Research Report

on

Bilingual Learning and its Effects
on Students' Communicative Competence

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by

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Abstract

The study looks into the important issues concerning the development of bilingual learning of the third-grade bilingual students in the Thai context. The research sample consists of 67 primary students at third grade from three classrooms and their six Thai teachers (three Thai teachers and three native English speaking teachers). The data are collected through classroom observations and semi-structured in-depth interview with the teachers. This study is based on an interpretive approach concerned with subjective meaning in a particular context with the collected data analysed inductively. The study reveals that the students can manage to communicate well in English. They have been exposed to a considerable amount of language from which they learned much more than grammar rules. Their main social task is to acquire communicative competence. The role of the environment has become more meaningful for the students' communicative ability. Overall, the bilingual education results in satisfying English proficiency and academic performance while the students' proficiency in their native language has been further developing. The results of this study help to advance the debate surrounding the effectiveness of a bilingual learning programme suggesting that a bilingual learning programme provides an effective instructional approach for elementary bilingual students.

Keywords: *development of bilingual learning, communicative competence, effective bilingual learning*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research rationale

As Thai-English bilingualism begins to flourish throughout the country, many academic institutes in Thailand have been trying to implement bilingual programs in which Thai children can become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. Accordingly, teachers and administrators are looking for ways to develop appropriate programs which are integrated with whole-institute efforts to improve and enrich instruction for Thai-English bilinguals.

From the study on Thai-English bilingual children (Suwanarak, 2013), it is apparent that the need for emphasis on bilingual education in Thailand has brought out the need for communicative competence, cultural literacy and multi-literacies. Complex instruction for the bilingual context requires that teachers combine knowledge of subject matters with a wide range of teaching strategies, current knowledge about learning theory, cognition, pedagogy, curriculum, technology, and assessment, and ample knowledge of the children' language, socio-cultural and developmental background.

The teachers of those bilinguals must be as proficient as possible in the two languages. Special care must be taken to give the teachers in such program profound learning opportunities, support, freedom within a well structured program, and resources to do their jobs well. The education of bilingual children is dependent on the degree to which the children have access to instruction that is challenging, but comprehensible. They need an accepting

institute and social environment which promotes academic achievement and values communicative competence of both Thai and English languages as well as cultural and language diversity.

1.2 Research aims

This study looks into the important issues concerning the development of communicative competence of Thai-English bilingual children in Thailand where English currently has great additive value. The researcher also aims to investigate the effects of bilingual learning from the view of the teachers who are in the process of bilingual education. As well, the implications for teaching approaches and the implementation of comprehensive bilingual programs are focused. As well, the study is discussed in the light of a psychological, individual approach to bilingualism, rather than of a more general sociolinguistic view.

1.3 Research questions

The following two research questions are developed based on the significance and purpose of this study:

1. To what extent do the Thai-English bilingual students in a bilingual learning program achieve communicative competence?

2. What are the effects of bilingual education on the students' learning achievement?

1.4 Research organisation

This research is organised in five chapters. The current chapter provides the rationale of the research, research aims, and research questions. The theoretical framework of the study, including a review of literature to the research topic will be outlined in the following chapter. Chapter Three presents the research design, including the paradigm selected and methodology used, sampling, data collection methods and procedures, as well as the approach underlying the data analysis. Chapter Four reports and discusses the results of the study in response to the research questions. Finally, Chapter Five offers the concise of the study and the implications for further research and practices.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study is carried out within the theoretical framework that sees the individual participants' views as dynamically constructed and changed. From a constructivist viewpoint, Jonassen (1991) remarks that people construct their knowledge or at least interpret objects and event based on their perception of mental structures, beliefs, and social experiences which are comprehended by their individual mind. This view of knowledge does not reject the existence of the real world, but what people see are from interpretations of their personal experience.

Nonetheless, individual meanings are not only generated by individual views and experiences, but also formed and developed through interactions with people in the community. The construction of social meanings entails intersubjectivity among individuals and meanings are always changed (Ernest, 1999). From a social constructivist's view, individual perceptions are derived from the way each individual perceives, understands and interprets the world, depending on the culture from which he or she originates. The social constructivist perspective, for this reason, emphasises the significance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Each culture has its own construction of meanings or systems and an individual's expressions are meaningful and informed within his or her own culture (Coleman, 1996).

On the subject of this present study, the views of teacher participants certainly correspond to their cultural grounding and practices. At some stage in the data collection procedure, for example, the teachers mentioned cultural influences on bilingual learning on the Thai-English bilingual children and the development of their communicative competence. To some extent, the cultural aspect in the teaching and learning environment may have some influence on the participants' views. Moreover, this study is considered contextually distinctive; by and large, its teaching and learning context is different from other environments and the participants' perceptions towards the bilingual children are to a large extent delineated by their context. To understand the nature and problems of English language learning, we need to have knowledge of the culture and context in which the teaching and learning take place (Coleman, 1996).

Based on the above discussion, the epistemology of social constructivism (Sutherland, 1992) underlines the theoretical framework of this current study. Not only does the process of understanding and meaning construction dynamically emerge from individual minds, but it is also formed and reformed persistently on account of social interaction.

