

School Administrators' Competencies for Effective English Language Teaching and Learning in Thai Government Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to explore school administrators' insights into the key competencies that play an important role in achieving success in English language teaching and learning at government primary schools in Thailand. The study employed semi-structured interviews with six school administrators, including four principals and two head teachers of foreign language departments from Bangkok and five regions in Thailand. Based on SEAMEO INNOTECH's (2015) *Success Competencies of Southeast Asian School Heads*, the results reveal that school administrators' essential competencies include strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement. These competencies are overlapped, interconnected, and underpinned by complex factors including school administrators' visions and administrative policies, English as a medium of instruction, Thai teachers, foreign teachers, teacher professional development, students' learning behaviors, learning materials and ICT, English language development activities, family engagement, and the strong support of the Ministry of Education. These factors are not mutually exclusive; they are, rather, interwoven in the sophisticated educational networks that require consistent and mutual collaborations from all relevant stakeholders who will gear the students towards English language learning success. School administrators' competencies and leadership skills should be enhanced for effective administration. Professional learning community partnerships need to be initiated and strengthened for long-term collaborations in order to enhance sustainable development of English language teaching and learning in primary education in Thailand.

Keywords: competencies, English language teaching and learning, government, primary schools, school administrators

Introduction

English, one of the designated foreign languages core curriculum documents, is a compulsory and foundation subject for all Thai students at government primary schools in Thailand. Primary education students' acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) can provide a crucial stepping stone for their English proficiency development and intellectual growth. From Nomnian's (2013) review of the 2008 Core National Curriculum with regard to English language education policies, there are a number of changes and challenges both internal and external that require development in the school curriculum, language education policies and teaching approaches in order to meet national and international standards for the success of Thai primary school students.

It is undeniable that primary education provides a strong foundation for English acquisition in order to promote higher English proficiency and instill positive attitudes towards English for primary school students. Thai primary school students' English language proficiency and performance is assessed against the standardized Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) under the supervision of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), which can demonstrate school accountability, promote school competition, monitor students' learning outcomes, assess education quality levels, and meet with related educational standards criteria (UNESCO, 2014). However, O-NET English results have revealed primary school students' low English proficiency for nearly the past decade (see Figure 1).

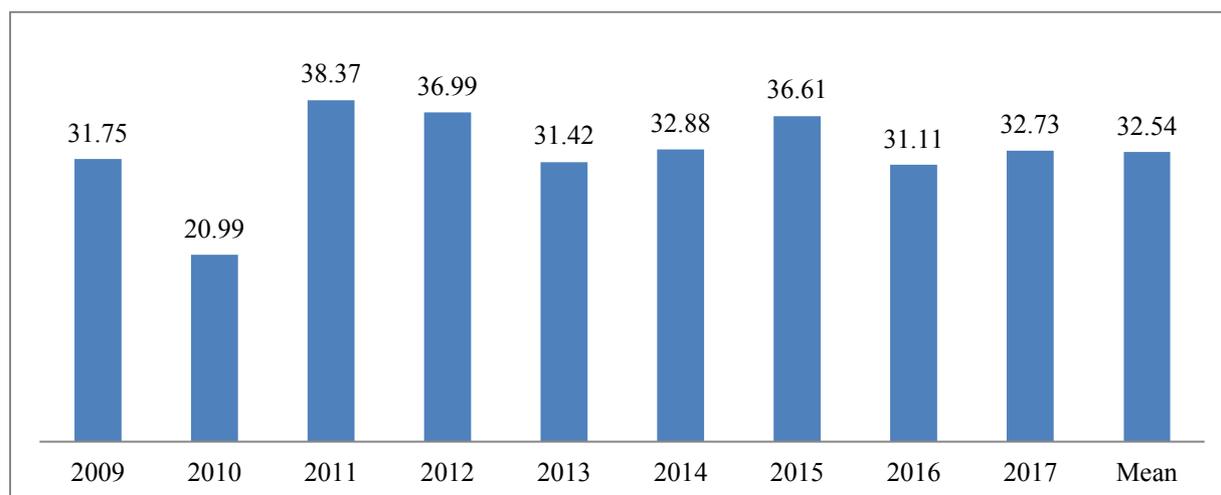


Figure 1: Average Scores of O-NET English for Primary Education (Grade 6) 2009-2017
(Data Source: National Institute of Educational Testing Service)

Figure 1 chronologically illustrates fluctuations in primary school students' annual average scores in English which have not exceeded the national expected minimum of 50 points out of 100. These scores are indicative of the undesirable outcomes and unmet goals of English language teaching and learning at primary school education in Thailand. Prapphal (2008) argues that educational quality and standards at various stages in the teaching and assessment process can be achieved by enabling teachers, learners, administrators and stakeholders, or end users to recognize the purposes, nature, benefits and drawbacks of each testing and assessment method when evaluating English language learning outcomes.

