Opinions of Mattayom Suksa 3 Secondary Students toward an English Course
in a Bilingual Program in a Thai Public School

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Abstract

The present investigation was to examine the opinions of M3 secondary students toward an English course in a bilingual education program in a Thai public school. The study also investigated the opinions of the M3 English language teachers as additional perspective for comparison. The student opinion questionnaire surveyed the classroom teaching and learning which consisted of 26 opinion statements and divided into the 7 factors: Learning in Class, Classroom Interactions, Teacher and Student Roles, Course Design, Teaching Resources and Activities, Attitude to Learning English and Overall Satisfaction. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 22 similar statements in the first 5 factors only, and included 3 open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire on 1) types of student activity used most commonly in the classroom, 2) the challenges faced in teaching English to Thai students and 3) the assessment methods, tools, and areas of assessments used. The student questionnaires were administered to randomized samples of 60 M3 EP English students in Challenger Secondary School (pseudonym) and the teacher questionnaires were handed out to 2 M3 English subject teachers teaching English grammar and English conversation. A descriptive qualitative analysis of mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the results of the students' and teachers' responses. The result of data analysis concluded that the students' and teachers' opinions were influenced by the combination of all the factors of teaching and learning. In Learning in Class, students and teachers agreed that was important for students to take formal English grammar classes focusing on learning linguistically correct grammar, with immediate error correction prompting language learning, and learning would be easier through active student participation. In Course Design, the students and teachers agreed that the course syllabus should consist of learning real-life language skills in the 4 English macro skills for listening, reading, writing and speaking. For Teacher and Student Roles, the students' perspectives supported by teachers' opinions that it would help language learning if there was student-centered approach with teachers as facilitators and students as active learning participants. Students felt that friendly teachers and relaxed learning environment would help them learn better. In Classroom

Interactions, both the students and teachers were in favor for student-student collaborations in pairs/groups for motivating learning.   In addition, in Teaching Resources and Activities the students and teachers indicated that instruction materials must be "authentic" and "meaningful" to motivate learning, and student learning would improve if there were fun activities involving active student participation.   Finally, for Attitude to Learning, students commented that parental encouragement played a major role in their interest in the English language as well as their instrumental motivation towards learning English for better future career paths.

Keywords: opinions, secondary, English course, bilingual program, public school

1. Introduction

English language learners worldwide are continuously expanding in the "outer circle" (Kachru, 1986), including in Thailand where there has been a spur in the growth of bilingual schools offering academic subjects in English and Thai mediums of instruction. In the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), English language is the working language (Kirkpatrick, 2012).   In Thailand, the Ministry of Education introduced an English immersion program termed 'English Program' (EP) into the state education system since 2002, in an effort to increase students' English language learning intensity and language proficiency. The aims of Thai bilingual education programs were targeted toward providing "English skills which are marketable, aiding employment and status" (Truckenbrodt & de Courcy, 2002).

Since 2002, it was estimated that the number of government schools with EP in Thailand have grown, but not much research studies have been found for EP classroom teaching and learning. The intention of this study was to evaluate the opinions of students, as well as getting teachers' perspectives of the classroom teaching and learning of English in an EP environment.   The data gathered would serve as valuable feedback for better teaching and learning of the English language in bilingual immersion programs in the government or private school sectors.

There have been a number of research studies on individual factors in teaching and learning and how they affected students' motivation in learning and positive attitudes.   Related research indicated that improved learning competences were achieved through implicit (meaning-focused instruction) and explicit learning (form-focused instruction) (Trosborg, 1994) in content-based instructions, experiential learning (Dewey, 1938), authentic and meaningful instruction materials (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, Kumaravadivelu, 2006), social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978), cooperative learning (Johnson and Johnson, 2005), low anxiety environment with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), and parental encouragements and motivations (Gardner, 1985).

2. Objectives

The objective of the research was to study the result of the opinions of M3 secondary students concerning English course in English Program (EP) at Challenger Secondary School (pseudonym) in terms of 7 teaching and learning factors: Learning in Class, Classroom Interactions, Teacher and Student Roles, Course Design, Teaching Resources and Activities, Attitudes to learning English and Overall Satisfaction.

