

Promoting Global English while Forging Young Northeastern Thai Learners' Identity

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ABSTRACT

Globally, English is used as a central means of communication; regionally, English has been endorsed as the working language for ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Therefore, the need to improve Thai citizens' English has become imperative. However, Thai learners' English language performance has been quite unsatisfactory. AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) integration in 2015 and globalisation have brought another concern that 'Thainess' is being eroded due to external influences. Therefore, an effort to maintain, revive, and revitalise 'Thainess' has been exerted. This study aims to enhance Thai students' global English and maintain regional "Thainess" in the northeastern region. Procedural steps in this research were carried out, integrating regional community involvement whenever possible. First, based on the community's prominent characteristics as expressed through the completion of a questionnaire, a set of instructional innovations for elementary English education was constructed and subsequently implemented to a Grade Level 4 class at a school in the northeastern region. Two sets of pre and post-tests were constructed and administered to estimate their knowledge of regional Thainess and English vocabulary at the beginning as opposed to towards the end of the instruction. Finally, the students performed a simulated tour guide task. Their accomplished execution of the task demonstrated their integrated knowledge of Thainess and English, contributing to a sense of pride in the region and a sense of achievement in their English proficiency. In short, with the instructional innovations necessitating community involvement, this research can address the pressing needs triggered by both globalisation and regionalisation.

Keywords: elementary education; English instructional innovations; Thainess; tour guide task; identity

INTRODUCTION

It has been established that, in the era of globalisation, English is used as a central means of communication across national boundaries. However, currently, the role of English is even more apparent in the era of regionalisation. That is, in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region of which Thailand is a member country, English has been endorsed as the working language. Both trends of globalisation and regionalisation have contributed to the influential role of English that permeates all aspects of our daily life, including business, education, technology, science, etc.

The trends of globalisation and regionalisation not only contribute to the increasing importance of English but also highlight the need for serious attempts to improve Thai citizens' English. Otherwise, Thailand will not be able to compete with other nations both regionally and internationally. However, despite many decades of English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand and a huge budget allocated for English education, the English language learning outcome as assessed by, for instance, national examinations (O-NET or Ordinary National Education Test and GAT or General Aptitude Test) has been unsatisfactory (Kanoksilapatham 2007, 2009, Kirkpatrick 2010, Prapphal 2003, Wongsothorn, Hiranburana & Chinnawongs 2003).

The situation of Thai students' underachievement in English has become exacerbated in scale and scope when Thai citizens are to compete with those from other nations. For

instance, the TOEFL scores of test takers from Thailand are comparatively much lower than those from many countries who are not native speakers of English (ETS 2009, 2011, 2014). The performance triggers the possible alarm that Thailand will lose its ground, resulting in a huge influx of immigrants who have a better chance of getting well-paid jobs in ASEAN.

The poor performance in English as assessed by both national and international tests has stimulated a number of scholars to try to identify possible causes, with the hope to ameliorate Thai ELT. The following factors have been identified to be responsible for the unsatisfactory outcome: under-qualified teachers with an overload of responsibilities resulting in the inability to perform the role of a language role model for students (Kanoksilapatham 2010, 2013); students' lack of opportunities to use, or be exposed to, English in an authentic situation, making them feel that English learning is quite irrelevant to their daily life (Karnnawakul 2004, Kimsuwan 2004), and inadequate and inappropriate instructional materials, making students feel uninterested in the lessons (Rajabi 2012).

For instance, Marina and Rajprasit (2016) conducted an interesting study that highlights the crucial role of the opportunities to use English in developing a set of communicative strategies or so-called 'communication mobility' in the workplace. This study compares 60 Thai and Russian professionals (30 each) working in international companies and agencies in the Bangkok and Moscow metropolitan areas with regard to their perceived abilities to employ communication mobility. Based on the analysis of the completed questionnaires, Russian participants were rated as good users of communication mobility, whereas Thai counterparts were rated as fair users. Moreover, among a number of personal factors (including age, work experience, their perceived oral proficiency level, frequency of their meeting attendance conducted in English, and frequency of English usage at their workplace), across the two groups, the frequency of English language use in the workplace was identified to be the only factor that potentially predicts these professionals' perceived communication mobility. The findings implicate that Thai nationals need to strive to be successful at English communication in the workplace. In so doing, they are obliged to embrace all of the opportunities to use English.

AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) integration towards the end of 2015 has brought another exciting challenge to Thailand. It has been a concern for many scholars that *Thainess* is declining due to a number of external influences (Howard 2012, Laungaramsri 2003, Simpson & Thammasathien 2007). One of the external influences is the English language that embraces all manifestations including entertainment, business and education. Therefore, an effort to maintain, revive, and revitalise *Thainess* has been exerted. The advent of AEC integration in 2015 also marks a new chapter for Thailand, allowing the free flow of ASEAN citizens in the form of tourists, investors, and people engaging in other professions into the country, making it even harder to maintain *Thainess*. In short, *Thainess* is potentially vulnerable.

This study aims to address the two putative conflicting forces by both enhancing Thai students' global English and maintaining *Thainess*. *Thainess*, as defined in this study, by extension, refers to a cluster of prominent characteristics pertaining to one specific area of Thailand (be they geographical, historical, architectural, cultural, or environmental). Whereas the urban areas of Thailand seem to enjoy the privilege of having access or exposure to English language input, the rural areas are relatively deprived of language facilities and thus deserve our attention here. The study being presented here represents the first phase of a three-year research project focusing on three different regional contexts of Thailand: northeastern, northern, and southern Thailand. In short, this study specifically focuses on the northeastern 'regional *Thainess*'. Correspondingly, northeastern regional *Thainess* in this study refers to a cluster of prominent characteristics pertaining to the northeastern region of Thailand.

This objective was accomplished through the implementation of a set of instructional innovations devised for the elementary English education in the northeastern region of Thailand. The topics of the lessons were initially determined by the needs of the regional community as voiced through the completion of a questionnaire. Based on the lesson topics generated by the community, the innovations were constructed and implemented to a Grade Level 4 class of a school in the focused region. Two sets of pre/post-tests were constructed and administered to the students to estimate their regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary knowledge, both before and after instruction, and to observe knowledge gain at the end of instruction. To ensure that the knowledge gained from the instruction was put into practical use, a tour guide simulation task was performed by the students. The accomplished execution of the task thus represents their mastery of integrated knowledge of regional *Thainess* and English, contributing to a sense of pride in their own region and achievement in their English proficiency.

METHODS

Thailand consists of a number of regions, each region with its own particular and distinctive features. This study, focusing on the northeastern region, addresses the objectives of assessing the effectiveness of the instructional innovations in terms of 1) maintaining the students' northeastern regional *Thainess* knowledge; 2) enhancing the students' English; and 3) putting the students' integrated knowledge of regional *Thainess* and English into use through a simulated tour guide task. To address these three objectives, the following procedures were conducted.

SELECTING A RESEARCH SITE OR SCHOOL

This study considers elementary education as the grassroots of the whole range of education paradigm. However, in this study, the students need to have some prior basic knowledge of English so that their English knowledge can be enhanced; therefore, students in Grade Level 4 seem to be appropriate for this study for the following two reasons. First, by the time they are fourth graders, they must have some English knowledge that can be further developed. Second, this grade level of students, as well as teachers and school administrators, are free from worries and stress imposed by the national examinations like ONET, which is required for all Grade level 6 students nationwide.

