

ENGLISH IMMERSION PROGRAM IN EFL SETTING: A MODIFIED MODEL, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EFFECTIVENESS

Yusup Supriyono¹, Yuyus Saputra², & Nita Sari Narulita Dewi³

Universitas Siliwangi, Indonesia

¹yusupsupriyono@unsil.ac.id; ²yuyussaputra@umsil.ac.id;

³nitasarinarulitadewi@unsil.ac.id

Abstract: This study reflects the best practice of the English immersion program designed for EFL learners. Through observation in the research site and interview with eight participants (two language managers and six language learners), the modified model is discovered as the guidelines in ruling the project in which curriculum, English proficiency, and language management are the main points. Besides, Informal learning becomes the hot issue of this study since English zone facilitates English informal interaction between language partners and learners which enhances English learning experiences effectively and motivates them to use English. The finding also reported that English immersion program emerges learning community, personal qualities development, English language acquisition, and self-efficacy, language awareness and language exposure. The study may contribute to the body of knowledge in second language acquisition and recommend schools or universities and other related institutions to implement English immersion program as the alternative solution for English language learning in non-native speaking countries.

Keywords: English immersion; informal learning; Second Language Acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

The study on language immersion has been conducted since the 1960s when French immersion was developed in Canada, and followed by foreign language immersion programs in the United

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States which were designed to enrich the education of native-English-speaking students by teaching them all of their academic subjects in a second language (Fortune & Tedick, 2003). Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of Asian universities and countries (e.g. in Japan, Thailand and Hong Kong, Korea) which send their second or foreign language learner of English to join overseas English language immersion programs (Bodycott & Crew, 2001; Ee, 2016; Poon, 2016).

Some studies provide evidence that immersion students performed much better than non-immersion peers in second language proficiency. Knell et al. (2007) evaluated that immersion students perform better on English vocabulary, word identification and oral proficiency. The language learners become proficient in the second language and increase cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2010; Ahn, 2015; Poon, 2016; Lee, 2009). A study by Cheng et al. (2010) discovered that immersion students, compared with non-immersion students, did better in English at all three grade levels.

Some studies reveal that English immersion program can enhance students' learning, knowledge and build motivation. Through 48-student analysis of the effects of English immersion education in elementary school, Kim (2007) reported that English immersion education enhances students learning of English as well as content knowledge and highlights the fact that the program facilitates student's participation and motivation for learning of English. A survey study by Rios-Aguilar et al. (2012) revealed that there is an increased focus on learners' English language development. The structured English immersion (SEI) model which implements the 4-hour English Language Development (ELD) block has shown that the implementation of the model contributes to students' academic success on English language acquisition. Cheng et al. (2010) claimed that English immersion has a close relation to students' achievement, cognitive development and teaching and learning process concerning teacher education. Meanwhile, Goldberg & Noels (2006) argued that

immersion programs are able to enhance positive attitudes towards L2 and to enhance the equity of educational opportunity.

Researches findings demonstrating cultural understanding and personal development in English immersion settings can be identified by the following studies. Xiong & Feng (2018) found that international bilingual education program students demonstrated a better performance in terms of emotion, intellectual, and cultural awareness. Meanwhile, Lee (2009), involving a group of Hong Kong English Language student teachers who joined a six-week immersion program in Auckland, claimed that the program has successfully developed the student teachers in terms of language enhancement, cultural understanding, pedagogical understanding, and personal development.

Studies considering to typology for immersion education in EFL context have been developed by May (2008) who exclusively concern to ESL or EFL since the considerable number of typologies (Hornberger, 1991; Baker, 2010) derived from North America and Europe (Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010) were still not adequate for unpacking the characteristic of immersion education in an EFL context. This leads to a need for developing a typology for immersion education reflecting the EFL context in which English is learned as a foreign language. In his study Jeon (2012) discovered English immersion in Korea has two types, English Immersion as an EFL program which is offered in private language education institutes and English villages. English Immersion as a bilingual program is offered only in a few prestigious private elementary schools and special-purpose middle and high school. He stated that one-way immersion of English can be used since it has an additive approach, which aims to foster bilingualism by adding English to the students' existing language repertoire. Another typology of English immersion can be identified as Lee (2009) demonstrated the implementation of the six-week immersion program in Auckland in 2007 as initiated by Hong Kong government. He found that the program designed reflects English immersion setting since the program covers four main

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components: academic studies, field experience, homestay, and community and socio-cultural activities. Poon, (2016) who investigated the implementation of Hong Kong Government's policy on overseas English immersion implemented in 2001-2002, reported that in the English immersion setting, the curriculum includes formal and informal activities such as courses, school experience, lesson observation, homestay, cultural visits, outdoor activities and exploration trips. By virtue of the immersion program, students were provided with ample opportunities to get immersed in an English learning environment.

