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Practical Curriculum Inquiry: Students' Voices of their EFL Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract: This mixed-methods study borrowed Schwabian notions of practical curriculum inquiry (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) to investigate students' perceptions of their English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum and instruction in light of their interactions with the four commonplaces; i.e., teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, interviews, and focus group interviews. Altogether 70 Thai university students volunteered to participate in the study. When woven together, these data demonstrated how this particular group of students perceived their EFL curriculum and instruction in terms of the four commonplaces encompassing curriculum development and instruction. In particular, they discussed how teachers' personalities, pedagogical knowledge, and subject matter affected their language learning; how they were bullied by their colleagues when using English; how significant English was, and; how their environment determined their learning. The information elicited in this process highlighted how important student voices are in evaluating educational programs.

Introduction

In his controversial best-selling book – *the Shame of the Nation: the Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, Kozol (2005) argued that students knew best what went on in their schools. In his own words, "Students were the best data source, pure witness and more reliable in telling the truth of the schools than the others" (p. 12). Similarly, Bain (2004) valued students' voices, noting, "every student is unique and brings contributions no one else can make" (p. 72). These arguments are, however, not new. In his two influential books first published in 1913 and 1916 (republished in 1975 and 2004), Dewey advocated that students necessarily be involved in their own education. More than eight decades later, Corbett and Wilson (1995) made more or less the same suggestion as that of Dewey. That is, students' involvement in their own education was crucial. In 1995, the journal – *Theory Into Practice* focused an entire issue on the significance of students' voices. A group of seminal scholars and writers were involved and contributed their articles discussing the reciprocity between students' voices and educational reform, teachers' instructional practices, and curriculum development (see, for example, Commeyras, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Heshusius, 1995; Johnston & Nicholls, 1995; Lincoln, 1995, O'Laughlin, 1995; and Oldfather, 1995).

More recently, the salience of students' voices has become explicit in the growing body of research dealing with students' voices. For example, available empirical research findings have shown that collaborative work between teachers and students not only generated a better relationship between teachers and students but contributed to a better understanding of

learning that eventually could enhance engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm within learners (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, & Reay, 2004; Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2014; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; Demetriou, Goalen, & Rudduck, 2000; Houghton, 2001; Kaba, 2000; MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck, & Myers, 2003; Rodgers, 2006; Yair, 2000). In addition, students' voices are critical to the successful implementation of educational reform (Beresford, 2000; Ericson & Ellett, 2002; Fielding, 2001, 2004, 2006; Holdsworth, 2000; Mitra, 2006, 2007; Pekrul & Levin, 2007; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Wilson & Corbett, 2001; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009).

Students' voices are not as extensively documented in literature in the field of language education compared to that in general education. In fact, students' voices appear to be not only underutilized but also understated in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Murphey, Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009). In response to the significance of students' voices and their being missed from the realm of EFL education, we conducted a study to uncover and document Thai university students' voices of their EFL curricula and instruction. To do so, we closely followed Schwab's (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) theoretical concepts of practical curriculum inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

After having identified crises in American educational systems, Schwab (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) offered an alternative theoretical notion for curriculum development and instruction; i.e., practical curriculum inquiry. Practical curriculum inquiry is centralized on three main perspectives including (1) state of arts, (2) arts of eclectics, and (3) interaction among the four commonplaces.

State of arts doubts generalizations but emphasizes the uniqueness of each educational context and encourages researchers/practitioners to immerse themselves into the contexts in which they are investigating. Arts of eclectics require researchers/practitioners to possess theoretical knowledge in order to be able to apply and adapt their knowledge or to invent new theories to redress their specific problems. Interaction among the four commonplaces stresses the necessity for concurrent communication among the four commonplaces Schwab considered essential components of curriculum development and instruction; i.e., teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu (environment).

Hinging on Schwabian notions (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983), we went into one Thai university context (*Scholastic University* – a pseudonym) to document students' voices of their EFL curricula and instruction. In particular, we documented how students perceived the four commonplaces including their teachers, their colleagues, their subject matter, and their environment.

Mode of Enquiry

Following the notions of a mixed-methods paradigm (Bergman, 2008; Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2003; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier, & Moore, 2007; Patton, 2002, Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), we requested our participants to complete both of our

quantitative (a questionnaire) and qualitative (interviews and focus group interviews) data collection tools.

