

Teachers and Students' Perspectives in Current State, Problems and Needs of Multicultural Learning in Malay Language Communication in the Southernmost Region of Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the teachers and students' perspectives in current state, problems and needs of multicultural learning in the Malay language communication subject at the secondary in Narathiwat province. Data was collected by the questionnaires from 33 secondary school teachers and 36 students under of the Narathiwat Secondary Educational Service Area Office. Data was analyzed by mean and standard deviation (SD). The results indicated that, in overall, teachers held a high level of opinions regarding the current state (mean = 3.69, SD = 0.63), moderate level of opinions regarding the problems (mean = 2.89, SD = 0.73) and high level of opinions regarding the needs (mean = 4.14, SD = 0.79) of multicultural learning in the Malay language communication. In addition, in overall, students held a high level of opinions regarding the current state (mean = 4.03, SD = 0.68), moderate level of opinions regarding the problems (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.73) and high level of opinions regarding the needs (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.75) of multicultural learning in the Malay language communication. The teachers and students held the perspectives in current state, problems and needs of multicultural learning in the Malay language communication in the same direction.

Keywords: Perspectives, Current State, Problems, Needs, Multicultural Learning, Malay Language Communication

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Introduction

Thailand stands out as a nation marked by a rich tapestry of diversity, encompassing a wide array of ethnicities, languages, religions, customs, and ways of life, particularly in regions contiguous to its neighboring countries. This commitment to diversity is enshrined in the constitutional framework of the Kingdom, specifically articulated in Article 70, Section 5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (2017) (p. 18). This constitutional provision underscores the pivotal role of the state in fostering an environment that safeguards and promotes the rights of Thai citizens hailing from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It emphasizes their entitlement to live harmoniously within society in accordance with their respective cultures, traditions, and original lifestyles. This liberty is extended, provided that such expressions of diversity do not compromise public order, moral values, or present a threat to the security and public health, as elucidated in the Constitution of The Kingdom of Thailand (2017). In essence, Thailand's constitutional framework manifests a dedication to preserving the myriad cultural identities within its borders while upholding the broader interests of societal well-being. Furthermore, the National Education Act B.E 2542 (1999), as amended (2nd edition) in 2002, Article 10 Section 2 on Education Rights and Responsibilities, specifies that "...educational management must ensure that individuals have equal rights and opportunities to receive basic education for a minimum of twelve years, provided universally and with quality, without charge" (Office of the National Education Commission, 2002, p. 7).

The evolution of the education system, with a focus on fostering acceptance of diversity, acknowledging its inherent value, and underscored by an emphasis on the significance of involvement in various professions and stakeholders, is an integral component of the national objectives delineated in the National Education Plan (2017-2036).

The plan addresses the increasing trends of conflicts and violence in society, the refusal to accept differing opinions, and the aggressive behavior of certain individuals spreading across various countries. The rise in conflicts of opinion within society results in unrest, leading to citizen apprehension and a lack of safety in life and property. (pp. 17-18)

Envisaged within the framework of the National Education Plan (2017-2036), the strategic blueprint for education management to fortify social stability and uphold national security. The southern border provinces of Thailand exhibit distinct characteristics in language, religion, and culture, necessitating a concerted effort to promote and support the education of multicultural societies. The Southern Border Provinces Development Strategy for the years 2022-2024 advocates for the advancement of multicultural understanding, national history, and local history through the formulation of curricula. This educational approach is designed to underscore the significance of comprehending multicultural societies, national history, and local history within the southern border provinces, with a pronounced emphasis on fostering unity and harmony among the diverse population.

Integral to this initiative is the enhancement of the identity and individuality of the people in the southern border provinces. This involves not only the promotion of Thai language but also the cultivation of proficiency in the Malay language, English, and other pertinent foreign languages at all educational levels. These linguistic skills are positioned as essential tools for communication, daily life, career development, and establishing connections with the Malay world, Arab world, and the broader international community. Thus, the strategy encapsulates a comprehensive approach to education that aligns with the distinctive characteristics of the

southern border provinces while concurrently fostering a sense of unity and interconnectedness within the broader regional and global context.

