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Phenomenological Study: Bilingual Teaching Classroom of Malaysian Community Colleges

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Abstract

The study of bilingual teaching classroom of Malaysian community colleges was designed for developing a brand new environment of teaching in a classroom. It was also to find the main factors that lead to this crucial phenomenon of bilingual classroom. This study has never been conducted among the academicians of community colleges and this is the first study invented by the researcher in order to help in creating new environment of teaching in a bilingual classroom and also to equip learners with good command of English language as to produce trainers who are proficient in the language. The targeted respondents of this study were several course content instructors from several different programs of Malaysian community colleges. Students from semester four undertaking certificate courses from various disciplines of studies were also involved in this research. Non-structured interviews, non-participant observation and note taking were the methods used in this research. The result indicates various answers given by the respondents from the interviews. The needs of the language for each classroom are highly depend on the teachers’ competencies of the language used instead of the learners’ needs. In a nutshell, the bilingual teaching classroom of community colleges can be evaded by practicing better approaches and methods in teaching.

Keywords: bilingual teaching classroom; students of community college; course content instructors

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1. Introduction

The study was designed in relation with teaching techniques at Malaysian community colleges where the course content teachers should have taught the learners in English. However, they are not. Community College is one of the higher education institutions established in Malaysia under the Department of Community College Education, Ministry of Education. Bilingual teaching in a classroom does exist everywhere all over the world. This study will also refer to any similar studies conducted in China and United States of America.

In Malaysia, English is used as a Second Language (L2). In some other countries, English is used as second or foreign language. Therefore, bilingual teaching in Malaysian community colleges is the best method in order to ensure learners’ understanding of the content and lesson taught. Bilingual teaching is defined as teaching two or more languages used in classroom as the medium of interaction, giving instruction and giving/receiving feedback in any subjects taught than the mother tongue language (L1) [1]. It is designed to equip learners become bilingual that called ‘two-way bilingual education’ [2]. Bilingual teaching classroom in community college resembles to classroom in Hong Kong where students are taught in both Chinese and English languages in everyday classroom. Meanwhile, in some countries of United States bilingual education is given to learners as they face difficulties in reading, writing, speaking and understanding the English language. The study of bilingual classroom in the context of Malaysian community college has never been conducted in this country. Thus, by having this research it is hoped that it can help other teachers of community colleges to improve and diversify the teaching techniques.

There are many factors that lead to the study of bilingual teaching classroom. The main factor is the involvements of course content instructors. Numbers of them were not interested in taking part in this study. Another factor is the consideration of the students in the targeted classroom whom receiving lessons in bilingual education. These learners are the most affected group who will later join the workforce where some of the trainees need to communicate in English; however, they are taught using other language. This is the most crucial part of bilingual teaching in a classroom, as the course content teachers do not have required skills in teaching learners using English language.

All established Malaysian community colleges have strong connection with industries. As Malaysian community colleges produce semi-professional skilled workers for industries, these trainees undertaking certificate courses must be equipped with complete knowledge and skills in order to serve the industries when they join the workforce. One of the skills that must be taught is by giving learners good command and understanding of English language [3]. English is lingua franca as it helps people in the universe to communicate. These community college students should not only be equipped with good skills in communication but also to know and understand the jargon of language according to their field of studies. Unfortunately, these trainees are not taught accordingly as demanded by the language needs of the industries. Thus, this study was designed to overcome the problems by providing some recommendations to this unsolved scenario at Malaysian community colleges. This study limits to the nature of certain community college staff and learners as there were only eight selected course content teachers involved in this study from four main different programs who had eight bilingual teaching classrooms. As this is a phenomenology study, the researcher did only observation, interviews and note taking during the investigation.

Observations were conducted for all teaching classrooms. During the observations, notes were taken down. Interview sessions were also conducted at the end of the lessons with all course content teachers.

2. Methodology and Design

This small-scale research of study involved eight course content instructors and eight bilingual teaching classrooms. It was designed to see the degree of bilingual language used in a classroom. The instructors were chosen randomly from four different programs that are Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Installation, Fashion and Design, and Tourism established in Southern region community colleges. The participants ranged from different age and years of teaching experience as they willing to be observed and interviewed. The observations were conducted in two constant weeks for all classes. The notes were also taken during the observations, as they did not allow the researcher to record a video during the observations and interviews.
As this is a qualitative study, purposive samplings of respondents were selected [4]. Semester Four students aged from 19 to 22 years old were involved in this study. The course content instructors ranged from 25 years old to 40 years old and have one to ten years of experience. From Mechanical Engineering program, two male instructors aged 28 and 35 were chosen. The 28year old instructor has 4 years of experience meanwhile the other has eight years of experience. They were both teaching mechanical subjects for certificate students. Other male teachers chosen from Electrical Installation program aged 29 and 31. Both of them have six years teaching experience and teaching electrical subjects. Conversely, two female staff from Fashion and Design program aged 25 and newly appointed. Another female teacher aged 36 and has 9 years of teaching experience. Finally, two teachers were chosen from Tourism program. One female aged 37 has eleven years of experience meanwhile the other male teacher aged 40 has 13 years of experience. They were all volunteered to be a part of this study.

There were four main different programs of Southern region community colleges involved in this study. However, only selected classrooms were taking part. All bilingual teaching classrooms that involved in this study were being observed and all the instructors were interviewed. The observations were completed in two consecutive weeks. Every class had one hour of teaching period. As the researcher was constrained by time and there were few classes to be observed, only 45 minutes of observation was carried out for each teaching classroom.

