Development of an e-Learning Management Model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to (1) garner a working-model list of factors critical to successful management of e-learning; (2) develop an e-learning management model for private English language institutes in southern Thailand; and (3) evaluate the e-learning management model for private English language institutes in southern Thailand. The tools were document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The results showed that the crucial factors of an e-learning management model for private English language institutes in southern Thailand consisted of 6 factors: 1) Technology Factors: including Hardware and Software Quality and Age, Technology Infrastructure, and WIFI Availability and Quality; 2) Learner factors, including mentoring, counseling, monitoring, and motivation; 3) Course factors (including course structure, course content, and new applications); 4) Course Administration Factors, including Quality Control, Assessment, and Accreditation; 5) Instructor Factors: This encompasses the appearance of teachers, their adjustments, and their training and observation. 6) Emergency-situation factors encompass the forced adoption of e-learning, change, risks, and fear.

Keywords: e-Learning; Model Development; Private English Language Institutes; Southern Thailand

Introduction

This Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007-change, brought into effect in 2009, marks a complete turnaround for Thai education on the world stage: moving away from nine years of compulsory education toward fifteen years of free education, which according to The World Bank's DataBank World Development Indicators (Shobande, 2018) means Thailand formerly ranked one year below the world average of ten years for Thailand's nine years of compulsory education, thus, according to the same World Development Indicators, and since this leap to fifteen years of free education was made, Thailand has now moved up to the top of the rankings, bettered only by the sixteen years of "compulsory" education for Venezuela and Guatemala (World Bank, 2018). The students from primary through upper-secondary schools, all the way up to university levels are affected by the low level of English ability, as this interview with a leading Thai professor by a Bangkok Post Newspaper journalist report: "Paron Israsena, who sits on the boards of Chulalongkorn and Chiang Mai universities, was unfortunately correct in his interview with this newspaper on Sunday. "Most Thai students coming out of universities cannot communicate in English," he said. The reasons are clear. From Prathom 1 (first year) through university, government-run language teaching is almost universally rote, unimaginative and presented with no motivation. In most schools, the distinct lack of qualified language teachers is another ingredient in the mix for failure" (Bangkok Post, 2012).

e-Learning as an education delivery system, is gaining momentum in our increasingly technology-reliant modern society, both within Thailand and most other countries around the world, especially due to the COVID19 pandemic, which struck the world at a later stage of this study. There already existed a symbiotic relationship between the internet and e-Learning, which can be explained by their dual proximity and shared internet platform. Additionally, use of this technology is arguably a form of e-Learning in itself, as we invariably gain new knowledge with each use. Moreover, the vast majority of internet content is in English, which also further establishes a convincing case for the symbiotic-relational claim between the internet and English-language e-Learning in this research, In Thailand embraced e-Learning at an early stage of the term's development in aspects of self-study online learning and training. As one of the earliest examples in Thailand, the Distance Learning Foundation (DLF) established the web site 'www.dlf.ac.th' e-Learning Service in 2002, shortly followed by the National E-learning Centre being authorised by the Council of Ministers in March 2003, to provide self-study e-learning and e-training services as a resource for all learners (Pagram & Pagram, 2006). The Thai government

also established a knowledge-based plan under the National Information Technology (IT) policy framework (Chandoevwit, 2010). The vision was to provide Internet access to Thais, promote the use of IT for lifelong education, and efficiently improve quality of life and the environment (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2008). This was the first step in incorporating e-Learning into mainstream Thai education (Panyajamorn, 2018).

For e-Learning to succeed in Thailand, critical success factors such as sufficient user training, technical support, and sufficient training of engineers must be observed (Alhomod & Shafi, 2013). It is also crucial for institutions to develop and maintain solid e-Learning management practices that will ensure the continuous development of e-Learning materials and provide the support needed to maintain the system and keep it running efficiently. Technological e-Learning programmes should be flexible and provide a clear direction to learners for the process to be beneficial. The barriers that stand in the way of effective e-Learning specifically in private English language institutes in Southern Thailand are resolvable through the implementation of an e-Learning management model. This management model would conceivably result in enhanced English language proficiency among Thai online learners of private language Institutes in Southern Thailand, and moreover, the model could feasibly be applied to English language e-Learning generally throughout the region and conceivably the entire nation.

This research paper presents the development of an e-learning management model for private English language institutes in Southern Thailand.

Research Objectives

1. to garner a working-model list of factors critical to successfully managing e-Learning.

2. to develop an e-learning management model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand.

