

Problems of Policy Implementation at Thai Border Schools in the ASEAN Community Context: Reflections from Teachers as Practitioners

Ampa Kaewkumkong, South China Normal University, China
Ke Sen, South China Normal University, China

Abstract: *The Thai government launched an emerging border school policy in 2010 concomitant with the inception of the ASEAN Community. The policy considered national and international circumstances and aimed particularly at establishing close cooperation among neighboring countries. This paper aims to investigate the problems of border school policy implementation in regards to the dimensions of personnel recruitment and preparation at pilot schools situated along border areas between Thailand and Cambodia in order to understand the actual conditions based on local implementers perceptions. The research applied a descriptive mixed-method strategy that employed both qualitative and quantitative research design. The methodology, therefore, included documentary analyses, interviews, observation, and a questionnaire survey. The findings revealed that there were problematic issues in terms of implementer preparation and practice at both the central and local level. The major issues were a shortage of personnel assigned to run the program at both levels, a lack of personnel capacity at the local level, and a coordination gap between state officers, supervisors, and teachers. Another important outcome was developing an initiative to expand the cooperation between Thai and Cambodian schools and clarifying border school policy requirements.*

Keywords: Problems, Policy implementation, Thai border school, ASEAN Community, Teacher as a practitioner

Introduction

Thailand introduced the first border school in 1956, known as the Border Patrol Police (BPP) School. Initially, the school was intended to educate children in the remote areas while improving their quality of their life and enhancing their well-being (Border Patrol Police Bureau, 2007). A major turning point for the development of Thai border schools was in late 2008, after the ASEAN Charter was drafted and Thailand launched various programs to promote educational cooperation, including the establishment of Buffer Schools. The Buffer School initiative focused on educational cooperation between schools that shared boundaries with neighboring countries in line with the goal of integration of ASEAN Community countries to better handle the challenges of globalization (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2012).

The ASEAN Community went into effect in 2015 with the main purpose of achieving regional harmony and stability. Importantly, developing human capital has been a major focus of achieving ASEAN's expected goals. Furthermore, advancing educational cooperation is embedded in the blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The ASEAN Work-plan on Education established in 2012 addressed certain themes related improving the quality of life of under-served populations, marginalized people in remote areas, and minority groups (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012). Developing education at border areas is considered in line with this as well as the global commitment under the concept of "Education for All: EFA" that seeks quality basic education for children (Mundy and Murphy, 2001).

In Thailand, border development was specifically addressed in the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016), which emphasized a strategy to create regional connectivity for greater social and economic stability. This goal was pursued through the development of sustainable partnerships that nurtured mutual benefits among ASEAN member countries. Strategy design and implementation of education development plans were executed at local levels so as to assure the connectivity between neighboring countries, promoting and expanding Thailand's academic development and institutional networks. In addition, it was considered necessary to use native dialects while also promoting the use of English and the languages neighboring countries simultaneously to better understand the different cultures and ways of living of people residing in ASEAN, which is considered a crucial preparatory process for future ASCC integration.

Despite Thailand's numerous initiatives regarding cross-border education cooperation, its attempts to pursue cooperation with Cambodia in this regard have to date not been as fruitful as hoped. The two nations have signed a number of multilateral cooperation agreements in relation to human resource development, such as GMS in 1992 and ACMECS in 2001. Also, in 2003, the two governments signed an MOU to provide bilateral cooperation in education development. Despite these efforts, at the local level, the two nations still lack effective cooperation, which inevitably has resulted in redundancy. The majority of cooperative projects that have been efficiently conducted were those implemented at the national level with emphasis on short-term goals (Kaewkumkong, 2012). Therefore, it is important for Thailand to review its cooperation in previously conducted educational projects. Specifically, more attention needs to be paid to the border areas shared between Thai and Cambodian people who have similar ways of living and who could work together for their mutual benefit. Recommendations from relevant studies have pointed out that Thailand should analyze cooperation between local Thai and Cambodian educational institutions situated along the border in order to create better mutual understanding (Institute of Asian Studies, 2009; Office of the Education Council, 2010; Kaewkumkong, 2015). Clearly, more research studies need to be carried out on Thai-Cambodian educational conditions at the institutional level. The Buffer School initiative, which seeks to improve understanding between Thais and their neighbors at the local level, is one important program which would benefit from this.

