

An Investigation of Subject Teachers' Perceptions and Needs of Using English as a Medium of Instruction in order to Improve Students' English Language Proficiency

Wantanee Boonla

Lecturer of Business English Major, Roi Et Rajabhat University

e-mail: Wantanee134@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the subject teachers' perceptions and needs of using English as a medium to strengthen their students' English language proficiency. This research study was conducted at Roi Et Rajabhat University in Thailand with 99 subject teachers who used English in their classrooms. The data was collected through a set of questionnaires in order to gather the subject teachers' perceptions and needs. The results showed that the majority of the subject teachers had positive opinions toward using English as a medium of instruction. Over 90% of the subject teachers agreed that English skills helped their students to improve their subject knowledge. Moreover, over 85% of the subject teachers believed that using English in their classrooms could abundantly benefit for their students. The findings also indicated that the subject teachers concerned about their students' English problems and they tried to contribute positive classroom environment. Finally, the subject teachers expressed that they needed to co-ordinate with English language teachers in order to use English as a medium in their classrooms effectively to improve students' English language proficiency.

Keywords

Subject teachers, English as a medium of instruction, Perception



วารสารวิชาการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏบุรีรัมย์
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การสำรวจความคิดเห็นและความต้องการของอาจารย์ประจำวิชา ต่อการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอนวิชาเพื่อปรับปรุงความสามารถ ทางภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา

วันทนีย์ บุญหล้า

อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏร้อยเอ็ด

อีเมล: Wantanee134@gmail.com

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยนี้คือการศึกษาค้นคว้าความคิดเห็นและความต้องการของอาจารย์ประจำวิชาที่มีต่อการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอนเพื่อนำไปปรับปรุงความสามารถทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา การวิจัยนี้ได้จัดทำขึ้นในมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏร้อยเอ็ด กลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือ อาจารย์ที่มีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอนทั้งหมด 99 คน โดยใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บข้อมูล ผลการวิจัยพบว่าอาจารย์มีความคิดเห็นในทางที่ดีต่อการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอน พบว่ามากกว่าร้อยละ 90 เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่งว่าทักษะภาษาอังกฤษจะช่วยให้นักศึกษาพัฒนาความรู้ในสาขาวิชาที่ตนสอนได้มากกว่าร้อยละ 85 เชื่อว่าการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอนจะเป็นประโยชน์อย่างมากต่อนักศึกษาที่ตนสอน นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าอาจารย์มีความเป็นกังวลและมีความเห็นว่าเป็นหน้าที่ความรับผิดชอบของอาจารย์ผู้สอนในแต่ละรายวิชาในการพัฒนาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา และจากผลสำรวจพบว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความต้องการในการประสานงานกับอาจารย์ในสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อพัฒนาการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอนให้ได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ

อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชา การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสอน ความคิดเห็น



Statement and Significance of the Problems

As it is known that English is important in a growing global phenomenal, English also plays significant roles in the current educational situation (Chang, 2011, Sindkhedkar, 2012). Besides teaching English as a foreign language, it has been the using English as a medium of instruction for academic subjects such as science, mathematics, geography, and medicine (Dearden, 2014). Therefore, teachers, instructors, researchers, and educators try to develop their English language skills in order to upgrade their students' English language skills. Especially for the university students in Thailand, there has been widely promotion for English using as the medium in their major subjects.

In addition, classroom management can affect the students learning performances including English language learning (Evans, 2002). Effective and successful classroom management facilitates students' learning performances (Wang and Walberg, 1991). Once students feel secure, safe, care for, and involved, they can learn well because it provides students' opportunities to socialize with interesting learning contents (Suleman and Hussain, 2014). When teachers provide a comfortable and conductive environment to use English in classrooms, students' achievement could be promoted. Therefore, this research study assesses teachers' perceptions toward classroom management in order to facilitate students' English language learning through using English as a medium of instruction in their classrooms.

English has played an important role in Thai education since it has been taught from the kindergarten to university level (Darasawang, 2007). However, it has been seen that Thais' level of English proficiency is low in comparison with many countries in Asia (e.g. Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore) (Breene, 2016). According to the speech given by the Ministry of University Affairs on March 6, 2000, the average TOEFL scores of Thais are the same as for Mongolians but higher than for North Koreans and Japanese (Wiryachitra, 2002). In order to increase students English language proficiency, English is promoted to be used as the medium for the other subjects' instruction especially in university level. However, subject teachers have several problems in using English as a medium in their classes (Tilahun, 2015).



