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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Principled Eclecticism: A Mix and Match Solution for Rural Thai Classrooms?

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Abstract: The methodology of principled eclecticism employs a number of different teaching theories towards a specific set of goals. This quasi-experimental qualitative research examined whether principled eclecticism would affect learning achievements and attitude towards English by students in remote areas of Thailand, with a view to re-examining Thailand's educational policy. A total of 20 hours of teaching was conducted on primary school students at a school in the remote rural northeastern province of Kalasin using principled eclecticism. Pre- and post-tests revealed improved learning achievements to a significant degree; however, when broken down into sections, significant learning achievements tended to be in areas where students memorized vocabulary rather than used vocabulary to make critical choices. Student attitude towards English language learning improved significantly. Results can be used as guidelines for the Thai Ministry of Education to implement policy changes in the field of English language teaching, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas where scores are traditionally low.

Keywords: Principled Eclecticism, English as a Second Language, primary education, educational policy, education in Thailand

The objective of this research was to experiment with English teaching methodologies to see if a more varied and eclectic curriculum would help raise learning achievements among students in Thailand and if so, could then be used in adjusting educational policy towards learning English as a second language.

Research findings show that poverty has a negative impact on learning or English proficiency levels of students (Tilak, 2018; Santos et al., 2018; Draper, 2012; Nunan, 2012; Kohlhaas et al., 2010; Connell, 1994). This is also true in Thailand. International tests of English proficiency put Thailand at a low level. Data from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL, 2018) puts Thailand at number 120 out of a total of 168 countries. On another global index of non-native English speaking countries, Thailand is ranked 74th out of 100 countries, regarded as "low proficiency" (English First, 2019). In 2015, when this research began, the average score of all five subjects on the national standardized examination known as "O-Net" for Year 12 students failed to hit 50%. The lowest average score was in English at 24.98%.

Students who registered the lowest scores in English were generally found in remote provinces, either on the border or in the rural area of North-Eastern Thailand, a lower socioeconomic region of the country (Bureau of Educational Testing, 2016). This is the reason students targeted in this research were rural students at a lower socioeconomic level.

Research from Asia has revealed the importance of the teacher's role in the English as a Second Language [ESL] classroom, as teaching methodology moves away from traditional methods to task-based learning (Ji, 2018; Mohammed, 2017). However, research suggests that teachers are resisting the change. Ji (2018) found that in Asia, English language classes tend to be teacher-centered and based on textbooks with a focus on memorization. Although this may be effective for exam preparation, it does not facilitate good instruction with task-based learning or enhancing critical thinking skills (Kavlu, 2017). Primary school teachers who are being told to teach in this new methodology are often not skilled in task-based learning (Noopong, 2002). On top of this, in Thailand, many of these teachers are not English majors, having graduated in other subjects such as mathematics and science (Kanoksilapatham, 2014). Butler (2012) found that primary school teachers in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan felt they did not possess the minimum skills required to teach. In Thailand, the teacher's role has moved towards a more task-based approach, according to the Ministry of Education's policy and its Basic Education Core Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Research supports the idea that Asian students generally feel uncomfortable and even anxious when learning English as a second language (Tien, 2018). Tien (2018) found that Taiwanese students of EFL were "extremely concerned" over the accuracy of their grammar, their lack of vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and the ability to be understood. Subandowo (2017) and Mulyono et al. (2019) found the same with Indonesian students who experienced a fear of losing face and an inability to express ideas in English. Meanwhile, Thail students at all levels feel they have an inadequate vocabulary, do not have enough opportunity to practice with native English speakers, and have poor pronunciation and listening skills (Sahatsathatsana, 2017; Wahyuni & Ilyas, 2016). Ritthirat and Chiramanee (2015) found that many Thai students learned the most from watching movies and listening to less-stressful English songs rather than from the classroom. Akkakoson (2016) found that university students, despite 12 years of studying English, still felt anxious when speaking English in the classroom.

A possible way forward in Thailand is having teachers being instructed in or exposed to the method of principled eclecticism to help raise levels of English language learning achievement in students living in remote provinces where English scores are low. This method stresses a varied and sometimes non-conventional approach that, by its eclectic nature, spices up the learning environment. This may, in turn, improve students' attitudes towards learning English. If indeed there were significant results, these findings could be used in determining educational policy in the field of ESL teacher training and learning.