To date, few studies have been conducted concerning policy implementation in the ASEAN Community era, including policies such the Spirit of ASEAN strategy, in relation to Buffer Schools. Some studies have, however, investigated these schools within the larger dimension of school development and educational cooperation along the border between Thailand and neighbor countries. The relevant previous studies found several problems in the process of implementing policies required for preparing to enter the ASEAN Community, such as fundamental tensions in border areas and insufficient and overloaded policy implementers (Somphong, 2013; Wongboonsin et al., 2013; Chinsettawong, 2014; Chaisorn and Viseshsiri, 2014; Siangwan, Saikaew & Poonsawat, 2015). Moreover, one pilot school in the Buffer School program had to be terminated from the program as it was not properly equipped and ready to operate at a level in line with the policy goals.

Based on the literature review, it is clear that there is a crucial lack of knowledge on emerging border school policy and the educational relationship between Thailand and Cambodia at border areas. Although a few studies concerning border school issues were found, there had been no adequate research studies on the Buffer School scheme. Therefore, this research aims to address the key question: What problems do teachers face in implementing the policy of Buffer

Schools at the Thailand-Cambodia border? The study further seeks to examine the circumstances that have become obstacles to policy implementation. Analysis of problems in this research focus on personnel recruitment and preparation and covers operational problems faced by 1) state officers and supervisors; and 2) teachers as practitioners. It also addresses coordination between the two levels of policy implementers.

The significance of this study is amplified by conducting an analysis of Thai border schools within the context of the ASEAN Community. Studying the pilot program of Buffer Schools is expected to reveal vital insights into the process of going from policy to practice. Policy implementation models are used help to dissect the process of operation for understanding the relationship between policy and practice (Chunnu-Brayda, 2012). In regards to studying education policy, Rui (2007) noted that a quote from Pan Maoyuan (1999), a Chinese scholar, is particularly relevant:

“Attention should be paid to comparing the actual practice in different countries, rather than only the analysis of their policy documents. Policy documents are an important source, but not the only one. What is written in policy documents manifests the intention of the governments, and is usually far from the reality.”

The Buffer School policy was launched in an era of regional integration. Therefore, this study can contribute to a new perspective on the problems and tensions of education policy implementation at the border areas of Thailand and Cambodia. The results from the study are also expected to yield useful information for interested academicians in the realm of education development in the border areas of other ASEAN countries.

Literature review

This part of the research contains a review of: 1) educational development and policy at border areas; 2) empirical findings of recent relevant research studies; and 3) the theory used in the study and the related conceptual framework. The primary purpose of the review is to understand the meaning and the concepts of education at borders and the application of analytical paradigms. The review also discusses certain research studies related to border schools in the ASEAN Community context. The theoretical framework demonstrates how to analyze policy and assess its implementation.

Educational development and policy at border areas: There is only slight variation in the definition of ‘border school’ among various scholars. Generally, the term border school refers to schools located at the periphery of a country adjacent to a neighboring country. In terms of education, Nishimura (1999) analyzed education at the border area between Malaysia and Indonesia and discovered features of nationalization, localization and internationalization in academic activity and educational management. Meanwhile, Cashman and McDermott (2013) examined the challenges of crossing the US-Mexico border where students travelled back and forth between the two neighboring countries on a daily basis. Cline, Reyes and Necochea (2005) looked at how young school-age children must choose whether to assimilate into the world of mainstream institutions or maintain their close ties with their home and community, which could have disastrous consequences for their identity formation.

In Thailand, education management in border areas is different from other areas in the country. The Office of the Education Council (2010) notes that the southern border employs diverse forms consistent with Islamic education, while the Thai-Cambodian border presents a diversity of multiracial and ethnic students. The Office of the Higher Education Commission

(2008) likewise recognizes the importance of diversity in education management at border areas, noting that it requires a clear and concrete strategy and must recognize the context of each border area, which is very diverse in terms of society, culture, and politics.