Global demand for English is continuing to grow (Dearden, 2014). Governments increasingly recognize the importance of English to their economies and societies, and individuals see English as a tool that can help them to fulfill their personal aspirations (Tilahun, 2015). English as a second language in developing countries is considered as an important issue in teaching and learning. The governments in developing countries have been trying to improve their population's English language proficiency by promoting the use of English as a medium in other subjects' instruction (Wesche & Akehan, 2002 and Park, T. S., & Khemngud, E. (n.d.).

There has been much research conducted to study about the English use as the medium in the teachers' instruction in classrooms. The majority of the research focused on the teachers' perceptions towards using English as a medium and using their native language in their classrooms. However, there has not been many research studying the teachers needs and perceptions together about using English as a medium in their classroom in order to develop the students' English language proficiency. The results of Su's study (2006) indicated that using English as an instruction in Taiwanese teachers' classrooms could improve the students' English language skills and academic performances. On the other hands, the data of the interview and observation revealed that teachers faced the difficulties in terms of the large number of students in one class with various levels of English language proficiency and limited teaching hours and resources.

Objectives of the study and research questions

This study aims to assess the subject teacher needs and perceptions toward using English as a medium in order to strengthen the students' English language proficiency at Roi Et Rajabhat University. Thus, the followings are the research questions of this study.

1. What are the subject teacher perceptions toward using English as a medium of instruction in their classroom?
2. How subject teachers think and concern about their students' English language problems to communicate about the subject contents?



3. Are the subject teachers trying to improve their students' English language communication skills by creating effective classroom environment?

4. What are the subject teachers' needs of using English language as the medium of the instruction in order to improve students' English language proficiency?

The results of the study establishes guidelines and gives some information for subject teachers and university management so that there might provide continuous training for the subject teachers in the future. Moreover, the results might remind the subject teachers themselves to be aware of the importance of using English as a medium in their instructions. Finally, there might be some clues for the university administrators for the further plans of the university in order to train the subject teachers to use English as a medium for instruction in their classrooms.

Methodology

This study aimed to explore the subject teachers' perceptions and needs of using English as a medium to strengthen their students' English language proficiency. Therefore, the subject teachers who concerned in this study were randomly chosen in this study. They were asked to answer a set of questionnaire online so they had to log in by their email in order to answer the questionnaire. Thus, each teacher could answer the questionnaires only once. The subjects were screened to take into account in this study by the question asked about their used of English as a medium of instruction in their classrooms. Only the answers from the teachers who used English as a medium in their classrooms were used to calculate in the data analysis session. With this regard, 99 answers from the subject teachers were brought to calculate in this study. **The estimated total number was 308. According to Yamane's** formula of sample size (1967), an acceptable number for a population of 308, with a confidence level of 95%, is 78. In this study, 99 participants answered the questionnaires.



Research instrument

A set questionnaire developed based on previous research about teachers' perceptions toward using English as a medium of instruction and needs analysis. They consisted of two sections. The first section aims to find out the background information of the participants. In the section two, the participants were asked to answer about their perceptions and needs about using English a medium of instruction. In this section, the questionnaires were divided into four parts which concerned about 1) the subject teacher perceptions toward using English as a medium of instruction, 2) subject teachers thoughts over their students' English language, 3) the subject teachers' creation of effective classroom environment, an 4) the subject teachers' needs of using English language as the medium of the instruction. Experts were consulted to ensure the content validity and revisions were made before a trial with a comparable group of 23 participants. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.96731 confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data gained from the questionnaires concerning the perceptions and needs regarding using English as a medium of instruction of participants. Percentages of their responses to the items related to their reaction to the medium of instruction, the problems encountered in terms of the use of English in the classroom, classroom managements, and teachers' needs were calculated.

Findings and Analysis

The results were organized into four sections. In the first section, the subject teachers' perceptions toward using English as a medium in their classrooms were examined. In the second section, the focus was on how the subject teachers concerned with the students' English language problems. In the third section, effective classroom management of the subject teachers was emphasized. In the fourth section, needs of the subject teachers were analyzed.



