

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter consists of a summary of the study, a summary of the results, discussion, implications and recommendations to meet the objectives of the study.

#### **Summary of the study**

The study of the attitudes of non-native English speaking students and their parents towards an English immersion program in Chiangmai, Thailand focusing on English language acquisition was conducted in order to find out answers to the following questions:

1. According to the actual experience of non-native English speaking students and parents, to what extent has this immersion program been seen as successful, focusing on English language acquisition?
2. Taken as a whole, is it seen to have been worthwhile to join this immersion program, in terms of high expenses, cultural effects, and so on?
3. Based on these results, how might this immersion program be revised to better meet these students' and parents' expectations.

The study was conducted with all the 63 non-native English speaking students studying in one English immersion program in Chiangmai, Thailand

during the academic year of 2002-2003 and 50 parents of non-native English speaking students by using questionnaire, observation and interview. The results were processed and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows. The outcome of the analysis was displayed by frequency, percentage (%), population mean ( $\mu$ ), population standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) and description.

### **Summary of the results**

Based on the result collected, it was revealed that there were more female non-native English speaking students than male studying in grade 4 to grade 12 in one English immersion program in Chiangmai, Thailand for mostly 3-4 and 7-8 years. The majority of them were Thai.

The students' most important reason for choosing to study in the English immersion program was to gain the opportunity for English language study. Nearly half of the students studied the English language as a subject in school for 1-5 years. About one third of the students had extra lessons and self-study for English language outside of school time with approximately two thirds participating in English activities outside school programs, e.g. summer camps in English speaking countries.

More than half of the parents who answered the questionnaire were females. Nearly three fourths were 41-50 years old. Nearly half of them got bachelor degrees in their education. More than half of them were in business and nearly half of them got 50,000-100,000 baht as their income per month.

## **1. Students' attitudes towards the English immersion program**

### **1.1 Students' general opinion**

Most of them thought that it was good to use the English language for teaching all subjects in school because they got subject content and the English language at the same time. Since English was not their native language, using English in the study helped them pay more attention in class. They accepted that they were happy studying in the immersion program. Nearly three fourths of the students thought that though there were some problems in the points of native language or academic area, they were content with their general educational progress. They believe that getting the English language and being happy in study was important.

### **1.2 Students' self-rating of their abilities**

Students self-rated their English language and native language skills "Better" than those of their peers studying in non-immersion programs. More than half of them found that they were making good progress in the English language. Nearly half of the students thought their native language remained the same. About one third felt they needed improvement in their native language especially in writing skills. For general subjects or academic knowledge, they rated as "Comparable" with mathematics as "Better" than their peers' in non-immersion programs while geography as "Worse" than their peers'. However, their overall knowledge compared to peers' studying in non-immersion was "Better". Over half of the students were satisfied with their academic knowledge because they got enough attention from teachers due to small classes.

### 1.3 Students' cultural aspect

Students most strongly agreed that every culture should be appreciated though they agreed that they were proud of their own culture. They found it beneficial to understand people who speak other languages and understand their way of life, therefore it was worthwhile to spend time discussing the culture of people who speak other languages. They were comfortable playing with friends from different cultures and felt at ease expressing their attitudes on various topics. They also agreed that through the study of the culture of other languages, especially English, they discovered that some aspects of their culture were better than they had thought. More than one third of the students accepted that they experienced different things and people from various cultures, which helped them to have wider thought and more understanding about people. More than one third of the students reported that they gained more confidence in expressing themselves in various aspects. One third of the students accepted that studying in the immersion program had some effects on their behavior because they saw many kinds of behaviors, which were against their culture all the time, therefore they tended to imitate those behaviors unconsciously. However, they tried to decide and choose what they should and should not follow.

For cultural grouping, nearly half of the groups investigated consisted of Thai and Mixed Thai. About two thirds consisted of Thai / Mixed Thai and other non-native English speakers. Nearly two thirds of the groups consisted of Thai / Mixed Thai, other non-native English speakers and native English speakers as well as groups of all other non-native English speakers.

