

Enhancing ELT through Local Language Policy: a Case from Phuket, Thailand

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Received 18 June 2025; revised 18 August 2025; accepted 20 August 2025

Abstract

For success in English language teaching (ELT), all stakeholders need to work together to achieve the goal. Local government has a crucial role as a policy maker and a supporter. How policy is translated into practice should be analyzed and the voices of practitioners should be heard. This research aims to analyze the ELT policy established by the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization (PPAO) and how it has been implemented in schools. The participants in the study are school administrators and teachers working under the supervision of PPAO. Data were obtained by a semi-structured interview method and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Results reveal that the school network has been taking the right path collaboratively under a feasible and fruitful policy. Areas in which potential for improvement is perceived are identified. The results benefit local governments in making language policies for local schools in Thailand.

Keywords: language policy, English language teaching, Phuket Thailand

1. Introduction

In the complexity of human society, language policy (LP) is inseparable from other social components; for example, politics, economics, history and culture as stated in Spolsky (2004, p. 6). LP has a significant role in contributing to which languages are used and how they are used in a given society. Like other policies, an LP can be a double-edged sword as its consequences may be both positive and negative for different stakeholders. For instance, a policy to promote a national language designed to build national unity can harm minority languages in the country because when the majority of the population in a country shifts to a national language, minority languages are prone to extinction. LP affects the people within a community, so it has gained attention from sociolinguists such as Joshua A. Fishman, Einar Haugen, J. V. Neustupny and Bernard Spolsky to name but a few. These scholars have analyzed how LPs were established and implemented, as well as how they influence or reshape the given community.

Language in education is always a primary area that reflects the national language policy because the national language is often mandated as the primary medium of instruction. Many studies have been directed at policies for English language teaching (ELT) in countries where English is not the native language. Policy on ELT is the main subject of the current study. According to Spolsky (2021, pp. 34-37), language in education is mostly under the purview of central government bodies who choose the languages to be used as media of instruction in schools. In addition to central policies, decentralization of power in language instruction has been practiced in several countries; for example, the United States, Canada, Germany and England (Spolsky 2021, p. 35).

In Thailand, where the present work is situated, the English language is included in the Basic Education Core Curriculum, A.D. 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008). Thai students start learning English from Primary 1 in compulsory courses that they will have to follow until secondary level

(Pathanasin, 2024, p. 81). Although Thailand's Ministry of Education has a policy to promote ELT in all schools around the country, the implementation of the policy has not yielded very impressive results. Statistical studies show that Thai students' English proficiency tends to be lower than that of students in neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam (Education First, 2024 p. 6).

Despite the substantial budget allocated to the promotion of ELT in Thailand's education system, the persistently low English proficiency among Thai students raises questions about the implementation of the policy. As in many countries, Thailand implements ELT at both national and local levels (Pathanasin, 2024 p. 81). The national policy mandates that all schools across the country adhere to a central curriculum in which English is a compulsory component. This curriculum allows schools the flexibility to design courses that are suitable for learners and meet the demands of both students and their guardians. Consequently, ELT has been implemented in different ways across local schools nationwide.

Despite the growing body of research on ELT policy in Thailand (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Kaur et al., 2016; Kwon, 2017), little limited attention has been given to the effectiveness of local policies on ELT. Critical questions remain: how are policies translated into practice? And how can local governments leverage local resources to promote ELT within their communities?

Building upon previous research on teachers' perceptions of ELT policy (Boonsuk et al., 2023; Jeon & Lee, 2017; Kwon, 2017; Orosz et al., 2021; Su, 2006) the present study aims to investigate teachers' views on the top-down policy recently revised and established in Phuket province for PPAO schools. The study seeks to answer two research questions: how do teachers perceive the PPAO's ELT policy, and how can the schools implement the policy to yield the greatest benefit? Since the outcomes

of the study are adaptable, the findings will contribute not only to the local community but to the country as a whole.

2. Literature Review

This study primarily addresses ELT policy in Phuket, Thailand, a set of policies that are derived from national policies with local adaptations. Accordingly, relevant theories and previous research were reviewed to establish a background framework supporting the study.

