Site

The study was conducted in a public elementary school located in Aringay, La Union, Philippines, during Academic Year 2025–2026. The school was selected because it consists of two separate compounds: the East Compound and the West Compound. The East Compound accommodates learners from Kindergarten to Grade 3, while the West Compound serves learners from Grades 4 to 6. The selection of the East Compound is directly aligned with the scope of the study, which examines the school's institutional language practices in the context of the language policy prescribed under Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 020, s. 2025, entitled *Policy on the Medium of Instruction for Kindergarten to Grade 3 Effective School Year 2025–2026*. The policy took effect at the beginning of School Year 2025–2026 and specifically applies to Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners.

Given the policy's coverage, the East Compound provides an appropriate institutional setting for examining the languages used in signs, notices, labels, posters, and other linguistic materials displayed within the school environment. The study focuses on documenting and describing the institutional language practices made visible through the schoolscape within

the context of the newly implemented medium-of-instruction policy. This includes examining the languages present, their distribution and visibility, and the ways in which these linguistic resources are used in the institutional environment.

Furthermore, because DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025 was implemented beginning School Year 2025–2026, the selected research site provides a timely context for documenting institutional language practices during the initial stage of the policy's implementation. Focusing on the East Compound also establishes a clear connection between the research site and the specific grade levels covered by the policy, allowing the study to situate the observed schoolscape within the broader institutional language policy environment.

Data Sources

The primary data source consisted of photographs of signage and other visible linguistic materials displayed within the school premises during the Academic Year 2025-2026. These included classroom displays, directional signs, announcements, instructional posters, office signage, and other publicly visible texts found in different areas of the school.

Data Collection Procedure

During the data-gathering period from April 5 to 9, 2026, the researcher conducted a systematic walkthrough of the school premises across four visits. The observation followed a predetermined route covering the major areas of the school, including classrooms, hallways, administrative offices, bulletin boards, entrances and exits, comfort rooms, safety areas, and other common spaces. The researcher followed established inclusion and exclusion criteria in identifying linguistic materials for documentation. A sign was included if it contained visible written language, such as words, phrases, sentences, labels, notices, posters, announcements, instructional displays, directional signs, or other linguistic materials publicly displayed within the school premises. The researcher considered signs located in classrooms, administrative offices, corridors, entrances, reading areas, comfort rooms, waste-management areas, and other accessible spaces within the school. Both permanent and temporary signs were considered, provided that they were visibly displayed during the period of data collection and contained linguistic information relevant to the study. Signs without linguistic content, signs that were not sufficiently visible or legible, and duplicate signs were excluded from the dataset. When the same sign appeared in multiple locations, each instance was considered only when it represented a distinct physical display; repeated copies of the same sign were

treated as duplicates to avoid inflating the frequency of particular linguistic patterns. The researcher conducted systematic observation across the accessible areas of the school and recorded each qualifying sign once, noting its location, language composition, and source. This procedure established a consistent basis for determining which linguistic materials formed part of the 63-sign corpus and ensured that the documented signs were directly relevant to the research questions and representative of the observable linguistic environment of the selected school.

The researcher photographed all identified signs that met the inclusion criteria, which served as the primary data for analysis. To ensure consistency across the photographic data, the researcher followed a standardized documentation procedure. The researcher photographed each sign to capture the complete linguistic material and, when appropriate, its immediate spatial context. The researcher maintained a reasonably consistent distance and angle and avoided unnecessary obstruction, glare, and distortion. The researcher took additional photographs when needed to ensure the linguistic content was clear and legible. For signs containing multiple languages or visual elements, the researcher captured the entire sign to allow analysis of language order, relative prominence, visual arrangement, and emplacement. Individuals were not the focus of the documentation, and the researcher avoided photographs containing identifiable persons or cropped them when necessary. The researcher recorded relevant information for each sign, including its location, language or languages used, sign type, and source of production when identifiable.