3. Methodology

The qualitative method research approach was employed in this study. The research design was a survey through student questionnaire and teacher questionnaire. The opinion scores from both students' questionnaires and teachers' questionnaires were analyzed with mean and standard deviation. The contents of the open-ended questions at the end of the teachers' questionnaire were analyzed to provide additional details from the student and teacher questionnaire.

3.1 Population and research participants

The population of the study consisted of 120 M3 English subject students and 2 M3 English language teachers in the English Program of Challenger Secondary School (pseudonym) in Bangkok. Random sampling was taken on 60 M3 English subject students consisting of 16 male and 44 female students aged between 14-15 years old, who were attending the English Program English classes for 5 periods per week on grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and English conversation on listening and speaking. The 2 M3 English language teachers consisted of the Thai native teacher who taught English grammar, vocabulary and reading and writing, and the English native teacher who taught English conversation on listening and speaking.

3.2 Research instruments

In the investigation, two instruments were used. The student questionnaire containing 26 statements and based on a 5-point Likert scale, was used to investigate the opinions of the M3 English subject students in the English program towards teaching and learning factors in Learning in Class, Classroom Interactions, Teacher and Student Roles, Course Design, Teaching Resources and Activities, Attitude to Learning English and Overall Satisfaction. The teacher questionnaire contained 22 statements on a 5-point Likert scale was used to investigate the opinions of the M3 English language teachers in the English program towards teaching and learning factors in Learning in Class, Classroom Interactions, Teacher and Student Roles, Course Design and Teaching Resources and Activities. Open-ended questions were attached at the end of the teacher questionnaire asking for teacher feedback on the types of activity most often used in class for teaching, the challenges teachers face with teaching English to Thai students and the assessment methods, tools and areas of assessment used.

3.3 Research procedure

The student questionnaire was administered to 60 M3 English subject students in the English program, and the teacher questionnaire to the 2 M3 English language teachers. The scores from the opinion surveys were collected on a five-point Likert

scale items (on a scale of 1-5, ranging from strongly disagree =1 to strongly agree = 5) for all the statements in the factors for Learning in Class, Classroom Interactions, Teacher and Student Roles, Course Design, Teaching Resources and Activities, Attitude to Learning English and Overall Satisfaction. The quantitative data for each factor in the students' and teachers' questionnaire were analyzed and compared across using mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (SD). The results of the opinion survey were also presented in frequency percentages. In addition, the qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions at the end of the teacher questionnaire were analyzed and used to elaborate the findings.

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1 Results of the quantitative analysis

Table 1 Factors of teaching and learning

Factors	Student Evaluation		Teacher Evaluation	
	Mean	Opinion	Mean	Opinion
1. Learning in Class	4.06 (.23)	Agree	3.90	Agree
2. Classroom Interactions	3.96 (.11)	Agree	4.13	Agree
3. Teacher and Student Roles	3.94 (.18)	Agree	4.38	Strongly Agree
4. Course Design	3.83 (.29)	Agree	4.38	Strongly Agree
5. Teaching Resources & Activities	3.97 (.11)	Agree	4.30	Strongly Agree
6. Attitude to Learning English	3.78 (.09)	Agree		
7. Overall Satisfaction	4.15 (.84)	Agree		
Mean all Factors	**3.96 (.39)**	**Agree**	**4.22**	**Strongly Agree**

5: Strongly Agree; 4: Agree; 3: Neutral; 2: Disagree; 1: Strongly Disagree

Table 1 above shows the results of the scoring of the students' and teachers' opinion survey questionnaire. The students' mean score for all 7 factors were 'Agree' at mean=3.96, and the teachers' mean score for all 5 factors were 'Strongly Agree' at mean=4.22. The students' Overall Satisfaction for the English course was high at mean=4.15. The students' weight scores for all the 7 factors, arranged in the order of descending importance, were 1) Learning in Class with mean=4.06, 2) Classroom Interaction with mean=3.96, 3) Teacher and Student Roles with mean=3.94, 4) Course Design with mean=3.83, 5) Teaching Resources & Activities with mean=3.97 and lastly 6) Attitude to Learning English with mean=3.78. On the other hand, teachers 'Strongly Agree', in order of importance, to 1) Teacher and Student Roles with mean=4.38, 2) Course Design with mean=4.38 and 3) Teaching Resources & Activities with mean=4.30. Teachers rated 'Agree' to the other two factors for Classroom Interactions with mean=4.13 and Learning in Class with mean=3.90.

