

Practical Classroom English for English Program Teachers of Naresuan University Demonstration School: A Case Study of Teachers' Training Experiences, Needs and Perceptions

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of 47 teachers towards a Practical Classroom English Training Course. The participants of this study were the high school teachers of different Learning Areas including that of life science, health and physical education, social studies, religion and culture, arts, mathematics, foreign languages, Thai Languages, and occupations and technology. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings indicate that the majority of the participants showed satisfaction and believed they benefitted from the five-day English course, however, some teachers felt that the training duration was not sufficient to equip them with the necessary English communication skills to teach all subject matter that they handled in English. Other participants also noted that the uncondusive location is one downside, which could have been improved to provide a better learning environment, thus contributing to the efficient learning process as a whole. This study paves a way for future research by indicating issues and questions that need to be addressed.

Keywords: practical, training, high school, technology

Introduction

'English Rules' is an actual example, presenting to the world an uncomplicated scenario suggesting the universality of the language's spread and the likelihood of its continuation (Crystal, 2003). With the advent of the Internet, we are now living in an interconnected and globalised world. With 53 countries having English as its official language and approximately 400 million people around the world who speak this language (O' Grady et al., 2011). People are now cognisant of how learning the language can broaden one's horizon in communicating globally and notably in gaining one's edge in the professional world. It is therefore essential for schools to lay a solid foundation for the language. Thailand is one of the countries that is making consolidated efforts in attaining this goal.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education in Thailand initiated pilot testing of an English Program in Yothinburana School with the main purpose of enhancing Thai students' proficiency in English. Since then, many schools have followed, including five schools in southern Thailand (<https://Owww.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2452315116300273>).

The approach is embedded in three paradigms i.e. the teaching of Science, Mathematics and Computer courses, in English by Thai teachers; the use of multimedia and other technological tools to support to Basic English language learning; and the development of English language skills of both students and teachers (<https://www.ajarn.com/blogs/abel-cadias/english-for-integrated-studies>).

According to the Ministry of Education's report on its strategic plans during 2006–2010, its goals concerning English language development had not been met by 2010 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286925009_English_Education_Policy_in_Thailand_Why_the_Poor_Results).

According to Geringer, the most important factor in student learning progress is the teachers. Teacher quality outweighs other factors such as motivation, funding, and class sizes. Qualified teachers can create the best environment for learning (2003).

This vital factor prompted schools, particularly secondary schools, to offer English Programs to strengthen this movement and through offering professional development to teachers.

In view of the intensifying role of the English language in today's global communication and English language teaching, this study was conducted to investigate high school teachers' perceptions toward a Practical Classroom English training course conducted over a 5 day period in October 2017. The Likert Scale and open-ended Questionnaires were employed to collect data from the Thai high school teachers working at a Demonstration School in northern Thailand.

Review of Related Literature

Teachers learn best through professional development that addresses their needs (Meissel et al., 2016). The theoretical framework of adult learning theory shares the need for ongoing quality professional development, which requires teachers to become lifelong adult learners (Eleonora, 2003; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002).

Teachers need to be empowered to further develop expertise in subject matter content, technologies, and other essential elements that could lead to high standards or quality

teaching (Korkko, Kyro–Ammala, & Turunen, 2016; Witte & Jansen, 2016). The NSDC (2007) created a set of nine standards that all professional development should follow. These standards include content knowledge and quality teaching, research-basis, collaboration, diverse learning needs, student learning environments, family involvement, evaluation, data-driven design, and teacher learning.

Developers and policy makers call for more rigorous evidence that describes how professional development design elements affect the likelihood of program success (Witte & Jansen, 2016). Poskitt (2005) stressed that participations in professional development have some impact on the teachers' ability to acquire and develop knowledge and skills. Gabriel, Day, and Allington (2011) noted the importance of emotional intelligence skills essential to good thinking, planning, and dealing with students and colleagues.

Desimone (2009) notes the importance of the positive impact of professional development on the teachers' ability to decide on and implement valued changes in teaching. Bolam (2002) stresses the impact of professional development on leadership behaviour so that teachers could educate their students more effectively, thus achieving a desirable balance between the individual, the school and national need.

For many teachers, professional development has been viewed as a task that generally involves a 1-day in-service training or workshop, with little or no expectation of what the teacher should do with the information or how the teacher should share the information with other colleagues (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) argued that in compared with activities of shorter duration, the activities of longer duration have more subject-area content focus, more opportunities for active learning, and more coherence with teachers' other experiences. This is reinforced by Garet et al.