In summary, the previous studies had discovered outstanding findings which inspired the researchers to take a part of English immersion study, particularly in non-native English-speaking country where English is learned as a foreign language, like Indonesia. The notion of the background is very concerned since there is a perceived difference between learning a language in a second language context and in a foreign language context (Freed, 1995; Huebner, 1995).

Since the previous studies concerned more on English immersion occurring in L1 and L2 context, then this current study takes an idea to investigate the modified English immersion model for non-native English-speaking country or EFL setting, implementation and its effectiveness on language acquisition through a case study at English education department of a university in Indonesia. To this respect, then the following questions are proposed:

- (a) How is the model of English immersion designed for EFL setting?
- (b) How is English immersion program implemented in EFL settings?
- (c) What is the perceived effectiveness of English immersion program by the EFL learners?

Hopefully, this study contributes to the development of body knowledge of second language acquisition in terms of English immersion in non-native English speaker countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SLA as the bases of English language Immersion

Language learning highly needs an effective instructional process to comprehensively understand and produce linguistic information with different levels, word, phrase, sentence, and text (Wang, 2017). Ellis (2005) admitted that three pedagogical approaches to teaching a second language should be considered, oral-situational, notional-functional, and task-based. The initial refers to a structural syllabus, consisting of the linguistic structure to be taught, for instance, how present-practice-produce (PPP) is emphasized. The second refers to a functional syllabus, addressing a list of language functions such as apologizing, refusing, etc. with still the instruction using PPP, and finally, task-based, consisting holistic tasks and promoting interactional authenticity of learners are much emphasized.

Anton-Mendez et al. (2015) pointed out that the four issues become the concerns in the instructed second language acquisition, age, prior bilingualism, anxiety, and attitude. Studies (Birdsong, 2006; Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Singleton, 2005) admitted that critical period Hypothesis explains that age influences on opportunities of learners to use a second language. Further, studies affirmed that there is evidence that different critical ages associate with different linguistic aspects Kuhl, Tsao, & Liu, 2003; Sebastián-Gallés, Echevarría, & Bosch, 2005). Bilingualism scholars (Mitchell & Myles, 2004; De Angelis, 2007) pointed out that the prior languages affect the success of the instructed second language acquisition. Another study (Anton-Mendez et al., 2015) reported that language anxiety as an affective factor also influences learners' second language learning. The last, attitude to languages and learning to a specific language has been admitted to associate with the success of learning (Dornyei, 2007; Masgoret & Gardners, 2003).

The other relevant studies reported, for example, Skehan (1991) claimed that in second language learning, the recognized variables in terms of motivation, age, gender, personality, cognitive

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style, learning strategies, intelligence are very crucial for effective management of language teaching. And then learners-centred emerged as the approach on which learners becomes a pivotal element in the learning process promoting autonomous learning (Nunan, 2013).

From the description above, obviously, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) includes of informal L2 learning, formal L2 learning and the mix of the two settings and linguistics, psychology, and social perspectives as interdisciplinary approaches are very crucial in understanding the nature of language learning (Saville-Troike, Muriel 2012) and become the bases of how to teaching a second language.

In case of English language immersion setting, the designed situation will provide overwhelming language exposure or language learning experiences in which second language learners get immersed in that situation by interacting with others reflecting as the member of the language community who involves their emotional engagement in their language learning. In the English immersion environment, the learners are guided and monitored by the teachers in various activities such as drawing, listening to songs, telling stories familiar routines, etc. to acquire better level English proficiency in both words, phrases, sentences, and texts as well. Through experiential learning, the second language learners use their cognitive, affective, and behaviour to process knowledge, skills, and attitudes in learning situations characterized by a high level of active involvement. Thus, the learners can acquire the second language in meaningful context naturally through the integration of language learning with subject knowledge (Qiang & Zhao, 2001) and having them concrete experiences by trial and error, by processing feedback and by problem solving activities (Brown, 2007) to give them opportunities to use that language. The interaction built in a certain situation can be the comprehensible input that can develop their language subconsciously.