Principled Eclecticism

Principled eclecticism was conceived in the mid-1990s and adopted over the last two decades in schools, aimed at students who studied English as a second language (Mellow, 2000, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Brown, 1994). Principled eclecticism combined different approaches and methodologies to teach language, depending on the aims of the lesson and abilities of the learners. Among scholars, Mellow (2000) described it as a "desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching" (p. 1), which involved the employment of a variety of language learning activities working towards a common goal. Alharbi (20)17) argued that using these different methods of language learning had to be guided by giving appropriate importance to the different components of language learning, rather than separating them into chunks of grammar and vocabulary. Brown (1994) devised a four-step teaching process model for principled eclecticism—diagnosis, treatment, assessment, and feedback—which would be implemented in the curriculum for this research. Besides this, there have been a number of research paper and theses on how principled eclecticism can be used in the classroom (Alharbi, 2017 Paramboor, 2015; Cushing-Leubner & Bigelow, 2014; Kumar, 2013; Gao, 2011; Xiao-yun, 2007; Thornbury, 2006; Lochana & Deb, 2006; McCormick, 1997).

However, the scholar who delved the deepest into principled eclecticism was Mellow (2000, 2002), who devised a two-dimensional model of linguistic and

psycholinguistic assumptions (henceforth referred to as the two-dimensional model) consisting of specific principles that could be subjected to theoretical and empirical evaluation. It is because of this depth of study that we modeled the curriculum for this research upon its foundations. Mellow's model features four quadrants—formal-construction, construction-functional, functional growth, and formal-growth—and are the basis for the lesson plans devised for this research. Mellow (2002) argued that different types of instructional activities could be categorized in terms of which quadrant they belonged to in the two-dimensional model. The language was characterized as either "formal" or "functional," whereas learning was characterized as either "construction" or "growth." When these two dimensions of assumptions intersected to create four quadrants, learning activities could be categorized in terms of their placement within the two dimensions.

These two dimensions can be combined to create a model of different types of language teaching activities. Figure 1 shows an example of the first dimension (horizontal) and the second (vertical). Their intersection creates the four quadrants. The formal-construction quadrant features methodology that stresses grammar and pronunciation drills. The construction-functional quadrant comprises a methodology, such as total physical response (TPR), guided dialogues, speech memorization, and role-plays. The functional-growth quadrant leans towards activities and learning in the field of reading comprehension and an emphasis on writing sentences and stories using a more natural approach. The formal-growth quadrant stresses a more natural approach to language, with little correction or reference to grammar and in this research, activities that stress this quadrant are in English only. This convergence of teaching philosophies provides a structural framework for principled eclecticism when compared to more traditional methodologies, and could be the best solution for English students as a second language in Thailand.

Methods

This research was derived from a field study using mixed methods conducted between January and February 2019 in Kalasin province, Thailand. For lesson plans, we studied Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 to understand the required standards as designated for Year 6 in the subject of

