

Thai School Teachers' Preparedness and Perceptions of More-English-in-schools (MEIS) Policy

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: June 01, 2019

Accepted: October 10, 2019

Published: October 31, 2019

Volume: 7 Issue: 4

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

As far as English language ability is concerned, Thailand has a lot of room for improvement. Efforts to boost Thailand's language skills abound. In this study, Thai school teachers in two primary schools were asked to answer questionnaires on their English language use in their schools, their preparedness, and their perceptions of the policy to add more English into the schools. Twenty-three school teachers from two schools participated in the study. The data collection was done in March 2018. Those school teachers participated in the English Plus Program (EPP) workshops, aiming to equip them with concepts and techniques to add more English elements in their classes and their schools. The teachers underwent six hours of training. At the end of the workshops, they were asked to reflect on the lessons and answer the questionnaires. It was found that the majority of the school teachers perceived themselves to be moderately prepared for the MEIS policy. They believed it was a useful policy and recognized the role of support from the students' parents, the community, as well as the school administrators.

Key words: English Language Skills, Perceptions, Professional Development, Thai School Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing its use and role as international language, like schools in most countries, Thai schools are required to provide English language instruction to their students, starting from primary to tertiary levels. This can be seen from the requirements of the national curriculum (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). English is regarded as one of the most important foreign languages in Thailand.

Despite being perceived and regarded as being an important foreign language, the provision of English language instruction in most Thai schools and colleges has not been regarded as successful or even satisfactory. The latest ranking of Thai students' English language proficiency, repeatedly, confirms the previous low rankings (English First, 2019). Thai authorities, thus, are concerned about this shortcoming, as it may affect the development of the nation. English skills are necessary for Thailand's economic competitiveness (Darasawang, 2007; *The Nation*, 2013).

English is a challenge for Thailand and all eyes are on education. Past ministers, for example, have all called for either school reform or more emphasis on English language instruction. Jaturon Chaisaeng, a former Minister of Education, for example, called for improvement in teaching methods, reasoning that "many Thai students could not speak English fluently even after learning the language for more than a decade" (Intathep, 2013). The present minister, similarly, has opted for a more comprehensive approach to

English language education in Thailand. He has implemented several initiatives, one of which is the training program for English teachers. International scholars, too, have researched the factors affecting the success and not-so-successful English language instruction in Thailand.

Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick (2016) wrote that among the factors inhibiting Thais from being competent in English are the emphasis on Thainess (in the negative way) and the unclear language policy of Thailand. Similarly, Thadphoothon (2018a) discusses how Thailand's language policy affects the teaching of foreign languages. Previous research showed that Thai school teachers lacked necessary English language skills and other instructional skills, especially those necessary to facilitate students-centered instruction (Thadphoothon, 2016, 2018b).

Recently, many schools offer English programs, offering courses in English to Thai students (Darasawang, 2007). For example, a school in Bangkok called Yotghinburana School, among many other schools has offered an option for students – an English program (EP). Students who are ready have choices. They may choose to go for the English program where all subjects, except for Thai, are instructed in English. The main aim is to upgrade the quality of instruction, especially the quality of English skills. One of the popular ideas is the link between English language ability and national development (English First, 2019). In previously conducted research (Thadphoothon, 2018b) Thai teachers still perceived

themselves as having low to moderate levels of English. Yet, they noted the importance of English as part of the driving force for social and economic development.

It should also be noted that Thailand has a strong international schools' market. Many international students start coming to Thailand to attend its international schools. Thai families start sending their children to these international schools, and they are doing so because they trust their quality of instruction. With Westernized ideologies, critical thinking skills and English, it is expected that students would be equipped with the right skills for overseas work, advanced studies, and other opportunities (SI News, August 23, 2019). However, the majority of Thai children and young adults simply could not afford such expensive education. Critics often cite this as an example of Thailand's inequalities.

