



Circumstances of and Challenges in Providing Inclusive English Education for Thai Novices and Monks

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ABSTRACT

In Thailand, 408 campuses of the Buddhist Scripture School provide education to orphans, minorities, and disadvantaged children. Approximately 34,000 students are enrolled on the campuses nationwide. These students were ordained as novices and monks. In addition to studying their religious curriculum, they take courses in the general education, including English classes, and can obtain a high-school certificate. However, learning is disrupted regularly due to duties in the Buddhist communities, serving as the officiants of ceremonies, including merit making, funerals, weddings, etc., so their English achievement may not be satisfactory. This qualitative research investigated circumstances, challenges, and approaches to inclusive English education for novices and monks by adopting a critical pedagogy as the theoretical and analytical framework and a phenomenological approach as the methodological framework. The researcher visited a rural temple school to observe classes, inspect documents, and interview students, teachers, and abbots. The results show that most students resided in temples where people speak the Khmer dialect, and there were not enough opportunities to use English. The number of monks had decreased because of migration. Teachers had added responsibilities. Inclusive English education could be achieved by revitalizing the local economy and establishing a mentoring program to motivate them and inculcate student agency.

Keywords: English education, inclusion, novice monks, critical pedagogy

Introduction

Inclusive education means learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded—not only children with disabilities, but also speakers of minority languages (UNICEF, 2023). Inclusivity is important because Thailand is culturally and linguistically diverse. Different population groups speak many different languages, but the main language in school is Thai, leaving children speaking other languages at a disadvantage (Acker, 2019). Inclusive education has gained scholars' attention, and there have been numerous research projects related to it (Sharma & Trory, 2019; Vibulpatanavong, 2017; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2012). However, these studies dealt mostly with inclusive education for disabled children. Another group of people that needs consideration is novices and monks in temple schools because more than 3,000 of them annually graduate with a high-school diploma (Department of Buddhism Education, 2021). They go on to study in universities, either in the Buddhist universities or regular higher education institutes. For example, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi admitted five students who were novices from Mongkol Wittaya Temple School in Rayong Province. They were qualified for engineering programs (KMUTT, 2020). Mongkol Wittaya Temple School has had more than 375 novices gaining admission into top universities since 1996 (Education develops people, 2020). Many other novices and monks have also entered the two major Buddhist universities, i.e., Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamakut which have campuses around the country.

However, obtaining a place in university does not guarantee graduation. There is a risk of student dropout if admissions are not selective. Dropping out of school creates not only financial liability but also wasted time. Untimely departure from universities can create a stigma and psychological trauma in a person's life. One of the challenges that incoming students encounter is the required English courses. Such courses are considered rigorous measures of English language competence to ensure that new graduates can enter the workforce with competitive communication skills. Therefore, tertiary education institutions declared their English standard criteria and funded studies conducted to assess the English background of students in Thai universities (Phong-a-ran, et al., 2019; Puengpipattrakul, et al., 2007; Waluyo, 2019). It was generally found that although students might possess excellent skills and aptitude in their major courses such as art, science, and mathematics, their English skills seem barely adequate. Most freshmen and sophomores possess English proficiency at the A1 to A2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)(Waluyo, 2019). Consequently, both the administrators and the instructors need to elevate the English competency skills of university students. Kuharatanachai and Sukonthamut (2020) discovered that admission scores in the subjects of the Thai and English languages were highly correlated with the achievement in college English courses. Another study conducted in a large public university in the North also found that students' high-school English proficiency was parallel with college English competence. Their skills seemed to remain the same even though they had spent three to four years studying in college (Ruanklai & Yodmongkol, 2017). This clearly indicates that high school education or equivalent is crucial. Stronger pre-college academic experience may reduce pressure and the risk of dropping out.