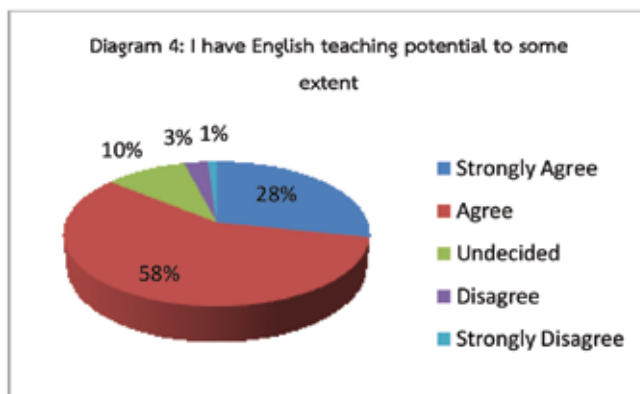
1. Teachers' perceptions toward using English as a medium

The subject teachers were asked to rate on a five point Likert scale the extent of several agreements related to their perceptions of using English as a medium in their classrooms in order to improve students' English language proficiency.

The findings indicated that the majority of the subject teachers presented positive opinions about using English as a medium in their classrooms. As shown in the first diagram, 58.6% strongly agreed and 36.4% agreed that "English language skills would help the learners to improve their subject knowledge".

Similarly, the data shown in diagram 2 indicated the subject teachers' opinions that most of them thought that "If English is used in subject classes, students would benefit a lot". 55.6% of the subject teachers agreed and 30.3% strongly agreed to this item.

With respect to teachers' preparation, the results showed that the subject teachers were willing to use English as a medium in their classrooms even though they had to take more time for the teaching preparation. Most of the teachers 57.6% agreed and 19.2% strongly agreed that they were willing to use English as a medium in their classrooms even though it had to take more time to prepare the lessons and to rehearse using English in the classrooms. There were 16.2% of the subject teachers reported that they undecided to this item. However, there were some teachers expressed that they did not agree to spend more time for the teaching preparation in order to use English as a medium in their classrooms with the number 4.1% was for disagree and 1.1% was for strongly disagree.



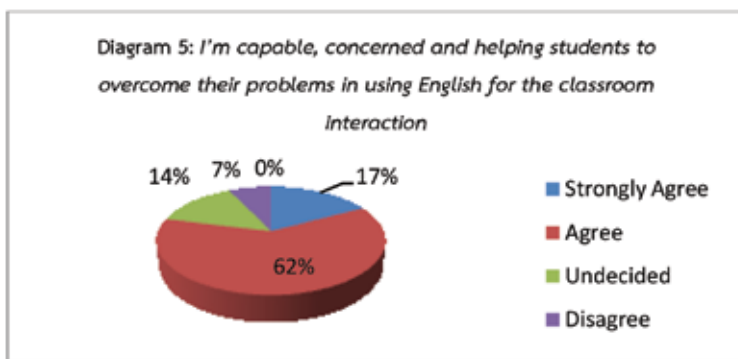


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Diagram 4 showed that the majority of the subject teachers believed that they had English teaching potential to some extent. There were 57.6% of the teachers agreed and 28.3% strongly agreed regarding to this item. Undecided was selected by 10.1% of the subject teachers.

2. How the subject teachers concerned with the students' English language problems

In this section, the subject teachers' responded to the concern over the students English usage problems through the questionnaires.



Overall, the subject teachers felt that they were responsible for students' English language problems. The teachers responded that they agreed that they were concerned and helping students to overcome their problems in using English for the classroom interaction. There were 61.6% of the subject teachers agreed, 17.2% strongly agreed, 14.1% undecided, and 7.1% disagreed.

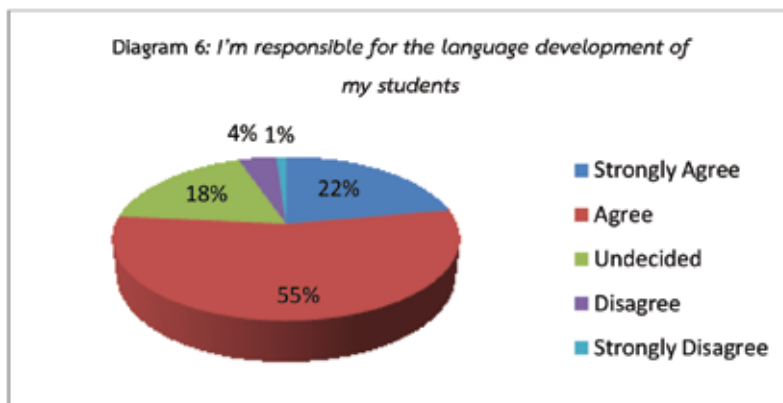
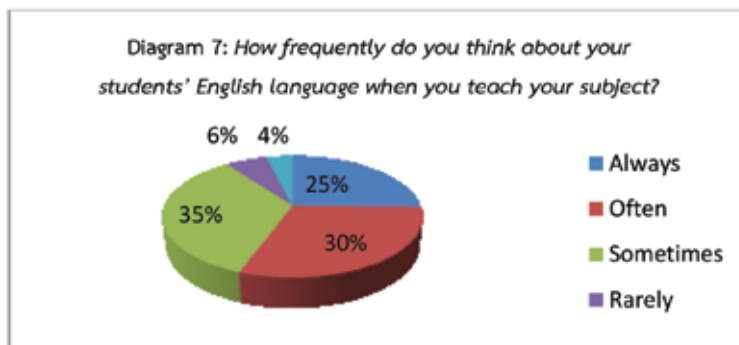