At this juncture, the selection of the school in the region to participate in this project was conducted with help from local educational administrators in the region. In addition to the local educational administrators, selection criteria include that the principal of the school should be ready to cooperate and make necessary arrangements to accommodate the implementation of instructional innovations for a total period of eleven weeks (one week of introduction, eight weeks of instruction, and two weeks for mid-way and final assessments), two class periods for each week. Preferably, one classroom of Grade Level 4 was selected regardless of its scholastic performance, socioeconomic status, and gender. A school with facilities like computers and projectors was preferred so that multimedia materials developed to accompany the instructional innovations for this research could be fully exploited for the benefit of language learning and the appreciation of regional *Thainess*. Finally, access to the school should be manageable for ease of travel to the research site and for safety reasons.

It should be noted that the implementation was considered an intervention which means that the students continued with their regular class schedule as much as possible, with two class periods each week when they were pulled out to participate in this research project.

Based on the criteria described above, one school was selected, and one class of Grade Level 4, comprising 37 students was selected from that school. After the site was selected, the researcher formally contacted the principal for official permission and other necessary arrangements for the project.

CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY GENERATED ENGLISH INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS

Since a school is a part of the community, giving the community a chance to identify community issues or specific concerns that are related to community development, and enabling the students to serve their respective community needs will likely yield a positive outcome. In order to construct community based instructional innovations in English, it is imperative to identify primarily the topics of the lessons. In order to identify a set of regional *Thainess* that would, in turn, be the topics of the instructional innovations, the community members from diverse walks of life in the region (school teachers and administrators, businessmen, local politicians, nurses, police officers) played a crucial role. To emphasise, the northeastern regional features or the instructional innovation topics of this study including arts, history, geography, environment, culture, local wisdom, tradition, environment, and architecture were identified. Based on the information obtained from the Internet search, a questionnaire consisting of 25 items representing diverse features and characteristics of the northeastern region was produced. Then, regional community members from all of the 20 provinces in the northeast region ($n = 1,100$) were requested to help identify a set of ten prominent regional *Thainess* features in the region from the list that they think northeasterners should have knowledge of. The popularity of each item based on a total of 985 questionnaires collected was recorded and ranked. Only the top eight most popular topics were selected to be the topics of the lessons. In short, this stage illustrates the attempts to integrate community involvement into the construction of the lessons, resulting in community based instructional innovations and reflecting the actual needs of the community.

Based on the eight topics obtained, five of them are regional tourist attractions (*Ban Chiang, Phanom Rung Stone Castle, Pha Taem or Painting Cliff, Phra Thai Phanom, and Phimai Stone Castle*) and the other three are traditions (*Rocket Festival, Bun Pha Wet, and Candle Festival*). To verify that the list of topics represents the northeastern region and addresses the objective of this study, the list was presented to two elementary school teachers who were also community members in the region for verification in terms of the representativeness of the topics and the possible sequence of the topics. Upon the teachers' approval of the topics and based on the information available from the Internet and other sources like books and tourism pamphlets, a set of instructional innovations consisting of eight lessons were constructed. The content of the eight instructional innovations related to the eight topics initially searched from diverse sources was linguistically modified to a certain extent to be appropriate for the young age of the students. For instance, certain constructions that are cognitively challenging for Grade Level 4 students (passive construction, extraposed *it* construction, complex sentences) are avoided in order not to intimidate these young learners.

All of the eight lessons share more or less the same format. That is, each lesson begins with a set of ten vocabulary items which are related to individual lesson topics (Numan 1991, Luan & Suppathy 2011) and accompanied by their Thai translation, a practice which was found to be facilitating and beneficial (Joyce 2015, Liu 2008). Following the word list are a number of English sentences (5-7 sentences of about 60-80 words) containing all of the words previously presented. Figure 1 presents an example of a lesson constructed. It is about *Prasat Hin Phimai* or *Phimai Stone Castle*, one of the most popular tourist attractions in the northeast of Thailand.

Lesson 8
Prasat Hin Phimai



Vocabulary

castle	ปราสาท
biggest	ใหญ่ที่สุด
beautiful	สวย
century	ศตวรรษ
capital	เมืองหลวง
rectangular	สี่เหลี่ยมผืนผ้า
pond	บึง
gate	ประตู
link	ทางเชื่อม
earth	โลก

Prasat Hin Phimai or Phimai Stone **Castle** is in Phimai Historical Park, Nakhon Ratchasima Province (Korat).

