

## HIDDEN CURRICULUM AND ENGLISH LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF A THAI NURSING COLLEGE <sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Hidden curriculum helps the learners in acquiring values, attitudes and knowledge more than what we expect from the formal curriculum. It is considered significant in language learning such as English because learners get to acquire the skill during their exposure to the hidden curriculum. Learners realize that the values, attitudes and skills they practice is the result of the unintended purpose of their exposure to the hidden curriculum. This paper identifies the hidden curriculum and distinguishes the support of it in English learning in Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang, Thailand. The methods were observations, documentation, face to face interview with 10 students & 4 teachers, and comparative analysis of data. There are seven hidden curriculums of the college appeared in the results. 1. Physical Environment which includes the visual (images) and the Auditory (sounds) 2. Teachers' Role Modeling in English communication and use of English in subjects. 3. Peers' Role Modeling and Influence. 4. The Hidden English Learning in Formal Curriculum in English subjects and non- English subjects. 5. Extra-curricular activities. 6. Exposures to academic and non-academic events using English medium. 7. Clinical and Community Placement Practicum. The results imply that the hidden curriculum of the college lacks support to stimulate the learners' English skill due to lack of English integration. Educators, environment, activities, and even the formal curriculum play an important role in English learning. The authors recommend that hidden curriculum can be augmented in four ways. First, the environment must include more English words in the surroundings for more exposure of the students to the language. Second, educators must be a role model by trying their best to use the language during interactions with students. Third, formal curriculum must integrate English language in and outside the classroom. Lastly, the extra-curricular activities and non- academic events which involve English must be done continuously and variously.

*Keywords:* Hidden Curriculum, Nursing College, and English Language Learning

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## Introduction

Curriculum consists of all the means of instruction used by the school to provide opportunities for student learning experiences leading to desired learning outcomes (Krug, 1957). Learning opportunities come from different factors around the school such as the teacher, the lessons, peer relationship, teacher-student relationship, and the environment and even from simplest things present around the school.

The formal curriculum intends for learning outcomes but behind this, there are implicit results that schools encounter. These learning results are carried by students outside the school example; students incorporate the classroom's routine and instructions during an encounter outside the school. These are the results of the Hidden Curriculum. Hidden curriculum as defined by Vallance (1973) is the "unstudied curriculum," the "covert" or "latent" curriculum, the "non-academic outcomes of schooling," the "by-products of schooling," the "residue of schooling," or simply "what schooling does to people." One of the effects of hidden curriculum is when students' classification and labeling them as "brilliant", "dull" of the language teachers who naturally will lead to positive and negative behaviors and attitudes affect their learning (Aazami & Fallah, 2016). It affects students inside and outside the school.

Hidden curriculum is not confined to values and attitude learning but also to skills and knowledge that education unindents to deliver. Language learning like English may also arise from hidden curriculum if supported and stimulated by many factors in the school. Learning English as a second language is a challenge to non-English speaking countries like Thailand. It is one the countries in Asia who is aiming for English learning. Thailand has always been a country with one official language, Thai. It has never been colonized. Another reason for having been a country with one language is the concept of national stability. There have been proposals to make Thailand a country with two languages, Thai and English, but this has never materialized due to the abovementioned reasons (Biyaem, 1997). Biyaem (1997) also mentioned about the difficulties of teachers and learners faced in Thailand: for teachers, there are many obstacles such as: heavy teaching loads; too many students in a class (45 – 60); insufficient English language skills and native speaker cultural knowledge; inadequately equipped classrooms and educational technology; university entrance examinations which demand a tutorial teaching and learning style. As for the learners, they wish they could speak English fluently but most of them think that English is too challenging for them to be competent because of these difficulties: interference from the mother tongue (Thai) particularly in pronunciation; syntax, and idiomatic usage; lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives; unchallenging English lessons; being passive learners; being too shy to speak English with classmates and lack of responsibility for their own learning. Educators are a help with this problem by supporting the hidden curriculum. It is important to language educators to learn the effects of hidden curriculum for them to be mindful of their attitudes and behavior towards language learning. With this, there will be hope to make the learners acquire the language at the same time make them enjoy during the teaching-learning process.

