



Significance, Circumstance, and Difficulties of Immigrant Children in Thai Language Schooling of Thai Public Schools

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Abstract

This paper aims to review and conceptualize the significance, circumstance, difficulties of the host country's language schooling for immigrant children from previous literatures and research in the area of second language learning. The data will contribute to the issues of further research and policy suggestion for Thai educators in case of engaging the Thai language schooling for immigrant children in Thai public schools.

Regard to the literature review, it is evidenced that the language curricula which based on the tenets of *bilingual approach* and *international perspective* have been empirically reinforced in order to enhance effectively second language schooling for children with migrant background. On the other hand, Thai language have been used as the medium of instruction in general. The bilingual curriculum is hardly provided, since the poverty of bilingual instructors. Consequently, the empirical works yielded that even immigrant children mainly express their oral Thai language competence, their academic knowledge and skills in Thai language, such as comprehensive reading, still have limited. Moreover, there is solely a few research which address the issues of teaching Thai language for immigrant children in Thai public schooling.

Keywords: Immigrant Student, Education for Immigrant Children, Thai language for Immigrant Children, Multicultural Education



Introduction: immigrant children and second language education

Regard to impact of global economic and political mobility, transnational flows of people have dramatically increased in each nation-state's territory. Concurrently, the proportion of children of those immigrant people have been growing. According to Hugeut&Punpuing (2005) and Thu (2006) have categorized immigrant children into three groups; children migrating themselves, children migrating with their parents or guardians, and children in immigrant background born in host country. No matter immigrant children will come from the different background within their group, they unavoidably deny learning the host country's language as their second- or third-language for their survival in the new society. Additionally, some countries even require this competence as the obligation which immigrant people have to take responsibility.

Not only for survival and responding the obligation, many literatures in the research area of sociological and psychological linguistic (e.g. Ataca& Berry 2002; Clement, Noels, & Deneault 2001; Jasinskaja-Lahti 2008; Masgoret& Ward 2006; Vedder&Horenczyk 2006; Ward & Kennedy 1993; Yaagmur&Vijver 2012) have echoed that second language proficiency is significant key associating with the academic attainment, developing of well-being, and declining a risk of psychological deficiency for immigrant children. In the sociological linguistic perspectives, second language proficiency play the main role for integrating immigrant children in their new social-cultural environment. Many research (e.g. Chamot& O'Malley, 1986; Masgoret& Ward, 2006; Vedder&Horenczyk, 2006; Yagmur&Vijver, 2012) have replicated the finding that children who have higher oral skills in the host country's language can better draw up the social network with the native speakers beyond one with lower competence. Moreover, through the socializing with native speakers in second language will enhance the cultural integration for the newcomers. For the psychological linguistic perspective, second language proficiency has benefited to generating the self-esteem and cognitive competence (Hamayan, 1990; Urzua, 1980; Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002) which are positively influential determinants on the academic performance and psychological healthy.

The information above implied that second language is the key of element for both cultural integration and educational attainment; however, children with the immigrant background often have to struggle with high barrier to acquire the sufficient second language proficiency (Baeza, 2010; Malarova& Birman, 2016; Zoido, 2012; Seung, Yang & Cha, 2017). Consistent with the research on second language education for immigrant children in various nation-states (e.g. Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Clegg, 1996; Christina, 1992; Enright & McClosky, 1998; Leikin, Schwartz & Tobin, 2012), many mainstream teachers mainly have applied the national curricula and mainstream instructions to the classroom. Every student will receive the same nurture regarding to notion of 'same is equality'. Notwithstanding, the immigrant children have the specific needs which require considering their cultural, historical, and linguistic background. Rather considering that immigrant students have their own language competence, some teacher perceived that lack of host country's language proficiency is language deficit (Helot & Young; 2002). Indeed, there is gap of knowledge between their previous experience and the new exposure in their host country and school culture. This might take longer time to adjust culturally and psychologically themselves toward new environment in school rather than their native peers. Moreover, immigrant children mainly come from low income family which lack of academic resources and support to generate their school performance. Consequently, even some studies have launched the insignificant difference of academic performance between native and immigrant students (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Hofferth& Moon, 2016), it is more apparent that students with foreign origin



much likely lag behind non-foreign students when examining their educational outcome from long-term studies (Levin & Shonamy, 2012; Shany & Geva, 2012).