English Language Immersion

The needs of English immersion program to facilitate learners to acquire language proficiency has great attention to many scholars (Jeon, 2012; Qiang & Siegel, 2012; Poon, 2016; Ahn 2015; Lee et al., 2010; Park, 2009). English immersion education is a method in teaching English in which the English language becomes the medium of instruction and content taught to students (Jeon, 2012). Qiang & Siegel (2012) affirmed that teaching English in English immersion setting concerns foreign language acquisition and subject content learning. This principle makes English immersion different from other foreign language approaches. In the immersion system, the acquisition of the target language is achieved by making the language as the medium of instruction for subject content. To these respects, Huang, Trube, and Yu (2011) explained that in the English immersion program, English language learning is taught as meaningful as possible addressing the daily life of the students and attract them to use English in their everyday activities. Teachers should be able to encourage learners to get engaged actively in the learning experiences by facilitating them to express what they already know and share or collaborate with their partners. Engagement should be designed to emerge curiosity, creativity, hard-working, and responsibility to build better confidence, self-directed learning, self-discipline, and goal orientation (Huang and Trube, 2006).

A study by Poon (2016) discovered that to provide learners get immersed in the English environment, formal and informal learning of English are incorporated into different domains and various activities such as courses, academic experiences, field-observation, homestay, cultural visit, tours, and other outdoor activities. Qiang and Siegel (2012) emphasized that in English immersion program learners use English as the only instructional language which facilitates them to express new ideas, arts, music, science, and social studies. Through offering opportunities to use English as a tool of meaningful communication, The English immersion program is

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effective in facilitating learners to enhance their ability to acquire better English (Byon, 2008).

A study by Myers (2007) described the English village in South Korea facilitating short-term English immersion experiences in which English is used in replication of small town with full of the facility like gym, restaurant, cinema in which learners participate in a real-life situation like the negotiation of custom or immigration at airport, meeting with a doctor, trips to stores, reservation at restaurants and other services organized by English-speaking guards. Jeon (2012) recognized that English immersion in English villages in South Korea can be categorized as teaching English through English (TETE). Another study Ahn (2015) reported English immersion camps in South Korea are designed to provide opportunities for students to have the best learning experiences to acquire a linguistic and cultural understanding of English. Furthermore, Ahn admitted that English Immersion camps in the EFL context different from the immersion program in native English-speaking countries or ESL contexts. For instance, the curriculum of Korean English camps greatly has an interest in learning English, not other areas through English as a medium of instruction. Studies (Lee et al., 2010; Park, 2009) reported that English immersion camps are similar as English villages in Korea which facilitate learners to practice and acquire English with the help of native speakers in an immersion setting.

In sum, English immersion program effectively facilitates learners to acquire the English language through formal and informal learning which provide learners to participate actively both in and out-off classroom through interactive and effective ways guided by teachers or professionals. In the English immersion environment, the learners only use English as the home language in their daily learning experiences in various contexts.

METHOD

A Qualitative study was used to investigate the designed English immersion model, implementation and effectiveness of the

English immersion program in the EFL setting. The locust of the study takes place in the English zone of the English education department of a university in Indonesia since the circumstances provide critical and productive learning experiences of English as performed by student teachers. Observation and interviews were employed to acquire appropriate data reflecting English immersion situation where English is used as a home language in the restricted area.

Two top language boards (LB) were interviewed to explore the perception towards the implementation of the program and six English education department students participated in the English immersion program were the participants to whom observation and interview administered to quest their perception on the effectiveness of English immersion. Through observation and evaluation, they are chosen as the eligible participants regarding representing the most active students who get involved in English immersion activities such as classroom interaction, telling stories, talk show, language ambassadors, drama, round table discussion, etc. which are facilitated by the English zone. The acquired data were analyzed using thematic analysis the steps: familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

FINDING

Dealing with research questions of this research, then data are collected and analyzed. The following findings are drawn as the answer to the following questions: (1) How is the model of English immersion designed for EFL settings? (2) How is the English immersion program implemented in the EFL setting? (3) What is the perceived effectiveness of the English immersion program by the EFL learners?