#### **1.4 Students' choice of language spoken**

The results indicated that the students spoke very little English at home. At school, they spoke mostly Thai with Thai friends, some English with foreign friends who could speak Thai and mostly English with foreign friends who could not speak Thai. When they spoke with Thai teachers they seemed to speak Thai, but mostly English with foreign teachers.

For other non-native English speaking students, they generally spoke their native language with friends of the same nationality and tended to speak English with foreign friends. When they spoke with Thai teachers, they usually spoke Thai, and mostly English with foreign teachers.

For students' choice of language spoken in the group, they spoke Thai in Thai groups. When the groups consisted of other non-native English speakers or native English speakers, students spoke Thai with those who spoke Thai and English with those who could not speak Thai.

#### **1.5 Suggestions from students**

Students seemed to think that friends who were English native speakers were helpful to them in the area of the English language learning as well as non-Asian teachers, e.g. European, American, Australia, etc. They also found the multimedia room helpful to them in learning more English.

A significant number of students would like to see students speak English all the time or at least more English to each other. They also suggested that Thai teachers should speak English with students. Nearly half of the students thought that the EFL program should be more advanced. Approximately one third of them thought they got English better in studying

general subjects together with peers in the regular class because in the EFL program, there were too many students and very different levels while others found the EFL program good in helping them understand English better. Less than two thirds thought the academic knowledge should be more intensive and have a higher standard. Some of them suggested that teachers who teach science, mathematics, etc. should be specialists and native speakers or equivalent in order to help students to fully understand. They also suggested that students without enough English to study at their levels should not be accepted because they were boring in the class and there should be more students who are native speakers of English.

## **2. Parents' attitudes towards the English immersion program**

### **2.1 Parents' general opinion**

Most of the parents strongly agreed that having their children study English is the most important part of their education. One third of them were satisfied with the using of English language for teaching all subjects in schools. They thought this helped their children to learn both subject content and the English language at the same time. They thought it was worth the expense to send their children to this immersion program though they agreed that the school fee was too high because they believed that their children would be fluent in English if they continued studying in the program. A significant number of the parents were satisfied with the progress of their children's English language learning in the immersion program.

## **2.2 Parents' rating of their children's ability**

Parents' rated their children's English language as "Better" than that of their peers studying in non-immersion programs. More than half of them found that their children were making good progress in English language especially in listening and speaking and they were satisfied with it. Their rating of their children's native language was "Good" and was "Better" than their peers studying in non-immersion programs. Nearly half of the parents thought their children's native language has no problem while approximate two thirds saw that their children had spelling problems and needed to have extra lessons. Their general or academic knowledge compared to peers studying in non-immersions was perceived by their parents as "Comparable". Over half of the parents were satisfied with their academic knowledge.

## **2.3 Parents' opinion on cultural aspect**

The parents agreed that children adapted well to western culture but still retained their own culture and they had a lot of friends of different nationalities. Some parents agreed that their children were proud of their culture and nation while others argued that their children had lost their own culture. Nearly half of the parents saw that their children's attitudes had been changed positively, e.g. their children had more confidence in expressing themselves in various aspects, they were less shy, and were happy in their study. Two thirds of them found that their children had done many things against their culture. Less than one tenth accepted that studying in the immersion program causes both good and bad effects on their children. The students had more freedom to act out and the parents needed to be careful in giving them advice.

#### 2.4 Suggestions from parents

Parents seemed to think that their children's friends who were native English speakers were helpful to their children in the area of English as well as non-Asian teachers who teach general subjects, like science, mathematics, etc. Multimedia room and EFL program were moderately thought to be helpful to their children's English study. A number of parents thought their children like the program because they were able to understand lessons more than studying in the regular class. Two thirds of the parents felt that they should regularly be informed about the EFL program. They also suggested that good students should not study with very weak ones and there should be a more intensive course for advanced EFL students.