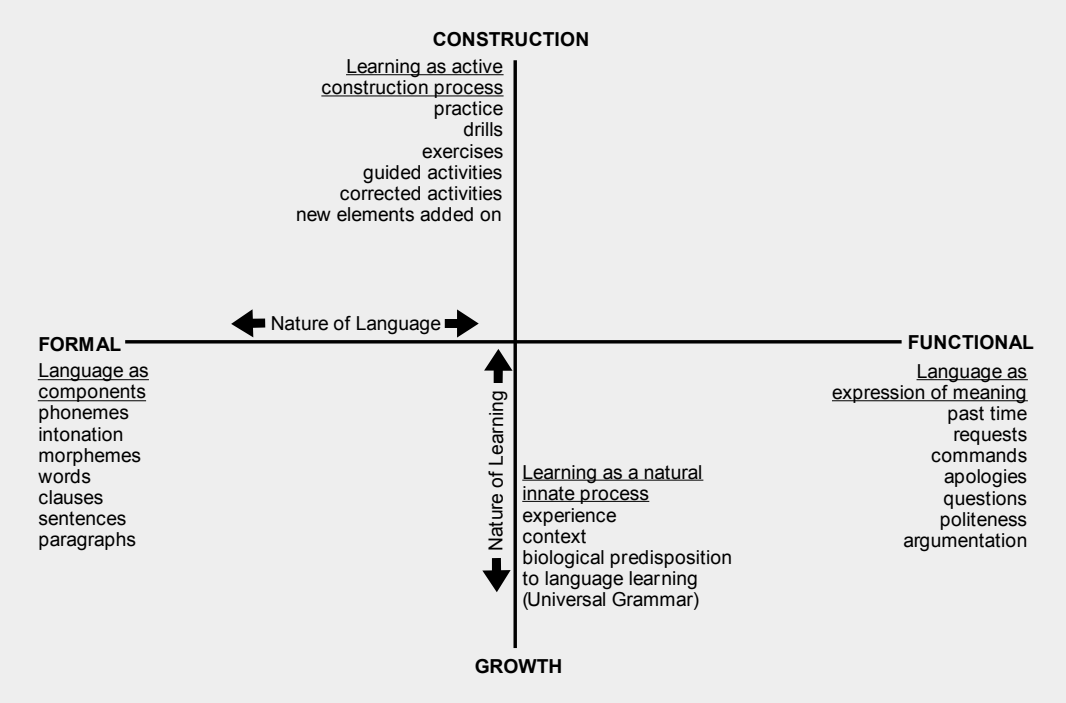

Figure 1. The Four Components of Mellow's Two-Dimensional Model

Foreign Language (English). We spent two weeks teaching primary school students for 20 hours and observed the learning achievement and attitudinal change towards the English subject.

For the quantitative approach, a 30-question pre- and post-tests were given to the students. For attitude evaluation, we formulated 10 statements based on the objectives, taking the form of a Likert scale as strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4), or strongly disagree (5).

To cross-check data from the questionnaires, students were interviewed to establish their needs with regards to learning English using open-ended questions.

Selection of Participants

In the academic years of 2016 and 2017, just prior to starting this research, Kalasin appeared in all three lists of Thailand's 77 provinces with the lowest O-Net national examination scores for Years 6, 9, and 12 (Ministry of Education, 2016). Thus, it was selected as the province to conduct the research. A random draw based on Kalasin's primary school educational zones resulted in the choice of one rural school to conduct the research, and an official letter was written and sent to the school director. After explaining the research purpose to the school director, he agreed to allow the research to take place and delegated the work to the school's Year 6 teacher to facilitate the research. The school informed the parents of the proposed research, and they agreed to allow their children to participate.

For the purposes of anonymity, each participant was assigned a number. Their results were kept in an encrypted file in our computer. It was decided that this information would be kept for a period of five years, after which it would be destroyed. This information would only be shared following the consent of all participants. To avoid psychological risks, the purpose of the research was carefully explained. After learning the purpose, school teachers agreed to involve us in the classroom environment, and students agreed to provide their insights. Students were encouraged to talk about their English learning experience while in the classroom in approximately one-hour interviews. The interviews were conducted in the school only.

Criteria

This research sheds light on teaching methodologies and how students reacted to the new teaching methods. For this research, 35 students currently studying Prathom 6 (Year 6) at a school in Kalasin province were purposively chosen. Students were selected by the Year 6 teacher, who took the two regular Year 6 classes and put them together into one class. Year 6 students were selected for this research as this is the first year that Thai students are subjected to the national standardized testing known as O-Net. Students were both male and female with no cognitive impairments and could at least respond verbally to commands and questions. They were all of the Thai nationality, and the research was approved by the school and the students' parents.

To protect their privacy, the school name and respondents' biodata have been kept anonymous.

School Contextualization

Kalasin is an impoverished rural province found in the central region of North-East Thailand. A sizeable part of the workforce is itinerant workers and farmers. Children are often left in the care of grandparents as parents move to big cities like Bangkok to work. As this research found, there is little stimulation in the home environment to perform any academic work, such as school homework, because parents are often missing to provide such support. From official statistics, in 2015, the primary causes for student drop-outs in Kalasin were the itinerant nature of the family, poverty, and adaptation (National Statistics Office, 2015).

