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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN EAST ASIA

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Abstract: The international school market continues to grow at a rapid pace, and a considerable amount of growth is taking place in East Asia. With the majority of international school enrollment being local students, care should be taken when developing or restructuring the second language acquisition (SLA) instructional model employed in the school. The purpose of this study was to explore the current use and preference of SLA instructional models in international schools in East Asia. The researchers further sought to explore the difference in preference of SLA instructional models between administrators and teachers. This quantitative exploratory survey-based study had 543 participants, all of whom were active administrators and teachers in international schools in East Asia. The main findings of the study revealed that there are differences between implemented and preferred SLA instructional models in international schools in East Asia. Additional findings include the frequency of SLA instructional model implementation and that there was no statistically significant difference in SLA instructional model preference between administrators and teachers. Findings from this study can allow stakeholders and policymakers to understand current practices and potential future shifts in SLA instructional models in international schools in East Asia.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, instructional model, international schools, intensive English, push-in support

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2019, International School Consultancy (ISC Research) reported there were more than 10,000 international schools, and the number is predicted to reach 16,000 schools by 2026 (ISC Research, 2016; 2019). As the number of schools increases, so does the tuition revenue. Using ISC data, Lewandowski (2012) reported on the predicted rise of tuition revenue from USD26 billion in 2012 to USD37 billion in 2015. By 2022, tuition revenue is anticipated to reach USD60 billion (Bunnell, 2014), and by 2026, revenue is expected to reach USD89 billion (ISC Research, 2016).

The enrollment of international schools has gradually shifted from expatriate to both expatriate and local students (Blaney, 2000), and many international schools have a student enrollment in which the majority of students are from the host country. Although ISC Research (2019) reported that local student enrollment in international schools is well above 80%, the enrollment for many schools consists of 100% local student enrollment. A primary driver for the growing number of local students enrolling in international schools is the desire of host country parents to provide their children with an English-medium education (Dearden, 2014). However, many of the local students entering international schools are classified as English language learners (ELLs); some have limited English proficiency (LEP). Although international schools attract students from the wealthiest portion of the local population (ICEF Monitor, 2013), Sears (1998) reminded international school personnel that these students tend to show ordinary ability, talent and maturity comparable to students not from the wealthiest portion of the local population.

Background

Significant growth in international education worldwide began to occur in the second half of the century (Hayden & Thompson, 1995). With the ending of World War II, the number of allied personnel working abroad created a need for schools that offered national curricula for the children in accompanying families (Carder, 2007). However, increased economic development in East Asia during the past 40 years has provided opportunities for numerous families to accumulate wealth, which has enabled parents to seek educational opportunities outside of the national school systems. As a result, there has been an accelerating increase in the demand for international education, and this demand has propelled the rapid growth of international schools throughout Asia (Bryant, 2018).

In many international schools, the second language acquisition (SLA) instructional model (IM) is often the wrong model for that particular school. Having been an ELL (ESL/EAL) specialist teacher and ELL curriculum coordinator in international schools in countries in East Asia, the principal researcher routinely observed poorly developed and or implemented SLA IMs, which can have adverse effects on the language acquisition of ELLs. As Carder (2007) stated, many international schools are "turning out students who are not fully literate in English, and who have lost a good level of ability in their mother tongue". Graduating students who have not developed adequate literacy in English and who have not continued to develop full literacy in their native tongue are practically illiterate. Further, stakeholders in international schools should ponder the thought that some international schools are knowingly graduating students who have never fully developed literacy in either English or the mother tongue.

Overall, there is a deficiency of empirical research examining effective pedagogical practices for working with language learners in international schools (Baker & Lewis, 2015). According to Bunnell (2019), "the diverse arena of 'International School' is continuously growing yet still underreported" (p. 1). Through this study, the researchers seek to provide stakeholders in international schools with data upon which to reflect concerning the current practice and preference of second language acquisition instructional model(s) in international schools in East Asia.

Theoretical Framework

This research study was grounded in the theories of comprehensible input and the affective filter, as put forth by Krashen. According to Krashen (1981), students acquire language when language is comprehensible; the affective filter is representative of the state of mind the learner has while in situations of learning. The relationship between comprehensible input and the affective filter was illustrated when Krashen (1981) stated that "comprehensible input is the only causative variable in second language acquisition" (p. 62). While many international schools tout their accreditation(s) and affiliation(s), a number of those schools are not implementing an SLA IM that provides English language learners with reasonable access to the curriculum. Poorly implemented language acquisition models can prevent students from having reasonable access to the curriculum (Carder, 2013; Gallagher, 2008; Hernandez, 2003) and harm student linguistic development (Carder, 2013; Murphy, 2003). Furthermore, many language learners are not being provided with comprehensible input in an environment that allows them to acquire language at a rate that justifies the cost of the tuition charged.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the current use and preference of SLA IMs in international schools in East Asia. Additionally, the researchers sought to make a comparison in the preferred SLA IMs between administrators and teachers in international schools in East Asia. The researchers developed three research questions to guide the study.