Two thirds of the parents suggested that there should be various activities to help their children use more English in different aspects and speak more English at school. More than half of the parents would like their children to be encouraged to speak only English outside class, others would like teachers to make sure that their children speak only English in the classroom. Some parents suggested that the school should arrange a home stay program having students stay at the native English speaking teacher's house during weekdays or at the native English speaking teacher's hometown during vacation.

Approximately two thirds of them suggested that there should be more subjects for students to choose and the academic standard should be higher. There should be more homework, field trips and useful relevant journals. Some of them suggested that students who were weak in English should be separated so that students with good English could go faster in their academic study. Two thirds of the parents suggested that all teachers should be native English



speakers. They also suggested that there should be more students in each class to make it good for group work and for students' social benefit.

### **3. Comparisons**

#### **3.1 Self-rating of English language skills by early/middle and late immersion students**

(Early/middle immersion students first attended IP under 12 years old and studied in IP for an average of 7.5 years. Late immersion students first attended IP when they were 12 years old or older and studied in IP for an average of 2.7 years)

The early/middle immersion students self-rated their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, as "Good" while the late immersion students rated them as "Average".

#### **3.2 Students' and parents' rating of students' abilities**

Both students and parents rated students' English language as "Good" and native language as also "Good".

For students' general knowledge, English language and native language compared to peers studying in non-immersion programs, both students and parents rated them as "Comparable", "Better" and "Better" respectively. In details, students self-rated their abilities a little better than their parents did.

In conclusion, students and parents' actual experience towards an English immersion program in Chiangmai, Thailand focusing on English language acquisition was found to be more or less in accord with most of the

findings from other research on foreign language immersion programs worldwide.

## **Discussion of the findings**

The findings will be categorized into 4 sections:

1. Significant findings consistent with the related studies
2. Significant finding inconsistent with the related studies
3. Significant findings regarding effects of immersion program on cultures
4. Significant findings needing further investigation

There is interesting information derived from the students' and parents' questionnaires, i.e. students' English language and native language (see table 18.1, p. 64), and students general knowledge, English language and native language compared to those of their peers studying in non-immersion programs (see table 18.2, p. 65), which was used as underlying information in this study. Both students and parents rated all 5 categories of these perceived students' abilities exactly with the same descriptive values. Therefore, this parallel report of the students and parents could imply that the information gotten from the students' and parents' questionnaires was honest and reliable and should be applicable for the following findings:

### **1. Significant findings consistent with the related studies:**

Based on the results derived from all kinds of instruments, it was evident that non-native English speaking students and their parents regarded English language very important in the students' education, e.g. the students' most

important reason for choosing to study in the English immersion program was to gain the opportunity for English language study and the parents believed that having their children study English was the most important part of their children's education. They also thought that the immersion program provided them not only the English language learning but also subject content learning at the same time. All these points of view accord to the responses to the questionnaire asking about English immersion in Hungary that parents enrolled their children in the immersion program so that they could learn a foreign language as well as subjects in English at an advanced level (Duff, 1997).

Both students and parents self-rated students' English language and native language ability as "Better" than their peers studying in non-immersion programs. This is parallel in many other findings, as discussed in the related studies above. For example, Lambert & Tucker (1972) reported that children who were in immersion programs performed as well as or better than their non-immersion peers in second language proficiency. Genesee (1987) reported that the French immersion program in Canada was highly effective in developing an impressive level of foreign language proficiency. Slaughter (1997) showed that students in the immersion programs performed well in Hawaiian (L2) reading assessment. Reixach (1990) discovered that immersion students' achievements in Catalan (L2) were significantly higher than those of their non-immersion counterparts. Dahlberg (1999) indicated that immersion students attained near-native Spanish (L2) proficiency in listening and reading and after 9 years in immersion programs they attained a high degree of fluency in speaking and writing. Tucker & d'Anglejan (1972) claimed that the immersion students were able to read, write, speak, understand, and use English (L1) as well as

youngsters instructed in English in the conventional manner. They can also read, write, speak and understand French (L2) in a way that English students who followed a traditional program of French as a second language never did. Baker (1997) revealed that French immersion children in Canada not only gained a second language, but also extra benefits in English (L1) proficiency. Bjorklund (1997) reported that students in Swedish immersion programs in Finland did not lag behind in their L1 development. In “retelling the story” tests, they produced L2 stories equal in length to L1 stories produced by the non-immersion students. Similar result was also investigated by Grandell (1994). Rubio (1998) referred to recent comparative studies of immersion and non-immersion students in the States that immersion students performed as well as or better than their monolingual counterparts in English language (L1).

