Programs Promoting Communicative English in Selected Secondary Schools in Southern Thailand

โครงงานส่งเสริมทักษะการสื่อสารด้านภาษาอังกฤษในโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาพื้นที่จังหวัดภาคใต้

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Abstract

In this paper, the researcher examines programs promoting English communicative skills at selected secondary schools in southern Thailand. The researcher investigates the advantageous and disadvantageous impacts following in the wake of the schools conducting activities promoting English communicative skills for students. Data were collected from questionnaire and interviews conducted with school directors, deputy directors in academic affairs, English Section heads, and English teachers.

Findings showed that the secondary schools under study conducted nine programs promoting English communicative skills for students both inside and outside their schools. These programs were the organization of classrooms for the English Program (EP); the Mini-English Program (MEP); the youth guide program; a student exchange program; overseas trips; English Camp; English Day; English Club; and the Street Interview project. In studying the operations of these programs, the researcher found that the students increasingly exhibited enthusiasm in using English for communicative purposes. They displayed confidence in using English for communication. However, disadvantageous impacts were also discovered as the consequence of problems uncovered after operations had been investigated. There were three factors generating problems: budget, teachers and students.

Keywords: Communicative Approach, English Communicative Exercise, Southern Thailand, Secondary Schools

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาโครงงานส่งเสริมทักษะการสื่อสารด้านภาษาอังกฤษของโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาเขตพื้นที่จังหวัดภาคใต้ รวมทั้งศึกษาผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นทั้งข้อดีและข้อเสีย หลังจากที่โรงเรียนได้จัดทำกิจกรรมที่ช่วยส่งเสริมทักษะการสื่อสารด้านภาษาอังกฤษแก่นักเรียน การเก็บข้อมูลใช้วิธีสัมภาษณ์และตอบแบบสอบถามโดยผู้อำนวยการ รองผู้อำนวยการฝ่ายวิชาการ หัวหน้าหมวดภาษาอังกฤษ และ อาจารย์ภาษาอังกฤษ เกี่ยวกับโครงงานและกิจกรรมที่โรงเรียนได้จัดเตรียมให้แก่นักเรียนเพื่อช่วยให้นักเรียนพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารด้านภาษาอังกฤษรวมทั้งผลการดำเนินงาน

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ผลการวิจัยพบว่าโรงเรียนมัธยมดังกล่าว ได้จัดกิจกรรมที่ช่วยส่งเสริมทักษะการสื่อสารแก่นักเรียน ทั้งในและนอกโรงเรียน รวมทั้งสิ้น 9 โครงงาน คือ การจัดห้องเรียนหลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษ (EP) และ ห้องเรียนหลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษขนาดเล็ก (MEP) กิจกรรมส่งเสริมการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ โครงงาน มัคคุเทศก์น้อย (youth guides) โครงงานนักเรียนแลกเปลี่ยน (exchange student programs) โครงงานทัศน ศึกษาต่างประเทศ(overseas trips)โครงงานค่ายภาษาอังกฤษ (English camps) โครงงานวันภาษาอังกฤษ (English Days) โครงงานคลับภาษาอังกฤษ (English clubs) และโครงการสัมภาษณ์นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติ (street interview projects) จากการดำเนินงานดังกล่าวพบว่าผลที่เกิดขึ้นคือ นักเรียนมีความกระตือรือร้นที่จะ ใช้ภาษาในการสื่อสารเพิ่มมากขึ้น มีความมั่นใจในการใช้ภาษาในการสื่อสาร มีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อภาษาอังกฤษ ในขณะที่มีผลกระทบด้านลบเกิดขึ้น เนื่องจากพบปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นหลังจากการดำเนินงานโดยมีสาเหตุมาจาก งบประมาณ ครูผู้สอน และนักเรียน

คำสำคัญ: วิธีสอนภาษาตามแนวการสอนเพื่อการสื่อสาร, กิจกรรมที่เน้นการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ, ภาคใต้ของ ประเทศไทย, โรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษา

Background

Many Thai people recognized the importance of English many years ago; according to the Ministry of Education, the first international school was opened in Thailand in 1957. English became more important for Thai people after Thailand became a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. The purpose of ASEAN is to build up international cooperation and economic growth, together with promoting peace and stability in the region (Amer, 2002). Obviously, after ASEAN was established in this region, English has played a more important role for Thai economic development. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has realized that English will affect Thai people in competitive situations in the future; accordingly English was added to the Thai curriculum as the principal foreign language for Thai students in 1995 (Office of the Basic Education Commission, n.d.). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education of Thailand has launched the policy to support Thai students to improve their English skills every year. During 2003-2010, the Ministry of Education made considerable efforts and allocated a large budget to improve the English skills of Thai students; for example, the Ministry of Education gave support to poor students who wanted to study in English Programs and Mini English Programs, and the Ministry provided teaching development for Thai English teachers every two years. In addition, the Ministry required schools to hold English camps for students every year, and they have to provide activities which can help students practice their English skills outside the classroom. Furthermore, the Ministry allocated funds to schools to provide multi-media learning facilities for the students such as

self-access learning centres (SALC), electronic books (e-books), enhanced television programming (ETV) and internet service for students to help them learn, depending on their individual interests. In addition, many schools provide special computer programs, which can help students practice their English skills (Arunee Wiriyachitra, 2001, pp. 4-7). Recently, the Thai government allocated a large budget to the Ministry of Education to purchase electronic tablets for students in order to help them learn through modern media and motivate them to use modern technology to search for more knowledge. In spite of these major efforts, it seemed that the policy was not very fruitful. Thai students are still poor in English; results of the General Aptitude Test (GAT) revealed that the mean English score of Thai students was below 50%. This was considerably lower than the standard, and the Ministry of Education revealed that in the Ordinary National Educational Test (ONET), the English score is lower than the scores in all the other sections (The Ministry of Education, n.d.). Thai students also have low proficiency in using English for communication. According to the Education First Institution, Thai students' English competence was ranked sixth in ASEAN, behind Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. Additionally, Thailand ranked 42nd in Asia. This is very low proficiency (Education First Institution, 2013). The issue is an important one because in 2015, Thailand will become a part of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The Royal Thai Government and the Ministry of Education expect 80% of Thai students to be able to use English for communication because the opening of economic integration also comes with more competition (Office of the Education Council, 2013). Therefore, the Ministry of Education emphasizes raising the communicative ability for Thai students in order to use English for communication. The Ministry of Education also requires schools to build up the environment inside and outside the schools in order to motivate students to practice their English skills (The Ministry of Education, n.d.). Therefore, following the policy of the Ministry of Education, schools must have procedures and arrange activities or programs to support students to improve their English skills for communication. Based on the discussion above that the policy of the Ministry of Education for 2013-2016 requires schools to launch the programs promoting communicative English and build up the environment in the schools to motivate students to practice communication skills, this study aims to accomplish the following goals: (1) to examine the programs of the secondary schools assisting students improve English skill for communication (2) to study the impacts (the advantageous and disadvantageous impacts) emerged after the programs were implemented

Methodology

Population

The population of the study comprises the school principle, academic director, the head of English department, and English teachers both male and female in the secondary school in three provinces: Phuket, Surat Thani and Songkhla. The total number of school directors is 6, deputy director of academic affair is 6, the English Section head is 6 and English teacher is 18. All participants totally are 36. The researcher selects these three provinces because these provinces are economic hub in the south of Thailand.

Research Instrument

The open- end questionnaire and tape recording for interview are used for investigating. They are asked to all participants; this approach is designed for the school principal, academic director, the head of English department, and English teachers. The questions in open-end questionnaire and interview are on the basis of the purpose of the study, which mainly focused on the programs of the secondary schools in assisting students improve English skill for communication, the impacts emerged after the schools implemented the programs.

Questionnaire Data Analysis

Analysis and interpretation were undertaken. The researcher analyzed the data by categorizing and grouping the information gained in order to summarize the answer of the research question. The interpretation of the findings from the school principal, academic director, head of English department and English teachers would allow conclusion to be drawn and verified using analysis. The answers from questionnaire were analyzed and used to help in answering the purpose of this research in order to examine the programs and activities were provided in order to enhance English skills for communication for their students and to study the impacts emerged after the schools implemented the programs.

Interview Analysis

After the data was gathered, the researcher listened to the tapes and wrote transcripts of the interviews. The data gained by interview was reread in order to provide useful information. This part was analyzed and interpreted using qualitative approach. The results of the interview data would be beneficial in term of discussion and further explanation from participants. The researcher believes that the analysis of all data would be worth studying and should be beneficial for the schools, students, and the Ministry of Education.