In conjunction with the theoretical framework, the literature on bilingualism and the relevance of language learning of the Thai-English bilingual children to communicative competence will be reviewed and discussed in the following parts.

2.2 Literature review

Bilingual learning

Taking into account benefits of bilingual learning, Moll et al. (2001) give a view that social advantages can be an extensive link between a home culture and the second language's culture. Bilingual children have an opportunity to indulge in their home culture while assimilating into a new one. In a sense, the children set out on a journey into two worlds.

Another most concerned is academic advantages which include development of cognitive abilities and linguistic/literacy related skills necessary to function in academic settings, while the second language is being obtained. Children in a bilingual context need not to fall behind in other important areas of development when the second language is introduced. Research has demonstrated that reading and writing skills acquired in the first language will transfer to the second language (Wolfe, 1996). Moreover, it is useless to teach children interpreting skills when knowledge of meaning and ability to communicate has not yet been achieved. Knowledge of content areas, namely, information, facts, and reasoning skills, also shift to the second language, once sufficient skill is attained. This also holds true when transferring information for the second language to the first language is a reciprocal process.

Aspects of bilingual language development

Mackey (1962) lists several factors such as gender, age, memory, language attitudes, and motivation as likely to influence a bilingual's aptitude. A large number of different means can be found in which children achieve bilingualism. The most common practices, according to Hoffmann (1991), are

as follows: 1) the immigrant children acquire the first language from their parents and the other language from other people; 2) the children have one parent speaking one language and another using a different language may acquire both on condition that the parents are consistent in their language use; and 3) the children have to attend a school which uses a language apart from their native language as the medium of instruction.

According to Volterra and Taeschner (1978), the early stage of developing bilingual children is basically monolingual. The important concern is whether the two languages of bilingual children develop autonomously or interdependently. With this regard, interdependent development would be a consequence of systematic influence of one language on the development of the other, resulting in patterns or rates of development that differ from what would be expected in monolingual children.

These theoretical and practical concerns have resulted in research that compares the development of bilingual children to that of monolingual children acquiring the same languages. On the other hand, this may be an inappropriate frame of reference because it stigmatises bilingual patterns of development and risks attributing differences that bilingual children exhibit to deficits in children's ability to acquire two languages at the same time (Cook, 2002). Alternatively, the linguistic competencies of bilingual children, like those of bilingual adults, should be examined and evaluated on their own advantages (Grosjean, 1997). Such comparisons are prevalent in experimental research; consequently, this can have important real world implications.

Effects of bilingualism

The effects of bilingualism on children have been comprehensively considered for several years. There have been some disputes among researchers on the effects of bilingualism and various studies show divergent results. Bialystok (1986) indicates that children's bilingualism positively affects their increasing ability to solve problems involving high levels of control of linguistic processing. The majority of research has shown positive effects of bilingualism on the subsequent metalinguistic abilities: early word distinction; sensitivity to language structure and detail; recognition of ambiguous; correction of ungrammatical sentences and detection of language mixing and control of language processing.

However, there is no explanatory model of how or why bilingualism has such positive effects has yet been developed or tested. So far, it is not clear; for instance, how bilinguals' metalinguistic skills are related to advantages in cognitive abilities not directly related to language, such as classification or visual skills. A study carried out by Diaz and Klinger (1991) reveals that the positive effects of bilingualism are connected to low levels of second language proficiency that a new threshold hypothesis is formulated. This is contrary to Cummins' (1991) premise. Diaz suggests that only before a certain threshold of second language ability, would bilingualism have a strong impact on cognitive ability. The data show that the effects of bilingualism on cognitive development are most likely mediated through the processes and experiences related to early stages of second language learning. Likewise, in the study of Mexican-American bilingual pre-school students, Diaz and Klinger (1991) also inform the positive effects of bilingualism on several age appropriate tasks of cognitive ability.

More recently, numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between learning a second language early in life and cognitive ability. Robinson (1992) summarises in his study that children whose experience with two language systems seems to have let them with mental suppleness, dominance of concept information, and more diversified mental abilities. The study also demonstrates that children who have studied a foreign language perform better on standardised tests and tests of basic skills in English math and social studies. Thus, it is clear that the development of bilingualism is described by acquisition patterns both within and outside the school context.

Development of communicative competence

Hymes (1972) defines the term '*communicative competence*' as language performance of an individual, whether habitually or occasionally in a particular kind of behavior. For Hudson (1996), communicative competence is knowledge needed by a speaker or a hearer. Instead of referring only to the linguistic forms, it includes knowledge, perhaps ability, which would be a better term of how to use linguistic forms appropriately. If speakers are communicatively as well as linguistically competent, they will also be able to form correct sentences and use them appropriately, both accessibly and effectively.

In the study of Cummins (1999), bilingual children use metalanguage which connects to a higher stage of development in communicative competence or as referred to later as '*conversational competence*'. The data recorded are spontaneous speech, disregarding the observation of egocentric speech since there is no need for these children to express themselves in the target language.