What is the potential determinant which deploy to divergent outcome of an academic performance within immigrant children? the answer from the empirical works (e.g. Graham & Brown, 1996; Helot & Young, 2002; Leseman, 2016) is providing second language curriculum for them in public schools. According to socio-cultural theory of learning advanced by Vygotsky (1986), all of human activity, as learning language, is impossible to be dissociated from individual, social, cultural, and historical contexts which is constructed. Therefore, an individual has been already shaped via their ethnic socio-cognitive norms via their first language learning and will have to adapt as well as to acquire such the norms from the other group when they learn the new language. As the result, it is undeniable to maintain the first language and cultural background of immigrant student during their developing second language proficiency. From this sense, applying the bilingual approach and intercultural perspective are needed to serve for the function. Therefore, there are numerous previous research on education for children with immigrant background, (e.g. August & Hakuta, 1997; Baker, 2001; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1998; Carrasquillo & Rodrigueuz, 2002; Reyes-Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1998; Cummins, 1989, 1994; Ovando & Collier, 1988; Ramirez, 1992) have yielded that the second language and bilingual program or applying intercultural perspectives in the pedagogy which bridge the gap between their previous knowledge and new exposure in the schools can effectively enhance their school performance.

Based on the notions of educational equality and constructing of human capital in host countries, the importance of special second language program and bilingual curricula, have been recognized by not only in the traditional immigration countries as U.S., Canada and Australia, but also the countries where immigration is recent phenomenon. However, such a second language program and bilingual curricula have designed diverse settings as the figure 1.

Figure 1: Types of bilingual and second language program (Carrasquillo & Rodrigueuz, 2002)

Type	Characteristics
<i>Transitional bilingual program (Early-exit)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It begins with the second language teaching via native language of immigrant children until they are ready to be transferred to a mainstream classroom. • It focuses on social and cultural assimilation into the dominant culture.
<i>Developmental bilingual program (Late-exit)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction emphasizes on developing both second language and native language of students. • It promotes cultural pluralism

Type	Characteristics
<i>Two-way dual program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class includes of both second language as well as native language of students. • Both native and foreign students share and learn the language of each other.
<i>Second language program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extra-program to enhance the specific needs in learning second language during their studying in mainstream program



According to Carrasquillo &Rodríguez (2002), the characteristic of second language of bilingual models as well as the length of program will be dependent on the willingness of each nation to promote these programs, the funding allocation, and the number of bilingual teachers.

All in all, this section has illustrated of briefly conceptual data about schooling second language for immigrant children from the previous empirical works. Even it cannot generalize that all immigrant children will confront with the same obstacle within their host countries, it is vital that the children of immigrants require the specific needs in term of second language learning. The data mentioned above have displayed to ground fundamental and implemental information for discussion about the circumstance and difficulties of immigrant children in Thai language schooling of Thai public schools which will unfold in later section.

Methodology

The desk-based study was employed for this paper. The data of literatures were accessed from e-database, such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, International Labor Organization, and World Education, via the keywords both in English and Thai: immigrant/migrant, Thailand; immigrant/ migrant, education, Thailand; immigrant and refugee, Thailand; immigrant/migrant children, Thailand; เด็ก/นักเรียนต่างด้าว; เด็ก/นักเรียนข้ามชาติ; เด็ก/นักเรียนอพยพ. The 30 concerning reports and research were derived and conceptualized about the circumstance in term of education and leaning Thai as the second language for immigrant children in Thai public schools.