The Findings

According to the findings from the questionnaire and from the interview, it was found that the selected secondary schools arranged programs promoting their students both inside and outside the school in assisting students improve communicative English ability; English program and Mini English program classrooms, communicative English exercises, youth guides, exchanged student programs, overseas trips, English camps, English clubs and English days and street interview projects. The schools enhance communicative English ability for student by put the students in the environment that support them to use English for communication typically, youth guides, street interview projects, overseas trips, and exchange student programs. Regarding the impacts, there were positive and negative effects. It was found that in positive impacts, students would be more enthusiastic to study English and they had more confidence to use English for communication with their foreign teachers and other people. More importantly, they also had a good attitude toward English. Apparently, they motivated themselves to practice English to communicate with their foreign English teachers outside the class. After they had more experience in communication with their foreign teachers. They had much confidence to speak with other people. Concerning the negative impacts, there were some problems emerged. Budget was the problem emerged in running all programs. The schools had to spend the large budget to promote their students, typically, the policy to hire the foreign English teacher to enhance communicative English ability for their student, providing learning facilities for students, creating atmosphere to motive student to use English for communication, and setting English communicative activities outside the school; therefore, the large budget was the important problem of the school in running all these programs. Secondly, there were problems came from teachers. Some Thai teachers were unqualified because they were still focus grammar structure teaching more than focus to motive student use English for communication. Thus, it was very difficult to enhance communicative English ability for students. In addition, the big size of class was very difficult for teacher to look after their students. In addition, this was very difficult for teacher to launch communicative activity in time since time was limited in 50 minute. Furthermore, English teacher were overload with other works. Thus, many of them were not enthusiastic to find the new technique to teach their students. Additionally, some English teachers didn't graduate with an English major in bachelor degree; therefore, it was difficult for them to help student have communicative English skill improvement. Lastly, the attitude of students toward English was important problem for communicative English development. Some students didn't realize the importance of English and some of them had no

confidence to use English for communication because they were afraid to use the language. They were worry about grammar structure and too shy to speak English with classmates.

Conclusion

The secondary schools arranged programs supporting students both inside and outside the school in assisting students to improve their communicative English ability. However, there were positive and negative outcomes emerged after implementing the programs. It was found that in positive impacts, students would be more enthusiastic to study English and they had more confidence to use English for communication with their foreign teachers and other people. Concerning the negative impacts, there were problems which emerged after schools implemented the programs for students. The problems came from budget, teachers and students. Budget was a problem which emerged in running the programs. The schools had to spend the large budget to run the programs in order to support their students. Secondly, problems came from teachers. Some Thai teachers were unqualified because they still focused on grammar structure teaching rather than focusing on motivating students to use English for communication. Moreover, some English teachers did not use English to communicate with their students and some English teachers had not graduated in English; therefore, they did not have the skills and experience to try to help students to improve their communicative skills. Thus, it was very difficult to enhance the communicative English ability of the students. In addition, the large class sizes made it very difficult for teachers to look after their students. It was also very difficult for teachers to manage the class because there was insufficient time for all students to practice their English skills for communication since time was limited to 50 minutes. Furthermore, English teachers were overloaded with other works. Thus, they were not enthusiastic to find new techniques to teach their students. More importantly, some students did not realize the importance of English and some of them had no confidence to use English for communication because they were afraid to use the language.

Recommendations for Further Study

Firstly, the further research should focus more on the assistance required from the Ministry of Education in order to help the running of the programs in secondary schools, because many schools had problems in running the programs regarding the budget. In particular, they had to spend a lot of money to hire foreign teachers and provide programs both inside and outside the schools. The Ministry of Education could offer assistance to schools for successful implementation of the programs. In addition, the further

research may focus on the procedures for solving the problems resulting in negative impacts which emerged in this research; for example, there were some English teachers still relying on teaching from the book, who did not adapt their teaching to rely on real situations. Moreover, some English teachers did not use English to communicate with their students because they had not graduated in English. They were too shy to speak English with students. Thus, they avoided using English for communication with their students. Further research may therefore focus on the procedures which might be applied in solving these problems. Lastly, further research may focus on students' interest in programs. In order to help students make English communication improvements, students' interests are an important consideration. The programs and activities which schools provide should depend on students' interests.

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