There are challenges encountered by Thai teachers who have low language proficiency and no prior training in the learner-centered and communicative language teaching approaches, underpinned by certain impeding factors such as teacher, learner, institutional, internal and external factors (Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2011). Nomnian's study (2012), for instance, claims that Thai primary school English teachers who have not majored in English prefer "standard" or "native-like" English pronunciation to teach students. In addition, these teachers experience challenges in teaching primary school students whose language learning behaviors, inhibitions, age, parental dependence, ethnicity, and linguistic differences hinder the students' English proficiency development (Nomnian, 2012).

Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick (2016) suggest the following five strategies to improve English language teaching in Thailand: learning English informally through print media, the Internet, radio and television; engaging teachers in educational planning at a national level; establishing a network for local English teachers to organize seminars, presentations and training sessions for other teachers to gain English knowledge and skills; expanding bilingual schools by recruiting qualified foreign teachers; and increasing teachers' salaries based on their English skills and teaching abilities. It is also important to be aware of English as a lingua franca (ELF), which is the official working language of ASEAN. English teachers should employ more realistic and practical teaching approaches among Thai primary school students who will communicate with other non-native speakers within the Southeast Asian region.

Although pedagogical implications have been suggested to enhance English language teaching and learning at primary school education, Thailand's language education policies have been relatively inconsistent due to political instability. Under the current government led by Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha, there have been a number of initiatives such as boot camps and digital English resources and innovations to boost English skills and proficiency for all education levels in Thailand. Part of the impetus is because English is agreed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member nations to be a working language within Southeast Asia, and the Thai government is highly aware that to gain international presence and be competitive within the region, English language education needs to be introduced from primary school levels.

Baker and Jaruntawatchai (2017), however, argue against the over-emphasis of English language education policies underpinned by native-speaker ideology and Anglo-centric models of English. In early 2016, the government used its special administrative powers to the centralized educational system by promoting a more top-down management model that was claimed to ease policy implementation in spite of the red tape, bureaucratic, traditional, and hierarchical structure (Oxford Business Group, 2016). Located in EFL academic settings, educational institutions in Thailand should promote English-medium instruction and mediated teaching materials (Forman, 2016). The Education Minister, Teerakiat Jareonsettasin, has set a new standard for English teaching and learning based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). CEFR is an international standard for assessing teachers' and learners' English language abilities by striving for all Grade 6 (Prathom Suksa 6) graduates to achieve the A2 level (pre-intermediate level) with frequently used expressions, and to be able to express themselves in English in everyday situations within five years (Fredrickson, 2016). Despite the fact that a large amount of the budget has been allocated for English language teaching reforms, initiatives and innovations by the Ministry of Education (MoE), students' English proficiency is under-achieved (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

English language education policies, such as Thailand 4.0 proposed by the current government, have been implemented nationwide at public primary schools. School administrators play an essential administrative role in educational policy implementation that can promote teaching and learning capable of driving schools in a more effective direction in order to meet the national education goals. Key competencies of school administrators', including school principals and head teachers, for effective English language teaching and learning are under-explored. Funded by the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC), this present study aims to draw on school administrators' perceptions of the competencies that lead to desirable English language learning and teaching. Affected by the current political uncertainties and English education reform, this study highlights key challenges and provides some practical recommendations for the government and the Ministry in terms of educational policies, planning, and administration for strengthening primary English language education in Thailand.

Literature review

The conceptual framework of this present study draws on *Success Competencies of Southeast Asian School Heads: A Learning Guide*, developed and proposed by the Southeast Asian Ministry of Education Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology. The framework (Figure 2) suggests five key competencies including strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2015).