Result

The Circumstance of immigrant children in Thailand

For decades, the augmentation of Thailand's economic sectors as well as the slowdown of fertility rate has created a large demand for immigrant labours (Chantavanich 2007; Petchot, 2014). Many transitional people come from the neighboring countries in particular from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia. Within influx of these population is not only the immigrants, but their children and migrating people under 18 years of age also recently make up a significant number in Thai soil. For instance, the official record from the Thai Ministry of Public Health in 2003 showed there were approximately 14,000 migrant children born in Thailand per year (et. al, Vungsiriphisal, 2011), a report developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) pointed that it might be 200,000 immigrant children under the age of 17 years residing in Thailand (et. al, Petchot, 2014), or the international Labour Organization (ILO) estimate that there are nearly 400,000 migrant children in Thailand (et. al, World Education, 2014). However, the accurate estimating number of children with immigrant background in Thailand is stillundershadow, since there is a sizable number of immigrant population have illegally migrated and residedin this host country. Even many of them were born in Thai territory, they have still no birth certification. As a result, it is concluded that there is a significant larger number of children in this group which still cannot be estimated.

Recently, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Ministry of Labour (MOL) have promoted registration of temporary residence and work permit for immigrant labours; however, many migrant populations still hold the illegal status (Petchot, 2014; Vungsiriphisal, 2011). This leads migrant parents avoid registering their children with Thai authorities, like hospital or public school which can lead to interrogate their unregular condition. For this respect, many immigrant



children were undocumented which inhibit them to access the social welfare service of the country, such as the healthcare facility, human right protection and education service (Vungsiriphisal, 2011).

Moreover, many studies in area of immigrant children in Thailand have replicated the consensus that many migrant children, especially children from Burma which is the largest number of migrant children in Thailand, are risky to be vulnerable status, such as being abusive child labour, victim of human trafficking and sexual industry, staying with poverty, experience of family separation, victim of discrimination and oppression, being psychological unhealth, and being in drug industry (CPPCR, 2009;ILO, 2014; Petchot, 2014; Vungsiriphisal, Chantavanich, Khanchai, Jitpong&Kuroiwa, 2010).In particular, the children who have resided separately with their parents and guardians have higher being risky in social, cultural, psychological, economic complication.

Education for All: Policy versus Practice

In order to alleviate any risks for immigrant children, education becomes significant key and essential strategy for instrumenting their knowledge and skills to protect themselves (ILO, 2008; World Education, 2014). Indeed, at first, Thailand initially has not provided this service for the migrant and displaced children. Even though Thailand hosted the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 (WCEFA, 1990), and the 1999 Education Act had already declared that ‘all individuals shall have equal right and opportunities to receive 12 years free basic education provided by the State’ (The National Education Act, 1999), the policy did not explicitly involve the migrant and stateless children. Until 2005, the cabinet has declared that education opportunities must be extended the opportunity for children from immigrant household (OEC, 2008; MOE 2009 Vungsiriphisal, 2011; Nawarat2012). This policy advocates the migrant children enrolling to the Thai school, regardless to illegal status and absence of nationalities (CPPCR, 2009). Not only giving the educational opportunities, the government also provides subsidies for tuition fees, school uniforms, school textbooks, and learning material to facilitate migrant children (Arphattananon, 2012; Chantavanich&Vungsiriphisal, 2012). The increasing number of migrant children enrolling to local Thai school evidenced the positive outcome of this policy (CPPCR, 2009; Vungsiriphisal 2011). For instance, in SamutSakorn province, which comprised of the most Burmese labours populated in Thailand (Amaraphibal&Worasean, 2010), there is increasing number of migrant students who enrolled to public Thai schools from 177 peoples in 2005 to 922 peoples in 2009 (Chantavanich&Vungsiriphisal, 2012).

