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Professor Name

Course Name

Current Date

An Argument for Using Native Language in the Classroom

In the essay “Mother Tongue,” Amy Tan describes the limited English skills of her mother, a Chinese immigrant, noting that “my mother had long realized the limitations of her English” \*\*Tan citation here\*\*. Tan goes on to describe how her mother had to compensate for these limitations throughout her life.

This is the experience of many immigrants to the United States, who struggle to learn a new language while adapting to life in a new country. Immigrant children have the opportunity to learn English in the public schools, but educators do not agree on the best approach to teaching them. Some advocate total immersion in an English-only classroom, while others contend that students should be allowed to use their native language at least while they develop English language skills. Using native language in the classroom is necessary for immigrant students’ academic success.

Students who cannot speak English well enough to participate in the classroom will suffer academically. Teachers report that when students are not allowed to use their native language, they often repeat what they have heard without actually understanding the concepts \*\*Dahlberg citation here\*\*. Doing so affects their ability to learn not only English but content in other subject areas, as well.

Results from standardized tests demonstrate that many English language learners lag behind their peers in academic achievement \*\*Leonard and Rivera citation here\*\*.

Students who are allowed to use their native language in the classroom feel a greater sense of security, which enhances their ability to learn. Third grade teacher Debbie Walsh, who teaches in a bilingual program in Miami, Florida, strongly believes that “children need to know they can ask for help, explain problems, say how they feel, and so on” \*\*Teacher Talk citation here\*\*. For many children, doing so requires using their native language, at least early on.

Students who are discouraged from speaking their native language may feel personally rejected. According to Professor Jim Cummins, an expert on language acquisition, “When [students] feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction” \*\*Cummins citation here\*\*. It follows that students who do not or cannot participate in the classroom will lose their motivation for learning \*\*Dahlberg citation here\*\*.

Allowing students to use their native language also enhances their critical-thinking skills, further boosting their academic achievement. Again quoting Cummins, “Bilingual children may develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages” \*\*Cummins citation here\*\*. Research involving elementary-age students has shown that when children continue to develop skills in two or more languages, they have broader language skills and a better understanding of how to use language effectively \*\*Leonard and Rivera citation here\*\*.

Conversely, children who do not have regular opportunities to use their native language can lose their ability to speak it within two or three years of starting school \*\*Cummins citation here\*\*.

Allowing immigrant students to use their native language in the classroom is key in their academic success. Not only does native language use support students in developing English language skills and learning academic content, but it also gives them the confidence and motivation to participate in the classroom community. The critical-thinking abilities that have been proven to result from speaking multiple languages should encourage educators nationwide to adopt a bilingual model of education. Native and nonnative English speakers alike would benefit from that approach to instruction.