The southern border provinces of Thailand possess distinctive characteristics in terms of language, religion, and culture. Therefore, it is crucial to promote and support the learning of multicultural societies, as outlined in the Southern Border Provinces Development Strategy for the years 2022-2024, on page 13. The strategy provides 12 development directions, and one of them specifies: "Promote and support the learning of multicultural societies, national history, and local history through the development of curricula that emphasize the understanding of multicultural societies, national history, and local history in the southern border provinces, emphasizing the creation of unity and harmony among people in the area. Enhance the identity and individuality of people in the southern border provinces, including promoting the learning of the Thai language, Malay language, English, and other important foreign languages at all levels of education as tools for communication, daily life, career development, and relationships with the Malay world, Arab world, and international community" (Southern Border Provinces Development Strategy 2022-2024, pp. 11-12).

The Core Curriculum for Basic Education B.E. 2551 (2008) strategically organized learning management into eight subject groups, with Foreign Languages standing out as a pivotal category. This inclusion is notably influenced by the regional context of the southern border provinces adjacent to Malaysia, where Malay serves as the second foreign language. The central Malay language, specifically, plays a prominent role as a widely utilized means of communication in this region and stands as one of the primary languages within the ASEAN community.

Malay, whether referred to as Bahasa Malaysia in Malaysia or Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesia, Bahasa Melayu in Brunei, parts of Singapore, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, and the southern region of Thailand (in the form of the local Malay language), holds significance. Notably, its distinction lies in its use of the Roman alphabet, shared with English, and its straightforward language structure. The Core Curriculum acknowledges the pragmatic aspects of learning Malay, given its simplicity and widespread usage. Beyond regional borders, the utility of Malay extends, contributing to its potential as a lingua franca within the ASEAN community. This multifaceted language not only eases communication but also fosters an enhanced understanding of diverse lifestyles, cultures, and traditions across the region. Such linguistic inclusivity aligns seamlessly with the overarching vision of "One Vision, One Identity, One ASEAN Community," promoting unity and mutual comprehension within this dynamic and culturally rich collective (Prasert Yenprasit, 2013).

The Multi-cultural Literature Learning Model (McLL) can be flexibly incorporated into classrooms through diverse methods, aiming to enhance multi-cultural literature learning. One effective approach involves the utilization of Malay literature as a means to foster career-based communication. Nevertheless, an examination of the literature related to education in Thailand underscores a notable gap in research dedicated to exploring the current state, problems and needs concerning the McLL. Consequently, the researchers are motivated to delve into an inquiry aimed at comprehensively understanding the current state, problems and needs concerning the implementation of McLL in grade 11 level.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study were as follows: a) What are the current state, problems, and needs related to multicultural literature learning? b) What are desirable characteristics of the new McLL model emphasized career-based communication for teaching the Malay for Communication subject for grade 11 students?

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study were two folds: a) to explore the current state, problems, and needs related to multicultural literature learning in Malay language educational context of Thailand; and b) to create a new Multi-cultural Literature Learning (McLL) model emphasis on career-based Malay communication for grade 11 students.

Literature Review

In this section, the authors reviewed the literature related to multicultural learning as follows.

Multicultural Learning

Multicultural Education is a concept that arose from the need to serve the diversity of races, classes, genders, languages, values, and beliefs in education. Multiculturalism is the social capital of cultural learning. It is an educational opportunity for learners from diverse cultures to learn together by developing positive values about cultural differences, and encouraging learners to develop their ability to learn in society happily. There is linguistic diversity within ethnic groups, using their own dialects as part of their identity, such as the local Malay, Thai Southern Jehe, and the Central Thai language; and there is also variation based on the accent of each locality. There is a diverse beauty that comes with the language exchange in learning the Malay language through use of literature as a medium of learning.

