DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 450 FL 015 059

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TITLE State of the Art of Pacific Bilingual Education. Bilingual Education Paper Series Vol. 4 No. 10.
INSTITUTION California State Univ., Los Angeles. Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; *Educational Needs; Federal Legislation; Instructional Materials; *Language Usage; *Program Administration; Program Descriptions; *Program Design; Program Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS American Samoa; Guam; Micronesia; *Pacific Islands

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the state of bilingual education in the Pacific islands administered by the United States (Guam, American Samoa, and Micronesia) begins with background information on the patterns of education and language use in the region and in each separate area. The current status of bilingual education programs and support projects is described, and the lack of materials and program assessment is discussed. Special considerations of program development in these areas are noted, including costs, isolation from universities, need for materials, lack of continuity in administrative personnel, research needs, and low funding. The general recommendation is for a federal commitment to bilingual education basic programs, teacher training, materials development, and research on program effectiveness. Specific recommendations are also made for each area of special consideration in program development. (MSE)

ISSN 0161-3707

Vol. 4 No. 10
May 1981

Bilingual Education PAPER SERIES

STATE OF THE ART OF PACIFIC BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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The subject of this publication was supported in whole or in part by the United States Education Department. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the United States Education Department; no official endorsement by the United States Office of Education should be inferred.

This publication was printed with funds provided by the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by Public Law 93.380.

STATE OF THE ART OF PACIFIC BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Robert E. Gibson

Describing the state of the art of bilingual education in so vast an area and with cultures so variable as those on the hundreds of islands in the Pacific Ocean is no easy task. Any generalization made about what has happened or is happening in bilingual education can be refuted by those on other islands where that generalization does not hold. The history of each island group has been significantly influenced by outside authorities who have reshaped the local societies that existed before contact with non-Pacific nations. Rather than attempt to describe all of these situations, this paper will focus on areas that have been administered by the United States. Thus, while much interesting work has been done in bilingual education in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Western Samoa, the Solomon Islands, the new nation of Kiribati, and others, they will not be the subject of this report.

BACKGROUND

One thing that various island groups have in common educationally is colonialism. All the islands have been controlled at one time or another by European or Asian nations who developed many of the present educational systems. All the islands had viable educational programs before contact with colonials. Navigation systems for which the Pacific Islanders are famous were taught

by mast[illegible]chers to the most promising students. History, throug[illegible]borate geneologies and other forms of oral culture, were ta[illegible]ght so well by master teachers that these geneologies are still the most reliable sources of pre-contact history. Other everyday living necessities such as canoe and house building, fishing, farming, weaving, and medicine were taught formally through an apprentice system. These facts should dispel the notion, held by many, that introduction of a formal educational system was the work of colonial governments.

Language Use

With colonial rule came the need for using a second language in education. Traditional education continued in the communities' language, while newly introduced concepts were communicated through the dominant group's language. Thus, early schooling was for the purpose of imparting whatever the early colonials wanted the local inhabitants to know. This, at first, was the new religion.

The Spaniards were the first group of colonials to set up an educational system for bringing their religion to the Micronesian people. Evidence of these early contacts can be found in the many borrowed religious words. It is no accident that in most cases the word for "church" is some form of *iglesia*. Samoa, however, was not dominated by the Spaniards. Instead, several countries, including Great Britian, Germany, and the United States vied for control of the islands. An agreement to split Samoa between the Germans (Western Samoa) and the United States (American Samoa) was reached around the turn of the century (at about the same time the

United States assumed control over Guam). In the late 1800s, Germany assumed control over the Northern Marianas Islands, the Caroline Islands, and the Marshall Islands (with the exception of Guam). During this time, schools were set up in Micronesia where missionaries taught traditionally Western subjects using German as the medium of instruction. Attempts were made to commit some of the local languages to print, the Bible being the main subject of such work. Catechisms and song books were also translated at this time, but the main work was done in the colonial language.