The school was situated in a small village in the heart of sugarcane and rice farming country. The school catered for 490 students from kindergarten age up to Year 9 (Matthayom 3) with a staff of 14 teachers. Student numbers had been steadily decreasing over recent years. The school director attributed this to new schools opening up, and a declining birth rate in the region.

Data Collection and Analysis

We studied various popular methodologies employed in teaching English, paying attention to where they fell within the four quadrants of Mellow's two-dimensional model. We created a teaching model that encouraged active learning within the framework of constructivism, developed a 20-hour curriculum, or 10 lessons of two hours each, under the main topic of "Feelings." An evaluation of the lesson plans to establish the test's content validity was performed using three English academics.

From student interviews and prior research, the objectives of the curriculum included the ability to spell, pronounce, and identify words that were related to feelings, express feelings, and to cultivate a positive attitude towards English.

For the pre- and post-tests, a test of 30 questions comprising 25 multiple choice questions and five written questions was formulated and sent to three experts to evaluate the test's content validity via item objective congruence (IOC). Adjustments were made. A try-out of the multiple-choice test was performed using 50 students from a nearby school in Kalasin province. Following the try-out, the difficulty and discrimination indices of the test were established, and both fell within an acceptable range. Finally, the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR-20) was applied, and the test was adjusted accordingly.

For the attitude evaluation, we formulated 12 statements based on the three objectives using a Likert scale. The 12 questions were sent to three experts to evaluate the questionnaire's content validity via IOC, where each expert had to determine whether the questions agreed with the objectives. The average value per question was 0.86, an acceptable figure.

As stated, this research followed Mellow's two-dimensional model as a base for selecting eclectic methods of teaching, as well as utilizing Brown's four-step teaching process model. An eight-step instructional design model was created for this research.

We performed the pre-test before the first lesson on January 21, 2019. Students took up to one hour to complete the test. On the final day of teaching, Friday, February 8, 2019, students took the post-test. We carried out the teaching of the lesson plans.

For student interviews conducted prior to teaching, responses from participants were coded and classified into major themes for analysis with key themes being identified. The results were completely derived from participating students, and the responses were grouped by student comments.

A dependent-samples t-test was conducted on the pre- and post-tests. Each of the six sections of the exam was broken down, and a dependent samples t-test was performed on each section to determine which parts of the curriculum achieved a greater degree of learning achievement over others. An attitude evaluation questionnaire was handed out to students at the end of the final day's instruction. Statistics used in data analysis included the mean, standard deviation, and dependent samples t-test in inferential statistics.

To ensure data accuracy and overcome our biases, participatory observation through teaching students was introduced to cross-check data from the questionnaires received from those students.

As the number of students was only 35, we developed themes from the students' responses that included teaching skills of teachers, student attitudes towards English, teaching demonstration, and students' learning improvement.

Results

The results were grouped according to student statements and the results of the questionnaire. The results showed the views of the students concerning their English learning experience. Their views reflected their source of worry about their English proficiency. From initial interviews, it was established there was a general feeling that English was a dull subject, and although students were keen to learn, it was considered "difficult" and "beyond their ability."

Teaching Skills of Teachers

For the interview, we took notes and grouped themes according to students' responses. Students provided insightful information about English learning. The English subject was their greatest source of anxiety, they said, because teachers put a great emphasis on accuracy more than fluency. Students wanted their English teachers to be accommodating and encouraging them not to fear making mistakes. One of the students, who was in Year 6, explained:

> I don't know how to speak English. All my teacher does is ask us to copy down things from the whiteboard or textbook. Then she gives us a test on those words, and we have to write them out. If we spell the words wrongly, we get no marks.

Another female student added:

> The teacher tells us to learn to spell words from the textbook, but I don't know where to start. I'm afraid to ask her in class because she will get mad at me. It's disappointing because I want

> to be good at English, but it seems too difficult for me.

Spelling and pronunciation demoralized students in their ESL learning. One of the students in the Year 6 class argued that:

> Normally, I speak Northeastern dialect at home and with friends in my daily life. It's hard for me to learn English pronunciation because I really don't use it in my life. In class, we speak English, but I don't think it's the correct way because we just guess how the words are spoken based on our own dialect.