Communicative competence has been somewhat neglected in EFL literature probably because of its intangibility and intrinsic difficulty in labeling it. Widdowson (2002) defines communicative competence as an unstable concept that is simply understood as the ability to produce spoken utterances which are marked for illocutionary function. Nevertheless, he specifically argues that no syllabus can produce communicative competence. The responsibility, therefore, lies on the teacher who will be in charge of putting this communicative syllabus into practice. The fact that notions of everyday situations are included in classroom situations is not the procedure for a more comfortable relationship between the students and their target language.

Communicative competence includes what Chomsky had defined as '*linguistic competence*' as well as the rules of language in context that are analysed under the heading of pragmatics, attitudes, values and motivations that are usually left out when discussing a language (Cited in Skehan, 2003). One of the main components of an individual's communicative competence is a set of conceptual structures or schema to face and handle different kinds of problems that entail a variety of linguistic resources, such as asking for things, complaining, answering negatively and others which are equally complex. The schema will be therefore varied in its forms that may probably have been taken from the individual's own experience or from other people's behaviour that may be considered successful in other cases.

In similar vein, communicative competence in a second language could be based in the schema that children bring from their first language, though the first and second languages differ to a great extent in their grammatical and lexical realisation. It is then the role of teachers to build on this already

acquired competence. If teachers ask the right questions, they also may help their children to develop their communicative and thinking skills. As well, a preference for references rather than display questions will promote communicative competence.

Previous research on the effect of bilingual education

Many researchers have been interested in bilingual education, but most of them have not identified the underlying effect of bilingual education as contrasting to other English language programs on student outcomes (Greene, 1998). Several studies do not have comparison groups of students who are not in bilingual programs, whereas others are observable or unobservable.

Among the studies with comparison groups and controls for selection, several researchers focus on the effects of primary language instruction, usually in academic subjects, on individual students. This limiting definition is relatively similar to the definition of bilingual education that this current study employs. Many research studies (e.g., Federman, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Mora, 2000) find insignificant or negative effects of bilingual programs on labour-market outcomes such as educational attainment and earnings. On the contrary, Cheng (1996) discovers positive effects of bilingual education on both of these outcomes, even though the exogeneity of his tool is questionable. A limitation of these studies is that their comparison groups include all students who speak a language other than English at home. The comparison groups include students who are proficient in English and students who are not proficient in English.

From the study of Parrish et al. (2006), there are insignificant effects of bilingual education on student-level mathematics and reading test scores. Their ideal model is a hierarchical linear model for a large group of student-level data from the Los Angeles school district. However, they disclose that this model may not completely control for the non-random selection of students who are in bilingual education programs.

The effect of bilingual education on grade-level academic achievement is explored by Gordon and Hoxby (2002). The researchers look separately at the effects of bilingual education on the performance of English language learning as well as on the performance of English-proficient students. Apparently, there is positive effect of bilingual education on achievement in multiple subjects although these effects are concentrated in the earlier grades.

Green (1998) conducts a meta-analysis of eleven rigorous studies on bilingual education. He comes across a positive effect of bilingual education on academic achievement. As well, August and Shanahan (2006) obtain similar conclusions that students in bilingual education programs outperform other English learning. Likewise, Genesee et al. (2006) realise that there are positive associations between native-language instruction and various measures of English proficiency and academic achievement.

By and large, these previous studies show mixed effects of bilingual education on academic achievement and labour-market outcomes. They use a host of techniques to control for the nonrandom placement of students into bilingual education. Their data sets are either aggregated to the grade level or contain English proficient students along with English learners. However,

none of them considers the effect of bilingual education on English proficiency.

Chapter 3
Research Design

3.1 Research paradigm

Since there are individual differences in views of teachers on bilingual learning and its effects on students' communicative competence, this study does not intend to obtain an ideal or universal set of perceptions. Rather, it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic being investigated. Therefore, the study is best informed by the interpretive paradigm. According to Radnor (2002), reality is socially constructed by individuals. Different minds interpret different meanings even in relation to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 2003). Thus, the objective truth does not really exist. What exists is actually individual construction grounded on the subjective meanings given to a particular situation by those who are involved in it. Knowledge is more subjective and arises out of a perception and illumination that only come from personal experience (Cohen et al., 2003). This study, per se, lies clearly within the social constructionist framework.

Crotty (2003) describes social constructionism as the view that all knowledge and meaningful reality is dependent upon individual practices, constructed in and out of interaction between individuals and their world and developed within a social context. Within social constructionism, according to Burr (1995), the current accepted ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality, but from the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. Therefore, social interaction of all kinds is of great interest to social constructionists and the understandings of the world could take a wide variety of different forms.

Social constructionism also recognises that culture shapes the way individuals view the world (Burr, 1995). In this present study, the teachers' perceptions constructed occur through the meaning making in the interviews. The shared construction of reality within cultural facilities a common understanding of the meanings of interactions and through this process builds a version of knowledge which is culturally constituted. Analysis of the interviews would indicate where the teachers of Thai-English bilingual students and the researcher may or may not have shared the same cultural understandings and therefore different knowledge may be produced.

