

ภาษาอังกฤษแบบเข้มข้น: โปรแกรมภาษาอังกฤษแนวใหม่ ของมหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรี¹

วิชัย กฤตประโยชน์² และ เสาวลักษณ์ เทพสุริวงศ์³

มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรี บางมด ทุ่งครุ กรุงเทพฯ 10140

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บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาอังกฤษแบบเข้มข้นเป็นโปรแกรมการสอนภาษาอังกฤษแนวใหม่ของมหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรี ที่จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อใช้แทนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษบังคับพื้นฐานในระดับปริญญาตรีที่จัดสอนในภาคการศึกษาปกติ โปรแกรมนี้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนการสอนและมีลักษณะเป็นโมดูล แต่ละโมดูลประกอบด้วยฐานการเรียนรู้ต่างๆ ซึ่งจัดเตรียมขึ้นเพื่อให้ผู้เรียนมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ พัฒนาทักษะทางภาษา และสามารถประยุกต์ใช้กลวิธีในการเรียนรู้จากการประเมินผลการจัดการเรียนการสอนโดยใช้แบบสอบถามสำรวจความคิดเห็นเกี่ยวกับทัศนคติของผู้เรียนและผู้สอน พบว่าผลการประเมินโดยภาพรวมเป็นไปในทางบวก กล่าวคือ ผู้เรียนมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการเรียน และคิดว่าตนเองมีทักษะทางภาษาที่ดีขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม ผลจากการสำรวจพบว่าทัศนคติของผู้สอนมีความแตกต่างกันพอสมควร โดยผู้สอนมีความกังวลและไม่แน่ใจว่าการจัดโปรแกรมการสอนภาษาอังกฤษแนวใหม่นี้คุ้มค่าหรือไม่ งานวิจัยนี้นำเสนอผลการประเมินการจัดการเรียนการสอนและอภิปรายผล ข้อดีข้อเสียของโปรแกรมการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษแบบเข้มข้นนี้

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² อาจารย์ สายวิชาภาษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์

³ ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ สายวิชาภาษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์

Intensive English Courses: KMUTT's Innovative English Programme ¹

Wichai Kritprayoch ² and Saowaluck Tepsuriwong ³

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangmod, Toongkru, Bangkok 10140

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Abstract

Intensive English courses are KMUTT's ELT programme innovation to replace normal first-semester compulsory undergraduate English courses. This English-medium programme involves station-based modules and aims to encourage positive attitudes, language skills, and use of learning strategies. Programme evaluation was conducted by using questionnaires to survey the attitudes of the students and teachers involved. On the whole, the results were positive. The students bore a positive attitude towards learning and believed that their language skills had improved. The teachers' attitudes, however, varied considerably. They wondered whether the programme change was worthwhile. This paper reports the programme's evaluation results and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the intensive English programme.

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² Lecturer, Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts.

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts.

1. Introduction

A fundamental English course in a university is usually a 3-credit subject requiring students to enroll in a class that lasts 45 to 60 hours a term. Students regularly meet once or twice a week in sessions of 45 to 60 minutes each. Apart from English, students take 3 to 5 other courses which are scheduled alternately in their tight timetable. The learning time for each course, including English, therefore, is unavoidably broken down into short sessions scattered across the semester. This traditional class management cultivates a “start and stop” nature of learning, and is consequently referred to as a ‘drip-feed’ method [1]. Due to the fragmentation of learning time in a semester, English sessions are shorter, giving less time for tasks and activities that promote interaction and communication. The more sessions there are, the more the revision time is required in each session; thus, valuable learning time is reduced. So “a lesson is hardly begun when it is time to end” [2].

In order to efficiently learn a second language, students need concentrated periods to be able to use the language spontaneously and with ease [2]. Unlike a conventional class arrangement, an intensive programme provides the required concentrated period for learners since it is usually scheduled in extended sessions involving a lot of activity, effort, and careful attention [3]. Although an intensive course normally implies a short duration usually lasting about a week or two, each learning session extends to 4-6 hours a day or even a whole day as in an English camp. The intensive situation expands each learning session, and so helps maintain the students’ focus on English. It allows them a longer time for language exposure, practice, and communication in each session. Research points out that the amount of time spent on learning a language is

closely related to the level of achievement attained. [4]

Student-student and student-teacher relationships are also enriched through interactive activities fostered by extended sessions. Language learning in an intensive course, thus, resembles naturalistic language acquisition [5]. Moreover, if a school designs its own intensive course, the course can be tailored to suit the needs of the students and the school’s curriculum.