(2001) who assert that longer professional development activities are more likely to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of the content, pedagogy, and student conceptions/misconceptions. The authors suggest that activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers more time to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching (Girvan et al., 2016; Sedova, Sedlacek, & Svaricek, 2016).

There has been considerable interest in the effectiveness of in-service education of teachers (INSET) as a means of improving teaching and student outcomes. This is evident in previous research on in-service education (Fullan 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987; Huberman & Miles; 1984, Ingvarson & Coulter 1987; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Little, 1989; Sprinthal, Reiman & Theis-Sprinthal, 1996). Despite the extent of this research it is still complaints that much in-service training is ineffective (Dalín, 1993; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Robertson, 1992). Ingvarson, (1988) found that those who fund or attend ineffective in-service training programs begrudge the wasted effort and resources. Guskey commenting on lessons learnt from research on professional development noted:

Questions are being raised about the effectiveness of all forms of professional development in education. And with these demands have come increased demands for demonstrable results. Legislators, policy makers, funding agencies, and the general public all want to know if professional development programs make a difference (1996, p. 1).

Methods and Materials

The qualitative instrument chosen to carry out the research was a structured questionnaire covering 13 categories considered to be necessary in teacher training. These factors

influence the level of teacher professional development, types of activities based on training programs and aspects that might influence the teacher's educational practice. This instrument was a paper survey conducted on 47 high school teachers from Naresuan University Demonstration School (20 male and 27 female). All the teachers were qualified and may be regarded as certified professionals. Learning areas included the life sciences, health and physical sciences, social studies, religion and culture, arts, mathematics, foreign languages, Thai language, occupations and technology.

The questionnaire used comprised 13 items divided in two major parts. Part A pertains to teaching, course content (see table 1) sourced from the book: Practical Classroom English (Hughes and Moate with Raatikainen, 2007) and facilitators-researchers from Naresuan University Language Center (NULC). Part B were mostly open-ended questions to allow teachers to express their opinions and give ideas and suggestions freely. Part A took the form of a five-point Likert Scale, with the levels as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The researchers printed the questionnaires and administered them as hard copies.

Homogeneous purposive sampling was used to choose the respondents, a non-probability method as the respondents were chosen according to researchers' judgement. The researchers knew that the people being selected would give the required information. Of the 47 questionnaires distributed, 45 were returned.

The questionnaires were given to the teachers of different subject areas: 1 director (of the Demonstration School), 8 mathematics, 13 life science, 7 social studies, religion and culture, 3 health and physical education, 4 foreign languages, 3 occupations and technology, 5 Thai language and 2 arts.

Table 1 Course Topics

Unit No.	Unit	Topics
1	Everyday Classroom Routines	a. Beginning the lesson b. Running the lesson c. Ending the lesson
2	Involving the Learners	a. Getting the students to join in b. Classroom etiquette c. Confirming and encouraging
3	Managing the Classroom	a. Managing the physical environment b. Managing the learning environment c. Using classroom effectively

Results and Discussion

Following the order of the Likert-scale questionnaire, the results will be presented. The analysis of data were put under categories and the questions were listed in the tables.

Table 2 The 9 Likert-scale items that are determinants of the course effectiveness (n=45)

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The set objectives were clear and objective	37	8			
2. Participation and interaction were encouraged.	38	7			
3. The topics covered were relevant to me.	37	8			
4. The content was organized and easy to follow.	36	9			
5. The materials distributed were helpful.	33	12			
6. This training experience will be useful in my work.	38	7			
7. The trainers were knowledgeable and well-prepared.	39	6			
8. The meeting room and facilities were adequate and comfortable.	8	32	4	1	
9. The time allotted for the training was sufficient.	36	5	4		

1. Attainability and clarity of the set objectives

Eighty-two percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the outlined objectives were clearly defined and attained during the five-day training course while 18% agreed.

2. Inclusion of functional, practical and collaborative activities

In response to whether activities included in the course were useful to the learners, 83%, responded they strongly agreed that all activities were beneficial to them while 17% agreed it was indeed the case. There were no neutral or negative responses.

3. Relevance of the topics covered

At least 82% of the respondents said that the topics covered were significant for them to carry out classroom routines and handle students of various levels. They therefore strongly agreed. Eighteen percent of the participants agreed. None of the respondents indicated a neutral or negative response.

4. Organization and usefulness of the content covered

Eighty percent of the participants strongly agreed that the entire course was easy to follow and was well-organized. The majority of them participated in almost all activities and tasks set. The remaining 20% indicated that they agreed. None of the respondents indicated neutral or negative responses.