3.2 Research methodology

The issue of reality and knowledge underpinning this study affects the methodology used in this study. Methodology is relevant to the frames of reference, methods, concepts, and ideas which form the selection of a particular set of data collection methods (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Within the interpretive paradigm, we can understand the occurrence of human actions and behaviours in social contexts. Interpretive investigations take into account personal experience, perceptions, and attitudes. The main interest of interpretive research is to understand current issues. On account of this, the qualitative approach is the most appropriate for this study given that it does not intend to generalise the findings, prove or disprove a hypothesis. The main objective is to comprehend the individual perceptions in a particular context.

This qualitative research is based on an interpretive approach concerned with subjective meaning in a particular context. It takes into account that knowledge is flexible and depends on the personal perspective. There is not absolute reality situated in context, but there are multiple realities which are multifaceted and complex (Radnor, 2002). Personal experience and understanding of qualitative researchers is an important part of the research inquiry. What the researchers can do, within the interpretive paradigm, is to examine and interpret situations through the views of participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The research questions were also developed from a particular context, individual interviews were employed, and the collected data were analysed inductively.

3.3 Sampling

The study was carried out in a private elementary school in Bangkok, Thailand and focused on its bilingual programme of study. The school was selected on the basis of ease of accessibility. In doing qualitative research, a decision on sample size has no definite formula, but depends on main research purpose and the depth of insights (Patton, 1990). The researcher, therefore, regards that an adequate sample for the study is 67 primary students in three classrooms and their six teachers (three Thai teachers and three native English speaking teachers) which could accurately represent the population being targeted, satisfactorily produce meaningful findings and fully answer the research questions.

The teacher participants are bilingual school teachers teaching third-grade Thai students at the age of 7 and 8 studying in a bilingual private elementary school. The students have attended this bilingual programme for almost six

years; all of them started bilingual education in kindergarten. In addition, socio-economic backgrounds of the students do not differ much from one another; their parents are well-educated and engaged in well-established businesses and public/private organisations.

3.4 Data collection method

The data collection method involves observations of students' interaction in three bilingual classrooms and individual interviews with their teachers (three Thai teachers and three native English speaking teachers). Through the observation, the researcher witnessed the students' communicative competence and possible effects of their bilingual learning. Consequently, the interview construct was developed from the observation of interaction among the students. The teachers were then semi-structurally interviewed as the research aim is to get as closely as possible to the teachers' views in relation to their students' bilingual learning and its effects on students' communicative competence.

The researcher had carried out classroom observations during the first two weeks of August 2013 before individual interviews with the teachers were taken place after class at the school. The interview construct consists mainly of open questions, as the research aim is to get as closely as possible to the views of the teachers in relation to bilingual education and communicative competence of the third grade students in the bilingual education programme. Through the procedure of data collection, the researcher focused on the possible similarities and differences of the Thai-English bilingual students involved and this information would be used for the bilingual portrait of each students.

3.5   Data collection procedure and analysis

Once the researcher presented the objective of this study to the bilingual school principal, the teacher in charge of supervising Grade 3 class gave suggestions for possible classrooms and teacher participants for the study. The suggestions were based on the criteria that had been previously defined by the researcher.

Qualitative data from the observation and interviews were analysed by using an interpretive approach. After all, the observation note and the interview transcripts were content analysed to identify categories according to the answers to the interview questions, the researcher used a coding process where the observation note and the interview transcripts were read carefully to code content to the emerging categories. To increase validity with the data, a researcher in TESOL reviewed the transcriptions for data groupings and common themes that might have arisen and could answer the research questions.

Chapter 4
Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the results from the observation and interviews with the teachers are described in order to answer the research questions. The focus is on teachers' views on their students' communicative competence and the effects of bilingual education on their learning achievement after six years in a bilingual learning programme (from K1 to Grade 3). Under each research question, qualitative analyses of the researcher's observation and the interview data from the teachers (three Thai teachers and three native English speaking teachers) are presented and discussed.

4.1 Findings and discussion in response to research question 1:

To what extent do the students in a bilingual learning program achieve communicative competence?

The students in the context of this study have Thai as a first language and attend a bilingual school, learning English as a second language, for its added social value. The data were gathered at a Thai-English bilingual school in Bangkok, Thailand. When considering their development of communicative competence, it was apparent that the second language was developing and the first language was also in a developmental stage.

Through the classroom observation, the students did not have a full understanding of the reach of using English proficiently. They usually used code-switching and code-mixing while interacting with teachers. English was somehow given to the students as a second language rather than skilled and

developed. The more the teachers spoke English to your students, the better results they would get. There was not real space for the integration of English and mother tongue, keeping both languages as far away from each other as it was possible. Thus, in this context, learning a foreign language did not enrich the learning of the mother tongue. Cummin's Common Underlying Principle (1981) was apparently ignored and in the English class the teachers tried to keep the students away from their mother tongue.

