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Re-Thinking Language and Culture in Education for Thai Schools: Case Studies of Myanmar Migrant Students in Public Schools in Thailand

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Abstract

The study aims to explore an approach for Thai schools to promote linguistic and cultural diversity as an educational resource in the community for both Thai mainstream students and ethnic minority students. Ethnographic investigation is used to examine teaching and learning in Thai schools including two schools with a mainstream student concentration and a school with Myanmar ethnic student concentration.

Results indicate that linguistic and cultural diversities are not promoted in Thai schools. The public schools still emphasize the mainstream value of Thai-only medium and high status of English as a foreign language. However, ethnic minority languages in the community are not much valued. The public schools do not recognize that ethnic minority languages and culture in their communities are an educational resource for both groups of students. The ethnic students are not encouraged to speak their native language in Thai schools. In addition, the insufficient knowledge in bilingual practice and the lack of bilingual resource contribute to a monolingual education. Several issues found in this ethnographic research are underrepresented in previous bilingual research.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that a language policy for education in terms of a medium of instruction needs to be reconsidered to promote linguistic and cultural diversity of the ASEAN community. More importantly, to promote an understanding of cultural diversity, regional understanding and working in harmony in the region, language education should be redesigned to emphasize the aspect of multilingual competence.

Key Words: Language and culture in education, Myanmar migrant students, Public schools in Thailand

Introduction

Language and culture in education need to be taken into consideration when student populations speak a first language that differs from the school language. Linguistic barriers can reduce their chances of studying in schools or comprehending class instruction through second language medium. Most public schools in Thailand allow only the national language as a medium of instruction for all students in order to promote national identity. However, in the age of globalization and ASEAN becoming one community, it is necessary to re-think language and culture in education in Thai public schools. Linguistic and cultural environment in schools are expected to support the learning of all student populations including not only Thai mainstream students, but also non-Thai and students of various ethnic backgrounds.

Literature Review

Language Policy

Language policy is a means to promote national identities in many countries including Thailand. A language policy that only values the national language while devaluing minority languages, does not promote linguistic and cultural diversities. Thailand has almost 80 minority languages spoken in the country, but Thai (Standard Thai) is the only language accepted as an official national language (Rappa & Wee, 2006). The Thai national language policy has had a significant impact on the existence of minority languages and ethnic languages in the country.

National language policy in Thailand has long been used to strengthen Thai national identity. In addition, the policy results in assimilating other languages and cultures which have been practiced until now. Therefore, regional languages and minority languages other than Standard Thai are not allowed to be used as a medium of instruction in all educational levels in Thai public schools. The loss of language and cultural identity has occurred in some minority and ethnic groups due to this assimilation policy. When mother languages are not allowed to be spoken in schools, it can be expected that younger generations of some minorities become Thai monolingual speakers who are unable to speak the language of their parents.

Language in Education

Language of instruction in schools has significant effects on academic achievement, especially for ethnic minority students whose mother language (first language) is different from the language used at school for instruction. A language policy that prohibits other minority languages for the medium of instruction in public schools has shown to negatively impact literacy development among linguistic minorities in Thailand. Ethnography of education in immigrant children shows that these children encounter many more learning difficulties than the children of mainstream society because of the language barrier and insufficient academic background (Vidali & Adams, 2006).

School language proficiency and learning experiences are critical for learning achievement. However, immigrant children often lack academic experience in schools at their primary years and are unable to read or write in their mother languages which effects high order of thinking skills and literacy in school language (Adams & Shambleau, 2006). The fact that close to 80 minority languages are spoken in Thailand and half of the Thai school population in Thai schools are not native Thai speakers means the students of ethnic minorities have to study at school through a second language medium.