Participants

All students majoring in English at *Scholastic University* were asked to participate in the study. Heeding to the cautions of Soltis (1990) and Smith (1990), we ethically employed several methods in recruiting participants. For example, we informed these students of their rights. Also, we ensured their confidentiality and privacy. Altogether 70 (F = 50, M = 20) students volunteered to participate in the study. Of these, 9 participated in all the three data collection tools; 30 responded to a questionnaire and agreed to join focus group interviews; 7 did a questionnaire and consented to interviews; and 24 completed a questionnaire only.

A Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in our study was adapted from that of Savignon and Wang (2003). Altogether, the questionnaire had 68 items and was divided into four sections covering students' perceptions of the four commonplaces. The questionnaire was piloted and its reliability equaled 0.97.

Interviews

Adhering to the concepts of semi-structured interviews (Barriball & While, 1994; Bryman, 2006; Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004; King & Horrocks, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011), we developed a set of interview questions by considering studies of Brosh (1996), Savignon and Wang (2003), Schinke-Llano and Vicars (1993), Shawer (2010), and Tse (2000). These interview questions were piloted on five Thai university students with the same characteristics as the potential participants. The questions were then re-arranged and reworded; 18 interview questions were finally used.

Focus Group Interviews

Mindful of the notions of focus group interviews (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Brenner, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2014; Frey & Fontana, 1991; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002), 30 students consenting to focus group interviews were divided into groups of three to six. During focus group interviews, we asked questions that allowed the participants in each group to exchange their opinions and to discuss their ideas with their group members. Nonetheless when we recognized the silence of one group member during the interview, we directed that particular member with a question to ensure his/her participation in the interview.

Data Analysis

All the completed and returned questionnaires were tallied, tabulated, and calculated with SPSS. Interview and focus group interview data were transcribed and analyzed with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notions of open and axial coding techniques. To do so, the

transcribed data were read and re-read to categorize and re-categorize to create a meaningful group of data to uncover the participants' voices of the four commonplaces. Later, both quantitative and qualitative data were woven in terms of their convergence, inconsistency, and divergence to reveal students' perceptions of EFL curriculum and instruction at *Scholastic University*.

Results

Our calculation of the completed and returned questionnaires demonstrated, to some extent, the student participants' perceptions of the four commonplaces. For example, the majority of the participants agreed that EFL instruction should be fun (mean = 4.6866), focus on real-like situations (mean = 4.8333), and involve cultures of English speaking people (mean = 4.2239). Further, they agreed that an effective EFL teacher necessarily had good language proficiency (mean = 4.7910), had good knowledge of the English language (mean = 4.7761), was able to motivate students (mean = 4.6269), and prepared the lessons well (mean = 4.2985).

Interestingly, these numeric data offered some glimpses into how these student participants perceived the four commonplaces. Our analysed qualitative data further uncovered these participants' perceptions of their EFL teachers, their colleagues, their subject matter, and their environment.

Students' Perceptions of Their EFL Teachers

During interviews and focus group interviews, these student participants shared with us their perceptions of their EFL teachers in terms of the teachers' personalities, pedagogical knowledge, and subject matter knowledge. Several students explained how teachers' friendliness and open-mindedness attributed to their successes in language learning. They agreed that teachers' friendliness made them feel comfortable enough to approach teachers with their problems. One second year student, *Greg*, noted, "Teachers here are friendly with everyone. Teachers' friendliness encourages me to talk to them both in and outside of the classroom." Another second year student, *Mia*, emphasized, noting, "Teachers are friendly. There's no gap between us. I can talk to them anywhere and anytime. That is good." *Pat* concurred. "I often talk only with teachers who are friendly. I negotiate with them, for example, text schedules." Gaps between teachers and students could, *Luis* warned, "stop students from wanting to talk with teachers. We even feel like we should not ask them anything. This sucks." *Paul*, also a second year student, concluded, "Their friendliness very much helps me with my learning. Because they are really friendly, I even approach them in their office when I have some problems. In classes, I am eager to answer questions. And I bet all my friends feel the same too."

The attribution was also discussed during focus group interviews. Following was what *Lily* and her group members shared.

Lily:	Most of the teachers here are friendly and caring. They don't only teach us but also care about how our college life is going. They are concerned with, for example, whether we have some problems with assignments or not.
Will:	They also want to know why some students are absent.
Helen:	They remind us to submit our work when the due is coming.
Lily:	This personality of theirs makes us know that we can always talk to them

if we have any problem.