The castle is Khmer in style.

The castle is the **biggest** and the most **beautiful** in Thailand.

A Khmer king built the castle in the 16th or 17th **century**.

The castle faces south, towards the **capital** of the Khmer Kingdom.

The castle is **rectangular**, with four **ponds** and four **gates**.

The castle is a **link** between the **earth** and heaven.

FIGURE 1. Lesson on Prasat Hin Phimai or Phimai Stone Castle

In addition to the lessons, accompanying multimedia materials were constructed to scaffold learners in the task of learning. For instance, PowerPoint slides and movie clips on the topics produced based on the actual visits to sites were included to make the lesson more vivid and to facilitate the students' understanding of the lessons. The lessons were later endorsed by a native speaker of English for the accuracy of the English language used, and subsequently by an English school teacher to ascertain that the English language used in the lessons was appropriate for Grade level 4 students. Also, to partly compensate for the lack of exposure to English spoken by a native speaker in certain areas of the region, recordings accompanying individual lessons in English were made, containing an account of the lessons delivered at a speed appropriate for young learners. These recordings were produced by a female native American who was a faculty member of a public university in northeastern Thailand. Using a Voice Recorder, a convenient and simple online tool, she could record her voice using a microphone and save it as an mp3 file. These audio recordings not only provided these students with accurate language input, but also served as a tool to connect what the students had seen in the movie clips, potentially facilitating language learning and reinforcing the knowledge of their own region.

CONSTRUCTING ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

In this study, a number of assessment instruments were constructed to assess Thai learners' regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary: regional *Thainess* pre/post-test, vocabulary pre-test/post-test, hand-outs as a scaffold for the simulation tour guide task, and scoring rubrics.

First, to assess Thai learners' regional *Thainess* knowledge, a pre/post-test of 40 items in Thai was constructed based on the contents of eight instructional lessons. The students were required to complete the blanks with the needed information about a tourist spot named *Pha Taem* or *Painting Cliff*. These items are presented to the students in Thai. As shown in Figure 2, the test items originally in Thai were translated into English.

<p>Pha Taem (Lesson 6)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In order to conserve <i>Pha Taem</i>, the National Park Department has designated <i>Pha Taem</i> as a _____. 2. <i>Pha Taem</i> is in the province of _____. 3. <i>Pha Taem</i> is a high cliff with a number of paintings of about _____ years old. 4. The paintings found at <i>Pha Taem</i> are _____ in color. 5. <i>Pha Taem</i> is the spot that people can see _____ before anybody else in Thailand.
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FIGURE 2. Pre/post-test items on regional *Thainess*

Similarly, to assess the students' knowledge of English vocabulary, a pre/post-test of 40 vocabulary items representing five selected vocabulary items from each of the eight lessons was constructed. This instrument was primarily designed to enhance their vocabulary repertoire, providing the students with a means to express ideas in English. Therefore, the task was not meant to test the students' writing or spelling skills. To be appropriate for the young age of the students, in this test, the students were required to listen to individual words read and then choose one of the four pictures matching the word heard. For instance, in Figure 3, the word 'rocket' was produced, so the students were supposed to circle the letter d. as an answer.

Name: _____ No. _____

Directions: For each item, one word is read twice. Circle the letter a, b, c, or d that corresponds to the word produced.

1.





a) 	b) 
c) 	d) 

FIGURE 3. Vocabulary Pre/Post-test

For each of the two tests, the total is 40 points. Also based on the instructional materials constructed, hand-outs as a scaffold for the simulation tour guide task were constructed. A set of three or four colourful pictures pertaining to each lesson provides visual clues to the task. At this juncture, similar to the instructional materials, to make sure that the contents of all the tests described above were not too daunting, and the length was appropriate for the young age of the students, all instruments above were approved by a social science teacher and an English teacher of a school in the region.