2.1 Language Policy

LP has received significant attention from linguists around the world, who have offered various definitions and perspectives. For instance, Spolsky (2004) defined language policy as:

“...all the language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity.” (p. 9)

Spolsky (2004, p. 5) offered an applicable model for LP analysis. The model consisted of three components: belief, practice and management. Belief reflects how people perceived and value languages in the policy. Practice refers to the real situations where languages are used and how these may not correspond to belief. Management is how the policy is translated and implemented. For example, parents of an immigrant family may believe in preserving their family language. They manage and even insist that children speak the language in the home. In practice, the parents themselves may occasionally speak to children in the language of the host country. The situation in this family reflects the gaps between belief, practice and management.

Policy and actual practice may not align. To account for this, Gottlieb and Chen (2001, p. 4) distinguished two terms: language planning and language policy. They stated that language planning refers to

“deliberate efforts to direct, change, or preserve the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of language codes within a given society,” whereas language policy refers to “a systematic formulation of such efforts by authoritative agencies...in laws, regulations and guidelines...”

LP has received significant attention from sociolinguists for several decades. The early age of study began in the 1960s when the main interest focused on post-colonial administration, in which policies were set and implemented for national unity (Oakes & Peled, 2018, p. 9). Subsequently, questions were raised on the suitability or even possibility of LPs for creating a sense of nationhood overlooking local heritages and economic inequality. English as a lingua franca emerged with the role of bringing modernization to post-colonial nations and the developing world. From the 1980s onwards, sociolinguists turned their attention to linguistic human rights with a belief that all languages are equal and individuals should have the right to use their inherited languages. Such a principle extended to languages of minorities, and endangered languages. In the meantime, the perception of the English language shifted from one of a stigmatized language of colonization to one of a global lingua franca. Oakes and Peled (2018, p. 11) pointed out that the current trend in LP studies has shifted to how LP can address problems in societies and how policies should be implemented to improve people's conditions.

2.2 English Language Teaching (ELT) Policy

ELT is an important topic in LP since the English language has become a lingua franca for communication between people around the world and is probably the most important language for economic development. In many countries, English is the first foreign language that students learn at school (Pathanasin, 2024 p. 72).

Not only has the English language been taught widely on a global scale, but statistics show that children around the world start learning

English from an early age. Baldauf and Nguyen (2012, pp. 630-634) reported that in many Asian and Pacific countries, Thailand included, students started learning English at six or seven years of age. Research has been conducted to identify up-to-date methodologies for ELT. Orosz et al. (2021) stated that the trend of ELT policy is to include content and language integration learning (CLIL), communicative language teaching (CLT) and the use of technology. Nowadays, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been accepted worldwide as a standard against which students' English proficiency can be assessed.

Perceptions of teachers and administrators towards the ELT policy have been seen as important areas for study. Su (2006) investigated teachers' perceptions of LP on the English language in Taiwan which implemented compulsory English courses at elementary level. Results from the interview data and classroom observations showed that the teachers saw both positive and negative effects of the policy. On the positive side, the policy made students engage with English from their early years, enhancing their English proficiency and cross-cultural communication. On the negative side, the policy reduced the importance of other foreign languages (e.g., Japanese, French and German). Also, the English proficiency test had a significant impact on teaching and learning activities. The participants revealed in the interview that they spent time preparing their students for the test instead of practising authentic communication with them. A longitudinal survey has been conducted in South Korea by Jeon and Lee (2017). The study focused on teachers' perceptions of English education policies in two different periods. Data were collected by online surveys in 2010, and again in 2016 to find out how the policies had been interpreted and how school teachers perceived their effects over time. The results from both surveys showed that the participants viewed employing native English speakers to teach secondary students was the most effective way to enhance learners' English communicative skills. Putting students into classrooms suitable for

their ability levels was the second policy that they agreed upon. Lastly, the national test of English had a great impact on teaching and learning activities. In Ecuador, Orosz et al. (2021) interviewed teachers in public schools in-depth to ascertain their perceptions towards ELT policy in their country. The researchers reported that the participants saw the policy as unrealistic and unachievable; the teachers had expressed several limitations such as their own proficiency in English, a lack of training and an inability to motivate their students.