Helen: The atmosphere in the classrooms is relaxing because the teachers are friendly.

Will: We want to go to classes because we can ask our teachers questions whenever we don't understand.

Similarly, another focus group interview noted,

Jane: They are friendly. They always invite us to go talk to them in their office. When we run into each other, they stop and talk to us. They give us chances to use English in our daily life as much as possible.

Donna: We often talk to these friendly teachers. But some of us are too shy to talk to them.

Another teacher characteristic contributing to students' successes was open-mindedness. *Paul* emphasized the importance of teachers being open-minded and listening to students. "It is good for teachers to listen to their students. They need to know what our problems are. They should also share their problems or their difficulties with us. So we both can solve problems. This, I think, could make the teaching and learning better." One third year student, *Greg*, noted, "I'm always glad when my teachers listen to me. Sometimes students' needs and teachers' don't match; learning and teaching can't be fully effective. To match these needs, teachers and learners must meet half way where both parties can be satisfied." Often, *Mia* shared her feelings of teaching with her teachers because "they did ask me. I told them. It feels really good to know that my teachers aren't dictators. Together, we work out how our classes should be like." A group discussion between two third year students exemplified the attribution of teachers' open-mindedness to students' successes.

Norah: If teachers listen to our opinions, this shows that we are equal.

Sophia: We can study better when teachers listen to us and adapt what we say into their teaching. For example, in our Business Contact Translation class, when we first studied this class, we had difficulties in understanding technical English legal terms. So we talked to the teacher. Then what she did was she told us to translate the Thai legal documents to English first because we were more familiar with the Thai legal terms. That helped a lot.

Good pedagogical knowledge also attributed to students' successes. A couple of our student participants related teachers' instructional practices with students' desires to learn. For example, *Greg* explained, "If EFL teachers can teach well, students will pay attention and that will make our class a good EFL class." *Linda* echoed, "Some of our classes are fun. Teachers ask us to share our opinions about many things. We speak a lot as we are given chances to speak more." These students made complaints of several English classes in which teaching by the textbook, seat work exercises, and grammar foci were largely implemented. *Pat* criticized her English Reading and Writing classes this way. "In the Reading and Writing classes, I only sit in my desk and do exercises. Then the teachers will ask us what the answers are. It's always like this. It's quite boring." Then she suggested, "Instead of having us do exercises in textbooks after reading stories, the teachers could ask students what they think about the stories. We can do group discussion, class presentation, or anything that gives us chances to communicate with one another." *Juan* explained how teachers' strict adherence to textbooks lessened students' desires to learn. "In some classes, the atmosphere is boring because of the ways EFL teachers instruct the classes. For example, some EFL teachers only read us textbooks. They never talked to me or showed me anything beyond textbooks that related to the contents." Similarly, *Tina* criticized,

The atmosphere in most classes is boring. Most students don't even pay attention in classes because teachers only teach according to the books. Students already

knew what and how they would study even before coming to the class. And it is even worse when all the answers of the exercises are provided at the back of the books. Some students just copy these answers and submit the exercises to the teachers and spend the rest of the time chatting with one another.

During their focus group interview, *Emily*, *Sophia*, and *Norah* exchanged their dissatisfaction with the teaching practices of some of their EFL teachers.

Emily: Some of my EFL classes are boring because these teachers only read us textbooks.

Sophia: I suddenly feel sleepy when they do that.

Norah: Me too. I was like "Is this how you teach?" If we are here to listen to you reading books only, I can read them myself at home. Sometimes, I think the contents in the books are fine but the way some teachers teach just make them boring.

Students' successes to learning were also owed to teachers' subject matter knowledge. *Tina* complimented her Phonology teacher who could give students a clear explanation. "English Phonology class is really interesting. The teacher who teaches this class can always explain well. She always tells me why it is this way…why it is that way. She can also give me a lot of examples from her experiences. She teaches from what she knows, not from textbooks."

