A Study of Student, Teacher, and Parent Factors in Relation to English National Test Scores of Grade 9 Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the relationship between (1) the learners’ attitudes and their National Test (NT) of English achievement scores, (2) the learners’ English learning strategies and their NT of English achievement scores, (3) teacher factors and learners’ NT of English achievement scores, and (4) parent factors and learners’ NT of English achievement scores.

Subjects consisted of 300 students randomly selected from 17 secondary schools situated in the area of the Office of Basic Education Suratthani. Data collection was carried out using (1) a question asking about factors affecting English learning achievement, and (2) scores of English NT achievement, constructed by The Department of Academic, The Ministry of Education. A statistical package was employed to identify frequency, percentage, means, standard deviation and correlation. It following findings was made.

1) Scores of learners’ attitude toward some English language learning was related to the English NT achievement scores, at 0.05.

2) Learners’ English learning strategies was not related to the NT of English achievement scores.

3) Teachers’ teaching behavior was not related to the NT of English achievement scores.

4) Parents factors were not related to the NT of English achievement scores.
INTRODUCTION

The progress in industry, sciences, technology as well as the convenience in communication has led the closeness and mutual reliance among world countries. English, one of the languages most widely used worldwide, thus, become a lingua franca for such the phenomenon (Crystal, 1997; McKay, 2002). In addition, the English language is well recognized in education. Most printed and non-printed materials related to various sciences are in English. It is, thus, the language essential for higher education domestically and abroad. Besides, those with decent command of the language have better understanding of beliefs, attitudes, cultures of people from other countries, as well as the movement on world politics, economics, social situations (Angwatanakul, 1997).

Thailand has well recognized the importance of the English language learning and teaching. She has reformed the Thai educational system launching The 2001 Basic Education Syllabus in order to catch up with such changes. Under the syllabus, the English language syllabus has been improved according to the social streams and the language leaning technology (The Department of Academic, The Ministry of Education, 1999).

 Nonetheless, the Thai educational system has experienced certain problems caused by the demand from the changing society. The system was made to prepared graduates to meet such demand in order that Thailand is able to complete in the world arena. In the midst of such situation, she has encountered educational failure, confuse, and various problems. In fact, the Thai education is in a crisis (Gaewdang, 1997).

Such phenomenon was documented in the 9-year report of the educational reform (1999-2008). Regarding to educational achievement, it was reported that the grade point average was continuously decreasing for the previous 5 years in 5 academic subjects—Mathematics, Thai, English, and Sciences. That happened to grade 6 as well as grade 9 students. Similarly, grade 12 students’ scores on Thai, Social Studies, English, Mathematics, and Sciences were under 50 percent during 2003-2004 (The Office of Educational Counsel Secretariat, The Ministry of Education, 2009).

Regarding the issue, it was found that English language scores of the learners in the 17 secondary schools situated in the area of the Office of Basic Education Suratthani, Region 2 were below 50 percent. The researcher (Nitchanan), as an English teacher in a school in the region was interested to investigate the learner, teacher and parent factors in relation to English NT achievement scores of grade 9 students in 17 secondary schools situated in the area of the Office of Basic Education Suraththani, region 2. It was expected that findings from the present study will be of benefits to all parties involved in education in that the
information discovered can be employed to make better the teaching, and basic education syllabus.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study was aimed at investigating the relationship between:
1). the learners’ attitudes and their National Test (NT) of English achievement scores,
2). the learners’ English learning strategies and their NT achievement
3). teacher factors and learners’ NT of English achievement scores, and
4). parent factors and learners’ NT of English achievement scores

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Below is a brief description of the key concepts involved in the present study: learner, teacher, and family factors; attitudes towards the English learning; the English learning strategies; and the basic knowledge in the English language.

Learner factors refer to the learners’ attitudes toward learning English, attitudes, knowledge, intellect, aptitude and background knowledge, interest, motivation and learning behavior.

Teacher factors refer to the knowledge about: the process of learning management; knowledge in the subject matter; the ability in providing decent learning environment; learning sources and information technology; the ability in self-assessing regarding their teaching behavior; and teaching quality.