At the beginning of World War I, Japan assumed control over Micronesia except for Guam and the Gilbert Islands and instituted an educational system consisting of three years of mandatory schooling where the medium of instruction was Japanese and the subjects taught were, generally, Japanese culture and practical arts. A few Micronesian students were sent to a territorial technical school to learn carpentry and boat building. Use of the local languages was not allowed in the schools, and therefore, there was no materials development in the local languages. Meanwhile, schooling in Guam and American Samoa was largely in English with explanations given in the local languages. During all of the administrations of the Spanish, Germans, and Japanese, the colonial language was used. Bilingual education just did not exist.

At the end of World War II, the United States controlled Guam (after three years of Japanese rule), Micronesia (known as The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands), and American Samoa. Since these three major areas were administered separately, their approaches to bilingual education programs were quite different.

They will, therefore, be treated separately here. All share the common experience of foreign domination, resulting in linguistic domination and in societies with somewhat negative attitudes toward their own languages. From the beginning, these island cultures were told that the United States encourages people to respect their own cultures and languages and that they would have educational systems appropriate to their cultures. The reality was often at variance with this promise.

Guam

Guam has had a large United States military presence since the end of World War II and was greatly influenced by this presence. Large numbers of English-speaking servicemen and their families have profoundly affected the use of the local language (Chamorro) in the schools as well as in the community. While Chamorro is spoken by most of the mature generations, many school age ethnically Chamorro children speak little or no Chamorro. This change has occurred in the last 15 years and appears to be the result of a zealous campaign by teachers and parents to encourage the use of English in the school and at home. Many parents are reported to forbid the use of Chamorro in the home. Children constantly surrounded by English in the school, through television and radio broadcasts, and who see that English speakers hold the best jobs in the community, will naturally become English speakers. The belief, held by many, that one must forego study in the first language to learn English effectively, is an additional obstacle to the use of first languages.

Exclusive English use is also promoted by immigrants from Korea, the Philippines, and Indochina, virtually none of whom speak Chamorro. Fear that Chamorro in Guam will go the way of Hawaiian in Hawaii, an almost extinct language, is founded on a very real possibility. Recently, the Government of Guam has undertaken a series of programs designed to revitalize Chamorro in the schools and communities; however, it is too soon to tell what the lasting effect will be. It seems clear that Guamanians do not want their language to be relegated to linguistic museums.

American Samoa

American Samoa, in contrast to Guam, has no large United States military presence and, therefore, has not felt pressure to replace Samoan with English. School age children still speak the language of their parents. Samoan is the language of the Church and of the greatest part of the community. While television carries primarily English-language programs, there are also Samoan-language programs, strengthening the idea that Samoan is viable. There appears to be no immediate possibility of Samoan slipping in its position as the main language of those islands. While English was the official medium of instruction in the public schools for many years, many teachers and students continued to speak Samoan. There remains, however, a paucity of materials in Samoan, since until recently, it was not used for instruction. One factor that probably contributed to the continued use of the language in the schools is the nearby presence of independent Western Samoa with a population of approximately 152,000, about five times the

size of American Samoa (Van Naerssen, 1979). By the time students complete their final year of high school, they are bilingual, although there is some question about English reading and writing facility. No assessment of their facility with Samoan reading and writing is available at this time.

Micronesia (The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia)

Micronesia is so vast, with a population scattered over a hundred separate islands, that it is almost impossible to generalize about language use. In some places English is almost nonexistent, while elsewhere the local languages are hardly spoken. Understanding the area's diversity precedes understanding how English and the local languages are used. With this in mind one can say that during the first 15 years of American administration, local languages were dominant in communities and schools, a result of the lack of a large English-speaking community in the territory. Although books found in the schools were probably in English, there were few people who could read them with ease. The education budget during that period was so small that many schools were simply left to organize themselves, and teachers taught the way they remembered the Japanese teachers teaching them a few years earlier. What teacher training existed was short term and basic.