Students' Perceptions of Their Colleagues

Students' discussions of how they perceived their colleagues were mainly centralized on their experiences involved bullying. A couple of students complained about being the targets of bullying when speaking English with other students in their College. *Paula* recalled her experience. "When I first came here, I tried to practice my English with my friends. But people laughed at me; some ignored me; and some thought I was showing off. This let me down." *Tina* was also upset about this, lamenting, "I have one good bullying experience example. In our freshman orientation, I first tried to talk to my new friends in English. But I learned later that they had talked behind my back and laughed at me for trying to use English. I felt really bad about this." Among themselves, these two groups of students shared what had happened to them when speaking English with their Thai colleagues. The first group complained,

Helen: Sometimes we want to speak English with other students in the College. But they are like….they don't talk back to us when we speak English.

Greg: They stared at us as if saying that we're showing off.

Will: We don't know what their problem is!

Students in the second group also were ridiculed.

Norah: Students don't talk to one another in English in the class. Some might be shy.

Emily: But another thing is that some students laughed at students trying to speak English.

Norah: They asked us why we speak English when we all are Thai. They accused us of showing off.

Helen: We admitted that our English is not good. But at least we try to improve it by using it more.

Students' Perceptions of Their Subject Matter

Our student participations' discussions on how they perceived their subject matter were divided into two main categories. One focused on the significance of the English language; the other one concerned the English Foundation courses required by their university. Several participants recognized the significance of the English language and admitted that their proficiencies of the English language would be essential for their future careers. Students discussed this during their focus group interviews.

Lily: I think English can be used in many different occasions because a lot of people use English as a mean of communication.

Greg: English will really be useful in our future career.

Helen: It has become the universal language already.

Another group of students echoed the crucial role of the English language for their future careers.

Sandra: I choose to study English because it is the second language of many countries.

Nancy: I need to have English. It is the language that people in the business world use for communication. In the future, I need this language to communicate with foreigners in the business world.

A couple of students further explained that the English language would become even more significant in 2015 when Thailand would join the other nine South East Asian countries to become ASEAN. As these countries had their own language, the English language would then be used as an official language within the ASEAN community. *Tina* said, "I really think English is important nowadays. Moreover, we are about to a part of the ASEAN community in the next few years; English would even become more important. This is because it will be used as a mean to communicate within the ASEAN community." *Mark* concurred, noting, "Since Thailand is going to join ASEAN in the next couple of years, English is certainly necessary for my future career. Knowing English would give me better opportunities because it is the official language of ASEAN."

When asked to express their perceptions toward their English courses, these students had mixed feelings of these courses. Some found that the two required English Foundation courses were useful especially for students with low English language proficiencies. *Tom* admitted, "Before I studied here, my English was really terrible. I knew almost nothing. I think these courses are really helpful for those with low English proficiencies like me." *Paul* resonated this, noting, "I think it's good to have these classes. They could help those who have low proficiencies improve their English." Students' discussions during their group interviews stressed the benefits of these Foundation courses.

Lily: In our English Foundation classes, we study basic stuff. Our teachers try to bridge the language proficiency gap between the stronger and the weaker, so they start from the very beginning.

Will: These Foundation classes are important classes. I think they are the best ones for me. Personally when I first came here, I knew almost nothing. I knew vocabulary but I have no grammatical knowledge. These classes taught me a lot. They make me understand English a lot more.

Greg: They help freshen up what we already knew.

Another group of students agreed,

Tina: These two courses gave us strong background to do some other more advanced classes.

Will: There exists a gap between strong students and weak students. Though it is impossible to completely close this gap, these two Foundation courses certainly help to some extent.

Contradictorily, some students were not satisfied with the content of these two English Foundation courses and criticized their repetitive content.

Donna: These classes bore me. Learning the same stuff is boring. I want to learn something new…something we have not yet known.

Jane: Why do we need to study what we already knew? We end up learning nothing new. We certainly are bored.

Olivia: In these classes, we are learning the same thing as we did in high school again.

Apart from these two English Foundation courses, the majority of our participants also took this opportunity to voice their feelings toward the content of their other English courses. Similarly, almost all these participants were satisfied when cultures of the English language were incorporated into their courses. They agreed that cultural knowledge would help them not only communicate with foreigners better but also behave more appropriately. As such this knowledge, these participants emphasized, would be beneficial for their future career. *Paul* noted, "My EFL teachers bring cultural knowledge into classes. Since I study to do business with foreigners, I need to know what to do and what not to do with those people from different countries. I think teaching culture in English classes is really useful." *Top* agreed, stressing, "I'm studying English for Business Communication major. So I need to know culture too in order to communicate effectively." Like two of his colleagues mentioned here, *Juan* echoed, "I do think sharing experiences in EFL classes is important especially when related to cultures. When my foreign EFL teachers talk about their countries or their cultures that are related to the content, I can picture things they are teaching." Discussions during focus group interviews ensured the necessity for EFL teachers to include cultures of the target language into their teaching. Within their group, *Betty* and *Linda* shared this.