Literature is something that is expressed in the language of creation by humans through the imaginative process that aids in human communication, whether written or oral, in prose and poetry – a valuable asset contained within the elements of literature. Clearly, literature is thus the key in many ways, whether in Interdisciplinary learning, a model of learning management based on multicultural literature, and in multicultural literature alone is thus critical for learning in the 21st century era that emphasizes various skills. Teachers have emphasized professional communication skills in particular to develop effective learning management. Cultural learning management places a pronounced emphasis on the integration of skills in a world where technology assumes a pivotal role. The conventional confines of learning, tethered to textbooks within classroom walls, have given way to a more expansive approach. In this paradigm, the learning experience transcends traditional boundaries, enabling access to information and educational resources on a global scale through the vast expanse of the internet. The overarching goal of this approach is to transform learning into an experience that seamlessly aligns with the unique interests and needs of each individual learner.

As technology solidifies its status as an indispensable tool, its integration into the learning process becomes imperative. Learners today don't solely rely on traditional textbooks; they also harness the power of the internet to access a wealth of information and educational resources on a global scale. Offering students the opportunity to leverage technology for creating works that manifest their knowledge and creativity is not just beneficial but essential.

Within the realm of cultural learning, a pivotal aspect lies in the development of skills across diverse learning styles. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of fostering adaptability and proficiency in various approaches to learning, recognizing that individuals may engage and interact with information in unique ways.

Cultivating proficiency in various learning styles constitutes a foundational element of cultural learning management. This approach goes beyond merely promoting self-directed learning and the use of technology; it also places a strong emphasis on nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills through both formal and informal educational activities. The goal is to equip students not only with academic knowledge but also with the essential abilities to confront diverse perspectives and challenges that life presents. Recognizing the paramount importance of adaptability in our rapidly evolving world, cultural learning management further prioritizes the development of emotional intelligence, teamwork skills, and effective problem-solving capabilities. This strategic focus enables learners to adeptly navigate and adapt to changing situations, ensuring that they emerge not only academically proficient but also well-prepared to tackle the multifaceted challenges of life in the more complex world.

In summary, multicultural learning emerges as a response to the dynamic landscape of education in the digital age, where the pivotal roles of technology, adaptability, and diverse learning styles come to the forefront. The principles and concepts delved into in this research strive to be instrumental in shaping a more comprehensive and effective approach to education within the context of the contemporary world.

Research Methodology

This research employed survey research that targeted two distinct participant groups: teachers and students actively engaged in the teaching or learning of Malay Language within the multi-cultural classroom context. There were 33 teachers participated in the survey of current state, problems and needs of teaching with multi-cultural learning. They all had experience in teaching with multi-cultural learning for more than five years. In addition, 36 grade 11 students, who already had experience with multi-cultural learning classroom, were asked to respond to the survey of current state, problems and needs of teaching with multi-cultural learning. The participating teachers and students were affiliated with Narathiwat School under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Secondary Educational Service Area of Narathiwat.

Data Collection

To collect quantitative research data, the researchers utilized a questionnaire about the current state, problems, and needs in multicultural learning management. The items of Current State, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning Management Questionnaire for teachers were five-level rating scale, which consisted of three main parts: a) Background of a respondent (3 items); b) Current state, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning Management (21 items); and c) Suggestions for further improving multicultural learning management (1 open-ended item). In addition, the items of Current State, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning Management Questionnaire for students were five-level rating scale, which consisted of three main parts: a) Background of a respondent (2 items); b) Current state, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning Management (22 items); and c) Suggestions for further improving multicultural learning management (1 open-ended item).