In the sixties, with the influx of large numbers of American teachers, Peace Corps volunteers, and the institution of an almost English-only policy in the schools, use of local languages was discouraged, if not disallowed. However, even while the government mandated use of English in the schools, the local languages were

also widely spoken. The reason is simple: children entering school did not know enough English for effective learning through that language, and their teachers recognized the need to teach them through a language they could comprehend. It is amazing that many teachers continued to teach in English, knowing that the children did not know enough of the language to understand what was taught. In this case, a good deal of English and little else was actually being taught.

In the seventies, conditions changed, leading to revival of the local languages and to the expectation that children could be educated in both English and their own languages. One very real influence was the presence of large numbers of Peace Corps volunteers who had some facility in the local languages. This was dramatic evidence that these languages were legitimate means of communication taken seriously by the United States government. At about the same time, the Congress of Micronesia was becoming aware that the cultural heritage was in danger if the indigenous languages continued to play subservient roles to English. With this in mind, and with the knowledge of what had happened to Hawaiian and many of the Native American languages, the Congress of Micronesia passed a resolution requesting the Director of Education to institute cultural studies and local language study in the schools.

Fortunately, an unrelated action on the part of the Federal government further reinforced the use of Micronesian languages--the passage of the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII ESEA. With funds from that legislation, the government of Micronesia was able to translate its hopes into programs that allowed children to learn

through the languages they understood while learning English at a realistic pace. Now, in Micronesia, children enter school speaking their first language and are allowed to learn through it until they master enough English to be able to learn effectively. The Micronesian languages are very much alive and well in Micronesian schools and communities.

CURRENT STATUS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual education programs funded by Title VII exist in all three major areas of the Pacific Islands served by the United States. There are eight basic programs in Micronesia--one in American Samoa, and one in Guam. The programs in the Northern Marianas and in Palau were the first to show success to be emulated by others. Community participation and efforts by local departments of education to develop materials in the first languages appear to be their major strengths. Table 1 shows the programs and number of students being served. There are still thousands of children not served by basic bilingual education programs funded by Title VII ESEA. In many cases, bilingual education is offered without the services available through the Title VII programs. Particularly lacking are materials for such non-Title VII programs.

Serving the Pacific region are several support projects funded by Title VII. San Jose State University has a program that provides university level training to the Northern Marianas. The Cross Cultural Resource Center at Sacramento, California; the Materials Development Center in Tucson, Arizona; and the BETAC in

Table 1

BASIC BILINGUAL PROGRAMS IN THE PACIFIC

Outlying Territories

	Grades Served	Estimated Number of Students	Language
American Samoa	K-12	1,149	Samoan
Guam	6, 7	520	Chamorro
Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas	1-12	990	Chamorro Carolinian
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Palau, Marshalls, Federated States of Micronesia)	1-8	1,549	Kosraean Ponapean Marshallese Trukese Palauan Woleaian Ulithian Yapese

Source: *Guide to Title VII ESEA Bilingual Bicultural Programs--1978-1979.* (Austin, Texas: Dissemination and Assessment Center for Bilingual Education, 1979), pp. 72-74.

Tacoma, Washington provide various training services. PALM, a Materials Development Center at the University of Hawaii, serves the language communities of the Pacific; and the Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center at California State University, Los Angeles also serves the area. Because there are so many islands to serve and so many different languages, providing services to Pacific Island students continues to be a problem. The promise of bilingual education for students, over 90 percent of whom have limited English proficiency, has yet to be fully realized.

A unified statement of goals for bilingual education as part of an overall statement on education was made at a conference on language planning held in Saipan in 1978 ("Report on the 1978 Language Planning Conference"). This document was followed in Micronesia. No equivalent statement appears to exist for the other Pacific Islands. In addition, at a Pan Pacific Conference on bilingual education at the University of Hawaii in February, 1979, the Pacific Islands Bilingual Association was formed to promote a regional approach to improving educational experiences of Pacific students through bilingual education programs. Its first president, Robert Underwood of the University of Guam, began promoting Federal policy that fostered bilingual education for Pacific students. Already there is a rather impressive membership list from all over the United States' Pacific area. At its organizational meeting, the membership passed a series of resolutions directed to the Congress, the Office of Bilingual Education, and other interested individuals, which called for renewed effort to promote bilingual education in the Pacific region.

