
The Effectiveness of Mother Tongue-Based Language Teaching in Facilitating English Language Skills for Thai University Undergraduates and their Perceptions on L1 Use in English Classrooms

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Abstract

This research study investigates the effectiveness of mother tongue-based language education in facilitating English language skills among Thai university undergraduates and explores how Thai university undergraduates perceived using mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms. The participants were 100 private university undergraduate students in Chiang Mai, Thailand selected by purposive sampling. Based on the data collected via an experimental study, a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview, the findings were statistically significant. The results demonstrated a significant increase in the mean scores of the post-tests in the experimental group and the control group. The mean scores of the changes of the tests in the experimental group were also greater than those of the control group. Therefore, the findings indicated that the method could generate a higher level of achievement in English language learning skills among the experimental group. In addition, the participants perceived various advantages of using their native language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms. First, employing students' mother tongues allowed for better understanding of the content being taught. Second, this tactic increased motivation to participate in classroom activities and complete tasks. Third, it enabled teachers to clarify and explain some difficult concepts, including directions for classroom tasks and activities. Ultimately, the participants generally supported use of their mother tongue in an English classroom to enhance their foreign language skills, citing particular benefits in explaining English grammatical rules and the meanings of difficult or confusing terms.

Keywords: English language skills, Mother tongue-based language teaching, Perceptions, Thai university undergraduates

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a notable inclination toward the use of native language (L1) in the field of English language teaching. Researchers and educators have increasingly expressed interest in investigating the potential benefits of utilizing L1 within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, as well as determining

appropriate methods for integrating L1 effectively in EFL teaching and learning (Aurbach, 1993; Mukattash, 2003; Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002). Willis (1996) advocates for L1 usage in foreign language classrooms, asserting that it can enhance students' language competence and facilitate greater exposure to the target language. Use of one's mother tongue should not be banned; instead, teachers should strongly encourage attempts to use the target language. Banning the use of L1 could impede students' comprehension of the target language. Thus, L1 should be used to support learning in a foreign language classroom if it is necessary (Nunan & Lamb, 1996).

In the context of Thailand, students' language skills require remedial instruction which provides additional support to individual students' needs and fosters their language development, particularly in areas such as speaking and writing in the target language (Wongsathorn et al., 2002). Moreover, students with a low or even moderate level of English proficiency often encounter difficulties in the English-only classroom at higher levels of education, such as in universities. Indeed, students' level of English proficiency can present a significant obstacle in a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) classroom, where the primary emphasis is on using English exclusively for communication (Ueasiriwatthanachai, 2020; Wiriyaichitra, 2001). Nilubol and Sitthitikul (2017) asserted that among low-achiever students, the use of their mother tongue served as a more comfortable and familiar means of expressing their thoughts and seeking clarification in the classroom. As they gained confidence in utilizing their native language, they became more willing to participate actively in class discussions. Students' language proficiency development can be significantly influenced by the teaching approach adopted by teachers in the classroom. If teachers, educational institutions or educational systems restrict the utilization of students' first language, this can impact their language proficiency progression (Wigglesworth & Simpson, 2008).

Therefore, allowing learners to use the language they are most comfortable with while learning English may reduce confusion and frustration, ultimately increasing lower-proficiency EFL students' confidence and understanding and generating positive learning outcomes as a whole (Alptekin, 2002, Ricablanca, 2014). However, there exists a notable contrast of views among researchers regarding the use of the L1 as a facilitative tool in second language (L2) learning environments. While some researchers advocate for the integration of L1 to enhance students' learning experiences, others are steadfast in supporting the conceptual principles of CLT which emphasizes the exclusive use of the L2 for student interaction during language lessons (Wongsathorn et al., 2002). The extent, timing, and appropriate methods for incorporating L1 in the EFL classroom also remain topics of ongoing debate. Educational institutions, including schools, universities, and specialized language-learning institutions, grapple with the decision of whether to promote an English-only classroom environment or adopt policies that endorse the strategic and purposeful use of L1 (Çelik, 2008).

According to Mangubhai (2005), educators should provide students a suitable learning environment with minimal learning obstacles. Teachers are responsible for selecting appropriate pedagogical methodologies that enable students to effectively

master language skills. In the past, questions regarding the suitability of mother tongue use as the language of education have been raised. Some scholars have supported the use of mother-tongue based education while others still maintain doubts. This research thus sought to investigate the effectiveness of mother tongue-based language teaching among Thai university undergraduates and to explore how Thai university undergraduates perceived using mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating English language skills for Thai university undergraduates.
2. To explore Thai university undergraduates' perception of mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms.