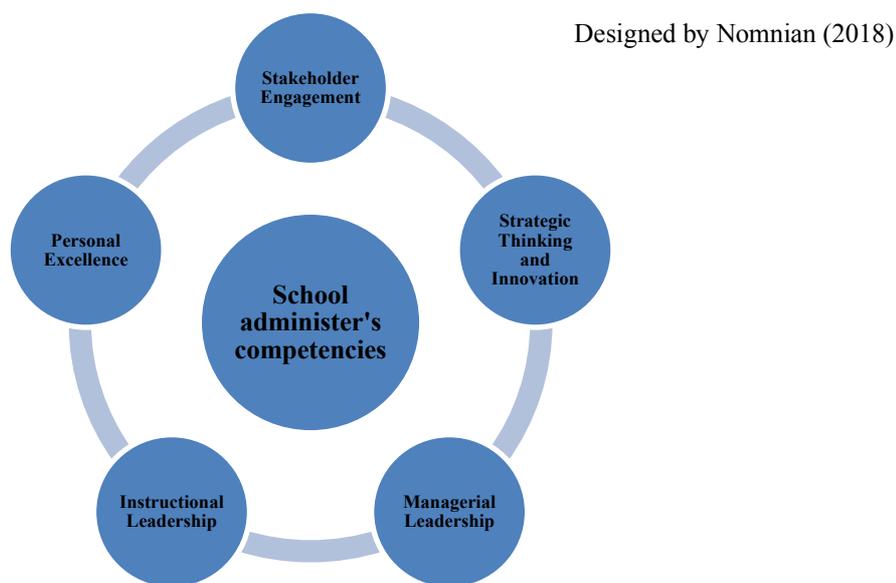


Figure 2: Five Competencies of School Administrators
(Data Source: SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2015)

In terms of the competences, first primary school administrators must be equipped with strategic thinking and innovation that accommodates with the rapid change of new technological advances in English language education. Kenan Institute Asia (2017) states that Thailand 4.0 policy aims at promoting Thai primary school students developing 21st century skills in English, digital literacy, and creativity in order to be a competitive workforce for Thailand's digital economy. An education advisor at the Primary Educational Service Area Office in Nakhon Nayok province calls for school administrators and teachers to implement innovative ELT pedagogies through Project-Based Learning (PBL) (Kenan Institute Asia,

2017). It is thus essential that English teachers must be supported by school administrators with appropriate teaching materials and resources for effective teaching and learning (Forman, 2016).

Secondly, managerial leadership is essential for school administrators who need to lead academic and support staff to meet the government's vision and mission as well as the MoE's policies. Drawing upon Sakulsumpaopol (2010), school administrators must perform key roles as follows: team building, professional development, curriculum leadership, community partnership establishment, administration, creation of school vision and missions, effective communication, collegial support, task delegation, monitoring and evaluation. In this study, school administrators are crucial in administering and managing staff and resources to meet the national education goals. It is, however, important to consider situated socio-cultural and political influences that may affect school administration and performance. Establishing a strong collaboration among academic and administrative staff within the school can help sustain the school goals.

The third competency regarding instructional leadership enables school administrators to monitor and advise teachers' pedagogical development. Borg, Birello, Civera and Zanatta (2014), for example, identify pre-service primary school English teachers' beliefs about effective EFL lessons as follows: lessons should have Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) content; parents should have opportunities to contribute to lessons; lessons should employ new technologies; lessons should include interactive activities such as role plays; lessons should use English as a medium of communication; the teacher's role is to guide; and, resources should include language-learning games, computers, and authentic materials. It is advisable for all primary school teachers of English to receive continuous professional development in order to keep up-to-date on relevant ELT methodologies (Borg et al., 2014; Hayes, 2014; Uysal, 2012).

Personal excellence is the fourth competency related to school administrators' recognition of professional development for themselves and staff. English language teacher education is vital to the promotion of effective ELT at primary school level. Uysal (2012), for example, states that effective educational reforms and productive change in in-service primary school teacher education programs require an ongoing professional learning process with a follow-up component by establishing collaborations among authorities or change agents, trainers, and trainees at all stages of this professional development process. Teachers should be allowed to participate in and reflect upon what they learn, such as new techniques and methods through different models; be provided practical resources and materials; and be valued, and additionally supported and monitored, in their own contexts in order to develop a sense of ownership of their change process (Uysal, 2012).

Last but not least, stakeholder engagement is essential as school administrators have to meet the needs of stakeholders including the Government, the MoE, communities, and parents. Young learners are, of course, central to all stakeholders' goals that aim to build their sound foundation. As Hall (2014) notes, the increasing demand for English language learning at an early age is underpinned by governmental obligations, parental expectations and national targets. Hall (2014) addresses four principal reasons for the growth of Primary ELT, which are due firstly to the widespread assumption that younger children are more likely to be successful language learners; secondly, to the increasing globalization-driven demand for English; thirdly, to government and policy-makers' needs of English-speaking workforce for higher economic gain; and finally, to parents' expectations of their children to benefit from learning English.