Upon the request of every teacher who did not allow to be recorded during the observations, the researcher had another alternative by having notes. The notes were taken during the observation. Each teaching session and responses given by learners were recorded through note taking. This is important as recording method assists researcher to see the flow of the conducted teaching approach.

Finally, every instructor of each lesson was interviewed. Again, the interviews were not recorded, as the researcher was not allowed to do so. The results of the interview questions were written in the same notes taken during the observation. The interviews were however not conducted in English language as the instructors had requested to not to ask in English. All the interview questions were asked and answered in Malay language. It proved that the teachers did not use English in classroom as they had confessed that they have limited English vocabulary.

3. Results

3.1 Observation

3.1.1 Mechanical Engineering Course

From the observations, Malay language had been used for most of the time (90%) during the teaching process. Unfortunately, exercises given were in bilingual language. The teacher gave no notes during the teaching process as it is assumed that the instructor has informed the learners to find notes on their own. The responses given by the students were also in Malay language.

3.1.2 Electrical Installation Course

Electrical Installation Course trainers can be said that had almost the same way of teaching as Mechanical instructors. However, during the observation it was found that teachers did not give any exercises for the students, and they conversed in Malay language. The students of this program were more passive compared to mechanical students as most of the time the teachers just had one-way interaction of teaching process. This brought more disadvantages to the students, as they will face more difficulties in understanding the jargon of language in their discipline of studies.

3.1.3 Tourism Course

Conversely, Tourism trainers were more concerned on the English language. It was found that about 60% of the lesson was conducted in English language. It showed that the instructors emphasized on the importance of English language among the learners. Furthermore, they realized the importance of English not only to equip the trainees with the jargon of hospitality language but also they will be the most important persons who will serve and entertain customers/guests in the hospitality and tourism industry.
An alternative was taken by these teachers in order to strengthen students’ understanding of the content. The notes and practices written in English were given to the students. The use of English language has been strongly emphasized, as the learners need to deal with certain terminologies when they join workforce.

### 3.1.4 Fashion and Design Course

This teaching and learning process conducted in this program was the most awful as the teachers did not emphasized on the importance of English language. The trainers spoke in Malay language most the time and no practice was given for the students. They were also more on chitchatting in class. No notes were given to the student as they were only taught on hands-on skills such as drawing, sketching and sewing. This should not be happened, as the learners should be taught in English since they are undertaking a sort of communication skills under the umbrella of Fashion and Design.

### 3.2 Interviews

The conducted interviews were mainly looking forward to answer some questions pertaining to bilingual teaching classroom. The questions include:

1. How many years have you been teaching in community college?
2. Do you prefer to teach in English or Malay language? Why do you say so?
3. What do you think of the students’ responses if you are to teach in English?
4. Do you think teaching students using fully English language gives any benefits not only for the students but also for you?
5. What is/are your opinion/s on improving the use of English language in classroom?

Below are the results of the summarized interview sessions.

#### 3.2.1 Mechanical Engineering Course

The interviews resulting that the instructors of this program want English language to be implemented only to semester one students. Other than that, the system of community college education is not systematic and well arranged. Thus, they want it to be more structured, well planned and systematic.

Moreover, none of the teachers has tried to use English language in class although the circular on English language classroom has been introduced in 2008. As a result, the grade of the students’ English spoken had deteriorating for every semester.

#### 3.2.2 Electrical Installation Course

The instructor of this course had almost similar thoughts as mechanical instructors in which they wanted English language to be conducted for semester one students. The instructors have own perception toward the teaching using English language. They emphasized more on content instead of the language. Besides, they also requested for more English courses to be conducted, as this is one of the ways to improve their English so that they can teach students using English language in classroom.

#### 3.2.3 Tourism Course

The interviewees of this course had several years of teaching experience and they were some of the senior teachers. Based on the interview result, they like to use English in classroom, but they do not have enough skill in English communication. In addition, they also requested for more English courses either in-house or outside which can improve their English language. They also realized the importance of English language not only for them as instructors but also for the learners as they need to know the hospitality languages as trainees will be dealing with customers in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Other than that, they agreed that the use of English language in a classroom is greatly depends on the learners’ interest and competency. Upon the realization of the importance of English language, the teachers take an effort by speaking English in class although they know it is possible to engage learners in English language spoken in classroom. Another factor that leads to spoken English is the learners’ ability. Very few of learners had ‘pass’ rate
English result in their SPM examination. Thus, it is possible for the learners to respond and communicate in English with the trainers.

3.2.4 Fashion and Design Course

The results of the interview sessions were astonishing. The trainers of this course did not have interest in speaking English, as they believe that there is no relevancy of speaking English language in classroom, as students do not have to speak English during examinations. Furthermore, students undertaking courses of Fashion and Design are equipped with skills and techniques. Any lesson given only emphasizes on skills and techniques that they need as preparation before joining any industry. Thus, the lacks of interest among the trainers will only give bad impact for learners’ speaking ability and yet they will face problem to correspond with employers at industry.

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4. Conclusion

In conclusion, majority of the trainers have less interest in using English in classroom except trainers from Tourism course. The use of English language in a classroom depends on the relevancy and needs of the instructors, not for the sake of the students. The bilingual teaching classroom is much preferred as it helps the instructors to develop learners’ understanding of the learning content and translation of English is best accepted [5]. This study proved that bilingual teaching classroom is a crucial phenomenon exists in Malaysian community college and this study has never been conducted earlier.

Finally, it is hoped that this study will open the heart and mind of other community college instructors in giving the best education for learners. It is also hoped that similar studies on this issue can be carried out in the future in order to improve the system and policy of Malaysian community college education in helping trainees to be well equipped with good English and to be well employed by the industry in the workforce.

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References