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DECISION ON STUDYING FOREIGN LANGUAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The individual purpose plays a significant role in language learning achievement. This research is studying what is students' preferences for a foreign language class and exploring their reasons for choosing to study a foreign language. The samples were 108 students. This study was a quantitative type of research. The demographic details of respondents, learners' preferences regarding the duration of classes, and reasons for choosing to study a foreign language were identified as variables based on an extensive review of the literature. A questionnaire with a .816 reliability index was deployed to be the research instrument. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The results found that the samples decided to study a foreign language from Monday-Friday and preferred to study in the morning for an hour. Their interest in that language was the highest-rated factor of the reason for choosing to study a foreign language, follow by traveling to a country where people speak the language they learn, communicating with native speakers, increasing foreign language skills, and learning the society and culture of that language.

Keywords: Decision, Foreign language, Student, Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

The economic growth, the advancement of technology, domestic and international labor markets, the tourism industry, and dealing business with foreigners are the important and necessary reasons for studying foreign languages. Language is a significant tool of communication for human beings. Humans are willing to learn both a native language or main language and a foreign language or a second/third language (Yothinsirikul, 2017). Students nowadays have more interest in learning foreign languages. It was shown that a large number of students in Thailand are interested in studying western and eastern languages and cultures, such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, and German. For example, in 2018 there were 40 universities that taught the Korean language and more than 30,000 high school students who study the Korean language (Sornsuwannasri, 2020). Therefore, schools and universities have established and organized more foreign language learning programs for those languages.

The individual purpose is an important factor for success in studying languages. Many people study a foreign language in order to communicate with native speakers, some have purposes for entertainment such as movies, and TV shows, and some for marketing, trading, or forming a business partnership with foreigners. Seven (2020) stated that a student may be motivated to learn by an idea, emotion, or physical need. Learners may face some difficulties in learning a foreign language because they lack adequate motivation. Without a desire to learn, it is very difficult for learners to gain effective learning (Alizadeh, 2016).

Research studies on motivation have been studied extensively. It was found that researches on motivation in learning languages were conducted both in Thailand and abroad. Motivation provides people an effort with an aim and direction to reach their goals as well as successfully in foreign language learning (Alizadeh, 2016; Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016; Nguyen, 2019). Mendoza and Phung's research (2018) presented a critical research synthesis (CRS) about motivation to learn languages other than English (LOTEs). They synthesized substantive findings by comparing and contrasting findings in different research contexts. The study found that the studies in Europe and the Inner Circle have been concerned about students' attitudes toward different LOTEs and the learning conditions that supported motivation. While the studies among Asian emphasized whether there are cross-cultural differences in the motivation of language learners in different countries. Jeangjai (2009) studied the factors affecting learning Chinese of International Business: China and Chinese Studies students at the faculty of international

studies, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket. The results found that the important factors that increase the number of people studying in faculty of international studies was the increasing of the number of Chinese studying among high-school students. The motivation for studying in this faculty was that students realized the increasing of opportunity to get a good job in the future. Saepun et al. (2017) studied the circumstances and problems on Chinese language teaching and learning in a secondary school, Yala province, and found that the most important reason that students choose Chinese were firstly, China had very good potential in economic, secondly, students like to study foreign languages and lastly for an advantage in the future. Sornsuwannasri (2020) studied the motivation Factors affecting Korean language learning in secondary schools and universities in the upper Northern region of Thailand. The finding found that the motivation of the first sample group was self-motivation and the first expectation after graduation from the institutes was to understand Korean Music/Series/TV Show. Secondly was to understand Korean's social and culture, and to be able to communicate with Korean native speakers and to use as an advantage in their future career, and look forward to studying abroad in Korean.

The above literature has highlighted different models which provide the basic framework to understand the students' attitudes and motivation regarding learning foreign languages. The research results indicated that motivation is an important factor in learning a foreign language. Learning motivation plays an important role in the learning process and learning success.

International School of Tourism, Suratthani Rajabhat University is one of the top faculty that provided foreign languages programs, which are English and 7 more third language including Korean, Chinese, Japanese, French, Malay, Russian, and German. The third language was a category in an elective or optional subject (foreign language for career group), including as a free elective course for students from other faculty in universities. International School of Tourism has frequently organized foreign language training programs to disseminate language and cultural knowledge for people in organizations and for public interest or outsiders. In order to provide education and services efficiently and to properly meet the expectation of those who are interested in studying the third languages, this research is therefore studying how the students make decisions or preferences on studying a foreign language. What are the students' reasons or motivations for learning a foreign language? The results of the study can be used as a guideline

for improving and developing the teaching and studying foreign languages according to the needs of the students in the future and will help instructors to make decisions on content, format, technique, and teaching activities management that are truly in line with the interests and needs of the learners.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study as follows:

1. to study the decision on studying a foreign language of high school students and
2. to explore the students' reasons for choosing to study a foreign language.

