An Investigation into the Readiness of Teaching English as the Lingua Franca in TEFL Countries of ASEAN: The Case of Thailand

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to investigate the readiness of TEFL countries in ASEAN especially Thailand, to see whether they will be able to meet the requirement of English policy in 2015 It is a qualitative research conducted by means of content/documentary analysis. The documents include the curriculum and relevant books or papers obtained from the Office of Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education. The eight relevant documents selected in the past decade (2003-2011) were analyzed as sources of data for solving ELT problems, with particular reference to Thailand. The major results were synthesized from eight relevant books and were summarized according to important macroskills and microskills of understanding English as a lingua franca. Following the research results, the recommendations are presented in five categories: (1) for teacher development; (2) for classroom practices; (3) for curriculum development; (4) for teachers' behavior; and (5) for further research. In conclusion, this research clearly indicates that Thailand is not ready to use English as a lingua franca in 2015.*

Key Words: English as a Global Language, English as a Lingua Franca, English as a Working Language, Expertise, Readiness in ELT

Introduction

Indeed, many researchers in Thailand have a false conception that only a quantitative approach per se is a genuine research in the real sense of the term! Hence a Thai research scholar argues that it is 'Micchaditthi' or a wrong view. As early as 1988, he calls for a 'qualitative-cum-quantitative research paradigm' (Brudhiprabha, 1988 or what is known as 'mixed methods research' today (Creswell, 2003**,** Hessie-Biber& Nagy 2010).

Because of a paucity of qualitative research in English language teaching (ELT), the researcher has decided to conduct studies by means of content or document analysis which is one of the most important techniques in the humanities and social sciences. According to Krippendorff (2004, p. xiii):

> The content analyst views data as representations not of physical events but of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted upon for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind. Analyzing texts in the contexts of their uses distinguishes content analysis from other methods of inquiry.

A review of related literature indicates that there is relatively just a meager qualitative investigation into ELT in Thailand in terms of content/document analysis, text analysis (Yordchim 2012). Hence, in the meantime, the researcher has already completed her study using this research

paradigm. The following research article explains what the researcher has done for an international M.Ed. degree in TESL at the HRD Centre, Faculty of Education, Burapha University.

The Research Study Itself

English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand has a very long history. It dates back to the reigns of King Rama III (1824-1851) and King Rama IV (1851-1868). Nevertheless, according to Brudhiprabha (2013a,p.2) "from the haydays of TEFL/TESL/ TESOL (1940s-1970s) to the present decades of TEIL/ TEGL/ TELF (1980s-2000s), the English proficiency of the students is still far from satisfactory, their communicative competence is extremely limited."

The first English teacher officially employed was over a century and a half. King Rama IV employed an English governess, Mrs. Anna Leonowens to teach at the Royal Palace School in 1862 (Brudhiprabha, 2013b). Leonowens wrote about the benefits of an English education which she gave and hoped that this would raise the rank of Thai to that of superior nations (Leonowens, 1870, p.78). According to Kachru (2006) English in Thailand is considered as a an expanding circle and is referred as English as a foreign language (EFL). In EFL countries like Thailand, students are only exposed to English in the classroom and some English classes are taught in the students' mother tongue.

Hence holistically this study attempts to answer the exact inherent problem of ELT in Thailand from an education linguistic point of view and an SLA (second language acquisition) standpoint (Brudhiprabha 2013, Ellis 1994) by conducting content/document (C/D) analysis in terms of the following:
1. Teacher development and reengineering
2. Curriculum development and reform
3. The methodology of teaching integrated communication skills
4. The teachers' behavior
5. When to start teaching English in our educational system
6. The use of English outside the classroom

But only lip service has been paid to the solution of these problems so far (Kosol &Prabha 2013). Hence an investigation into these problems is carried out in this qualitative inquiry.

Since the *de facto adoption* of English as the only working and official language of ASEAN according to ASEAN charter Article 34 'The working language of ASEAN shall be English', it has put tremendous pressure in learning English language. As English is the only language mentioned as a working or official language in the entire charter; therefore, all ten members agreed to legally use it.