Kosonen (2008) and Smalley (1994) found that the low proficiency in second language or school language among ethnic minority students tend to cause the significant problems in their

education. According to the researchers, many linguistic minority students have difficulty in understanding instructions in Thai as early as their primary school years. This comprehension problem results in low academic achievement, grade repetition, and dropping out from schools. The survey of ethnic minorities in remote areas in Thailand in 2006 shows that these children have low proficiency in Thai and do not comprehend the class instruction in Thai as much as native-Thai students do (Sitragool, Petcharungsa, & Chouenon, 2009). Consistent with the survey findings, the Office of Basic Education of Thailand investigated schools along the country's borders and found that students and teachers speak different languages and the teachers' instruction are incomprehensible for the students (Sitragool et. al, 2009).

Literacy development in first language and school language are important for academic success. However educators who lack awareness of learner diversities and the importance of first languages do not promote literacy in Thai or in mother languages for these students. The annual standardized tests conducted by national testing institutions show that the students have low achievement in both literacy and content subjects. This suggests that language in education should be taken in to consideration. According to Kosonen and Young (2009), mother tongue-based education is one approach for linguistic minority children. However, this language education is still a new concept for schools in South East Asia.

Immigration and immigrant children education

Thailand has seen a high influx of immigrant workers from ASEAN countries, especially Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos to meet the critical labor shortage in certain industries in the country. Immigrant workers and their families are becoming a new population which is increasing rapidly in Thailand. Adams and Kirowa (2006) point out that more than half of the immigrants are children. These researchers suggest that educators working with immigrant children should be made aware of their difficulties living in a new society. As immigrant children are becoming a new population in Thai schools, educators may face new challenges; more over the education system needs to be adjusted.

Diversity in languages and cultures, plus these school population changes raise the question of language in education policy, and the potential to promote multicultural and multilingual education to best suit Thailand and ASEAN countries. For a qualified education process to take place, it is necessary that schools, teachers, and school personnel become more flexible. More importantly, there is a need for critical change in the teacher's curriculum. This change is important if teachers are expected to provide teaching service with knowledge, skills, attitude, and a belief that all children deserve and have right to education with quality.

Myanmar children education in Thailand

The number of Myanmar children population in Thailand is unidentified due to the undocumented immigrant children. This causes the problem of educational management for this group of children. Education is one means for developing immigrant children so that they have knowledge and healthy life skills (Vungsiriphisal, 2010). In 1992, the Ministry of Education allowed immigrant children to study in Thai schools but at that time there were only 20 Myanmar children in Thai schools (Muangmee, 2005). It is estimated that less than 10 percent of registered immigrant children study in Thai schools (Vungsiriphisal, 2010).

This number is consistent with ethnography research conducted by Phonlabutra (2011) concerning Myanmar children education in Phetchaburi province. The researcher found that less than 10 percent of the children registered in small public schools. Although some immigrant

children in Samut Sakhon province, a region with the largest population of Myanmar workers in Thailand, are able to be educated from non-formal education, religious institutions, the number of immigrant student is relatively low compared to Myanmar children population in Thailand (Amaraphibal & Worasaen, 2010).

The study

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Rationale of the study

ASEAN countries will officially become one community in December 2015. It is necessary for Thailand to prepare schools and school personnel to provide a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning environment for a diverse student population. This is a pioneer study aimed at re-thinking language and culture in education in Thai schools for ethnic minority and immigrant students.

Objectives

- 1) To explore learning and teaching in Thai public schools including a school with a predominately Thai population and a school with a predominately ethnic student population in the Samut Sakhon province
- 2) To find an approach for Thai public schools to promote multicultural and multilingual environment for teaching and learning

Method

This study is qualitative. Data collection is conducted through observations in schools and classrooms, in-depth interviews, and documents and student works collection.

Research context

Samut Sakhon has the highest population of Myanmar migrant workers. The province's main product is seafood. There are many frozen seafood export companies in this province. The industries have been watched by international organizations that are concerned with the quality of the laborers' life and child labor. To protect the industries' reputation, some companies help promote the education for immigrant children. The research schools are located in Mon ethnic communities (ethnic minorities from Myanmar). Both schools were former Buddhist temple schools and are located in temple compounds.

The participants

Participants for this study were selected from reliable sources and on voluntary basis. The informants include the following groups.