Research Questions

The research questions therefore are:

1. To what extent could mother tongue-based language teaching facilitate English language skills for Thai university undergraduates?
2. How did Thai university undergraduates perceive using mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms?

Significance of the Research

The contributions of this project include: 1) offering a path to facilitate English language skills for Thai university undergraduates and 2) providing an appropriate framework for teachers to use mother tongue-based language teaching effectively in the EFL classroom. Accordingly, the results of this current study can be integrated into educational policies for language learning development at all levels.

Literature Review

L1 use in language learning

Mother tongue-based language teaching entails the utilization of students' L1 as the principal medium of classroom instruction. Specifically, L1 refers to the language with which students are inherently familiar, as it is the one in which they are identified as native speakers, as defined by UNESCO (2003). Proponents of using L1 in L2 learning classrooms have offered many reasons this technique is advantageous (Cook, 2000; Cummins, 1979, 2000). Cummins (1979) presents the Threshold Hypothesis which states that learners' achievement in L2 acquisition depends on the level of proficiency of their own native language. This hypothesis is in contrast with the idea that the more language learners study through the target language-only instruction, the higher level of target language proficiency they will have. Mother tongue-based

instruction does affect students' L2 learning accomplishment (Cummins, 2000). Moreover, a humanistic approach to education supports the idea that the use of L1 in an L2 classroom should not be banned. Students should be provided opportunities to speak and express their opinions naturally without fear of incorrect vocabulary and making mistakes. L1 should not be perceived as a language barrier. Conversely, it should be a tool to help facilitate the language learning process (Cook, 2000).

Nation (2003) proposed that employing mother tongue-based language teaching has the potential to significantly enhance students' comprehension and active engagement in classroom activities. Furthermore, this approach can foster a heightened sense of motivation among students. Also, using L1 in the L2 classroom creates a friendly atmosphere for students. All of these advantages could result in students' successful language learning outcomes. To support Nation's rationale, Miles (2004) conducted an experimental study to check whether L1 could help students learn the English language or not. The participants were Japanese EFL students whose mother tongue was Japanese. The participants were divided into three classes. The first class was the English-only instruction class. In the second class, students were able to speak Japanese in class but the teacher used only English. For the third class, both the teacher and students were able to use Japanese and English. After taking an English language pre-test and post-test, the average post-test scores of the third class were higher than those of the pre-test. The results revealed that L1 use did assist in English language learning. In addition, Tang (2002) conducted a study into the use of students' mother tongue in EFL classes and the findings confirmed Miles' findings. The incorporation of students' L1 in L2 learning proves to be beneficial for their overall language proficiency. The utilization of the mother tongue facilitates the acquisition of the L2 and augments opportunities for students to access and engage with the target language more effectively (Tang, 2002).

In the theoretical framework of instructed second language acquisition (ISLA), learners engage with the L2 primarily through classroom-based learning rather than acquiring the L2 through natural exposure and interaction with native speakers (Spada, 2014). Within ISLA, a crucial aspect of consideration lies in understanding the mechanisms of learning, encompassing the processes involved in language acquisition and the nature of the input provided to learners (Loewen & Sato, 2017). Numerous studies have examined the influence of the L1 in ISLA, specifically investigating the impact of integrating the use of L1 by both students and instructors during L2 classroom instruction. These studies aimed to determine whether such an approach has an effect on learners' development of L2 proficiency, in comparison to L2-only instruction. The findings from these studies suggest that L1 may play a more crucial role in the advancement of L2 proficiency. Particularly, a high frequency of L1 usage consistently demonstrated a facilitating effect on the process of L2 learning (Fuente & Goldenberg, 2022; Türker, 2018).

Challenges in employing L1 in language learning

Despite numerous studies emphasizing the significance of integrating the L1 to facilitate target language acquisition, certain studies have raised doubts and concerns regarding the practical implementation of L1 in language learning. Prodromou (2002) mentioned that teachers should consider providing the appropriate amount of L2 input in the classroom for the students. The amount of L2 input provided should be based on students' levels of language proficiency. Students with higher levels of language proficiency might want to avoid mother tongue-based instruction altogether since they have greater capacity to reap the benefits of direct exposure to the target language and already associate increased exposure with increased skill level. Prodromou conducted research to explore Greek EFL students' attitudes toward the implementation of L1 in English classes, and found that the students who had higher levels of English proficiency were not willing to use L1 in the classroom. Moreover, students had positive attitudes toward using only L2 in the classroom. Additionally, Malone (2008), Malone and Paraide (2011), and Wa-Mbaleka (2014) cited other concerns related to mother tongue-based education. First, English language teachers are usually trained to teach solely using the English language, and so use of their students' mother tongue may prove challenging. Second, there may be a limited number of teaching materials in students' native languages since teaching materials for English classes are generally in English.