Their responses indicated that teachers played a pivotal role in delivering English. However, it seems that teachers put a great emphasis on English accuracy more than fluency. Such teaching fails to help students develop learning passion. It leads students to adopt a negative attitude towards English learning.

Student Attitudes Towards English

Responses indicated that students did not like English, even if they expressed an interest in it, because of teaching methodology and the atmosphere in the classroom. One student said, "I live on a farm. English isn't my language. I don't care about it." Another student said, "It's beyond my ability. I'm not smart enough to be able to speak English – only clever students who are better off than me can do that." This attitude was also reflected in another student, who said: "I'm too poor to learn English.

Their responses demonstrated a negative attitude towards English, resulting from a lack of English teaching skills among teachers.

Teaching Demonstration by the Researcher

We volunteered to teach English to targeted students. With principled eclectism, we found that group work was an effective intervention in learning English. Group work also aided basic functions, such as memorizing lists of words. Vocabulary was the core of the curriculum—learning 20 words to describe one's feelings. It was also the section with the most significant improvement. Much of the pre-test for many of the students appeared to have been guesswork. However, after 20 hours of teaching, student scores had improved dramatically. The teaching for this part of the test consisted largely of activities from the formal-construction quadrant, which featured grammar and pronunciation drills, reflecting a more rigid, traditional approach to second-language learning. Although this methodology may be a reason for Thai students expressing a dislike of learning the subject of English, it is worthy to note that from observation, the students in this research responded well to this part of the lesson. It could be inferred that this reaction could have been based on the fact that this method of learning was accompanied by other more interesting and entertaining ways of learning within the same lesson. This is supported by research by Khotchomphu et al. (2016), who found that with added games, physical activities, and music, Thai primary school students fostered a more positive attitude towards, which had a direct and significant effect on their learning achievement.

The writing section of the test required students to choose a feeling based on looking at a photograph. Scores improved significantly in this section. Students in Kalasin had great difficulty reading and spelling English. Writing down the words was not going to be enough. In the end, students learned how to spell the words while actioning each of the letters. These activities came from the construction-functional quadrant. This was either posing in the shape of the letter or a physical action while shouting out the letters. These results conform with James J. Asher's total physical response (TPR), which found acting out commands or, in this case, spelling vocabulary, was more beneficial and fostered retention better in ESL students than just writing down the words (Asher, 2009).

Finally, reading comprehension involved storytelling, role play, and guided dialogues. Students enjoyed this part if only just for the dressing up. The repetition of telling the story by the instructor seemed to have a positive effect. There was no active translation. However, the students quickly picked up meaning. At their most relaxed and joyous moments, they appeared to be picking up the most language (Asher, 2009). Haulman (1985) stated that acting out fairy tales not only enriches students with a glimpse into the cultural aspect of learning a foreign language, but also helped offer an array of language contexts for building vocabulary. In a similar study, Inphoo and Nomnian (2019) successfully used dramatizing

traditional Northeastern Thai folklore as a means to reduce anxiety in English language learners as well as increasing their confidence.

Attitude towards English language learning improved. Results showed how much the students enjoyed the classes owing to its eclectic nature. This eclecticism included extensive use of games, competition, positive reinforcement, and small-group work. The same student who professed to be unable to learn English owing to her poverty level later said: "I don't want this class to end. I want to keep studying like this."

Another student, who was at a much lower level than his peers, said, "Now, at least, I understand how the language works. It's similar to Thai, but we have to know a lot of words. I want to keep learning new words so that I can communicate even better than this."

Another student said, "It's actually not as difficult as I thought it was. It's also kind of fun, in that we can play games and learn at the same time."

Their responses demonstrated that they did not like learning English. It appears that teachers are held accountable for the students' negative attitudes. In contrast, the questionnaires showed that students took a positive attitude towards English, and their proficiency was significantly improving after they received effective intervention through principled eclectism.

Learning Improvement Among Students

Principled eclectism results showed positive effects, and it strongly correlated to quantitative data. Teaching using a principled eclecticism methodology improved the results of lower-level students significantly and improved their attitude towards learning English.