- 1) School administrators
- 2) School teachers
- 3) Immigrant students
- 4) NGO staff

Data collection and data analysis

This study collects data from a Thai majority school and an ethnic majority school in Samut Sakhon. The analysis method for the study is content analysis. The data for the analysis is documents, interviews, field notes, official record, students' essay, and other relevant material. The data analysis leads to the following themes and sub themes.

Findings

Education Policy

Child Right to Basic Education

Despite the government's guarantee that all children receive basic education at no cost, the number of immigrant children registered in public schools is remarkably small, which may be due to a lack of family readiness to send their children to Thai school (Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, 2014)

According to the Ministry of Education, there were 260,000 immigrant children in Thailand in 2010. However, this number is inconsistent with the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) estimation around 200,000 – 400,000. Moreover number of children who enter public schools in Thailand is just about 20-40 percent (Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, 2014). A researcher team from Dhurakij Pundit University investigated the number of immigrant children in Samut Sakhon province and found that the children age 5-15 are 9,689. However, only 1,500 of them were registered in public schools which, represent 15 percent of the children population who are attending a school (Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, 2014)

Educational personnel's understanding of the policy

Although children rights to basic education are guaranteed by the National Educational Act, the number of immigrant children registered in public schools is remarkably small comparing to the actual child population. It is necessary that school personnel understand the policy and the practice because it affects the access to study in schools of this group of children. The following aspects influence the chance to register immigrant students in public schools.

1) Immigration law and registering in school

Most immigrant children (non-Thai children) do not have official documents such as certificate of residence registration which is necessary for registering in public schools. Some school personnel falsely believe that by registering non-Thai children without official documents is an illegal action against immigration law; therefore, they are likely to refuse to register these children (Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, 2014). In fact, registering non-Thai children, making students record and their academic report, and providing education for them are rightful action which is not against immigration law.

2) Official documents for school registering

In fact, the Ministry of Education allows flexibility in regulations for schools to register non-Thai children, so that the children can have access to school education. Many immigrant children do not have a birth certificate, certificate of residence registration, academic records from previous school, or even parent identification documents. Most Thai schools including schools in Samut Sakhon refuse to register immigrant children without official documents in accordance to this regulation. However, to enhance the opportunity for immigrant children to attend, the Ministry of Education has informed schools that they can get such documents by filling the necessary information in the form provided by the Ministry. The information about the child can be asked from the third party who knows the child (NGO staff or adults who take the

child to the school). Schools in Samut Sakhon that register many Myanmar students follow these flexible regulations.

3) Budget and support from the Ministry of Education

Some school personnel, responsible for student enrollment, are not aware that once a child is registered, Thai or non-Thai, school receives budget for each child includes school supplies, uniforms, school lunch, milk, snack, etc. However, some communities have more immigrant children population than such schools resources are able to accommodate. These schools require extra support from the Ministry of Education otherwise they will keep refusing to register immigrant students. The two schools in this study were very effective in registering the immigrant children into their school system because they have received extra support from their communities and industries in the communities.

4) Teachers, curriculum, and teaching

Typical Thai public schools lack teachers who have experience in teaching non-Thai students who lack Thai language skills. Even though the two schools in this study are successful in promoting education for immigrant children, they insist on accepting only those children who can communicate in Thai. This means that many immigrant children in Samut Sakhon are left behind. The Thai majority school that gets extra support from business sector has preparation class for immigrant students who do not speak Thai. They have to show development in communicative skills and literacy skills before they are admitted into regular classes. At present Thai schools in Samut Sakhon do not have teachers or curriculum to respond to culturally and linguistically different students.

The continuity of implementation

In order to promote education for immigrant students in public school effectively, just the policy is not enough. Schools need practical guidelines and continuous support for implementation. The ethnic majority school was selected as the first school in Samut Sakhon to register non-Thai students. According to Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, the school has implemented Mother tongue-based approach for non-Thai students since the beginning of the policy. However, the school does not practice this approach any more.