The researcher observed ethical considerations throughout the study. Before data collection, the researcher secured permission from the appropriate school authorities to conduct the study and document publicly displayed linguistic materials on school premises. The study focused exclusively on signs, posters, notices, labels, bulletin-board displays, and other publicly visible linguistic materials and did not involve interviews, surveys, or direct participation of learners, teachers, or other school personnel.

Data Analysis

The study utilized thematic analysis as the main method for analyzing the data in this study. Specifically, it employed a deductive thematic approach, as the analysis was guided by Scollon and Scollon's geosemiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. A deductive approach, or theoretically driven coding, uses theory as its point of departure (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, the areas of analysis were identified prior to examining the data

based on the research questions and theoretical frameworks. This approach allowed the analysis to focus on specific aspects of the schoolscape and identify recurring linguistic and visual patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The documented signs were coded and organized into five predetermined themes corresponding to the four research questions. Theme 1, Languages Present in the Schoolscape of Aringay Central Elementary School, addressed Research Question 1 by identifying the languages appearing on the documented signs. Themes 2 and 3, Language Hierarchy and the Symbolic Ordering of Languages and Distribution of Languages Across School Spaces, respectively, addressed Research Question 2 by examining the relative prominence, ordering, and distribution of the identified languages across different school spaces. Theme 4, Classification of Signs, addressed Research Question 3 by categorizing the documented signs as top-down or bottom-up based on their source and authorship. Theme 5, Schoolscape and Policy-Related Linguistic Patterns, addressed Research Question 4 by examining linguistic patterns in the schoolscape within the context of DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2025. Frequencies and percentages were also used to summarize the distribution of languages and sign types, while qualitative analysis provided contextual interpretation of the observed patterns.

To ensure consistency and reliability in classifying and coding the documented signs, a second coder independently reviewed a portion of the photographic data using the same coding categories and criteria established by the researcher. The second coder examined the identified languages, language combinations, sign locations, and the classification of signs as top-down or bottom-up. The independent coding results were compared with the researcher's initial classifications. The researchers discussed and resolved any discrepancies through consultation and reference to the operational definitions and coding criteria established for the study. This process helped minimize individual interpretation and strengthened the consistency and credibility of the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Languages Present in the Schoolscape of Aringay Central Elementary School

A total of sixty-three (63) signs were found across various locations within Aringay Central Elementary School. The signs were collected from entrances, hallways, classrooms, administrative offices, comfort rooms, safety and disaster preparedness areas, waste management stations, reading corners, and other public spaces within the school premises. Following the principles of Linguistic Landscape analysis, each sign was categorized

according to its linguistic composition as English-only, Filipino-only, bilingual/multilingual, or symbol-only.