## Review of related literature

### Hidden Curriculum

Curriculum is “the educational program of the school” and divided into four basic elements: 1) program studies, 2) program experiences, 3) program service, 4) hidden curriculum (Oliver, 1977). Moreover, according to Caswell and Campbell (1935) curriculum is composed of all of the experiences children have under the guidance of the teacher”. Curriculum has three important components: 1) the intended outcomes, 2) what is taught, and 3) the manner of implementation. Curriculum is again defined as planned learning experiences with intended outcomes while recognizing the importance of possible unintended outcomes. There are three types of curriculum: first, explicit (stated curriculum), second, hidden (unofficial curriculum), and third, absent or null (excluded curriculum) (Stewart, D. n.d.). Every school implements these and every educator expects their learners to acquire most especially from the intended curriculum however, sometimes educators are unaware of the results of the hidden curriculum that they unintended to execute and hidden curriculum becomes evident. While the “formal” curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach to students, the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school (Hidden curriculum, 2014).

Hidden curriculum can be found in the social structure of the classroom, the teacher’s exercise authority, the rules governing the relationship between teacher and student (Martin, 1976). Standard learning activities can be found also to be sources, as can the teacher’s use of language, textbooks, tracking systems, and curriculum priorities (Martin, 1976). Giroux (1983) then defines hidden curriculum as those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom. He also identifies hidden curriculum as what is being taught and how one learns in the school as he also indicates that schools not only provides instruction but also more such as norms and principles experienced by students throughout their education life. Margolis (2001) argues that hidden curriculum, the school and classroom life, is the reproduction of schooling that enables to understand schools hegemonic function(s) that also maintains power of state. Durkheim (1961) observed that more is taught and learned in schools than specified in the established curriculum of textbooks and teacher manuals. Even though it is not directly mentioned as, hidden curriculum, this refers to hidden curriculum (Durkheim, 1961). Learning to wait quietly, exercising restraint, trying, completing work, keeping busy, cooperating, showing allegiance to both teachers and peers, being neat and punctual, and conducting oneself courteously (Jackson, 1968). Hence, hidden curriculum is found in the schools’ environment and other related factors and it is the unexpected outcome from the learners’ experiences in school.

## Hidden Curriculum and Learning English

Hidden curriculum is the unintended and the unexpected outcome from the environment, educator, teacher-student relationship, other specific factors as defined by many scholars and authors in the above literature. Hidden curriculum on English learning is close with the definition of Hidden curriculum in general. It gives a specific and clearer definition of the hidden curriculum in English learning. It shows the affectivity of it in English learning in school. As stated by Velecka (2015) effective classroom management is needed for both teachers and children to be able to work successfully. Children need to be motivated and encouraged but also need to learn mutual respect for both teachers and their classmates. They need to learn the value of obeying rules and to handle consequences for breaking them. It was clarified that children need to be praised and rewarded for the right kind of behavior rather than punished for the bad one. It is very important that teachers are persistent in their rules and model the appropriate behavior which they expect from their students. English language classes offer a great possibility for developing social and emotional skills of children because of the many personal issues discussed in the classroom, the possibilities to express own ideas and attitudes and opportunities to interact in pairs and groups (Velecka, 2015). Therefore, it is very important for teachers, working at schools which do not systematically and explicitly support values in the curriculum, to realize that language teaching is a great opportunity for the development of social competencies.

Mei (2015) from her article "The Hidden Curriculum in Language Classrooms", studied the manifestations of the Hidden Curriculum from the teachers' and learners' perspective stated that from the teacher's perspective: The local school culture also plays an important role in that schools normally have their own features and slogans in running it. All of these will be instilled into the students consciously or subconsciously by the teacher in the classroom. While for the students' Perspective: learners often learn things other than what has been taught. Another example offered by Nunan (1989) sighted by Mei (2015) reveals that not all learners will necessarily be focusing on the point of the lesson that is being taught by the teacher. For instance, while teachers are trying to develop communicative activities with a focus on meaning, the learners are more interested in the formal aspects of the language, such as grammar and structures.