5. Adaptability and effectiveness of teaching materials used

Of the forty-five who responded to the questionnaire, 73% strongly agreed that the teaching materials such as hand-outs, related worksheets and teaching aides were suitable, while the rest of the respondents, i.e. 27% selected agreed. These activities and materials encouraged them to be active learners.

6. Applicability of the training course to real classroom scenarios

There were 84% of the respondents who strongly agreed that what they learned can be applied to various situations in class. They believed these have positive influences on their teaching practices. The remaining 16% of the participants indicated that they agreed. No neutral or negative responses were made.

7. Knowledgeability and preparedness of the lecturers

Eighty-seven percent out of the forty-five respondents strongly agreed that the objectives set by the trainers for the course were clearly defined. This contributed to a successful knowledge transfer. The lecturers were also able to utilize various teaching methods that catered to the participants' needs. The remaining 13% chose agreed. Negative and neutral responses were not chosen by any of the participants.

8. Adequacy of facilities and conduciveness of the training venue

Seventy-one percent of the respondents agreed that the venue was geared toward the participants needs. It allows them to be able to work as a group and technologies were available to aid learning. Eighteen percent strongly agreed it was the case. Nine percent of the total population chose neutral. They believed it could have been improved. Further, there were 2% who indicated disagreed. They stated that the venue could have been more accessible. A better location could have been chosen to allow participants to move freely and express themselves without disturbing other classes.

9. Plausibility of the training course schedule

The responses revealed that 80% of the respondents strongly agreed that the five-day course was adequate for the outlined topics but they believed this would not be sufficient to acclimatise them to the use of English language as a medium of instruction in the subject area that they teach. There were 11% who agreed. The result

also showed 9% neutral responses. There were no negative responses.

Part B- Responses to the open-ended questions

1. What topics were most useful and interesting to you?

Fifty percent of the participants stated *Managing the Classroom* was the most valuable topic for them. They became acquainted with various useful phrases and were given opportunities for practice during the course. Twenty percent indicated that *Classroom Etiquette* was necessary for them to better understand their students and to build rapport. Another 20% of the population indicated that *Ending the Class* is another topic that they could apply in class. The remaining 10% stressed the importance of being exposed to different activities that can be integrated into different lessons.

2. How helpful is this course to you as a teacher?

Ninety-eight percent of the entire population who attended the course pointed out that the course is beneficial for them. They stated further that the course has given them ample ideas on how to improve their teaching strategies while using English as a medium of instruction. The phrases they learned in every topic were definitely what they needed in real classroom scenarios. Thus, the course contributed to building their confidence in using the language. At least 2% did not leave any comments.

3. Would you recommend this course to another student or educator like you? Why?

All the respondents who returned the questionnaire indicated they would definitely recommend this to other students and teachers who feel the need to develop their communication skills in English. They stated further that attending courses like this gives more opportunities for collaborative learning. In addition, this encourages any educator to revisit one's classroom practices.

Table 3 Participants' Responses

Responses	Number of respondents
Yes	45
No	0
Total	45

4. Give suggestions and comments on how this course can be improved.

Of the forty-five respondents who returned the questionnaire, 55% said they were satisfied with the course. They were appreciative of the trainers' efforts in making the five-day course worthwhile. Twenty percent of the respondents expressed their concern on how they felt restricted due to the location, as they could disturb other classes. Twenty-five percent of the population stressed further that the trainers helped them a lot. They were lively, easy to understand and were very

much concerned about every participant. They were also able to cater to the different learners' needs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the institution is trying its best to provide teachers with in-service trainings in schools in order to provide students with quality education. Conversely, there are constraints and limitations to successfully implement such initiatives. The constraints are, among others, the duration of the training course. Though the five-day training course provided teachers with functional classroom language, in-depth and on-going training is necessary to further enhance work performance and the motivation of teachers in the field. Another concern that was raised pertained to the location of the training course. Despite the availability of technology in the training venue, the location generated some problems. The data showed that the teachers experienced restraints and were occasionally reminded to keep their voice low to prevent disturbing other classes. Also, the classroom used wasn't spacious enough for some activities. These factors therefore, limited them in being active learners and hindered them in self-expression.

Recommendations

a) The study only focused on teachers' perception of the training which was largely insufficient. The researchers believed that the observation of classes should also be infused with regular in-service training for the teachers. Participants can either observe experienced teachers who use English as a medium of instruction or be observed and receive feedback and comments. A broader perspective would have been unearthed pertaining to classroom usage of the English language.

b) The study should also be extended to other regions in Thailand to get an overall picture of the teaching of various subjects in English among secondary schools that implement English Programs.

c) The researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education roll out a robust program to train teachers in the use of the English language as a medium of instruction for different subjects that are part of the high school curriculum.

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