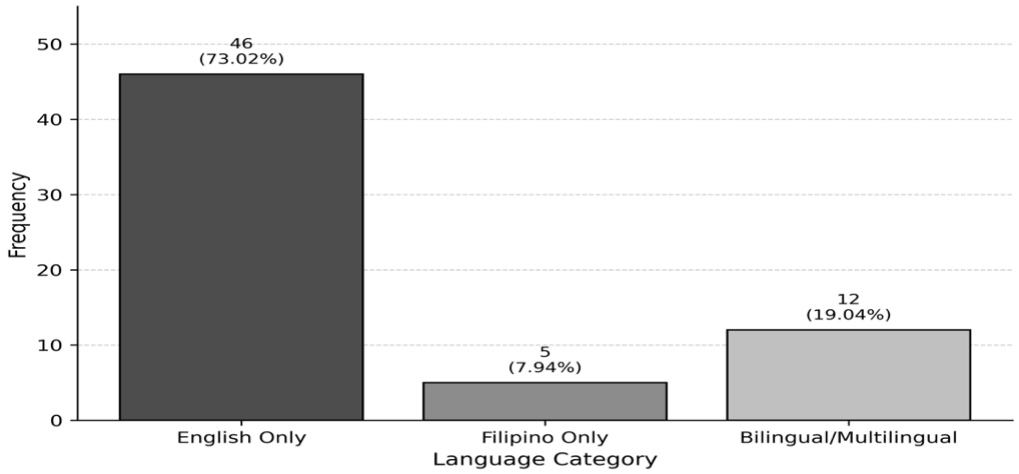


Figure 1. Distribution of Signs According to Language

As shown in Figure 1, English-only signs constituted the largest proportion of the documented schoolscape, making English the most visible language in the selected school. This distribution demonstrates a clear asymmetry in the linguistic composition of the schoolscape, with English occupying a more prominent position among the languages displayed in the physical environment. The predominance of English-only signs suggests that English serves as a primary resource for conveying information and organizing communication within the school space.



Figure 2. No Loitering Sign



Figure 3. You Are Now Entering a Smoke-Free Zone Sign



Figure 4. DRRM Corner

In contrast, the comparatively limited presence of Filipino-only signs indicates that Filipino has a less extensive independent presence in the visible linguistic environment. The limited visibility of Filipino-only signs is also noteworthy. Although Filipino is recognized as one of the primary media of instruction under the current language policy for Kindergarten to Grade 3, its representation in the physical schoolscape is considerably lower than that of English. This discrepancy suggests that a language's formal status does not necessarily translate into equivalent visibility in the school's material environment. The finding illustrates the distinction between language policy as formally prescribed and language policy as visibly practiced, in which institutional language choices may still be influenced by established beliefs about the usefulness, prestige, and appropriateness of English.



Figure 5. Lalake (Boy) Sign



Figure 6. Babae (Girl) Sign

The occurrence of bilingual and multilingual signs, however, shows that the schoolscape also accommodates the use of multiple languages. These signs demonstrate that languages are not necessarily used in isolation but may be combined within the same communicative space. However, their smaller proportion compared with English-only signs suggests that multilingual representation remains relatively limited. This pattern may indicate that multilingualism is accommodated selectively rather than being consistently represented across the schoolscape. Therefore, the findings point to a tension between the multilingual realities of Philippine education and the comparatively strong symbolic visibility of English in the physical school environment.

Taken together, the distribution of signs suggests that the schoolscape reproduces a linguistic hierarchy in which English is the most visible language, while Filipino and multilingual representations occupy less prominent positions. This finding aligns with previous Philippine schoolscape research showing English's strong position in educational spaces (Bernardo, 2024b). This prominence may also stem from Filipinos' generally positive attitude toward English and its long-standing role as a second language in the country (Gonzalez, 1980). Filipinos have become accustomed to using English alongside Filipino and

local languages in various domains of communication (Esquivel, 2019). As Finzel (2012) noted, linguistic landscapes may either emphasize minority languages or reflect the growing influence of English as the language of globalization. While bilingual signs promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity, they also reflect English's continued influence within the school environment. Thus, the findings suggest that the schoolscape simultaneously supports multilingual communication while reproducing English's prominent role in educational spaces.

Language Hierarchy and the Symbolic Ordering of Languages

The trilingual sign *"No Vendors Allowed / Bawal Magtinda Dito / Maiparit iti Aglako Ditoy"* (see Figure 2) provides a clear example of language hierarchy within the school's linguistic landscape. Although the sign communicates the same regulatory message in three languages, the arrangement of languages suggests an unequal distribution of linguistic prestige and authority. Languages placed in more prominent positions are often associated with greater authority, prestige, and institutional value (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Scollon & Scollon, 2003). As Scollon and Scollon (2003, p. 120) explained, "In most cases studied so far, the preferred code is located above the secondary or peripheral codes if they are aligned vertically."



Figure 7. No Vendor Allowed Sign

Placing English at the top of the sign suggests its status as the preferred language for official communication within the school. Filipino occupies the middle position, reflecting its

role as the national language and a medium for broader communication within the school community. Ilocano, the dominant local language in La Union, appears at the bottom. Although its inclusion acknowledges the local community's linguistic identity, its limited visibility suggests a less prominent role in the school's public signage.