Relevant studies

Recent research studies have identified the significance of mother tongue-based language teaching (Li & Majhanovich, 2010; Obod et al., 2020; Ricablanca, 2014). Li and Majhanovich (2010) investigated the benefits of mother-tongue language teaching after the implementation of Hong Kong language learning policy in 1998. The findings revealed that with mother tongue-based education, students' performance in English language learning had improved. In addition, the significance of mother tongue-based education was supported by the study of Obod et al. (2020). An experimental study was conducted among elementary school students in the Philippines. The findings revealed that the use of mother tongue-based instruction was more effective than non-mother tongue-based instruction. The mother tongue-based language education group significantly learned more than the non-mother tongue-based language education group.

Various studies have also indicated that a majority of teachers and students maintain positive attitudes toward the use of their mother tongues in language classes, citing perceived benefits on their language proficiency (Kayaoğlu, 2012; Khejeri, 2014; Kim & Petraki, 2009). The idea that most students prefer implementation of their mother tongue in the L2 classroom was supported by the study of Khejeri (2014). Khejeri utilized a questionnaire, observations, and tape recordings to explore mother tongue use as a medium of instruction in Kenya. The study revealed that, through mother tongue-based instruction, the students found it easier to learn their target language. Apart from that, Khejeri proposed some suggestions for implementing mother

tongue use in English learning, arguing that governments and educators should be encouraged to produce teaching materials in both students' mother tongues and in English, as well as support a language policy which promotes the use of mother tongue and the target language as a medium of instruction simultaneously. The aforementioned studies demonstrate that there is room for mother tongue use in the L2 classroom. With the appropriate use, mother tongue-based instruction would be undeniably helpful for students' L2 acquisition.

Research Methodology

Table 1

The research design of the experimental study

	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Control group	√	O	√
Experimental group	√	X	√

The experimental study involved two groups of Thai university undergraduates: an experimental group that received mother tongue-based instruction for English language learning and a control group that received English language instruction for English language learning. Based on Table 1, X symbolizes having the treatment (mother tongue-based language teaching) while O symbolizes not having the treatment. A pre-test and post-test were given to investigate the effectiveness of mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating English-language skills for the selected students. Additionally, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how Thai university undergraduates perceived mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms.

Participants

Private university undergraduates in Chiang Mai, Thailand participated in this study. The participants were selected via the purposive sampling method. The students enrolling in the General English course participated in the experimental study, responded to the questionnaire and took part in the semi-structured interview. Two-hundred and fifty students were enrolled in the course according to the university's registration system. Yamane's formula of sample size (Yamane, 1973) was utilized to determine a sample group of 100 students. The majority of the sample group was female. Only 5% of the students in the group were male. This inconsistency in participants' sex was due to the fact that most students from the participating faculty were female.

Research Instrument

Pre-test and post-test

A test was selected as the research instrument in the experimental study to investigate the efficacy of mother tongue-based language teaching for Thai university undergraduate students. The test contained a reading section and a vocabulary section. The test was designed and developed by the researcher, then validated by three experts in the field of English Language Education using the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC).

Questionnaire and interview

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed in order to explore how Thai university undergraduates perceived mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms. The questionnaire was adapted from the study of Korean students' and teachers' attitudes regarding use of their L1 in English classrooms (Kim & Petraki, 2009). The questionnaire and the interview questions were translated into Thai to ensure that the participants clearly understood the items in the questionnaire. Three experts in the field of English language teaching also validated the questionnaire and interview questions using the IOC.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Before the experimental phase started, the sample group of 100 students took part in the same pre-test. Then, all of them were taught English by the researcher with the same textbook and supplementary materials. In the experimental group, the researcher employed the use of mother tongue-based language teaching. While for the control group, the lesson was given in the English-only classroom. At the end of the experimental phase, both groups were asked to take part in the same test which was regarded as the post-test in order to determine the effectiveness of using mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating the subjects' English language learning skills.

The pre-test and post-test scores of the students in each group were analyzed using paired *t*-tests to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group separately. Second, an independent *t*-test was used to analyze the pre-test and post-test scores of the students from both groups to compare the differences between the changes after post-test of the experimental group and the control group. Then, the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were administered to the participants in the experimental group after they had opportunities to learn through mother tongue-based language teaching. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed for Mean and Standard Deviation (*SD*). Then, the qualitative data from the open-ended part of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were coded and categorized into several themes.