One important aspect of border education in relation to the context of the ASEAN Community is Buffer Schools- a program initiated and operated under the concept of promoting educational cooperation between schools on the borders of Thailand and its four neighboring ASEAN countries. Each school participating in this scheme has a different role and duty due to its unique situation and location. At present, there are 24 schools participating in the Buffer School program. Buffer Schools have a specific label in regards to the Thai policy concerning border schools. It is the official denotation specified by policy makers to guide implementation of the education policy of the schools. It defines the schools as “schools that have teaching and learning about knowledge of the ASEAN Community, running the ASEAN Study Center, learning together in a multicultural society, using ICT to support learning, and the distinction of the scheme pays attention to learning the ASEAN language of the country adjacent to the school; Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia” (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2012).

Considering the profound importance of educational development at border areas, a detailed analysis of Buffer School policy implementation could effectively serve as development guidelines for future educational cooperation. In the long run, this will create deeper understanding between Thais and the people of their neighbor countries, which in turn will benefit the ASEAN Community as a whole.

Previous works regarding border school policy implementation and policy implementers in the ASEAN Community context: As revealed in the work of Chaisorn and Viseshsiri (2014), preparing people for the ASEAN Community is a new endeavor involving many agencies and divisions. However, the number of policy implementers are scant and number of teachers in these schools are very limited. The teachers have to carry a great burden and often manage multiple grades at the same time. Furthermore, an overall teacher shortage is worse in small schools, which are often located in rough and remote areas. Siangwan, Saikaew & Poonsawat (2015) also noted that the shortage problem leads to teachers being overloaded with duties, resulting in insufficient lesson preparation and ineffective teaching. The teachers also are denied the opportunity to develop and improve their abilities because of the difficulties in increasing their knowledge. Somphong (2013) adds that it is vital for teachers to personally prepare lessons, content, and courses as further research is necessary if textbook is not adequate.

Moreover, bureaucratic organizational structures strictly based on rules and regulations can bring about refusals to cooperate between the relevant agencies if the new tasks are not considered their regular duties. Keawsomnuk (2017) states that a major obstacle to providing education in highlands and remote areas as well as along the borders comes from the schools themselves. These schools tend to have little understanding of integrating local society, culture, and ways of life into their curriculum. In a study of Kaewurai and Wattanatorn (2013), it was found that poor conditions of border schools in Cambodia have serious limitations on budget and cause inadequacies of personnel, learning, buildings, educational materials, and facilities.

Policy design is also often ambiguous. Jinerawat, Nirantawee, Sompasong & Wattanarong (2017) noted that in Thailand that small schools in remote areas are faced with challenges in the policy system involving the Ministry of Education, Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Office of Educational Service Areas (OESA), and the schools themselves, when adopting a new policy. Boonped and Kosaiyawat (2012) argue that schools located along

the borders between Thailand-Laos and Thailand-Cambodia fail to establish networks, agreements, and academic cooperation with their neighboring counterparts because they lack budget support for education management, scholarships for students in the neighboring countries, and special staffs and agencies to look after them. Border schools in these areas are also obstructed by a regulations regarding recruiting teachers from neighboring countries and cooperation agreements between institutes.

Funding is also typically a problem. Somphong (2013) noted that funding for the fifteen secondary schools in the Spirit of ASEAN program were under the auspices of the OBEC along with more than five hundred nationwide network schools, limiting the funding available to the schools. Wongboonsin et al. (2013) also noted that allocating budget for promoting the ASEAN Community policy had several problems and limitations, with most schools having a tight budget for implementing the policy, forcing them to become self-reliant and reallocate money from other areas. Chinsettawong (2014) further describes how allocating funding under current political policies results in an inability to meet the needs of each locality, leading to a failure to achieve the expected goals.