Information about legislation for bilingual education beyond the Congress of Micronesia's resolution is not available at this time, if it exists at all. The effort has been almost entirely funded by Title VII ESEA and Title VII ESAA. Programs thus funded were required to conform to guidelines developed for the mainland United States not for the Pacific where conditions are so different.

Research into effectiveness of bilingual education in the Pacific setting is all but non-existent, so a host of questions have not been asked, much less answered. Basic research has been done on the languages themselves, resulting in many linguistic documents such as reference grammars and dictionaries; but no organized studies of language acquisition or program effectiveness have been carried out, even though such information is crucial to the success of any educational effort directed to the Micronesian, Samoan, or Guamanian experience. Despite the lack of a rigorous study of bilingual education's effectiveness, the impression gained by visiting the classrooms in various Pacific islands is that where bilingual education is supported by effective materials, there is a noticeable rise in students' educational levels. The difficulty appears to be that the programs have yet to be applied in a uniform manner to the other schools in the area. Such efforts to generalize the experience are dependent on conditions presently lacking.

DESCRIPTIONS OF BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

Attempts to characterize Pacific bilingual programs using a few anecdotes are inadequate, but can serve to show some of the effects of the approach. Since many of the islands have had relatively successful TESL programs for a number of years, the addition of the students' mother tongues has been one of the significant educational changes.

Another significant change is in students' reading levels. Books originally written for a particular grade level are soon read by students a year younger, and, in a year or two more, by students younger still. Obviously, students' reading levels are improving as books are brought home and read by younger siblings or friends. Expectations about reading in the vernaculars have also climbed. Students are now requesting books to read for enjoyment. The more reading materials produced, the more they are used.

Recently, at one school, two equivalent seventh grade classes were observed--one learning science in their first language using materials made by the teacher and the other learning social studies in English--using new texts from a large United States publishing house. The contrast between the two classes was striking. Students learning in their first language were literally jumping out of their seats with enthusiasm while the other class looked bored and uninterested. It should be noted that both teachers appeared to be prepared and hardworking. The difference is that the first class was learning something besides English; they were learning

science. The second class was concentrating on language and not much else.

In another bilingual program, parents frequently visited the schools and watched the classes through the windows. Being monolingual speakers of the vernacular, they were able to understand what was taught, which was not the case when the students were taught almost entirely in English. What they saw, they understood and supported. The school, previously seen as an alien institution, was considered an extension of their community and strongly supported. Discipline problems were reduced and student participation increased. Not simply use of the mother tongues, but the total effort to use all resources available, including students' first languages and their parents' support, made this total experience work. Such experiences should substantially change past limited educational efforts, resulting in higher educational expectations for both teachers and students. Functional bilingualism is a key to this effort's success.

NEEDS, PROBLEMS, AND ISSUES

To develop an educational system that fully uses available community and student resources, several problems must be overcome.

One of the greatest difficulties faced by Pacific Islanders is the region's geography. Hundreds of isolated islands with relatively few people creates special problems. Communication systems taken for granted on the mainland United States are sadly lacking in the Pacific or are too expensive. A telephone call from Hawaii to Saipan costs approximately $12.50 for three minutes

when the telephones work. Phone calls between other islands are almost impossible because connections are so bad. Travel between islands is hampered by lack of reliable air transport or extremely high fares. The nearest institutions of higher education, the University of Guam and the University of Hawaii, are hundreds of miles away from most of the islands, making a solid education for most teachers nearly impossible. While several Pacific Islanders were able to leave the islands and secure good educations, most have not. The educational level for adults in much of American Samoa and Micronesia is probably somewhere between high school and the first year of college. Few educators have graduate degrees, with the exception of expatriate Americans. Guam is somewhat different, since a university exists on the island. Its resources, however, are limited; and it is unable, as a result, to serve much of the Pacific. Education is constantly hampered by lack of basic knowledge. Until the teaching corps is upgraded, this problem will continue to exist. Various attempts to remedy this situation have resulted in some moderation of the problem, but it still exists as a major barrier.