Data Analysis

The researchers conducted an analysis of respondents' background data obtained from Part 1 of the questionnaire by tabulating frequencies and calculating percentages. Ratings from the five-level scale were interpreted as follows: Very High = 5, High = 4, Moderate = 3, Low = 2, and Lowest = 1. Then, the data from Part 2 was analyzed by calculating for mean and standard deviation (SD). The interpretation of mean ranges from each item in Part 2 of the questionnaire followed the guidelines outlined (Wongratana, 2007): 4.50 - 5.00: Indicates that the current state, problems, and needs were at a Very High level and 3.50 - 4.49, 2.50 - 3.49, 1.50 - 2.49, and 1.00 - 1.49 being interpreted as a High, Moderate, Low, and Very Low levels. Furthermore, the qualitative data Part 3 was subjected to content analysis.

Results and Discussion

The research results in accordance with the research questions as follows:

Teachers' Perspectives about Current State, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning

From the survey of teachers' perspectives on the current state, issues, and needs in multicultural learning, there were 33 teachers responded to the survey. Predominantly, the respondents were female, constituting 72.7% of the sample. A breakdown by educational levels revealed that 51.50% of the participants were teachers from upper-secondary education (grades 10-12), followed by those from tertiary education (27.30%) and lower-secondary education (21.20%). The teachers' perspectives on the current state, issues, and needs in multicultural learning were presented in Table 1.

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Current state				
1.	Multicultural learning (ML) is suitable for school.	3.97	0.88	High
2.	ML is suitable for students.	4.03	0.92	High
3.	ML is important.	4.24	0.87	High
4.	ML is beneficial.	4.09	1.01	High
5.	A school administrator supports ML in school.	4.09	0.95	High
6.	Teachers support ML.	3.94	0.90	High
7.	The content of Malay language communication is suitable for ML.	4.30	0.73	High
8.	ML can develop students' central Malay language communication skills.	4.27	0.76	High
9.	ML management can develop students' career-based communication skills.	4.09	0.91	High
10	ML can raise students' awareness of cultural diversity.	4.15	0.75	High
	Overall average	4.12	0.68	High
Problems				
11.	The school is not yet ready for ML management.	2.67	0.96	Moderate

12.	Teachers are not yet ready for ML management.	2.70	1.07	Moderate
13.	Students are not yet ready ML management.	2.64	0.99	Moderate
14.	It is difficulty to conduct ML in my classroom context.	2.82	0.95	Moderate
15.	There is a lack of support from a school in ML management.	2.88	1.14	Moderate
16.	There is a lack of ML resources.	3.12	1.02	Moderate
17.	There is a lack of technology for ML.	3.03	1.14	Moderate
18.	There is a lack of ML resources.	3.18	1.18	Moderate
19.	Conducting ML takes too much time.	3.00	1.12	Moderate
	Overall average	2.89	0.84	Moderate
Needs				
20.	You want to keep ML management in your classroom.	4.24	0.79	High
21.	You want to keep ML in your school.	4.03	0.95	High
	Overall average	4.14	0.79	High

Table 1: Teachers' perspectives on the current state, problems and needs in multicultural learning

From Table 1, in overall, the teachers regarded the current state of multicultural learning at a high level (mean = 4.12, SD = 0.68). The top three items of current state, which were rated in a high level, were: Item 7: The content of Malay language communication is suitable for multicultural learning (mean = 4.30, SD = 0.73); followed by Item 8: Multicultural learning can develop students' central Malay language communication skills (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.76); and Item 3: Multicultural learning is important (mean = 4.24, SD = 0.87).

In addition, the responding teachers reflected a moderate level of problems in multicultural learning (mean = 2.89, SD = 0.84). The top three items of problems, which were rated in a moderate level, were: Item 18: There is a lack of multicultural learning resources (mean = 3.18, SD = 1.18); followed by Item 16: There is a lack of multicultural learning resources (mean = 3.12, SD = 1.02), and Item 17: There is a lack of technology for multicultural learning (mean = 3.03, SD = 1.24). In addition, the teachers stated a high level of needs of multicultural learning (mean = 4.14, SD = 0.79). They reflected that they highly needed to keep multicultural learning in their classroom (mean = 4.24, SD = 0.79) and schools (mean = 4.03, SD = 0.95).