As described above, the major issues hindering effective policy implementation at border schools are the lack of capable personnel and number of staff, insufficient funding, and unpreparedness of schools to follow policies. Still, border schools have to face the challenges posed by the policy's existence while trying to expand cooperation with neighbouring countries as a part of the ASEAN Community.

Policy implementation and policy implementers: Policy implementation is principally the stage that occurs between policy formulation and policy evaluation. Numerous variations on the typology of policy have been put forward, usually offering differentiations of sub-stages (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). In recent years, analysis of the implementation process in policy studies has shifted towards the international level. This shift has been concurrent with the trend towards globalization and regionalization. A vital example is the integration of the European Union (EU) (Pulzl and Treib, 2007). Rui (2007) also addresses the shift towards international policy, noting that one important change is that boundaries between states have become blurred.

In doing policy research, a policy model should be employed as a framework of study. The model for policy implementation study includes works such as "The Policy Implementation Process" by Van Miter and Van Horn (1975), "Interactions between Factors Model" by George C. Edwards (1980), "A model of decentralization program implementation process in Asia" by Cheema and Rondinelli (1983), "An ideal process of policy implementation" by Jann and Wegrich (2007), and for education, "Dimensions of contemporary education policy implementation in practice and research" by Meredith I. Honig (2006). Honig concludes that education policy faces substantial complexities in practice, stating that to get implemented and be successful, education policy is produced by interaction amongst policy, people, and places.

The 'people' dimension of Honig's model is categorized into policy targets, policy implementers, policy participants and supportive providers. In conducting research, the researchers need to examine how all of those involved respond to policy demands. However, this paper focuses specifically on implementers such teachers and central officers, who confront diverse demands, opportunities and constraints in implementation. Moreover, as Honig notes the importance of policy makers and implementers learning about policy problems, policy design, and implementation progress, the implementers can be seen as the significant drivers of policy.

Methodology

There are many approaches to educational research methodology. In the broadest sense, these can be classified into quantitative and qualitative methods. Both research methods have their own advantages and disadvantages. Fairbrother (2007) has argued that the goal of both methods is to seek answers to the same fundamental questions through different approaches. In quantitative research, data is gathered from a large number of participants by survey in order to illustrate a broad picture. At the same time, qualitative research focuses on events, processes and behaviors in the micro context. It is conducted through case studies with various techniques such as observation, interviews and documentary analysis to assure completeness of the research. Therefore, this research has applied a mixed-method strategy for understanding the situation more profoundly. It was designed with descriptive mixed-methods that employ the survey research as well as descriptive case study research. The data was gathered between May and September 2017.

Quantitative approach: A new questionnaire was developed to determine the actual problems faced in the Buffer Schools regarding policy implementation. The questionnaire was originally created following the process of research instrument development with a set of response categories containing questions for the respondents to complete. The content included problems of policy implementation based on its conceptual framework applied from Honig (2006)'s deliberation.

Teachers were asked to rate their opinions regarding the level of severity of a problem on a five-point Likert scale. Responses ranged from "slightest problem" (1) to "heaviest problem" (5). Validity and reliability were significant criteria of quality for the survey. Validity was ensured by asking three experts: a public policy administration scholar, an education professor, and a professional officer at the Thai Ministry of Education. The questionnaire then was pilot-tested among 30 people. Overall, reliability of the questionnaire was found to be satisfactory, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.939. Multi-stage sampling was applied for gathering data and stratified sampling was used in the first step to separate groups of the operating committee and general teachers. Simple random sampling was then employed. The sample size was established at 106 teachers from six pilot Buffer Schools.

To collect the data, after a questionnaire passed questionnaire validity and reliability, it was distributed to teachers. Distribution was coordinated with one teacher at each pilot school. One teacher in the school network at a Buffer school and several volunteers also helped the researcher with distribution of the questionnaires. The data was analyzed by descriptive statistics using the SPSS program. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were manipulated to analyze the problems during policy implementation. Scoring and interpreting were analyzed and grouped into five levels.