3. to evaluate the e-Learning management model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand.

Literature Review

In relation to the research objectives, the literature review related to this study has been divided into four areas:

1) Thai students with learning English

Thai students learn English in school from as young as 3-years of age (Anuban 1, or the equivalent of kindergarten 1). In 1996, English was made compulsory for all primary students from grade one onwards (Wongsothorn et al., 2002). Students studying the Thai equivalent of K-12 will have studied a total of 15-years of English lessons according to the present incarnation of the Thai Ministry of Education's prescribed national English curriculum. Despite the high number of periods spent studying English, Thai students continue to show low scores in their English language ability (Noom-ura, 2013). Thailand recorded Very Low* Proficiency level from EPI's inception until 2017, where the nation moved up one level to Low*. However, EPI data reveals that only the Central Region of the 4 Regions of Thailand has achieved the Low* Proficiency level. The populous of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region justifies the national ascent in EPI level. Population data from the 2010 census by the National Statistical Office reported Bangkok Metropolitan Region population as 14,626,225, the most populous region in Thailand by far (Jack, 2019). and accounted for 46.3 percent of national GDP. Furthermore, in 2016 the OECD and UNESCO found that within Thailand there are significant disparities in student performance between rural and urban areas (Jack, (2019). Oxford Business Group's The Report: Thailand 2017, further adds weight to the urban vs rural divide, "Research has found that students from families with incomes that allow for the hiring of private tutors tend to do better than those from poorer families —a problem that exacerbates the rural-urban divide further." (World Bank, 2018).

2) e-Learning

According to recent literature, the most important benefits of e-Learning are: its effectiveness in educating students, its use in professional development, its cost-effectiveness to combat the rising costs of education, credit equivalency and the 46 possibilities of providing a world class education to anyone with a broadband connection (Koller & Ng, 2014; Lorenzetti, 2013; De la Varre, Keane, & Irvin, 2011; Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley, 2009; Bartley & Golek, 2004, as cited by Nguyen, 2015). One of the major benefits in favour of e-Learning stems from the fact it can be both synchronous & asynchronous (Crichton & LaBonte, 2003). Regular classroom learning is strictly synchronous, as there is a real-live teacher present in the classroom conducting the lesson, meaning learners have to learn at that time. Having the choice between synchronous and asynchronous flexibility affords a choice for learners and the option of repetition at any time (Vassiliou & McAleese, 2014; Charmonman et al., 2009).

3) ELL through e-Learning in Thailand

Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) hit on a number of local factors affecting Southern Thai students and language learners in general, namely technological problems, including internet access, learners' level of technological skills, as well as course design and content, along with clear integrated explanations. Orientation-training to be able to use the online-learning resource was also mentioned as a solution to a potential problem area, as well as providing assistance. Motivation for Thai English language learners to want to learn English has always been elusive. If there is even a mere hope that e-Learning may provide motivation for learners to want to learn English.

4) Management Success Factors in e-Learning

Alhomod and Shafi, (2013) conducted a study on success factors in e-Learning projects, their study revealed that the eleven e-Learning project success factors were: sufficient users' training, organisational commitment, management support, technical support, positive attitude of users, easy to use tools, sufficient training for engineers, sufficient e-Learning initiatives, sufficient manpower, availability of information on the e-Learning website, and support from other departments. In a study on e-Learning in Thai higher education institutes, found that critical success factors for e-Learning implementation were: media and technology, institution and management, instructional design, supporting factors, and evaluation components (Chantanarungpak, 2010). Another Thai study on critical success factors in higher education e-Learning, by Cheawjindakarn et al. (2012), found five similar factors: institutional management, learning environment, instructional design, services support, and course evaluation and go on to itemise a further four elements under Institutional Management: Market Research, Program Framework, Operational Plan and Cost Effectiveness (Cheawjindakarn et al., 2012).