It is in response to such language learning inequalities that regular Thai schools have recently begun offering 'ready' students different types of English programs, ranging from basic to intensive. While these initial EP classes have achieved some success, there exists a fundamental obstacle to a more widespread implementation of such courses which is the preparedness of primary and secondary Thai teachers to incorporate English into their instruction. The increase of instructional hours of English is daunting for many Thai teachers who have historically taught their subject courses in Thai.

Objectives

The study seeks to investigate Thai school teachers' preparedness for the more-English policy and their general perceptions of the more-English-in-schools (MEIS) policy.

Following are three strands of literature: (1) English in Thailand, (2) Efforts to improve Thai students' English skills, (3) theories and concepts behind the practice.

English in Thailand

First and foremost, it should be recognized that, for Thailand, the English language is classified as an important foreign language; others include, for example, French, Chinese, and Japanese (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). It should also be noted that English has a special role in Thailand as the most important foreign language and has been regarded as the language of the educated Thais, which some might view it negatively as the language of the elite. Thai schools teach English to Thai students since their very young age as primary school pupils. Nowadays, many kindergartens in Thailand start offering basic English lessons.

Previous research revealed that Thai school teachers had problems using and commenting in English, especially pronunciation problems (Thadphoothon, 2017). Research also found that in general Thai school teachers needed more professional development opportunities (Sinlarat and Thadphoothon, 2014).

Narrowing the topic down to English, Thailand's English language use and performance has not been perceived satisfactorily. Many years ago, Prapphal (2003) conducted a study on the English proficiency of Thai students. She

reported that the majority of Thai students obtained cores below the required standards.

Efforts to Improve the English Skills of Thai Students

Efforts to address the language challenges abound. Following are the existing programs or efforts aiming to boost Thai students' English proficiency. The Thai government has recently commissioned the British Council to help develop ELT skills of Thai teachers. Other efforts include the adding of more teaching hours. In short, several measures and policies have been implemented to address the issues.

English programs, for example, have been offered as choices for students who are ready in many public and private schools. Many schools in big cities are now offering English programs (EP) as an alternative for some Thai students. In an EP classroom, English is used as the medium of instruction. Except for a few subjects like Thai and Social Sciences, all subjects, including the instructional media, are conducted in English.

Similar to EP, but being operated at a lower cost, the so-called Mini English Program (MEP) is another popular initiative. Under the MEP, the use of English is less than that of the EP one, that is, not more than 80 percent of the available subjects. Usually Thai and social science are taught in Thai. The rest are in English, instructed by both Thais and non-Thai teachers.

Bilingual program (BL) is another innovation. For the BL, each subject is taught by two instructors. In other words, students are taught by two teachers: the first teacher will teach them in English and then the 'Thai' teacher will do it in Thai. This mode of learning is not popular, compared with the EP or MEP as it is more costly for schools to manage.

What is promoted by the Ministry of Education of Thailand is this one ---the Intensive Program (IP). Many schools use English as a medium of instruction in some key subjects, usually math and science.

International program (IP) is an extreme form of English madness. Students are 100% exposed to the language. The curriculums are also imported. There are many international schools in Thailand. As Thailand is opening up its educational sector, more foreign schools start offering services in many big cities in Thailand, especially in Bangkok.

What's common among the schools offering such programs is their preparedness. Usually bigger schools are more equipped with personnel and media ready to do it. Most Thai schools are not ready. This might have led the ministry to come up with other measures. One of such is the policy to add more instructional hours of English. This would help narrowing the gap of inequality in Thai society. However, the feedback from the teachers was somewhat negative. Most schools and teachers were simply not ready to embark upon such daring endeavor. Now, only the schools that are considered ready are allowed to increase the number of English hours for their students (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2017).

Theories and Concepts behind the Practice

The practice here means the increase of English teaching hours and the adding of English elements into Thai schools.

First and foremost, the theory underpinning the practice is the merit of exposure. The rationale is that if the students are exposed more to the target language (English), they will gradually pick up the language. Research findings supporting their concept have been reported.