Qualitative approach: As the research focuses on examining the situational context of policy implementation, the case study adopted a variety of approaches to collecting data. The researcher organized fieldwork through visiting six pilot schools of the Buffer School program, making observations, taking notes, conducting interviews, taking pictures, making voice recordings, and conducting certain other activities such as examining documents. Gathering evidence from fieldwork was mainly based on discussions, with the policy text from the national and regional government (ASEAN) being included in the analysis. This was accomplished through surveys aimed at concrete policy outcomes and feedback. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to better understand the context of the cases and to gather data from the questionnaire.

In public policy analysis, Dunn (2004) suggested that the sample size of policy Delphi might range from 10 to 30 people depending on the complexity of policy problems and the nature of the issue. In this research, 22 teachers including a Cambodian teacher who teaches Khmer language at a Buffer school were interviewed. Interviewees were selected by purposive sampling and interviews were arranged face-to-face for both individuals and groups, depending on the situation at each site. Data gained from the interviews was used for descriptive analysis, which was organized according to intensive descriptions by analyzing Buffer School policy delivery and its change in each contextual area. The process began with transcribing from written notes and audio-recordings. Data was then classified through manual coding based on the conceptual framework of the research. It was necessary to employ the depth of analysis in this stage that refers to detail, completeness, and wholeness. This process was completed including explanation and criticism. Reliability testing was employed to cross-check the qualitative data. These multiple sources of evidence were triangulated with each other to assure the accuracy of data.

Ethical Concerns

The current research gave priority to ethical considerations. Ethical consent forms were created in both formal and informal patterns for the research participants. Ethical consent designs were located on the first page of the questionnaire survey, recorded for interviews and on letters of permission for study visits. Ethical considerations were based on the guidelines of the Central Research Ethics Committee under the National Research Council of Thailand. Domestic as well as international practices regarding ethical concerns were applied during the research process.

Findings and discussion

The results of information obtained from the actual sites found that teachers faced a number of problems and tensions regarding their preparation and development for emerging border school policy implementation. Data from the survey is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, which indicates teachers' perceptions toward the problems by rating them on a five-point scale from slightest to heaviest problem. Table 1 presents the percentage of frequency of rating problem degrees. There were seven problems in the 'people' dimension in policy implementation. Overall, the majority of teachers considered problems of border school policy implementation as being moderate with an average at 37.3 percent. Observations from these results shows that item (2) was rated from heavy to heaviest problem while item (7) was a slight to slightest problem. Asked about the other five items, teachers all rated these as being moderate to heavy problems.

Table 1. Degree of problems in Buffer School implementation from teachers' perception

Situation		heaviest problem	heavy problem	moderate problem	slight problem	slightest problem
1. Implementers fail in ASEAN vision or international cooperation viewpoint	n	7	30	35	25	9
	%	6.6	28.3	33.0	23.6	8.5
2. Implementer shortage and work overload	n	17	34	36	13	6
	%	16.0	32.1	34.0	12.3	5.7
3. Officers pay less attention to policy implementation and neglect monitoring	n	9	26	40	18	12
	%	8.6	24.8	38.1	17.1	11.4

Situation		heaviest problem	heavy problem	moderate problem	slight problem	slightest problem
4. Officers have insufficient understanding about policy implementation	n	6	28	43	19	9
	%	5.7	26.7	41.0	18.1	8.6
5. Lack of communication and coordination between officers and practitioners	n	9	31	42	15	9
	%	8.5	29.2	39.6	14.2	8.5
6. Practitioners have inadequate understanding and lack of skill in program management	n	6	26	42	23	9
	%	5.7	24.5	39.6	21.7	8.5
7. Non-cooperation and participation of teachers and personnel in schools	n	5	13	37	26	22
	%	4.9	12.6	35.9	25.2	21.4
Overall	%	8.0	25.5	37.3	18.9	10.4

Note. ‘Implementers’ refers to state officers, supervisors, and practitioners or teachers

Considering the mean score, Figure 1 shows that teachers overall yielded a degree of problems with a mean total score of 3.02. This score indicates that they considered the problems of policy implementation to be at a moderate level. When compared across items, teachers expressed item (2) as having the highest mean score, which is at the level of “heavy problem”. The other items did not show much difference in the mean scores. They were evaluated from 2.54-3.15; these values were interpreted as being at a moderate level. This reflection is further clarified by the qualitative data.