The conceptual framework of this study is related to both the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). OECD/UNESCO (2016) suggests four main aspects of Thailand's education system that are crucial for progress: curriculum, student assessment, teacher and school leader policies, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education, which will potentially promote a high-quality education system that drives socio-economic development in order to gain competitiveness in ASEAN community. These aspects focus on the revision and improvement of curriculum standards for all students, assess students across their full range of competencies being relevant for their life-long learning, develop a holistic strategy to prepare teachers and school leaders for education reform and implementation, and create effective ICT strategies to equip all schools, teachers and students for the 21st century skills and competencies (OECD/UNESCO, 2016).

Thailand's Ministry of Education is a significant agent in developing school administrators, teachers and students to meet targeted international standards through professional development and sufficient resources, including teaching materials and ICT facilities for teachers and students (Rasyidah, 2017). Vungthong, Djonov and Torr (2017), for instance, claim that, in 2011, the Thai government initiative called "One Tablet Per Child" (OTPC) was not effective because there were pedagogical drawbacks regarding teachers' roles in guiding EFL learners to use tablets as a portable device for English language learning (p. 32). It is important to note that, according to Hayes (2014), effective primary English language education should be conducted by competent English-major teachers, teachers with positive attitudes toward English, continual professional development mindset, stimulating theme-based activities promoting genuine communicative language use, and considerable extra-mural exposure to English through films and television programs in English that are subtitled rather than dubbed into learners' L1 in order to promote language competence across the education system (p. 28).

Besides the education system, socializing processes such as access to social network, family support and the positive influence of friends, directly and indirectly influence learners' personal choices and engagement in interaction for language learning, which will in turn affect students' motivation, and this can be seen not only in teacher-student relations but also in student-student relations and in the informal out-of-class interactions in which learners engage (Dadi & Jin, 2013). Creating the school and family partnership can help both parties to monitor learners' physical, mental, social and academic growth by strengthening the relationships between teachers and parents because their mutual support can effectively synergize learners' English language learning (Nomnian & Thawornpat, 2015).

Although this conceptual framework categorizes each competency, school administrators need to employ appropriate competencies when performing certain administrative tasks. Thus, these competencies are not mutually exclusive, but rather interconnected, overlapped, and context-dependent. This conceptual framework can potentially address and assess individual school administrators' competencies that are relevant for professional, institutional, local and national levels. It is a meaningful, useful, and practical framework for this study because it can pinpoint educational administrative issues for further improvement. Thai primary school administrators can therefore evaluate their performance by themselves in enhancing students' English language proficiency and promoting the sustainable development of Thailand's English language teaching at a primary education context.

Research Methodology

A qualitative study was employed as the research methodology in this study. Creswell (2009) states that qualitative research offers a way to explore and interpret the meanings of social, cultural, and political issues and problems. Therefore, to gain school administrators' perceptions on meaning making of these underlying competencies in this study, a qualitative research design can enable researchers to recognize particular competencies that surveys and statistics may not bring to life since education is a complex and interwoven system that needs a closer lens to examine it (Farnsworth & Solomon, 2013).

Six primary schools were purposively selected from exemplar schools that were representatives of each region in Thailand (i.e. Bangkok, Central, North, South, East, and Northeast). These primary schools were chosen according to a range of criteria. First, they had to be government schools under the supervision of OBEC. Secondly, students at the schools had to have gained high achievements in O-NET English tests over the past decade. Thirdly, the schools had to have been assessed according to the educational quality standards by Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) and gained a "high distinction" level. These large-scale schools, with more than 1,000 students, were publicly well-known as they were located in downtown areas of major provincial cities in each region. Parents were keen to send their children to study at these schools as the students' academic performance, teachers' credentials and support were highly qualified and reliable. All of them also had classes such as English and Gifted programs for academically competent and talented students, which were not only financially supported by the government, but also parents associations.

Approved by the Mahidol University Ethics Committee in Social Sciences (MU-SSIRB) prior to data collection, ethical issues were regarded in this study as the school administrators were high-ranking government officials whose identities had to be kept strictly confidential prior to the data collection. The school administrators in this study preferred not to reveal themselves because some information they gave might be traced back and could have adverse effects on their positions and career paths. The researchers understood their concerns and confirmed for them that their information would be treated with the greatest degree of security. Their names would not be stated in any published reports, materials, and articles so as not to hint to government authorities or readers in any way.