One theory relevant to the increase of teaching hours is the Input Hypothesis posited by Stephen Krashen (Krashen, 1985). More comprehensible input is better for language acquisition. Another concept is the positive effects of learners being put in the input-rich context. The exposure to L2, according to Chiswick and Miller (1995) would build up the language skills of the learners. The basic idea behind the more English project is that the learners have to get into contact with the target language, to interact with the environment, including the target language.

This study's overarching aim was to give the reader an overview of Thailand's effort to improve its English language skills of its citizens. The study had four research questions:

1. How well prepared for the MEIS policy were the school teachers?
2. What were their attitudes towards the policy?
3. What were their practices with regard to the MEIS policy?
4. What factors were identified by the teachers to be salient for the success of the policy implementation?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The tools for data collection were the questionnaires of three parts: (1) background of the respondents, (2) items addressing their preparedness, and (3) items addressing their perceptions and attitudes. The respondents were twenty-three school teachers. The teachers in two schools participated in the workshops on English at Thai schools. The workshop was six-hours long, broken down into two sessions: theory and practice. The theoretical part lasted for three hours. Likewise, the practical session also lasted for three hours.

The two schools are large public schools located in Non-thaburi province, north of Bangkok. They were the schools under the university-school mentoring program for the academic year 2018.

By the end of the workshop they were asked, on a voluntary basis, to answer the questionnaires. The data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. The results and discussions are as follows.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Information

Following are the results of data analysis. Two schools participated in the study. There were 11 teachers (47.80%) in School 1 (CP11) and 12 of them in School 2 (TR55), accounted for 52.20 percent. In terms of their ages, it was found that the majority of the school teachers (47.82%) were aged between 31-40 years old. Nine of them (39.13%) were between 25-30 years old; only 3 of them (13.04) were aged 41 or above (Table 1).

As for their gender, it was found that most were female (95.65%). Only one of them was a male teacher.

As Table 2 shows, The majority of the teachers had 1-5 years of teaching experience. Only two of them (8.69%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Most of the teachers were BA holders (65.21%). Eight of them (34.78%) were teachers with a master's degree (MA).

School Teachers' Current Practice

The summary of current teaching practices of the teachers is provided in Table 3.

The majority of the teachers sometimes added English elements such as words or phrases into the existing curriculums (47.80%). Only three of them (13.00%) said that they always added English elements in their instruction. Trying to read aloud the English words to the students was a common practice among the teachers. Thirteen teachers (56.52%) said they often did that. Only two of them (8.70%), however, did it on a regular basis.

It was found that the majority of the teachers (82.45%) sometimes and often read and translated the words or phrases to their students. Ten teachers (43.48%) sometimes provided detailed explanation of the English words to their students. Five occasionally and rarely did this. Eight of them (34.78%) often and always gave their students detailed explanation of the key words.

The majority of the teachers occasionally and sometimes skipped the English words in their teaching (65%). Six of them (26.09%) never skipped it. Two often did. The majority of the teachers (74%) occasionally and sometimes asked their students to improve their English language skills as homework.

The majority of the teachers said they sometimes and often used the Internet via their smartphones to help them when they encountered the English words (51%). As high as 34.78% of them (8 teachers) always did this. In terms of material preparation, it was found that one-third of the teachers (30.43%) did not produce teaching materials to help them deal with the English elements in their subjects. Only five of them (22%) always and often did it.