Even the policy of ‘Education for All’ (EFA) seems to display the positive outcome; however, Arphattananon (2012) and Vungsiriphisal (2010) pointed out that there is less than ten per cent of total number of migrant children registered with Ministry of Labour attending to Thai public school. Consistent with Amaraphibal&Worasean (2010) the number of migrant students attending to Thai public schools is very small compared to migrant children in Thailand. Additionally, the empirical work of World Education (2014) has suggested the high proportion of drop-out of migrant students from Thai public schools after their elementary levels as the table following;



The grade level	Thepercentage
Kindergarten	30%
Elementary	67%
Secondary	3%
Upper secondary	less than 1%

Table1: The percentage of migrant children enrolled in Thai schools by level (World Education, 2014)

For these negative outcomes mentioned above, many studies have pointed that it might occur from inconsistencies between policy and practice in Thai public schools which lead the migrant children still have confronted with challenging and difficulties in part of assessing in Thai educational service. Even if the migrant children have been entitled to access the 15 years- free education in Thai public schools, Thai public schools have responded to this policy with different interpretation which mirroring the difference practices (Petchot, 2014). For example, some schools require the communicative level of Thai language competence before enrolling (CPPCR, 2009), whereas some still ask for the migrant children’s documents of birth certification (CPPCR, 2009). This means immigrant children still face a diverse barrier since the initial process as school application.

The lack of recognition and understanding of opportunities, right, and policies among a migrant communities and schools is another reason which caused migrant children not attending in Thai public school. Even many public relation media have been utilized to promote the school enrollment, it is not directly assessed to migrant parents (Arphattananon2012). The promotions have been mostly in Thai language; nevertheless, majority of migrant labours cannot read and write in Thai as well as do not uptake Thai school system (Phonlabutta, 2012). The participation of migrant children has been limited for this reason.

In addition, economic difficulties and conflicts of migrant children is influential reason which keep them out of Thai public schools. Even if the policy of EFA subsidize the 15 years-free education, there are other costs which every student has to spend within schooling. Many migrant parents cannot afford to pay for those extra costs, then decide to drop-out their children prematurely. Moreover, some of them view that the high education is not beneficial as working, so some migrant students even were required by their parents to leave their schools for working and helping their household’s financial status (Arphattananon, 2012; Petchot, 2014; Phonlabutta, 2012; World Education, 2014).

Significantly, many empirical works (Arphattananon, 2012; CPPCR,2009; Petchot, 2014; Phonlabutta, 2012) also have illustrated that there are cultural prejudices both from Thai subjectivities and migrant parents which advocate the small number of attending migrant children in the schools. For Thai agents, migrant labours, especially Burmese people, are perceived as insecure and harmful outsiders, therefore, some parents even decide to move out from their children to non-immigrant schools regard to these prejudice and stereotype. In some case, the cultural prejudice does not matter, but due to participating immigrant students in classroom is considered that it might slow down the instruction and Thai students will not receive the effective schooling. Consequently, this lead and display the cultural-ethnic segregation through the Thai parent’s educational choices and practices. As well as migrant parents, even many of them express the positive perception toward Thailand and Thai people Kocheck (2005), they still decide to not enroll



their children to Thai public school because of the fear of discrimination from Thai teachers and peers.

According to Petchot (2014) and Vungsiriphisal(2011), children who attend in Thai public school will also apply for a civil registration (the thirteen-digit ID numbers) for their legal-temporary residence in Thailand with a maximum of ten years. However, the process which have been deployed by school and the MOI is very delayed leading the immigrant student hold the 'liminal-legal status' (neither illegal, nor legal status). Without the digit ID numbers, school cannot receive the 'per-head budget' to implement the free-education policy, therefore, many schools are reluctant to welcome and engage migrant children in Thai education system. Regard to the fear of being arrested and deported, moreover, many illegal migrant labours avoid contacting with Thai authority, such as Thai school, which prevent right of their children in acquiring educational service.