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Model of English Immersion in EFL Setting

Through observation and literature review, it was discovered that the modified model of English immersion in the EFL setting considers some elements: curriculum, English proficiency, and language management. These become the main points that English immersion implemented includes syllabus, teaching competences, materials and assessment (curriculum), language skills, methods, second language learning, qualified NETs and NNETs, and informal learning (English language proficiency), and rules, language boards (Language management).

The followings describe the modified model of English Immersion, which is implemented in the restricted area (i.e. English zone).

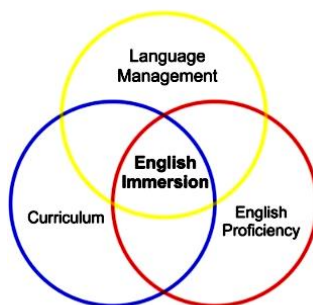


Figure 1 Three elements of the modified English Immersion model

Model designed includes three elements: English proficiency, curriculum, and language management. The purpose of learning English using the immersion method is the ability that can be seen from the ability to listen, speak, read and write. To achieve these objectives, certain learning methods are needed addressing the characteristics, abilities, and needs of students so that the learning process is interesting and effective. Teacher qualifications, both native and non-native, are very important. The interactions in the learning process focus on developing mastery of English language, culture, and personal qualities. The learning situation is created interestingly

in which instructors who act as adults interact with participants interactively using English as a home language (daily language).

Furthermore, the curriculum is designed as a learning framework so that learning activities can be planned, implemented and evaluated in a measurable manner. Therefore, technically the syllabus which is prepared should be a direction or target for instructors and students. The instructor's professionalism is very important, therefore pedagogical and content knowledge, and technology competency is prerequisites so that the instructor is truly competent. The preparation of teaching materials which meets the abilities and needs of participants and the present context are central issues. The socio-cultural context becomes very important when this knowledge becomes the content of the material to be learned in English immersion activities. It is expected that students have good linguistic competences and knowledge of the world as well. Assessment (as, for, and of learning) both qualitatively and quantitatively is carried out to measure learning achievement. The results of the assessment become feedback for the learners, management, instructors so that learning activities can be improved quickly, accurately and continuously.

The other component, language management has a vital role in the project of English immersion. To this respect, the language board is established and has the authority to organize the program to achieve the goals. The board makes plans, action, and evaluation of the program regularly and may enact rules to facilitate language learners to get immersed with the program.

Implementation of English Immersion in EFL setting

Through observation and interview, data representing the implementation of English immersion can be acquired. The modified model becomes the guidelines for management to rule or organize the program comprehensively and promote English immersion activities to language learners interestingly. English zone facilitates language learners to learn English informally and encourages them to actively

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participate in such activities: English café, round table discussion with language partners, English debate, telling stories, English cooking, happy singing, English tour, English competition, watching movies, etc. All activities are managed by language board which officially gets mandated from the institution and are observed and measured regularly in terms of language partners' and learners' activities, benefits, obstacles and other issues which directly or indirectly influence the program.

The respondents reported that English immersion program is purposefully for EFL learners to build their language proficiency and multicultural knowledge. English zone is designed to promote informal English learning experiences in which English café promotes interaction between the language partners and visitors or learners when they buy something and are served in the café.

The followings describe the responses of the two language boards or language managers when interviewed about the idea of establishing English immersion followed by language learners' perception of the English immersion program.

English immersion is a grand design of promoting English learning on our campus. The benefit could be for all parties, teachers, students, and other employees in which they use the English zone for improving their English proficiency. The board manages the project to provide English services on campus comprehensively supported by well-knowledge language partners. Since the project is very complex, then research is undertaken to measure and evaluate the project. (LB1# Interview)

We initiated to establish English café as the facility to promote informal learning of English for EFL learners. The smart and warm language partners will be a good model and motivate the learners to use English in the restricted area. English café represents English immersion because all learners or visitors are suggested to use English in their communication. The existence of language partners is really helpful to help them learn and use English for communication. However, this job is not easy, so we need to evaluate all activities or programs through a study organized by the language board. (LB2# Interview)

The two language managers also reported that they establish language board that function to make language planning, rules

establishing, and evaluation in order to make the project run well successfully. All program organized by language boards such as talk show, happy cooking, drawing and painting, English tour, and English café services, etc. can promote English as daily language reflecting English immersion activities in the English zone (LB1#2# Interview).