2.3 ELT Policy in Thailand

According to Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017), ELT was introduced in Thailand in the time of King Rama III, in the 1820s. At that time, ELT was only available to the elite who had contact with foreigners. As the country's economy became more international, English became a compulsory subject for students in school. Through several curriculum reforms, English has remained a compulsory subject for all students from an early age until tertiary level. In another study, Nitsaisook et al. (2025) analyzed the ideology underpinning LP in Thailand from the early period to the present day through many national ELT policy reforms. They pointed out that the ideology of English native speakerism had been attached to Thai ELT policy since World War II. In the present time, globalization has emerged as another ideology that drives ELT policy of the country.

Despite all the efforts and large budgets allocated to ELT, many international indicators show the short-comings of ELT in Thailand. Several studies have been conducted to analyse the causes at the policy level of the slow progress and to propose ways to improve Thailand's performance in English proficiency. For example, Darasawang and Watson Todd (2012) analysed Thailand's policy for ELT focusing on how different policies were translated into practices. Their analysis indicated that different policies did not align with each other and were poorly implemented. For example, while the National Education Act emphasizes effective

communication, the textbooks recommended by the ministry focus on grammar and cultures of native English speakers. Further, the national test was seen as a washback; it was poorly designed and acted as an inhibitor of transferable knowledge acquisition and analytical thinking. Regarding the decentralization of power which is the focus of the present study, Darasawang and Watson Todd (2012) discussed the policy that allows schools to adjust their curricula and design their own teaching materials. They found that it had been implemented unsuccessfully since teachers had not been well-trained, and teaching materials were poor. Further, Kaur et al. (2016) pointed out some flaws in Thailand's ELT policy, such as teacher-centered practices, exam-oriented teaching, insufficient English proficiency of teachers, low motivation in students and cultural gaps between foreign teachers and Thai students. Also, Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017) analysed Thailand's ELT policy and reported that Thailand places heavy emphasis on native speaker norms, particularly on aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, rather than of developing broader communicative skills.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the perceptions of practitioners towards ELT policy in Thailand. For instance, Kwon (2017) interviewed Thai teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the implementation of ELT in the classroom. Results showed important challenges that the teachers faced; for example, textbook design, large class sizes, national English examinations and lack of ELT training. Further, Assalihee and Boonsuk (2022) analysed obstructions of ELT in six private Islamic schools in three deep-southern provinces of Thailand. They found that the central policy on ELT did not address local needs. The results revealed five important obstructions of ELT, namely: the central policy was not suitable for schools with a unique cultural background; there was insufficient integration with Islamic culture; students did not value English; content in textbooks emphasized Western cultures and did not relate to students' social environment; and classroom management was not effective.

In addition, Boonsuk et al. (2023) interviewed Thai teachers teaching in Thai higher education to understand their perceptions of the teaching of Global Englishes and other English varieties. The results showed that participants had positive views on having multiple varieties of English and agreed that British or American English should not be set as a standard for learners to follow. Further, second language learners should be assessed on how well they can communicate rather than how closely they can imitate speakers of the "Inner Circle" in Kachru's (1988) Circle of English terms. Consequently, Boonsuk et al. (2023) suggested that the policy for ELT in Thailand should move away from the native speaker model to teaching a more Global English style of communication. Also, perceptions of learners were investigated in Savski and Rukthong (2025). The study presented perceptions of university students with low English proficiency towards national ELT policy. In group discussion, the participants perceived their success in English acquisition as 'on the process' rather than 'failure'. Despite their negative experience in learning English, the participants aimed to acquire English for their future. As a result, Savski and Rukthong (2025) concluded that the participants had positive perceptions, even though they were aware of Thailand's low ranking in English proficiency reported in the media (i.e., the Education First English Proficiency Index), which reflects a failure in the Thai ELT policy. The researchers pointed out that the ELT policy in Thailand, with the target for Thai learners to reach CEFR level B1, seems to lack a clear rationale and recognition of linguistic diversity across different socio-economic groups, as well as a consideration of the effect on learners' emotional perceptions of their proficiency.

2.4 ELT Policy in Phuket

Phuket Island is one of Thailand's 77 provinces and has its own local government that recognizes the importance of English communication skills among residents, especially since the island is Thailand's second most popular tourist destination after Bangkok and enjoys a high annual

income from the tourism industry (Pathanasin, 2025, p. 213). There are over 100 government schools on the island. Most of them are regulated by the Ministry of Education. Under the central government's decentralization policy, the Phuket local government (reporting to the Ministry of Interior) is responsible for providing education in the island province. The Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization (PPAO) operates five schools on Phuket Island. To enhance English proficiency in children from an early age, the PPAO has issued a policy on language education for implementation in its schools, using powers delegated by the Ministry of Education under Sections 29 and 39 of the National Education Act 2002, as amended, (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2002), which mandates a core curriculum but permits local adjustment.