Following confirmation of the ethical guidelines, the participants signed the informed consent form and allowed the researchers to interview them at their schools. Having educational administration degrees, the six school administrators, including four principals and two head teachers of foreign language departments, were highly competent with more than 20 years of administrative experience. Choosing administrative career paths, they moved from small to large-scale schools with a large number of students and staff, exceeding 1,000. Challenged by the current government and national educational policies, they had to implement and carry out the policies that meet the Ministry's objectives, goals, and standards. The role and responsibilities of school principals also included school performance, quality assurance, teacher supervision, resource and budget allocation, staff promotion, parents association, and community outreach and engagement. Head teachers were more concerned with academic and language subjects that had to meet the Ministry's expected learning outcomes.

In this study, although the school principals were more accountable than the head teachers, they worked closely together. For instance, the head teachers had to put ELT policies such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach into teaching practice. They were all

accountable for national policies and stakeholders' expectations for the students' academic performance based on O-NET results. It is worth noting that there were two main processes comprising top-down and bottom-up. The former focuses on policy implementation and assessment while the latter emphasizes the actual practices as a response to the policies. School principals liaise between the MoE and fellow academic staff and students. Head teachers, on the other hand, were rather practical and realistic as they had to work with teaching staff and students and gain feedback to be returned to the principals. Thus, their roles and responsibilities were equally significant, leading to the effective teaching and learning of English.

Semi-structured interview was the main research tool used for data collection in this study because the researchers could gain deeper insight into their real-world experience. They influenced school administration and students' academic performance as they made final decisions and supervised overall planning and quality assessment. Interview questions were sequenced in terms of school information and background, government policies (their implementation and challenges), English language teaching and learning practices and success stories, parental and family support, government support, and further needs and recommendations. Each interview lasted for an hour, was conducted in Thai, audio recorded, then transcribed, translated, and validated by the researchers.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed in this study as it enables social science researchers to examine people's perceptions and interpretations of their meaning such that they might reflect the "reality" of their lived experiences, in particular the social contexts in which they live. In this study, the perceptions shared by each school administrator would, to some extent, reflect on key competencies impacting on the desirable outcomes of teaching and learning at one's school.

Results

Drawing upon SEAMEO INNOTECH's (2015) *Success Competencies of Southeast Asian School Heads: A Learning Guide*, the results of this study reveal five competencies including strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement, which are shared by school administrators for effective ELT in primary school education in Thailand.

Strategic Thinking and Innovation

Because of the government's current policy of Thailand 4.0, school principals and head teachers are advised and encouraged to employ various kinds of technological devices and innovations to enhance students' English language learning. Schools should also be equipped with sufficient computer facilities and Internet that can not only facilitate teaching practices, but also promote ICT literacy in their students.

Extract 1

Every class is equipped with computer and Internet. Teachers are encouraged to promote students' ICT skills for seeking knowledge and information on-line.

Extract 2

Our library offers English textbooks and subscribes to search engines that are made available to students both off-line and on-line database.

Extract 3

We try to allocate an IT budget sufficient for equipment ready for mediated on-line learning and teaching materials.

Both on-line and off-line teaching and learning materials have become essential learning devices in 21st century classrooms for everyone. Schools that know how to utilize them will gain a comparative advantage over other schools in terms of teaching effectiveness and updated information that students can access anytime, anywhere (Hayes, 2014; OECD/UNESCO, 2016; Vungthong, Djonov, & Torr, 2017). Yet, schools must allocate the budget wisely for effective returns on teaching and learning.

Managerial Leadership

School principals play a significant role in envisioning the schools' direction and policy implementation. They need to lead by example and show that they sincerely care about their teaching staff in order to attain school goals and objectives in terms of promoting students' English language skills and proficiency.

Extract 4

The school principal needs to be a leader in prioritizing and recognizing the importance of English in school. Instead of telling teachers to follow English language policies, the principal has to monitor how teachers implement the policies and see whether the implementation is effective.

School principals' attitudes toward English are equally vital since they can provide an alternative lens for seeing English as a communicative tool rather than a subject. In the schools that participated in this study, principals stated firmly that English is valued as a learning tool that helps gain knowledge from other subjects such as the sciences, mathematics, and social sciences.

Extract 5

I would like see English as a tool for learning rather than a subject. English can be learned through other subjects such as maths, science, and social sciences, which I think will be more beneficial.

