

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical background of an immersion program

According to the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, an immersion program is one in which school pupils are taught all subjects through the medium of a language which is not their native one (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, Immersion). In other words, the foreign language is not taught as a subject itself but is used as the language of instruction for all subject matters. Students learn science, social studies, math, reading, and other content area material in the foreign language (Pontius, 2000).

The extent or “depth” of immersion in these programs may be categorized as follows:

1) Total immersion

Total immersion is a program in which all subjects are taught in a foreign language. The foreign language is not taught as a subject itself but is used as the medium of instruction for other subject matter. Students learn all content area material in the second language. No native language is used except in the native language subject (Pontius, 2000).

2) Partial immersion

Partial immersion is a program in which a foreign language is used as the language of instruction for some subjects and the native language is used for others (Johnson & Johnson, 1998 p. 162).

Another way of categorizing types of immersion programs relates to the age at which learners are immersed (Johnson & Johnson, 1998 p. 162):

1) Early immersion involves children in an immersion program from the beginning of schooling, at the age of 5 or 6.

2) Middle immersion typically involves children starting in the middle years of primary or junior school education at around the age of 9-10.

3) Late immersion concerns children who enter the program early in secondary schooling, usually between the ages of 11 and 13.

Immersion programs in the schools were initially developed in Canada in 1965 to provide majority-group English-speaking Canadian children the opportunity to attain proficiency in French. It appears that, initially, a group of middle-class English-speaking parents persuaded educators to set up an experimental immersion program to enable their children to fluently use French (Baker, 1993). Since then immersion programs have been set up to acquire a variety of second languages (Genesee, 1994). Immersion programs have also been adopted in many different areas of North America. Alternative forms of immersion have been devised, and the immersion program has been the most interesting innovation in second language education during the last two decades (Genesee, 1987). 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 (Reyhner, 2003).

Immersion education is based on the common underlying principle that successful language learning occurs when students are presented with target language material in a meaningful way. Content becomes the organizing principle. Students learn language from context and this focuses the learners' attention primarily on meaning (Center, 2001).

Baker (1997) also explains that immersion education is based on the idea that L1 is acquired relatively unconsciously. Children are unaware that they are learning a language in the home. Immersion attempts to replicate this process in the early years of schooling. The focus is on the content and not the form of the language. It is the task at hand that is central, not conscious language learning. In the early stages, there are no formal language learning classes, although simple elements of grammar such as verb endings may be taught informally. In the latter years of elementary schooling, formal consideration may be given to the rules of the language. The early stages of immersion tend to be the unconscious acquisition of learning of the first language. Only later will a child be made conscious of language as a system, to reinforce and promote communication.

Genesee (1994) supported that in immersion, second language teaching is embedded in a rich and meaningful communicative context. The goal of learning language is not grammatical perfection, but meaningful communication among students and teachers. Immersion is also unique in its primary focus on academic instruction. Students remain motivated to learn the

second language when they have a sense of academic accomplishment and of increasing competence in using the second language for communicative purposes.

Broner (2000) explains that when the goal of the task focuses on the L2, as well as content, children used the L2 to a greater extent. Anderson (1990) also claims that when learners are exposed to coherent and meaningful information and have opportunities to elaborate the information, their linkages are more complex and recall is better. Troike & Modiano (1975) supported that research found no significant correlation between the students' scores on second language proficiency and the number of years of formal second language study. Interestingly, 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.

Finnocchiaro (1986) mentioned that the primary objective of English language immersion programs is to give learners opportunities for practice which will ensure accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness in a variety of social situations. This accords with what Halliday (1994) explains about the methodology in English language teaching, that it should be appropriate to the social context in which it is to be used. Teaching English as a foreign language is a universal process which reflects the properties of the human mind. The innate mechanism operates as a result of the input of hearing normal, comprehensible, conversational language.

