



HS029

**Factors Affecting the Development of the Twenty-First Century's
Foreign Language Learning Potentialities of Higher Secondary
Schoolstudents at Muangphonpittayakom School
in Phon District, Khon Kaen Province**

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Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-method designed research was to study factors affecting the development of the 21st century's foreign language learning potentialities of higher secondary school students in terms of the schools' policies, problems in the policy administration, the schools' curriculum administration, problems in the schools' administration, the teachers' roles and class management, problems in class management, the students' roles, and the knowledge they can apply in their lives.

The target group was at Muangphon pittayakom School, including the Deputy Director of Academic Affairs, foreign language teachers, and senior high school students. Three sets of five-level closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires based on Likert's and unstructured questions were used to collect the data from the target group.

The director of the school answered the questionnaire and unstructured questions by himself. He revealed that the school followed the policies of the Ministry of Education at three levels: (1) the highest level in terms of encouraging the students to love being Thai, to be able to work with others, and to live with others; (2) a high level in terms of ethics and analytical thinking; (3) a moderate level in terms of creative thinking and technology. He specified that his administrative problems concerned the improvement of the curriculum, the lack of teachers, and the teachers' workloads. The problems related to the foreign

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language management were the students' lack of leadership and confidence in speaking English, the lack of instructional media, some difficult text, and the students' weak background of English.

Two foreign language teachers answered the questionnaire and unstructured questions concerning the teaching management. They stated they realized their roles as teachers at the highest level in all aspects except analyzing individual student, setting goals for the students, and selecting appropriate instructional media, which were at a moderate level. For their teaching, they strictly followed all indicators of the curriculum. Their only problem was that the students did not realize the importance and benefit of English, for they live far away from the city.

The students realized their roles at the highest level, and they said they could apply what they had studied at the highest level, too. However, they requested the school for more computers, books in foreign languages and in Thai. In addition, they wanted the teachers to create pleasant learning atmosphere, let them watch some foreign movies, display their outstanding work, speak the language studied in class, invite native speakers to class sometimes, and put on foreign language plays.

Keywords: The twenty-first century, foreign language learning potentialities, higher secondary school students

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the Ministry of Education emphatically states that Thai students have to “be ethical; love being Thai; be skillful in analytical thinking, creative, technological motivated, cooperative to work with others; and able to live with other people peacefully” (The Ministry of Education, 2008, p.2). In order to carry out education to be in accordance with the policies on the development of Thai students to be well-equipped for the

twenty-first century, the Ministry of Education puts a great emphasis on qualifying their education to be responsive to popular and social needs. They must have potentialities in competitions and cooperation in the global society (The Ministry of Education, 2008). Thus, in foreign language learning, they must be well-equipped with these four areas of content: (1) language for communication, (2) language and culture, (3) language and relationships with other areas of learning



content, and (4) language and relationships with communities and the world.

Due to such specifications, the researchers wanted to study what the school administrators and foreign language teachers have done for their students to accomplish them.

2. The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to study factors affecting the development of the twenty-first century's foreign language learning potentialities of higher secondary schoolstudents in terms of (1) the schools' policies (2) problems in the policy administration, (3) the schools' curriculum administration, (4) problems in the schools' administration, (5) the teachers' roles and class management, (6) problems in class management, (7) the students' roles, and (8) the knowledge the students can apply in their lives.

3. Research Methods

3.1 The Target Group

The target group was the deputy director for the academic affairs, foreign language teachers, and the seniors at Muangphongpittayakom School in Phon District, Khon Kaen Province.

3.2 The Research Tools

3.2.1 Three Five-scale Questionnaires

These three five-scale questionnaires were used to collect the data from the deputy director for the academic affairs, the foreign language teachers, and the seniors. Each questionnaire was based on Likert's five rating scale, with both closed-ended and open-ended items.

The first questionnaire was for the deputy director for the academic affairs. It was divided into two parts; part 1 was about the respondent's status, and part 2 was about the school's policies on the administration of the foreign language curriculum so as to develop the students into the world of the twenty-first century.

The second one was for the foreign language teachers. It was divided into two parts; part 1 was about the status of the respondent; part 2 was about the teachers' roles and his or her class management to cover the content and language skills according to the foreign language curriculum benchmarks specified in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008.

The last one was for the seniors. It was divided into three parts; part 1 was about general information about the student: gender, age, and the language/



languages they were taking; part 2 was about the students roles; and part 3 was about the knowledge they could apply. In terms of the knowledge gained, the items were the same as those indicators for the twelfth graders specified in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008.