Besides possessing visionary leadership skills, principals need to have management skills for issues such as foreign teacher salaries in order to meet the Ministry's requirements. In particular, for schools with an English Program, principals need to hire foreign teachers to teach most of the subjects, and that increases the school fees that parents have to pay.

Extract 6

In terms of the budget for recruiting foreign teachers, school fees according to the Ministry regulations are no more than 70,000 baht a year -- that's 35,000 baht per term. However, our school only collects from parents 25,000 baht per term; that equals 50,000 baht per year as a budget from which to hire foreign teachers.

Nevertheless, continual teacher professional development is a must for all teachers who should seek professional learning communities that can offer them opportunities to keep up-to-date with current research and practices that allow them to feel empowered and meet other teachers with whom they can share and learn from one another (Borg et al., 2014; Hayes, 2014; Uysal,

2012). Teacher professional development enhances effective teaching practices and heightens teachers' English competency, which eventually promotes students' English achievement.

Extract 7

Our school is sponsored by ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) to provide professional teacher training courses to our teachers and other schools in the area to improve their English language proficiency and skills.

Extract 8

Our school values teacher professional development. We usually support our teachers and co-teachers to attend English language development training every year because they can improve our students' English proficiency.

Extract 9

I think teacher training is important; yet, it is also advisable to analyze factors impacting on effective teaching and learning first, so teacher training courses will not be a waste of time, and the Ministry can tackle the issues more directly. Otherwise, our students' English proficiency will remain low.

It is undeniable that school administrators emphasize the professional development of their teachers because they strongly value the contribution of teachers who have a significant impact on students' English development. Teachers must set themselves up as examples for life-long learning for students who will then be motivated to learn English (Borg et al., 2014; Hayes, 2014; Uysal, 2012).

Instructional Leadership

Since the English Program was initiated by the MoE to meet the demands of ASEAN and globalization, it has become an alternative means by which parents can encourage their children to attend classes because English is used as a medium of instruction in most courses taught by foreign teachers. The number of teaching hours in the English Program is more than that in the Thai program, which exposes students to more English than their Thai program counterparts.

Extract 10

Besides the normal Thai program, our school has had an English Program (EP) since 2003 because English is an important subject to prepare our students for ASEAN.

Extract 11

EP students study maths, the sciences, computer science, and PE in English with foreign teachers for 18 hours a week while those in the Thai program study 3-5 hours a week for English classes.

Extract 12

EP students have high English proficiency compared with students in the Thai program because they use English with native-speaking teachers.

Foreign teachers are consequently sought after for English language teaching and learning in Thai primary schools to expose children to authentic communication within the educational landscape. Foreign teachers also provide linguistic and cultural resources to which students are not readily exposed beyond the classroom.

Extract 13

The main difference between foreign and Thai teachers is that students need to use English constantly with foreign teachers.

For school administrators, foreign teachers are roughly classified into native-speaking and non-native-speaking teachers with the former coming from countries that use English as a first language (e.g. USA and UK), and the latter coming from countries that use English as a second language (e.g. the Philippines).

Extract 14

Our native-speaking teachers are British and American. But for kindergarten, we use Filipino teachers who understand children because they have an education degree in Early Childhood.

Extract 15

Native-speaking teachers cannot teach grammar. Thus, we use Thai teachers to teach grammar. But, the sciences, maths, and health science are taught by Filipino teachers who can speak English. Filipino teachers seem to understand Thai ways of teaching and learning better than native-speaking teachers.

Although school administrators view native-speaking teachers as linguistic representatives of English, Filipino teachers are preferred since they are culturally more familiar with Thai primary education practices.

Extract 16

We have a job opening for native-speaking teachers who are required to demonstrate whether they can teach. Then, they are required to attend a teacher training to develop their teaching skills. Yet, we prefer to hire Filipino teachers since they are Asian, who are like Thai teachers, easy to work with, and never absent from school. We also use an agency to find native-speaking teachers because they are normally problematic and often leave without notice. The agency will find a replacement teacher immediately.

Currently, foreign teachers have not only become part of the academic discourse in Thai schools, but have brought linguistic and cultural diversity to their schools' socio-cultural landscape where teachers, students, and staff benefit from and seek possible opportunities to improve their English and intercultural communicative competence.