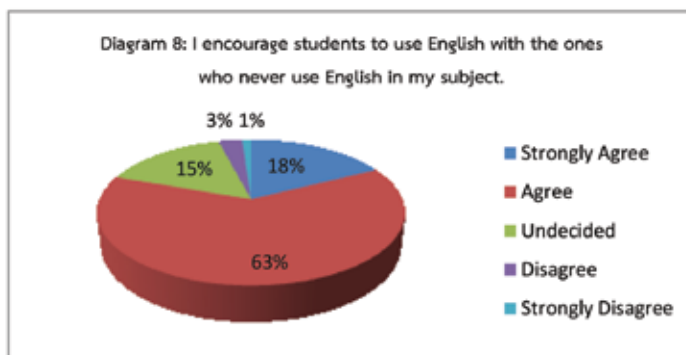
Diagram 6 showed that the subject teachers perceived they were responsible for the language development of their students as shown in the data. They agreed to this item at 54.5% and strongly agreed 22.2%. There were 18.2% of the subject teachers expressed that they undecided. Finally, with the number of 4.2% disagreed and 1.1% strongly disagreed.



Finally, the subject teachers concerned about the students' English language when the teachers used English as a medium in their classrooms. As the teachers responded in the item "How frequently do you think about your students' English language when you teach your subject?", the teachers often concerned about it with 30.3%, always 25.3%, and sometimes 34.3%. There were 6.2% of the teachers rate rarely and 3.9% never concern about their students' English language.

3. Effective classroom management

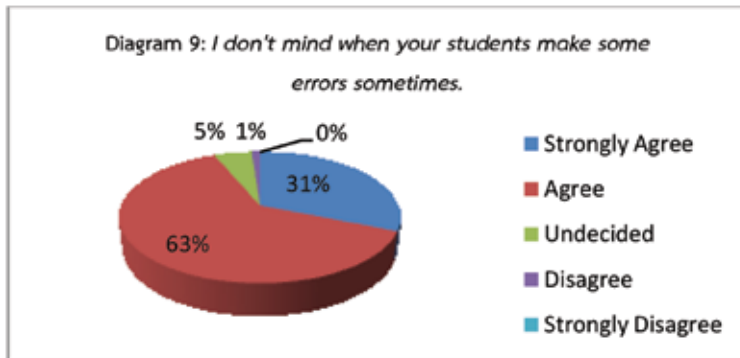
The results of the study indicated that the subject teachers created facilitating positive classroom environment for their students to practice English language in subject classes.





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The results in Diagram 8 showed that 61.1% of the subject teachers agreed and 17.2% strongly agreed that they encouraged students to use English with the ones who never use English in their subjects.



Moreover, the subject teachers expressed that they could accept some students' English errors occurred in the classrooms. There were 62.2% of the subject teachers agreed and 31.1% strongly agreed to this statement. This result indicated the positive environment in their classrooms.