This research, therefore, attempted to examine an approach to providing a more solid scholastic capacity for Thai college-bound students. The participants were non-traditional students—they were novices and monks in Phra Pariyat Dhamma School, a Buddhist temple school. The research setting was a campus located in a lower northeastern area. These students are eligible for admission to university, but they might not have equal opportunities due to having to participate in religious services during their studies, resulting in mediocre qualifications. This study, by using a phenomenological approach, hoped to shed light on how to provide better English language education for them so that they are better prepared to deal with academic challenges in college.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative research was based on critical pedagogy in language teaching (Crookes, 2012). The researcher also relied on critical applied linguistics, which is a paradigm for language use, teaching, and learning that seeks “to connect the local condition of language to broader social formations, drawing connection between classrooms, conversation, textbooks, tests or translations and issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology or discourse” (Pennycook, 2008, p. 169). The critical pedagogy derived from the seminal work by Freire (2000) has been studied and implemented by several educators in many countries including Thailand (Adunyarittigun, 2017; Khamratana & Adunyarittigun, 2021; Pathomchaiwat, 2021; Zyphur, 2020). Critical pedagogy was utilized in this research because it accommodates students’ family and community circumstances and cultures, teachers’ outlooks, and socioeconomic aspects of education, especially English language education. Thai society is very diverse in many respects.

The diversity can be seen in the education landscape as well. Students come from the full range of the population. While well-to-do parents can place their children in a private school, extremely poor guardians often leave the duty of educating their offspring in the hands of state schools and religious seminaries. According to the Equitable Education Fund (2022), students from exceedingly poor families have increased from 994,428 in 2020 to 1,307,152 in 2022. These students are at risk and may drop out at any time. This is a phenomenon resulting from many factors. The major reason seemed to be the devastation of crops because of natural disasters (World Bank, 2019). The population which works in the agricultural sector is about 13 million (Bank of Thailand, 2022) accounting for about 30% of the workforce. When these parents cannot gain sufficient income from agriculture, their children are usually impacted. Consequently, a large number of caretakers must emigrate from rural areas to urban centers where they can make ends meet in the manufacturing and service industries, such as factories, sales, hospitality, construction, etc. Many children are unfortunately left behind in their hometowns with grandparents because their parents must work full time. Although technologies such as FaceTime and video-call programs allow parents to keep in touch with their youngsters, it is challenging for teenagers when they need tutoring or advice on school-related matters. In 2019, only 28% of Thai children lived with parents, while 43% lived with grandparents. The other 28% of Thai adolescents lived with someone else who is not a parent or grandparent (North Public News, 2019).

In many cases, parents do not earn an adequate income to fully support their children. Some grandparents, likewise, cannot physically or financially afford to rear them, resulting in children being required to be ordained as novices in Buddhism as an alternative way to obtain basic education. By becoming a novice residing in a temple and studying in a monastery school administered by the National Office of Buddhism, boys have the opportunity to acquire education for free and earn some allowance from donations. Novices have important roles to play in sustaining religion and as religious personnel (Ketkaew, 2022). The need for monks and novices to chant and bless Buddhist believers has never diminished, but the number of monks and novices has declined considerably. According to the National Statistics Organization, in 2010 there were 291,116 monks and 70,408 novices in 37,100 temples around the country. However, in 2020 the number dropped sharply. There were only 205,513 monks and 33,510 novices in 42,461 Buddhist temples (National Statistics Organization, 2021). The book, *Little Angels*, described novice monks as youths in rural Thailand who are trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, broken homes, illiteracy and drug abuse. “When all else fails, Buddhism becomes their last resort: providing them with physical shelter and spiritual refuge. It heals their childhood traumas and gives them a moral framework for living and a better outlook on life”, (Pannapadipo, 2009, p. 1).