IMPLEMENTING AND ASSESSING THE INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS

A period of ten weeks (two class periods per week) was set aside for the implementation of instructional innovations, as well as midway and final assessments (one week each). However, one additional week prior to the instruction was needed to get acquainted with the school, students, and setting. It was also in this class that general information about this research project was given to the students, and two pre-tests (on regional *Thainess* and vocabulary) were completed by the students and subsequently marked and scored. Also in this first class meeting, an overview of the region including a number of key words in English was presented (*north, east, west, south, river, province, district, dialect, and language*). It was required that at least one school teacher of English be in the class throughout the research

project for the purpose of observing and providing feedback towards the end of the instruction. In the following eight weeks, typical procedures were as follows. Initially, the hand-outs corresponding to individual lessons were produced and distributed to the students. The instruction began with the introduction of a set of vocabulary, followed by a reading which consists of five to seven sentences (or about 60-80 words). A number of language activities that reinforce the understanding of the words and the reading texts were conducted. Then, the colourful slides and movie clips accompanying individual lessons were shown to the students. Towards the end of each lesson, the students were reminded of the dictation task in a subsequent class. The dictation task at the beginning of the subsequent class consisting of five words from each lesson was conducted, and the scores were awarded. This task served as a device and an incentive to encourage the students to study the words learned in class, and thus the dictation scores were recorded but not analysed. Every classroom session was audio-visually recorded for future reference and scrutiny.

In order to assess the implementation of the instructional materials (by using the post-tests on regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary and a tour guide simulation task) without making these Grade 4 learners feel too overwhelmed, each original pre-test and post-test on regional Thailand and vocabulary (40 items each) was split into two halves. The first half of the post-test was administered after the completion of Lesson 4 (*Candle Festival*), and the other half after the completion of Lesson 8 (*Phimai Stone Castle*).

Similarly, a tour guide simulation task was administered twice, after Lesson 4 (*Candle Festival*) and Lesson 8 (*Phimai Stone Castle*). The tour guide task was performed on an individual basis. No time limit was fixed, and the students were welcome to carry out the task when they were ready. With the provision of the pictures in front of them, they were to describe what was seen in English. The purpose of the task is to check whether these students were able to integrate the knowledge of regional *Thainess* with the English knowledge.

A scoring rubric was created, allocating a total of ten points for this task (four points each for the content and language used, and two points for intelligibility). The tour guide task was selected to assess the students' integrated knowledge of regional *Thainess* and English because it allowed the students to take the role of a knowledgeable person in the community, sharing their knowledge in English with someone who does not belong to the community. The execution of the task was also recorded, contributing to a more accurate assessment of the students' performance of the task when necessary.

DATA ANALYSIS

The pre-test and post-test scores of regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary were analysed and compared, using descriptive statistics and observing gain scores over time. The recordings of the classroom in action for the period of ten weeks were reviewed, the dictation scores were examined to observe general patterns of betterment, and the scores of the tour guide task performed were scrutinised, in addition to the assessment based on the rubric constructed. These reveal some interesting insights regarding their English performance and their knowledge of their regional *Thainess*.

RESULTS

The school selected for this study is one of the municipality schools in Mueang District of Roi Et Province and has a total of 692 students (Figure 4). The school offers classes ranging from kindergarten to junior high. As far as elementary education is concerned, there are 280 students in Grade Levels 1-6. Each grade level has only one class. The Grade Level 4 class,

the focus of this study consists of 37 students (17 of them are boys and 20 are girls). However, not all students attended the class regularly. Therefore, the ultimate pool of 36 students includes those who participated in the pre/post-tests of regional knowledge and English vocabulary and a tour guide simulation task.