In conclusion, e-Learning is effective in educating students. It is also an inspiration for students to want to study English by the management of the institution learning environment Instructional design Service support and curriculum evaluation.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a research study about development of an e-Learning management model for private English language institutes in southern Thailand. The researcher defines the research conceptual framework based on the concept of factors critical to successful e-Learning management together. The details are as follows.
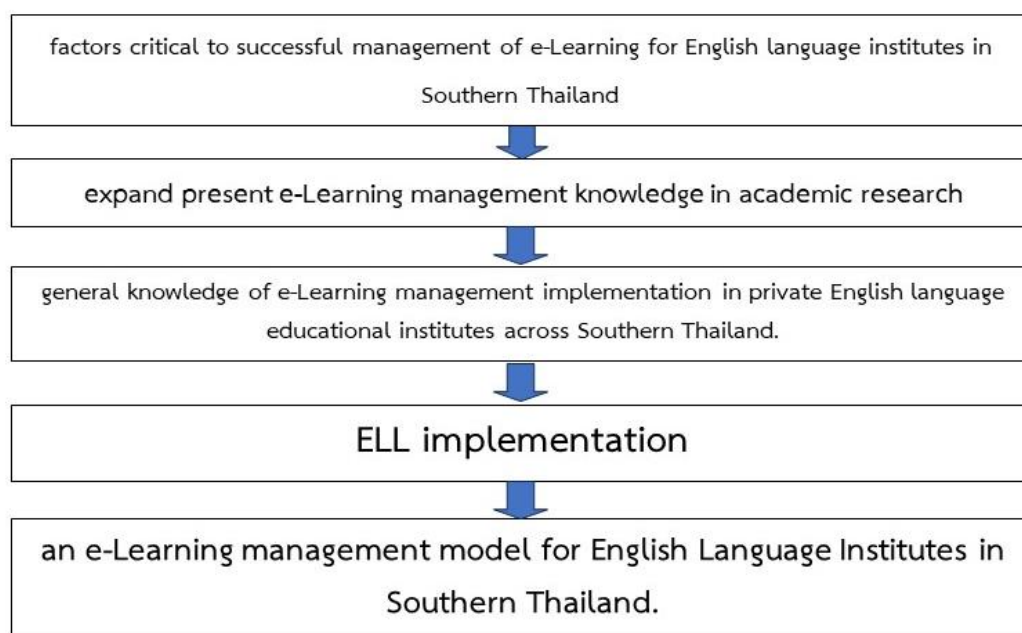

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research was divided into 3 phases as follows;

Phase 1: The first step of phase 1 was to garner a preliminary working-sample of Factors Critical to Successful Management (FC2SM) of e-Learning in Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand (ELISTs) through exploratory in-depth document analysis of the literature's current Critical Success Factors (CSF), culminating in a working-model list of FC2SM for ELISTS under 8 categories: 1) Management Factors, 2) Learner & Instructor Factors, 3) Course Factors, 4) Cultural Factors, 5) Factors Related Uniquely to e-Learning 6). Technology Factors, 7) Media Delivery Factors, and 8) Institute Factors. Step 2, this step consisted of semi-structured interviews with target selected local professionals in the fields of e-Learning, educational management, language institute management and English-language teaching. The target group for interviewing included 11 professionals in the fields of e-Learning, educational management,

language institute management, English language teaching and software development. Data were collected by document analysis and semi-structured interviews; and analyzed by content analysis.

Phase 2: Develop an e-Learning management model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand to define and structure a prefatory management model for ELISTs through a focus- group of leading content experts from the field of e-Learning. The target group consisted of 5 content- experts from Southern Thai universities. Data were collected through focus group discussion and analyzed by content analysis.

Phase 3: Evaluate the e-Learning management model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand using Focus Group. The target group consisted of Southern Thai leading experts from the field of education including private school owners, Education Faculty professors and lecturers, numbering 5 experts. Suggestions and recommendations from the panel of experts were recorded. Data from the focus group discussion were listed and analyzed.

Research Results

Objective 1. The results showed that the study sought to garner a list of provisional Factors Critical to Successful Management affecting ELL in private English language Institutes in Southern Thailand through an in-depth study of relevant literature. Although there is no literature pertaining directly to e-Learning management as a management discipline, nor e-Learning management in English language institutes, this study focused instead upon compiling an extensive list of 25 working-model factors under 8 categories of Critical Success Factors (CSF) in e-Learning and repurposing the Factors Critical to Successful Management (FC2SM) of e-Learning in Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand. Literature-study findings revealed 25 provisional Factors Critical to Successful Management affecting e-Learning ELL, under 8 categories, 1) Management Factors including Educational Management, e-Learning Management, and Thai Management Styles; 2) Learner & Instructor Factors including Ethics in Thai Education, e-Learning Ethics, Moral Compass, Instructor Factors, and Learner Factors; 3) Course Factors including Course Structure, Course Rigour, and Course Content 4) Cultural Factors including Professionalism, Hierarchy, and Autonomy; 5) Factors Related Uniquely to e-Learning including Mentoring of Learners, Student – Student Interaction, Cost of e-Learning Development, ELL Factors, and Course Availability to World Market; 6) Media Delivery Factors including Device of Computer Delivery, and Content Type; 7) Technology Factors including Technology Infrastructure, Latest

Hardware and Software, and WiFi Availability and Quality ; and 8) Government Enforced Factors in Education and Institutional Factors including English as an Academic Subject.