About one-third of the teachers did not sound out the word, but only told the meaning of the word to their students

Table 1. Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
25-30	9	39.13
31-40	11	47.82
41 or more	3	13.04
Total	23	100

Table 2. Teaching experience

Year	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	14	60.86
6-10 years	7	30.43
More than 10 years	2	8.69
Total	23	100

Table 3. Teachers' current teaching practice

Statement	Frequency	Number	Percent
1. I add English elements as required by the curriculums.	Rarely	-	0.0
	Occasionally	3	13.0
	Sometimes	11	47.8
	Often	6	26.1
	Always	3	13.0
Total		23	100
2. I was trying to read aloud English words to the students.	Rarely	-	-
	Occasionally	1	4.35
	Sometimes	7	30.43
	Often	13	56.52
	Always	2	8.70
Total		23	100
3. Read + translate to the students	Rarely	-	-
	Occasionally	2	8.70
	Sometimes	11	47.83
	Often	8	34.78
	Always	2	8.70
Total		23	100
4. Detailed explanation given to the students	Rarely	3	13.04
	Occasionally	2	8.70
	Sometimes	10	43.48
	Often	5	21.74
	Always	3	13.04
Total		23	100
5. I simply skip the English elements.	Rarely	6	26.09
	Occasionally	8	34.78
	Sometimes	7	30.43
	Often	2	8.70
	Always	-	-
Total		23	100
6. Homework as a tool to add more English	Rarely	1	4.35
	Occasionally	9	39.13
	Sometimes	8	34.78
	Often	5	21.74
	Always	-	-
Total		23	100
7. Internet/smartphones as a tool to add more English	Rarely	1	4.35
	Occasionally	-	-
	Sometimes	5	21.74
	Often	9	39.13
	Always	8	34.78
Total		23	100
8. Production/preparing teaching materials	Rarely	7	30.43
	Occasionally	3	13.04
	Sometimes	8	34.78
	Often	1	4.35
	Always	4	17.39

(Contd..)

Table 3. (Continued)

Statement	Frequency	Number	Percent
Total		23	100
9. Only the meaning is explained in class.	Rarely	5	21.74
	Occasionally	5	21.74
	Sometimes	6	26.09
	Often	4	17.39
	Always	3	13.04
Total		23	100
10. Doing my own study or research of English before hand.	Rarely	1	4.35
	Occasionally	1	4.35
	Sometimes	7	30.43
	Often	8	34.78
	Always	6	26.09
Total		23	100
11. I try to speak in English with my students.	Rarely	2	8.70
	Occasionally	2	8.70
	Sometimes	8	34.78
	Often	9	39.13
	Always	2	8.70
Total		23	100
12. I used videos on Youtube to help me adding English to my instruction.	Rarely	-	100
	Occasionally	7	30.43
	Sometimes	9	39.13
	Often	6	26.09
	Always	1	4.35
Total		23	100

(30%). This reflects the fact that Thai teachers in general had problems in their pronunciation of English.

The majority of the teachers (61%) did their own research before teaching English words. The majority of them (48%) often and always tried to speak English with their students in their classes. Four of them (17.40%) never and occasionally tried to speak English with their students. Nine teachers (39.13%) sometimes used videos and YouTube videos presented in English to supplement their teaching. Seven of them (30.43%) often and always resorted to the use of such media.

Attitudes of School Teachers towards the Policy

Table 4 presents the teachers' responses to the questionnaires on their attitudes towards the policy.

Based on the above table, it was found that the majority of the teachers (70%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement: 'I don't like English'. Only three of them (13.04%) agreed with the statement. All of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that adding English elements in their existing teaching is useful. In addition, most teachers agreed with the practice of adding English elements into their existing instruction (80%). Only two of them (8.70%) were undecided.

Most school teachers agreed and strongly agreed that the policy was a good one; only one of them (4.35%) was undecided. The majority of the teachers also agreed and strongly agreed that parental support was crucial for the adding of English in the lesson. Only two of them (8.70%) were undecided.

Seventeen of the teachers (73.92%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that the policy was a waste of time. Most teachers (91.31%) agreed and strongly agreed that school administrators played an important part on the success of the policy. Only one of them (4.35%) disagreed with this statement.

All of the teachers (100%) agreed and strongly agreed that media were important for the success of the policy. Most teachers (95.65%) agreed and strongly agreed that adding English could be thought of as a way to upgrade Thai education. Only one was undecided (4.35%).