School context

The research schools including an ethnic majority school and a Thai majority school are both located in Mon ethnic communities in Samut Sakhon. The Mon ethnic populations in these communities are minorities who migrated from Myanmar many decades ago. This section illustrates how language and culture in education is represented in these schools. The following are the subthemes.

Ethnic majority school

Ethnic majority (Em) school provides both pre-school education and primary education. Each level has 48 and 223 students respectively and 14 teachers. According to the school size standard in Thailand, EM is a small size school. The school locates in Mon ethnic temple's compound. This Buddhist temple was founded by Mon ethnic abbot. Since the government has affirmed child right to basic education, this school was selected as the first school in the province to provide education for non-Thai students.

1) School population change

In the past, EM had more Thai students than non-Thai students. However, because the transportation has been developed very fast recently, most Thai families send their children to study in the city where there are more famous schools. Therefore the school population has changed from a Thai majority school to an ethnic majority school. The ethnic students include Mon, Myanmar, Laotians, Cambodians, and Karens but the highest majority is Mon ethnic.

2) Linguistic and cultural environment in Thai schools

Although more than 90 percent of the students of EM are non-Thai students, mostly Myanmar and Mon, the school environment does not represent language and culture of the students. There are only one welcome board in Myanmar and a small piece of wood written in color campaigning for cleaning teeth and hands. All of the school information in the school campus is written in Thai. This primary school is annually evaluated its quality assurance according to the criteria set by the Ministry of Education. According to the criteria, each school has to choose its own identity and uniqueness that suit its local context.

EM claimed its identity as a school of ethnic costume and language conservation. Students are encouraged to wear their ethnic costumes, instead of the school uniforms on every Tuesday. Therefore, there would be no cultural representation of students' identity for another four school days. For the language, the school gets support from one Myanmar NGO who volunteers to teach a class called "education guidance". In fact, there is no Myanmar language class. The volunteer can teach whatever he thinks the students want to know. Regarding the uniqueness of school, EM chooses to be a "Healthy school" focusing on students' health care and clean environment of the school. One reason for choosing this uniqueness is because of the government's policy to strictly protect the spread of contagious disease that may come from immigrant communities.

3) Curriculum

Despite the fact that more than 90 percent of its students are non-Thai, EM's curriculum does not promote language and culture education for the students. Its curricular subjects are based on core curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education. Even though the Ministry of Education gives free choice for each school to develop its own additional subjects and activities for their student that suit its own local context, EM does not provide any class relating to language and culture of their students.

In order to prepare the school, teachers, and the students for participating in ASEAN community which will officially begin in 2015, EM has provided additional class called "English for communication" for all students of grade 1 to grade 6. This indicates that ethnic languages such as Myanmar and Mon spoken by the students and their families in the community are not recognized as educational resources by the EM school.

Thai majority school

Thai majority (TM) school provides education from pre-school to secondary school level. It is a medium size school. TM has 599 students and 25 teachers. At present, TM is the school that registers the highest number of non-Thai students. The school has about 300 non-Thai students. The ones who have communicative skills in Thai will be registered in the school system and study in regular classes with Thai students. The ones who cannot speak Thai and do not have literacy skills are placed in an academic preparation center located in the school. The preparation center was founded and supported by industries in the community.

1) School population change

TM actively registers non-Thai students because of the low birth rate of Thai children population which results in the decrease in student population enrolling in the school. Therefore the government's policy has the potential to increase the student population from immigrant communities in the province. Moreover, many frozen food companies in the province that rely on immigrant workers, support their workers by collaborating with NGO and the school so that the children can study in Thai schools.

2) Linguistic and cultural environment in Thai schools

Although almost half of the student populations of TM consists of mainly Myanmar children, the school does not have cultural and linguistic representations of students in campus. There is only one welcoming sign written in Myanmar. As the schools register many immigrant children who do not speak Thai nor have an literacy skills, they place the students in an academic preparation center which is sponsored by the industries in the communities. The industries have donated a beautiful modern building and pay for teachers to instruct these students. Therefore, the whole building is used for teaching Thai language and basic reading and writing for this group of children. However, all information and signs in the whole building and every classroom are written in Thai and English.