Family factors refer to parents or caretakers’ activities and attention on the students’ education.

Attitudes towards the English learning refer to learners’ positive or negative feelings, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to the environment--things, people, and groups.

English learning strategies refer to learners’ planning and self-designating and self-control.

The basic knowledge in the English language refers to learners’ prior knowledge in English.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study focused on investigating the relationship between (1) the learners’ attitudes and their NT of English achievement scores, (2) the learners’ English learning strategies and their NT achievement, (3) teacher factors and learners’ English NT
achievement, and (4) parent factors and learners’ English NT achievement scores. The 300 subjects were randomly selected from the population of grade 9 students enrolled in the 2008 academic year in 17 secondary schools situated in the area of the Office of Basic Education Suratthani. At the time of data collection the subjects were grade 10 students. Data collection was carried out using (1) a question asking about factors affecting English learning achievement, and (2) NT of English achievement scores, constructed by The Department of Academic, The Ministry of Education

METHODOLOGY
The present research is a survey study conducted during the 2009 academic year. Subjects were 300 grade 9 students affiliated to 17 secondary schools situated in the area of the Office of Basic Education Surathani, region 2. A simple random selection was carried out for 5-15 subjects depending on the number of students in each school. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the sample group after achieving the designated number. Data collected were analyzed statistically to determine frequencies, means, standard deviation, and the correlation between the NT of English achievement scores and the factors in question.

Research Results
Findings were made about the attitudes towards the English learning, English learning strategies, English teachers’ teaching behavior, and family’s support in the English language learning. The findings regarding each aspect are presented below.

1. Attitudes towards the English learning

Table 1 below shows the relationship between the learners’ attitudes towards the English learning and the scores on English learning achievement.

Table 1: Relationship between the learners’ attitudes towards the English learning and scores on English learning achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes Towards the English Learning</th>
<th>Coefficient correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning English is more difficult than other subjects.</td>
<td>-.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To learn English is very important in everyday life.</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English is the subject I like so much.</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. English is important for my future career.</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The English learning make me more interested in the</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English language.

6. When I have free time I would go to the library to read English newspaper, cartoons, and stories.

7. When I join English activities I think I spend my time productively.

8. I think a person will get a good job if s/he knows English well.

9. When encounter difficult words while reading I would give up right away because English is not the subject I like most.

Table 1 shows that most aspects related to attitudes towards the English learning did not relate to scores on NT of English achievement. While certain aspects were found having such correlation, it was at a very low level. Generally, learners with positive attitudes would achieve high scores. Thus, the following interpretations are made to explain the errors resulted.

(1) The items in Table 1 concern feelings. Each subject in the sample group might have the same or different feelings.

(2) When trace back to the learners’ scores on NT of English achievement it was found that most students scored very low, with a very low means. The test results obtained from the tests given by the school teachers, on the other hand, were at rather high level. The result, thus, might not reflect the learners’ genuine knowledge. This issue should be paid great attention by all parties involved to find out what caused the problem and how to solve it.

(3) The NT of English could be too difficult for the students at this particular level.

2. English learning strategies

The present study found certain important information related to English learning strategies presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: English learning strategies in relation to scores on NT of English achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Learning Strategies</th>
<th>Coefficient correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I revise what I have studied before starting a new lesson.</td>
<td>-.072</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. I understand new knowledge by linking it to the knowledge I have already had. | -.058
3. I remember new words by constructing sentences using the new word. | -.094
4. I apply grammatical rules to communicate in new situations. | -.001
5. I practice using English for communication by listening to English news. | .016
6. I try to talk to foreigners every time I have a chance. | .004
7. I have my students translate some difficult words to help me understand reading comprehension. | .048
8. I use easy vocabulary to help explain the specific terms I don’t know. | .023
9. I try to use English every time I have a chance. | -.008
10. I always write down the interesting words or expressions from TV, newspaper or magazines and keep them in a note book. | .039
11. I have a definite goal of learning English. | -.019
12. I try to learn about other countries’ cultures. | -.037
13. I have my teachers or friends correct my errors in using English. | -.017
14. I do activities to practice English skills with friends. | -.015
15. Besides teachers, I ask for advice in the English learning from relatives and people I know. | -.046

It is shown in Table 2 that the results were similar to those found in Table 1. Most of the learning strategies did not have relationship with the scores on NT of English achievement. Similarly, although certain aspects were found having such correlation, it was at a very low level. The findings were against the work by Pintrich (1995) from which it was found that learning strategies can be trained. Pintrich also argued in his study that learning strategies enhance learning as well as skill and creative thinking development. Students having high scores on learning strategies were found attaining high achievement scores.