3.2.2 Three Sets of Unstructured Questions

These three sets of unstructured questions were applied to collect in-depth data from the informants from the school: the deputy director for the academic affairs, the foreign language teachers, and the seniors. They were meant to collect the first-hand information for the qualitative phase.

The first set of the unstructured questions was composed of three questions requesting the deputy director for the academic affairs to give (1) detailed descriptions of the problems in administering the Ministry of Education's policies on the foreign language curriculum, (2) problems in administering the school's own policies on the foreign language curriculum (if any), and (3) suggested means to find solutions to the problems.

The second set of the unstructured questions was composed of four questions requesting the foreign language teachers to give (1) detailed information about native teachers of the languages offered at school, (2) the languages they used in class, (3) the

problems they encountered while teaching, and (4) suggestions or suggested solutions to the problems.

The last set of the unstructured questions was composed of two questions asking the students to specify (1) what they would like the school to provide more for them, and (2) what activities they would like their teachers to organize in teaching them the foreign language.

3.3 Data Collecting

The questionnaires, together with a letter of cooperation from the College of Asian Scholars Vice President to the director of the school requesting for his/her permission to allow the deputy director for the academic affairs, the foreign language teachers, and the seniors to answer the questionnaires and the unstructured questions, were sent to the school via mail. Two more letters—one to the foreign language teachers, and the other one to the students—were also sent to the school. Returned envelopes were prepared for all the respondents and the informants to send the questionnaires and the answers back to the Faculty of Liberal Arts, the College of Asian scholars by the requested date.

3.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the quantitative data, the researchers followed the following steps:



(1) Checking on the complete questionnaires

(2) Using a software page to analyze the data

(3) Using descriptive statistics to analyze the data from the complete questionnaires for frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation

The criteria for the data interpretation were:

| The Scale | Meaning |
|-------------|-------------|
| 4.50 | the highest |
| 3.50 – 4.49 | high |
| 2.50 – 3.49 | moderate |
| 1.50 – 2.49 | low |
| 1.49 | the lowest |

In analyzing the qualitative data, the researchers followed these steps:

(1) Analyzing all segments
(2) Classifying the topics and information

(3) Summarizing concepts and themes of the information classified

(4) Presenting all in descriptive writing

4. Research Results

4.1 The Results from the Deputy Directors for the Academic Affairs

The Director of the school answered both the questionnaire and the unstructured vquestions instead of the Deputy Director. He is a male. His age is in the range of 46-50 years. He has held a doctorate in administrative education, and has held this position for 1-3 years. He stated that he administered the foreign language curriculum according to the policies of the Ministry of Education at three levels: (1) at the highest level in terms of encouraging the students to love being Thai, be able to work with others, and live with others; at a high level in terms of ethics and analytical thinking; and (3) at a moderate level in terms of creative thinking and technology.

The administrative problems as stated by the director concerned the approval of the curriculum, the lack of teachers, and the teachers' workloads. In terms of the foreign language curriculum management, he pointed out that the students lacked leadership and confidence in speaking English; there were not enough instructional media to motivate the students to be more interested in lessons; some text was too difficult; and the students' background of English was weak.

To find solutions to the problems, the director suggested that the government allocate more budget for instructional



media; the teachers should adapt the teaching material to suit the students' capability; and English training programs should be held for teachers so that they can appropriately apply what they are trained in their teaching.

4.2 The Results from the Foreign Languages Teachers

There were only two teachers teaching English to higher secondary school students at the school. Both were females aged 46–50 years; both have master's degrees: one in educational administration, and the other in curriculum and instruction (the teaching of English); one has 11–15 years of teaching experience, and the other over 21 years.

Both teachers realized their roles as specified in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 at the highest level. In terms of teaching or class management, they taught the students in line with the benchmarks required by the Ministry of Education at the highest level, too.

In response to the unstructured questions, the teachers said there was only one flaw in the teaching of English at the school. The students did not see the importance and the benefit of English, for they live far away from the city, so there is a dim chance for them to use it. To help solve the problem, the teachers

recommend the authority hire native speakers of English to teach at the school so that the students can have a better chance as those in a city. In addition, the teachers suggest all teachers prepare their lessons in accordance with the benchmarks specified in the curriculum and the goals they wish to achieve.

4.3 The Results from the Seniors

Two hundred and forty-one seniors-127 males and 114 females-responded to the questionnaire and the unstructured questions. Their ages ranged from 17 to 20 years. Twenty-seven of them also studied another foreign language: Japanese.

