

## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION USED IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

**Rosario J. de Guzman**

*Bureau of Non-Formal Education*

*Department of Education, Culture and Sports*

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will be presenting the major programs and projects of the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE) of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, and the language of instruction used for each.

We at the BNFE are well aware of the distinct characteristics and learning needs of the out-of-school youth and adult learners along with the latest developments and thrusts in non-formal education. We have reviewed and improved the non-formal education system to provide learning opportunities to these out-of-school youth and adults who have not had the opportunity of availing of the formal school system or of finishing formal elementary and secondary education. The issue of language of instruction for non-formal education programs of the DECS has recently been brought into focus by recent program developments facilitated by the on-going Asian Development Bank-assisted Philippines Non-Formal Education Project.

### CURRENT INNOVATIVE NFE PROGRAMS

In line with its vision of empowering learners through responsive quality non-formal education programs, the BNFE has initiated the following innovative programs:

#### **Functional Education and Literacy Program**

The goal of the Functional Education and Literacy Program (FELP) is to provide the illiterate and functionally illiterate out-of-school youth and adults from the poorest segments of society with educational programs specifically designed to address their expressed needs. The FELP is expected to contribute to the country's poverty alleviation program by raising the literacy and numeracy skills of the poor to engage in self-help and community development activities.

The FELP target learners are the illiterate 15-year old and above out-of-school youth and adults from depressed rural areas or in slum dwellings in the cities who either had no access to the formal education system or had dropped out of the formal school system and had reverted to illiteracy.

## DE GUZMAN

The FELP utilizes the Literacy Services Contracting Scheme (LSCS) as a delivery mechanism whereby the DECS contracts qualified service providers which are either non-government organizations (NGOs), state colleges and universities, private colleges with extension services, local government units, people's organizations, church-based organizations, and NGO umbrella organizations which have affiliate members at the local levels.

### LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN FELP

The principal goal of the FELP is to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills in its target learners. For many years there has been an on-going discussion among national and international literacy experts as to the preferred medium of instruction for the development of functional literacy. UNESCO has long advocated the use of the mother tongue/vernacular as the medium of instruction for functional literacy programs. The international award winning ethnographic study of the University of the Philippines – Education Research Program (UP-ERP) *Learning from Life* funded by the Philippines' Non-Formal Education Project, similarly concluded in 1994 that “where the medium of instruction is familiar to the learners (i.e., in the home language) literacy acquisition is earlier. Conversely, when the medium of instruction is foreign to learners, it occurs later.” It strongly recommended that the language of instruction for basic literacy be the local or regional language, with Filipino to be used as a supplemental language. These findings were further corroborated by the recent Report of the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform (PCER) during its detailed review of the Bilingual Education Policy of the DECS. To this end the PCER Report includes a clear recommendation for introducing the use of the regional lingua franca or vernacular as a medium of instruction in Grade One of the formal school system. The PCER concluded that “Studies have shown that this change will make students stay in school longer, learn better, quicker and more permanently, and will in effect be able to use the first language as bridge to more effective learning in English and Filipino” (PCER Report, April 2000, p. 122).

The DECS-BNFE similarly believes that the acquisition of basic literacy skills among the basically illiterate out-of-school youth and adults can best be achieved if the medium of instruction is their “mother tongue.” Our extensive experience in implementing basic literacy programs for hundreds of thousands of Filipinos from the most depressed and disadvantaged communities of the country has repeatedly demonstrated that the native language or the local dialect provides the most effective entry point for the development of basic reading, writing, and computational skills in out-of-school youth and adults. Based on this convergence of national and international research findings and our own practical educational experience, the FELP has therefore consistently made use of the vernacular as the medium of instruction for its literacy learning groups.

The use of the learners' own languages has important implications for the development and use of appropriate learning materials for basically illiterate learners. In order to accommodate the range of lingua francas of illiterate learners across the Philippines, the FELP incorporated financial allocation for local materials development in the financial payment given to contracted literacy service providers under the Literacy Service Contracting Scheme (LSCS). Service providers are allocated Four Thousand One Hundred Twenty-Five Pesos (P4,125) per learning group of 25 learners for the development, adaptation, and translation of literacy learning materials according to the needs, contexts, and language requirements of learners. As part of the capability building program of the ADB

assisted Philippines NFE Project, service providers were also provided training in community-based literacy materials development.