Personal Excellence

Although school administrators' personal excellence varies, their attitudes toward English can underpin the recruitment of Thai and foreign teachers. They need to determine whether or not foreign teachers are properly qualified to teach English rather than just focusing on their nationality and accent (Baker & Jaruntawatchai, 2017; Nomnian, 2012).

Sharing Thai as a first language with students, school administrators can help facilitate and overcome communicative challenges and academic misunderstandings between Thai students and foreign teachers where they occur.

Extract 17

In EP, there are two types of Thai teacher. One is a teacher assistant whose background is in English, who can co-ordinate between Thai and foreign teachers. The other one is a classroom teacher who has graduated in another field such as Thai or maths. They serve as points of

contact for students who have difficulties in any subject. There are a few teachers who do not have an English-major degree; yet, if they can show their English proficiency through our interview, they are also qualified to teach. We have an English teacher who has a degree in tourism.

Although most Thai teachers of English should have a degree in English, some English-competent teachers are recruited on the basis of sound teaching experience. Additional English training is required to enhance their English proficiency and teaching skills.

Extract 18

Most of our Thai teachers have a degree in English. However, there are also teachers without an English-major degree who are experienced in teaching English because we have about 3,000 students. Our school still lacks English-major teachers.

Extract 19

English teachers who do not have a degree in English are required to attend English training so that they will gain expertise in teaching.

These extracts show that Thai teachers of English are part of these schools' success because, without them, students may encounter difficulties dealing with academic and personal issues that foreign teachers may not be able to mitigate due to different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Stakeholder Engagement

Key stakeholders in this study include families, communities, students, and the MoE. Family support contributes significantly to the development of young language learners who are dependent on their parents' decisions as to which academic program (Thai or English) they should be enrolled in. However, well-to-do parents who would like their children to excel in English from an early age, normally opt for the English Program due to their belief that the more exposure their children have, the better and more quickly they can acquire English proficiency.

Extract 20

Parents are the most important factor in supporting students' English language learning. In particular, those parents whose children study in EP are interested in extra-curricular activities for their children because they are financially able to do so.

Extract 21

Parents can afford to pay 25,000 baht per term, which is 50,000 baht a year for their children studying in EP. Students will be provided with all the books, teaching materials, extra-curricular activities, and school uniforms they need.

Extract 22

Parents would like the school to improve their child's vocabulary by reciting 10-20 words daily, with which I agree; but, these words need to be relevant for students.

Parents should, however, recognize the importance of their supporting role, which needs to be balanced and not conflict with school requirements otherwise, they may unintentionally disrupt the schooling process (Dadi & Jin, 2013; Hall, 2014; Nomnian & Thawornpat, 2015).

Schools with high O-NET scores tend to gain a positive reputation with parents who trust and contribute to all their school's needs in order to meet their child's achievement goals. Some schools are, however, able to set up tutorial classes for students' English development with help from university student volunteers. English Camp, for example, can promote positive attitudes in students toward English and language development should be encouraged because they allow students to use English in a fun and meaningful way.

Extract 23

Students normally attend English camp twice a year. They play games and take part in a walk rally. They enjoy using English without fear and gain more confidence.

Extract 24

We have a weekend tutorial class for students. There are university student volunteers to help our school.

School connections with local colleges or universities facilitate collaborations with external experts to be part of academic success because these experts not only bring with them their expertise, but also opportunities for further collaborations, which will be beneficial for students and teachers.

Extract 25

Every year, we often seek English language experts to give talks to our Thai and foreign teachers to improve their English knowledge and skills.

English language development activities not only provide a platform for English language use for teachers and students, but also create a mutual space for learning English through various collaborations that are extremely valuable and from which the participating schools can benefit (Hayes, 2014; Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Nomnian, 2013).

Being one of the key stakeholders, students must develop their active learning behaviors and classroom engagement. However, since Thai teachers focus on strict classroom management more than foreign teachers, students tend to be more confident using English in classes conducted by foreign teachers.

Extract 26

Thai students are very shy to speak. Comparing Thai and foreign teacher classes, the students are given more freedom to speak in foreign teacher classes than Thai ones that focus more on classroom management.

Extract 27

Students who learn with foreign teachers are more confident in speaking.

Besides the influence of teachers, using English media can motivate students to engage more in class since the media can stimulate positive attitudes towards learning, particularly for young Thai learners.

Extract 28

Students need to be exposed to English media like movies or cartoons so that they will have positive attitudes toward English and become more confident to communicate. Teachers should also encourage them to pronounce English with confidence.