Objective 2 . The results showed that After eliciting Critical Management Factors and drawing the preliminary Framework Model of Successful Management of e-Learning in Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand, the researcher developed a draft model and remodel of the categories as well as the factors, undertaken to hone the categories according to advice and suggestions from the experts in focus group discussions. The draft model consisted of 6 factors; 1) Technology Factors comprising: Hardware and Software Quality and age, Technology Infrastructure, and WIFI Availability and Quality; 2) Learner Factors comprising: Mentoring, Counselling and Monitoring, and Motivation; 3) Course factors comprising: Course Structure, Course Content, and New Applications; 4) Course Administration Factors comprising: Quality Control, Assessment, and Accreditation; 5) Instructor Factors comprising: Appearance of Teachers, Teacher Adjustment, and Teacher-training and observation; 6) Emergency- Situation Factors comprising: Force-adoption of e-Learning, and Change, Risks and Fear.

Objective 3 . The results showed that the e-Learning management model for Private English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand is the e-Learning in ELISTs model.

Discussions

Six factor-groups were found to be critical to successful e-Learning management in ELISTs. The three upper factor-groups are colored yellow to denote general e-Learning-specific factors, and the three lower factor-groups are colored blue to denote ELIST-specific factors in the model. Each factor-group has its own intrinsic components. A total of 16 factors were found in the third phase of this study to be critical to successful e-Learning management in ELISTs, under 6 factor groups. See Table 1.

Table 1 Factor–groups

Factor–group	factorial components
Technology	Hardware & software quality & age
	Technology infrastructure
	WiFi availability & quality
Learner	Mentoring, counselling, monitoring & motivation
Course	Course structure
	Course content
	New applications
Course Administration	Quality control
	Assessment
	Accreditation
Instructor	Appearance of teachers
	Teacher adjustment
	Teacher training & observation
Emergency–Situation Learning	Forced adoption of e–Learning
	Change, risks & fear

Technology Factors: 3 components; Learner Factors: 2 components; Course Factors: 3 components, Course Administration Factors: 3 components; Instructor Factors: 3 components; and Emergency–Situation Learning Factors: 2 components.

Under the Technology Factors, hardware and software quality and age, technology infrastructure and WiFi availability & quality were originally deemed outside the scope of this study, however, it was found during step 2 of phase 1, that these components bore such significance on the success of e–Learning that they were moved back within the scope. All respondents mentioned that learners' hardware and software, WiFi and technology infrastructure fell far short of up–to–date or indeed reliable. Limited access to WiFi in remote villages was also

mentioned by three interview respondents. This finding is supported by a recent regional e-Learning study undertaken by Mailizar et al. (2020) in Indonesia, which found that the students' lack of access to devices and internet connection proved a major challenge to e-Learning's success.

Under Learner Factors, mentoring, counselling, monitoring, and motivation were found to be critical in this study. Due to the hierarchical structure of Thai society, students rarely raise their hands to ask questions in either a physical or virtual class. As such, this research found a vital need for the three factors under Technology Factors to compensate the passive learning norm (Pongsuwan et al., 2016; Mounier, & Tangchuang, 2018).

The three factorial components under Course Factors, namely: course structure, course content, and new applications, bore significance in this study. There was both ambiguity and conjunction between course structure and course content throughout this study, so both factors will be addressed together. This study found that when evaluating and improving the effectiveness of ELL course structure and content in e-Learning environments, findings showed that the following key components must be addressed:

1) Attention to educational language-learning design principles such as adequate course structure and guidance, activating learning tasks, stimulating interaction, and timely feedback on learning process and progress were seen as essential components, which tie in with Han Xiaotian's 2023 study findings (Xiaotian, 2023).

2) Alignment of course objectives, assessments, class activities, resources, and technology support were seen as indispensable factors working together as a unified system in e-Learning, as Wali et al.'s (2023) study found.

3) Findings showed integration of holistic and practical application of learned language through project-based learning (PBL), and adoption of student-centred instruction were necessary, tying these findings with Müller et al.'s (2023) results.

4) Designing discipline-specific, learner-related contextualized content and assessments to ensure the suitability and quality of e-Learning materials were found to be in need of further improvement, as outlined by Sui and Yang (2023).