3) Curriculum

The school's curriculum is based on a core curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education. The immigrant students in grade 1 to 6 study in regular classes just as Thai students do. Until 2013, there were no additional classes or activities that introduce ethnic languages and their cultures. The school began to have Myanmar classes for students in the regular program after the industries hired Myanmar teacher for the school in 2014. The school has made a clear statement of its vision as a school of opportunity for learning and has accomplished this vision in terms of the number of immigrant students in the school.

Different from immigrant students in school system who study in regular classes, the students in an academic preparation center are taught by the school made curriculum. In addition, there is no official school curriculum for the center. The curriculum for the students in this center depends on how teachers in the center apply the pre-school and grade 1 curriculum to suit the students in the center.

Teachers

Ethnic majority school

1) Role and experience

Teachers at EM have faced a decrease in student population at their school. For this reason, they actively inform the employers of immigrant workers about the benefits of children attending opportunities in school. Experienced teachers understand the policy and successfully apply to suit their school context. However, just registering the immigrant children is not sufficient because if the students quit the school in few days, it hence wasting school supplies and uniforms provided by the government. Therefore, experienced teachers must be properly informed of the practice by the third parties (unauthorized learning centers) who take the students to register at school in order to receive the government aid for their own sake.

2) Teaching

The school used to have a preparation class for non-Thai students which was cancelled in 2014. Since then, the children are placed in a pre-school level or grade 1 appropriate to their age. The school does not place non-Thai children in regular classes above grade 1 if a student does not have previous academic records. For pre-school children, the school hires a Myanmar

teaching assistant to help with communication as Thai teachers do not speak Myanmar. The following subthemes concerning teaching non-Thai students are from in-depth interviews with several teachers in the school.

A. No preparatory class

The teachers think that it is a waste of time to keep children in a preparatory class for a year instead of placing them in regular classes immediately. This is because the characteristics of non-Thai children have changed from the past. They are mostly Thai born ethnic children. Although Thai is not their mother language, they can communicate in Thai and they start learning from kindergarten or grade 1 at school. For newly arrived immigrant children, teachers adapt their teaching styles by slowing down their speech, repeating, asking peers who speak the same mother language to translate what the students do not understand. Also, from the teachers' experience, non-Thai students acquire school language by playing with their Thai friends in class and on school campus. This helps them in developing communicative skills in Thai.

B. Teaching content in Thai

Previous research in bilingual education and immigrant education found that students who speak a language that is different from the school language tend to show low academic achievement due to language barriers and academic readiness or background knowledge. However, teachers in the schools who teach all content in Thai for non-Thai students report that they do not experience this problem. This is because the students have to start from kindergarten or grade 1 and most new immigrant children have already had academic readiness from Myanmar. Some of them almost finished primary school or even finished primary school in Myanmar before they migrated to Thailand. Therefore, the students are much more mature than Thai students at the same grade level and tend to perform as well as, or even better in almost every curricular subjects.

C. Teaching for Thai educational system

Even though the school has more non-Thai students than Thai students, the school's performance is evaluated by same standard like other schools without immigrant students, such as quality assurance and students' achievements in several standardized tests etc. Therefore, teaching in this school is heavily focused in Thai literacy and core curricular subjects to meet the standard. Ethnic language and culture has a limited role in this school except when it comes to presenting ethnic costumes. The teachers do not perceive that language and culture of students are a valuable resource in the classroom. They think that non-Thai students can learn their mother language and their culture at home, or at an ethnic learning center in their neighbor that tends to be organized by a NGO. It appears that many of these students are becoming Thai monolingual speakers who are unable to communicate in their mother tongue.

D. Myanmar volunteer teacher

As Myanmar language and culture has no role in the school, the Myanmar volunteer teacher is asked to teach in counseling activity classes. As the class is not language class, the Myanmar volunteer does not focus on teaching language proficiency or literacy, but rather is expected to help in counseling the students in various topics. The interview revealed that some students frequently ask for the meaning of Thai words they do not fully understand, or the words that do not have equivalent meaning in Thai and Myanmar. Several topics in this class include life skills, child rights, Thai manners, future careers, dos, and don'ts in Thai culture, or anything the students would like to know.