FIGURE 4. Municipality School in Roi Et Province

REGIONAL THAINESS KNOWLEDGE

As previously described, the results of this study were obtained from multiple sources. At this juncture, because of the students' young age, administering the tests in entirety might be too overwhelming and possibly stressful. Therefore, to avoid these unpleasant effects, the tests on regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary were split into two halves. The first half of the pre-tests (or pre-test 1) was administered before Lesson 1 and the second half (or pre-test 2) before Lesson 5. Similarly, the first half of the post-tests was administered after Lesson 4, and the second half after Lesson 8. The scores of pre-tests 1 and 2 and of post-tests 1 and 2 together are referred to as combined scores.

First, with the focus on regional *Thainess* knowledge, Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics conducted on the pre-test scores, and Table 2 post-tests scores, respectively.

TABLE 1. Pre-test scores on regional *Thainess*

	Pre-test 1 (20 points)	Pre-test 2 (20 points)	Combined Pre-test (40 points)
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	6	5	9
Average	2.84	1.38	4.22

TABLE 2. Post-test scores on regional *Thainess*

	Post-test 1 (20 points)	Post-test 2 (20 points)	Combined Post-test (40 points)
Minimum	9	5	16
Maximum	20	20	40
Average	14.03	13.08	27.11

The analysis of the students' combined pre-test scores administered on regional *Thainess* knowledge as reported in Table 1 revealed that out of a total of 40 points, the minimum score of the class was 0, the maximum was 9, and the average pre-test score was 4.22, which clearly suggests that the students, at the beginning of the project, generally possessed minimal knowledge of regional *Thainess*.

In the two post-tests conducted after Lessons 4 and 8 on regional *Thainess* knowledge as reported in Table 2, the analysis of the combined scores shows that the minimum score of the class was 16, and the maximum was 40. The average score across the entire class was 27.11, which is drastically higher than their combined pre-test scores of 4.22. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the students performed much better on the post-test on regional *Thainess*, indicating the students' knowledge gain about northeastern *Thainess* after their exposure to the implementation of the instructional innovations.

A comparison of average gain scores pertaining to pre-tests and post-tests was performed by a paired *t*-test. The significant increase in mean scores at $p < 0.01$ ($t = 24.86$, $p = 0.000$) indicates a significant increase of regional *Thainess*. This finding substantiates the positive impact of the instructional innovations in developing their regional *Thainess* knowledge.

ENGLISH VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

The descriptive statistical analysis of the students' pre-test and post-test scores on English vocabulary knowledge is shown in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 3. Pre-test scores on English vocabulary

	Pre-test 1 (20 points)	Pre-test 2 (20 points)	Combined Pre-test (40 points)
Minimum	4	3	8
Maximum	12	4	25
Average	6.95	7.35	14.29

TABLE 4. Post-test scores on English vocabulary

	Post-test 1 (20 points)	Post-test 2 (20 points)	Combined Post-test (40 points)
Minimum	11	10	24
Maximum	20	20	40
Average	16.39	17.11	33.70

The results revealed that out of a total of 40 points, the minimum pre-test score of the class was 8 and the maximum was 25, as shown in Table 3, resulting in a class average score of 14.29. These findings clearly suggest that the students, at the beginning of the project, generally possessed some knowledge of English vocabulary related to northeastern regional *Thainess*.

In the two post-tests conducted after Lessons 4 and 8 on English vocabulary knowledge, to assess the students' possible knowledge gain after their exposure to the instruction, an analysis of the combined scores, as displayed in Table 4, shows that the minimum score of the class was 24, and the maximum was 40. The average gain score was 33.70. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores demonstrated that the students performed better on the post-test, indicating the students' knowledge gain of the English vocabulary related to northeastern *Thainess* through the implementation of the instructional innovations.

A paired *t*-test conducted on the average gain scores on English vocabulary suggest a significant increase in mean scores at $p < 0.01$ ($t = 32.08$, $p = 0.000$), indicating a significant increase of English vocabulary knowledge. This finding corroborates the positive impact of the instructional innovations in developing not only their regional *Thainess* awareness but also their English vocabulary knowledge.