Interestingly enough, while the learners’ scores on NT of English achievement were low, the test results obtained from the tests given by the school teachers were at rather high
level. The result of the NT, thus, might not reflect the learners’ genuine knowledge. Therefore, the findings in table 2 may have been resulted from certain reasons, the level of difficulty in particular.

Nationwide, a large number of students in remote areas do not have access to decent learning opportunities and advanced educational technology or information. Besides learning aids, those students lack opportunities to practice English in real situations. Similarly, a lot of students residing in urban areas only have chances to use English with their teachers and simulations. The contents in the NT, on the other hand, consisted of test items concerning every day life communication, which were far beyond what the students have opportunities to learn.

Therefore, the level of difficulty in the NT of English might not match the ability of the students at this particular level. Another reason might be the test format which is rather different from what the students have experienced.

3. English teachers’ teaching behavior

Another aspect found in the present study is the relationship between the scores on NT of English achievement and English teachers’ teaching behavior, presented in table 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English teachers’ teaching behavior</th>
<th>Coefficient correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My teachers listen to students’ opinion in adjusting ways of communicating to accommodate the contents of the subject.</td>
<td>-.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My teachers encouraged students to create English learning activities.</td>
<td>-.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My teachers use simple English structure and vocabulary easy to understand.</td>
<td>-.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My teachers adjust teaching techniques when students don’t understand what is presented.</td>
<td>-.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My teachers prepared teaching materials and activities for every lesson.</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My teachers know well about the contents they teach.</td>
<td>-.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My teachers tell the objectives of each lesson, revise the contents of previous lesson,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
summarize the lesson, and have evaluation after each lesson.

7. My teachers use pictures, printed matters, video, and other teaching means in explaining vocabulary to make the contents easier to understand.

8. My teachers use various ways and different kinds of teaching materials in explaining and demonstration.

9. My teachers use interesting and appropriate techniques and teaching materials in explaining and demonstrating.

10. My teachers give supportive encouragement and feedback when students make errors.

11. My teachers ask appropriate questions and give fair shares to all students in answering questions.

12. My teachers’ questions encourage students to find out the answer.

13. My teachers explain instructions clearly when giving assignments.

14. The assignments my teachers give relate to the contents taught.

15. The assignments my teachers give are interesting and challenging.

16. My teachers correct students’ deviating behaviors and provide students with the opportunities for consultation.

17. My teachers are interested in the learning behaviors of every student.

18. My teachers are able to control students’ problematic behaviors.

19. My teachers regularly give complements to students.
Table 3 shows that most aspects relating to teacher behaviors did not correlate to the scores on NT of English achievement. Like what found in table 1 and table 2, only a few aspects were found having such correlation, and it was at a very low level. The table also shows that in average the teacher behavior factors are at very low level. When considering each individual factor, it was found that the assignment given to the students was well related to what was taught.

It is, thus, speculated that a large number of students studying in opportunity-expanding schools nationwide learn English from the teachers who were not majored in English because there is a lack in teachers with bachelor’s degree in English or teaching English. The problem is even worse when those teachers have to teach more than one subjects—not only English. Thus, the quality of the English teaching is questionable.