Materials availability for instruction remains one of the major limiting factors in Pacific bilingual education. Of course, materials in English abound. Educators can find virtually anything in English that they desire. These materials, with minimal adaptation to the local scene, can be used all over the Pacific. However, the same cannot be said for any of the local languages. Although much effort has been spent on materials development in

the local languages for use in bilingual education programs, more is still needed. Many children learn to read in their own languages only to discover that there is nothing to read. This seriously limits what children can learn until they have enough English proficiency. While some materials have been developed to last a full school year, increased student proficiency has shortened progression through such materials. Availability of only a single set of materials forces all children to lock-step educationally, making the educational pace too fast for some and too slow for others. Brighter students usually suffer the most from this state of affairs: Variety that English speakers take for granted is almost totally lacking. If a student is not interested in one approach to a subject, another book can be selected. Pacific Island students will enjoy the same privilege only if substantial materials development is sustained over the years. These materials must be of high quality, culturally sensitive, and represent a variety of approaches to education and a broad selection of topics. All stories need not have a single theme. Materials consisting of traditional stories, stories from other cultures, and original contemporary stories must be used if the school is to appeal to students' wide range of interests.

A problem that continues to plague the Pacific Islands is a lack of continuity in personnel directing the bilingual effort. In most places, well-educated people are so few and are needed in a variety of situations that they are recruited away from the bilingual programs. This may be the result of a lack of professional commitment to bilingual education, too much reliance on expatriate

Americans who leave and take their expertise with them, and a few people attempting to do too many jobs. Until bilingual education has continuity in the people who direct these programs, there can be little sustained progress. Each new administrator will have to start over.

Research in many areas relating to bilingual education is desperately needed. No one knows, for example, the extent to which Palauan children have mastered the complex morphological constructions in their language when they enter first grade; no one knows the size or nature of their vocabularies; and no one knows whether the complex constructions English speakers understand are known by Pacific Islanders of comparable ages. Educators need this information. Tentative studies made in some of the language communities have barely scratched the surface. If materials are to be developed with realistic vocabulary counts, appropriate subject matter, and comprehensible syntax, much research into the language acquisition of Pacific Island children is needed.

Research into learning styles or approaches to bilingual education likely to yield positive results have not yet been undertaken. Evaluations by bilingual project directors have been carried out, but no efforts have been made to promote decision making based on empirical observation of children in various educational settings. Intelligent choices concerning approaches for Pacific Island students requires basic research. As it is now, many educated guesses are being made.

Finally, many of the efforts have been hampered by a lack of adequate funding. There is little political clout in the Pacific.

Except for support of a few friends in the Congress, at various universities, and in bilingual education programs on the mainland, there would be almost no funds for Pacific bilingual education. The major problem appears to be the small number of people involved; however, percentages of people who need bilingual education approach 100 percent. To paraphrase Derek Bok, Presdent of Harvard University, if people believe that education (of Pacific Islanders) is expensive, they ought to try ignorance (Dickson, 1978, p. 15). Frankly, it is not too expensive and the results can be spectacular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many recommendations were included in the statement of problems. What is needed most is a commitment from the United States Education Department to support bilingual education basic programs, expand training programs leading to degrees, and a sustained effort to provide adequate, rich materials for Pacific students. Coupled with a vigorous research program, the possiblity exists for an educational experience that would allow Pacific Island students to grow academically from the very beginning until they finish their formal education, making full use of their individual potential. Every bit as important is a commitment on the part of Pacific Island educators to educational excellence and a dedication to building a system suited to each island, a system that would allow students to compete successfully with speakers of other languages. All this is possible if efforts now begun are sustained over the next generation.

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