TOUR GUIDE SIMULATION TASK

Individual students' performance of the simulated tour guide task in English, which requires their integrated knowledge of regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary, was assessed based on the rubric described earlier. Two tour guide tasks were performed: after Lessons 4 and 8. Out of ten points for each of the eight lessons, the average scores for individual lessons are 6.03, 5.38, 5.24, 5.87, 6.84, 6.05, 6.54, and 6.16. The mean values clearly suggest that the students were somewhat successful in integrating two bodies of knowledge in executing the task.

In addition to these objective assessments, the observations made based on the instruction and the viewing of the audio-visual recordings demonstrated that these young Grade Level 4 learners were enthusiastic about the instructional innovations, especially the movie clips of the sites and traditions, highlighting their identity as a northeasterner. Classroom observations throughout the eight weeks of instruction also allowed us to monitor student motivation, a crucial contributing factor to learning. Towards the end of each lesson, when time permitted, the students would often ask if it was possible for them to view the movie clips again. Moreover, towards the end of the project, the students requested that the lessons be offered to them in the future. Although this paper did not intend to address the issue of motivation to begin with, and thus no objective assessment of student motivation was devised, the observations reported above clearly suggest that the students' motivation in learning English was enhanced.

DISCUSSION

This research study was based on the premise that while it is obvious that Thai learners of English need to be better equipped with the English language, knowledge of their *Thainess* also needs to be instilled, particularly in young learners. Therefore, this paper focuses on enhancing young learners' regional culture awareness and English. In this study, the instructional innovations of eight lessons and their accompanying multimedia materials were initially devised based on community involvement. Subsequently, the materials were implemented to 37 students in a school in a province of the northeast of Thailand for a total period of 11 weeks.

In addition to the construction of the instructional materials, a number of assessment instruments were constructed, including two separate pre/post-tests (on regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary), and a tour guide task as well as its scoring rubric. Regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary pre-tests were administered prior to instruction. Post-tests of regional *Thainess* and English vocabulary were administered after instruction. The significant gain scores of regional *Thainess* and English towards the end of the instruction demonstrate that the instructional innovations were successful in developing the students' regional knowledge and English, the skills that empower them in real life situations.

This study yields a number of interesting observations. First, this study highlights the pivotal role played by a set of carefully designed instructional innovations. That is, in this study, community based curriculum or instructional innovations were administered to the respective community, contributing to the long lasting and sustainable growth of the northeastern community. This study also illustrates the collaboration among diverse sectors involved including educational administrators and school teachers of social science and English. From the students' perspective, the lessons focus on regional tourist attractions and traditions which allow them to make close and direct connections to the content of the lessons, facilitating their comprehension and enhancing their sense of identity.

Second, to assess their integrated knowledge of English and regional *Thainess* in performing a simulated tour guide task, based on the scoring rubric, a large number of students were able to successfully execute the task. The mastery of the content (regional *Thainess*) facilitates the conducting of the task because the students got actively involved in language interaction, willing to communicate about a particular aspect of regional identity rather than memorising grammar or vocabulary that may seem arbitrary. This finding bears certain crucial pedagogical implications, underpinning the principal role of language as a means of communication. Additionally, this finding highlights the significance of a set of vocabulary items that need to be initially activated and contextualised. Subsequently, language tasks need to be carefully designed to provide a realistic opportunity for learners to use them in a meaningful way.