| 20. My teachers have students share opinion in setting goals of study. | .033 |
| 21. My teachers use challenging activities to raise students’ motivation. | .114(*) |
| 22. My teachers give encouragement to students who have learning problems. | .016 |
| 23. My teachers report the results of each assignment together with giving students complements. | .008 |
| 24. My teachers give feedbacks and have them correct the errors right after they answered the questions. | .101 |
| 25. My teachers give explanation to each individual student in case s/he does not understand. | -.013 |
| 26. My teachers use different ways of evaluation, such as questioning, quizzes, etc. | -.004 |
| 27. My teachers have students take a pre-test to find out the students’ basic knowledge of English. | .009 |
| 28. My teachers have students take tests during and after the session. | -.008 |
| 29. My teachers report test results to students and point out their drawbacks. | -.007 |

* Sig. 0.05
A statistically significant correlation, 0.05, was also found between the scores on NT of English achievement and the questions teachers asked to trigger students to find out answers, as well as between the scores on NT of English achievement and the activities provided by teachers to trigger students’ motivation. However, the level of correlation was very low.

In a further qualitative analyzing, a possible reason of not finding correlation or low level of correlation was identified. Unlike the situation of grade 12 students, the scores on NT of English achievement for grade 9 students do not have any effect on their further study. Thus, they do not acknowledge the significance of the test leading to their not paying enough attention in taking the test.

4. Family’s support in the English language learning

The last aspect investigated in the present study is the correlation between the scores on NT of English achievement and the learners’ family’s support in the English language learning, as shown in table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family’s support factors</th>
<th>Coefficient correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My parents encourage me to read English cartoons and novels.</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My parents encourage me to have international friends.</td>
<td>-.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My parents encourage me to use the internet to practice English.</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My parents encourage me to take short courses in English.</td>
<td>-.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My parents encourage me to take English tutorial courses.</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My parents encourage me to participate in club activities to practice using English.</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My parents are interested in having exchange students in order that I have more opportunities to practice using English.</td>
<td>-.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My parents do not encourage me to have additional outside-class lessons.</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. My parents encourage me to learn by heart all the vocabulary every day.  
10. My parents do not provide any advice on make plan on my English learning.  
11. My parents make me see the importance of learning English.  
12. When having problem with learning English I can consult my parents.  
13. I spend most of my time studying English by myself, without my parents’ involvement.  
14. My parents let me see English TV and videos at home.  
15. My parents see English soundtrack movies.  
16. My parents encourage me to listen to English radio programs or watch English programs on TV.  
17. My parents buy English books, newspaper, and magazines so that I can increase my English ability.  
18. My parents encourage me to buy English learning materials.  
19. My parents are pleased when I sing English songs.  
20. My parents give me complements when I can remember English words.  
21. My parents are pleased when I speak English.  
22. My parents give me complements or reward when I get good scores in English.  
23. My parents blame me when I get low grade in English.  
24. My parents encourage me to enter in English skill contests or competition.  
25. My parents like English and that makes me like English too.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. My parents encourage me to learn by heart all the vocabulary every day.</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My parents do not provide any advice on make plan on my English learning.</td>
<td>-.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My parents make me see the importance of learning English.</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When having problem with learning English I can consult my parents.</td>
<td>-.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I spend most of my time studying English by myself, without my parents’ involvement.</td>
<td>-.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My parents let me see English TV and videos at home.</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My parents see English soundtrack movies.</td>
<td>-.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My parents encourage me to listen to English radio programs or watch English programs on TV.</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My parents buy English books, newspaper, and magazines so that I can increase my English ability.</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. My parents encourage me to buy English learning materials.</td>
<td>-.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. My parents are pleased when I sing English songs.</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My parents give me complements when I can remember English words.</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. My parents are pleased when I speak English.</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. My parents give me complements or reward when I get good scores in English.</td>
<td>-.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. My parents blame me when I get low grade in English.</td>
<td>-.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. My parents encourage me to enter in English skill contests or competition.</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. My parents like English and that makes me like English too.</td>
<td>-.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that, like what found in the previous tables, only certain aspects were found having correlation with the scores on NT of English achievement, at a very low level.
The aspects include the followings: parents’ recognition of the importance of learning English, parents’ satisfaction when the learners speak English, parents’ encouragement to listen to and watch English programs, and parents’ purchase of English learning materials—books, magazines, and newspaper.

