

## On the Management of Innovations in English Language Teaching in the Philippines

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Filipinos have always concerned themselves with issues on languages – English, to be more specific; applied linguists, policy-makers, and educators and teachers in the country have always been talking about matters of language planning, English-medium education, and, more specifically and most importantly, English language teaching. However, one may notice that not much attention has been given on the what can undoubtedly be considered as among the most critical in the English language teaching enterprise – the management of English language teaching.

To augment this dearth in Philippine English language teaching enterprise and scholarship, Borlongan (2010) attempted at a description the various aspects of management in English language units in a public and a private high school and a public and a private university and a derivation of a model of the management of English language teaching in the Philippines out of the description made. He based his description and derived model on semi-structured interviews with unit heads and teachers or instructors from one public high school, one private high school, one public university, and one private university in Manila, the Philippines.

The interviews conducted by Borlongan (2010) reveal interesting insights on the management of English language teaching in the Philippines: Generally, the English language units interviewed are uniform in many aspects like structure, culture, management style, selection process, career planning and counseling, management of finances, and marketing strategies – and even the absence of a system for the management of innovation – to name a few. The units vary in no more than finer details of management though. The management of curriculum though is one major aspect of the management of English language teaching in the Philippines where the units also vary in practice. Borlongan also recognizes the fact that the units' autonomy versus dependence from higher administration seems to be generic, distinguishing variable that cuts across all aspects of management of English language teaching in the Philippines surveyed. He then uses this variable and its relative prevalence as fundamental characteristic and nature to be able to distinguish one aspect from another in his proposed conceptual framework or an illustrative model on how English language teaching is managed in the Philippines.

One point though worthy of further discussion among Borlongan's (2010) findings is the seemingly lack of innovation management in English language teaching units in the Philippines. The units he interviewed made mention of sessions wherein the teachers and instructors get to share their "best practices" inside the classroom. New strategies and approaches are shared among their colleagues during meetings and in-house workshops. Occasionally, they may be fortunate to be able to invite speakers from outside their institution, if finances may allow. For the public university, instructors who are pursuing more advanced degrees may be a resource of new ideas.

But aside from occasional sharing of ideas, there is no formal system set up to manage innovations in the English language units that Borlongan (2010) interviewed. The head of the unit from the private university gives a hint as to why it is difficult to introduce innovations:

Introducing innovation? It is difficult. When we introduce an innovation, it is okay at the unit level since the faculty members of the unit are open-minded in general. But to inform the deans about the changes [is difficult]; some deans do not like the idea. So you are always put on spot. But for me, what I believe is that, if there is anyone who is in the best position to revise the curriculum, it is not the dean; it has to be the department chair.

This remark from Borlongan's interviewee identifies bureaucracy as a possible explanation as to why it may be difficult to introduce innovations in English language units in the Philippines.

But on further analysis, several explanations may be drawn to explain why the management of innovation appears to be absent in English language units in the Philippines. These explanations that are drawn below White, Martin, Stimson, and Hodge (1991) already hinted at also in their discussion of implementing innovations. And it appears that the data from the Philippines only substantiates what they wrote about the difficulties in implementing innovations.

White et al. (1991) cite Miles (1964) who distinguished innovation from change: Innovation is, unlike change which is involuntary, is deliberate and may, at times, be badly planned. This very nature of innovation is sometimes the problem in itself - it may be difficult for those who have become "too" familiar with older ways to be introduced to something new; hence, they react negatively. Particularly those who have also aged in the profession, the introduction of an innovation would be burdensome.

Quite expectedly, practices that one has come to adopt along maturing in the profession are difficult to deskill and unlearn. Particularly difficult to introduce are innovations that are highly original (cf. White et al., 1991). A teacher and/or instructor may have already adopted a practice all throughout his/her teaching career and loyalty may have been established in one's career-old practices. Any proposed deviation from these practices may no longer appeal, amidst the promise of a more successful delivery of English language instruction. It is definitely not easy to convince people in one side of the fence to join those in the other, most especially when it is a matter of giving up age-old beliefs.

And the universal human behavior of politicking also adds up to the complexity of innovation management in English language teaching in the Philippines. Every so often, the case may simply be that one is not really against the proposed change itself but simply an attack on the person proposing the change.

But sometimes, the fact is, actually, “an innovation is not necessarily any more complex than existing practice, but because it is *different*, it will be perceived as something more complex” [emphasis original] (White et al., 1991, p. 183).

The foregoing discussion simply points out that nuisance may always accompany managing innovations in English language teaching in the Philippines but this is not an excuse not to do so. In the Philippines, educational institutions may occasionally live on simply trying to solve problems that come along daily operations. Changes implemented may have always been simply a response to a problem. It is emphasized here that important that English language units in particular and educational institutions in general be always receptive to learning something new. It is always a better disposition to look forward to something better even if what is now is already good (cf. Senge [1990] on the “learning organization”). No definitive framework for innovation management is proposed here though. What is important is that English language units find it necessary to put up such.

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