Lastly, according to consensus among works (e.g.Arphattananon 2012; CPPCR 2009; Katwibun, 2013; Nawarat 2012, 2014, 2017; Petchot 2014; World Education, 2014; Vungsiriphisal 2011) about education for immigrant children in Thailand, it is evident that language barrier is one of most influential obstacle for immigrant children surviving in Thai public schools. Thai language is placed as the main medium of instruction in Thai schools and education system (Narawat, 2012). However, many immigrant children still lackof Thai language proficiency before enrolling to the schools as well as Thai teachers mostly do not have any ideas and knowledge about language of their immigrant students. Therefore, both Thai teachers and immigrant students have serious challenging within the schooling in the Thai mainstream classroom. This might lead some students to leave their school prematurely due to their incapacity to link with skills and knowledges teaching via Thai language.

In sum, it is apparent that there still is a gap between the implementation and policy which prevent against migrant children to access in Thai education for various reasons. From the data above, one of serious difficulties of migrant students in Thai schools is Thai language competence. It raised the question that what kind of program which apply for their schooling Thai language? Does it appropriate and response for their specific needs? These queries will be addressed in the next section.

Thai language Schooling for Immigrant Students

In fact, there is a flourish number of research on teaching Thai language as foreign language, especially for international undergraduate students; however, it has merely a few research which emphasize on schooling Thai language as second language for immigrant students. Majority of research in the area of immigrant children have accommodated the issues of Thai language proficiency as the challenging and difficulties circumstance which immigrant children mostly faced rather addressing the point of view in their language learning. Nevertheless, it can be concluded the provision and obstacles of children with immigrant background in section of Thai language schooling in Thai public schools as follows;

First, Thai public schools typically use Thai language as the medium of instruction without addressing language of immigrant children in the classroom. Additionally, the national curriculum which comprises with mainstream and national culture have intensively employed to assimilate immigrant students to be 'Khon Thai'. Many Thai schools and instructive personnel perceive that immigrant students gain much benefit from the free-education policy; therefore, it is not duty to Thai teachers for adjust the curriculum which fit with them, rather immigrant children are required to enhance their Thai language proficiency as soon as possible. In contrast, some



school which majority is immigrant students or have long experience in schooling these children will provide the flexible curriculum and translators which facilitate migrant students to integrate into Thai society (Petchot, 2014; Phonlabutta, 2012). Besides, some schools even conduct the transition program to develop Thai language before their mainstreaming in the classroom of grade level. The data showed that with the extra-Thai as second language program and small size of classroom can help immigrant students to learn Thai language effectively (Phonlabutta, 2012). It is obvious that there is scant of such a bilingual program because bilingual instructors and facilitative funding are less. The direction of each school toward designing Thai language program for immigrant students depends on the vision of school's principle, number of educational personnel, funding, proportion of immigrant and Thai students, and school size.

Second, many school still require the Thai language skills from immigrant children before their enrolment, however, the previous literature point that there is a few number of immigrant children can communicate fluently in Thai. Therefore, many of them have to develop their Thai language at the learning centers which stall their time to attend Thai schools. Consequently, many immigrant children with the elder age of their Thai peer share the class even their physical and cognitive growth are obviously seen. With the elder age, some can develop their learning surpass their Thai peers; however, many of them show the slower learning Thai language since the instruction and contents in classroom do not match with the experience and cognitive development in their age.

Third, there is only research developed by World Education (2014) which directly investigate the Thai reading proficiency among Burmese immigrant children compared between children attending in Thai schools and Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs). The finding suggested that even many Burmese immigrant children can achieve in Thai oral competence, majority have showed the low score in reading comprehensive level (Table 2).