In addition, the school rules as one of the elements of the hidden curriculum have great impact of the student's learning English lesson (Mei, 2015). The individual relations in schools are as one of the elements of the hidden curriculum has great impact on the student's learning English lesson (Aazami & Fallah, 2016). Hidden curriculum in English teaching and English learning can be conducted in three categories: improve the physical environment on the campus; regulations on the university adopt; emotional category (atmosphere of the campus) philosophy of teaching, orientation values etc. Aazami and Fallah (2016) also mentioned about technology, that hidden curriculum can greatly improve the efficiency of English language teaching and learning, especially when the information technology represented by the computer network has been integrated with college English learning curriculum. Moreover, hidden Curriculum considers all the factors which unintended learning may come from including the use of

technology. Technology is a phenomenon that the generation cannot control and the positive side of it is it can be an aid for learning. It is expected that students in the field of Foreign Language use mobile phones for educational purposes much more than the others because it is widely known that mobile phones contribute a lot to foreign language education (Akpinar, et.al, 2016). Students prefer to use mobile phones to communicate, listen to music, share announcements, send text messages, take photos, and connect to social networks and for educational purposes (Akpinar, et.al, 2016). These preferences are, in a sense, means of building a school culture or reproducing it, which is described as hidden curriculum. This case can be considered as the sign of a new hidden curriculum, being built by mobile phones informally. This curriculum can be named as m-hidden curriculum or e-hidden curriculum (Akpinar, et.al, 2016). Hidden curriculum therefore includes all the unintended and implicit factors that help the students in learning. It can also be one of the effective tools in learning implementation but then, educators must remember that it is unintended so they must be aware of the unplanned behaviors, strategies and rules that the learners grasp all throughout the process.

### **English Learning in Thai Nursing College**

The authors explored the hidden curriculum in Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang, Thailand which aids the students in English learning apart from the English subjects they offer. The college includes four English subjects to their formal curriculum to develop English skills and to prepare the students in their field. The college hires both Thai and foreign teachers to teach the subjects. Accordingly, the college aims to improve the English skills of the students through exposure and practice that will help them in real life situations most especially when they exercise in their own field. Though, aside from the reasons above, their deeper aims are to bring out the potential of each student in communicating in English, to give them realization, self-trust and confidence that they can communicate in English despite of all the barriers (Language barrier). With this, they will gain self-respect and awareness of their potentials and realize that the most important achievement they can do is to transfer their learning into a bigger view of the world. These aims will be able to achieve through the formal curriculum of the college and by the aid of the hidden curriculum.

### **Methods**

This case study took place at Boromarajonani College of Nursing Nakhon, Lampang (BCNLP) the college has two campuses namely, Khelang Campus & Lampang Campus. The authors conducted observations of BCNLP's environment and face to face interview to students and teachers to explore the hidden curriculum in the college. The researchers documented the college's physical environment through taking pictures of the 14 sites in the college. The following sites were the offices, hallways/ corridors, library, computer laboratory, science laboratories, meeting rooms, classrooms, dormitories, sport areas, reception area, halls, gate, rest rooms and parking areas. The interview was performed in BCNLP with 10 students from

different year levels (4 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> years, 4 from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and 2 from the 4<sup>th</sup> year) and with 4 teachers from the different departments, 2 from the Adult and Aging Department and 2 from the Community Nursing Department. The interview lasted for 10-20 minutes and was documented by a recording and transcript. The data were analyzed through a comparison and classification.

## Results and Findings

### 1. Physical Environment

#### 1.1 Visual (images)



Figure 1: Promotion along the hallway



Figure 2: Signage



Figure 3: Dormitory



Figure 4: Library Entrance (Lampang Campus)



Figure 5: Library Entrance/ Exit



Figure 6: Library book sectioning



Figure 7: Exit gate (Lampang Campus)



Figure 8: Main Gate (Lampang Campus)



Figure 9: Rest Rooms (Khelang Campus)

Fourteen different sites in the college were observed and documented to see the use of English language around. The following sites were the offices, hallways/ corridors, library, computer laboratory, science laboratories, meeting rooms, classrooms, dormitories, sport areas,

reception area, halls, gate, and rest rooms and parking areas. The following pictures show that most of the words written in the college's environment are in Thai language. Therefore there is a need to reinforce English learning in the environment.

## **1.2 Auditory (sounds)**

The activity included under this category is broadcasting for English and Health promotion every Tuesday in the lunch time done by the students. However this broadcasting is done in Thai and with few English songs during the commercial part. In addition, teachers, faculty and staffs use Thai in communicating and the college is not English speaking zone. They commonly encounter English words from their Thai teachers such as "good morning" and "how are you?" Students listen English language mostly in their English classes and only when they meet foreigner teachers and visitors in the college.