METHODOLOGY

This research was descriptive with a quantitative approach. The research design was implemented in steps by step as follows:

Research scope: This research was aimed at studying the decisions and reasons for choosing to study foreign languages among high school students. The study was held during the semester break. The data collection was conducted in October 2021 via an online system by using questionnaires as a tool to collect the data.

Participants: The target population was 150 high school students in Thailand who registered for the online courses on IST 2021 foreign languages which were held during the semester break between 18 – 29 October 2021. The samples were 108 students selected by the purposive sampling technique. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table in this study, the sample for this study was estimated to be 108 students who choose to study foreign languages which were Korean (22) Chinese (22) Japanese (22) French (21) German (21). The researchers notified the students regarding the objectives, methods, and details of the research for their consent before they participated in the survey. Participants can withdraw from being involved in the research project at any time. The refusal or withdrawal of the participants will not affect any rights.

Procedure: The researcher brought the questionnaire to 3 experts to verify the content and the use of language. The content validity was validated based on the index of item objective congruence (IOC). The content validity was between 0.6 and 1.0 based on IOC by three experts. Then the revised questionnaire was used for testing (Try Out) with a similar sample group of 30 people who were not the sample group in the research. The reliability of the scale was .816 based on Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. Due to the pandemic situation, online

questionnaires were used to collect primary data from the respondents in October 2021. The survey consisted of three parts, namely, sociodemographic, students' decisions on studying a foreign language of high school students, and reasons for choosing to study a foreign language. The survey was designed in a Likert Scale format for rating statements. A Google forms questionnaire link was sent to students. One hundred eight questionnaires were returned and provided complete information for this study.

Data analysis: Data were collected on demographic features, followed by learners' preferences, and reasons for choosing to study a foreign language. The interpretation of opinions on 5 levels: highest (mean = 4.51-5.00), high (mean = 3.51-4.50), moderate (mean = 2.51-3.50), low level (mean = 1.51-2.50), the lowest level (mean = 1.00-1.50). The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data.

THE STUDY RESULTS

The demographic variables included gender, age, level of education, and study programs were analyzed by frequency and percentage and presented in Table 1 as shown below.

Table 1. Demographic details of the respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	13	12.0
Female	95	88.0
Total	108	100.0
Age		
15 years old	22	20.4
16 years old	40	37.0
17 years old	22	20.4
18 years old	24	22.2
Total	108	100.0
Education		
Secondary Matthayom 4	48	44.4
Secondary Matthayom 5	24	22.2
Secondary Matthayom 6	36	33.3

Total	108	100.0
Study programs		
Arts-Math	5	4.6
Arts-Language	48	44.4
Science-Math	55	50.9
Total	108	100.0

As exhibited in Table 1, the personal data of the respondents included gender, age, educational institution, educational level, and study plan showed that

Gender: most of the samples were female, 95 people (88.0%), and 13 respondents (12.0%) were male.

Age: Over one-thirds of respondents (37.0%) were 16 years old, followed by 18 years old (22.2%), 17 years old (20.4%), and 15 years old (20.4%) respectively.

Education: 44.4% of the respondents studied at Secondary Matthayom Four, one-thirds (33.3%) studied at Secondary Matthayom Six and the rest (22.2%) studied at Secondary Matthayom Five.

Study Program: half of the respondents (50.9%) studied the science-mathematics program, 48 students (44.4%) studied the Arts-Language program, and the rest (4.6%) studied the Arts-Math program.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of decision on studying a foreign language

Decision on studying a foreign language	Frequency	Percentage
Time		
Morning	78	72.2
Afternoon	17	15.7
Evening	13	12.0
Total	108	100.0
Days		
Mon-Fri	68	63.0
Sat-Sun	40	37.0
Total	108	100.0
Hours		
45 Minute	11	10.2
1 Hours	66	61.1
1.30 Hours	19	17.6

2 Hours	12	11.1
Total	108	100.0

Table 2 presented information about the learners' preferences or decision-making behaviors in choosing to study foreign languages of high school students including the period of studying a foreign language, the day, and the number of hours in studying as follows:

Time: Over two-thirds of respondents (72.2%) decided to study foreign languages in the morning, 17 respondents (15.7%) were interested in choosing the afternoon time and the rest (12.0%) preferred to study in the evening.

Days: almost two-thirds of respondents (63.0%) decided to study a foreign language from Monday to Friday, while over one-thirds (37.0%) preferred to study from Saturday to Sunday.

Hours: More than half of respondents (61.1%) preferred to study a foreign language for 1 hour, 17.6% of them made the decision for 1.30 hours, while 11.1% selected 2 hours, and the rest (10.2%) would like to study a foreign language for 45 minutes.