To support local materials development efforts, the BNFE has developed 29 prototype learning modules and one workbook which cover the essential literacy and numeracy skills needed for the achievement of basic literacy. These learning materials are based on an NFE curriculum framework for the basic literacy level which was developed in 1998 in response to the new national definition of functional literacy (and its key indicators) developed by the Literacy Coordinating Council. The 29 prototype learning modules were initially produced in Filipino to attend to the personal and community learning needs of learners in Filipino-speaking areas nationwide. These learning materials were subsequently translated into seven major languages, namely, Bicol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Ilocano, Maguindanao, Tausug, and Waray. In the case of other language groups, the literacy service providers are encouraged to translate the learning materials into their learners' own language.

Hand-in-hand with the development of literacy materials in the eight languages, the BNFE has also developed an Assessment of Basic Literacy (ABL) Test to determine the level of comprehension of learners of the essential competencies of the basic literacy level. This test was originally developed in English with the technical assistance of international consultants from World Education, Inc. It was subsequently adapted into Filipino and translated into the same seven major languages as the literacy materials. The ABL covers the reading, writing, and computational competencies detailed in the NFE curriculum framework for the basic literacy level.

The use of the lingua franca as the medium of instruction for basic literacy training does, however, raise a number of issues.

- 1) Strictly speaking the policy runs counter to the provision of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which declares that "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino.... and for purposes of communication and instruction the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English" (Article XIV, Sec. 6 and 7).
- 2) Although the BNFE promotes the use of the mother tongue for basic level literacy it is committed to encouraging the eventual widespread use of Filipino, which is the lingua franca, nationwide. It, therefore, encourages its literacy service providers to assist learners to develop their skills in Filipino, in order that they may better participate in the broader political, economic, and social activities of the country. The development of Filipino communication skills also helps prepare those FELP learners who are interested in seeking educational certification of their functional literacy skills through the Non-Formal Education Accreditation and Equivalency System, where Filipino is the principal means of instruction and testing.
- 3) Although the vernacular is used as the principal means of instruction in the FELP, the BNFE has also observed that some communities prefer instruction to be in either Filipino or English since mastery of these languages is seen as a means to achieving economic and social advancement in terms of employment and participation in political affairs.

On the other hand, research studies and BNFE's own experience have revealed that some Maranaos view English and Filipino as the languages of Christians and not of Muslims. They consider the use of both languages as an instrument to convert them to Christianity. Some of them refuse to participate in non-formal literacy programs if the

language of instruction is Filipino or English for fear of being exposed to the dominant Christian culture.

- 4) The BNFE's policy to have the learners' own language as the language of instruction for the basic literacy level raises issues for eventual transition to functional literacy skills development in English and Filipino. In essence the present policy conforms with the Lingua Franca Project of the formal school system of DECS, which is anchored on the rationale that the more developed mother tongue literacy is, the more readily literacy in a second language can be acquired and that reading and writing skills learned in the learners' first language transfer to a second language, allowing the learners to learn to read and write more quickly in English. The BNFE, however, is still studying the challenges and needed strategies for facilitating the smooth transition of learners from basic literacy in the vernacular to functional literacy in Filipino.

### **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION ACCREDITATION AND EQUIVALENCY (NFE A&E) SYSTEM**

The Non-Formal Education Accreditation and Equivalency (NFE A&E) System is a truly Non-Formal Education Program, an alternative learning system which provides opportunities to the economically depressed and disadvantaged to upgrade their skills, knowledge, and competencies and gain an elementary or a secondary certificate in order to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

The NFE A&E is a pioneering program that offers a uniquely flexible non-formal alternative learning system to formal schooling. It aims to:

- provide a system for assessing levels of literacy and other non-formal learning achievement covering basic and functional education skills and competencies designed to be comparable to those of the formal school system
- offer an alternative pathway by which out-of-school youth and adults can earn an educational qualification comparable to the elementary and secondary school system
- enable out-of-school youth and adults to gain reading, writing, and numeracy skills to meet their learning goals as they define them and to gain the skills they need to improve their economic status and to function more effectively in society.