## **2. Teachers' Role Modeling**

### **2.1 English Conversation**

Teachers do not use English in daily conversations because they use their own language, Thai. It is unusual for them to use English for conversation. In addition, teachers do encourage students to learn English but they do not use the language in communication.

### **2.2 Use of English in subjects**

Teachers use Thai as a medium of instruction in their non-English classes. The use of English is limited only when discussing technical terms and in giving activities like searching for English journals to be used in their research.

## **3. Peers Role Modeling and Influence**

The influence of peers or friends or classmates is also a hidden curriculum. Students are affected when they see their classmates/ friends doing well in English, they also feel the need to learn English because for them, English is important. In addition, they are not affected by the negative ideas of their classmates about English but rather, they motivate them to learn English.

## **4. Hidden English Learning in formal Curriculum**

### **4.1 English Subjects**

The college has been hiring foreigner teachers to teach English subjects. During English subjects with foreigners, students communicate in English language and they are more exposed to it because the foreign teacher only uses English as medium of instruction. Conversely, Thai English teachers use Thai language as a medium of instruction in teaching the subject. This makes the students more comfortable in learning with the Thai teacher because they understand the concept easier but they lack of practice of the English language.

### **4.2 Non- English subjects**

Teachers handling Nursing subjects use Thai as a medium of instruction. They involve English in their subjects but only when discussing about technical and medical terminologies. English is seldom used in Non-English classes because teachers explain the concepts in Thai and use Thai in communicating inside the classroom.

## 5. Extra-curricular Activities

The students are engaged to extra-curricular activities and they call it in English “special-activity” (no English name). This special activity is done during student assemblies’ or meetings once a year, where they watch English movies, play vocabulary games such as crossword puzzles, and sing English songs. This activity aims to promote health care using English language.

## 6. Exposures to activities/ non-academic events using English medium

The college involves a yearly project with Australian students from New Castle University and Dakin’s University, taking up Nursing or Midwifery. This project requires the students to study a short course in the college. They stay in the college for about 2-3 weeks. Australian students spend their journey together with a Thai nursing student which they call “buddy”. The Thai buddies are students of BCNLP and mostly from first year level. Before engaging to the activity, the buddies were trained by teacher/s to communicate in English and to deal with foreigners like Australians. These activities give opportunities to the students at the same time implicitly learning Australian practices and English language.

## 7. Clinical and Community Placement Practicum

Nursing students are aware that Pharmacist and Medical students speak English better than them because their course allows them to practice English more. Nursing students feel intimidated and afraid to talk to Pharmacist and Medicine students because of their anxiety of committing mistakes during interaction. Accordingly, pharmacist and doctors know some English terms that nursing students do not know. This made them think of wanting to learn Nursing in English medium but not in all the subjects. They also wish to consider more English classes in their curriculum so that they will become more confident when meeting some medical students like them.

## Discussion

The environment as hidden curriculum is classified into two, the physical and the auditory. The physical environment includes the signage, bulletin boards, reminders, instructions and other visual materials around the college that implicitly aids the learners in English acquisition. The findings show that the college lacks of these materials thus, most of the visual materials are written in Thai language. There are English books and magazines in the library but still insufficient for English learning because students do not usually use them. This implies that the environment lacks support in English learning in Thai Nursing College. In addition, the auditory materials that the college provides are mostly in Thai, they include English songs during events like farewell or welcome parties but this only happens sometimes. BCNLP is not an English speaking zone for students and they do not get sufficient opportunities to be involved to English language.

Another hidden curriculum is the teachers’ role modeling in using English in conversations around the college. From the interview, the attitude of the teachers affects the



learners in English learning. Teachers who use English in conversations expose the learners to the language. Through this, students implicitly learn English and are encouraged to develop their English skill. Yet, in BCNLP only few teachers use English in communication. Aside from teachers, the learners get along with other learners every day and every time in the school. This is also found as one of the hidden curriculums namely Peers' Role Modeling and Influence. Most students view English as a tough job consequently, they recognize the importance of English. Students, who enjoy English, advise their peers to learn and never give up. In addition, students who see their peers striving in English feel motivated and want to learn English too because of the need to learn the language. This hidden curriculum aids the students in English learning even if they are unaware that this motivates them to learn.