This pattern reflects what Li (2011) described as the tendency of dominant languages in linguistic landscapes to mirror existing social and institutional power relations. Viewed through Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Model, the ordering of the languages reflects language beliefs regarding the relative value and functions of English, Filipino, and Ilocano within the educational setting. English appears to be associated with institutional authority, Filipino with national accessibility, and Ilocano with local community engagement.

At the same time, including Ilocano in the trilingual sign matters because it brings the local language into an otherwise predominantly English-oriented schoolscape. Although Ilocano appeared in only one of the 63 documented signs, its presence is noteworthy given the linguistic context of the community in which the school is situated. The sign, *"No Vendors Allowed / Bawal Magtinda Dito / Maiparit iti Aglako Ditoy,"* combines English, Filipino, and Ilocano, making the local language visibly present alongside the two nationally prominent languages. However, its occurrence in only one sign also indicates the limited visibility of Ilocano within the school environment. Thus, while the sign provides evidence of local linguistic representation, it does not suggest that Ilocano occupies a prominent position in the overall schoolscape. Instead, its restricted occurrence points to an uneven distribution of linguistic visibility, in which a locally relevant language is present but remains considerably less visible than English and Filipino. This finding highlights the importance of examining not only whether a local language is present but also how frequently and in what spaces it is represented.

The trilingual sign illustrates how language policy is manifested not only through the presence of languages but also through their visual arrangement in public space. The sign simultaneously reflects institutional language priorities, national language practices, and local linguistic identity, making it a concrete example of how language choices are negotiated within the schoolscape.

Distribution of Languages across School Spaces

Table 1. Distribution of Languages across School Spaces

School Space	Dominant Language
Entrance/Gate Areas	English; English-Filipino-Ilocano
Administrative Offices	English
Classrooms	English
Reading Areas	English
Safety and DRRM Areas	English
Comfort Rooms	Filipino
Waste Segregation Areas	Filipino; English-Filipino
Achievement Displays	English
Health and WINS Corners	English

Table 1 shows that language representation varied by the school space where signs were situated. English appeared across most of the documented areas, including administrative offices, classrooms, reading areas, safety and DRRM areas, achievement displays, and Health and WinS corners. This broad spatial distribution indicates that English was not confined to a particular school activity but appeared across educational, administrative, informational, and safety-related functions. However, the distribution should be interpreted primarily as a pattern of visible language representation rather than direct evidence of the language used for actual communication or instruction in these spaces.



Figure 8. Di Nabubulok (Non-Biodegrable) Sign

Filipino appeared more selectively, particularly in comfort rooms and waste segregation areas. Examples such as *Lalake* (See Figure 5), *Babae* (See Figure 6), and *Di-Nabubulok* (See Figure 8) demonstrate the use of Filipino in signs associated with routine activities and environmental management. The presence of Filipino in these locations suggests that it functions as a visible resource for communicating practical information. Nevertheless, because the study is based on photographic documentation, the data cannot establish that Filipino was intentionally selected because it was considered more accessible to learners. Such an interpretation would require additional evidence from the sign producers or school stakeholders.

The multilingual signs provide another dimension of the schoolscape. Bilingual English-Filipino signs occurred in waste segregation areas, while the trilingual sign (See Figure 7), *"No Vendors Allowed / Bawal Magtinda Dito / Maiparit iti Aglako Ditoy",* was documented at the school entrance. The entrance sign is particularly significant because it marks a boundary between the school and the surrounding community. The use of English, Filipino, and Ilocano in this location makes multiple linguistic resources visible to students, parents, visitors, and other community members. However, the presence of only one trilingual sign also indicates that Ilocano had considerably less visible representation than English and Filipino in the documented schoolscape.

Viewed through the concept of emplacement (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), these findings demonstrate that language visibility is connected to the physical and communicative functions of school spaces. English appears across classrooms, offices, reading areas, safety areas, and achievement displays, giving it a broad spatial presence within the schoolscape. Filipino, in contrast, appeared more selectively in signs associated with routine and practical activities, while Ilocano appeared on a community-oriented entrance sign. Thus, the significance of language representation cannot be determined solely by counting languages; it also requires consideration of where languages are displayed and what types of communicative functions those locations serve.