4.2 Results of the qualitative analysis

The findings from the open-ended questions in the teacher questionnaires are in the Tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Table 2 Types of activities teachers used most commonly in the classroom

English Teachers	Types activities
English Conversation Teacher (Foreigner)	1. Authentic teaching materials that are interesting: movies, records, music
	2. Role-play, presentations, drama, debate, conversations in groups
English Grammar Teacher (Thai native)	1. Authentic reading materials (internet, newspaper)
	2. Student-student communication,

student-teacher reading, question and
answer than just do grammar exercises
3. Teacher uses Thai language to explain
if student cannot get meaning, as students
sometimes uncomfortably speak English
to each other

Table 2 above shows that both English conversation and English grammar teachers used authentic teaching materials in classroom activities, and highlighted student activities were role-play, presentation, drama, debate, and group conversation, student-teacher reading and question and answer. The English grammar teacher emphasized the need to use Thai language to summarize the lesson if the students were unable to understand.

Table 3 Types of challenges teachers encountered in teaching English

English Teachers	Types of challenges
English Conversation (Foreigner)	1. Cultural sensitivity: concern if examples used in English conversation class are culturally fine with students.
English Grammar (Thai native)	1.Thai students generally do not like English grammar classes or reading or writing in English 2. Thai students tend to want to await teacher tell them what to do next 3. Teacher has to make class fun with activities.

It can be seen from Table 3 that the English conversation teacher listed his challenges as cultural sensitivity. The English grammar teacher felt that it was vital to make the English grammar class alive and fun with activities, as students were generally bored with grammar classes.

Table 4 Testing Tools & Assessment Areas

English Teachers	Testing Tools & Assessment Areas
English Conversation (Foreigner)	1. Tests on real-life listening and face-face conversations. 2. Assessment areas: listening and writing exam, speaking.
English Grammar (Thai native)	1.Mid-term and final exams –multiple choice, fill-in blanks 2. Assessment Areas: grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing 3. Assessments include mid-term and final exams, and also summative tests during the term.

Table 4 shows that the English conversation teacher used authentic assessment tests on real-life listening and face-face conversations and English grammar teacher used traditional assessment methods such as tests (multiple-choice and fill-in blanks).

5. Discussion

Students and teachers repeatedly advocated a student-centered approach in teaching and learning as exerting positive influences for language learning, empowering learners' grammar competence and subjects' motivation and interaction, improving students' speaking skills and positive attitude towards learning English and developing their confidence to speak and the courage to use the language in real life situations (Kahari and Chalak, 2014; Dueraman, 2013; Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf, Moni, 2006). It is important that school administration makes sure that teachers are well trained and can implement student-centered approach, as Silver and Skuja-Steele (2005) cited that in their research in China, Japan, Singapore,

Switzerland and USA that they found that although teachers were aware of policy initiatives but failed to implement due to immediate priority facing classroom daily lessons. Students and teachers strongly support that authentic teaching materials that have "meaningfulness" and "authenticity" significantly increase classroom motivations for language learning, improve listening comprehension, and enable higher retention of learning (Mousavi and Iravani, 2012; Yu, 2005; Peacock, 1997). In addition, as authentic materials and assessment methods were indicated to be important in teaching and learning. It would be worthwhile for the teachers to explore all forms of multimedia presentation techniques (Crandall and Tucker, 1990).

6. Conclusion

Students and teachers opinions as reflected from all the factors of teaching and learning, indicated that they think English language learning competency was best achieved through having formal English grammar classes with teachers' immediate error correction, student-centered approach for teaching and learning. Teachers were facilitators in guiding active student learning and collaborative learning, using authentic and meaningful instruction materials, implementing the syllabus and using real-life language skills in teaching the English 4 macro skills for reading, writing, listening and speaking, and lastly parental encouragement and instrumental motivation to learn. Further studies can be pursued on other potential influencing factors such as teacher personality, multimedia instruction materials, learning

anxiety, or possibly a nation-wide study of classroom teaching and learning in the English subject class in all EP schools in Bangkok to gather feedback opinions for improving the bilingual education system for higher English learning outcomes.

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