



Motivational orientation and preference for English-medium programs in Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Economic globalization and the resulting internationalization in higher education have resulted in a proliferation of English-medium programs. The investigation reported here examined the relationship between various measures of motivational orientation toward English language learning and students' preference for English-medium graduate programs. Data were collected from undergraduate students enrolled in nine different academic programs in Thailand ($N = 2252$, males = 31.2% and females = 68.8%). The results of mean values in the motivational scales show that instrumental goals occupy the first rank across academic programs but integrative goals were also positive and more significant in association with the idea of undertaking English-medium graduate program, especially for females. Levels of English language classroom anxiety and perceived social support from parents, peers, and teachers were significant to the discrimination between student groups who would prefer to study in English or in Thai. Our findings validate the importance of integrative goals, classroom learning situation and the affective dimensions of motivation in student preference for English-medium instruction.

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1. Introduction

In his seminal work on “World Englishes”, Braj Kachru (1986) has described three “concentric circles” of English language use in Asia: The “inner circle” represents Australia and New Zealand, where English is, primarily, a first language; the “outer circle” represents India, Singapore, and Philippines, where English is an institutionalized additional language; and the expanding “outer most circle” represents China, Taiwan, Korea, and Thailand, where English is primarily a foreign language. In the decades following Kachru's study, there has been significant growth in English language teaching and learning in the “outer most circle”. English has become a *lingua franca* in higher education (Coleman, 2006; Crystal, 2003). English-medium programs are burgeoning throughout Asia (Wiriyachitra, 2001, 2002) as Asians have become the largest group of consumers in this education marketplace. Currently, most applicants for international English language proficiency exams (e.g., TOEFL or Test of English as a Foreign Language) are students in higher education from Asia.

Motivational orientation is considered to be a good predictor of an individual's curricular decision-making, from class attendance to the completion of assignments and choice of a particular program of study (e.g., Koballa & Glynn, 2007;

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Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool, & Ploisawaschai, 2009). This paper reports the results of an investigation in Thailand on motivational factors that influence undergraduate students' preference for English-medium programs for their graduate studies.

2. Background

Thai (Central Thai language) is at least moderately-well understood by over 90% of Thailand's population (Diller, 2002), and Thai has been the traditional medium of instruction in the majority of primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities.

In the aftermath of the severe economic recession of 1997–1998, Thai educational policy makers have mandated the advancement of English language teaching and learning to prepare students for economic globalization and internationalization (Wiriyachitra, 2001). English is now a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools. College and university students are required to take an English language proficiency test before graduation. Many graduate programs now require applicants to take TOEFL or a similar English language proficiency exam as an entrance or candidacy requirement. The higher education system has seen a significant increase in the number of undergraduate and graduate English-medium programs (e.g., Chalapati, 2007), which are called "international programs" in Thailand. In 2002, 78 universities offered 446 international programs. In 2007, approximately 100 universities offered more than 727 English-medium programs across the country. Despite policy that mandates English language learning, many Thai students delay required English language coursework for as long as possible and avoid communicating in English (e.g., Koul et al., 2009).

Motivational theories can be applied to explain why individuals may strive for the specific goal of learning a foreign language, how intensively they will strive, how long they will strive, and what feelings and emotions characterize individuals when they are engaged in the process of learning a foreign language. There are many conceptualizations of motivation for second language learning (e.g., Dornyei, 1994; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004). Dornyei's model (1994) usefully distinguishes three motivational factors: *Learner, language and learning situation*.

The *learner* factor involves an individual student's goals and language proficiency. According to achievement goal theory, individuals pursue the achievement goals that reflect their motivation for second language learning: Generally speaking, mastery goals focus inwardly on mastering a task and personal improvement while performance goals focus outwardly on normative outcomes, grades and other external evaluations and comparisons (Hyde & Durik, 2005). A student who endorses a performance approach goal wants to demonstrate ability that is superior to others and a student who endorses a performance avoidance goal wants to not appear stupid compared to others (e.g., Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001). Mastery goals have been found to be associated with higher levels of English language self-efficacy whilst performance avoidance goals have been found to be associated with lower levels of English language self-efficacy (e.g., Koul et al., 2009).

The *language* factor involves a student's instrumental and integrative motives for learning a second language. According to Gardner's socio-cultural theory, individuals have instrumental motives (e.g., studying English to meet graduation requirements) and integrative motives (e.g., studying English to enhance socialization and relationship with foreigners) for learning a second language (see also Dornyei, 2005; Yashima, 2002).

The *learning situation* factor involves student motives with respect to the learning environment. Motivation, as a construct, includes the affective domain (e.g., Koballa & Glynn, 2007): Feelings of fear and apprehension toward the second language learning situation can contribute to tension and frustration, or what is called "foreign language classroom anxiety" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 127). A growing body of research from the mid-1970s onwards indicates that anxiety with respect to the classroom learning situation affects many foreign language learners and is considered a good predictor of foreign language development (e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; Koul et al., 2009).

Along with the motivational factors described above, levels of social support from parents, teachers and peers motivate language learning. In his work on French language learning in Canada, Kissau (2007) notes that "encouragement is an important variable to consider when examining enrolment in second and foreign language studies" (pp. 429–430). Kissau notes that very little research has been conducted to investigate differences in the encouragement males and females receive for second or foreign language learning.

This research report presents the results of a survey investigation conducted with undergraduate students enrolled in nine different academic programs in Thailand. Our investigation was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' predominant motivational orientations toward English language learning?
2. What is the relationship between different measures of motivation and student preference for English-medium graduate programs? What is the influence of academic program?
3. What are the best predictors for undergraduate males' and females' preference for English-medium graduate programs?

Assessment of both individual and group responses in relation to these questions offers a richer understanding of how motivation plays into second or foreign language learning (see also Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Shedyiv, 2004). In the case of Thailand, are there differences in measures of motivation between males and females and across academic programs? Do college students enrolled in English-medium undergraduate programs exhibit more favorable attitudes toward English-medium graduate programs compared to undergraduate students enrolled in non-English-medium programs? Do college

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