At King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), most first-year students are required to complete at least 3 compulsory English courses within the first 3 semesters of enrollment. Their first foundation course, however, varies according to their English O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) scores. If the scores are lower than 50%, they start with LNG 101: Fundamental English I, and continue on to LNG 102: Fundamental English II and LNG 103: Fundamental English III in consecutive semesters. If the scores are higher, they start with LNG 102, and go on to LNG 103 and LNG 104, which is the highest compulsory course. All of these courses have been previously carried out in a conventional ‘drip-feed’ style for years, even though the curriculum has been regularly revised and changed from a skill-based to a task-based design [6].

Positioning itself at the forefront of academic success, KMUTT realizes the importance of English and pushes all its students to become proficient English users. It reinforced the plan to foster students’ language proficiency by setting up an inter-departmental advisory committee for creating innovative schemes for both classroom teaching and outside-class learning. After a number of executive meetings, the committee proposed a top-down policy for transforming the first two fundamental English

courses (LNG 101 and LNG 102) into intensive programmes. The rationale underlying this change is rooted in the belief that language learning shares the same principle as boiling water. To reach its boiling point, water needs to be constantly heated. If it is heated merely for a while and the fire is then taken away, it is unlikely to reach boiling point. This metaphor is consistent with Lightbown and Spada's concepts on the weaknesses of the drip-feed method [1]. Another main reason for organizing the intensive courses is the tight schedule of the first-year students. Setting up a new intensive course where students get sufficient concentrated periods of time for learning, unlike the conventional course, means allocating more time for the freshmen to prepare and to adjust themselves to their new lives in the university.

2. KMUTT's Intensive Modules

KMUTT's intensive courses have been designed to replace the conventional compulsory English courses, but maintain the objectives of their predecessors and also their duration of 60 hours. Each learning session, however, is extended to 5 hours a day. The courses are run within 12 consecutive days before the official start of the semester. In these courses, preparation of the learners, acquiring positive attitudes towards English and learning, an

element of fun, as well as a friendly learning atmosphere, are of paramount importance. Moreover, English as an instructional medium is stressed to create an English-speaking environment and to ensure rich language exposure. The courses also emphasize active learning situations. Learners are required to be actively involved in the learning process using English to perform various fun activities. The number of quizzes and tests is minimized.

The intensive courses have been designed in an activity-bound station-based module consisting of 6 stations (see Fig. 1). Each station lasts 2 days and is a self-contained unit. Station A: "Importance of English and Just English / Nice to Meet You" is the starting point and is arranged in a large class where all learners meet for a course orientation where they are warmly welcomed to the programme. They are informed about the course requirements and how the module works. They also have a chance to meet famous people who are successful language users or nationally known English teachers. These guest speakers create rapport to build up a positive attitude towards language learning and a fun atmosphere, and give a talk on the importance of English. After the plenary session, the students are divided into smaller groups based on the modules that they will attend to brush up their English.