Betty: We need to know what is appropriate to say in foreign countries as well as what is not supposed to be said. I feel good when our EFL teachers show us some examples of some cultural differences. So we can adapt ourselves to a new culture when living or working with foreigners.

Linda: These teachers shared with us about their lives while living in their countries. We're really interested in these because we've never been there before. So, if in the future, we will have a chance to work abroad…….

Betty: We will be able to adapt ourselves to fit with other people.

Linda: We will already know how to behave.

Similarly, another group of students noted,

Tina: I think it is necessary for us to know western cultures.

Josh: We study English. We should know what it is like outside Thailand. We need to know western cultures.

Ashley: These western cultures also interest us.

Josh: Of course, we are studying English and we are in an international program.

Tina: Again, I need to stress how important it is for us to understand cultures. This is because we all want to work with foreigners.

Students' Perceptions toward Milieu

Students' responses to our interview questions on their perceptions of their milieu (or environment) were largely centralized on the feelings they had toward the administrative systems. Overall, their responses clearly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with some of the

administration policies such as the teaching staff recruitment processes, the College's education network, and the College's student intake requirements. One group of students criticized how the system forced some teachers to involuntarily leave their jobs.

> *Laura*: I think what needs immediate improvement is our college's administrative staff! I have no idea what kind of EFL teachers they are recruiting.
>
> *Sharon*: The staff only recruit their people whom they know they can work with. Or should I say control? Those EFL teachers who don't get along with them are forced to leave in some way.
>
> *Laura*: Like Lecturer Nick. We really like him. But he had some issues with the administrators. So he left to teach somewhere else.
>
> *Ruth*: We want him back.
>
> *Laura*: Yes. We want him back to replace some of those administrators.

Another group of students not only vented their concerns of but also questioned the qualities of some of the teaching staff currently employed.

> *Tina*: We want more good teachers. I mean we used to have more than we do now. But they left.
>
> *Ashley*: Like our favorite one – Dr. Maria. She still teaches us but she doesn't work here anymore. She left after these administrators run the college.
>
> *Tina*: When I was a freshman, this college had four Ph.D.
>
> *Karen*: Now we only have one – Dr. Maria. And she in only a visiting lecturer.
>
> *Tina*: When the Office for National Educational Standards and Quality Assessment came to evaluate our college whether it met the requirements and standard, it was more than obvious to them that we didn't have enough qualified teachers. The best that we ever had was four and that still didn't meet the Office's requirements. But instead of recruiting more qualified teachers, these administrators only bring in their own people.

One lone student questioned the administrators' decisions in terminating the College's education network with other foreign institutions. Such the decisions affected the College's student exchange program. Not only did this, *Josh* complained, rob students from an opportunity to further their studies abroad but it also stopped foreign students enrolling at the College.

> The College used to cooperate with several universities abroad. But the cooperation was terminated after these administrators ran the College. I want it back as this cooperation gives students chances to go abroad to further their studies or to be exposed to English. This also stops students from other universities to come to our College to study with us. We want them here to create an English speaking environment to help us practice our English.

Several students concurred with *Josh*. *Tina* explained how foreign students could help improve her English communication proficiencies.

> I wish for more foreign friends. Maybe some sort of exchange students. If there are some of them here, we will have more opportunities to use English. Speaking to students is certainly not like speaking to teachers. With teachers, our conversations are mostly restricted to academic matters. I think I still have to pay respect to teachers a lot when talking to them. Sometimes I even have to be ceremonious. But with students, I feel like I can talk with them about anything as long as we share common interests.

One student group interview clarified this further.

> *Sophia*: We need more foreign students to create an English speaking

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>environment in our College. We don't have many chances to talk to teachers in our classes.</td></tr>
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Emily: And there is a difference between talking to teachers and to friends. When we talk to teachers in and outside of classes, our conversations are always related to academic matters. Plus we can't be close to teachers as much as we are with friends. When we talk with our friends, we talk about general topics or things that we share common interest.

Norah: We can hang out together.