Meanwhile, the language learners expressed that English café facilitates them in learning English in a warm and interesting way. They think informal learning makes English fun for them.

I really appreciate that English café is present on this campus. So I can learn English without feeling anxiety. It was impressive when I bought a drink and food in the café, I was served in English. Honestly, I was surprised but fun (P1#interview). I love English Café much because I can learn English in fun and effective way. I just sit in the café and language partner accompanied my practice of speaking English (P2# Interview)

The other program performs English immersion activities which are implemented in informal and warm ways like, English talk show, happy cooking, and singing. These make learners get longer to stay and watch the English performance.

They motivated me to learn English better. I love when they were on the stage, entertaining us." (P3# Interview) "I like programs promoted by English zone such as happy cooking and happy singing. These help me learn English naturally, about the procedure of making something and learning vocabulary in a fun way, particularly, singing, in my opinion, is the best way to learn English language through interesting way." (P5# Interview)

The other participants considered that roundtable discussion, telling stories, watching movies are effective ways in building language proficiency and self-confidence since the activities encourage them to use English language in discussion and practice of language skills through listening and telling stories, debate, watching movies, English camp (P4, P5, P6).

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Since the English zone is enacted, then all visitors (EFL learners) are welcomed by language partners who promote English informal language learning experiences. English is the only one language used in communication, including in transactions when visitors buy some meals or drinks in the café.

EFL learners' perception of the effectiveness of English Immersion

Through interviews with the selected participants in English immersion, then the following data describe the learner's perception toward the effectiveness of English immersion. From the six participants interviewed, then the following qualitative data are acquired representing the findings that English immersion emerges learning community, personal qualities development, English language acquisition, and self-efficacy, language awareness and language exposure.

When the participants were asked about the effectiveness of English zone, they responded *"I love learning English here, really, everybody, my friends and language partners really support me, so I feel like at my home and living with a great community. We learn together and improve our English skill."* (P.1# Interview). Seeing the data, then it can be perceived that the participants consider that the English zone provides a learning community in which all participants feel comfortable and warm and enhance their study of English freely and softly. Moreover, participant 2 recognizes that learning community provides language partners that can motivate and guide him to communicate in English *"Practice of English here is amazing because language partners and friends with the same interest and language level altogether learn and share knowledge. They are like family for me, warm and motivating"* (P2# Interview). Not surprising since the immersion program promotes a community in which the members feel the same interest or motivation and build interaction to achieve the learning goals altogether.

The effectiveness of the English zone is also recognized when participants admitted that the English Zone builds personal qualities

in terms of open-minded and self-confidence. *“Since I join the English zone here, I can feel my English is better and I also feel I have more confidence and open-mindedness” (P3#Interview).*

Other participants pointed out that English zone benefits in helping them acquire better English language acquisition, particularly on grammar and vocabulary. *“Sure, my grammar becomes better and better because I am pushed to use English every day. And one more I can learn vocabulary not only from the teacher but from my friends.” (P1#Interview).* *“I often find a new word, the meaning and how to pronounce. For me, interaction with my friends every time and anywhere build my English better”. (P6 #Interview).*

The participants also admitted that the English zone has built them self-efficacy in learning strategies. They realized that their learning strategy gets increased since they mostly get involved in the interaction and participation in which English is the only language in the zone.

“To learn English in the camp is challenging because nobody is allowed to use other languages, except English. I often make notes for certain words, and try to find solution to study grammar, vocabulary appropriately. I try to be an independent learner and be able to solve my problem” (P2# Interview).

The participants also perceived that English zone helps them have more sensitive to their language (language awareness) and more enhances to use language (language exposure) since language partners and atmosphere encourage them to learn the language through effective interaction. These can be recognized from the participants' responses:

Since I often join the English zone, I become more sensitive, I can revise my language by myself or I open the dictionary or ask my teacher. (P5# Interview). *“I love talking with people in the English zone. My English becomes better because through the communication I did with people there. I can imitate the way they speak with correct grammar and this helps me more sensitive to my language (P3# Interview).* *“I think my English becomes better and better since the atmosphere builds emotional relationship among us as a learning community promoting intensive*

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communication among us and amazing, I have better confidence to evaluate my English grammar whether right or not. (P4#, Interview)

Other participants claim that the situation in the café is so warm, making them freely communicate with others without feeling worried about making mistakes. They perceive that English immersion atmosphere enhances them to use English all the time to everybody in the area of English zone (P1, P2, P4, P6).