3) Thai teachers' attitude toward non-Thai students

A. Children from caring families

Thai teachers report that they have a positive attitude toward ethnic students, especially to those families whose care contributes to the well-being of the child. The teachers in EM point out that due to a fear of contacting diseases, some Thai families are afraid to enroll their children in a school with non-Thai children. However, the teachers explain that the non-Thai students from labor families are well taken care because they live with both parents. Not all Myanmar workers can afford sending their children to Thai schools, but the ones who can; they highly value education for their children. Typical Myanmar families are serious in home discipline and the child well-being. On the contrary, most Thai students in the school have divorced parents and live with their grandparents or other relatives. Therefore, some of them may not receive sufficient caring comparing to non-Thai children taken care by both parents.

B. Culture for success in Thai school

Most non-Thai students are Mon ethnic and Myanmar who have strong beliefs in Buddhism. Their Buddhism culture is highly respected by the school and Thai community. Teachers believe that all good nature of the students are influenced by their Buddhistic culture including being polite and respectful to teachers, humbleness, kindness, hardworking, and service minded. These characteristics are what Thai teachers expect from students. Teachers agree that the non-Thai students meet their expectations which helps the students succeed in learning in a Thai school, despite the linguistic barriers.

C. No discrimination and assimilation

Teachers in EM see that non-Thai students are like Thai students in terms of appearance and culture in general. Although they claim that they treat non-Thai students similarly to Thai students, the claim lies in contrast with the national language policy and school policy that cause ethnic students more difficulties for being successful due to their background. As the teachers do not see any differences, they do not recognize that linguistic and cultural diversities the students have can be rich resource for learning for both non-Thai and Thai students.

Teachers believe that the ethnic students have already been assimilated into Thai lifestyle and the only differences are ethnic costume and ethnic food. They point out that the Mon ethnic community around the school has already been assimilated into Thai society for a long time. Today, there is a shortage in Mon ethnic people who can transfer Mon cultural heritage to younger generations. Unfortunately, young generations of Mon ethnic speak less Mon and become Thai monolingual. However, teachers comment may not reflect reality. Ethnic families have been struggling in maintaining their ethnic identities not just ethnic costume and ethnic food. Moreover, the fact that ethnic students become Thai monolingual does not mean that they fully assimilate into Thai mainstream society.

Thai majority school

1) Active Role in collaborating with private sector and the community

TM is the only public school in the province that has an academic preparation center for immigrant students. The school administrator and teachers think that the preparation center is necessary because there are more immigrant children than school facilities and teaching staff can support. When the number of the students increases to a few hundred, but the number of teachers are the same as every year, this results in large classes. Placing the immigrant students who have limited communicative skills in Thai and no academic readiness in the same class with Thai students may not help them learn, especially in a large class.

Therefore, the teachers have to take an active role in collaborating with private sectors for a large sum of donation for building a preparation center and salary for 6 teachers. All of these

expenses are beyond the budget provided by the Ministry of Education. Because of the government policy of children rights to basic education, no public school is allowed to reject immigrant children, but not all schools actively welcome them especially big name schools in the city. Therefore, most immigrant students enrolled in small temple schools without sufficient facilities and teachers. Teachers in TM are very successful in working with big companies for the financial support, and collaborating with NGO in enhancing opportunity for learning among immigrant children.