Findings

The effectiveness of mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating English language skills among private university undergraduates

Table 2

Comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group in two sub-tests

Variables	Pre-test (n = 50)	Post-test (n = 50)	Change (%)	t	p-value
Reading test					
Experimental Group	20.84 ± 9.75	26.20 ± 11.59	25.72	5.129	< 0.001*
Control Group	20.13 ± 9.72	23.48 ± 8.45	16.64	2.812	0.007*
Vocabulary test					
Experimental Group	11.82 ± 5.44	15.62 ± 6.25	32.15	4.781	< 0.001*
Control Group	11.24 ± 6.07	13.54 ± 6.39	20.46	2.338	0.023*

Data are mean ± SD * p-value < 0.05

According to Table 2, after the experiment, the mean scores of the reading post-tests in the experimental group and the control group increased significantly (p -value_{Exp} < 0.001 and p -value_{Control} = 0.007 respectively).

For the vocabulary post-test, the mean scores in the experimental group and the control group increased significantly (p -value_{Exp} < 0.001 and p -value_{Control} = 0.023 respectively).

Table 3

Comparison of changes after post-test of the experimental group and the control group

Variables	Change (%)		t	p-value
	Experimental Group (n = 50)	Control Group (n = 50)		
Reading	34.44 ± 45.08	22.71 ± 56.54	0.779	0.438
Vocabulary	27.51 ± 42.08	20.97 ± 41.87	1.147	0.254

Data are mean ± SD * p-value < 0.05

As presented in Table 3, when the changes after post-test of the experimental group and the control group were compared, there was no significant difference in reading between the means of the experimental group and the control group (p -value = 0.438). However, the mean scores of the percentage of change in reading test in the experimental group (34.44) were significantly greater than those of the control group (22.71), indicating a higher level of achievement in their reading skill.

The comparison of vocabulary test scores also yielded a similar result. There was no significant difference between the means of the experimental group and the control group (p -value = 0.254). Nevertheless, the mean scores of the percentage of change in the vocabulary test for the experimental group (27.51) were significantly greater than those for the control group (20.97), indicating a higher level of achievement in their vocabulary skill.

How Thai university undergraduates perceived mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms

Figure 1
The implementation of students' mother tongue in English classrooms

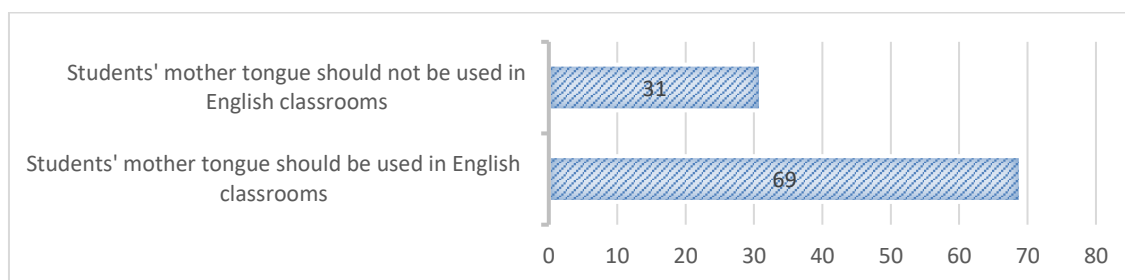
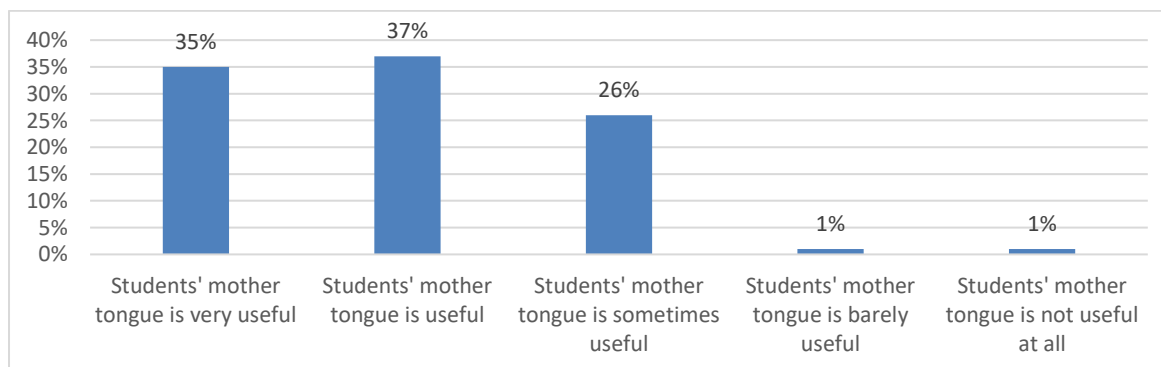


Figure 1 illustrates that when students were asked whether their mother tongue should be employed in English classrooms or not, 69% of the participants responded that their mother tongue should be employed and 31% responded that it should not be employed.