Hidden curriculum may also come from the formal curriculum of the school. BCNLP includes four English subjects in their formal curriculum. The English subjects are taught by Thai and foreign teachers. Students are more exposed to English with the foreign teachers since they use English more when interacting. This may make them anxious but at the same time they acquire the language. In contrast, Thai English teachers use Thai as a medium of instruction which allows the learners to feel comfortable in the subject but they lack exposure and practice of the language. English learning does not only depend on the formal English curriculum and on the lessons that the students learn from the subject but also to the teachers' strategies, practices and rules that he delivers to the learners. Other nursing subjects can also be a tool for English learning by integrating English in these subjects which may implicitly allow the students to develop their English skill. However, it was found out that teachers unusually use English in the nursing subjects because the medium of instruction for these subjects is Thai and they only use English when discussing technical and medical terms. Other teachers also give activities such as English journal analyzing but this is also not the focus of the subjects so it lacks continuity and not all teachers do this.

While the formal curriculum can be a source of implicit learning, the extra-curricular activities can be a good source of English learning because of the informality, variety, and flexibility of it that students enjoy and at the same time learn. The extra-curricular activities may not intend to teach English but may contribute to English learning by involving English in it. For example, extra-curricular activities may aim to promote health and may also aim to promote English. Though this becomes intended, the hidden curriculum enters during the students' realization that they can acquire English even when enjoying. However the extracurricular activities founded in BCNLP inefficiently support English learning because of lack of continuity and consistency. There is also an absence of English club that could support the students in developing their skill.

The students' exposure to non-academic events during the Australian's visitation in the college for the short course is also an aid to English learning for the students. During this time, students and teachers get to interact with English speaking people. They speak with them to accommodate them. They may not intend to learn the language but during the process of interaction, English learning happens through becoming aware of the words they say and the grammatical errors they commit. This is considered as a hidden curriculum.

Finally, the clinical and community placement practicum is also considered as a hidden curriculum because of the awareness it gives to the Nursing students. Pharmacist and Medicine students are more exposed to English because their course allows them to learn the language more. Nurses, pharmacists and doctors meet in the hospital during practicum and at times, nursing students become anxious when speaking with them especially in English. They know that Pharmacists and Medicine students can speak English more than them. This gives them the feeling of wanting to be as good as them, and wishing to experience more English opportunities like them. This feeling is considered as the hidden curriculum behind this experience. This gives realization of developing English and striving to be able to use the language in the field.

### **Recommendations**

The effects of hidden curriculum may be positive or negative that learners embody in their daily lives. This implies that the environment, the educators, the peers, and the schools' overall system which includes the formal curriculum and the extra-curricular activities play a great role in the learning especially if the school wants to educate the learners to a new language like English.

The hidden curriculum of BCNLP which are stated above can be augmented in 4 ways. First, the environment such as the physical and auditory as hidden curriculum must support English learning through including English in the surroundings like print outs, visual images, announcements, signage, information, and other texts, auditory materials such as music, announcements, and even the language that the people use. The environment must motivate the students in English learning. Schools and learners may not be aware of the effect of these but after frequent exposure to this kind of environment, they acquire English language. Schools aiming for English learning must consider the affectivity of the environment for learning a new language. Second, educators must also be mindful of their behavior and attitude towards language learning. Teachers are part of the school program, and they must cooperate with the schools' advocacies because students look up to them and believe in them as role models of learning. This implies that educators must take into consideration their strategies, rules, and action towards English learning. It may be a challenge especially to non-English speakers but we must remember that learning starts from the educators first before the learners.

Third, the formal curriculum offered by the college must also support English learning. The subjects offered by the Nursing College use Thai as medium of instruction, the subjects aim to teach the concepts of nursing. Using English language as a medium of instruction will result to a drastic change in the curriculum but integrating English in nursing subjects can support English learning without moving away from the aim of the subject. Lastly, the extra-curricular activities and exposure to academic and non-academic events must be done continuously and variously. These activities should be motivating and interesting especially to ESL learners.

School's environment, educators, peers, formal curriculum, and the extra-curricular activities are the hidden curriculum. They implicitly aid English learning of the students. However this will not be achieved if it lacks presence and will not support learning. With the recommendations given, the learners will be exposed to a more engaging English environment

and will result to English learning and development. The students may not learn English perfectly, but they will develop English skill around the college. This may give them the confidence in English speaking and may use English in other learning as they continue their path.

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