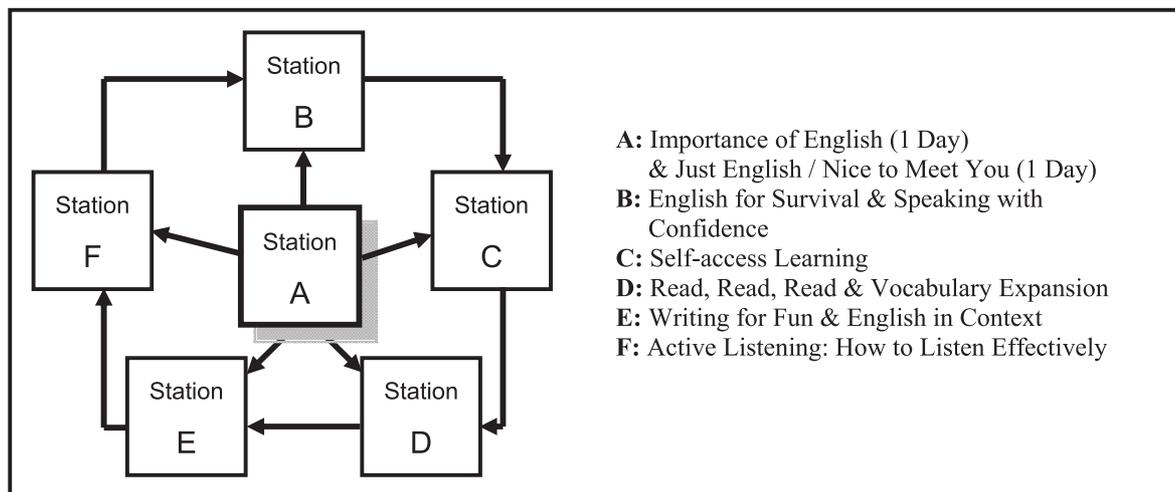


Fig. 1 The Intensive Module (A+5 Stations)

The other 5 stations (B-F) focus on language and study skills. Station B: ‘English for Survival and Speaking with Confidence’ focuses on speaking and communication strategies. This station is taught by a native speaker of English. Station C: ‘Self-access Learning’ aims to prepare learners with study skills and the concepts of learning how to learn. In this station, various learning resources including e-learning are introduced. Students practise analyzing their needs, proficiency levels, and interests, and work on making a study plan. They also have a self-study session learning from self-selected materials and monitoring their own progress. It is expected that this station would help learners gain positive attitudes towards autonomous learning, realizing its importance, and thus seek opportunities for outside-class learning. Station D: ‘Read, Read, Read and Vocabulary Expansion’ focuses on basic reading skills and vocabulary learning. Station E: ‘Writing for Fun and English in Context’ emphasizes the writing process and language awareness. The aim is to train the learners to write and revise their own work. Station F: ‘Active

Listening: How to Listen Effectively’ focuses on listening strategies and how to vary strategies to suit different purposes.

Each module can accommodate approximately 200 students. After a 2-day plenary session in Station A, the learners in the module split into 5 groups of 40. Each group is allocated to one station in the module, and they rotate to another station every 2 days until all the stations are completed.

3. Preparation for the Intensive Modules

In order to efficiently organize the intensive English courses, careful preparation had been made in 3 main areas. Firstly, materials and evaluation schemes needed to be redesigned since the former LNG 101 and LNG 102 courses were task-oriented and specifically designed as a 15-week course where all the topics or units in the syllabus were graded in order of difficulty. The new materials, on the other hand, had to cater for station-based intensive learning. They were, thus, designed to be language skill-oriented where the learners could start from

any station or unit. Moreover, students had to be immediately evaluated by taking a quiz and/or working on a task when completing each station. There was no final examination for the intensive programme.

Budgeting was another key area for consideration. The intensive plan required expansionary budgets for hiring native and non-native part-time teachers and teaching assistants, as well as arranging extra facilities. About 2,800 new students had enrolled in the intensive courses. Thus, 14 modules had to be set up which required at least 70 classrooms, computers and self-access facilities, and a large assembly hall for the course orientation. These 70 classes were run at the same time, needing about 70 English teachers for which the Department of Language Studies had to recruit many part-time teachers, together with a large number of teaching assistants for each module since each teacher was fixed at a particular station and all 200 students in the module rotated to a new station every two days. Teaching assistants were needed to facilitate the rotation and to collect evaluation results from each station, as grading was still required for the compulsory courses.

Lastly, cooperation and devotion from all sectors in the university were required. The intensive programme was organized for 12 consecutive days outside the term schedule to ensure that the learners were completely free from other courses or activities to concentrate solely on English. The university had to ask for cooperation from every faculty to delay the term-time for 2 weeks. Even the usual reception party or activities organized by their seniors were prohibited. Computer and classroom facilities all over the university were also booked to cope with the large number of students studying the

same course at the same time. The registration office had to work harder sorting the students' O-NET scores to place them in either the LNG 101 or LNG 102 module. Instead of grouping students according to their departmental origin, for the intensive programme, they were alphabetically grouped by names so that students from different departments were mixed up and could make more new friends. The intensive courses were also demanding on the teachers who had to work hard both during classes teaching, facilitating and/or monitoring students and after classes marking students' work.

4. Research Methodology

The innovative nature of the intensive English courses and the meticulous preparation required inspired the Department to evaluate the programme. However, its lasting only for two weeks did not allow for effective measurement of learning results. The Department, thus, evaluated the programme by using questionnaires to survey the students' attitudes and perceptions on their language improvement, as well as the teachers' reflections.