The student's living city and academic institutions	Reading with Comprehension		
	Emergent level	Beginning level	Comprehensive level
Bangkok Thai (n = 70)	49%	31%	20%
Mae Sot Thai (n = 180)	64%	32%	4%
Mae Sot LC (n = 155)	30%	55%	15%

Table 2: The finding of research on investigating reading comprehensive skills in Burmese migrant children in Bangkok and Mae Sot area (World education, 2014)

In addition, the interviewing quotation in work developed by Phonlabutta (2012), also uncovered that when immigrant students in Thai public schools find the more complex difficulties in classroom when the language become subject-matter. Especially, science or social study which required their own specific terms, concepts, and skills. According to Cummins (1994, 2000), there are two set of skills defined language proficiency; (1) basic interpersonal communication, and (2) cognitive academic language proficiency. The basic interpersonal communication refers to the language skills for communication in daily level which second language learners can develop this skill via socializing with native speakers in public spaces, such as supermarket, playground, religious instructions, meanwhile cognitive academic language proficiency refers to the skill and conceptual knowledge in specific language subjects and areas which generally enhance in academic institution. To become second language proficient learner, both domains of language skills have been implemented. Therefore, The fluency in second language speaking. The children who can be



fluent in Thai speaking do not mean they already achieve the sufficient Thai language proficiency for studying in Thai academic setting.

Last, Phonlabutta (2012) pointed that the strong influence of Burmese accent on Thai speech do not impede Their learning of Thai language, but not address what factors make up kind of learning barrier for them. Nevertheless, research finding from World Education has suggested that fluency of Thai exposure outside the classroom have significantly impact on level of Thai oral proficiency.

Conclusion

Regard to right and well-being of immigrant children, the enhancing second language in host country's schools should be recognized. The submersed instruction which emphasize immigrant students to acquire second language in short time without extra-program could be affect negative outcomes from their depression for adapting to new environment as public schools. The second language and bilingual program, which link the previous experience of migrant students to the new exposure in the public school, are needed.

However, from the literature review, Thai schools have responded for schooling Thai language diverse direction. Even there is some schools showed the positive outcome of schooling Thai language in case of majority is immigrant students, small size of classroom, having translators, having extra-class of Thai language, but many schools still explored the negative academic outcomes thank to lack of bilingual or extra-Thai language program provided for immigrant students, since there is scant of bilingual teachers and translators. Therefore, immigrant students have been participated in Thai mainstream classroom without bridging their linguistic and cultural background. This leads to sizable numbers of immigrant children stay out of Thai educational system and high rate of drop-out from schools, since their school performance, such as Thai reading competence, showed the low score as data presenting earlier. As the result, it is necessary for Thai government to provide the certain guideline to aid Thai teacher find the appropriate direction to teach and organize Thai language program which truly benefit to immigrant children in Thai public schools.

Besides, Thai teachers have to be aware that even immigrant students become orally fluent in Thai language, it does not means their Thai language is already proficient for Thai classrooms. From the result above, it shows that many immigrant students still confront with the difficulties when Thai language becomes the subject-matter. Therefore, Thai teachers have to monitor whether their Thai language knowledge is sufficient for Thai academic mainstream classroom for designing the appropriate extra-language program for teaching.

It is vital that Thailand recently still lack recognition of significance in education for immigrant children, then the preparation of instruction for children in this group is diverse and unclear. Since Thai government and people still are not aware the interest for Thai nation-state for offering the educational opportunities to the 'other' as immigrant children. However, many works from the other countries explored that providing the appropriate educational service help the immigrant children developing their sense of belonging and alliance which benefit to make up positive acculturation and social atmosphere in host country. Moreover, those educated immigrant children become the significant human capital who enhance the economic section of host country. For this respect, Thai policy such as educational policy and practice should be shifted from notion of national security to notion of human capital which might facilitate Thai government to be willingness in addressing serious educational policy and practice toward immigrant children.



Moreover, as data mention above, there is solely few research which seriously focus on schooling of Thai language in public schools. Since immigrant people are heterogeneous which hold the diverse characteristic according to cultural, social, psychological, political, and economic determinants which might deploy their diverse facilities and barriers in Thai language learning. As the result, the further studies are needed to offer such pedagogical or policy implication for Thai educators and policy makers in the future.

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