The teachers were partial about their students' attitudes. Eleven teachers (47.83%) were unsure about their students' attitudes. However, the majority of the teachers (47.83%) agreed and strongly agreed that the students liked the inclusion/addition of English elements in their learning.

As for prior training opportunities, it was found that six of them (26.09%) said they did not have any training at all. Six of them (26.09%) said they only had one training. Only three of them had at least three trainings. In terms of English language training, one third (7 of 23) never had any English

Table 4. Teachers' attitudes towards the policy

Statement	Level of Agreement	Number	Percent
1. I do not like English.	Strongly Disagree	6	26.09
	Disagree	10	43.48
	Undecided	4	17.39
	Agree	3	13.04
	Strongly Agree	-	-
Total		23	100
2. The more-English-in-school policy is a useful one.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	-	-
	Agree	8	34.78
	Strongly Agree	15	65.22
Total		23	100
3. I agree with the policy.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	2	8.70
	Agree	10	43.48
	Strongly Agree	11	47.83
Total		23	100
4. MEIS is a good policy.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	1	4.35
	Agree	12	52.17
	Strongly Agree	10	43.48
Total		23	100
5. Parents' support is crucial for the success of the policy.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	2	8.70
	Agree	8	34.78
	Strongly Agree	13	56.52
Total		23	100
6. The policy is a waste of time.	Strongly Disagree	11	47.83
	Disagree	6	26.09
	Undecided	3	13.04
	Agree	2	8.70
	Strongly Agree	1	4.35
Total		23	100
7. Policy of school administrators is important for success of the policy.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	1	4.35
	Undecided	1	4.35
	Agree	10	43.48
	Strongly Agree	11	47.83
Total		23	100
8. Media are important for success of the policy.	Strongly Disagree		
	Disagree		
	Undecided		
	Agree	14	60.87
	Strongly Agree	9	39.13

(Contd..)

Table 4. (Continued)

Statement	Level of Agreement	Number	Percent
Total		23	100
9. The more English policy is an attempt to improve the quality of education.	Strongly Disagree		
	Disagree		
	Undecided	1	4.35
	Agree	14	60.87
	Strongly Agree	8	34.78
Total		23	100
10. Most students like the more English policy.	Strongly Disagree		
	Disagree	1	4.35
	Undecided	11	47.83
	Agree	10	43.48
	Strongly Agree	1	4.35
Total		23	100
11. Did you undergo any training on more English in the classroom?	Never	6	26.09
	Once	6	26.09
	Twice	4	17.39
	Three times	3	13.04
	More than 3 times	4	17.39
	Total		23
12. How often do you have an English skills development training?	Never	7	30.43
	Once	5	21.74
	Twice	5	21.74
	Three times	1	4.35
	More than 3 times	5	21.74
	Total		23

language skills training. Five of them (21.74%) had it once. Five of them (21.74%) said they had more than three English language training opportunities (Table 5).

In terms of the teachers' self-taught behavior, the majority of the respondents sometimes and occasionally taught themselves English (65.21%). Five of them (21.74%) said they often did it; only three said they always did it (13.04%).

As shown in Table 6, all the listed factors were agreed upon by the majority of the school teachers, at the high level, as those that mattered in affecting success of the policy. The highest mean was found to be the mean for the item on access to the Internet and smartphones ($M = 4.57$), followed by the need of the parents and community (4.43), social environment of schools (4.43), and time for teaching preparation ($M = 4.43$). The lowest factor was found to be the one on performance evaluation ($M = 4.09$).

Table 7 indicates that the majority of the teachers said that they were moderately prepared and ready for the inclusion program (60.87%). Only six students (26.09%) said that their preparedness level was low.

Interesting Findings

A comparison of the teachers' beliefs and practices is presented in Table 8.