Third, this study also illustrates the benefits of constructing instructional materials integrating multimedia materials like movie clips and slides. In this study, many of the students in the class admitted that they had heard about the places and traditions which are in turn the topics of the lessons. However, unfortunately, they did not have an opportunity to visit the sites or to witness the celebration of the traditions deeply rooted in the northeast. As a result, multimedia materials accompanying the lessons provide almost real transition to those places. At this juncture, a word of caution is needed here. Although the availability of multimedia materials might be crucial for young learners' learning, they cannot and should not be used without scaffolding from teachers particularly prior to the viewing. For instance, in this study, a set of words were primarily activated to enable these young learners to understand and appreciate the significance and relevance of these words. Then, the pronunciation of these words was emphasised to enhance their confidence in uttering these words. Finally, sentences containing these words were presented to the class. In short, despite the merits of the multimedia materials, they should not be employed as standalone materials. As for the vocabulary test, the task was to expose the students to the tasks of pronunciation and determining meaning. Four visual clues for each item provide pleasure and fun, and a positive attitude towards the task.

This study opts to use the simulated tour guide task as a measure of their integrated knowledge. In this scenario, the task seems very appropriate in providing the students an avenue to use English. At the moment, the chance for Thai learners in rural areas to be exposed to English speaking people in their daily life activities is limited. However, recently, the Thai government has implemented a strategy to reinforce Thailand's position as the tourism hub of Southeast Asia. Therefore, the students are obliged to conduct their simulated tour guide task in the English language. Moreover, the tour guide task represents an opportunity for the students, in the capacity of knowledgeable persons, to demonstrate their regional *Thainess* knowledge. By the end of the instruction and with the input from the lessons, conducting a simulated tour guide task might not be too daunting. It is expected that some students, if the chance permits, can earn extra money to help support their families. Academically, they will become motivated to make full use of what they learn at school and put it to practical use for the benefit of the community.

This study bears a number of pedagogical implications. First, an English class can provide an avenue to integrate the regional characteristics into an English lesson. As shown in this study, the students came to the classroom with minimal knowledge of their own region. However, through the innovations, they have proved to be knowledgeable of their own regional identity. In this case, an English class can be successful, activating and making good use of students' regional background knowledge. That is, the students in this study could successfully execute the task that might be considered daunting and intimidating for some individuals. To elaborate, the task that matched their already activated schema became manageable. In the tour guide task, after hours of instruction, the students became familiar

with the regional contexts, providing a sense of security and guaranteeing successful execution. At this juncture, the interplay between regional *Thainess* and the English language has proved to be mutually beneficial. Teachers are in fact only facilitators, creating an avenue for students to put their knowledge into use.

Second, the findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of regional *Thainess* features and global English is potentially beneficial. However, adequate scaffolding must be adequately provided by the teachers. The selection of a tour guide simulation task seemed to be appropriate for this study as it represents a natural way to elicit authentic use of English that the students are likely to encounter in their actual life. Moreover, the instructional innovations that incorporate audio-visual materials seem to appeal to the digital native learners of Generation Z, who will grow in a world where all forms of social media are part of their everyday life (Prensky 2001). In this regard, images are likely to promote and enhance comprehension and pique learners' interest, allowing students to associate unfamiliar words with familiar concepts of traditions and cultures in their region.

Third, this study implicates that commercial textbooks written for an international audience seem to be of limited value. As shown in this study, locally generated instructional materials seem to be more fruitful, allowing their regional identity to be fostered while enhancing their English.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study depicts a possible scenario in which regional *Thainess* can be vulnerable, threatened or lost without proper maintenance and revitalisation. To address this issue, with the concern of the loss of regional *Thainess* at all levels and the concern that Thai people are not capable in English, this study opts to both enhance Thai learners' English and while maintaining and reviving regional *Thainess*. As demonstrated, regional *Thainess* literacy, in addition to English literacy, is indispensable for the sustainable growth of the country. This study in short highlights the multi educational values of community-based instructional innovations. As known, creating instructional materials is an arduous job because it involves a number of challenges. However, integrating learners' regional *Thainess* helps learners enjoy learning English, because they may feel autonomous and independent in using language to talk about their own region. Regionally generated materials constructed for English language education can be successfully offered by the community and for the community. In short, in this study, the students can be more proficient in English in addition to being knowledgeable about their own regional identity.

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