Indeed, the increasing demand of English in ASEAN countries has contributed to a trend in government schools for studying English and the national language of the country, rather than studying other neighboring languages. As a result, in most ASEAN countries other languages are taught as electives.

However, the Ministry of Education in Thailand's objectives of teaching English are not clear-cut; therefore, most Thai students cannot communicate in English. Recently the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) of Thailand has set a budget for schools to set up new projects for preparation to the integration into ASEAN Community. The projects were launched to promote the preparation for the AEC; however, OBEC had not given clear explanation and distinction of each type of school projects that were set.

The National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) is a public organization in Thailand producing and conducing examinations. Although the Thailand National Curriculum (Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E 2551) stated many goals for students to achieve, it seems to be unrealistic when looking at the level of the test scores nationwide. The O-NET English results show the average scores that students achieved for the English subject was approximately 20 percent from the total score out of 100.

The situation of teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)in Thailand is evidence that we have a big problem because, on average Thai students fail the O-NET and their scores on TOEFL and IELTS are relatively low, compared to the ASEAN member countries.

> The review of literature found that, while English has become the most common foreign language studied in five TEFL ASEAN member countries (Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand) the level of English proficiency needs to be improved in those countries, particularly in Thailand.

This study is limited to TEFL countries only in the 10-members of ASEAN because TESL countries in ASEAN use English as a language of wider communication in their societies. The source of data is limited to those published in the period from (2003 to 2013). The study attempts to investigate whether or not TEFL countries in ASEAN can use English as a lingua franca and as a working language in 2015, especially Thailand. The data is analyzed and synthesized for the findings using the content/document (C/D) analysis to provide a framework for success or failure in teaching English Language in Thailand.

The approach was clearly defined from the knowledge claims, the strategies and the method which indicated that this study employed a qualitative research. According to Creswell (2003, p.18), the term qualitative "is one in which the inquires often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives."

Table 1   Combinations of Knowledge Claims Strategies of Inquiry and Methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 15)

Research Approach	Knowledge Claims	Strategy of Inquiry	Methods
Qualitative	Constructivist assumptions	Hypothesis-generating inquiry	Content/ Document Analysis Relevant Sampling consisting of eight books 38 expert

Eight books were chosen to answer the given research questions and analytical problem at hand using relevant sampling or also called purposive sampling (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998 cited in Krippendoff, 2004). The relevant samples were selected from past decade 2003-2011 to solve ELT problems with particular reference to Thailand. Documentaries that were used are the works of well-known expertise as the sources of data for solving ELT problems.

The documents included the curriculum for studying English in Thai primary and secondary schools and relevant books or papers obtained from the Office of Basic Education Commission in the Ministry of Education.
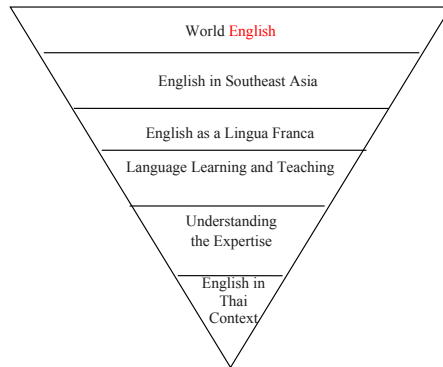
The resources chosen were categorized as follows:

Figure 1. Relevant Sampling

The purpose of analyzing these documentaries as the instrument is to find out what experts in the field of second language learning have learned about teaching, language policy and language education for teaching English as a *lingua franca* since the current curriculum only supports English as a foreign language. It is an approach by various experts in a field to ascertain the key features of a curriculum.
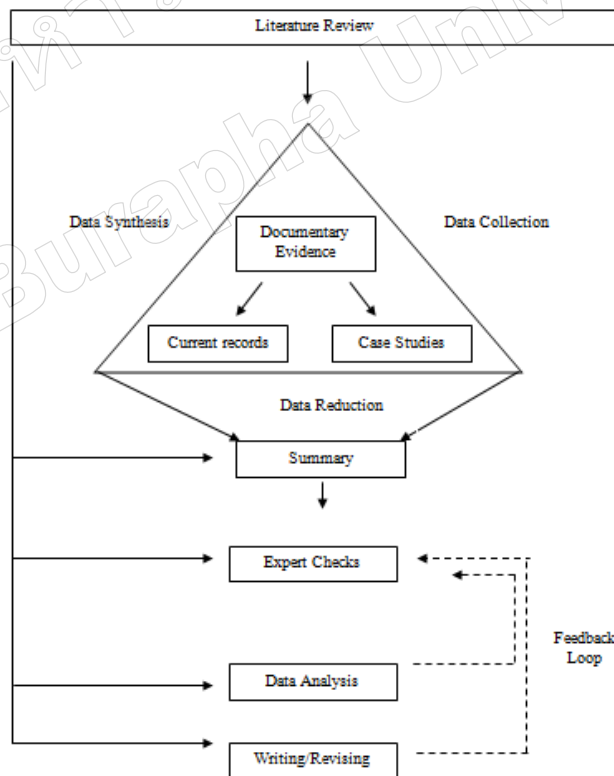
The figure below shows the research methodology.

Figure 2. Research Methodology

This research was a qualitative study, gathering knowledge claims based on a constructivist assumption. In this type of research, researchers seek to answer the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants meaning views from selected literature whose perspective of the phenomenon are interpreted by the researcher. It also uses hypothesis-generating inquiry as the strategy of inquiry. This means that it allows the hypothesis to be developed after the data are collected and hypothesis were not set at the beginning of the study.

This study is limited to TEFL countries only in the 10-member of ASEAN because TESL countries uses English as language of wider communication in their society. The source of data is limited to those studies published in the period from 2003-2011.

The major results were extracted from the eight relevant books and were summarized in terms of marcoskills and microskills and teaching factors of using English as a lingua franca in matrix tables.

From the result, Thailand has not produced the curriculum for English as a lingual franca, as the Thai foreign language curriculum is used for English teaching. The 2008 Thai foreign language curriculum for Mathayom 4-6 students was used as the frame of reference of this research. However, The Thai National Curriculum emphasizes only the four integrated macroskills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, but they should be supplemented by emphasizing the four important microskills, as explained from eight relevant literature samples. As a result from the findings, eight relevant samples were categorized in different matrix. Figure 5 below covers the aspect in accordance to the findings.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research & Development

Several experts like Kachru and Nelson (2006), Prescott (2007) and Kirkpatrick (2010) have pointed out the problems of second language learners in certain skills. Different methods are also suggested for solving problems as these problems are raised. Nunan (2003), in his book, "Practical English Language Teaching", suggested many different principles for each skill. Scriveners (2011) defines what is called 'macroskills' as listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as 'microskills' as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and discourse.

From the analysis, it can be found that the integrated communication skills of macroskills and microskills need to be related to each other, as the figure below:
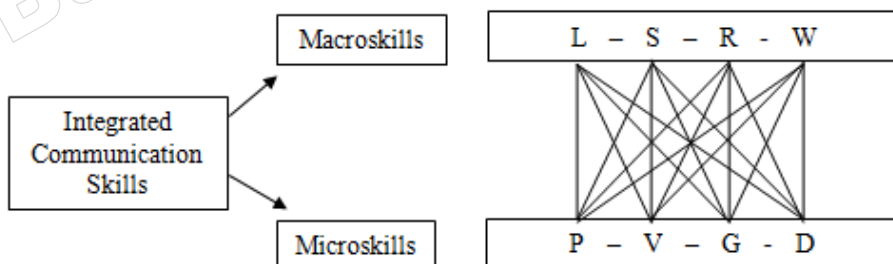

Figure 3: Integrated Communication Skills

The interface between language learning and communication skills should not be taught separately; an integrated approach of the communication is necessary (Scrivener, 2011). Referring to the frame of reference the Thai National Foreign Curriculum 2008, was categorized according to the four strands which may not fulfill the macroskills. The four strands are: (1) Language for Communication; (2) Language and Culture; (3) Language and Relationship with Other Learning Areas; and (4) Lanuage and Relationship with Community and the World. Moreover, the microskills of language learning was overlooked as part of the language system. There needs to be connection

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between macroskills and microskills rather than isolating them. Macroskills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. On the other hand, microskills are pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and discourse.