Table 5. Teachers' self-taught behavior

Frequency	Tally	Percent
Occasionally	8	34.78
Sometimes	7	30.43
Often	5	21.74
Always	3	13.04
Total	23	100.0

As the results in Table 9 indicate, there is a significant correlation between the teachers' self-taught behavior, their pronunciation, and their use of English in the classroom. It was found that the teachers who regularly learn English on their own are actually those who 'sound out' the English words in the classroom, and they are those happen to be the teachers who regularly speak English with their students.

DISCUSSIONS

The four aims of this study were (1) to investigate the school teachers' preparedness for the MEIS policy, (2) to investigate attitudes of the teachers towards the policy, and (3) to investigate their beliefs and perceptions of the policy in general, and (4) to investigate the teachers' current practices of the policy. Following are the discussions addressing the research aims.

Table 6. Factors affecting success of the more-English-in-school program

Factor	N	Mean	Meaning
1. Support from the administration	23	4.26	High-level agreement
2. Time for teaching preparation	23	4.43	High-level agreement
3. Access to technologies such as the Internet, smartphones	23	4.57	High-level agreement
4. Needs of parents and community	23	4.43	High-level agreement
5. Budget/financial support of the project	23	4.39	High-level agreement
6. Workload / teachers' responsibilities	23	4.17	High-level agreement
7. Performance evaluation	23	4.09	High-level agreement
8. Students' motivation	23	4.17	High-level agreement
9. Teachers' preparedness	23	4.35	High-level agreement
10. Consistency of practice	23	4.26	High-level agreement
11. Teaching manuals and examples of instructional plans	23	4.35	High-level agreement
12. Social environment of the school	23	4.43	High-level agreement

Thai School Teachers' Preparedness for the MEIS Policy

Of the twenty-three school teachers investigated, fourteen of them (60.87%) rated their preparedness as being at the moderate level, six of them at the low level, and only three at the high level. In general, their preparedness to implement the policy was at best at the moderate level, which would mean that a lot has to be done to raise the level of preparedness. For this reason, it was not a surprise when the minister of education himself came out and offered choices for OBEC schools – to implement the MEIS policy based on their resources availability.

Thai School Teachers' Attitudes towards the MEIS Policy and their General Beliefs

Overall, the attitudes of the teachers were found to be either neutral or positive, evidenced from their responses to the items on attitudes and beliefs. The majority of the teachers also agreed that the more-English-in-school policy was a useful one. They also agreed with the policy, reasoning that it is in line with the national development direction.

In general, the teachers believed that instructional media played a significant role in making the policy a successful one. This is noteworthy as the majority of the teachers were not English teachers (only 4 were English teachers). The workshop itself aimed to help them integrate or add English elements into their actual classroom teaching.

Teachers' Teaching Practice

It was found that the school teachers sought different ways to add the English elements into their teaching. Some of them, especially those who were keen to speak in English, actually conversed with their students in English on a regular basis. Many actually read aloud the English words or phrases. It was also reported that some of them turned to the use of smartphone applications to help them introduce English to their students.

Moreover, the MEIS policy received warm welcomes from parents and students. Our survey showed that eleven

Table 7. Teachers' levels of preparation

Level of Preparation	Frequency	Percent
Low	6	26.09
Moderate	14	60.87
High	3	13.04
Total	23	100

Table 8. Comparing the teachers' belief and practice

	N	M	SD	t	p
Material Preparation	23	2.65	1.43	42.20	0.00**
Use of media	23	4.39	0.49		

Interestingly, the significant difference between the teachers' production of instructional material was found to support the more English policy ($M=2.65$) and their belief regarding the value of instructional media ($M=4.39$)

teachers (47.83%) agreed and strongly agreed that the policy was loved by their students. Homework was a cited tool to add more English. Thirteen or 56.52% sometimes resorted to this traditional instruction.