They stated they realized their roles as students at the highest level, and they could practically apply what they had learned at the highest level, too. However, they have made several requests.

From the school, they have requested for more computers (71.37 %), reading English books in the library (30.29 %), reading foreign language books (Japanese; 26.56 %), reading supplementary Thai books (11.62 %).

From the teachers, they have requested for pleasant classroom atmosphere (68.46 %), watching foreign movies (60.58 %), displaying students' outstanding work (51.45 %), playing English games (48.13 %), speaking the foreign language in class (40.66 %), singing



foreign language songs (38.59 %), inviting native speakers of foreign languages to class (34.02 %) and performing plays in the foreign language (26.14 %).

5. Discussion

At Muangphonpittayakom School, the management of the foreign language curriculum has been operated according to the policies of the Ministry of Education, which are in line with the concepts of the 21st century learning framework to encourage students to think critically, have creative thinking, have cross-cultural learning skills but still love being Thai and have ethics, being able to adapt themselves to work and live with others in the world. The foreign language teachers have practically perform their duties according to the indicators specified in the benchmarks of the foreign language curriculum even though they have to fulfill other additional duties. In terms of students, they are able to apply what they have gained at the highest level. However, there is some room for the improvement of foreign language teaching, especially English.

The director said the students were inconfident to speak English because of their weak background of English. That is in line with what Gaewsot (2015) has presented in her research on the development of teaching style emphasizing English communicative

skills in local context by using electronic books for grade 12 students. Gaewsot said the students did not understand how to learn English when they were in elementary school. That made them discouraged, unenthusiastic, inconfident, and unable to speak English properly or fluently.

The results of this study reveal that the school should develop its personnel, and it needs more instructional media. They are similar to what Kaewkitsadang & Srisattarat (2012) have reported in their research on problems of Japanese Language Education in Thai High Schools. They have written that the teachers are willing to improve their teaching especially the use of instructional technology, but the problem is that the personnel and the teaching equipment are not supported or subsidized.

Another obstacle to the teaching of a foreign language stated by the director is the difficulty of some text. Certainly, this should be corrected. What seems to be too difficult for students should be adapted or simplified for them as Far (2016) has suggested in his research report on the effects of text type, text length and text difficulty on vocabulary retention through glossing. Far recommends that descriptive or explanatory short and easier text help students memorize vocabulary better.



One major point the teachers have considered the only obstacle in their teaching is the students' lack of interest, not seeing the importance or the benefit of English, for their chance of using it is very rare. This point is in line with what Huy (2015) has concluded in the research on problems affecting learning the writing skill of grade 11 students. Huy points out that many students do not realize the importance of the writing skill. There are few students successful in learning how to write well. Most of the students' writing is full of mistakes because of their lack of interest in the writing skill.

What the students have requested for concerning the reading of and singing in foreign languages is similar to what Lengwan (2012) studied on the development of reading exercises for basic English for grade 12 students and concluded that reading could help students improve their learning and be satisfied with it. For singing in foreign languages, Pianwate (2014) has revealed that after testing the students' pronunciation before and after Singing in French, their pronunciation of French words has improved after the singing.

6. Conclusion

This research study has yielded both satisfactory and unsatisfactory situations mainly involving the administration, the

management, and the teaching of English at Muangphonpittayakom School. Certainly, the unsatisfactory matters or the obstacles should be thoroughly taken into consideration if the students' foreign language potentialities are meant to be developed for the best in this century.

7. Suggestions

7.1 Suggestions Concerning the Research Results

7.1.1 The problems concerning the curriculum improvement, the budget e.g. to be allotted for instructional equipment, to hire more foreign language teachers, should be cooperatively corrected for the development of students' foreign language learning potentialities by all related authorities.

7.1.2 What is considered the better and the best the school and the teachers have done should be carried on. Moreover, what the students have requested from the school and the teachers should be taken into thorough consideration for better results of the foreign language teaching and learning atmosphere at the school.

7.2 Suggestions for Further Research

There should be more research on the followings:

7.2.1 The text which the students consider difficult, to examine how difficult it is, what can be done about it,



how to adapt it to make it easier for them (So, the teachers can develop some text to suit the students' capacity for learning.)

7.2.2 The English background of students at lower levels, e.g. elementary and lower secondary school, to see how it is, what the problems at each level are (So, the actual problems can be appropriately corrected on the right track for better English education in our country.)

8. References

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