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The important factors of English Program administration responsive to the ASEAN community for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine the important factors utilizing the key principles of the Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework in the administration of English Programs for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand in response to the protocols and agenda of the ASEAN community in its education platforms. The research explored various methods that involved analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the prepared 5-point rating scale questionnaire, interviews, and observation, target group discussion, and consultation with experts. The respondents selected as the sample group were English Program administrators, teachers, students, and parents from 5 selected English Program schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand for the academic 2013 year.

Based on results gathered from both qualitative and quantitative methods, the important factors under the concept of the IPO framework consisted of 21 factors:

Support-resource input consisted of 3 factors: integrating the curriculum with ASEAN community content, using technology as an effective teaching aid, and maximizing various learning resources. ***Personnel-resource input*** contained 2 factors: having a school director with a strong vision and understanding of bilingual education, and investing in qualified and professional teachers. ***School-management process*** highlighted 8 key factors: management structure, policy/vision, community involvement, school-networks, utilization of modern technology and classroom management for self-access learning, staff development, cultivation of the culture of research in the academy and student-centered activities that promote competence and quality assurance. ***Learning-management process*** consisted of 3 factors: learning patterns in the use of English and Thai as media of instruction, learning-management style, and measurement and evaluation. ***Output or educational quality*** entailed 5 determinants: learning achievement, attainment of the desirable characteristics of the learners, educational roles in society and culture, achievement of English skills among target groups in aspects of communication and research, and knowledge of the ASEAN community.

Introduction

The rapid change brought about by the demands of present society has driven global economies to initiate effective mechanisms to sustain developments and strive

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for higher levels of competitiveness. This was primarily the tenet behind the vision of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) regional economic integration by 2015. The AEC will transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014). For this, member states of the ASEAN, such as Thailand, have ceaselessly attempted to reform and direct policies in preparation for this cause. Runckel (2015) cited the current developments and issues in the AEC in terms of leadership, infrastructure, tourism, banking, and investment in an article on Asia Opportunities: ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, and pointed out that for soft infrastructure, the better English-speaking countries in ASEAN, such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, will have an advantage over countries like Thailand. He argued that although Thailand had initiated steps by establishing "English Speaking Year 2012" to prepare for the merging of the AEC, a new mindset in lieu of transition is needed. He reiterated that Thailand has not given enough attention to improving English skills throughout its education system and now is in a somewhat weaker position compared to countries such as Vietnam. This observation is also reflected in a comparison of the scores obtained by students in international standardized tests like TOEFL. Thailand is trailing behind its neighbors (Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar). Typically, examinees from the neighboring countries garnered scores that were 500 or above; whereas, Thai students in general fared worse with scores around 450 or lower (Eduzones, 2013). The language proficiency of Thai learners is also consistently ranked low in international surveys. In the report published by Educational First in 2012, Thailand's English Proficiency Index (EPI) was ranked 53rd out of 54 countries throughout the world.

Among the ASEAN member states, it was found that in terms of the level of communication in English, Singaporeans ranked first at 71% followed by Filipinos at 55.49%; Bruneians at 37.73%, Malaysians at 27.24% and Thais at 10%. From these statistics, the poor performance of Thais was consistently attributed to issues associated with the quality of English instruction in the country (EF Education First, 2012).

Thailand has to adopt drastic measures to improve the existing basic education to follow contemporary events such as advances in technology, learning other languages, and competence in English as a tool in communication, research, and career development (Wonglekha, 2010). In 1998, the Ministry of Education in Thailand initiated pilot testing of an English Program in Yothinburana School with the main purpose of enhancing Thai students' proficiency in English. Since then, many schools have followed, including five schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand: Wichianchom, Woranarichaleom, Hatyaiwithayalai, Pimarnwithayasan, and Khanarajsadornbumrung.

Premised on improving Thai students' competitiveness in English, particularly in academic and communicative functions, the English Program implemented in Thai schools is also expected to conform to the policies and regulations set by the Kingdom's education ministry. These include management, curriculum, testing and evaluation, research, and personnel development (Office of Basic Education Committee [OBEC], 2010). These days, the English Program has gained popularity in Thai society and this widespread recognition has led some schools to implement a program that does not conform to the aforementioned policies and regulations set by the Education Ministry. This has resulted in jeopardizing the quality of the educational output; hence, the reason why this research was proposed.