DISCUSSION

The findings provide sufficient evidence that English Immersion as perceived by the language managers and language learners confirms what Evans, et al. (2001) had claimed that language immersion builds the learners' intercultural understanding since the learning experiences promote intercultural contact with native speakers. However, the multicultural materials of teaching also contribute to the cultural awareness of their own and other culture. Lee (2009) discovered that English immersion program builds the participants' language enhancement language skills, personal development, cultural understanding. Xiong & Feng (2018) pointed out that international bilingual education program students demonstrated a better performance in terms of emotion, intellectual, and cultural awareness. Other researchers (Evans, et al., 2001; Poon, 2016; Ee, 2016; Lee, 2009; Jeon, 2012) argue that English immersion not only provides experiences in cultural interaction but also builds personal development. English immersion also builds personal qualities in terms of open-mindedness, self-confidence. This is a piece of sufficient evidence that conforms what studies discovered that immersion program builds personal growth in terms of global mindedness, independence, and builds up confidence and a stronger sense of self (Tang & Choi, 2004; Cushner & Mahon, 2002).

Further study on out-of-class learning experiences (informal learning) provides and enhances the educational system more generally (Sefton-Green, 2006). The source of material resources and relationships, found in physical or virtual spaces may provide

opportunities for learning (Barron, 2004). Other findings explain that language learning experiences of successful adult Japanese EFL learners in which they engaged with movies, TV programs, music, novel, and magazines were significant language learning outside the classroom and contribute to their language learning experiences (Murray, 2008). As explained by Lamb (2007), those out-of-class language learning activities function to provide extra language learning resources and opportunities, such as: shaping a positive learner identity and hence maintaining motivation for learning. Gao (2009) reinforces that those out-of-class learning experiences provide friendly and supportive learning community and offer the learners an opportunity for self-expression and for enhancing their self-perception which has eventually impact to their social/political context and their personal attitudes or identity (Lai & Gu, 2011; Hyland, 2004).

Since English immersion facilitates the language learners to use English as a home language used in every English immersion activities in the restricted area, then they have more motivation and self-efficacy which helps them to improve their English proficiency. This proves what Byon stated (2008) that the immersion program, by offering language learners opportunities to make use of English as a tool in a meaningful situation, was effective in helping students enhance their ability to understand English. Meanwhile, the learners' efficacy leads them to have more motivation and participation as the result of English immersion which is able to enhance their learning of English (Kim, 2007). In the situation in which everyone get immersed in English setting may build EFL learners' self-directed learning such as keeping learning motivation of English and choosing learning strategy as the self-efficacy effort to achieve the learning goals (Dewi, Marlina, & Supriyono, 2019)

CONCLUSION

The modified model implemented in English Immersion program has proved significant impact to motivate English language

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learners to study English informally since the English zone is designed and determined as the place where the language partners and visitors only use English as a home language in their communication.

The learning atmospheres as created in the English zone, which promotes and encourages the learners to use English in the communication with the teacher and among their friends change their perception toward English language learning. Natural and intimate communication conveyed by the learners and teachers gives opportunities for language awareness and language exposure in which the learners use English in the way of communicating to others naturally and confidently.

Transactional conversation using English as performed by visitors (language learners) when ordering meals and drinks as offered by English café in the English zone has indicated that informal learning occurs when the situated learning promotes them to use English in the transaction without feeling worried of making mistakes. Besides, the warm and inspiring atmosphere created in the other activities like happy cooking and happy singing, English talk show and telling stories performed by language partners has encouraged them to use the language and keep practising of listening and speaking of English and indicated interpersonal or interactional conversation in the informal learning situation occurs successfully. The finding of the study has implications to the pedagogical value, which informs English teachers and learners about effective teaching and learning of English through the effective method. Since English immersion emerges in the English zone, informal learning occurs, facilitating learners or participants to learn English joyfully without being worried about making mistakes when communicating with language partners. Further research is suggested to measure the interrelation of variables (i.e. elements of English immersion) since the elements are assumed as independent variables constructing English immersion model for non-native speaking countries.

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