Considering communicative competence in both Thai and English languages, the Thai teachers and the native English speaking teachers admitted that the bilingual students in this context were Thai dominant bilinguals. Although they were fluent and natural, their accuracy in English could not be considered high. Nevertheless, they chose to the request of lexis when unable to find the word they needed on their own. For example, they regularly used "*How do you say … in English?*" or "*What's … called in English?*". They were made entirely mindful of the distinction within the two systems from the start. They had notions of translation, fixed phrases, and autonomous skills in the target language (English) that did not correspond to their mother tongue (Thai): "*Can you say that again, please*?" or "*Shall we read it?*". The Thai teachers also noted that the students could name concepts in English which were unknown to them in Thai, but which had been acquired in the target language. The most frequent cases observed had to do with labeling items, food and ecological matters.

Regarding their age of acquisition, the third-grade students were childhood consecutive bilingual. All of them had acquired Thai as their mother tongue before they truly started their English bilingual learning. Less affecting

factors for the students would mark them as '*additive, exogenous, and monocultural*' bilinguals, considering social status, presence of L2 in the community, and group membership respectively. At school, when they used English as the target language, it was for the reason that there were audiences and authority. Therefore, a significant motivator must be a teacher. When they were getting older, this factor would gradually be lost and teachers would choose other means to ensure the use of the target language in class.

From the interview with all the teachers, communicative competence of the students was revealed. It was remarkable that the students had the same shortage of language for the explanation of the process applied when they had to give an explanation for a lexeme they were unlikely to handle. The teacher explained that, for example, one of the students seemed to have a greater ability to describe the process. He could talk about the elements used in a science laboratory. Only a word was missing and he alternated to the highly drilled: "*How do you call it … in English? I don't know it*". Not only his linguistic ability of the students was employed, their communicative notion of the code helped facilitate him to ask that question when he was in need. He knew he was entitled to it and he could ask that question to the teacher who supposedly knew English better than him.

One of the native English speaking teachers disclosed that if he did not give an answer to a student and used a longer wait time period without losing eye-contact, the student might resume the conversation: "*Why do we need it?*" This simple notion showed a developed code of communication and indicated that the students were not aware of his/her lack of vocabulary, and through paralinguistic features, decided to bring the dialogue to a closing

stage. Two other Thai teachers mentioned how the students tried to produce a noticeable "topic change" (Coulhard, 1977) which was a late-acquired strategy, to avoid the conflict evidence of his linguistic problem.

Another interesting point was what came first in the acquisition of communicative competence. The various components of communicative competence, such as phonological, semantic, lexical, and pragmatic and lexical levels, were necessary for the start in the pre-linguistic period of the students. Remarkably, the morphological and syntactic aspect emerged in the production data. Considering how communicative competence grew in the bilingual students, some aspects of communicative competence were developed simultaneously, but the order was remarkably altered. All the teachers agreed that the students needed to be encouraged by teachers. By means of constant interaction, observation, trial, and error, the students learned about the importance of turn-taking in the form of topic initiation, maintenance or change and the appropriate use of speech acts which would all lead to the development of coherence and cohesion in conversation.

Interestingly, one of the native English speaking teachers shared his experience of seeing how the students were recreating a short story he had read in class. They were not reading or memorising parts of the story, but were recreating it with their own utterances within their own reach, unique and adapted to the context. This appeared to be the first stages of meaningful communication at beginner level; the students made use of learned utterances which had been widely practiced and little combination was detected.

It was reported by one of the Thai teachers that the students abandoned the one-word stage very quickly. They moved on rapidly to the two-word stage, which had its own rules of analysis. In the case of developing bilingual learning, the students used two-word phrases, but they did incorporate function words. They already had a notion of noun phrases, as in the following examples:

Teacher: *What am I?*
Student 1: *A teacher*
Student 2: *An English teacher*

In their first language, the students were said to recognise the categories of verb-noun, or action-object. In accordance with this, Foster (1990) argued that it was easier for children to expand the object than the subject at the multi-word stage. Yet, in the following examples, the teacher showed the students' comfort in the expansion of the subject:

"*I like … book of history and the cartoon books.*"
"*I going to … vacations and I see TV and … playing*"
"*I'm going to be the best speak in English, for learn and because I'm in English. I like speaking in English.*"

As far as communicative competence was concerned, most of the students managed to hold a conversation, expand and justify their choice, use repair strategies by raising their voice and overstressing the preposition when they did not understand the given utterances.

The students slowly developed a sense for consistency and homogeneity in conversational texts. For example, the use of "*me*" instead of "*mine*" was not appropriate. The teacher noticed that the student managed to use a repair strategy to clarify the addressee of the question "*What is your favourite?*" and the student replied "*Me? The game computer.*"

One of the native English speaking teachers observed that the students also had a sense of texture and sequence in the story. Up to now, the resources they used were not very sophisticated; however, '*and*' and '*again*' were observed as a sample of early cohesion. Another kind of consistent devices already developed was the use of '*well*' and '*umm*' or '*urr*' meant to fill the space of thinking time. The students resorted to well-rehearsed structures with basic structures of subject and verb, but it was noticeable that they could develop and sustain their turn. The value of their exchanges relied on the successful use of lexical accuracy rather than on grammatical accuracy to complete the story. The teacher considered that the ability of telling a story was a skill that the students had already acquired in their mother tongue.