When asked about the reasons behind their attitudes toward the use of their native language (Thai) in English classrooms, the students who preferred the use of their native language (Thai) in English classrooms revealed that doing so enabled them to better understand the content. They were confident that use of English only would be an obstacle in their English language learning. Moreover, some students mentioned that they tended to feel more pressured, anxious, or stressed if they were forced to use English, especially students with a lower level of achievement.

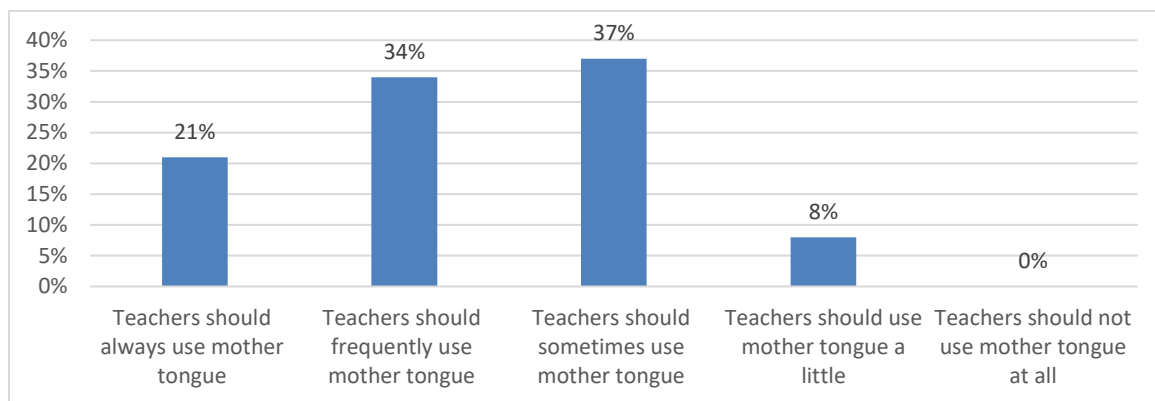
Figure 2
The usefulness of students' mother tongue in English classrooms



The students were requested to rate the usefulness of their mother tongue in English classrooms. Figure 2 reports that the majority perceived the implementation of their mother tongue in English classrooms to be useful (37%) and very useful (35%). Of the participants, 26% reported that implementation of students' mother tongue is sometimes useful in helping them learn English.

Figure 3

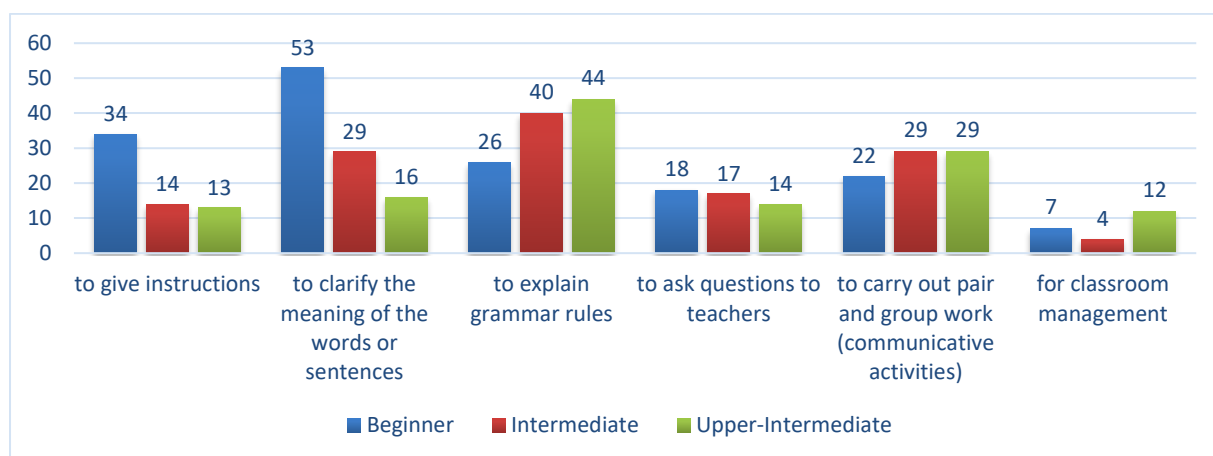
How often should teachers use students' mother tongue in English language teaching?



To answer the question regarding how often teachers should use students' mother tongue in English language teaching, Figure 3 shows that 37% of the participants responded that their mother tongue should sometimes be used, 34% responded that it should frequently be used, 21% responded that it should always be used, and 8% responded it should be used a little. Interestingly, not a single respondent stated that teachers should not use their mother tongue in English language teaching at all.