The present study focuses on two of PPAO's current policies. Firstly, the PPAO has chosen to emphasize employment of foreigners to teach English in all primary and secondary schools. The foreign teachers in these schools include both native and non-native speakers of English (e.g., Filipino, Russian, etc.).

The second policy is a requirement to increase the number of hours devoted to English teaching. Until the 2023-2024 academic year, all PPAO schools had one English Program (EP) classroom at each level. Students with high English proficiency were selected for EP classes and studied English for 12 hours per week with foreign teachers, whereas students in regular classes studied English for only five hours per week. Currently, the PPAO has changed this practice by cancelling all EP classes and increasing the number of English learning hours in all classes to promote greater exposure to English-speaking teachers.

The implementation of this revised policy has been investigated at four PPAO schools in Phuket province. In these schools, only one school (PPAO School A), is being developed as an international school where all students learn English with foreign teachers for a minimum of 18 hours

per week. In addition, students in PPAO School A learn maths and science in English. At the other three schools, students learn these subjects in Thai.

Several previous studies have reported significant challenges in setting ELT policies both in international contexts (Jeon & Lee, 2017; Orosz et al., 2021; Su, 2006) and in the Thai context (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Kaur et al., 2016; Kwon, 2017; Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2022). Nevertheless, no research has focused on the effectiveness of the decentralization of ELT policy in Phuket, and stakeholders' opinions on how the island should implement its version of the national policy have not been surveyed. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing stakeholders' perceptions and expectations of the ELT policy on Phuket Island in order to suggest how the policy might be better formulated and implemented.

3. Methodology

3.1 The sites

Provincial Administrative Organization schools exist in all provinces in Thailand and operate under the ELT policy of their respective province. Thus, all schools under the supervision of the PPAO practice the same ELT policy.

There are five schools under the PPAO, namely PPAO School A, PPAO School B, PPAO School C, PPAO School D, and PPAO School E. To answer the research questions, data were collected from four specific schools (PPAO Schools A–D), as only these schools have both primary and/or secondary levels; PPAO School E is a kindergarten and is therefore deemed outside the scope of the present study. The four target schools are located in different areas on the island.

3.2 Participants

The target participants of this research were ten teachers and heads of department (with administrative duties) working in the four target schools, as they are key stakeholders directly affected by ELT policy at the provincial level. The participants were selected using convenient purposive sampling, and the criteria for selection were designed to ensure that they were familiar with curriculum management in response to the ELT policy. Thus, all participants have worked for at least three years in their current school, are permanent staff, and teach English subjects. Educational qualifications for all participants were not specified, as they all met the job requirements, which is a bachelor's degree relevant to English teaching. Being permanent staff limited the target participants to Thai teachers only, since non-Thai staff are ineligible for permanent employment. Table 1 presents the demographics of the participants in the present study.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Position	Level of Teaching	Years of Experience
Interviewee 1	Female	29	Teacher	Middle school and High school	3
Interviewee 2	Female	41	Teacher	Elementary and Middle school	14
Interviewee 3	Female	46	Head, Department	Middle school and High school	20
Interviewee 4	Female	44	Head, Department	High school	17

Table 1
Participant Demographics (cont.)

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Position	Level of Teaching	Years of Experience
Interviewee 5	Female	59	Teacher	Elementary	15
Interviewee 6	Female	58	Teacher	Middle school	33
Interviewee 7	Male	31	Teacher	Elementary	6
Interviewee 8	Male	30	Teacher	Elementary	4
Interviewee 9	Female	30	Head, Department	Elementary	6
Interviewee 10	Female	43	Head, Department	Elementary	18

3.3 Research tools

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually. The interview questions were designed to elicit data for the analysis. All questions were verified by three experts using the Item Objective Index (IOC) form (Appendix A), yielding a result of 8.4. Before conducting the study, the research proposal was approved by the Ethics Committee of Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus in full compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report to protect the participants' rights and ensure the ethical conduct of the research (ref. psu.pk 003/2024) .