The spatial pattern also provides an important basis for examining the relationship between schoolscape and language policy. The relatively broad visibility of English compared with Filipino and Ilocano shows that a language's officially recognized status does not necessarily translate into equal visibility across school spaces. At the same time, the presence of bilingual and multilingual signs demonstrates that the schoolscape is not entirely monolingual. Rather, the data reveal a differentiated pattern in which languages occupy

different degrees of visibility and different spatial contexts. This finding supports the view that schoolscapes can show how language policies and linguistic practices become materially represented within educational spaces, while recognizing that photographic data alone cannot establish the intentions or beliefs underlying individual language choices.

Classification of Signs According to Source

The distribution of top-down and bottom-up signs (See Figure 9) also reveals an asymmetrical pattern of agency within the schoolscape. With more than three-fourths of the documented signs originating from institutional sources, the visual and linguistic environment of the school is largely constructed by those who hold formal authority. This suggests that the schoolscape functions not only as a space for communication but also as a medium through which institutional priorities, rules, values, and identities are made visible. This further suggests that institutional actors exercise significant control over the school's visible language environment. This observation is consistent with linguistic landscape studies that identify schools as spaces where official language policies and institutional priorities are visibly communicated through signage (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). The large number of top-down signs indicates that the school's linguistic landscape is primarily influenced by administrative decisions and formal educational objectives. The relatively small proportion of bottom-up signs indicates that opportunities for teachers, learners, and other members of the school community to independently shape the visible linguistic environment are comparatively limited.

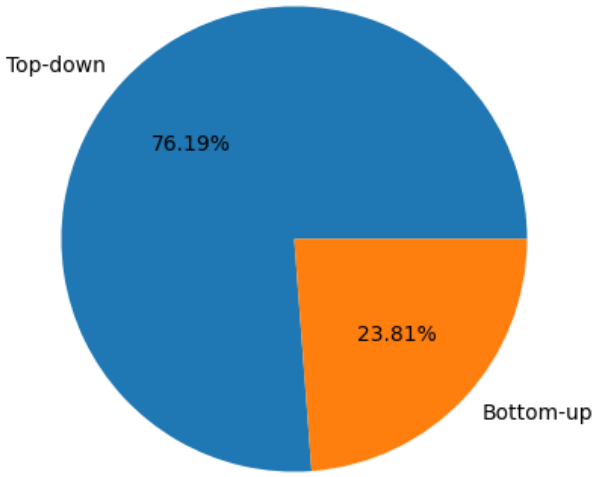


Figure 9. Classification of Signs According to Source

The physical location and communicative function of the signs further reinforce this distinction. Top-down signs were distributed across highly visible and commonly accessed areas, such as entrances, corridors, classrooms, and other shared spaces. Because these locations are encountered by a large portion of the school community, institutional messages have greater visibility and communicative reach. In this sense, the schoolscape can be understood as a form of institutional communication infrastructure, where signage extends administrative decisions and educational objectives into the physical environment.

The top-down signs also appear to perform multiple functions simultaneously. Beyond providing information, they communicate expectations about appropriate behavior, safety, cleanliness, achievement, and participation in school programs. For example, safety notices and evacuation signs regulate behavior, while achievement tarpaulins construct representations of institutional success. Project boards and program-related displays, meanwhile, make school initiatives publicly visible. Thus, top-down signage does not merely tell members of the school community what to do; it also contributes to constructing an image of what the school values and prioritizes.



Figure 10. Emergency sign (Top-down Sign)



Figure 11. DRRM Corner (Top-Down Sign)

At the same time, the presence of bottom-up signs, although limited, is significant because it demonstrates that the schoolscape is not completely controlled by institutional authorities. The taekwondo recruitment material, anti-bullying displays, and environmental awareness materials demonstrate that teachers, learners, and individual school units can also participate in shaping the linguistic and visual environment. These signs provide evidence of localized agency, particularly when members of the school community use signage to promote activities, express concerns, or encourage particular forms of participation.