5) Providing feedback for students during face-to-face mentoring-sessions and evaluating learning outcomes more quickly to determine the direction of further learning actions was seen as a vital component for continued e-Learning improvement, a point also raised in a related study by Yuricha and Phan (2023).

The New Applications factor covered in this study centred on inclusion of AI technology and interactive games related to language acquisition, as other applications or apps, such as platforms, LMS or meeting apps, were seen as 'infrastructural' by respondents. Although respondents hadn't successfully incorporated either of these new AI or gaming technologies into their e-Learning programmes, they saw the need for this burgeoning tech in all future e-Learning applications, a view reflected in Rusmiyanto, et al.'s (2023) recent study.

Under the Course Administration factor, this study found the following three sub-factors of quality control, assessment, and accreditation to be crucial for the administration of successful e-learning language learning courses, tying in with research results from: Khojah and Shousha (2020), Kezadri (2019), and McCroskey et al. (2011).

The instructor factor in this study found the following sub-factors to be requisite to quality e-Learning: appearance of teachers, teacher adjustment, teacher training & observation in the cultural and geolocational context of foreign English-language teachers living and working in Southern Thailand. For a contextual insight of the above, please see: Jack (2019), and Maxwell (2015).

The Emergency-Situation Learning factor was brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic during the period of this study. In hindsight, this period was seen as advantageous to this study due to the two perspectives of *before and after* this world-wide pandemic, from being a technology few in society were familiar with, to subsequent change in perception and comprehensive acceptance of online learning by society. The two sub-factors of Forced adoption of e-Learning or Online and Distance Learning (ODL) and Change, risks & fear were purely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; the former was a seamless transition due to no alternative, and the later was also a mitigated hurdle as there was again no viable alternative. From the perspective of this study, the sedate implementation and adoption of ODL across the spectrum of compulsory and higher education was instantly militated (Loi et al., 2023).

Knowledge from Research

The final conceptual model of Factors Critical to Successful Management of e-Learning in English Language Institutes in Southern Thailand, contains factors used as umbrella-factors for the following intrinsic sub-factors (see Figure 2):
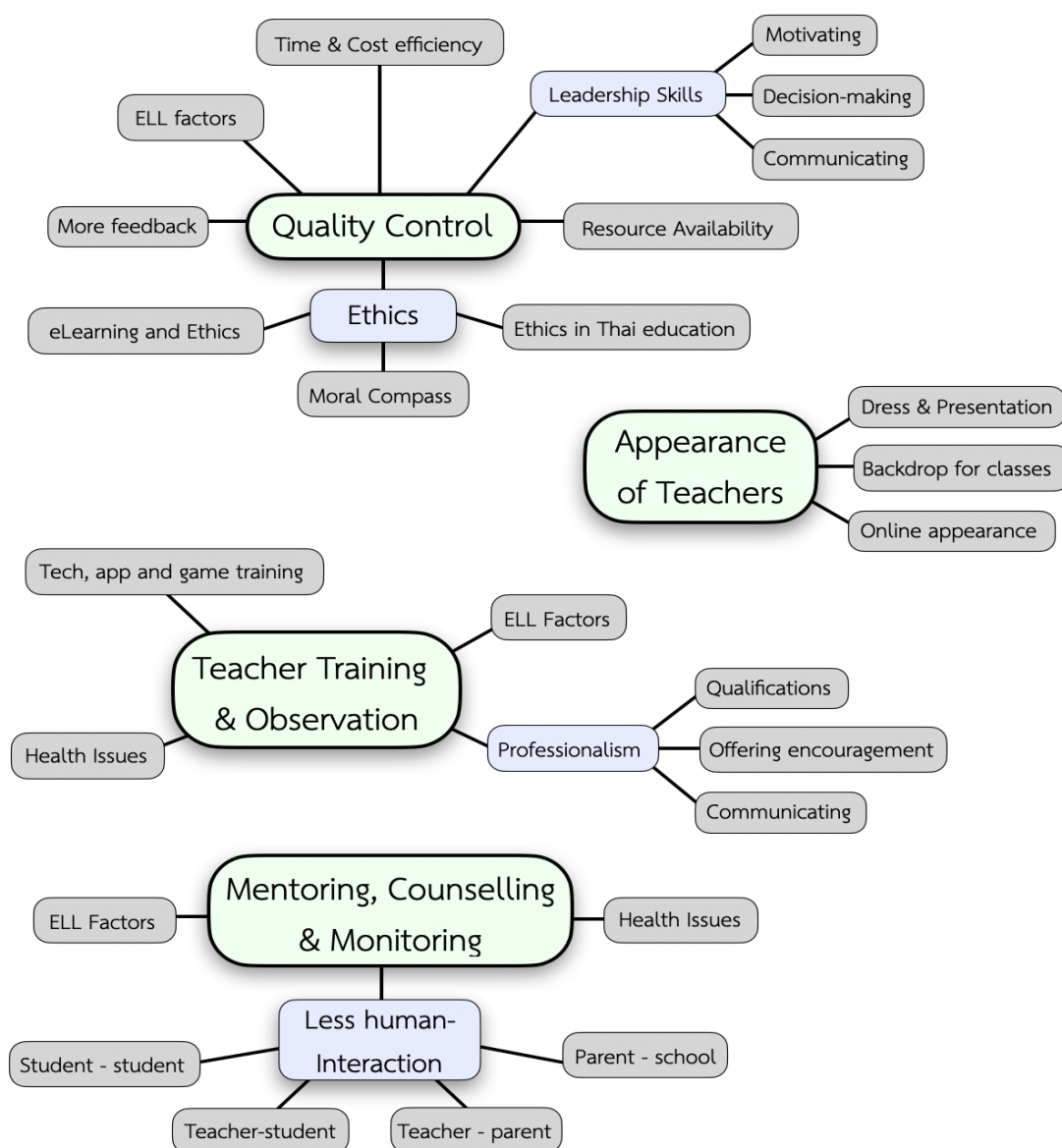
Feedback, learners' home–based interference/disruption and ELL factors.