For learning achievement results, a dependent-samples t-test was conducted on the pre- and post-tests. There was a significant difference between the pre-test results (M=9.65; S.D.=2.43) and the post-test results (M=15.75; S.D.=3.22).

The 30-question pre- and post-test was divided into six categories. The areas where learner achievement improved significantly were in the fields of Vocabulary, Writing, and Reading Comprehension. Areas where learning achievements did not improve significantly are Reading for Understanding, Reasons, and Parts of Speech.

For attitude evaluation, the average score was 4.88 from a possible score of 5 based on a Likert scale.

Discussion

The concept of learning using a principled eclecticism approach corrected the students' negative impression of English language learning. The areas of discussion include the use of an eclectic methodology, collective active learning, and encouragement.

For eclectic methodology, Thai teachers, particularly those in rural areas, tend to use tried and true teaching methodologies that are rigid and steeped in the past. Much of the teaching comes straight out of a textbook, and there is a great deal of memorization involved. For more than 10 years, the Thai Ministry of Education has instructed teachers to adopt more of a child-centered approach to keep up with changing trends in education in the 21st century, with teachers having been instructed to facilitate rather than teach, via active learning and project-based learning (Ministry of Education, 2008). Although this is commendable, Thai teachers often revert to their more comfortable, teacher-centered methods of teaching. Chen (2012) studied attitudes of Thai students towards their ESL teachers and found that many students were "disgusted" with their teachers because they did not have teaching techniques and skills to make things comprehensible to students, as well as being unhappy with teachers who simply taught from the textbook.

Thai English teachers often complain that the curricula are impractical, overloaded, unclear, and not relevant to learners (Noom-Ura, 2013; Hayes, 2010). Meanwhile, many primary school teachers who not English teachers are being forced to teach English because of a lack of workforce or simply because one teacher must cover all subjects according to school policy. Primary school teachers of English majored in a subject other than English, and it led to some instructional deficiencies, such as incorrect English, which has been a problem for at least two decades in Thailand (Graham, 2019; Kanoksilapatham, 2014; Noopong, 2002).

With such a scenario, students naturally are not exposed to what is considered the best way to teach English. When exposed to a rigid, arguably outdated method of teaching, students lack interest in the subject and feel no enthusiasm to learn (Akkakoson, 2016; Vibulphol, 2016, Punthumasen, 2007). In rural schools, resources are often at a minimum, contributing to students having a negative attitude towards English. English is perceived as difficult, beyond the students'

ability, and not a part of their daily lives (Fry et al., 2018). Poverty does not contribute to higher learning achievements nor better attitudes towards English (Phromwong, 2017). Students upcountry are often raised by one or more grandparents because their parents leave them to do menial work in the city. There is nobody at home to spur them on to do their homework, as was observed in this research.

We found that the simple act of mixing up activities in the principled eclecticism curriculum added a spark in the classroom. Some activities worked better than others, but with the activities changed in nature regularly was enough to keep the students engaged. The variety was an overriding factor in this curriculum; no matter how well an activity was faring, the four quadrants had to be covered in one lesson. The teacher who implements a principled eclecticism lesson plan needs to be willing to change activities quickly, as well as being willing to experiment and implement new teaching methods not usually encountered or used in the classroom. The teacher needs to be open to new ideas and ways of doing things in the classroom (Alharbi, 2016; Cushing-Leubner & Bigelow, 2014; Bergeron, 2004).

Apart from mixed activities in the classroom, collective active learning contributed to the success of the curriculum and students responded positively to it.

We found that group work was imperative to quality learning using the principled eclecticism methodology. Students were able to reinforce and review knowledge. It enabled students to participate in classroom activities actively—it was more difficult to remain a passive learner in a team of four students as opposed to a class of 40. It shifted the focus from the teacher to peers. It facilitated child-centered learning, as decreed by Thailand's national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008). There was more scope for discovery and peer co-operation in that process of discovery. It created an identity for students, and these positive qualities have been the groundwork for numerous textbooks and research papers (Partridge & Eamoraphan, 2015; McKeachie & Svinicki, 2013; Bonebright, 2009).