Figure 4

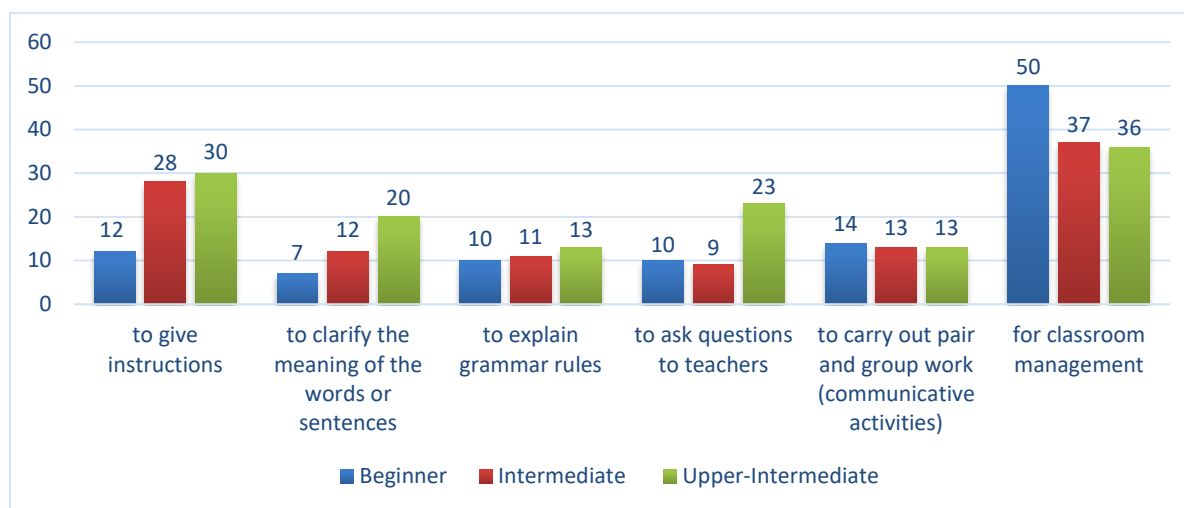
The most useful activities in English classrooms while using students' mother tongue



With regard to the most useful activities in English classrooms while using students' mother tongue, participants were allowed to choose more than one answer on the questionnaire. Figure 4 reveals students' responses to this question presented by

frequency rather than by percentage. Generally, for students at a beginner level, the participants thought that their mother tongue was most useful to clarify the meanings of difficult words and confusing sentences. Students’ mother tongue was considered most useful to explain grammar rules for students at an intermediate and upper-intermediate level.

Figure 5
The least useful activities in English classrooms while using students’ mother tongue



The students also used the questionnaire to point out the least useful activities for which to employ their mother tongue. These responses were also grouped by skill level. The results were chosen by the participants in the same way as the students’ attitudes toward the most useful activities in English classrooms (presented in Figure 4). Interestingly, the respondents agreed that classroom management and giving students’ discipline were perceived as the least useful activities while using students’ mother tongue for the students in all levels.

Table 4
The degree to which students’ mother tongue in English classrooms is beneficial for each skill

Skills	Mean	SD	Level of Interpretation
1. Speaking	3.59	.975	High
2. Listening	3.93	.956	High
3. Reading	3.70	.927	High
4. Writing	3.74	.949	High

According to Table 4, the responses showed that participants perceived use of their mother tongue in English classrooms as beneficial at high levels, with mean scores of 3.93, 3.74, 3.70, and 3.59 for listening, writing, reading, and speaking, respectively.

In addition, the participants made suggestions about the use of students' L1 in English classrooms regardless of students' level of proficiency. The results from the questionnaire showed that participants considered using students' L1 in English classrooms as beneficial for students at all levels of proficiency. Particularly, it was found that participants advised using students' L1 in English classrooms for students at the beginner level the most, followed by those at the intermediate level, and those at the upper-intermediate level.

Results from the semi-structured interview

The students were asked about difficulties and frustrations that they encounter when learning English. Most of the students mentioned that they tended to face problems with English pronunciation, which, in turn, impacts how they understand the messages that teachers want to convey. Some excerpts are reported below:

“English language has many words that sounds similar or some words that have the same sounds. So, it is quite hard for those who are not native speakers to translate and understand and often leads to misunderstanding.” (Interviewee 002)

“English and Thai are very different in term of pronunciation and stress. In Thai, we don't have to stress while we're talking, but in English they do, so it's very difficult for us to listen and speak in as we're not use to it.” (Interviewee 005)

The interviewees also pointed out that they feel frustrated when faced with new vocabulary they do not know the meaning of. Here are some examples of their responses:

“Encountering the specific words, jargons, and the words that I don't familiar with is very frustrating. I have to spend so much time looking for their meaning.” (Interviewee 008)

The interviewees were asked about what they do when faced with such difficulties and frustrations. Some excerpts are reported below.