The target learners of the NFE A&E System are the 15-year old and above out-of-school youth who are basically literate or have completed the FELP.

### **LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN THE NFE A&E SYSTEM**

The language of instruction in NFE at the elementary level is Filipino except for the subject English Communication Skills.

At the secondary level, the language of instruction is Filipino except for the subject English Communication Skills. The learning strand on problem solving and critical thinking, which belongs to science and mathematics competencies, is taught in English or Filipino at the choice of the learner but will be tested only in Filipino. For this reason, the interactive

learning modules are available in both English and Filipino. The modules were originally in Filipino but subsequently were translated to English. Specific English and Filipino language skills such as analytical listening and pronouncing words correctly are taught using multi-media and video.

This policy is also anchored on the provision of Article XIV, Section 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which states that for purposes of communication and instruction the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino, and, until otherwise provided by law, English. It is also based on the Bilingual Education Policy of DECS, which aims at achieving competence in both Filipino and English at the national level, through the teaching of both languages and their use as media of instruction at all levels. The aspiration of the Filipino nation is to have its citizens possess skills in Filipino to enable them to perform their functions and duties as Filipino citizens and in English in order to meet the needs of the country in the community of nations.

The NFE A&E curriculum framework is based on the new definition of functional literacy developed by the Literacy Coordinating Council. Under the new definition functional literacy is defined as:

“A range of skills and competencies – cognitive, affective, and behavioral – which enables individuals to:

- live and work as human persons
- develop their potential
- make critical and informed decisions
- function effectively in society within the context of their environment and that of the wider community (local, regional, national, and global)

in order to improve the quality of their life and that of society.”

At the basic literacy level addressed by the FELP, learners are heavily dependent on literacy facilitators for literacy skill development. In the NFE A&E System, the elementary level is a transition where learners are encouraged to begin to “learn how to learn” so they can increasingly study and learn by themselves at their own pace. At the secondary level, facilitator-aided instruction may still be required for some technical areas; however, it will be gradually reduced until the learners are able to learn effectively by themselves.

The NFE A&E learning materials, which are based on the NFE A&E curriculum framework, are designed to provide learning support to the elementary and secondary level learners. The sets of learning materials developed consist of learner’s guides, primers, facilitators’ guides, 152 interactive self-learning modules which contain pre- and post-tests, 10 audio-tapes for elementary and secondary levels which utilize the four A’s of Adult Learning (Activity, Analysis, Abstraction, and Application) as basis for the module design. At present 80 additional learning modules and six video tapes are being developed and all these materials will be available in English and Filipino.

An issue which will emerge is the transition of learning and testing in Filipino and learning in English. This will be a big challenge and instructional managers will have to give much support to their learners.

The BNFE is beginning to think about the possibility of having the language of instruction in the lower elementary learning materials which are facilitator-aided to be in the learners’ own language at the critical stage and to transition from FELP to A&E and from facilitator-aided to self-learning skills. Although the policy is bilingual education and the

## DE GUZMAN

learning modules are in English and Filipino, the monitoring results showed that in the Learning Support Delivery System the instructional managers actually used the local dialect in the clarification of concepts and in giving feedback to their learners. There needs to be additional support to the learners as part of the transition period.

The NFE A&E Testing, which is based on the NFE A&E curriculum framework, is designed to provide two levels of certification of learning achievements comparable to formal education's elementary and secondary levels. The NFE A&E Tests are in Filipino except for English Communication Skills. During the November 26, 2000 Test, a pilot test on authentic writing assessment was included. The test takers at both levels were made to write two or three paragraphs in Filipino about their most memorable experience. A majority of the test takers had stories to tell and could express themselves in Filipino in varying degrees of proficiency. Some test takers did not write in Filipino but wrote in English or in their local language. The writing test was scored in terms of the following criteria, namely, clarity of the central idea, coherent focus, organization, and support or explanation of the idea.