3.4 Data collection

Before data collection, letters were sent to the school directors requesting permission to collect data. Once the requests had been approved, the researcher contacted the target participants individually by phone and email to schedule interviews. Across the four schools, there were a total of twelve Thai teachers teaching English courses. Among them, ten participants agreed to take part in the study. Once the appointments had been scheduled, the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face

at their schools. The semi-structured interview method was employed, as it is considered sufficient for obtaining in-depth data. At the beginning of the interviews, each participant was asked to provide consent for data collection. They were informed that all discussions would be audio-recorded, but their responses would remain confidential and their identities would not be disclosed. This procedure allowed the interviewees to express their opinions freely without any discomfort. The interviews were conducted in Thai to enable participants to articulate their views fully and lasted approximately 25 minutes each.

3.5 Data analysis

The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. This method was chosen because it is widely recognized as a rigorous approach for analyzing qualitative data. The first step involved transcribing the audio recordings, which were then translated from Thai into English. The researcher read and reread the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the translation and to become familiar with the data. To validate the data, the transcriptions were sent back to the interviewees to check their accuracy and to confirm whether they agreed for the data to be analyzed. At this stage, ideas from the transcriptions were noted for further analysis. The second step involved coding to ensure anonymity of the data. All ideas in the data were systematically coded by the researcher prior to review by an expert with over ten years of experience in English language teaching and qualitative research, in order to verify the accuracy of the coding. Based on the expert's suggestions, the researcher subsequently revised the coding. Themes were then constructed, taking into account the research questions and the theoretical framework of LP. All codes were grouped to form themes, which were then reviewed, analyzed, and named. The results of the analysis were recorded in writing for further discussion and sent to the expert for validation, with suggestions incorporated and revisions made as appropriate.

4. Results

As described in the methodology section, ten out of twelve Thai teachers working in these schools volunteered to participate in this research. This sample was considered sufficient to provide in-depth information since data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The results of the interviews show the participants' views to the PPAO's ELT policy as follows:

4.1 Understanding the policy

The results showed that most participants consider that they understood the PPAO's policy on ELT through their daily work and through meetings. The participants explained that all schools under PPAO had the same structure. In addition to the national curriculum to which all schools adhere, the PPAO together with the schools determined a defining characteristic for each school. There are four key areas for each school to focus on: English programs, vacation, eco-school, and technology. Schools have the authority to design supplemental English subjects to complement the national curriculum, provided that these subjects align with the characteristics established by the PPAO. To promote ELT, the PPAO provides an annual budget for the recruitment of foreign teachers. Employment is conducted through an e-bidding process to comply with the central government's procurement regulations. The following excerpts show examples of participants' descriptions of the PPAO's policy on ELT.

Interviewee 3 “I think the decentralization of power by PPAO is not 100%. The PPAO acts as an intermediary in hiring foreign teachers for schools. It delegates authority to the Education Division, which in turn delegates authority to the schools.”

Interviewee 4 “In my many years of work under the supervision of PPAO, the local government fully supports education. Schools have full authority to make decisions on various matters, and they receive full support for what they need. Nationwide, schools must have a core curriculum, and schools have the authority to manage supplemental courses as needed.”

Interviewee 6 “The school is responsible for teaching and organizing the entire class schedule. Our curriculum is based on the national curriculum. The PPAO helps with various budgets, such as hiring foreign teachers through bidding processes.”

It was found that participants with a management role had been directly informed about the policy from attending regular meetings with the local government. Therefore, they had had more opportunities to discuss and express opinions on the policy. In addition, the participants in management generally had longer years of service, which provided them with greater background knowledge of the management issues that drive the policy. Participants who were regular teachers were typically informed of policies by their supervisors and through official documents. They understood the policy and performed their duties in accordance with their responsibilities.

4.2 In supporting schools

The results reveal significant perceived gains from PPAO’s policy on ELT. The most important form of support is the employment of foreign teachers. Having foreign teachers in schools provides students with opportunities to practice English listening and speaking skills. PPAO also encourages schools to organize activities to promote ELT, such as English camps and language competitions. The following excerpts present the positives aspects of the policy as perceived by the participants.