For students’ general knowledge compared to peers studying in non-immersion programs, students and parents rated it as “Comparable” though students rated mathematics as “Better” than non-immersion students. There have been a number of research which claimed for the same thing. For example, Johnson and Swain (1997) reported that research on French immersion programs conducted in 1985 found that the immersion students did as well as or better than the non-immersion students in mathematics and English (L1). Five immersion graduates even obtained a tertiary entrance score of 990, the highest possible under the system operating at the time. Downs-Reid (2001) claimed that students in a French immersion program clearly outperformed their non-immersion peers by ranking first in English (L1) reading, writing and mathematics. Baker (1997) found that French immersion students generally performed as well in mathematics and science, history and geography as did

non-immersion children. Rubio (1998) referred to recent comparative studies of immersion and non-immersion in the States which claimed that immersion students perform as well as or better than their monolingual English (L1) peers on all standardized measures of mathematics, science, social studies, and in the English language (L1). Arnau, Boada & Forns (1990) claimed that pupils in Catalan immersion programs achieved the same or even slightly higher results than non-immersion students in academic performance. Arzamendi & Genesee (1997) discovered that Basque immersion programs students scored significantly higher on all tests than students in non-immersion programs. Met & Lorenz (1997) indicated that immersion students generally achieved in subjects studied in the second language at a level equal to, or better than, their non-immersion peers who studied in English (L1). Genesee (1987) reported that French immersion students in Canada met their grade level or above in achievement in English skills (L1) and content subjects. Downs-Reid (2001) consistently showed that foreign language immersion students performed as well as or better in all subjects areas after 5-7 years studying in the program.

However, many students and parents of the English immersion programs in Hungary conveyed some concerns about the academic programs. They feared that students in non-immersion programs were covering more academic content than they were (Duff, 1997). This also reflected in the finding of this study since students and parents both suggested that the academic standard should be higher and that there should be more subjects for the students to choose.

Students accepted that they experienced different people from various cultures, which helped them to have wider views and more understanding about

people. They found it beneficial to understand people who speak other languages and understand their way of life. Therefore it was worthwhile to spend time discussing the culture of people who speak other languages. They reported that they gained more confidence in expressing themselves in various aspects. They had a lot of friends from different nationalities and found themselves comfortable playing with them and felt at ease expressing their attitudes on various topics. Parents also reported that since their children studied in the immersion program, their children's attitudes had been changed positively, e.g. their children had more confidence in expressing themselves in various aspects, they were less shy, and were happy in their study. A similar result is reported by Duff (1997) who suggested that the parents reported in the questionnaire that they enrolled their children in an immersion program so that the child would be able to learn more about the world, expand his or her worldview, enjoy contact with the rest of the world, Europe, or other people in general.

The early/middle immersion students who studied in the immersion program on an average of 7.5 years self-rated their English language skills as better than late immersion students who studied in the immersion program on an average of 2.7 years. This is consistent with what Troike & Modiano, (1975) claimed that research found no significant correlation between the students' scores on second language proficiency and the number of years of formal second language study. However, there was a significant and positive correlation between language proficiency and the degree to which students had been exposed to the target language as a medium of instruction for other school subjects.