Teams facilitated competition as well. Teams competed for points and, ultimately, a prize at the end of the 20 hours of teaching. The prize, large or small, appeared to be largely irrelevant. Students were more concerned with competing for that extra point or two for the glory of their team. One of the most crucial aspects of this step was assigning points to keep the competition alive. A points table was clearly seen in the classroom. The names of the teams were written on it, along with the number of points they have. It gave students the incentive to learn and digest knowledge for the sake of their peers and the glory of their team (Maltby et al., 1995).

Group work also enabled weaker students to be helped by the better ones. This is supported by research both inside Thailand and externally (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Legenhausen, 2010; Forman, 2008; Storch, 2007). When collaborative learning was introduced to grammar learning, students were much more responsive. Throughout the course, there were quizzes given to students. In the beginning, results were not spectacular. After two quizzes, we put the students into groups of four and made them do the quiz as a collaborative effort. The idea was for students to help each other to spell words. Once the group test was completed, the students then had to do the quiz on their own. Results markedly improved on their spelling quizzes, owing to the help of the group just prior to the quiz. This methodology was particularly helpful for lower-level students, who, when conferring with their peers before having to present before the class or work on their own, felt a boost in their confidence (Hue, 2010).

Although group work was important, it was always accompanied by constant encouragement. Lower-level students were actively praised throughout this research. A point was made to deliberately encourage lower-level students, or single them out to perform simple tasks, such as handing out papers or keeping scores. At the end of each day, one student was awarded a medal for his or her contribution to the class. It was a reward for a lower-level student who seemed to be making an effort. This positive reinforcement made a difference to students' attention to the tasks in hand, in-class participation, and, ultimately, their test scores, closing the gap between the weakest and strongest student scores. The work in behaviorism holds that by adding a reinforcement stimulus following a behavior, it is likely that behavior will occur again in the future, thus strengthening the behavior or response (Skinner, 1977). Positive reinforcement, particularly when combined with the prospect of receiving a point score for better behavior, had a significant effect on short-term memory (Sattar, 2019; Deesri, 2002).

These three areas — eclectic methods, group work, and constant encouragement — were the basis

for significant change in attitude towards the English language.

As discovered from initial student interviews, there was a general feeling among the students that the subject of English was dull, difficult, and "beyond their ability." This changed when students were constantly told that it did not matter if they were right or wrong in their answers, as long as they attempted to speak. The fear of making mistakes appeared to be a major worry for the students, especially in front of their peers (Alamri & Fawzi, 2016; Khamprathed, 2012). In this research, from day one, it was made clear that the students could make as many mistakes as they wished. Students appeared to be particularly enamored of this, reducing feelings of anxiety towards the language, while becoming more receptive to being corrected. Although students may have initially felt embarrassed and nervous, ultimately, they were not angry about being corrected, which suggested students understood the importance of being corrected rather than the necessity to be speaking correctly all the time (Alamri & Fawzi, 2016).

There was a clear difference in attitude in the students as a whole when comparing their opinions before and after learning. Students clearly took to the more entertaining and physical aspects of the curriculum, even expressing a strong desire to continue their studies.

Much of this attitudinal change can be attributed to our conscious decision to create a safe zone within the classroom where students were not penalized for making mistakes, and at the same time, it promoted positive attitudes in a non-threatening classroom, which eventually led to less learning anxiety in students (Hue, 2010).

It was imperative that the principled eclectism lesson plan took place in a safe classroom. The teacher had to approach the students in a supportive manner, always praising, and providing incentives to students as has been covered in other research (Akkakoson, 2016; Hue, 2010).

We made it clear that to progress in English, students had to make mistakes as opposed to being afraid of them. Students could not be humiliated by other students (or worse, the teacher) for making a mistake. It was only when a student felt safe in the classroom environment that they would gather the confidence to speak (Skinner, 1977; Sattar, 2018). Mistakes had to be encouraged and explained as a means for becoming more proficient. A student making mistakes was a student on the path to understanding, as opposed to a student who dared not do anything with their second language for fear of making mistakes. There had to be less emphasis on correction and more emphasis on building confidence (Marius, 2020; Lin, 2019; Akkakoson, 2016).