For example: "*Well, picture one … I see people and children look a elephant and and girl is taking. Picture two … there is two elephants and urr children and girl. In picture three … elephants have four legs and the tree. I see the elephant again in picture five and I see the children again.*"

Noticeable, turns in conversation between teachers and students were somewhat longer at this stage than earlier in their bilingual learning. The teacher remarked that the students could keep the topic and maintain the story all the way through. Regarding this, Foster (1990) remarked that

cohesion was achieved by devices that joining individual utterances together. The teacher could observe respect for turn-taking, no overlapping and a good command of cohesion. Nevertheless, understanding of many students of the inclusive pronoun was still imperfect.

The teachers informed that most of the students could manage to communicate very fluently from the very beginning of Grade 3. They produced not only grammatically correct sentences, but also appropriate sentences to a particular context. This indicated that the students had been exposed to a considerable amount of language from which they learned much more than grammatical rules. Their main social task was to acquire communicative competence. The role of the environment has become more meaningful for the students' communicative ability.

The students also showed a usual linguistic skill like the framing for questions in the classroom. Another native English speaking teacher reported that the students did not feel intimidated to ask questions because they were used to being exposed to a dialogue pattern between teachers and class. Most of the students could solve the problem of using the framing of questions more quickly and had a sense of comfort with the language and the dialogue situation. They could imitate intonation of usual questions; for example:

Teacher: *Well, I'm saying something about an animal, and you have to guess. I've got a big body.*

Student: *Are you an elephant?*

Teacher: *No, I'm not.*

Student: *Are you a bear?*

Teacher:	*No, I'm not.*
Student:	*How many legs you have?*
Teacher:	*No, I don't have legs. But I can swim.*
Student:	*Oh, I know! A ... whale ... Are you a whale?*
Teacher:	*Yes, I am.*

One of the Thai teachers noticed that pronouns '*I*', '*you*', and referential language use had been acquired both linguistically and pragmatically. When the student did not know a particular word, for example, she alternated to a further question and finally had all she needed to bridge the information gap with the framing of questions like what native children do at a younger age.

This question development stage could be a sign of the fact that the students could use rote learned structures appropriately. However, the student did not have a real understanding of the nature of the structures. The use of basic question words like '*who*', '*where*' and '*what*' were said to be first acquired by native children before the other complex ones like '*when*', '*how*' and '*why*'. As well, the native English speaking teacher reported that this pattern was applied to the students in the context of this study.

A significant component in the development of communicative competence in this context is the use of what has been called '*code-switching.*' Apparently, all the teachers observed that when the students run short of vocabulary, they had various responses: keeping silent, speaking in a very soft voice, changing the course of the conversation, or asking for help with "*How do you say ... in English?*" or "*What is it (in English)*", alternate to body language or use their

mother tongue. Nevertheless, they did not use it randomly; they either code-switched, code-mixed, or integrated. For example:

Teacher: *What's in the sky?*
Student 1:   *Mek (cloud)*
Student 2:   *Cloud*

From the above example, this usually happened in an English class; the teacher made a question and a student answered in Thai. The teacher pretended not to hear and the student repaired communication by using English.

Regarding the communicative competence of the students in this context, the idea of linguistic accuracy prevailed. They could be guided into the ability to make themselves understood with the less number of mistakes. They could be guided into it if the teacher did not restrict the language used to a set of classroom phrases, if they were not overloaded with grammatical or system-based explanations, and if they were allowed to use the language in activities that engaged them.

Obviously, all the teachers gave similar views that obstacles for the development of communicative competence were little exposure to the target language or a teacher who constantly interrupted the students' production for the sake of accuracy. The comfort of using English was usually fostered through the bilingual teaching. Being able to make use of the language, the students showed that they tried to create a sense of independence in

classrooms. The language structures were shown on the wall to expose the students to everything the language could give them.

To conclude, any approach to the understanding of communicative competence development must consider the students' roles, the input and the relationship between the teacher and the student (Foster, 1990). The way the interaction between the communicative competence experienced by the student and the student's psychological make-up of the student plus the right environment administered by the teacher would design the model of communicative competence in the early years of bilingual education. Unlike the acquisition of a first language, the beginning of the second one would make use of resources of the native language to build the new one.

Pragmatic development, in addition, appeared to involve a major role for input, including explicit teaching. The students were already equipped with a set of pragmatic rules that they would in turn transfer to the second language. Understanding other people and situations was an existing part of their cognitive development; as a result, this enabled them to move comfortably in the sociolinguistic sphere of the new language. The students transferred the patterns of their first language, no matter how difficult they might be. In fact, it was the students' maturity that would allow them to expand what they wanted to say.