Interviewee 7 “From my experience at a previous job in a small school in another province, students had no opportunity to interact with foreigners at all. However, here (at the PPAO school), students encounter foreign teachers at every grade level for sufficient hours. All students have the chance to learn with foreign teachers in every class, providing a great opportunity to practise and develop their English skills.”

Interviewee 8 “The PPAO schools organize their teaching into two parts: the section with Thai teachers and the section with foreign teachers. In the Thai teachers’ section, the primary language of instruction is Thai. In the foreign teachers’ section, the language of instruction is solely English, so students practice communication in English. There is collaboration between the two sections.”

Interviewee 9 “I think it (the policy) is appropriate in that, when foreign teachers are with us, we have full authority to oversee additional activities.”

4.3 Gaps in management

From the interviews, two main flaws were identified in PPAO’s ELT policy. First, the policy of using an annual e-bidding process to employ foreign teachers was considered problematic. Participants agreed that the e-bidding process (in which the organization that offered the lowest price wins the bid) is not an appropriate hiring procedure, as it does not guarantee the quality of the foreign teachers. The following excerpts show participants’ concerns regarding this issue.

Interviewee 2 “Regarding the issue of e-bidding, particularly with limited budgets, it prevents us from hiring good-quality foreign teachers who are proficient in language teaching. The quality of the foreign teachers remains a concern. Previously, we used a special hiring method where we could select any reputable company, but with e-bidding, we no longer have that choice. This affects the quality of teachers we get. It's noticeable that our students' achievements in various competitions have decreased, and this method results in changing teachers every year, lacking continuity. It depends on the bidding outcomes, and this is a significant disadvantage.”

Interviewee 10 “Ideally, we should not use e-bidding every year. It's better to have a minimum continuity of at least three years so that we can observe development and assess how these teachers perform over this period. In the past, when we used private companies that stay longer (not by e-bidding system), it enhanced our reputation because we outsourced to experts in their field.”

The second significant disadvantage identified by the participants is the school characteristic policy, with only one school having an EP characteristic. Under PPAO's policy, only PPAO School A continues to offer the EP, while EP classrooms have been discontinued in other schools since the 2023-2024 academic year. Teachers and Department Heads at schools other than PPAO School A viewed this as a major disadvantage. Under this policy, the schools are not permitted to offer alternative programs that better suit their students' needs. It also limits opportunity for students to enroll in the EP program, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

Interviewee 8 “The PPAO wants each school to have its own characteristic. Our school has an environmental identity, in which it can build awareness in its students. However, English is a crucial skill needed in the 21st century. Removing EP class affects parents’ confidence and causes them to worry that their children’s English skills will decline.”

Interviewee 9 “The policy that I find most problematic is the policy to cancel the EP program entirely at our school and move it to PPAO School A. I believe that children who excel in English are found everywhere. These children may not find it convenient to travel to PPAO School A for their studies.”

As noted above, teachers and administrators shared similar opinions toward the policies on e-bidding and the school characteristic concept. They also mentioned other minor obstacles, including a shortage of Thai teaching staff, insufficient teaching materials, excessive assessment of learning outcomes, and heavy workloads.

In summary, the participants agreed that hiring foreign teachers is a great benefit for students, and schools should receive sufficient support and freedom in shaping their curricula. Nevertheless, the results pointed out areas for improvement in the policy, namely a revised hiring procedure and better determination of the school characteristic.

5. Discussion

The results indicated that the participants shared the same perspectives, despite differences in their job positions and years of service. This section discusses the PPAO’s ELT policy by adopting Spolsky (2004)’s LP model with three components: belief, practice and management.

The participants’ positive response to the policy of employing foreign teachers reflects the belief that such teachers can enhance students’

English communication skills and create a positive attitude towards the English language. Building a positive attitude towards English learning is fundamental for long-term success. As noted by Savski and Rukthong (2025), learners with low proficiency reported having had negative experiences in learning English when they were young. In addition, foreign teachers, both native and non-native English speakers, bring global English communication into students' daily interactions. This result aligned with Jeon and Lee's (2017) study, in which teachers viewed the employment of foreign teachers as an effective policy.

