

## A study on a short-term English Immersion Program for Middle School Students

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**Abstract.** In order to overcome the restriction that the Korean English education system has, English camps for students have been proposed by the Korean Education system as a solution for improving Korean student's English ability. The purpose of this research is to analyze the characteristics of a short-term English Immersion program during a middle school English camp. This study was conducted at an Institute in Chungnam, during a short-term English camp for middle school students, including dormitory residency. My research focused on three different sections: Firstly, the TBL classes that are taught just by a native teacher. Secondly, EEC activities which are co-teaching classes that are taught by a Korean teacher and a native teacher. Thirdly, communicative activities are carried out by all students and every teacher. Communicative activities include ice breakers, performance, Olympic, fun farewell and journal writing. But I have some questions about this. The questions asked were: What do students feel most comfortable with among three different situations? Do they have some changes with themselves? With these questions in mind, my study will progress so as to analyze this program. Over a period of four days, students encounter three different kinds of learning situations as I've mentioned. Students who take part in this Immersion program are from different kinds of schools. At first, they feel nervous and embarrassed with many native teachers and their challenge of having to speak English. But at the end of the camp, students are all satisfied with this program. Their anxieties are decreased and their motivation to study English is increased. Contrary to our expectations, when students encounter native teachers without a Korean teacher, students feel confident as well. As an alternative of EFL English education, this immersion camp should be strongly recommended.

**Keywords:** TBL (Task-Based Learning) EEC (English-Experience Center Activities)

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## 1 Introduction

Even though people know the importance of communicative competence, Korean education focuses on how many answers students get right from school exams or Korean SAT. In the Korean curriculum, students start learning English from third grade in Elementary school. However, many students still have a problem speaking English with native speakers. Recently, the education office has taken steps to reduce the number of native teachers who are working in public and private schools by cutting down the budget. We need an alternative to these changes as English is an important language all over the world. This Institute located in Chungnam has an English Immersion program for middle school students, including dorm residency. This program can be categorized into three sections: English Experience Center Activity, Task Based Learning and Whole Learning. I'd like to study the sections that students feel comfortable with. I strongly believe that the purpose of this Immersion program is to relieve students' debilitating anxiety, to give them chances to meet native teachers face to face and also to create an English learning environment in which a variety of teaching methods can be used. Some people are skeptical of Korean public schools that have hired a native teacher. This is because the budget consumed has been vast and yet the improvement seen in student's English ability has been minimal. Another critical issue of this short-term English Immersion program is the question of how student's English ability can be improved in a short period of time. To explore an answer to this question, this study suggests that we need to impact positively on students motivational levels and their affective filter.

## 2 Specification of Immersion Program

According to Vines (1985)'s definition, language camp provides the opportunity for participants to engage in foreign culture-related activities that are not traditionally part of the classroom curriculum. This Immersion program is to improve students English ability and has three fields. The schedule of this program is from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m including dorm residency. The main program has three sections of English learning. First of all, we have TBL classes, which are Task-based Learning classes. Native teachers choose a subject that they like or are confident with and manage their classes in their own way. In a classroom, there is one native teacher and 13 students. Students have the opportunity to do a variety of activities covering different subjects. Secondly, we have EEC classes, which are English Experience Center activities. For these classes, one Korean teacher and one native teacher lead the class. Our institute is equipped with eight venues that are authentic in English speaking countries. Students learn essential expressions during classes and then practice these expressions in the authentic venues. Thirdly, we have communicative activities. Sometimes 3 Korean and 3 native teachers participate in some of the whole class teaching activities. At other times 10 native teachers and 7 Korean teachers join the same program with 70 or 80 students. The impact of the three different kinds of learning situations will be discussed in more detail in my research article that follows.