The students' questionnaires were distributed to 158 of the students enrolled in the course. The questions focused on their perceptions of their own language improvement, the effects of the course on their attitudes towards language learning and their motivation to learn.

The teachers' questionnaires were distributed to 21 KMUTT staff and 32 non-KMUTT teachers. The teachers' questions focused on whether the intensive courses were appropriate replacements for the conventional courses, and their attitudes and satisfaction towards the intensive style of teaching and learning.

5. Students' Perceptions of Their Language Improvement

The student's perception of their language improvement is a crucial affective factor for learning a language [7]. If the student feels that they have improved, they will be motivated to learn more as the feelings of success increase students' self-belief in their ability to learn, and so, success breeds further success [8]. The intensive courses did produce satisfactory results in terms of the students'

perceptions of their language improvement. They felt that studying English intensively had considerably helped their language and study skills (see Fig. 2). The percentages of their perception of each skill improvement range from 12.76 to 20.27 percent. Despite learning in a short intensive course, the students believed that they had improved. The intensive programme, thus, could be considered a success.

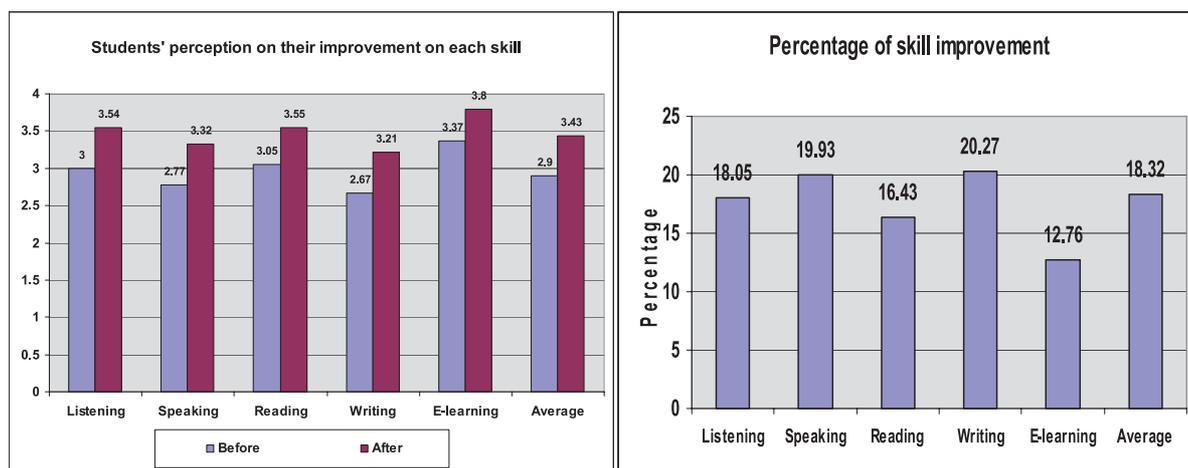


Fig. 2 Students' Perceptions of Language Improvement

Positive attitudes towards learning were also reported after the intensive programme. Most of the students (91%) revealed that the course had helped change their attitudes towards learning English. They commented that English was not as difficult as they had thought and could be an enjoyable subject. This part of the findings is consistent with that of MacFarlane et al. [9]. Comparing students' perceptions of learning French in an intensive as opposed to a traditional style, they found that students in the intensive programmes reported more self-confidence and positive attitudes towards

learning French.

The main factors reported as contributing to the students' positive attitudes were the variety of teaching techniques and class activities. The students did not seem to think that 5 hours of English per session was too long. They reported that the three most important factors that motivated them to be more active in class were their teachers, classmates and grades. They enjoyed learning with different teachers as they met a new teacher every 2 days. They also preferred learning with new friends from different departments. Grades were regarded as the

least important factor, but they did desire to pass the course and tried their best in every activity. There was a quiz or an evaluation at the end of each station which kept them active. As evaluations can either enhance or deter learning [10], the intensive course's evaluation scheme included both quizzes and fun activities, such as creative writing and preparing poster presentations. Such a scheme helped make the evaluation seem less threatening.

6. Teachers' Perception of the Intensive English Courses

The teachers' attitudes varied considerably. Many of the KMUTT staff still wondered whether the intensive courses appropriately replaced the traditional ones. Only 19% of the staff agreed with the replacement, while 38% disagreed, and 43% were unsure.