Teachers and mediated learning and teaching materials promote students' active learning behaviors towards English. Thai teachers, however, need to accommodate and be more open to students' different learning styles rather than keeping students in silence simply for classroom management purposes (Forman, 2016).

Last but not least, the obvious role of the Ministry of Education has greatly impacted on all aspects of language education in schools nationwide.

Extract 29

Our school would like the Ministry to act as a central agency in seeking and recruiting qualified foreign teachers. We are ensured of having qualified teachers for an English Program.

The second issue is that the Ministry should provide support to schools by producing qualified and competent Thai teachers of English who can work together with foreign teachers. This way, students are developed by both Thai and foreign teachers.

Extract 30

There are two kinds of support I would like the Ministry to help with. First of all, we need qualified foreign teachers. Secondly, we need Thai English teachers who have graduated with an English-major degree. This kind of support will promote our students' English proficiency.

Extract 31

The most urgent issue I would like the Ministry to help with is to reconsider the salary for foreign teachers. Currently, the Ministry set the cap of 25,000 baht, which is not attractive for native-speaking teachers from England or America. We can only attract Filipino teachers with this salary.

School administrators stress the need for qualified foreign teachers to be recruited directly by the Ministry of Education, so that budgeting issues remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance. Otherwise, schools can only afford to recruit Filipino teachers who are prepared to work for less than native speakers.

Discussion

Based on the results, school administrators' key competencies for desirable English teaching and learning outcomes include strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement. School administrators play a significant role in creating a school vision, establishing professional community partnerships, maintaining and delivering effective communication, supporting and promoting teacher professional development, building teamwork, delegating tasks and administration, promoting curriculum development, and enhancing staff morale. English as the medium of instruction used by foreign teachers enables students to think and use English in a meaningful way because they not only need to employ the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), but they also develop other relevant skills such as critical

thinking, ICT, intercultural communication, and interpersonal relationship (Borg et al., 2014; Forman, 2016). Recruiting qualified foreign teachers, producing competent Thai English teachers, and reconsidering foreign teacher salaries are the demands of highly effective schools for the Ministry to consider in order to facilitate the teaching and learning process and thereby promote students' English achievement (OECD/UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO, 2014).

School principals need to be equipped with competencies and capabilities for handling administrative tasks that can drive schools to meet the demands of the Ministry and stakeholders like parents. Success in English language teaching and learning is not easy; rather, it requires careful planning and implementation with the support of teaching and administrative staff (Hall, 2014; Hayes, 2014). The results also reveal the value of reciprocal support between school administrators and stakeholders such as teachers, students, families, communities and the MoE, which are vital at primary stages of students' physical growth and intellectual development for building a strong foundation and positive attitudes toward learning English for the effective outcomes in the future. These stakeholders' involvements are intertwined and embedded within socio-cultural and political networks that go towards establishing quality language teaching and learning in government primary schools in Thailand.

Acquisition of English at the primary level is an important foundation for young Thai English language learners, who need careful cultivation. To obtain effective English language teaching and learning outcomes requires collaboration between relevant parties that share similar goals in producing the best for both schools and stakeholders. To create and strengthen stakeholder partnerships, a professional learning community is necessary to provide a collaborative space among groups of stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers of English, parents, and public and private organizations to establish a strategic partnership community that can create synergies that drive all parties in a uniform direction under the leadership of school administrators. Thus, the students will be better-rounded and better equipped with 21st century skills required to meet the needs of ASEAN and globalization.

Conclusion

This study explores school administrators' essential competencies, namely strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement, which contribute to the desirable outcomes of English language teaching and learning at primary schools in Thailand. This study addresses complex education networks for promoting English language teaching and learning in government primary schools in Thailand. The results reveal the shared viewpoints and experiences of school principals and head teachers, who are considered as top-down stakeholders who are instrumental to policy implementation and practices. These underlying competencies are not mutually exclusive, but do in fact, overlap and interconnect. The practical implications of this study suggest that primary school administrators need to develop the necessary leadership skills and competencies that support the strategic thinking and innovation, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement that their positions require. In so doing, school administrators can perform their roles and responsibilities in enriching students' English language proficiency and life-long learning skills strengthened and sustained in the long term by the establishment of school-family-community partnerships. To this end, this qualitative study makes no claim to universality. It does, however, highlight school administrators' opinions on the complexity of the Thai primary education system and the maximum efforts required to meet the government's goal of elevating the standard of English language learning and teaching for young learners in Thailand.

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