## 2.1 TBL (Task-Based Learning)

According to Krashen(1982)'s Affective filter hypothesis, low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to raise the affective filter and form a mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. The theory says that a low level of anxiety is better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Before coming to work here, I thought that students feel lots of anxiety only when they are with a native teacher. Having personally worked at this Institute, what I expected before has not happened. An important aspect of teaching that I have witnessed is that the actual act of teaching has an undeniable impact on a student's level of anxiety. While observing this immersion program, I have noticed that native teachers have tried to create an embracing atmosphere to lessen students' anxiety. I am required to examine the classes which are done by native teachers. In this immersion program, students have six TBL classes for four days. The classes are all designed by native teachers. They choose the field that they are confident with. The classes vary from American Football, Forensic Science, Reading Activity, Astronomy, Economics, Marshmallow Building to Film Appreciation. These activities are all performed by one native teacher and 12 students. The goals of all activities are for students to communicate and complete the given task. Students have to participate in the activities and they cannot get a free ride. In order to appreciate the reason why students enjoy these classes, the detailed explanation of each lesson should be included. In the American Football class, students learn about basic rules of American football including some simple vocabularies and terms used. Students practice those terms through a simulated power point PowerPoint game and then play a game using paper as a football, incorporating sport rules. Students, especially boys, like to learn kinesthetic sports rules and terms. In the class of Forensic Science, students learn new terms relating to each finger and get to scan their own fingerprints just like police officers do in the movies. In the Astronomy class, students learn phases of the moon and try to make various types of moons using Oreo cookies. In Marshmallow Building class, students try to build a tall structure or tower using spaghetti noodles and marshmallow. The characteristics of TBL classes included kinesthetic activities aimed at including their participation. While students are trying to complete their given task, they are encouraged to speak English and are praised for their participation in the lesson. Students are absorbed in the task and they do not feel any debilitating anxiety when speaking English. Without a Korean teacher, if they accomplish the given roles, the student's level of satisfaction is higher. They try to solve the problems by themselves. Some people say that the limitation of a TBL class is ~~to~~ that they focus on the meaning, instead of the form. But I believe that this also has a positive effect on a student's affective factor. Students feel free to speak in English when they are away from grammar rules. Students need time to take a break from English grammar, so that they can enjoy English just for fun with a native teacher. Also, some of the limitations of a TBL class are compensated for by a worksheet activity and the teacher's classroom question and answer teaching method.

## 2.2 EEC (English-Experience Center Activities)

This institute is equipped with eight venues that are authentic in English speaking countries. The venues are airport, fast food restaurant, hotel, home, tourist center, street, superstore, clinic, pharmacy and post office. Among them, students have six EEC classes for four days. Each class is 45 minutes, of which half of the lesson is conducted in the classroom and the rest of them are done in the venue. Students have enough time to practice the new words and expressions in the classroom and then they move to the English Experience Center. The EEC venues start with the Airport class where they practice the dialog. Students learn how to do ticketing, security check, immigration, baggage claim and customs. Students can be a ticketing agent, security officer, flight attendant, immigration officer. After that, students go to the fast food or restaurant and learn how to order some food in English. There, students can be a clerk, waiter or waitress. Next, they are divided into two groups and some of them make a reservation at a tourist center and others practice being a hotel clerk. The students practice check in and check out dialog. In a superstore venue, students learn the different kinds of departments and practice how to shop in English. Students can also go to the clinic and pharmacy and they can be a doctor, pharmacist, or patient. Students who practice being a patient go to see a doctor and consult what their symptoms are. Students who practice being a doctor prescribe medication and give it to the patient. After getting a prescription from a doctor, students move to a pharmacy and get medicine from a student who practices being a pharmacist. In the post office, students practice mailing a postcard and a package while being a postman, post woman or client. Also, students learn the usage of prepositions and direction words in order to follow the street regulations. The distinctive feature that I want to mention is that the EEC classes are performed using a team-teaching method between a Korean teacher and a native teacher. According to Friend and Reising(1991), there are five types of team teaching methods. These are: lead and support type, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching and collaborative teaching. This institute has incorporated parallel teaching and collaborative teaching into the classes. The teaching method chosen varies according to the activity that is being taught. Parallel teaching involves two teachers planning a lesson together before class, but during the class, each teacher takes charge of his or her own section. In some venues such as clinic and pharmacy, fast food and restaurant, teachers choose the parallel teaching method. Students then are divided into two groups, and each teacher takes charge of half of a group and then exchange students. Collaborative teaching takes place when two teachers have planned together and then teach for the whole time together. In the post office or the home venues, teachers choose this teaching method. The benefit and advantage of this method is that Korean teachers have a chance to communicate with native teachers during lesson plan preparation and teaching. This helps in improving listening and speaking skills a lot. Another positive aspect is that Korean teachers can experience new teaching styles that they may not have used before. But when the question of whether students feel more comfortable with both Korean and Native teacher's teaching together or with a native teacher teaching alone arises, the answer differs according to the student's level. Students who have had less of a chance to meet a foreign teacher rely on a Korean teacher's translation and they feel more comfortable with having a Korean teacher in the classroom. But the students who are

extroverted are confident with their English even though they speak only one or two words in English.