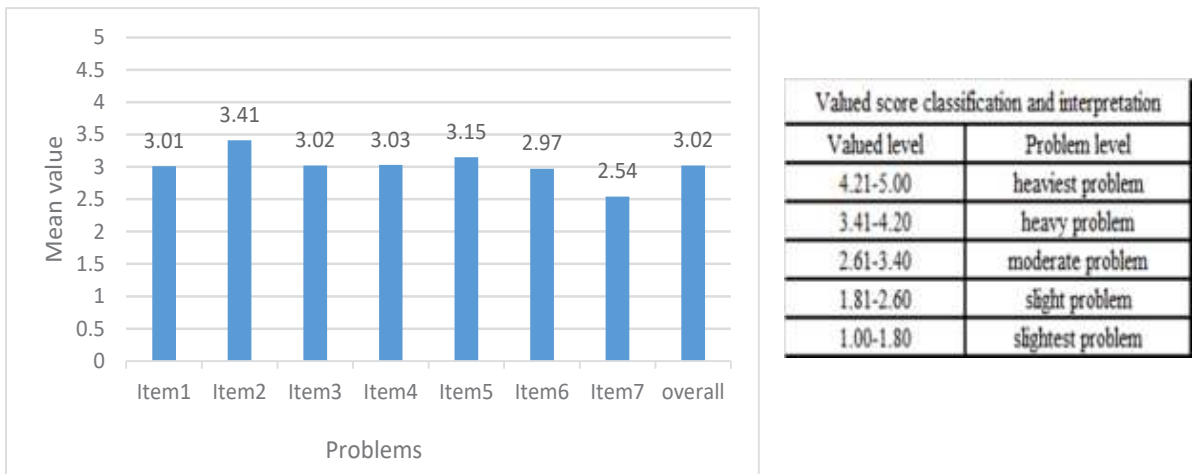


Figure 1. Teachers’ perceptions toward problems in implementing policy at border schools

Data obtained from the qualitative approach reveals that border schools face serious difficulties in policy implementation. In the dimension of personnel recruitment and preparation, teachers as a practitioner were found to have faced several problems and tensions. Problems of central implementers and other circumstances were also found to have affected practitioners.

Teachers expressed feelings of deep hardship in implementing the policy: The practitioners were teachers working in the pilot schools which were small primary schools that

usually faced a critical problem of working staff shortages, placing a heavy burden on them. Most teachers also had to teach students in multiple grades. Some of the teachers explained that:

“We don’t have enough teachers. We feel so exhausted because we have to perform several different duties.”

“Adopting this policy has increased our workload. We attempt to highlight this policy but schools are poor and underequipped. The families of the children are not equal. Those who have money can afford to study in the city.”

“Teachers here are so limited. A teacher needs to teach two grades in the same classroom. The conditions are becoming worse. We have to work hard to implement this policy. Therefore, we cannot do activities effectively.”

The conditions described are similar to those found in other works such as Chaisri and Wisetsiri (2014). They found personnel preparation for entering the ASEAN Community to be a new issue for the schools to deal with which required associating with numerous agencies. The central administration was revealed to have a lack of officers who are responsible for the task of policy implementation and the number of working staff at schools was insufficient. Teachers were found to be overloaded with work and often needed to manage multiple grades at the same time. The Office of the Education Council (2010) also pointed out the major problems on Thai-Cambodian border including teacher-related problems.

Importantly, teachers reflected on the struggle of needing to increase knowledge, ability and skills concerning the ASEAN Community. This was quite new for them at the beginning. None of the practitioners could imagine how the activities would run. The central officers organized a workshop to train teachers in doing activities only once a year and the teachers had few opportunities to exchange and gain knowledge from experts and specialists. This problem was compounded by the limited communication skill of English teachers in some schools and the hiring of foreign teachers was limited due to budget restrictions. Feedback from the teachers included:

“Teachers have poor skill in integrating ASEAN content into classrooms. This task requires knowledge, ability, creativity, and essential skill. If not, it will damage the main course.”

