SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE PHILIPPINE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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The question that is frequently asked about second language learners—English in particular—is the extent to which learning opportunities like bilingual education and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) should be offered to them and how extensive (Cummins, 1981). This question, interestingly, does not draw much attention in the Philippine education as it does in other countries especially in the United States.

At present, the United States espouses the multiculturalistic approach to education by confronting the fact that second language learners occupy a peculiar place in their educational system. In fact, when the United States Supreme Court came up with a resolution offering an interpretation of the Civil Rights Act, they obligated local school districts and states to furnish limited-English-proficient students (LEP, also referred to English language-learners and in California as English learners or ELs) with services appropriate to their needs as second language learners (Krashen, 1991). In other words, the highest court of the United States, by way of logic, appreciates the especial place in which second language learners are situated along with the mainstream society. Unaware perhaps of their educational needs, the Supreme Court for sure acknowledges the differences between native speakers and second language learners. However, lawmakers have a longstanding debate on whether educational services will be offered to second language learners for a long period of time. Specifically, the argument revolves around the duration with which the services will be rendered. In fact, during the times of reauthorization, the recommendation of putting a duration limit to services under the funding of Bilingual Education of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has been repeatedly been a topic of hot debates (Crawford, 2004).

In offering his view to this issue, Epstein (1981) earlier argued that “actually, it can take anywhere from a matter of weeks to six years for a student in a bilingual program to acquire a basic proficiency in English. This depends largely on whether English is introduced slowly or quickly” (p. 25). Because of this and similar observations, it seems important to consider the case
of students in our educational system recognizing their situation as second language learners much like in the same context discussed above. While it could be argued that the educational setting of the United States is much different from ours, the point of consideration is the status of second language learners in both educational setting.

By realizing the similarity thus conceived in the context of language acquisition, a unifying theme for both educational settings will emerge, that is, the timeframe before which second language learners can acquire proficiency in using the English language. Studies like those of Collier (1995) and Mitchell, Destino and Karam (1997) found that it would be approximately ten years before second language learners acquire full competence and proficiency in English. By full competence and proficiency, they mean the stage or point by which second language learners have already acquired a competitive skill in using English both in the academic and social setting. In other words, they have already attained the two main goals of language acquisition, that is, educational and communicative aims. This finding also implies that in the early stages of learning the English language, second language learners must have been experiencing tremendous difficulty. It could be noticed that this implication serves as the springboard for policy makers to come up with resolutions concerning services that could be offered to second language learners to assuage that difficulty. This is also the same springboard from which education policy makers must take into great consideration the difficulties experienced by second language learners in the Philippine Educational Setting.

References