Hence, competence is unquestionably a combination of innate and acquired knowledge, the basis of English and the environment input provided by the teachers and the school, the innate Universal Grammar and the core grammar the students are exposed to. The teachers are supposed to set up the right

scene for the creation of communicative competence because this discarded aspect of language relies more on the fostering than on the actual teaching of the notion. To some extent it is necessary to review needs in order to see whether the assessment tools are appropriate for the development of communicative skills. The significance of this growth will help the teachers construct their students' communicative competence with the aim at creating an independent speaker of English.

4.2   Findings and discussion in response to research question 2:

What are the effects of bilingual education on the students' learning achievement?

From the researcher's observation and the teachers' views, the bilingual education results in satisfying English proficiency and academic performance while the students' proficiency in their native language has been further developing. Both native language (Thai) and second language (English) have been integrated from kindergarten through third grade. Percentage of time the students are exposed to Thai and English in the core subjects (i.e., Reading, Writing, Math, Social Studies, and Science) is 50/50 whereas the English subject is instructed by native English speaking teachers.

The teachers noticed that the bilingual learning programme may foster more direct attention to language use. As one of the teachers stated, "*Students are more aware of their different languages as they are encouraged to use both regularly.*" In accordance with this, Cromdal (1999) considered it as the intermixing of languages that may result in increased metalinguistic knowledge, correlating with bilingualism.

The improved performance of core subjects observed by the teachers may also be due in part to these students being taught academic concepts in their native language. In the earlier grades, the bilingual students had taken Math and Science classes mostly in their native and likely stronger language; this may have increased comprehension of the lessons and enabled the students to learn the material more effectively. All of the teachers had similar views on this and one of them clarified:

> *"A possible reason for the bilingual students' improved comprehension is that a bilingual learning programme may foster more direct attention to language use."*

As well, in situations where a concept is taught in both English and Thai, memory for these concepts may be especially strong, as encoding in two different contexts may lead to deeper encoding and more retrieval routes. Thus, bilingual education may affect performance in and out of the classroom in many ways, and teachers should understand these effects (Genesee et al., 2006).

All of the teachers were well aware that making bilingual education more extensively accessible entailed current development setbacks. Participation during early elementary school years positively shaped achievement. According to Hakuta et al. (2000), it could take four to seven years to develop enough proficiency for successful academic performance. Some students may not have enough English-language proficiency in the early grades to perform successfully on the English-based learning and tests, thereby delaying the benefits in their academic achievement. Involvement in the later elementary

school years and prolonged involvement were not as beneficial and may even be weakening. The effect of early bilingual education involvement was related to the fact that the students were likely to learn the most fundamental reading, writing, and comprehension skills. If they enter later elementary grades without such skills, potential positive effects of later bilingual education would be diminished (Collier and Thomas, 2004).

The teacher participants accepted that either success or failure of bilingual students may well to some extent agreed on the strength of both native and second language supports and how skillful the teachers were at integrating both languages for facilitating academic success of the students. Research evident (e.g., Cheng, 1996; Gordon and Hoxby, 2002; Lindholm-Leary and Howard, 2008; Mora, 2000; Slavin and Cheung, 2003; Suwanarak, 2013) appears to support academic and social advantages of the primary language in bilingual learning settings because it facilitates the learning process, decreases frustration, enhances intellectual capacity, and deepens the understanding of intricate concepts.

In line with this, the teachers also supported the extensive use of the primary language and culture in successful bilingual learning. Students were allowed to process information and discuss concepts in their primary language. Evidently, all the native English speaking teachers found creative ways to help their third-grade students to understand key concepts in Math and Science by including a mixture of primary language strategies that facilitated comprehension. With this regard, one of the native English speaking teachers added: "*A Thai teacher in this regard could be a great assistance. At times there*

appeared to be little difference between bilingual and typical English-only classrooms in the role of the primary language."

Primary language support, therefore, became the powerful effect in effective bilingual learning as it provided comprehensible input, understanding of abstract concepts, and equal access to the core curriculum. On a regular basis, it was used to provide access to abstract concepts by employing a variety of instructional practices. As one of the teachers explained,

> "*It is important for the primary stage of bilingual learning. The students' home language can be supportive to develop their academic proficiency and facilitate content acquisition even when a teacher does not speak Thai.*"

Accordingly, incorporating student's native language apparently promoted formation of cognitive academic language proficiency because the students were better able to gain a deeper understanding of concepts, which could then transfer to academic learning and understanding (Skehan, 2003).

Another effect of bilingual education learning was relevant to modifications of instructional practices in order to help the students to understand the core curriculum and facilitate academic success. Most of the support component is dependent on individual teachers' creativity and willingness to experiment. The teachers shared the same opinion that success in this endeavor would only occur with teachers who had plentiful resources and materials, and perhaps training opportunities. As one Thai teacher emphasised,

"It is important that a school guide us and also collaborate closely with determined instructors to implement sound instructional theories and methods into practice."

Another teacher also underlined that the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices should be frequently evaluated.