“This policy is new. Promoting ASEAN matters through teaching materials remains limited. Talking about ASEAN in public is rare. Therefore, practitioners have a narrow concept of how to work. For integrating the ASEAN course in the school curriculum, I still do not know in which part of the curriculum we can integrate ASEAN content. We have to improve and expand our knowledge through materials that we create by ourselves. We must keep updating matters from meetings.”

These conditions are in line with the study by Somphong (2013), who found that teachers in schools under the Spirit of ASEAN program have obstacles in terms of readiness preparation for policy implementation, and knowledge, ability and skills concerning ASEAN. Most teachers sought to expand their knowledge. Likewise, Thamrongthanyawong, Thaijongrak, and Kobjaiklang (2016) found maximizing knowledge and understanding about ASEAN, including communication and public relations, to be problems in schools under the Spirit of ASEAN. Similar conditions were found to exist on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Funkhiaw, Chaowakeeratiphong, and Polprasert (2014) found that the region faced various problems including a limitation of personnel capacity. Kwon (2017) found that Thai teachers still struggle

to raise their students' communicative English competency and do not feel adequately trained to implement Communicative Language Teaching successfully. Furthermore, Shin, Brudhiprabha, and Surasin (2014) noted that Thailand is clearly not ready to use English as a lingua franca in 2015 as a part of the ASEAN Community goals. They found that the Thai National Foreign Curriculum did not integrate communication skills on macro and micro levels.

Frequently replacing and shifting teachers at border schools is another problem in regards to implementing policy. This interrupts program implementation and stops it from advancing as it should, especially as newcomers do not understand the policy well and have to constantly be trained on its basic principles. Often they think that they are just expected to resume the tasks of previous staff and do not devote themselves to taking on new responsibilities. This is in line with findings regarding the context of schools under the Spirit of ASEAN studied by Thamrongthanyawong, Thajongrak, and Kobjaiklang (2016). Their study identified several problems including lack of teaching continuity because teachers often move outside the area. In the interviews, teachers noted that:

“Teachers in the border schools are often replaced and moved around. They may work for two years and then move on. Working staff are not consistent. New teachers do not understand the principles and true objective of this policy.”

“In six years, the school director has been replaced three times. Policy implementation has been interrupted. If the former director was still here, it would be easier to continue because they knew the system well. Newcomers need to learn this project all over from the beginning.”

Teachers need to deal with network building and cooperation with Cambodian schools: Working to build international cooperation is one of the newer goals of basic education in Thailand. Therefore, implementers who have just begun their task do not completely understand the concept of international cooperation. Fortunately, they generally have a positive attitude towards it and see themselves as ready for policy implementation. According to the teachers interviewed:

“It is a new idea. It is a new matter. Practitioners need to keep improving their knowledge. We are ready for new things. I think this is an opportunity within the crisis.”

“Building international cooperation at the school level is a great idea. It further deepens the development process. But, it is very tough. This is different from higher education, where progress is more likely.”

The conditions of international cooperation in border schools is directly related to the study by Boonped and Kosaiyawat (2012). They found that most schools along border were not strong and ready for educational management to respond to ASEAN framework, particularly in network building and academic cooperation with neighboring countries. However, this trend is also found in other border areas around the globe. In Europe, the topic of cross border cooperation has been given special emphasis. The work conducted by Dołzblasz (2013) and Więckowski (2002) shows a variety of instances of border cooperation at the local level along border areas, projects being initiated for promoting cooperation between border regions and consequent assistance provided for overcoming problems. Likewise, Čok and Pertot (2010) also studied educational integration on the border and analyzed the conditions related to the European integration processes.