Teacher Training and Observation: Professionalism, Health issues, Tech, app & game training and ELL factors.

Mentoring, Counselling & Monitoring: Health Issues, Less human–interaction and ELL factors (interpreted as a critical sub–factor dimension under all categories and all factors bar two, namely Hardware/Software Quality & Age as well as WiFi Availability & Quality).

Appearance of Teachers: Dress and presentation, backdrop for online classes (i.e. green–screen) and online appearance.

Teacher Adjustment: older-generation teachers, distractions, stress-management strategies and health issues.

New Applications: meeting apps and online games.

Course Content: class length and content type.

Course Structure: social-interaction and course rigour.

Change, Risks & Fear / Forced Adoption of e-Learning: language-school closures, societal behavioural-changes and health issues.

Hardware & Software Age & Quality: webcam and mic issues (on both institute's and learner's sides).

Technology Infrastructure: cost of e-Learning development, technical-hotline number and technology not 100% reliable.

WiFi Availability & Quality: unstable WiFi / cellular network issues.

Accreditation: course availability to world market.

Therefore, repeating two sub-factors under different factors is inevitable in the above list. As in the case of ELL sub-factors, Learning English can be a matter under all factors. As it plays an important role in the basic e-Learning objectives of this study Except for clear and direct relationships with 'Hardware & Age and Software Quality', including 'WiFi availability and quality factors'.

Conclusion

When this research was first undertaken, it was intended as a "means to accelerate e-Learning's acceptance and facilitation in Thailand". However, the COVID-19 pandemic saw Lockdowns, e-Learning & Work-from-home become the new normal, thereby achieving the original purpose of accelerating e-Learning's acceptance and facilitation in Thailand, so the study underwent a repurposing of sorts to instead study which management factors are critical to e-Learning management in Thai language institutes, incorporating analytical cross-cultural context and English-language e-Learning as a means to circumvent Thailand's unsustainable and inherently-problematic reliance on Western native English-speaking (NES) school-teachers as well as the similarly unsustainable reliance on neocolonial Western ELL pedagogies used to improve the English-language skills of the nation's upcoming generations.

Suggestions

Aside from much-need further study of factors critical to successful e-Learning management, this study has exposed four additional areas of enquiry which stand out as warranting further research:

1) Culturally-appropriate pedagogical approaches to English-language teaching and learning congruent with archetypal Thai-learners' cultural-values.

2) Long-term adverse risks to psychological-health and socio-wellbeing of specific age-grouped learners exclusively learning through zero-contact learning, i.e. e-Learning.

Findings from this study indicate clear cross-cultural misalignments from the various cultural-dimensions of not only the respondents, but also the researcher. The question of whether these cultural faux pas are indicative of ethnocentric ideology, cross-cultural ignorance, closed-mindedness, or hailing from socio-developmental concerns, this cultural quagmire is in dire need of further research.

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