The findings correspond with what Gardner (1973) suggested that in order to enhance the learners’ achievement in the language learning, parents should provide their children with ample encouragement relating to English learning factors, including listening to and watching English programs, helping them do homework, giving reward when achieve success, etc.

However, most aspects relating to parents’ factors did not correlate to the scores on NT of English achievement. This could have been caused by several factors. Besides the reasons stated above, most of the parents of the subjects in the present study are in agriculture. Mostly they have relatively limited education, mostly are secondary school graduates, which probably makes them not realizing the importance of education. Their career is also time consuming leading to their not having time for their children’s education.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of present study, a few points are worth discussion.

First, it was found that the subjects’ overall attitudes toward the English learning were at a moderate level. When considering each individual aspect, the highest score on the belief that English is very important for everyday life was found at a high level. Another aspect the subjects ranked rather high was the belief that those who will get a good job should be very good at English.

However, it was found that their attitudes towards learning English did not correlate to the scores on NT of English achievement. This finding is contrast to what is well accepted in the field of second language acquisition—attitudes toward a second language relates to a learner’s language learning achievement, but they might not be dependent on each other (Krashen, 1982).

Second, the scores on language learning strategies were found at a moderate level. Similarly, certain aspect were found at a high level—item 6 (attempt to speak English whenever having a chance), for example.

Third, regarding teacher teaching behavior, like the first 2 variable groups above, only certain aspects of this factor were found correlated to the scores on NT of English achievement. It is remarkable, however, that the scores on ranking teachers’ teaching behavior were at moderate to very high level. It was found that the assignments given were highly pertinent to
what was taught, for example. High scores on ranking were also found about the aspect of teachers’ knowledge about the subject matter they taught, and the questions asked to trigger learners’ thinking.

Therefore, a few points can be made from the findings discussed above.

First, it can be assumed that because the subjects in the present study were grade 9 students, the scores on NT of English achievement did not have any influence on their future. They did not need the scores for entering into a higher education level. This fact is unlike the case of grade 12 students whole NT scores were considered a part of university admission criteria.

Second, it can be assumed that most subjects in the present study were from remote areas. They did not have ample access to decent learning factors. They hardly had opportunities to expose to real life communication using English, which is essential for effective second language learning (Gardner, &Lambert, 1972).

Third, relating to the factor above, the learners’ socio-economic status did not seem to accommodate their language learning. Most were from families doing farming with parents having limited formal education. Their parents, thus, might not have provided them with supportive advice.

Fourth, the English NT test items related to communicative English, emphasizing on everyday spoken language. The subjects, however, have experience the learning materials not emphasizing such aspect.

Finally, in the remote area a number of teachers are made to teach the subjects they were not majored in. Moreover, they have to carry out more than one subject. Often time a teacher holding a bachelor’s degree in social studies is assigned to teach English as well as sciences.

RECOMMENDATION

Following the discussion above, the followings suggestions for educators and researchers are made from the present study.

The following four suggestions are made for educators.

First, the findings show that the English NT did not correspond with what the learners are taught at school. Thus, it is recommended that the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education reconsider the curriculum imposed. The curriculum should contain contents relevant to what is tested at the national level as well as the contents relevant to local needs of the learners.
Second, owing to the fact that subjects in the present study were disadvantageous in terms of exposing to real life communication with speakers of English and other language learning facilities, education administrative officers at every level are recommended to equip the teachers with enough education resources of every kind, especially academic development opportunities, financial support for purchasing audio-visual aids and other teaching materials. If teachers without enough English education background have opportunities to develop themselves through short course training or academic seminars, they should be more competent and confident in what they have to conduct daily. Regarding educational facility, due to the lack mentioned, if the school is equipped with enough variety of such facility, teachers and learners together would be able to create more semi-natural foreign language learning environment leading to learners’ positive attitudes and motivation. A better learning achievement, thus, can be expected.

In addition, it is recommended that researchers conduct similar studies using scores of other achievement tests, such as the General Aptitude Test or GAT, the Professional Aptitude Test, or PAT for grade-12 students.

It is also recommended for further study that the research instrument contain fewer items in the questionnaire to avoid respondents’ fatigue effect.

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