A guide to success in ELT terms of the holistic process of English Language Teaching has been proposed (Brudhiprabha 2010) as follows:
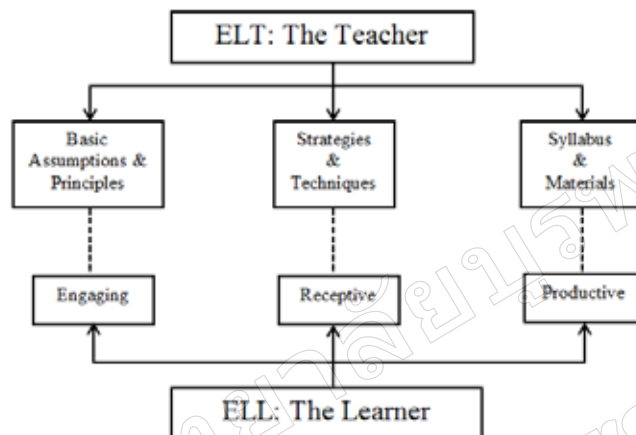

Figure 4: The Teaching- Learning Process

Source: Brudniprabha (2010)

This shows ELT as the umbrella term covering the aspects: (1) Basic Assumptions & Principles; (2) Strategies & Techniques; and (3) Syllabuses & Materials. These terms help reach the goal following the appropriate strategies and techniques. Referring, to the finding from Nunan (2003), the teacher plays an important part of the language learning process.

Benson (2008, p. 2) proposed three myths that have significant implications for learning they are:
1. To learn a second language, you must start as early as possible
2. The best way to learn a second language is to use it as a medium of instruction
3. The home language gets in the way of learning a second language

One of the experts gives very concrete ideas on solving the problems. Kirkpatrick (2010) reformulates Benson's three myths of language education as follows:
1. There should be at least five years of instruction before using a second language as a medium of instruction
2. You do not have to start early to learn a second language
3. Fluency and literacy in the first language will help develop second language or later languages.

As Benson (2008, p.2) three myths play a part of the cause of current government policy in language education (Kirkpatrick, 2010). One of the myths was 'to learn a second language you must start as early as possible' and tremendous pressure from parents wanting their child to start learning a second language in their early childhood. Whereas, the teachers do not achieve a proficiency level and have a lack of access to materials to teach English as a subject alone apart from other subjects.

Moreover, for the curriculum, Seidhofer (2005) agreed with Kirkpatrick that the curriculum should focus on how cultures differ and the implications for cross-cultural communication. This was

aimed to enable Thai teachers to understand English and their own language, language variation and the role of English in their teaching enabling them to become 'reflective practitioners'.

Teacher education is the heart of an education system. How can we get good quality students if the teacher does not reach the necessary standard? It is clear that teacher education programs should focus on pre-service and a systematic in-service training to keep the teacher up-to-date.

Pusawiro (2013) revealed the knowledge sharing of about 30 scholars on shaping a country's education system. They presented a collaborative change and constructive involvement for better Thai education.

According to UNESCO, (2011) the policy cycle shows that the failures and successes are feedback for policy development before implementing the policy that covers a wide range, such as curriculum, teacher/professional development, learning materials, management, or assessment. The five collaborative changes and constructive involvement stated above (Pusawiro, 2013) will help improve the policy cycle.

There have been several models built for language learning for both the teacher and the learners. One of the models was proposed by Brudhiprabha and Trikosol (2010), who called it the ELT-cum-ELL Model'. This model was proposed for Thailand's education system.

The model shows the clear input from both sides, from the curriculum and from the teacher's perspectives. It shows that the model links the learners' learning process as an input for the teacher to capitalize on.