Figure 12. Taekwondo Recruitment Sign (Bottom-up Sign)

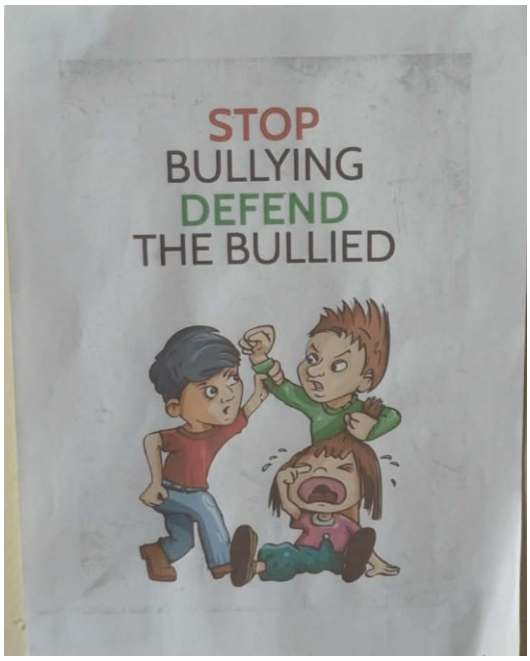


Figure 13. Stop Bullying Sign (Bottom-Up Sign)

The relatively small number of bottom-up signs may therefore reflect the institutional nature of the school as a regulated educational space. Unlike commercial or public spaces where bottom-up signage may be more extensive, school environments are subject to administrative policies, curricular objectives, and rules concerning what can be displayed and where materials may be placed. Consequently, the lower proportion of bottom-up signs should not necessarily be interpreted as an absence of community participation. Rather, it may indicate that community-generated expressions are more likely to occur within institutionally permitted spaces and contexts.

Another important observation concerns the relationship between authority and visibility. The dominance of top-down signs means that institutional voices are not only more numerous but are also more consistently represented in the school's visible environment. This creates a schoolscape in which official messages are more likely to become part of students' everyday visual experience. Repeated exposure to these signs may contribute to students' understanding of the school's rules, values, identity, and expectations. In this regard, the schoolscape can function as a form of implicit or indirect pedagogy, communicating institutional norms alongside formal classroom instruction.

However, the bottom-up signs introduce a degree of linguistic and social diversity into an otherwise institutionally regulated environment. Their localized nature suggests that school community members do not simply receive institutional messages but can also

produce meanings within particular spaces. This supports the view that linguistic landscapes are dynamic and socially constructed rather than being composed exclusively of official texts.

Overall, the 76.19%–23.81% distribution demonstrates that the school's linguistic landscape is predominantly institutionally driven but not exclusively so. The strong presence of top-down signs reflects the authority of school administrators and formal educational structures in determining what becomes publicly visible, while the smaller presence of bottom-up signs demonstrates the participation and agency of teachers and learners at the local level. The schoolscape therefore represents a negotiated space where institutional authority and community agency coexist, although they do not operate with equal visibility or influence. This finding provides an important basis for examining the subsequent patterns of language choice, particularly which languages are privileged, where they appear, and how their use differs between top-down and bottom-up signage.

Schoolscape and Policy-Related Linguistic Patterns

From the perspective of language practices (Spolsky, 2004), the findings show considerable variation in the visibility and distribution of languages across school spaces. English was observed across classrooms, administrative offices, reading areas, safety and DRRM areas, achievement displays, and WinS corners. Filipino appeared more frequently in comfort rooms and waste segregation areas, while Ilocano appeared only once, in an English-Filipino-Ilocano trilingual sign. These findings indicate that English has substantially greater visibility than Filipino and other languages in the school's physical linguistic environment.