Literature Review

Concept of System Theory

Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996) presented a systematic educational administration model which is particularly useful to analyze the operation of an educational organization and the role of school administrators within the operation from an open system framework. The dimensions of school operations can be divided into three main factors: inputs, transformation process, and outputs (Figure 1).

Inputs consisted of personnel, financing, theory and knowledge, federal and state, local governments, legal structure, and other groups.

Transformation process consisted of structure, culture, motivation, leadership, decision making, communication change, curriculum, improving teaching, and career development.

Outputs consisted of student achievement, teacher performance, student growth, employee growth, student dropout, employee turnover, student absenteeism, employee absenteeism, employee–management relations, school–community relations, student attitudes toward school, and employee job satisfaction.

Bilingual Education

The English Program in Thailand is based on the same concept of education management for bilingual education as in other countries. There are several types of bilingual education. Each type has the same objective to develop a child's recognition, to transit from one language to the target language essential to life. In a typical society, if the English language is the target language, the language should be taught as a second language or bilingual education until the child is able to use English just like native speakers (Brisk, 1999).

Bilingual education program models vary from transitional to late exit to dual language, so the student outcome indicators such as oral and written language proficiency and content area mastery in English and the native language are considered (Montecel & Cortez, 2002). It can also be done by measurement of the language development from the learner's achievements and the integration of culture and society (Brisk, 1999).

The school indicators supporting bilingual education are composed of many criteria (Montecel & Cortez, 2002). Among the indicators are: leadership, vision, school climate, linkages, school organization and accountability, professional development, parent involvement, staff accountability and student assessment, curriculum, and instruction.
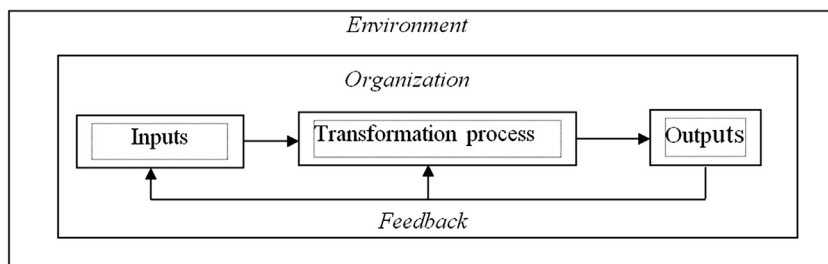
Figure 1 Basic system model
Source: Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996, p. 18)

English Program and Government Policy in the ASEAN Community

Thailand has provided a curriculum and instruction in English language since 1998 and up to now, this has been adopted in about 200 schools and also in five schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand. Management concerns cover classroom management, qualified teachers, teaching aid, and evaluation, among others (OBEC, 2010).

The Thai Government Policy for Educational Preparation towards ASEAN Community focuses on knowledge of ASEAN and the use of English language (Jamornthanyawat, 2011). However, in Thailand, the quality of education has to follow the Educational Quality Assurance of Thailand (ONESQA, 2011) which is concerned with learning achievement and effective administration.

Factors of Educational Administration Responsive to the ASEAN Community

From the documents and studies above, the concept of system theory (input, process and output) can be summarized as follows:

Inputs consisted of curriculum with ASEAN community content, high-technology teaching aids, various-learning resources, and qualified directors and qualified teachers.

Process consisted of management structure, policy/vision, community involvement, school networks, technology, staff development, learning activities, the learning pattern of using English and Thai as a medium of instruction, learning-management style, and measurement and evaluation.

Outputs consisted of learning achievement, desirable characteristics, society and culture, English skill for communication and knowledge searching, and knowledge of the ASEAN community.

Research Methods

Respondents

In this study, five schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand (Songkhla, Satun, Pattani, Yala, and Narathivat) implementing the English Program were chosen: Wichianchom School, Woranarichaleom School, Hatyaiwithayalai School, Pimarnwithayasan School, and Khanarajsadornbumrung Yala School. The population and sample group included administrators, teachers, parents, and students from these five schools for the academic 2013 year.

Data Collection and Analysis

Several steps were undertaken to determine the important factors of English Program administration responsive to the ASEAN community for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand.