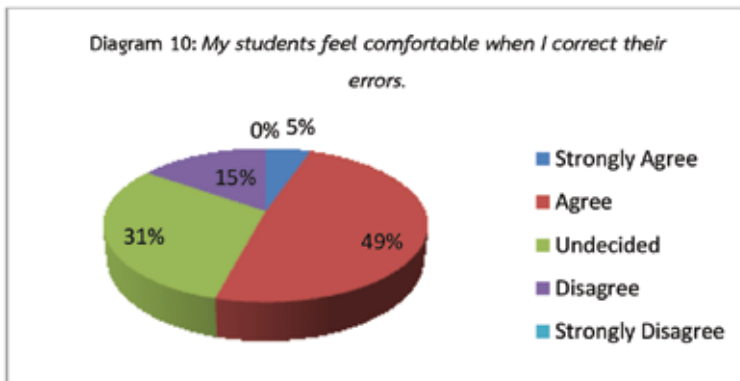


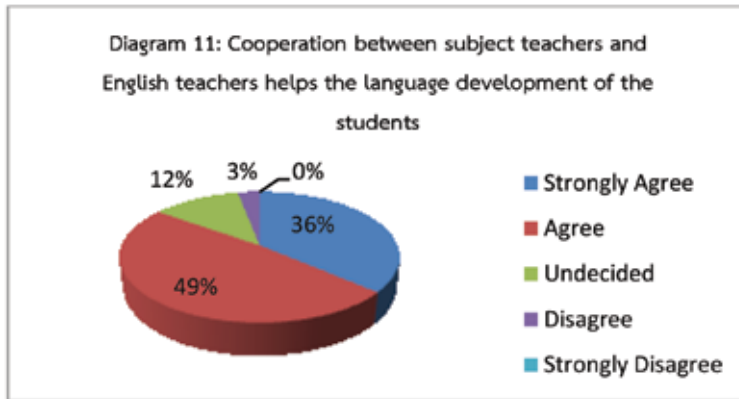
Diagram 10 showed that the majority of the subject teachers expressed that their students felt comfortable when the teachers corrected their errors. There were 48.5% of the subject teachers agreed and 5.3% strongly agreed that their students felt comfortable with the teachers' error corrections. However, it was shown that 30.3% of the subject teachers undecided and 15.2% disagreed.



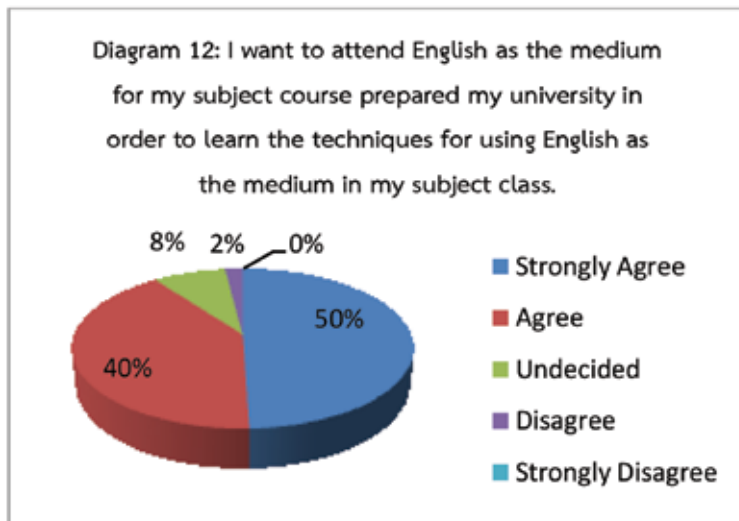
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4. Subject teachers' needs in order to enhance students' English language proficiency.

In order to enhance students' English language proficiency, needs of the subject teachers were explored in this section.



Obviously, the results showed that most of the teachers wanted to cooperate with English teachers to help the language development of the students. There were 48.5% of the subject teachers agreed and 36.4% strongly agreed to this item.





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Diagram 12, the subject teachers wanted to attend English as a medium for their subject courses prepared by their university in order to learn the techniques for using English as a medium in their subject classes. There were 49.5% of the subject teachers strongly agreed and 40.4% agreed to this item.

Discussions and Suggestions

There are several key findings and implications arising from this study. Firstly, the subject teachers' perceptions toward using English as a medium of instruction seem to be positive. They also consider using English as a medium of instruction benefits for their students in order to improve students' English language proficiency. Additionally, the subject teachers perceive that they are responsible for the students' English improvement. The results also show that the subject teachers are trying to assist their students to improve students' English language such as preparing themselves to use English as a medium of instruction and correcting students' English errors. Moreover, they recognize the advantages of knowing English language in order to exchange knowledge of other subjects. Thus, the implication of these points is that there should be the university policy to support the use of English as a medium for instruction concretely. Second, the results show that the subject teachers are aware of creating positive classroom environment. It could be seen that they try to encourage their students to use English in classrooms by ignoring the students' English errors sometimes and focusing on English for communication rather than the grammatical perspective. Finally, the subject teachers express that they need to work together with English teachers in order to help their students to achieve in English. Apparently, the results indicate the strong needs of the subject teachers to be trained to use English as a medium for instruction. Therefore, the university administrators should pay special attention to the training. The teachers should be trained how students' English language skills can be sharpened.



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