The distribution of languages across school spaces also suggests that English and Filipino are not represented equally across functions. English was particularly visible in instructional, administrative, informational, and organizational spaces, whereas Filipino was more frequently observed in functional and practical contexts. This difference is important because the presence of both languages alone cannot be taken as evidence of balanced implementation of a bilingual language policy. Rather, the findings demonstrate an uneven distribution of linguistic visibility, with English occupying a substantially larger portion of the documented schoolscape.

The findings may also be considered in relation to language beliefs, or the values and ideologies associated with particular languages (Spolsky, 2004). However, the study does not directly measure the beliefs of teachers, administrators, students, or other members of the school community. Therefore, the linguistic patterns cannot by themselves establish that

English is preferred because of prestige, academic value, or institutional authority. The greater visibility of English may have multiple possible explanations, including the age and origin of signs, the use of commercially produced materials, and existing institutional practices. These possibilities should therefore be considered when interpreting the predominance of English.

In terms of language management, the predominance of top-down signs is also relevant to the school's visible linguistic environment. Of the 63 documented signs, 48 (76.19%) were classified as top-down, while 15 (23.81%) were classified as bottom-up. The high proportion of top-down signs indicates that school authorities and institutional actors have a substantial role in determining which languages become visible in official and public spaces. However, the predominance of English among these signs should not automatically be interpreted as deliberate institutional preference because the study did not investigate the decision-making processes behind the production or selection of individual signs.

Overall, the schoolscape demonstrates an uneven linguistic distribution rather than a balanced representation of the two primary languages recognized in current language policy. English has considerably greater physical visibility than Filipino, while Ilocano has very limited representation despite the school's location within an Ilocano-speaking community. Thus, rather than concluding that the schoolscape directly demonstrates policy implementation or alignment, the findings reveal a policy-related linguistic pattern in which the formal recognition of Filipino and English as primary languages coexists with substantially greater visibility of English in the school's physical environment. This disparity provides a basis for further investigation into how national language policy orientations are translated into visible linguistic practices at the school level.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the schoolscape provides a useful lens for examining how language policy orientations become visible in educational spaces. The findings show an uneven distribution of languages across the selected public elementary school. English was visible across instructional, administrative, informational, safety, and achievement-related spaces, while Filipino appeared more frequently in functional areas such as comfort rooms and waste segregation spaces. Ilocano had very limited visibility, appearing only once in a trilingual sign. These findings indicate that the schoolscape does not simply reproduce official language policy; rather, it reflects a complex relationship among policy orientations,

institutional practices, communicative functions, spatial contexts, and the linguistic environment of the school community. The predominance of English should therefore be understood as a pattern of linguistic visibility rather than direct evidence of institutional preference or policy compliance.

The study further demonstrates the value of integrating schoolscape analysis with language policy perspectives. Spolsky's Language Policy Model provides a framework for considering the relationship among language practices, language beliefs, and language management, while the concept of emplacement highlights how the location and function of signs contribute to their meaning. The predominance of top-down signs also indicates the substantial role of institutional actors in shaping the school's visible linguistic environment. However, the presence of both English and Filipino cannot, by itself, be considered evidence of balanced bilingual policy implementation. Instead, the findings reveal policy-related linguistic patterns in which the formal recognition of Filipino and English as primary languages coexists with substantially greater physical visibility of English. The study contributes to Philippine linguistic landscape research by documenting the linguistic environment of a public elementary school and highlighting the importance of examining the material and spatial dimensions of language policy alongside formal policy provisions and classroom practices.

The findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. Because the research was conducted in a single public elementary school and focused on 63 visible linguistic signs, the findings are site-specific and cannot be generalized to Philippine elementary schools as a whole. Future research could therefore combine schoolscape analysis with classroom observations, interviews, and learner perspectives to determine whether patterns of linguistic visibility correspond to actual language practices in instruction and school interaction. Comparative studies across public elementary schools in different linguistic communities could further establish whether the predominance of English observed in this study is specific to the selected school or represents a broader pattern in Philippine basic education.

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