Some of the respondents suggested they would better understand English grammar and English sentence structure when presented. Here are some examples of such responses:

“First of all, I try to understand the different language structures. I start by learning the positions of the word in the sentence (S+V+O), then studying about tenses and so on. I try to start with something simple and understandable.” (Interviewee 004)

“I ask the teacher to describe English grammar and sentence structure in Thai. And then I practice doing grammar exercise and writing exercise in English.” (Interviewee 003)

Regarding the reasons why L1 (Thai) should be used, the students perceived that using L1 in English language classrooms to be beneficial in several ways. First, L1

helped teachers to clarify the subject matter for the students. When students had any problems with the course content and they could ask the teacher to explain in their L1, it would help diminish misunderstanding. Here are some excerpts of relevant responses:

“L1 should be used to give a clarification for a student who doesn’t understand something. It will be useful because a student will understand the subject more easily if explaining it in Thai language (mother language).” (Interviewee 001)

“Teacher can use L1 to describe more details. It is useful since it makes student understand and approach with the thing that teacher teaches.” (Interviewee 002)

Second, the interviewees also reported problems concerning students’ different language backgrounds and levels of proficiency. They stated that L1 should be used with students with a low level of proficiency or those who are in a beginner level. Some excerpts are presented below:

“L1 is very useful for those who just start to learn English. It will be a strong foundation for learners. If they understand clearly in their L1, they can make their learning more efficient. When students have a good foundation, learning will be smooth.” (Interviewee 004)

“In my opinion, L1 (Thai) should be used because not everyone can understand everything in English, so it will be better if the teachers sometimes explain the difficult things in L1 (Thai). This way, not only the students who have a high level of English proficiency would understand the point that the teacher wants to say.” (Interviewee 007)

Discussion and Conclusion

The effectiveness of mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating English language skills among private university undergraduates

As presented in the results section, this study’s findings indicated a higher level of achievement in reading and vocabulary skills among the students in the experimental group who were taught with mother tongue-based language teaching. This implies that the use of students’ native language for pedagogical purposes enhanced their mastery of the target language (Walter & Dekker, 2011).

That the results indicate positive effects for implementation of students’ mother tongue to facilitate English language skills is in line with the findings of previous research (Greene, 1997; Khodareza & Kaviani, 2016; Riches & Genesee, 2006; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). In the Thai context, Nilubol (2020) and Saiwongpanya and Sengsri (2015) also found that mother tongue-based language teaching facilitated English language skills among Thai EFL learners.

An explanation for this could be that providing opportunities to learn English in a mother tongue-based teaching environment allowed students to use the language they

felt most familiar with, thus enabling them to understand the academic content more clearly and gain achievement in language learning (Walter & Dekker, 2011). Vygotsky's theory of psycholinguistics (1976) proposed that when L1 is implemented in a L2 classroom, it can contribute to cognitive development among language learners and enable them to successfully acquire a L2. Many problems and frustrations in language learning such as incorrect translation, confusing content, and unclear instructions arise if students are taught without appropriate guidance (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002). Code-switching and using bilingual resources in foreign language classrooms is recommended since students learn better in classroom environments where they can complete tasks easily. According to Macaro (2001), prohibiting students from code-switching in classrooms and from using bilingual resources places a heavier burden on their cognitive development.

Regarding the positive effects of L1 use on vocabulary skills, the results of this present study are in line with the Khodareza and Kaviani's (2016) study, which revealed that L1 use had positive effects on learning English vocabulary. The students who received instruction and translations of target vocabulary in their mother tongue performed better in a vocabulary test than those who did not. A possible explanation could be Krashen's theory of L2 acquisition. Krashen highlighted that receiving "comprehensible input" brings about students' success in L2 acquisition. Comprehensible input was key to achieving proficiency (Krashen, 1989). Thus, students' L1 is beneficial for vocabulary skills, as it can be used to transfer knowledge such as definition and connotation into the L2 (Kang, 2012).