Factors Affecting Success of the More-English-In-School Program

Of the twelve factors listed, the teachers rated the listed factors as being highly important for successful implementation of the MEIS policy. Those factors were as follows: (1) Support from the administration, (2) Time for teaching preparation, (3) Access to technologies such as the Internet and smartphones, (4) Needs of parents and community, (5) Budget/financial support of the project implementation, (6) Workload/teachers' responsibilities, (7) Performance evaluation, (8) Students' motivation, (9) Teachers' preparedness, (10) Consistency of practice/policy, (11) Teaching manuals and examples of instructional plans, and (12) Social environment of the school.

Teachers would like to see more support from the government, especially the support from the school administration. They also need to work together and learn from each other,

Table 9. Relationship between self-taught ability, pronunciation ability, speaking ability, and preparation level

	Self-taught	Pronunciation	Speaking	Preparation
Self-taught	111	0.667** (N 23, 0.001)	0.489* (N 23, 0.018)	0.508* (N 23, 0.013)
Pronunciation		111	0.555** (N 23, 0.006)	0.526** (N 23, 0.010)
Speaking			111	0.541** (N 23, 0.008)
Preparation				111

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

too. Successful collaborative groups have commonalities that promote reflective inquiry. Research has shown that teachers in these groups develop norms for group work and communication skills that help establish and maintain a safe and trusting environment and encourage group members to reexamine, clarify, and transform their thinking so they can help students succeed (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003).

Most teachers agreed and strongly agreed that media production and the use of media were crucial for the success of their integration and that of the MEIS policy. This very opinion should point to the need to equip schools with high-speed Internet access and the improvement of hardware in schools. As we know, younger students are keen to use new technologies and they are not shy to assert their identities as well as their abilities. A survey conducted by Lyons (2016) with 1707 students in four secondary schools based in Chiang Mai revealed Thai students were keen to use new technologies, including smartphones. Making use of new technologies requires training and practice. The *technologies* should go hand in hand with the available technologies.

Our investigation revealed the strong and significant link between language ability and the ability to teach oneself, as well as the link between the ability/practice of self-education with the reported level of preparedness ($r = .667$). This finding, among other things, seems to suggest that most teachers are active and eager to learn the English language, as they realize that it is a path towards their professional development. The government should provide English language development opportunities, not only to Thai English teachers, but also subject teachers in general.

English Skills and National Development

English and national development have been hypothesized as being related. For Surin Pitsuwan, a former secretary-general of ASEAN, English could be the key to help improve Thailand's serious educational problems, among other development goals (*The Nation*, September 16, 2013). His remark, albeit strong and controversial, should remind us Thais to work harder on English language improvement. A recent study reported by *Bangkok Post* claimed to have found the relationship between one of national development indicators, equality of the people, with the English language proficiency of the people (English First, 2019). This hypothesis should be welcomed by the Thai authorities, as Thailand has been reported by the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook 2018 as being one of the most unequal countries in the world (*The Bangkok Post*, December 6th, 2018). If English could help narrowing this income gap and other inequalities, English language instruction should

be done with greater levels of success in Thai schools and colleges.

Our study showed that Thai school teachers in general welcomed the MEIS policy. In the survey, most school teachers agreed and strongly agreed that the policy was useful; only one of them (4.35%) was undecided. They also noted the important link between the policy and the effort to revamp Thai education. This reflects the important role of English in Thai society.

CONCLUSION

This research covered two public schools located on the outskirts of Bangkok and 23 school teachers participated in the study. They were the participants of the workshop aiming to develop their instructional skills. Based on the data analysis, the Thai school teachers under this study have been trying to add English elements into their teaching in a number of ways with varying degrees of success, including assigning students homework to do. What was significant also was that the majority of them had positive attitudes toward the MEIS policy. They began to integrate English elements in their classrooms. Yet, their preparedness level stood in the middle. This means that many Thai schools may not be ready to implement the policy. The government's policy, hence, should be accompanied with investment in teacher training and professional development.

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