Table 3. Reasons for choosing to study a foreign language

Reasons for choosing to study a foreign language	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Interest in that language	4.80	0.45	Highest
Traveling	4.83	0.44	Highest
Communication with native speakers	4.73	0.54	Highest
Increasing foreign language skills	4.73	0.45	Highest
Learning the society and culture of that language	4.64	0.72	Highest
Wishing to live in that country	4.48	0.84	High
For further education	4.40	0.75	High
Reading a book magazine of that language	4.38	0.81	High
Getting to know more people	4.25	0.88	High
Use in future careers	4.01	0.90	High
Popular language	3.56	1.30	High
Easy to learn	3.55	0.87	High
Friend Invited	2.91	1.46	Medium
Family Supporting	2.70	1.28	Medium
Total	4.19	0.51	High

Table 3 indicated that the overall reason for choosing to study a foreign language of students was at a high level (mean = 4.19, S.D. = 0.51). The five highest rated factors of the reasons for choosing to study a foreign language were interest in that language (mean = 4.80, S.D. = 0.45), traveling (mean = 4.83, S.D. = 0.44), communication with native speakers (mean = 4.73, S.D. = 0.54), increasing foreign language skills (mean = 4.73, S.D. = 0.45), and learning the society and culture of that language (mean = 4.64, S.D. = 0.72) respectively. While seven high rated factors were wishing to live in that country (mean = 4.48, S.D. = 0.84), for further education (mean = 4.40, S.D. = 0.75), reading a book magazine of that language (mean = 4.38, S.D. = 0.81), getting to know more people (mean = 4.25, S.D. = 0.88), use in future careers (mean = 4.01, S.D. = 0.90), popular language (mean = 3.56, S.D. = 1.30), and easy to learn (mean = 3.55, S.D. = 0.87) respectively. The two medium rated factors were friend Invited (mean = 2.91, S.D. = 1.46) and family Supporting (mean = 2.70, S.D. = 1.28).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the decision on studying foreign languages of high school students during the semester break found that the samples decided to study a foreign language by choosing the study time in the morning. The period of studying a foreign language should be an hour. Moreover, they were interested in choosing to study a language between Monday - Friday rather than studying on Saturday - Sunday, probably because the project was organized during the semester break, so students could therefore study a foreign language from Monday-Friday and they preferred to rest on Saturday-Sunday. Focusing on study for a period of time will result in learners having a good and effective learning process, continuous and comprehensive system in listening, thinking, speaking, writing, and reading skills or other activities. Studying online for an extended period of time may result in a lack of concentration and exhaustion. It can be said that concentration is important for studying because when someone focus or concentrate on something he or she will not be distracted. Wongyai and Patphol (2019) mention that concentrated learners are more creative than those with a lack of concentration. Therefore, it is necessary to consider these issues in designing and organizing the right foreign language class/course/program in the future.

The overall reason for choosing to study a foreign language of students was at a high level. The reason for choosing to study a foreign language of high school students found that the first reason for choosing to study a foreign language was their interest in that language. Secondly was to travel to a country that speaks that language, and wanted to communicate with native speakers. This finding is aligning with the research of Sornsuwannasri (2020) who reported that the motivation for choosing to study the Korean language was self-motivation and is consistent with the research of Saepun et al. (2017) that the students choose to study Chinese because they liked to learn foreign languages. This is consistent with the Maslow's theory (Morgan, 1981; Spaulding, 1992; Moore, 2009 cited in Sornsuwannasri, 2020) mentioned that the ultimate needs of human beings are to achieve fulfillment in life and to do things to achieve the goals that they desire for. For people who want to learn a language to use for communication or to meet their own needs is a motivation that arises within individuals such as thoughts, interests, attitudes, preferences, and needs to be able to communicate with native speakers and be able to apply knowledge to use in a career. Alizadeh (2016), Ekiz and Kulmetov (2016), and Nguyen (2019) indicated that motivation is considered as an important factor in learning a foreign language successfully. Perhaps a person will

be encouraged to learn something by physical motives. Motivation is mainly a result of learners' learning experiences. Learners' beliefs can be powerful motivators and they may be influenced by families and teachers. Students' beliefs and behaviors could lead to the main purpose of teaching (Seven, 2020). Ceylan (2021) stated that getting students interested in looking for opportunities to communicate using the language they learn and their desire to communicate in that language is an important goal of the language learning process.

From the results of this research, it was found that the language background of each participant was at different levels. Some people had no background in their chosen language. While some of them already had the basics knowledge. Therefore, the language program should be clearly defined which language level suits participants, for example, a basic language program for those with no background or an advanced language program for those with a background.

Further studies should explore the expectations and satisfaction of foreign language learners and study learning motivation and the relationship of intrinsic motivation factor with extrinsic motivation factor.

LIMITATION

This study was a quantitative type of research using a questionnaire to collect the data. Although the research has reached its aims, a study in the future should consider including semi-structured interviews to enhance informative and intensive details and information. The study should also have involved diverse participants and key informants such as instructors or students from universities.

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