2) Teaching

A. Teaching in preparatory class

The immigrant students in an academic preparatory center have significant differences in terms of Thai language proficiency, academic readiness, and student ages. This center is for preparing them to be able to communicate in a Thai class, academic readiness for grade 1, and socialization in a Thai school. Students are divided into 3 classes based on their Thai proficiency, academic readiness, and age. There are different ages between 6 to 15 years old. After one year in the center, the students will be tested if they are ready to transfer into regular program starting from grade 1 of the school system. The center does not have its own curriculum, so the teachers apply kindergarten and grade 1 curriculum for teaching literacy and content subjects. Teaching literacy for beginning level in these classes focuses on words sound, spelling, reading, and writing. The teaching method based on Thai native speaker model is very challenging for ethnic students, especially Myanmar and Mon speakers. Thai is a tone language full with vowels and consonants. These components differentiate word meanings. The immigrant students are struggling with the literacy lesson, partly because of the influence of their mother languages. The teachers found that their literacy development is very slow for several reasons. First, the students cannot differentiate sounds which results in word misunderstanding and misspelling. Second, their parents cannot help with their homework as they cannot read and write in Thai. Last but not least is that they learn by copying what the teachers write on whiteboard as the center does not have textbooks. The teachers suggest that teaching in this class is still ineffective for several reasons. They need curriculum, textbooks, material, and media that support the learning for the immigrant students in the preparatory class.

B. Teaching in regular class

Teachers said that teaching in regular program, classes that mixed between Thai and non-Thai students and classes exclusively for non-Thai students, are not different. They use the same teaching method. However, they have awareness that non-Thai students are not native Thai speakers, therefore teachers need to effectively communicate with the students and regularly check their understanding of the content. The problems about tones mispronounce and words misspelling still exist but they do not hinder content learning. The longer years the students are in the school system, the better academic achievement they have. Most teachers agree that their academic performances are equally well or even better than some Thai students.

The teachers believe that the effective of teaching starts from accepting the fact that each individual student may have different level of academic readiness and skills. Then, teachers have to promote academic development in each students based on their needs. This teaching style can help non-Thai students who speak first language different from school language gradually develop their literacy in Thai. However, the words mispronounce and misspelling problem still exists and need the right instruction.

According to the class observations, teaching a small class size actually affects how teachers interact and pay attention to each individual student. The higher grade, the less non-Thai students are in classroom. Some of them quit school due to several reasons such as financial issue of their families. For example, fifth grade class has only 16 non-Thai students. Most of them are born in Thailand and their Thai proficiencies are almost native level with Myanmar accent. The homeroom teacher of this class believes that her non-Thai students will perform well in Ordinary National Educational Tests (ONET) because they are older than typical Thai 5th graders, they learn fast, and they work hard.

3) Teacher attitude

A. Learning culture and family support

All teachers in TM have positive attitudes for their non-Thai students. Despite the fact that the non-Thai students in this school have linguistic barrier but teachers think that they have academic readiness because of their hard working culture. Teachers believe that working hard and being responsible for school work are valued in Myanmar family. Also, there are many reasons why the non-Thai students have good academic achievement. For example, families' support, their maturity which is a few years higher than Thai students in the same class, and their understanding of the value of education and opportunity to study in the school.

B. Respectful culture for success in Thai school

The non-Thai students are highly admired in several cultural aspects by the teachers which make them progress successfully in Thai school. Thai teachers, especially teachers who teach in a temple school influenced by Buddhism culture, expect students to be polite, humble, kind, and being considerate person. The teachers at TM agree that their non-Thai students, especially Mon ethnic and Myanmar students meet their expectations.

As the school was a temple school before being affiliated with the Ministry of Education, the school always supports the temple in all ceremonies, and cultural events. The school can rely on Mon and Myanmar students' service. They actively help in preparing the ceremonies, welcoming the guests, serving beverages, and cleaning after the ceremonies or events. They do not hesitate to serve even in their weekends. Teachers admire that they have strong belief in Buddhism, their service mind, and sense of responsibility on all task due to their maturity.

C. No discrimination and assimilation

Although the teachers admire several cultural values of the students, they don't perceive that the ethnic students have linguistic and cultural resource worth for learning in school. In fact, they think that assimilating the students without discrimination is an effective way to help them live and study in the community with less resistance from Thai local people and reduce fights between Thai and ethnic students. Teachers see Thai proficiency with Thai accent as an indicator of assimilation which the students still do not completely assimilate. Therefore, mother tongue and school language have different roles. Thai is for learning at school and mother tongue is for communication at home.