The limited number of state officers has negatively affected policy implementation:

The policy implementers at OBEC consisted of only one officer who was responsible for several different programs. She was responsible for the Spirit of ASEAN initiative, and had to manage 54 schools divided into 30 Sister Schools and 24 Buffer Schools, including three additional proceeding projects. As a result, she was not able to follow up and monitor the policy implementation consistently, closely, and inclusively. Meanwhile, supervisors under the OESA were assigned to supervise and run several programs, including promoting and expanding ASEAN working plans to cover all affiliated schools. Supervisors responsible for this policy have been replaced several times and the projects that they were implementing have not been followed through as many only work on them for very brief periods. As a result, the promoting, advising, and resolving of issues regarding this policy have not matched the reality of what needs to be done. This dilemma was studied by Jinerawat et al (2017), who noted that when schools try to adopt the policy, most of them struggle due to their small-size, remote location and central administration, such as the bureaucratic system of the Ministry of Education and OBEC, which put pressure on the schools.

Gaps in coordination between state officers, supervisors, and teachers is a serious problem: Teachers noted that communication between state officers and teachers is usually conducted through official letters. Therefore, annual performance reporting, supervising and monitoring are inconsistent and practitioners may feel that they are ignored and not enough given importance. Although teachers and supervisors have close consultation with each other, decision making power mostly rests with state officers. The problem of the frequent shifting of supervisors also interferes with the building of relationships. After exploring the relationships between supervisors and state officers, the current study found poor communication between them. It also revealed a lack of decision making power in certain important areas. Overall, this study has observed a problem of an overly complex coordination mechanism of the central administration. It involves provincial representatives at several levels who do coordinate plans in advance. This condition puts schools into a subordinate role where they must carry the heaviest burden since they have to follow orders from several different agencies. One school deputy director noted:

“In the bureaucratic system, all things must follow rules and process. It begins with OBEC, then OESA, and eventually at the school. Sometimes, it has to go through the Regional Education Office beforehand, which sometimes assigns tasks directly to the school. Central administration employs very complex coordination. The regional office is very poor at communicating. For example, when we are called to join a meeting we must travel very far but the meeting lasts for only a half of day. It is a difficult journey for us. We return home without any benefit. It is not worth the effort. Forwarding relevant information is often delayed and is not inclusive. It makes the school miss opportunities. We receive official letters occasionally. Sometimes they are not on time.”

The study by Boonped and Kosaiyawat (2012) supports this. They found that schools along the border have faced a major problem in coordinating with agencies, with agencies each formulating their own policy which is not designed to work in conjunction with those of other organizations. A survey study conducted by Somphong (2013) revealed a similar lack of coordination between schools and central units for policy monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

Evidence obtained from examination the actual conditions of Thai border school operations indicates that teachers as a practitioners of emerging policy implementation experience numerous problems. The recruiting and preparing of personnel for policy implementation face a serious problem with working staff shortages and work overload both at central and local levels. The supervisors who supervise and support teachers in running projects and activities are often shifted to other posts and work is interrupted. Importantly, teachers face a serious problem of developing the necessary skills and knowledge concerning ASEAN at the beginning of policy implementation. Furthermore, teachers in Thai border schools have to try to obtain cooperation from their Cambodian counterparts, who generally have a more limited basic education system. Also, this study has revealed a coordination gap between state officers, supervisors, and teachers.

In addition, implementing emerging Thai border school policy is also problematic in other dimensions. In the policy design, for example, schools face a variety of budgetary problems and schools have to deal with standardization as specified in the policy goals. In terms of operating units, for example, schools face the problem of readiness for implementing the policy. The work of the central implementing units also often overlap with other efforts of the schools, leading to confusion. When faced with these difficulties, teachers often develop negative attitudes towards policies.

Based on the current research, it should be recognized that although border schools share various common characteristics, each border school has its own distinct conditions and issues. As in most aspects of modern society, border schools are facing issues related to globalization with which they much deal or be left behind. Education management has made some progress while concurrently facing complicated conditions. In addition to working towards effective and sustainable policy implementation, maintaining a positive attitude among all stakeholders is essential for ultimately achieving policy goals.

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