### 2.3 Communicative Activity

This immersion program has several communicative activities, which are performed by every teacher and every student. The classes include one Ice breaker activity, four Drama Performances, one Mission Impossible, one BBQ party and one Fun Farewell. According to Scott and Ytreberg(1990), a good language game motivates students to learn in the classroom and spurs them on to continue studying outside the classroom. It is obvious that students like to play a game, even though it is done in English. But careful planning is important to ensure an effective lesson when working with large class sizes. This immersion program provides many opportunities to play many games. In the class of Ice Breakers, students are divided into six groups made up of 7 or 8 members. One native teacher takes charge of the whole class and leads several language games to break the ice with all group members. Three native teachers and three Korean teachers stand beside each small group and help them understand the game rules better when students feel confused. Examples of these games includes: national geography, the best game, pass the ball, picture catch or code breaker. As a small group member, students try to answer each question correctly and enjoy the games by competing against one another. Because the learning materials do not require a student's prior knowledge, they can do this activity just for fun. The class of Mission Impossible is a kind of treasure hunt. For 30 minutes, each team reads a clue card and then goes to find the book that contains the answer. Team members should move together by holding a rope and take a role such as captain, moral guide, head counter, time keeper, question master or navigator. From this game, students develop a team spirit. In the Drama Performance class, students can prepare a short English skit and dramatize their roles. According to their performance script, students can become a variety of animals, a king, a queen, or a movie character like the Hulk. We have many costumes which are suitable with the roles. The four classes consist of the preparation of reading warm-ups, physical warm-ups, vocal warm-ups and rehearsal. Charlyn Wessel (1987) said that drama is a kind of technique to produce in students the need to speak and make them involved in the learning process. During the first Drama Performance class, students feel stressed and try to take a role that has fewer lines. While they go through the steps of reading, acting and adding emotion, students help each other to make a better drama and they try to enhance their potential during the rehearsal time, they feel like becoming actors or actresses and try to make their drama more elaborate and sophisticated. On the last day of English camp, every member in this camp gets together in the auditorium. They then take turns to exhibit their group performance one by one. During the BBQ party, native teachers serve students their food and the students stand in line, asking them, "May I get a ~ ? They repeat the sentence and receive what they request. Through this activity, students feel confident with their English because they say a sentence, not pointing at it, and they get something to eat or drink. Students do not think that this environment is for learning English, they are just immersed in an English speaking situation in a very natural way.

### 3 Conclusion

I have analyzed the short-term immersion program and observed the students' interest and motivation in speaking English in this situation. This study focuses on these three different teaching sections: a TBL class with a native teacher, an EEC class with a Korean teacher and a native teacher and a communicative activity with a whole class teaching method. In comparing all of them, my conclusion was the following. Firstly, a student's debilitating anxiety does not hinder their motivation for learning English whether there is a Korean teacher or not. Rather, the important thing is what teaching technique a teacher uses and how well the teacher manages the class. The lesson plan should be student-centered and the activities authentic and kinesthetic. Teachers have to inspire the students to participate in the class. Secondly, students feel more satisfaction when they can understand and finish a given task with no help from a Korean teacher. In an English speaking atmosphere, students do not have as much pressure regarding grammatical rules as that imposed on by the Korean schooling system. They learn English naturally and they also learn English culture through a native teacher. Finally, students should be provided with more opportunities to speak English and need to attend more classes like this program provides. Some private institutes have English immersion programs during vacation periods but they are too expensive to draw a lot of people's participation. Therefore, I strongly suggest that the Korean government should encourage the public Institutes to plan more immersion programs in order to expose students to the target language and reduce private education expenses. Furthermore, I would also recommend the creation of an affective curriculum targeting the wider Korean populace including teachers and adult learners.

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