First, the general condition of the English Program administration among the chosen schools had to be identified. Surveys and interview methods were used to obtain the data. A 5-point rating scale survey questionnaire was administered to 200 respondents using purposive sampling. The respondents were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of 50 teachers from the five chosen schools. Specifically, they were represented by a sample of 10 teachers from each of the five schools: two teachers being the head and assistant head of the English Program, and an additional eight teachers who taught the eight core subjects in the curriculum. The second group consisted of 150 parents: with 30 parents of students in Grade 9 or Matthayom Suksa 3 from each of the five schools. The key factors were then identified and narrowed down by setting the criteria to the statistical mean interpreted as a high level upward (considering the statistical mean ($\overline{X}$) of the survey questionnaire equal to or higher than 3.51).

In-depth interviews were also conducted to further confirm and validate the data obtained from the survey. The interview responses were tabulated and added to the data obtained from the questionnaire. The key informants of the purposive sample from each school approximated 7–10 persons consisting of the head of the English Program, 2–3 teachers, 2–3 parents, and 2–3 students. The results of the in-depth interviews indicated that all of the factors were confirmed and validated as follows:

Educational quality: The students had achieved a level of success in all subjects according to the standards of the curriculum; and in particular, English might have higher achievement than other subjects.

"The knowledge of content such as Math, Science... I think ...I'm OK... I found this when I had joined private learning outside school with other students...I know as they know, although I study these subjects in English language..." (Student: Woranarichaleom School)

"I try to encourage them...to speak English in the classroom..." (English teacher: Hatyaiwithayalai School)

Support-resource and personnel-resource inputs: Schools provided an integrated curriculum between core

courses and ASEAN study, effective teaching and various-learning resources, and also all of teachers have knowledge and are willing to teach or develop students.

"Students…have activities supporting the curriculum: English camp, study abroad, academic competition…" (Parent: Woranarichaleom School)

"We all are able to use technology… use information from internet to teach…" (Head of EP: Pimarnwithayasan School)

School-management and learning-management processes: Most schools set up a clear policy, the parents know and help schools, teachers and students receive support from schools through holding seminars and activities in English. Learning and teaching in English improved students knowledge and skills.

"Take…my son abroad …if …have a chance for seeing different things…make him have a good vision…" (Parent: Hatyaiwithayalai School)

"…try to simplify some words…use dictionary…explain…at first …they have to know the meaning…should separate students 2-3 groups…excellent… so…weak…easy to teach…suitable for students…" (Math teacher: Woranarichaleom School)

Based on the list of key factors, the important factors of English Program administration were drafted. The draft was confirmed and validated by key informants being the heads of the English Program from the five chosen schools.

Next, the important factors were presented and evaluated by experts in the field based on their propriety and feasibility. The 12 experts consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Education, the Educational Service Area Office, and school administrators from the schools that participated in the study.

Based on the results of the evaluation and the recommendations provided by the experts in the field, the researcher came up with modified factors.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the tabulated data obtained from the survey and interviews regarding the general conditions of the English Program administration responses to the ASEAN community, there were 5 main factors and 21 minor factors were identified (Fig. 2):

Support-resource input consisted of three factors: integrating the curriculum with the ASEAN community content, using technology as an effective teaching aid, and maximizing various learning resources.

In the initial strand of the IPO administration framework, the three identified factors represented the input conforming to the curriculum and instruction design set by Thailand's Ministry of Education. With proper implementation and administration, students' productive learning processes and readiness with regard to other external factors concerning the environment, other learning resources, and commitment to the ASEAN are maximized and are considered ideal for the Thai education system setting. These compliment the findings of Montecel and Cortez (2002) who asserted that the curriculum and instruction were important indicators of the learning quality of bilingual education in the USA.

Personnel-resource input consisted of two factors: a school director with strong vision and understanding of bilingual education, and investment in qualified and professional teachers.

Generally, all of the teachers in the English Program were qualified teachers willing to teach and work hard and also most of the directors in English Program schools were intent on managing the program, so they influenced the education quality according to the research results of Office of General Secretary of Education Committee (2007) who reported that teachers and directors affected the education quality in Thailand.

School-management process highlighted eight key minor factors: management structure, policy/vision, community involvement, school networks, utilization of modern technology and classroom management for self-access learning, staff development, cultivation of the culture of research in academia, and student-centered activities that promote competence and quality assurance.