Many authors, notably Krashen (1981, 1984, 1985), and Swain (1985), have mentioned that the aim of providing comprehensible input in immersion programs is that the students should be actively involved with the input, and use the language in listening and speaking in authentic situations. Krashen & Terrell (1983, p. 31) also explain that one of the independent systems of second language performance is the "acquired system". This system requires meaningful interaction in the target language, in which speakers concentrate not on the form of their utterances, but on the communicative act. He emphasized that learning is less important than 'acquisition'. He also stated that the input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'.

Krashen (1984) emphasizes that second language acquisition occurs when the learner receives comprehensible input, not when the learner is memorizing vocabulary or completing grammar exercises. Therefore, methods that provide students with more comprehensible input will be more successful. He states that "comprehensible subject-matter teaching is language teaching" (p. 62) since learners acquire language when they understand messages in that language. In immersion, the focus is on the subject matter and not on the form or, as Krashen says, on "what is being said rather than how" (p. 62).

Output that facilitates language acquisition involves more than just speaking or writing the language. Swain states that "producing the target language may be the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her own intended meaning" (Swain, 1985 p. 249). She states that learners should be

pushed to move in their output a little beyond what they normally would produce. In this way, the learners have to try out hypotheses about how the new language works. In receiving feedback from their interlocutors in the form of correction or comprehension, the learners add to their store of knowledge about the new language (Baker, 1997).

Swain (1985) also suggests that in order to develop communicative competence, learners must have extended opportunities to use the second/foreign language productively. Thus, in addition to receiving comprehensible input, they must produce comprehensible output; in other words, explicit attention must be paid to the productive language skills of speaking and writing. She maintains that learners need to be “pushed toward the delivery of a message that is... conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately” (p 249). In immersion, students learn to produce language which is appropriate in terms of both content and language.

An immersion classroom not only enables children to acquire the second language but they do so in an unconscious manner. Towards the end of elementary education, a meaning based focus on the form of language may be added. A child may at this point be encouraged to analyze his or her vocabulary and grammar in a direct and systematic manner (Baker, 1997).

The learner is seen as progressing through a series of stages toward full target language proficiency; the learner is not expected to start off like a native speaker (Genesee, 1994). This is because language errors in immersion education are seen as a usual and important part of the language learning process. Errors are not a symptom of failure. Just as parents are more likely to

correct children's factual errors than their first language errors, language accuracy in immersion programs tend to develop over time and with experience (Baker, 1997).

The rationale underlying immersion is that students will learn the particular language skills that are used for academic instruction because those skills are necessary for mastery of that material (Genesee, 1994). The success of the programs is critically dependent on students' mastery of the academic content to the same degree and level as students in native-language classroom (Genesee, 1998). Therefore, through immersion programs the students acquire the English language implicitly and naturally via studying general subjects in the English language.

Related studies

The following literature review is based on minority language or L2 immersion programs located in majority language or L1 context which accords to the immersion program being investigated, i.e. an English immersion program in Thai language context.

In Canada, many researchers agree that one of the most successful programs for teaching second languages in the public schools has been language immersion (Broner, 2000). Research on French immersion programs over the past 30 years has consistently shown that children who are in immersion programs perform as well as or better than their non-immersion peers in second language proficiency (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Other research found consistent gains in second language proficiency for students in

French immersion programs in Ottawa, Canada, that students were almost without exception successful in their subject-matter learning. In the second semester they did as well as or better than they had in the first semester in their own language, and also compared favourably with first language sections taught by the same professors. Students generally also reported greater self-confidence and lower anxiety in using the second language, and their comments on the end-of-course questionnaires often indicated greater readiness and determination to use the second language out of class for a variety of purposes (Migneron, & Burger, 1986; Burger, Chretien, Gingras, Hauptman, & Migneron, 1984; Humptman, Wesche & Ready, 1988). Harley (1990) suggests that since the immersion students have much more time invested in learning the foreign language than the non-immersion students, they have more communicative competence than non-immersion students.