1. What are the frequencies of use concerning the various SLA IMs being implemented in international schools in East Asia?
2. What are the preferred SLA IMs of administrators and teachers in international schools in East Asia?
3. Is there a difference in the preferred SLA IMs between administrators and teachers in international schools in East Asia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

SLA Instructional Models

Effective pedagogical practices for working with ELLs in international schools evolve out of the SLA IM a school uses, and all international schools will have an SLA IM, whether intentionally designed or by default. Some international schools will utilise more than one SLA IM in their school. For example, the Primary section of a school may use one SLA IM, while the Secondary section uses another. Moreover, some schools may implement more than one SLA IM in a single section. For example, in the Secondary part of a school, there may be two SLA IMs employed simultaneously.

The mainstream classroom instructional model with no additional support other than what is provided by the classroom teacher can be seen as a default model in many international schools. In this SLA IM, ELLs are placed in the mainstream classroom with the expectation that they will learn English quickly (Carder, 1991; Shoebottom, 2009) and that the classroom teacher either currently implements best practices for working with language learners or will be able to quickly learn effective methods in working with ELLs (English & Varghese, 2010). Some schools view the mainstream classroom instructional model with no additional support as an inclusionary SLA IM. Push-in occurs when ELLs receive English language support by an ELL specialist teacher who goes into the mainstream classroom to support ELL students. ELL push-in teachers have multiple labels such as the specialist teacher, support teacher, and inclusion teacher. ELL specialist teachers who push-

in also have various roles in the mainstream classroom such as co-teacher, support teacher to the classroom teacher, and can serve as an autonomous teacher within the mainstream classroom (Lehman, 2018). Unless defined in the school language policy, the role of the ELL push-in teacher may need to be negotiated with each classroom teacher (Holderness, 2001). Push-in language support is an inclusionary SLA IM.

According to Carder (2014), the pull-out instructional model was the traditional SLA IM in international schools and is still used in many schools (Shoebottom, 2009). Pull-out occurs when ELLs are pulled out of the mainstream classroom for lessons in English language development. Pull-out lessons are taught by an ELL specialist teacher and happen in a location other than the mainstream classroom. Some schools use a hybrid SLA IM, where ELL specialist teachers do a combination of push-in and pull-out. Intensive English language programs (IELP) or intensive English programs (IEP) are short-term English immersion courses and may last from two weeks to a semester or more (Brevetti & Ford, 2017; Szasz, 2010). While some IELP or IEP courses aim to develop survival English, others require a particular benchmark to be met on a standardised test. Lastly, some international schools employ SLA IMs in which ELLs attend English language development lessons outside of the school day, and these lessons may occur after-school, before-school, or on the weekend.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument

The researchers used an observational cross-sectional survey for this study. According to Creswell (2012), a cross-sectional survey design is used to capture data without manipulating a variable. This research study reports unreported data acquired during a more extensive study for a doctoral dissertation. For the original study, the researchers used the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) questionnaire developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a guide for the survey. According to He and Kubacka (2015), the TALIS questionnaire passed rigorous validation protocols in its development. Additionally, experts in the field were used to establish content validity (Creswell, 2012; Salkind, 2013). All questions were categorical (see Appendix). None of the questions in the survey were mandatory. Lastly, the original study received IRB approval through the university in which the primary researcher was pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

Participants

The researchers primarily used the websites for Search Associates, International School Review, and East Asia Regional Council of School (EARCOS) to define the geographical limits of the study and to develop a list of international schools to target. Search Associates is an international school recruitment organisation; International School Review is a website that provides a platform for stakeholders to post reviews of international schools, English-medium schools, and international programs; EARCOS is an organisation of international schools in East Asia. Additional resources for locating names of international schools included Internet searches, LinkedIn profiles, and other entities that provide information and services for expatriates in foreign countries.