In terms of practice, students learn English with both Thai and foreign teachers. Furthermore, it was found that students in different schools under PPAO receive different opportunities in learning English. The policy was designed for students in all classes to study more with foreign teachers and reduce class time with Thai teachers. It appeared to participants that PPAO School A is being favored as a “centre of excellence” for English, which they saw as a disadvantage for their own schools, because it reduces opportunities to admit talented students and consequently affects the schools' academic performance negatively. Participants from PPAO School A also perceived their characterization as a burden, as it required them to teach challenging content-based subjects, such as maths and science, in English, even though students are thought to understand these subjects better when lessons are delivered in Thai.

The results reveal gaps in policy management. PPAO as the authority who is implementing the policy faces two important challenges. First, the findings indicate that e-bidding was the most important challenge in policy management because the process prevents the school network from selecting good quality foreign teachers. The second challenge identified from the interviews concerns the fiscal year, which runs from November to October and does not align with the academic year, which runs from May to April. Consequently, the timing of contracting foreign

teachers disrupts teaching and learning activities and hinders positive teacher-student relations and trust. Therefore, it is suggested that the hiring of foreign teachers involves schools in selecting outsourced personnel. Terms of employment should be designed to meet the schools' needs for ELT teachers, including start dates and contract durations.

The analysis reveals factors that contribute to the successful implementation of PPAO's ELT policy. These results contrast with those of Assalihee and Boonsuk (2022), who reported that learners' social environments and cultural backgrounds posed obstacles to implementing the local ELT policy. The present study analyzed ELT policy on Phuket Island where the social environment is international. There are many foreign residents from different countries. Therefore, students have opportunities to be exposed to English speakers and to develop an appreciation for English language learning. In addition, being part of a network strengthens the implementation of the ELT policy. Unlike schools in Darasawang and Watson Todd's (2012) study, which operated independently and designed their own curricula, the PPAO school network functions consistently. This consistency allows for greater involvement and participation of stakeholders, enabling greater success in the implementation of the ELT policy.

Nevertheless, PPAO's ELT policy shares similar obstacles to other local ELT policies in the country. The results align with findings from previous studies, which indicate that teacher quality, teaching materials, and assessments present challenges to the implementation of ELT policies (Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2022; Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Kaur et al., 2016; Kwon, 2017).

6. Conclusion

Policies affect different stakeholders. This research surveys teachers' perceptions on the PPAO's policy on ELT on Phuket Island. Deriving from an adequate budget, the PPAO is perceived to support ELT in its schools.

The PPAO utilizes the social environment in Phuket province, where there are many foreign residents, to enhance ELT. This is a significant advantage over local schools in other provinces. The goal has been set and the policy has been translated into practice. Overall, the participants (as stakeholders who translate the policy into practice) have positive views. This builds confidence, trust, and value in their careers. Despite some difficulties shared in the interviews, none of the participants expressed disappointment in the policy. For the best possible outcome of the ELT policy on Phuket Island, the participants consider that the PPAO should take the teachers' opinions as presented in the present study into consideration. The policy should be initiated from hearing. Principally, the foreign teacher hiring process should be improved, and budget should be allocated for schools to be able to carry out a variety of curricula rather than cutting off the EP program from most schools.

The results of the study can be fruitful to local administrations around the country in terms of ELT support. The PPAO proved itself successful in continuing policy on ELT for local students who lack the means to enroll in expensive schools. PPAO's policy and implementation can be a model for local administrators to apply in other provinces. Phuket has a good number of foreigner residents, so PPAO may be able to use this resource in implementing policy. Other local administrators should consider the advantages of their own areas and how they can support ELT.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies

Data of the present study have been collected from teachers working in the four target schools in only one province, so the number of participants is relatively small. Future studies should collect data from other stakeholders, such as parents, learners, and community members, to understand different perspectives on local ELT policies. Furthermore, the present study collected data solely through semi-structured interviews.

Additional methods, such as questionnaire surveys, should be employed for data triangulation in future research.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express thanks to the Faculty of International Studies, Prince of Songkla University, for sponsoring this project. The author is also deeply grateful to all the participants who took part in this study.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How well do you understand the decentralization of power in language policy in ELT by PPAO schools in Phuket?
2. In your view, is the decentralization of language policy in ELT by PPAO schools suitable for Phuket socio-economic groups?
3. In your view, what is the most urgent problem in terms of policy for English language teaching that should be addressed?
4. Could you suggest how PPAO schools might enhance English language teaching?