Normally, all of the English Program schools provided high technology and classroom management for self-access learning to support the students to be able to learn more and to make it convenient to access information easily which was one of the factors affecting education success according to the research results of Rukl (1986) who found that the prospects of the successes and goals with regard to the academic affairs of schools were factors supporting the schools to develop and be successful.

Learning-management process consisted of three minor factors: learning patterns in the use of English and
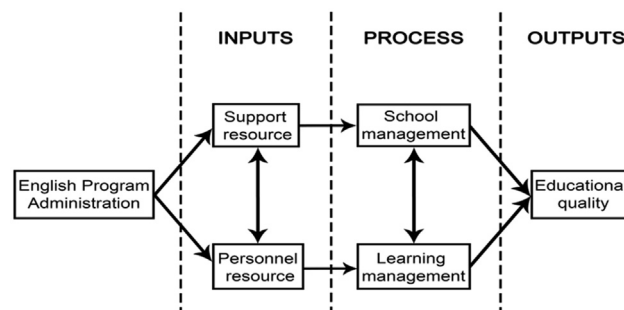

Figure 2 Five main important factors of English Program administration IPO framework

Thai as media of instruction, learning-management style, and measurement and evaluation.

Mostly, English Program schools tried to run activities to promote the students to learn more and be self confident in using English and also to provide periods for the proper use of English and Thai language in the classrooms according to the research results of Solis (2001); Gomez, Freeman, and Freeman (2005) who found that the learning patterns of students exposed to the use of English and mother tongue language in bilingual education were very important. They argued that the two languages should be suitable for student learning in equal proportions or should be based on student ability at each level.

Output or educational quality entailed five determinants: learning achievement, attainment of the desirable characteristics of the learners, educational roles in society and culture, achievement of English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing among target groups in aspects of communication and research, and knowledge of the ASEAN community.

Nowadays, most students are able to use technology to develop their learning and to search for information, compose reports, and extract some data from the internet. Students enjoy learning, using the skills of thinking, analyzing, and learning about the ASEAN community under the curriculum. Brisk (1999) argued that the success or failure of bilingual education rests on the target group's general assessment on language development, learning achievement, and integration of culture and society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aimed to determine the important factors of English Program administration responsive to the ASEAN community for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand based on quantitative and qualitative methods. The following conclusions were drawn:

1. The quantitative method of interpreting the data obtained was instrumental in identifying the general condition of English Program administration in considering the comments of the respondents from the chosen border schools in southern Thailand. Through this analysis, five main factors were identified: support-resource input, personnel-resource input, school-management process, learning-management process, and education-quality output, with an overall statistical mean at the high level.

2. From the results obtained based on the qualitative method through in-depth interviews, focus-group discussion and experts' evaluation, the English Program administration was composed of five major factors: support and personnel resources as inputs, learning and school management as parts of the processes, and the targeted educational quality as output. Other minor factors as discussed in the summary of findings are also supportive of the proposed paradigm.

From the research results on what constitutes the important factors of English Program administration

responsive to the ASEAN community for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand, the following recommendations for policy and future research are strongly advocated:

For Educational Policy

1. Based on the results obtained in this study, it was found out that the communication and research skills of Thai students were weaker compared to other identified factors. Notably identified in the communication level were the respondents' articulation and pronunciation that were not similar to the native speakers' accent. In this regard, it is strongly recommended that the education sector headed by the Ministry of Education in Thailand, including all other affiliated bureaus, must undertake a strong advocacy for achieving competitive and functional literacy among Thai students. This can be realized through quality instruction using English as a medium of instruction, with emphasis on the fields of Mathematics, Science, and English. These subjects should be taught by qualified foreign teachers or Thai teachers.

2. There is also a need for a revamp of Thailand's educational measurement and evaluation systems. Problems or weaknesses in the current policies regarding the promotion and retention of students should also be reevaluated and be given feasible and more suitable solutions that cater to Thai needs.

For Future Research

The ideas from this research about the important factors of English Program administration responsive to the ASEAN community for schools in the border provinces of southern Thailand should be adopted as a model. It is also recommended that replications of this study should be made in order to evaluate and improve the model.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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