The major concerns of the teachers were the students' learning, especially the continuation of learning after the intensive programme, as shown in the following samples of their comments below:

*"...The main problem is the **short-term nature of learning**. While students may have learnt a lot quickly, they may also forget quickly without **continuation of learning!** This is a potential worry."*

*"I'm afraid that during the semester, they won't have any English courses at all, so they don't have a **continuity in their learning** and will later forget what they've gained from the intensive course. Hopefully, they will keep on learning using self-access materials and e-learning on their own, if the session on 'Good language learner and e-learning' has successfully shown them how."*

Other concerns included evaluation and the work load involved in the meticulous preparation for the intensive courses. They commented that as a compulsory English course, the intensive needed to be evaluated and graded. The 12-day duration, however, did not cater to observable language improvement. Grading and evaluation of the course, therefore, seemed to be troublesome. Many teachers also questioned whether the results of the programme were worth their effort and hard work in teaching and preparing materials. They noticed that both the teachers and the students had become weary, especially during the last days of the courses.

On the other hand, the teachers who supported the replacement of the conventional courses believed that the intensive helped prepare the learners well in terms of learning how to learn and to improve each language skill. They further stated that the intensive courses provided opportunities for using the language. They felt that the amount of learning gained from the intensive courses was approximately the same as that from the conventional course. However, they agreed that there were problems about continuation of learning since in the following term students did not have any more English classes. What they had attained from the intensive courses would become forgotten and it would have been in vain.

Interrogated about their expectations of the intensive courses, the KMUTT staff revealed both positive and negative feelings. More than half of them (57%) bore negative attitudes since the programme had been initiated by the top-down policy with which the teachers had to comply. A traditional top-down approach to innovation usually encounters resistance as it often fails to create a sense of ownership and commitment to the innovation.

[11]. When the teachers first heard about the policy, many of them were unsure as to what they would do next and were worried about preparing new materials in a limited time, as well as what the levels of the students' proficiency and learning were. They also wondered what it would be like to teach the same topics to new groups of students every two days. Only 24% of the teachers expected it to be fun, interesting and challenging.

At the end of the intensive programme, they revealed that they had experienced all the aspects mentioned above. They had worked very hard both in preparing and teaching the courses. However, they felt that repeating the same topic every 2 days was not so negative since they met new students which were important factors that made their teaching varied. Most of them enjoyed teaching, though feeling exhausted in the last days. As for their concerns about the students' learning, they still could not answer whether the students learnt better in the intensive module. They suggested that the future organization of an intensive programme should be carefully reconsidered.

Overall, all of the teachers saw both strengths and weaknesses of the intensive programme. They said that they had done their best to adapt their teaching techniques to suit each group of students. Many teachers viewed each new group as an opportunity to develop and reflect upon their teaching in order to adjust it to that group, so their teaching was never the same for each group even though the content was.

Another value that the intensive programme fostered was an enjoyable learning atmosphere. The teachers had noticed their students enjoying learning and participating in the course. The programme had helped the students concentrate on learning and using English since they were not

interrupted by other courses or activities.

Most teachers, however, complained that the rotation of groups prevented them from knowing the students well. In a conventional course, they would remember their students and monitor the progress of their learning. On the other hand, in the intensive courses, they had met about 200 students within 12 days but could barely remember the students' names. Some of the teachers commented that the intensive programme was demanding, and were unable to work on demands of their jobs.

7. Suggestions and Conclusions

Considering the students' attitudes and perceptions of their language improvement, it seems that the intensive programme should be considered a success and should be continued. The teachers, however, seemed to be more reluctant, wondering whether the courses were appropriate replacements of the conventional ones due to the short nature of the sessions. Most teachers realized the importance of a concentrated period for learning. They were also aware that the students enjoyed learning and loved the atmosphere of the intensive courses, and thus suggested that they should be regarded as an additional enrichment programme, rather than a complete replacement. Furthermore, since the results of learning were not quite clear, there should be longitudinal research to follow up the effects of the intensive programme, focusing on the students' achievement and how they apply the skills learnt to other courses and to outside-class learning.

In addition, the teachers' concerns about the students' learning and the validity of the evaluation should not be overlooked. To reinforce learning, a continuing English class should be offered in the immediately following semester. Moreover, English should be reinforced in the students' content courses.

The intensive courses prepare students for self-access learning, so this should be encouraged thoroughly to promote a life-long learning skill and to make the most out of the intensive programme.

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