The St. Lambert experiment of French immersion programs in Canada suggested that the aims were met. Attitudes and achievement were not hindered by the immersion experience. Tucker & d'Anglejan (1972), summarized the outcomes as follows:

The experimental students appear to be able to read, write, speak, understand, and use English as well as youngsters instructed in English in the conventional manner. In addition and at no cost they can also read, write, speak and understand French in a way that English students who follow a traditional program of French as a second language never do.' (Tucker & d'Anglejan 1972:19).

Other evidence also suggests that French immersion children in Canada learn French at no cost to their English. Indeed, not only is there the gain of a second language, there is also evidence to suggest that immersion

results in possible extra benefits in English (L1) proficiency. It also found that early total immersion students in French immersion programs in Canada generally perform as well in mathematics and science, history and geography as do non-immersion children (Baker, 1997).

More research supports the view that French immersion programs in Canada are highly effective in developing an impressive level of foreign language proficiency in English-speaking children. They also meet their grade level or above in achievement in English skills (L1) and content subjects (Genesee, 1987). Research also found that students from different socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups perform as well as or better than their non-immersion peers on English (L1) tests (Holobow, 1988, 1998; Holobow, et al., 1987; Genesee, 1992).

Swain & Lapkin (1982) evaluated the results of achievement testing in math, science and social studies. Their findings also showed that, in the long run, French immersion students in Canada were able to maintain standards of achievement consistent with those of their English-educated peers. IQ results of students tested yearly showed a general trend in which the IQ scores of immersion students increase more than those of non-immersion students, suggesting possible beneficial effects of the bilingual experience on cognitive development.

However, Cummins (1998) found that for most grade 1 and 2 French immersion students in Canada, despite good progress in learning French (particularly listening skills) during the initial two years of the program, they are still far from native-like in virtually all aspects of proficiency – speaking,

listening, reading, and writing. They are still incapable of carrying on even an elementary conversation in French without major errors and insertions of English.

Genesee (1987) also cites longitudinal studies of French immersion programs in different parts of Canada, for example, St. Lambert, Montreal, Ontario, New Brunswick and British Columbia. He concludes that early total immersion students often experience a lag in reading, spelling and written vocabulary skills when English (L1) is first introduced into the curriculum in grade 2. However, there is no lag with the “interpersonal communication” skills of speaking and listening comprehension. In fact, immersion students were found to perform better than their non-immersion peers in these skills.

In Hungary, the success of English immersion programs is reflected in the production of graduates who enter the best Hungarian universities to pursue academic programs and who are also able to boast high levels of EFL proficiency (Medgyes, 1993).

In the spring of 1990, Hungarian questionnaires were completed by the majority of parents at two of the English immersion schools in Hungary. Parental responses indicated that they were supportive of their children’s enrollment in the immersion program for a number of reasons, including the following (in descending order of frequency):

- Their children could learn a foreign language well.
- It was their child’s choice.
- The school has a reputation for high-quality teaching.
- The child has better opportunities for jobs and life in general.

- The child is able to learn more about the world, expand his or her worldview, enjoy contacting with the rest of the world, Europe, or other people in general.
- The child is able to learn subjects in English at an advanced level.

About half of the parents of the Hungarian students in the English programs conveyed some concerns about their children's academic programs. Many, like their children, feared that students at non-immersion schools were covering more academic content. (Duff, 1997).

Other research at English immersion schools shows evidence that some students while often delighted with their rapid progress in EFL, were nevertheless concerned about attrition in their knowledge of subjects including Hungarian in some cases, but mathematics in particular (Duff, 1997).

In Australia, research on French immersion programs conducted in 1985 was concerned with the achievement subjects in mathematics and English. Grades from school-based assessment in these two subjects were examined. It was found that the immersion students did as well as or better than the non-immersion students. Other evidence that the program was successful in terms of students' academic achievement is that, in 1989, five immersion graduates obtained a tertiary entrance score of 990, the highest possible under the system operating at the time. A questionnaire was conducted in 1988 exploring students' reasons for joining the French immersion program, reasons for remaining in or leaving the program, and opinions about their immersion experiences. Results indicated that students took on the program and stayed in it for the intellectual challenge and

academic benefits of being part of a group of motivated students. Most students were pleased with the program and would recommend it to others. The results of the French immersion in Australia were extremely encouraging and the parents asked that the program be extended for 2 more years. The immersion program has been running ever since (Johnson & Swain, 1997).