In parallel with this, incomprehensible instructions could be an effect of bilingual education. When developing a primary language support component in a bilingual setting, all the teachers agreed that parents could provide invaluable assistance in helping to make instruction understandable for the Thai students. Using parents for lesson previews, clarification, and conceptual development could provide a powerful bridge when a teacher was trying to help students to understand abstract concepts taught in bilingual classes. As one of the Thai teachers illustrated,

"A teacher can send a lesson home a couple of weeks before it will be carried out in class and ask the parents to help their children understand the concepts in their primary language."

This was compliant with what Lopez (2003) and Mora (2000) suggested in their studies that parents could help clarify abstract ideas, especially when the curriculum called for common cultural issues. The potential for parental support in conceptual development was endless, particularly when teachers became adept at using the strengths of the family to enhance their curriculum.

This notion of parental support was very different from what was typically expected in various schools. Some parents may have more resources and abilities to help their children than others. Thus, it was imperative for the teachers to understand their students' society and families in order to ask parents to help in ways that they can be successful and will enhance the educational experience for students. Nevertheless, some parents might be over worked, stressed out, or unable to support. Teachers need to use a slightly different approach to help out their students. For this reason, without parental involvement should not be a reason for students' failure.

Overall, sustainable development of bilingual proficiency could be a positive effect of bilingual education. In this regard, the teachers are expected to provide a quality language support component in their classrooms. It is important that staff development activities are accompanied by appropriate materials and technology to implement the suggested strategies. A materials-rich classroom is essential for mainstream teachers to be able to create learning environments that provide English language learners with increased access to the core curriculum.

The status of both Thai and English languages also needs to be proactively raised within bilingual classrooms to help all students and parents see the value of biliteracy. Speaking a second language is not only seen as an asset but as a problem to be fixed. Even though none of the standards address status of the language, it is imperative that language and culture be valued and honored within the school and classroom setting to increase the likelihood of student success.

The teachers revealed that the school had a policy of elevating the status of the languages and valuing biliteracy by incorporating culturally authentic literature, artifacts, and historical figures into the core curriculum, having students share their personal cultural stories in the classroom and presenting a variety of angles on important historical events of both two different cultures. As stated earlier, the status of the Thai language also has a profound impact on the success of English language learning in a bilingual setting.

As one of the teachers remarked, "*When a teacher values the Thai and English languages spoken in class and gives students credit for their growing biliteracy, students begin to feel a sense of belonging and cultural compatibility.*" Accordingly, Lindholm-Leary and Howard (2008) put forward that being proficient of two languages will be viewed as a valuable asset to be recognised publicly in the school and outside. Raising the status of the language within a school, in this respect, cannot be an isolated event in a classroom but should be part of a systematic effort that includes as many facets of the schools community as possible (Robinson, 1992).

Chapter 5

Implications and Conclusion

5.1 Implications

Both a review of the literature and the interview conducted in this research identified the academic rigor of a bilingual programme as contributing factor leading to successful fulfillment of helping students become bilingual and bi-literate. The literature regarding successful bilingual programmes is overwhelming positive if certain key elements exist. It is the same element that parents should consider when choosing a programme or determining if this education model is a good fit for their children and family. Elements such as programme design, strength of school leadership, and quality of faculty can be learned by attending an information session, seeking out school information via the web, or contacting parents who have students currently enrolled in the programme.

The key element of parental involvement entails gathering information and that act of making a personal commitment should they end up choosing this model of education. In order to meet the mission of the programme, a full commitment to the school from kindergarten through sixth grade is required for students to achieve the bilingual, bicultural and bi-literate potential. Parents play a critical role in fostering this growth and work in partnership with teachers and administrators to achieve this goal. They need to be supportive in building bicultural relationships with other parents and families. They also need to accept that they might not be able to help with

homework or that their child may speak a second language better than the parents.

In addition, the quality of the teaching staff at the bilingual programme should be considered because it is critical to its success. All classroom teachers should be credentialed and bilingual in the languages taught by the programme. They need to be passionate about the bilingual learning goal about developing the students' language proficiency. Regular and open communication with staff is very important. Also, professional development opportunities to facilitate their own growth as educators should be supported.

Future research in determining key factors should include a broader perspective of those associated with a bilingual programme. Constituents to include may be parents of current students, parents of incoming students, depending on the timing of the survey, teachers at the school and staff who administratively support the school. Each of these groups has a unique perspective and may identify elements others have not considered.

5.2 Conclusion

The results of this study help to advance the debate surrounding the effectiveness of a bilingual learning programme and are aligned with previous research (e.g., Collier and Thomas, 2004; Genesee, 1983; Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Lindholm-Leary and Howard, 2008; Thomas and Collier, 2002), suggesting that a bilingual learning programme provides an effective instructional approach for elementary bilingual students.

On the whole, the bilingual learning programme has positive effects and is beneficial in multiple ways. Early benefits of bilingual learning should not disregarded. The third-grade students begin to show improvements in core subjects are hardly found when they were in earlier grades. This indicates that the students undergo a more immersive bilingual experience. The results suggest that balanced-language instruction to some extent promote academic achievement in bilingual students. Hence, the more bilingual experience and the more balanced exposure to both of their languages the students have, the more advantages they gain for promoting their learning success.

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