The researchers viewed school websites and the Internet for email contact information to obtain participants. A single invitation to complete the survey was sent to personnel in more than 500 international schools in East Asia. Participants of the survey were administrators and teachers in international schools in countries and city-states located in East Asia. These locations included Cambodia, China, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. The participants answered questions according to their circumstances and were not asked to specify any particular section of the school for which their answers pertained. A total of 543 international school personnel participated in the study.

Procedure

The researchers used IBM SPSS software (v. 22) to produce descriptive data and to perform Pearson chi-square tests (χ^2) with an alpha level of 0.05. The Pearson chi-square test is a nonparametric test and can be used to measure the distribution of frequencies (Salkind, 2013). Further, the Pearson chi-square test can evaluate categorical data (Creswell, 2012). All data analysed with Pearson chi-square tests met the assumptions as specified by McHugh (2013).

RESULTS

Data from the survey reflected that 13.4% of the respondents were in international schools that implemented an SLA IM of the mainstream classroom with no language specialist support (see Table 1). A similar percentage of participants were in schools that used a mainstream instructional model with push-in support by ELL specialist

teachers. Additionally, the mainstream classroom with a combination of push-in and pull-out support was the most used SLA IM with 44.2%. Also, the mainstream classroom with pull-out support by ELL specialist teachers had a percentage of 16.9%. Lastly, the use of an intensive English program was reported by 9.6% of the participants, and 2.2% of the respondents were in schools that implemented an after-school, before-school, or weekend-based SLA IM for working with students identified as being English language learners.

Table 1. Implemented SLA IM (N = 543)

SLA IM	In use	Percentage (%)
Mainstream no support	73	13.4
Push-in	74	13.6
Push-in and pull-out	240	44.2
Pull-out	92	16.9
Intensive English	52	9.6
After-school, before-school or weekend activity	12	2.2

Additional data from the respondents of the survey reflected that 4.6% of the participants preferred the SLA IM of the mainstream classroom with no ELL specialist support (see Table 2). There were 18.5% of the respondents that reported the mainstream classroom with push-in support as their preferred SLA IM. A majority of respondents with 52.4% prefer mainstream with push-in and pull-out support. Only 5.9% of the participants reported that mainstream with pull-out support was their preferred instructional model of support. The use of an intensive English program before transitioning to the mainstream classroom was preferred by 17.3% of the participants. Lastly, 1.3% of participants reported that an SLA IM based on after-school, before-school, or weekend support was their preferred instructional model of support.

Table 2. Preferred SLA model (N = 542)

SLA IM	Preferred	Percentage (%)
Mainstream no support	25	4.6
Push-in	100	18.5
Push-in and pull-out	284	52.4
Pull-out	32	5.9
Intensive English	94	17.3
After-school, before-school or weekend activity	7	1.3

The researchers used a Pearson chi-square test to find out if there was a difference in the preference of SLA IMs between teachers and administrators (see Table 3). The results of the Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the preferred SLA IMs between administrators (Group 1: n = 155) and teachers (Group 2: n = 387), χ^2 (5, N = 542) = 8.915, p = 0.112. Pearson chi-square post-hoc analyses based on adjusted standardised residuals further revealed no statistically significant differences.

Table 3. Preferred SLA model (N = 542)

SLA IM	Admin	Teacher
Main-stream no support	9	16
Push-in	30	70
Push-in and pull-out	91	193
Pull-out	7	25
Intensive English	17	77
After-school, before-school or weekend activity	1	6
Total	155	387

DISCUSSION

Data reported in Table 1 and visualised in Figure 1 shows the reported frequency of SLA IMs implemented in international schools in East Asia. Of note is the percentage of participants in schools utilising the SLA IM of the mainstream classroom with pull-out; according to Carder (2014), this instructional model was the traditional SLA IM in international schools. Clearly, the use of the pull-out model is in decline. The use of the hybrid push-in and push-out SLA IM has grown and is now of considerable interest because the data in this study shows it is the dominant SLA IM used in international schools in East Asia. The rise in the use of push-in practices will more than likely necessitate the need for the role of the ELL push-in teacher to be negotiated with each classroom teacher (Holderness, 2001) unless the school leadership or policy documents, such as the language policy, clearly stipulate the role of the ELL push-in teacher (Lehman, 2018).

Some concerns arise with the use of the mainstream classroom with no support, intensive English, and after-school/before-school/weekend SLA IMs, and these concerns are focused on teacher preparation and training and the well-being of the students. For example, once students are released from intensive English programs, will they continue to be supported upon entering the mainstream classroom, or will they be left to their own devices to cope with classroom

instruction based on a set time or minimum language level required to exit the intensive program? Additionally, ELLs attending after-school/before-school/ weekend SLA IMs are most likely attending mainstream classes during the day and are only receiving SLA support from the classroom teacher, who may or may not have training in SLA. When the percentages for the mainstream classroom with no support, intensive English, and after-school/before-school/weekend SLA IMs are combined, the percentage of participants reporting SLA IMs that place students in the mainstream classroom with no ELL specialist support other than the classroom teacher is approximately 25%.