Students' Perspectives About Current State, Problems, and Needs in Multicultural Learning

Of 36 students responded to the survey, the participating students were predominantly female, making up 82.9% of the respondents. Of all participants, 71.4% were 17 years old, 25.7% were 16 years old, and 2.9% were 15 years old. The students' opinions regarding the current state, problems, and needs in multicultural learning can be presented as Table 2.

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Current state				
1.	Multicultural learning (ML) is suitable for school.	4.06	0.84	High
2.	ML is suitable for students.	3.80	0.87	High
3.	You agree with ML.	4.00	0.80	High
4.	ML is suitable for the content of Malay language communication.	4.06	0.80	High
5.	ML is beneficial.	4.17	0.89	High
6.	ML is important.	4.09	0.78	High
	Overall average	4.03	0.68	High
Problems				
7.	The school is not yet ready for ML management.	2.97	0.92	Moderate
8.	Teachers are not yet ready for ML management.	2.80	1.02	Moderate
9.	Teachers lack skills in teaching with ML.	2.51	1.07	Moderate
10.	Teachers did not utilize enough technology in ML.	2.80	0.99	Moderate
11.	Students are not yet ready for ML.	2.91	0.85	Moderate
12.	Students have not yet developed sufficient communication skills in the central Malay language communication subject.	3.03	1.01	Moderate
13.	Students have not yet developed sufficient career-based communication skills in the Malay language communication subject at a satisfactory level.	3.00	0.84	Moderate
14.	Students have not yet developed a satisfactory level of awareness of cultural diversity in the Malay language communication subject.	3.14	1.06	Moderate
	Overall average	2.90	0.73	Moderate
Needs				
15.	The school should prepare more for ML.	3.86	0.94	High
16.	Teachers should develop readiness for multicultural learning.	3.74	1.07	High
17.	Teachers should enhance skills in ML.	3.74	1.01	High
18.	Teachers should increase the use of technology in ML.	3.83	0.89	High
19.	Students need to be developed their readiness for ML.	3.91	0.85	High
20.	Students need to develop central Malay language communication skills.	3.86	0.94	High
21.	Students need to develop career-based communication skills in the Malay language.	3.83	1.04	High
22.	Students need the develop of awareness of cultural diversity in the Malay language communication subject.	4.00	0.94	High
	Overall average	3.85	0.75	High

Table 2: Students' perspectives on the current state, problems and needs in multicultural learning

In summary, students stated the current state of multicultural learning at a high level (mean = 4.03, SD = 0.68). The three highest-rated items in the current state were: Item 5: Multicultural learning is beneficial (mean = 4.17, SD = 0.89); followed by Item 6: Multicultural learning is important (mean = 4.09, SD = 0.78); and Item 4: multicultural learning is suitable for the content of the Malay language communication subject (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.80). These three items were rated in a high level.

In addition, the students reflected the problems of multicultural learning in a moderate level (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.73). The top three problems of multicultural learning were: Item 14: Students have not yet developed awareness of cultural diversity in the Malay language communication subject (mean = 3.14, SD = 1.06); followed by Item 12: Students have not yet developed sufficient communication skills in the central Malay language communication subject (mean = 3.03, SD = 1.01); and Item 13: Students have not yet developed sufficient career-based communication skills in the Malay language communication subject at a satisfactory level, with a moderate level of problems (mean = 3.00, SD = 0.84).

The students stated the high level of needs of multicultural learning (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.75). The top three needs of multicultural learning were: Item 22: Students need the develop of awareness of cultural diversity in the Malay language communication subject (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.94); followed by Item 19: Students need to be developed their readiness for multicultural learning (Mean = 3.91, SD = 0.85); and Item 20: Students need to develop central Malay language communication skills (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.94).

