

The President's Address

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My address is for the first issue of *Rangsit Journal of Educational Studies (RJES)* and the editorial team members have my congratulations on their efforts on this academic publication. On this special occasion, I'd like to express my view points on two vitally important issues as pertinent to language education in Thailand and the ASEAN community. They are Education as Thailand's Strategy and Bilingual Education for Thai citizens as part of the ASEAN community.

From my background in political science as a civil servant, a politician, once the leader of the Thai Parliament, and now an educator with a specific vision for our country, I've gathered that at times our educational leaders tend to overlook great opportunities for the growth of our nation. We should look into special attributes or potential characteristics of Thai people to be fully developed or maximized to excel in certain areas of education. Our people are known for positive attributes like intellectual capacity, friendliness, warm hospitality, service-oriented, patience, and artistic impression. These characteristics unique to our people mean that if they are developed into the right disciplines, our people can excel as high quality citizens of our country, the ASEAN community and certainly the world at large.

Having talked about the disciplines we should develop for our people, I'm speaking from my experience as President of Rangsit University in witnessing how our young people can excel in their learning and performing professionally in specific areas, namely medical science, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, oriental medicine, biotechnology, biochemistry, and subjects in the applied arts group like creative art, art and design, and digital art. Tourism is also an area that we can all agree that we can excel in the world arena. If we look around us, we can see that it is not difficult to locate excellent practices in those identified disciplines. This has been recognized not only among us, but by foreign visitors who travel to our country not only for holidays but also for high-quality medical treatments. It is important to know our competitive strengths and on this point, I'd like to propose Education as the country's major strategy in the world arena of economy, social and cultural development.

In supporting my proposal for Education as the country's strategy, let me give tourism as an example of our competitive strength. We can certainly be proud of current practices in Tourism and Hospitality Industry, as in hotel services, food and restaurant businesses, reflexological and spa services. I've been traveling to different parts of the world and I'm not exaggerating to say that the best practices and services are indeed at home in our country.

My second point is on Bilingual Education for all disciplines under study to be able to survive and compete in the world community. Certainly, I'm not downplaying the significance of our mother tongue. In fact, I'm trying to say that the present and future functioning of our country as a member of the world community cannot do without Bilingual Education.

Why do I say so? Can you imagine how handicapped we could be in present and future communication with only one language? Certainly it is not beyond our imagination with current communication and cyber evidences around us. As it has been

recognized that English is now a language of wider communication, we need to equip our citizens with education of the first language as well as a second language as a tool for limitless communication of the world today. Teachers and educators are in the current trend to move along and benefit from it. In your teaching profession, you play an important role in helping your students communicate in English as a second language or at best for your students to become bilingual. The third language--one of the languages of our neighboring countries could be an advantage for young learners. This is one task on language education you are to perform for the young of our country.

In my view, Bilingual Education should be approached and practiced on the basis of knowledge derived from research in first and second language acquisition. Major findings from researchers in these two fields indicate significance of *language input* and *language functions* acquired through *interaction* or oral discourse. As reported in research in second language acquisition, language features are naturally developed from a vertical to a horizontal structure. The pedagogic implications of these findings point to the prime importance of native language input to insure the same type of output, followed by a high degree of interaction between the teacher and learners as well as learners to learners. In addition, gradual language features should be acquired through immersion in communication tasks without translation into the mother tongue. In executing these pedagogic implications, teachers and parents have to be patient in waiting for language functions to evolve out of oral discourse; the concrete outcomes can be seen within two to three years of language development. The empirical evidence on such SLA research was reported by Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS) in 2004-2005 and 2013-2014.

Let me emphasize that practices in bilingual education are not beyond reach for language teachers and they are to benefit our young learners. As known in our country, we have spent many years to train our students to develop their language skills in English with far-from-satisfactory results. Our students have to labor through repetitive grammatical practices and yet still cannot communicate in speaking or speaking at a functional level. It is time that we find an effective way to help our learners acquire the second language with greater ease through bilingual education practices. As reported in research about bilingual learners' success in acquiring the target language naturally, bilingual education could be an answer to our young citizens. It only takes understanding how a language is acquired with ease in the first five years for a child and patience of teachers and school stakeholders to provide suitable and sufficient interactions in the classroom contexts to support language acquisition at school. Parents need not worry too much about their children's academic achievements. When the learners are in the process of natural acquisition around two or three years, they can master the language as a tool to attain their academic achievements. This is what we have experienced at SBS: our students perform excellently in English in the national tests and their academic achievements do not lag behind their language skills. Giving the best education that can facilitate communication in English at an early stage can open a door to the new culture that in turn will support intellectual development as well as a new world view for cultural tolerance.

Back to ESL teaching in our country, we need to look into pedagogic implications generated by bilingual education as new guidelines for language practices. As all of us have witnessed, even though teachers may give a heavy dose of language practices to their students, they may not get much in return for target language performance. What they should integrate into their teaching is to interact with their students in class and let

them use the language to communicate in similar-to-real-life situations, if possible. Since language input and interactions are determinants for language acquisition in both the first and the second language, ESL teachers need to talk to your students. Keep in mind that if your students can speak, they can write after their speaking. This is how we learn our mother tongue, though you may not be aware of the process and many errors you yourself made before reaching your mastery in the first five years. Let's take this path and help your learners effectively.

These are my two points on Education as our country's strategy and Bilingual Education as a fast-track to help our young learners to be able to communicate in the second language of wider communication English more effectively. Thai educators please give a thought about them and when you are ready, then we can move as one in the same direction—that is to help our citizens become bilingual to do well and excel in the ASEAN and world community.

With my best wishes to all readers of RJES.