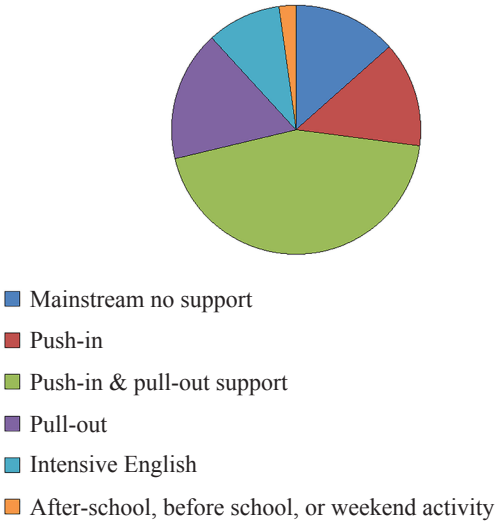
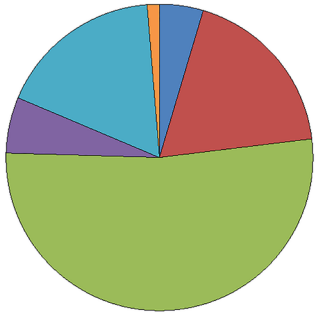


Figure 1. Implemented SLA IMs

While students will learn English in the mainstream classroom, a number of ELLs in international schools are possibly being placed in a 'sink-or-swim' situation (Carder, 2008; Krashen, 1981). Also, some are being placed in classrooms in which school administrators assume the classroom teacher currently implements best practices or will be able to quickly learn effective methods for working with ELLs (English & Varghese, 2010). With the mainstream classroom with no support, intensive English, and after-school/before-school/weekend SLA IMs, ELL student well-being is of concern. Are these ELLs receiving comprehensible input that allows them to have reasonable access to the curriculum? If left to their own devices, what is their state of being or affective filter?

Although there was no overall statistically significant difference between administrators and teachers concerning preferred SLA IMs (see Table 3), Tables 1 and 2, along with Figures 1 and 2, provide an opportunity to compare currently

implemented SLA IMs with preferred SLA IMs. The data reveal that the mainstream classroom with both push-in and pull-out SLA IM is the preferred instructional model in use and preference. Additionally, there is an increased preference in the use of the mainstream with push-in support. This particular instructional model is an inclusionary SLA IM but with additional support from an ELL specialist teacher, as opposed to the mainstream classroom with no support SLA IM that is also referred to as an inclusionary model. Although there are decreases in the percentages of preference for the mainstream classroom with no support SLA IM and the after-school/before-school/weekend SLA IM, there is an increased preference for the intensive English language SLA IM.



Mainstream no support
Push-in
Push-in & pull-out support
Pull-out
Intensive English
After-school, before school, or weekend activity

Figure 2. Preferred SLA IMs

The preference for intensive English programs by approximately 17% of the participants warrants discussion. To understand this preference, the researchers considered a couple of possibilities. The first possibility is that many teachers do not view themselves as language teachers, yet the majority of teachers in international schools are ELL teachers, whether they realise it or not (Halicioglu, 2015). The second possibility is connected to the first in that schools are admitting students with deficient levels of English to increase enrollment resulting in the preference by administrators and teachers for LEP students to develop an institutionally set minimum amount of English before transitioning to the mainstream classroom.

According to Padron and Waxman (2016), school principals and administrators often do not have a thorough understanding of second language acquisition and are often unable to describe how the SLA IM in their school functions or meets the linguistic needs of the ELLs. Because of the brevity of intensive English language programs (Brevetti & Ford, 2017; Szasz, 2010) and the warnings provided by Thomas and Collier (2002) of the dangers of short-term language acquisition programs, the increased preference of intensive English language programs in international schools is an area of concern. As the preference for the intensive English language programs possibly grows, once again, there is a concern for student well-being once the students exit the intensive program and enter the mainstream classroom. Will those students continue to be supported by an ELL specialist teacher or a classroom teacher who has training in working with ELLs? Or, will the students be left to their own devices?