Taken as a whole, students and parents were content with their general education progress. Students accepted that they were happy studying in the immersion program. Their parents also thought that it was worth the expense to send their children to the immersion program though they agreed that the school fee was too high. They were satisfied with the progress of their children' English language learning at the time and believed that their children would be fluent in English if they continued studying in the program. This was supported by Johnson & Swain (1997) who suggested that most students were pleased with the immersion program. It was also supported by Genesee (1987) who claimed that immersion programs had been the most interesting innovation in second language education during the last two decades. Reyhner (2003) also supported that to date, immersion methods have proven the most effective method of getting children to learn a new language well enough to carry on a conversation with a native speaker of that language.

## **2. Significant finding inconsistent with the related studies**

It is very interesting to find out that while students emphasized that they should speak only English or at least more English to each other and would like Thai teachers to speak English with them, their choice of the language spoken with friends and in their cultural groups was mostly their native language. It was also evident from the observation that students would generally speak their native language unless their respondents could speak only English, then they would speak English. This might imply that students understand that to speak English is helpful to their learning of English but somehow they choose to speak their native language. This might be, according to some students' report, that

they felt embarrassed to speak English with people of the same nationality and though they would like to speak English, they did not want to do anything different from what the group was doing. Another reason was that others who were better in English might laugh at their mistakes. This implied that students were lack of self-confidence in using the L2 outside class, which is inconsistent with the claims of a number of researchers that students generally reported more self-confidence and lower anxiety in using the second language, and that their comments on the end-of-course questionnaire often indicated greater readiness and determination to use the second language out of class for a variety of purposes (Migneron, & urger, 1986; Burger, Chretien, Gingras, Hauptman, & Migneron, 1984; Humptman, Wesche & Ready, 1988).

### **3. Significant findings regarding effects of the immersion program on culture (see also pp. 87-88)**

Since most of the students in this study were Easterners whose culture is quite different from Westerners, the “owners” of English language and culture that the students were involved with most of the time, further interesting perceived attitudes towards cultural aspects of the students were found in this study. Students agreed that through the study of the culture of other languages, especially English, they discovered that some aspects of their culture were better than they had thought and they strongly agreed that every culture should be appreciated though they agreed that they were proud of their own culture. Their parents also reported that their children adapted well to Western culture but still retained their own culture.



For students' cultural grouping, they tended to group within their own culture. However, there were also a significant number of groups which consisted of students from various cultures. This possibly implies that students should not have any serious cultural problems.

On the other hand, students accepted that studying in the immersion program had some negative effects on their behavior. They tended to follow some kinds of behaviors which were proper in other cultures but not proper in their culture. However, they reported that they tried to decide and choose what they should and should not follow. Their parents also accepted that their children had more freedom to act out and they found that sometimes their children did many things against their culture. It could be possibly concluded that studying in the immersion program causes both good and bad cultural effects on students' attitudes and behavior. Parents need to be intimately and carefully aware of their children's attitudes and behavior concerning cultural aspects in order to shape them into the most culturally appropriate.

#### **4. Significant findings needing further investigation**

It is interesting to find out that early/middle immersion students who first attended the immersion program when they were under 12 years old self-rated their English language skills as better than late immersion students who first attended immersion programs when they were 12 years old or older. However, early/middle immersion students studied in the immersion program on an average of 7.5 years while those in the late immersion studied in the immersion program on an average of 2.7 years. Though Troike & Modiano, (1975), claimed that research found no significant correlation between the

students' scores on second language proficiency and the number of years of formal second language study, but a significant and positive correlation between language proficiency and the degree to which students had been exposed to the target language as a medium of instruction for other school subjects, this result needs further investigation for a more reliable conclusion to be drawn regarding correlation between language proficiency and the age students first attend in the immersion program.

It is also interesting to find out that while students emphasized that they should speak only English or at least more English to each other and would like Thai teachers to speak English with them, their choice of the language spoken with friends and in their cultural groups was mostly their native language. It was also evident from the observation that students would generally speak their native language unless their respondents could speak only English. According to Thai culture, children are not raised to openly express themselves in public. Therefore, it might possibly be assumed that the majority of students who are Thai or are influenced by Thai culture might tend not to openly express that they can speak English in public unless they are instructed to do so since they do speak English in the classroom. However, this needs further investigation regarding correlation between cultures and choice of students' language spoken outside class.