The correction had to be done in the most constructive and positive way possible. It had to focus on the group rather than a single person. In that way, no student felt singled out or threatened, and other group or class members could shoulder the blame (Nimmannit, 1998). This correction was always positive. In this research, the teacher thanked students for mispronouncing something or saying the wrong sentence construction because it afforded an opportunity for everybody in the classroom to correct themselves. This research found that this type of positive correction, using humor and light-heartedness and praise in a safe environment, worked extremely well and helped change their attitude towards English via observation of the students. The mistake turned into a celebration of learning achievement, which led to attitudinal change.

This role of the teacher — as benign and friendly corrector — is backed up by a Thai study of student attitudes towards English, which found that even though learning English invariably takes place in a formal educational setting with evaluation, instructors needed to try their best to make the learning experience less nerve-wracking, such as less-stressful error correction, relaxation activities, and being very supportive (Gkonou et al., 2017; Akkakoson, 2016). As well, the teacher should be concerned with creating an appropriate classroom environment for error correction (Thamnu, 2017).

Conclusion

This research's objectives were fulfilled, demonstrating that principled eclecticism was an excellent tool to be used in the classroom to facilitate better learning achievements and in improving poor attitudes towards English.

Rather than teaching via rote or simply the rules of grammar, these two aspects of language learning can be enhanced for better learning achievements if teachers adopted a more "mix and match" philosophy towards their teaching methodology. By breaking the

classroom into smaller groups, students became more engaged and active in their learning. When students were aware that their mistakes were not hindering learning, they appeared to become more open to learning the language.

Although the school was located in a remote rural area of Thailand, teaching with the principled eclecticism methodology could be applied anywhere, rural or urban, and in all socioeconomic levels. It requires acceptance by Thai teachers of various teaching methods and willingness to adopt them. The major challenge in this situation is getting schools, often mired in bureaucracy, to adopt this policy.

The principled eclecticism method of teaching is not only challenged by teacher attitudes and school bureaucracy. Students themselves live in poor socioeconomic areas and often do not prioritize English. With principled eclecticism, however, students can improve their skills and foster more positive attitudes towards English.

Policy shapers, local government, and most importantly, the central Ministry of Education in Thailand need to be cognizant of this way of teaching and actively encourage it to be used in the classroom. Without such support, it would be difficult to implement. The national curriculum should be revised so that there can be more scope for eclecticism shaped by local communities, so that the educational experience is more focused on the needs of, and adapted to, students, such as the children of itinerant farmers in Kalasin. The needs of the Kalasin students are not necessarily the same needs of students in other parts of Thailand, which is why the national curriculum needs to be localized to a greater extent to what it is now. This localization, answering the needs of specific communities, combined with an eclectic approach, could enhance the English language learning experience in Thailand. With a greater fluency rate, Thailand could become a more viable and efficient competitor on the international stage.

Despite principled eclecticism in this research having positive results in both learning and attitudes, there were limitations. The research was carried out in just one small school in Kalasin. If implemented in other parts of the country, learning achievements may not be the same.

This is not just limited to geographical location. This method of teaching was limited to English language learning. It would be interesting to research learning achievements in other subjects, such as social science or sciences.

Because this research targeted lower-level students only, outcomes may be different if the principled eclecticism model was implemented with students with better learning achievements.

An eclectic nature of a curriculum, based on principled eclecticism, could be incorporated in any future development of Thailand's National Core Curriculum, which is currently in the process of being overhauled.

Future research could expand sample populations to include high school students, and even kindergarten and early childhood learning curricula. This research touched on the fact that many lower-level students in rural areas were not living with both parents. They were being raised by grandparents or single parents. Further research could be performed on ways to increase motivation and enthusiasm in learning at home as well as at school, and not just in language subjects. Research where families were educated on how to encourage their children to search for knowledge, along with a motivation to complete learning tasks, could have national ramifications.

As Thailand moves into the mid-21st century, the country needs to remain a viable competitor on the world stage. English is the international means of communication, and this should be a skill not belonging solely to the country's elite, but to all socioeconomic strata so that the entire population has the opportunity to develop. Although people of lower socioeconomic status in the rural regions of Thailand do not need to use English on a daily basis, students there should at least be given the opportunity and choice to be fluent in the language for their personal and economic growth.

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Declaration of Ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Ethical clearance

This research was approved by our institution.

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