According to Gaskel (2016), a growing number of international schools are embracing inclusion. As the number of international schools increases coupled with the rise of inclusionary SLA IMs that place ELLs in classrooms without ELL specialist teachers, a case can be made that the use of inclusionary instructional models can reduce personnel costs and improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix). However, in an international school, ELLs, many who are LEP, are more likely to experience marginalisation because they lack communicative skills in the medium of instruction.

Often administrators of international schools import SLA IMs, practices and dispositions from their home countries (Carder, 2011) with the expectation of identical implementation and results. Unfortunately, classroom teachers will rarely question such practices or find themselves powerless to bring about change. Additionally, ELL specialist teachers will often find themselves fighting for their students while simultaneously struggling to negotiate their position in the school (Carder, 2013). Therefore, administrators in international schools must understand that there is a difference between "between simply teaching in English and actually teaching English" (Torrance, 2005, p. 6).

CONCLUSION

The main findings of the study revealed that there are differences between implemented and preferred SLA instructional models in international schools in East Asia. Data from the study revealed the hybrid push-in and pull-out instructional model is the predominately used SLA IM in international schools in East Asia, and that the preference for this instructional model exceeds its current

implementation. Further revealed was the preference for some administrators and teachers in international schools to use the IELP or IEP SLA IM. Lastly, this study found there was no difference in the preference of SLA IM between administrators and teachers in international schools in East Asia.

The findings of this study are essential to various stakeholders in international schools for multiple reasons. Because the hybrid model is both the predominant and favoured model, international schools should seek to provide appropriate amounts of time and support for classroom teachers and ELL specialist teachers to meet and coordinate times of push-in instruction. Additionally, school leadership may need to define classroom teachers and ELL specialist teacher roles clearly to avoid staff friction and potential power imbalances (Carder, 2013; Lehman, 2018). The preference for the IELP or IEP SLA IM is of concern because the brevity of many of those programs may leave ELLs in a precarious position. A position of having attained enough English to exit IELP or IEP classes but not enough to be successful in the classroom without continued ELL specialist support or support via a classroom teacher with training in SLA. The findings of this study point to the need for schools and school leadership to provide structures of support, professional development, and planning time to ensure appropriate staff interaction, teacher instruction, and student learning is occurring.

Recommendations for Future Study

The researchers recommend the future study of the trends in SLA IMs in international schools. For example, will the use of intensive English language programs escalate, and if so, what structures of support are being provided to students and teachers after students exit the intensive program? Or, as the use of the hybrid SLA IM grows, are schools defining roles and developing structures of support that enable the classroom teacher and ELL specialist teacher to plan and work together?

Assumptions and Limitations

The researchers assumed that participants answered survey questions truthfully. The researchers further assumed that the data is representative of the geographical region covered by the survey. A limitation of this study was the use of international school administrators and teachers to answer questions based on their perceptions and experiences of their place of work when completing the survey. An additional limitation of this study was that the study included only participants for which the researchers located contact information.

Closing Remarks

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the current use and preference of SLA instructional models in international schools in East Asia. The researchers encourage stakeholders and policymakers in international schools to use the data provided in the article to reflect upon the current practice(s) of second language acquisition instructional model(s) in their school(s). In closing, the researchers encourage administrators and policymakers to implement an SLA IM that is considered the best fit for the ELLs in their particular school(s) while incorporating contemporary research-based pedagogical practices in working with ELLs.

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APPENDIX

Are you currently a teacher in a school that uses English as the primary language of instruction?

(1) Yes
(2) No

Are you currently an administrator in a school that uses English as the primary language of instruction?

(1) Yes
(2) No

Which of the following best describes the language acquisition model in place for working with students who are considered in need of English language support?

(a) Mainstream classroom with no push-in or pull-out support (classroom teachers handle all aspects of student language acquisition)
(b) Mainstream classroom with language teacher support (inclusion with push-in)
(c) Mainstream classroom with both push-in and pull-out support
(d) Mainstream classroom with students pulled out for support
(e) Intensive English program before transitioning to the mainstream classroom
(f) English language support is an after-school, before-school, or weekend activity

Please indicate which of the following best describes your preferred English language support model.

(a) Mainstream classroom with no push-in or pull-out support (classroom teachers handle all aspects of student language acquisition)
(b) Mainstream classroom with language teacher support (inclusion with push-in)
(c) Mainstream classroom with both push-in and pull-out support.
(d) Mainstream classroom with students pulled out for support
(e) Intensive English program before transitioning to the mainstream classroom
(f) English language support is an after-school, before-school or weekend activity