Because of the success of French immersion programs in Queensland, Australia, Ingram and John (1990), in their report to the Queensland government, recommended that second language immersion programs be extended more widely. There is great interest in the community and amongst language teachers about immersion, and many other schools are interested in setting up programs. Since 1991, at least one new immersion program has commenced each year. At the time of writing, there were six late immersion programs running in the state – three in French, one each in German, Chinese and Indonesian, and a program in Italian was in the planning stages (Courcy, 1997).

In Hawaii, research has also shed some light on immersion. The situation in Hawaii arose as a result of a colonizing of the islands by the United States. According to Allen (1982) during the nineteenth century Hawaiians were said to be a dying race. Hawaiians made up approximately 20% of the population of Hawaii but very few were speakers of Hawaiian. After the annexation of Hawaii to the United States in 1898, many Hawaiians stopped using the language with their children, believing that they would have more chance of success if they used English exclusively. However, in 1985 a

private Hawaiian language immersion preschool was established (Slaughter, 1997).

Research on the immersion programs in Hawaii has shown positive results. On the average, students in the immersion programs have performed well in Hawaiian reading assessment, which has been done on an individual basis (Slaughter, 1997).

Finland has also been involved in immersion studies. Students in Swedish immersion programs in Finland do not lag behind in their L1 development. In “retelling the story” tests, students in grades 3 and 4 produce L2 stories equal in length to L1 stories produced by the non-immersion program group and that their L2 vocabulary is very similar to the vocabulary used by native speakers of the same age when it comes to variation and sophistication (Bjorklund, 1997). Grandell (1994) also reported that students in Swedish immersion programs in Finland had better results in “retelling the story” tests e.g., understanding the plot and different motives, and they also produced longer stories than the non-immersion group.

However, preliminary test results of students in Swedish immersion programs in Finland show that in the international reading comprehension test for grade 3 level, 10% of the immersion pupils had results not as good as those of the non-immersion pupils (Bjorklund, 1997). In “retelling the story” tests, the non-immersion group scored somewhat better in grammar (Grandell 1994).

In Catalonia, at the time of the beginning of immersion programs, only 15% of the population could write Catalan. They were fully competent in Spanish due to the War of Spanish Succession in 1714 (Artigal, 1997).

Results from research show that immersion students' achievements in Catalan are significantly higher than those of their non-immersion counterparts. Both groups had similar scores for oral Spanish even though oral Spanish is not yet introduced into the immersion curriculum. Immersion students' scores in written Spanish were better than non-immersion students' scores in writing Catalan, even though the non-immersion program students had already been introduced to written Catalan (Reixach, 1990).

In grade 2 and 3 of primary education, pupils in Catalan immersion programs in Catalonia achieve the same or even slightly higher results than non-immersion students in academic performance (Arnau, Boada & Forns, 1990). Vila (1985) and Serra (1990) asserted that, if a rich pedagogical treatment is provided, in some aspects immersion pupils from poorer backgrounds achieve better results than their non-immersion peers.

An immersion program in Basque is another example of employing immersion programs for acquiring a language. At the time of the immersion programs in the Basque country, Basque was not widely spoken and not widely used in school, and even less so in the street. Even in centers like San Sebastian, in Gipuzkoa, where there are many native speakers of Basque, Spanish is often the common language of communication in public domains (Arzamendi & Genesee, 1997).

Overall, students in Basque total immersion programs in the country of Basque, scored significantly higher on all tests than students in Basque partial immersion programs. These two groups scored higher than students in non-immersion programs (Arzamendi & Genesee, 1997).