In the present study, the learners in the experimental group were explicitly taught by using mother-based language teaching, which subsequently generated a positive effect of increased L1 use among participants in this group. According to a study conducted by Espada (2012), language learning tends to be more successful if teachers and students share the same language and that language is allowed in the classroom. Allowing the use of this common language in the learning process facilitates better comprehension, interaction, and overall engagement, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Implementing students' L1 in L2 learning should not be considered as an obstacle for learners' language progress, but it should be regarded as a useful element in language learning (Cook, 2001; Miles, 2004). As Hopkins (2003) points out, in English-only classroom environments, students often struggle with attempts to understand the English language and consequently lose motivation to participate in classroom activities or complete tasks. He suggests that the use of mother tongue-based language teaching could support significant improvements in students' English language skills. Concerning the positive effects of one's mother tongue on reading skills, the results of the study are consistent with the results found in Seng and Hashim's (2006) study, which investigated the use of L1 in L2 reading comprehension among ESL learners. Using L1 helps students gain confidence in attempting to understand L2 texts since L1 use could reduce word-related and idea-related difficulties in classroom texts. This may be due to Krashen's theory of L2 acquisition, in which the affective filter hypothesis states that several variables such as motivation and anxiety can affect

language learning. Confident language learners with a high level of motivation and a low level of anxiety tend to be more successful in language learning than those who are not confident and anxious. Emotional and psychological variables can facilitate or prevent L2 learning. Therefore, it is very important to create a comfortable and friendly environment for students so that they feel comfortable practicing the target language. English-only classrooms can surely provide students with L2 input, however, when coupled with stress and anxiety, they might not be able to use that input effectively (Krashen, 1987).

How Thai university undergraduates perceived mother tongue-based language teaching in English classrooms

According to the findings section, most of the students perceived that L1 use in English classrooms is helpful as they agreed that employing students' mother tongue provided various benefits. One such benefit is that students felt more relaxed when they were in the classroom environment implementing language they knew well, particularly among the students with a lower level of achievement. Using L1 would be very helpful as it can significantly contribute to enhancing students' motivation. Motivation was considered one of the important factors that can build up L2 knowledge and lead to students' achievement in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). These results bear similarity to a study by Ford (2009), which showed that mother tongue implementation created a friendly atmosphere in which students' amount of worry and stress diminished. Since students had different language backgrounds and levels of proficiency, being forced to exclusively use English in the classroom could negatively affect their motivation in language learning and, ultimately, their language progress. This notion implies that using students' L1 may be beneficial in increasing learners' motivation and may also decrease difficulties in language learning that result from various language backgrounds and levels of proficiency (Ford, 2009).

Furthermore, the present study found that the participants acknowledged the importance of implementing mother tongue-based instruction in English classrooms with students at all levels of proficiency. In their opinion, using students' mother tongue in English classrooms is beneficial for beginner level students the most, followed by intermediate level students, and upper-intermediate level students the least. In support, Cole (1998) stated that teachers should consider using L1 on a decreasing scale according to students' English proficiency level. L1 will be more helpful when used with beginner level students and it should be used less with advanced level students. Students' L2 exposure in English-only classrooms is influenced by the fact that they had different language backgrounds and degrees of competence. Using L1 in clarifying and explaining academic content and the instructions of tasks may be more helpful with the students who have lower level of language proficiency since they have limited L2 knowledge (Kim & Petraki, 2009).

The results of the final question, which related to the students' perceived benefits of using their mother tongue in each foreign language skill, showed that using their

mother tongue in English classrooms was considered especially useful for listening and writing. According to a study conducted by Kim and Petraki (2009), listening could be more difficult for students when delivered in L2 only because they possessed limited vocabulary knowledge and thus did not understand the messages spoken in the target language clearly. Hopkins (2003) also revealed that if students did not understand what native teachers said, they may feel uncomfortable and pressured. To solve this problem, teachers could consider using L1 to explain what the students did not understand. In addition, the second most-cited benefit of mother tongue in terms of specific language skills was considered to be writing. Since writing requires intricate knowledge of grammar rules for the successful expression of ideas, L1 use is advantageous for students because it enhances their ability to write using proper grammatical sentence structures (Thornbury, 1999).

Since the present study revealed the positive effects of mother tongue-based language teaching in facilitating English language skills and positive associations with this technique by the majority of the participants, implications of the present study to ELT in Thailand are proposed. At present, teachers and educators are facing difficulties in selecting suitable teaching methodologies and techniques to help their students to acquire higher-quality education. The results highlight a prevailing inclination among students toward the utilization of their mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction due to the fact that this approach facilitates comprehension, enhances active participation, and fosters heightened motivation within the classroom setting. The students' general agreement mirrors the views of Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015), which emphasize that the use of students' L1 should not be excluded from L2 classrooms. They argue that teachers should not even consider students' L1 as an obstacle in language learning. In contrast, in order to help enhance students' language progress, students' mother tongues should be considered as supportive tools rather than as problems. Thus, the implementation of mother tongue-based education stands out as an effective way to help achieve that goal.

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