Desirable Characteristics of the Multicultural Learning Model Emphasized Career-Based Communication for the Malay for Communication Subject for Grade 11 Students

The researchers conducted a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to Literature-based Learning and Multicultural Learning. Subsequently, the Multi-cultural Literature Learning Model (MCLL) was developed.

The literatures related to multicultural learning or education include: Mitchell and Salsbury (1999), Banks (2001), National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2002), Sungthong (2008), Institute of Research and Development for Health of Southern Thailand (2010), Choochuen (2012), Liewvarin (2009), Najib al-Attas (2002), Wati (1965), Sastera, Kualalumpur and Antara (1965), Dewan (2007), Uden (1994) and Saesong (2009). The key characteristics of Multi-cultural Literature Learning Model (MCLL) can be presented as Table 3.

Key Characteristics of Literature-based Learning	Key Characteristics of Multicultural Learning	Key Characteristics of MCLL
Literature is an art expressed through language, originating from human creativity and imaginative processes.	Education that embraces cultural diversity	Learning approach utilized language literature from various cultures
Literature yields diverse values for humanity and facilitates communication among individuals	Aim to foster positive attitudes and values regarding cultural diversity and enhance the ability to learn about different cultures Encourages learners to develop the ability to learn and integrate into society with happiness	Aim to use literature to promote learners' development of communication skills, socialization, cultural learning, and positive values related to cultural diversity
Literature can be divided into literary works of art and literary works of expression, both in prose and verse forms.		Language literatures are classified into literary works of art and literary works of expression, both in prose and verse forms
The components of literature include rhythm, melody, word arrangement, clear meaning, and fundamental ideas		The components of language literature include rhythm, melody, word arrangement, clear meaning, and fundamental ideas

Table 3: Synthesis of key characteristics of Multi-cultural Literature Learning Model (MCLL)

The Multicultural Literature Learning Model (MCLL) refers to an educational approach that utilizes language literature from diverse cultures. The objective of employing literature is to promote the development of communication skills, socialization, cultural learning, and positive values regarding cultural diversity among learners (Communication, Socialization, Culture Learning). Language literature is categorized into literary works of art and literary works of expression, both in prose and verse forms. The components of language literature include rhythm, melody, word arrangement, clear meaning, and fundamental ideas.

Discussion

In line with the finding from this study, Chomphu Phuengtham (2013) studied the current situation of schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education in the border provinces of Thailand that share borders with the Union of Myanmar. The finding indicated that the overall educational management situation of these schools falls at a Moderate level in almost every aspect, with the exception of the preservation of local culture, which is rated at a high level. The top three areas are the preservation of local culture, learning conflict resolution through peaceful means, and the continuous creation of educational opportunities.

Regarding cultural diversity research, Nantaburom and Na Ayuthaya (2015) studied the effects of multicultural education-based prejudice reeducation activities on understanding

diversity in races, religions and cultures among upper secondary school students in the ASEAN community. The results were as follows: 1) After the treatment, the attitude scores posttest of understanding of diversity in races, religions and culture in the ASEAN community of students taught by prejudice reduction were higher than pretest scores at 0.05 level of significance. 2) Students changed their attitudes by learning contents which based on the diversity of races, religions and culture in the ASEAN community. Students gained their social skills, thinking skills and learning from others' perspective through prejudice reduction activities which were cooperative activities, critical thinking activities, discussion, drama technique, role playing, simulation, case studies and facing with problems situation activities. This may fulfil the new teaching model created from this study so called the Multicultural Literature Learning Model (MCLL).

Conclusion

This study reveals insights into the current state, problems and needs in implementing multicultural learning of the Malay language communication for grade 11 students in southern region of Thailand. The current state indicates that the content of Malay language communication is suitable for multicultural learning. Implementing multicultural learning can enhance students' proficiency in Malay language communication.

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