## **Implications**

In response to the questions of the study, the answers based on all the findings discussed above are as follows:

**1. According to the actual experience of non-native English speaking students and parents, to what extent has this immersion program been seen as successful, focusing on the English language acquisition?**

This immersion program has been seen as successful in helping the students acquire the English language as they expected. Their English language skills have been seen to be better than those of their non-immersion peers and keep making progress and their general knowledge also met their grade level (see pp. 84-87).

**2. Taken as a whole, has joining in the immersion program been seen worthwhile in terms of high expenses, cultural effects, and so on?**

According to their reports, both students and parents regarded acquiring English as very important so parents were quite ready to invest a lot of money for what they thought was best for their children's education. For students, since they would like to acquire the English language, they tried their best, despite their immaturity, to adapt themselves to the foreign language as the medium of instruction and try to overcome cultural differences they had to encounter (see pp. 86-92).

**3. Based on these results, how might this immersion program be revised to better meet students' and parents' expectations?**

This immersion program should hire more non-Asian teachers, e.g. European, American, Australian, etc. as well as have more students who are native English speakers enroll in the school because students and parents see that these people are helpful to the English language learning. The multimedia

room should be retained and keep developing for the best use. The EFL program should have fewer students and only one level per class, should be more intensive for advanced EFL students, and parents should regularly be informed about the program.

Teachers who teach science, mathematics, etc. should be specialists and native speakers or equivalent in order to help students to fully understand. Students who are weak in English should be separated so that students with good English could go faster in their academic study. For selective subjects, there should be more variety for the students to choose. There should be more homework, field trips and useful relevant journals for students. Finally there should be more students in each class for the students' social benefit.

From the discussion about the students' choice of language spoken with their friends and in their cultural grouping, it could possibly imply that students are quite ready to speak English but what they need is constant encouragement from friends, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Therefore, the school should try to create various activities to encourage students and teachers to use more English in different aspects and speak more English at school, both inside and outside the classroom. Students without enough English to study at their grade levels should not be accepted or have them prepare themselves with an intensive English course until they reach or near their grade level before acceptance because these students will cause their friends not to speak English with them since they do not have enough communicative competence. If possible, the school should arrange a home stay program having students stay at the native English speaking teacher's house during weekdays or at the native

English speaking teacher's hometown during vacation for the benefits of the students' language learning.

The findings of this study are applicable for students to realize where they are and how to improve themselves in the area of English language acquisition; for parents to realize how far they have come towards fulfillment of their expectations for their children in the area of English language acquisition and in what direction they should better direct their efforts to help their children better acquire the English language; for teachers to become more aware of the attitudes of non-native English speaking students and their parents, in order to improve their teaching strategies and understanding of parents' expectations and students' hopes for outcomes; for administrators to have a better grasp of the attitudes of non-native English speaking students and their parents in order to improve administration and to better support the teachers in helping the students to acquire the English language according to their expectations; and for others in the community to have increased understanding of immersion programs in the area of English language acquisition, for better decision-making regarding their children's education, especially in the English language area.

### **Recommendations for further studies**

The purpose of this study is to investigate one particular English immersion program. Therefore, the specific information derived from this investigation is directly useful for this immersion program to improve itself in order to better satisfy their students' and parents' expectations of the program as well as to provide information for people in the community who are interested in English immersion programs. The study, therefore, would be especially

useful to English immersion programs, which have the same or similar contexts, structure, and nature. However, the results should be able to, more or less, be applied to other foreign immersion programs on a case-by-case basis.

To follow up the finding of this study, further studies on attitudes of early/middle immersion students and their parents towards an English immersion program, attitudes of late immersion students and their parents towards an English immersion program, comparison of attitudes of early/middle immersion students and late immersion students towards an English immersion program, or cultural effects on Thai students studying in an English immersion program should be conducted for the most benefit to the community who are lacking information about immersion programs in Thailand.