Students

Immigrant students in both schools are only a small percentage of immigrant children population in Samut Sakhon. They are fortunate ones selected to study in Thai public schools. Although all immigrant children have right to basic education in Thai public schools, but not everyone is ready to take the opportunity. The following themes result from in-depth interviews with the students and their essays from both schools.

1) Maturity and readiness for learning

The non-Thai students are a few years older than their Thai classmate in the same grade level. Most of them have learning experience in ethnic learning center organized by NGO or their ethnic community which are not authorized by the Ministry of Education. Some of them almost finished their primary education or secondary education from Myanmar before followed their families to Thailand. However, when they register to Thai school, they have to start from grade 1 or in academic preparatory center because of the lack of Thai proficiency and Thai literacy. However, once they can communicate in Thai, they can learn fast because they have academic skills in their mother tongue.

2) Family values

Most immigrant students live with both parents. Although the parents cannot help with homework but home discipline, financial support, and moral support from their families contribute to their success in schools. Myanmar and Mon ethnic students respect their family very much. They appreciate their parents support and want to succeed in school and find good jobs to return their gratitude to their parents.

3) Positive attitude toward learning and school

Although the schools do not include the ethnic language and culture as resources for learning in school curriculum, the schools' promoting the wearing of ethnic costume once a week makes the student feel proud of their ethnics. The students have positive attitude in leaning in the schools and the school environment. They believe that their education in Thai schools will contribute to their good jobs in the future. This is their motivation for studying hard. The students enjoy coming to school every day as they have many friends in school. They love school environment which is clean, beautiful, and safe for them. Many students said that schools are their second home.

4) Teachers are second parents.

The students respect their teachers as much as they respect their parents. They share similar value with Thai people in terms of respecting teachers as second parents. This value and the practice are still ingrained in the ethnic students. Therefore, they study with respectful manner, listen to their teachers, follow the instruction, and work hard to meet their teachers' expectations. This attitude based on their cultural value helps them get good attention and special care from their Thai teachers. Therefore, the students have good learning experience in Thai schools. They said that they love their teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Both ethnic majority schools and Thai majority schools are successfully promoting learning opportunities for immigrant children in Samut Sakhon. The teachers kindly help them develop Thai proficiency, Thai literacy and academic achievement. However, this educational opportunity based on assimilation policy as all ethnic students must study through Thai medium and their mother language and culture have a limited role in their learning at schools, except their ethnic costumes.

The fact that the Thai majority school has limited resources including numbers of teachers and facilities in schools, it tends to register immigrant children who can communicate in Thai and have some academic readiness to regular classes. The students who lack both Thai proficiency and Thai literacy are less likely to be registered into school system but they are more likely to be placed in the preparatory center exclusively for immigrant children.

Although language and culture of the ethnic students have a limited role in their learning in Thai schools, their academic achievement are equally well or even better than some of their

Thai classmates due to several reasons. They are, for example, the immigrant students' previous academic background, their maturity, their family support, the cultural value, their positive attitude toward school learning and teachers, small class size, and Thai teachers attention and caring for them. However, the increasing number of ethnic students population in schools and ethnic communities around the schools do not contribute to multilingual and multicultural education which is essential for ASEAN community.

The following proposals are for promoting linguistic and cultural diversity as an educational resource for both Thai students and ethnic minority students. First, the Ministry of Education, Samut Sakhon Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, and involved organizations should support the schools to provide mother tongue-based education. This approach will be the first step for schools to need to use ethnic language and culture as resources for learning. This direction will promote collaboration between Thai and ethnic communities which is the value of ASEAN community. Next, the schools need support and guidance for developing school curriculum, teaching methods, and appropriate teaching materials that suit the mother-tongue based education for their ethnic population. Last but not least, is that the program evaluation and quality assurance should be different from typical Thai program but emphasize in both mother language and school language development, and academic achievement. This approach can contribute to the development of multilingual and multicultural environment for Thai schools.

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