However, during the pilot phase, there was an experiment for the bilingual testing of the learning strand on problem solving and critical thinking covering science and math competencies because the DECS Secretary allowed the test takers to have a choice on the language test for these competencies, whether they wanted to take the test in Filipino or in English. The Center for Educational Measurement (CEM), which was contracted by DECS to develop the test, had to resort to having colored sheets for the test in the English language for problem solving and critical thinking on the science and math portion of the test. The administration of the test was problematic, it resulted in confusion, delay in answering the test by flipping the pages from one page to another. The results showed that a great majority took the test in Filipino and there was no significant difference between the performance in English and in Filipino. The recommendation of CEM for subsequent tests was to have only the test items in English Communication Skills to be given in English and the rest of the test to be given in Filipino, and this was approved by the DECS Secretary.

Prior to the conduct of the May 2000 test, two Burmese nuns requested the DECS Secretary that they be allowed to take the NFE A&E test in English but there was no time to translate the test items from Filipino to English. In response to this request, the test items will have to be translated to English except for the Filipino Communication Skills to open the test to *balikbayans* and foreigners. To accommodate this request DECS-BNFE contracted CEM to translate the 2000 test. A new revised test shall be developed and shall be ready for implementation soon.

It may be mentioned that the NFE A&E System has opened windows of opportunities for the test passers, because they can enroll either in post secondary technical and vocational courses of the Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA), in college in the member institutions of the Philippine Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (PASUC), and universities supervised by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) after passing the screening required also of the formal secondary school graduates. They can apply for scholarships with the Meralco Foundation, Inc. if they pass the screening process and qualify in terms of their parents' income. These were made possible by the signing of the Memoranda of Agreement between the DECS Secretary and heads of these agencies.

The Civil Service Commission issued Resolution 000499 which recognized the NFE A&E certificates for permanent appointment in the government requiring elementary

## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

and secondary certificates provided other requirements were met. There are a total of 638 position titles in government which require elementary and secondary certificates.

Administrative Order No.116 signed by the President mandates all concerned local government agencies and local government units to support NFE A&E.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the BNFE was awarded the UNESCO International NOMA Award 2000 for its innovative, flexible NFE A&E System.

### ACADEMIC-FOCUSED BRIDGING PROGRAM

The NFE A&E Secondary Level test passers who are interested in entering college require additional learning support and have to cope with the demands and entry requirements of college education.

The academic-focused bridging program will offer interested secondary level test passers an opportunity to prepare for the intellectual challenges of university/college education, to move up a continuous ladder of learning from basic literacy level to college level education. The learning materials which are now being developed are on essential life skills preparatory to college work and these are mainly in English, except for a few modules in Filipino which are meant to strengthen the Filipino Communication Skills, while higher English, Mathematics, and Science competencies are in English.

In the academic-focused bridging program being developed, the learning materials are predominantly in English to prepare the secondary level test passers for college. Since courses in colleges and universities are being taught predominantly in English, the instructional support given by the instructional managers needs to be mainly in English.

### CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The language of instruction in non-formal education is an area for ongoing discussion. Through actual application on the use of the languages, the BNFE seeks the answer as to which is the best way of achieving literacy skills development. We should not lose sight of the ultimate goal, which is the empowerment of the downtrodden, underprivileged, underserved sectors of society through the upgrading of their basic education skills, knowledge and competencies to be able to participate actively in social, economic, and political affairs in order to improve themselves, their families, and society.

### REFERENCES

- Doronila, M.L.C. (Ed.). (1994). *Learning from life: An ethnographic study of functional literacy in Philippine communities*, 9 volumes. Manila: Literacy Coordinating Council of the Philippines, University of the Philippines, and Bureau of Non-Formal Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports.
- Philippine Commission on Educational Reform. (2000). *Philippine agenda for educational reform: The PCER report*. Manila.