In Hong Kong, according to research on English immersion programs in Hong Kong, students' reading skills in English are lower than their skills in Chinese. The immersion program fails to produce the high level of second language proficiency that is expected from it. However, there were some positive results in some aspects of the late immersion curriculum (Johnson, 1997).

In the United States, more than 200 K-12 immersion programs have been started since the first U.S. immersion program began in 1971 (Downs-Reid, 2001). Although most second language immersion programs conducted in the United States involve Spanish, there are programs in French, German, Japanese, and Chinese as well (Met & Lorenz, 1997).

Research over the past 30 years in the United States has consistently shown that children who are in foreign language immersion programs are not handicapped in any way when it comes to performing adequately in their native language, English. Moreover, because children in immersion classrooms have such an enriched language experience, they often perform above average on the standardized tests, which school districts typically give to assess student achievement in English. However, it should be noted that the test scores of children in the lower grades may, in fact, lag behind the scores of non-immersion students. This is because many immersion programs begin

formal reading instruction in English at grade 2 or 3, but test scores do not catch up until later (Pontius, 2000).

A number of studies conducted in the United States indicate that immersion students generally achieve in subjects studied in the second language at a level equal to, or better than, their non-immersion peers who studied in English. These studies and other measures of students achievement used nationally have been based on standardized test scores. (Met & Lorenz, 1997).

Rubio (1998) refers to more recent comparative studies of immersion and non-immersion students in the States, including Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Louisiana and Greensboro, North Carolina. Research has repeatedly indicated that immersion students perform as well as or better than their monolingual English peers on all standardized measures of mathematics, science, social studies, and in the English language. Research (Downs-Reid, 2001) consistently shows that foreign language immersion students perform as well as or better in all subject areas after 5-7 years studying in the program.

Further research (Dahlberg, 1999) on Spanish immersion programs for students whose native language is English reports that immersion students attain near-native proficiency in listening and reading. After 9 years in immersion programs they attain a high degree of fluency in speaking and writing .

Interesting research on French immersion programs in the States has been done on comparing one immersion school with nine non-immersion schools in English reading, writing and math using the 1999 Minnesota

Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). It found that students in a French immersion program clearly outperformed their non-immersion peers by ranking first in English reading (L1), writing and math. For one Spanish immersion program, the immersion students ranked 3rd in writing and 4th in reading and math. Another research effort on a Spanish immersion program in the States shows that the immersion students ranked 3rd in reading, 4th in writing and 6th in math. The other Spanish immersion program ranked 1st in reading and math, and 6th in writing. However, the average scores of these three immersion schools were better than non-immersion schools in the district overall. Results of the tests were consistent with research that immersion students score as well as or better than their non-immersion peers do on standardized tests in English. (Downs-Reid, 2001).

Two decades of second language immersion programs in the United States have been characterized by extraordinary success. Thus almost every immersion program continues in existence today and new programs are initiated annually (Met & Lorenz, 1997).

In Thailand where this research will be carried out, there are very few immersion programs compared to Canada and the States and even less research on this matter. However, Elango (1997) reported that the immersion students at the English Language Center (ELC) of Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand are able to effectively apply the language in real situations. The students themselves confirmed the claims of the Center that after the course they use more English in their conversations and read more English newspapers daily at home.

In conclusion, most research on immersion programs as an integrated approach to foreign language instruction shows that the participating students acquire the target language skills they needed in order to acquire academic skills and knowledge appropriate for their grade level. Students acquire functional proficiency in the foreign language including cross-cultural awareness that surpasses that of students in all other forms of foreign language learning to which immersion has been compared. However, there are also some limitations of the program in the areas of academic aspects and high costs.

The present research, therefore, is an attempt to survey the attitudes of non-native English students and their parents towards an English immersion program in Chiangmai, Thailand focusing on English language acquisition in order to find out to what extent the actual experience of the students and their parents in this English immersion program is parallel to worldwide research findings regarding foreign language immersion programs.