Brudhiprabha and Trikosol's (2010) model presented the process from head-to-toe. Each component in the model links to one another. Referring to the UNESCO education policy cycle (2011)**,** it is very important that the main goals are set, as they cover the areas of curriculum, teacher/professional development, learning materials, management and assessment. The composite model of TESL was proposed for Thailand as follows:
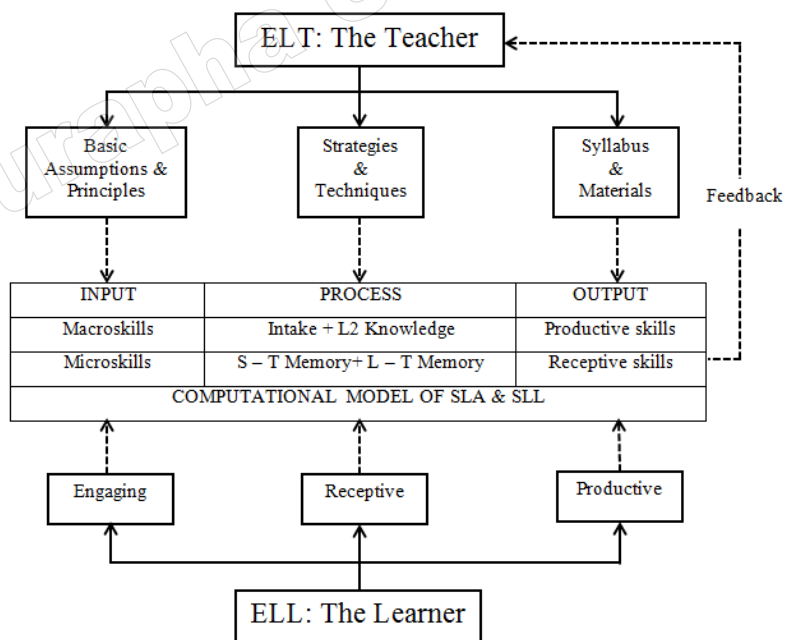

Figure 5. A New Composite Model of TESL (Brudhiprabha ,Trikosol & Soinam 2012)

Brudhiprabha ,Trikosol & Soinam's (2013) model presented the process from the head-to-toe meaning the overall aspect of English Language Teaching and Learning. Each component in the model links to one another. It is very important that the main goals are set, as they cover the areas of curriculum, teacher/professional development, learning materials, management and assessment. At the top of Figure 3, teachers play an important role in implementing the learner's input, such as basic assumptions, implementing the instruction, and the strategies and techniques. The computational model of SLA shows the input of what the learner will receive in terms of macroskills (listening – speaking – reading – writing) and microskills (word - group – clause – sentence – discourse). As the process proceeds, it later turns to the learner's knowledge as the output.

According to the research results, extracting from the eight relevant documents and summarized in terms of macroskills and microskills and teaching factors of using English as a lingua franca the recommendations were presented into four categories:

1. For Teacher Development

Teacher education should be a continuum of pre-service and in-service training. NIETS needs to develop a standardized test for evaluating English proficiency to be able to teach both macroskills and microskills commutatively.

2. For Classroom Practices

Teaching methods should reflect the teachers' own personal teaching styles
Teachers should know the content in the course book well to be able to use SARS (Select, Adapt, Reject, Supplement) to adapt and make materials. Teachers must have hands-on experience of the classroom problems and are able to solve. Promoting an English speaking environment for students to get exposure to the language in the real world.

3. For Curriculum

The curriculum should be developed to cover the microskills, not just content development focusing on the macroskills. It should be a functional and communicative syllabus.

4. For Classroom Practices

Part of the failure of in-service training is from the teachers' behavior, after the training the pre-service education they tend to stick to their old way of teaching.

5. For Further Research

A study should be conducted to gain better understanding of TEFL countries' language needs and policies. Information on certain countries would be easier to find if the researcher from that country had conducted the research on their own country.

More importantly, it is highly recommended that further research on vocational education should be emphasized because the future workforce for Thailand as well as AEC, will depend greatly on vocational institutions. There have been predictions that skilled workers will be in great demand in 2015 and beyond, especially those who can communicate effectively in English.

The researcher undertook a C/D analysis from the frame of reference of the Thai foreign curriculum 2008. It is recommended that there should be other methods to triangulate the results of this study.

Future researchers should include other learning materials such as books/documentary on communication skills and the integrated skills of both macroskills and microskills.

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