Sophia: And these foreign friends don't even have to be English native speakers. They could come from Malaysia or anywhere. When we are together, English will definitely be used as a mean for communication.

The current College's requirements for student intake consistently threatened the quality of its education and could eventually tarnish the College's reputation. In their focus group interviews, the following six students complained of the effects derived from students' low English proficiencies. Oftentimes teachers were inevitably forced to adapt their teaching to match with students' proficiencies. *Betty*, *Mary*, and *Linda* criticized;

Betty: Criteria of student admission must be changed. English speaking class can never happen if too low language proficiency students get accepted here. Some can't even speak English at all.

Mary: So teachers can't teach using communicative activities. And when there's no English communication in the class, students will never be able to improve their English proficiencies.

Sophia: They will also get bored for not having a chance to speak.

Another three students similarly complained;

Ashley: Student admission must be improved.

Karen: It seems like our College accepts anybody who applies here regardless of his/her language proficiencies.

Ashley: Some of them are rejected from somewhere else so they come here because they need a place to study.

Tina: We feel sorry for our EFL teachers who could not teach the ways they plan since some of the students don't know English at all.

Ashley: With this quality of students, our College can't improve. The College has no good reputation so only a few smart students apply here each year. And without smart students, we can't gain our reputation.

Tina: We have a number of drop outs. Less than half of the class of the students accepted that year graduated. Criteria of student admission must be improved a lot.

Conclusion and Discussion

Emerging from our study were the usually suppressed or unheard voices of a group of university EFL students from one Asian context (Murphey, Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009). This particular group of students from one Thai university revealed their perceptions of their EFL curriculum and instruction in light of the four commonplaces; i.e., teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1983). Together, these student participants identified characteristics of an EFL teacher that, they believed, could determine their learning. These characteristics were discussed in terms of personalities (friendliness and open-mindedness), pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of subject matter (Banno, 2003; Bell, 2005; Brosh, 1996; Chen & Lin, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan, 2009; Walls,

Nardi, von Mudden, & Hoffman, 2002). These participants also shared their pressure mounting from being a subject of peer bullying (Doll, Spies, LeClair, Kurien, & Foley, 2010; LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009). These students were derided when speaking English with other students. In addition, the majority of these student participants recognized the increasing significance of the English language resulting from Thailand's joining the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. More than a few of them suggested the teaching of cultures of the English language be implemented in their EFL content (Bayyurt, 2006; Bouton, 1999; Guest, 2002; Lessard-Clouston, 1996; McKay, 2000; Prodromou, 1992; Scollon, 1999; Tseng & Chao, 2012). Furthermore, these student participants criticized how administrative systems (e.g., teacher recruitment, student entry requirements, and collaboration policies, among many others) affected their learning and called for a change in the administrative systems (Boyd, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010).

Importantly, the voices of these student participants demonstrated these students' analytical skills in critiquing their EFL curriculum and instruction. These voices might be different from (or might, to some extent, conflict with) administrators' and teachers' perspectives. They, however, need to be heard and respected (Cook-Sather, 2006). Administrators and teachers must essentially pay close attention to these voices when designing and developing courses and curricula, choosing teaching methodologies, and reforming education, among others. Further, Cook-Sather (2010) warned,

Because some of what students say will challenge educators' beliefs, and because some of what they say may conflict with educators' perspectives, it is essential for educators to pay close attention to their responses to what students have to say and, rather than becoming defensive or dismissive, educators should ask themselves what they could do to better understand student perspectives and help students better understand theirs. The challenge often lies in adults overcoming their own feelings as educators to recognize, understand, and accept the true feelings of students in order to work collaboratively to build a more meaningful learning environment. No matter what students feel, and whether the adults agree, it is real feeling to students, and educators must work with them as all participants in the conversation move beyond their limited perspectives. Turn doubt and disagreement into opportunity for further learning. (p. 45)

Students' voices do not only improve education but they also contribute to students' growth and development. Mitra (2004) convincingly listed three benefits students could gain if they are invited to participate in their own education. Participating could help "(1) to instill agency in students, or beliefs that they could transform themselves and the institutions that affect them, (2) to acquire the skills and competencies to work toward these changes, and (3) to establish meaningful relationships with adults and the peers that create greater connections to each other" (Mitra, 2004, p. 681). Given the benefits of students' voices, students must be given opportunities to speak out and their voices need to be listened to. Students, despite where they are, need not be shunned from such the opportunities.

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