Because novices are mostly still adolescents and teenagers, they are offered schooling in both the religious curriculum and general education prospectus. According to Hinsila and Pundhitamethee (2021), the Department of Religious Affairs and various other related

departments jointly agreed that a particular type of school should be set up to meet the needs of monks and novices. In 1971, the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School was established. It is under the supervision of the Department of Buddhist Education, National Office of Buddhism. There are now 408 campuses and more than 34,000 students studying for the lower-secondary certificate and high-school equivalence certificate (Kongrit, 2021). The term *Pariyat* means studying the scriptures. The school consists of three sections, namely, the Dhamma Section, the Pali Section, and the General Education Section. In the Dhamma Section, students mainly study Buddhism. In the Pali Section, the focus is on mastering the language in addition to learning Buddhism. In the General Education Section, students are expected to learn subjects similar to those of secondary school. Thus, apart from learning Buddhist philosophy and instructions, students must study the Thai language, foreign languages, mathematics, science, social studies, geography, history, economics, careers and technology (Wat Thung Hiang, 2020). They also take an examination that is directly conducted by the Ministry of Education. If these monks and novices leave the monkhood to study in state educational institutions or enter government services, they would have sufficient and appropriate knowledge to be able to integrate and advance themselves and the country as well.

Previous Research Studies

There have been many studies conducted to investigate conditions and circumstances at the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School campuses. For instance, Sarato (2021) studied the status and situation of education management on a campus, and he proposed solutions to the problems. He found that the campus lacked several important elements; therefore, he recommended seeking academic collaborations with higher education institutions to develop capabilities and competence. In addition, training and workshops were needed for the personnel in every academic area. In addition, computers and equipment for teaching and learning were needed. Fundraising should be organized for specific purposes such as for improving technology and community relations. Furthermore, teachers and instructors should be compensated competitively. Thitavisittro (2018) conducted qualitative research examining the education management on a campus in Chiang Mai. He found that four factors contributed to the efficiency of administration, namely, the vision, the budget, the environment, and personnel. Similarly, Thitapanyo, et al. (2022) used the mixed methods approach to study teachers' potential in temple school campuses. The data yielded a model for developing teachers' potential. The model consisted of values, skills, knowledge, attributes, and professional development. Values include beliefs in caring and virtue. Teachers must also have instructional dexterity, thorough knowledge, respectable characteristics, and continual improvement in their work. Chanwongduen, et al. (2020) conducted research to investigate conditions and problems in Dhamma education in eight monastery schools around Thailand. There were some problems with the Dhamma Education curriculum which included "lacking clarified and standardized curriculum, manuals and educational books. The temples did not develop teaching documents. Related departments lacked supervision, follow-up and support on teaching and learning activities. Teachers focused on lecturing. Teaching media were not up to date. Conditions in the classroom have not been improved. The budget was limited. The examination committees did not strictly supervise the exams. Qualifications of the examinees were not clear but focused on numbers. Examinations did not cover the content of the curriculum. Criteria for checking the results were vague. Exam results were not applied. Curriculum management for Dhamma education lacked a clear system" (p. 2). These research studies seem to show that teaching and learning at Phra Pariyat Dhamma School needs support. Therefore, this research aimed to examine the context of a Phra Pariyat Dhamma School campus in a temple in a district of a province in lower northeastern Thailand.

Critical pedagogy has been implemented and studied in several of Thailand's English teaching and learning contexts. For example, Stone (2017) used critical literacy in teaching English writing. By encouraging students to take an active role rather than being passive learners, they

could develop critical thinking skills and motivation to learn to write. Students were encouraged to have a dialogue with the teachers and teachers were expected to act as facilitators, not knowledge transmitters. Learners could be less dependent on teachers. Critical literacy had proved to be an effective way to increase inspiration by fostering meaningful and self-regulating learning. Maneewong (2019) implemented critical pedagogy in an English class in a Thai high school. In her study, critical pedagogy was applied to enhance the English discussion skills of eight tenth graders. The students learned to voice themselves, respect others, and empower others in group discussions. The researcher found from the pretest and posttest that students' discussion skills in terms of fluency, accuracy, and contents improved significantly. In addition, all participants demonstrated good democratic involvement during the discussion. Khamratana and Adunyarittigun (2021) introduced critical pedagogy as an alternative approach for teaching English literacy to marginalized students living near the northeastern border of Thailand. The researcher found that critical pedagogy could be used to deconstruct the political and economic oppression in students' lives. In addition, they were encouraged to investigate issues in the communities relevant to them and to turn real-life experiences into knowledge. Finally, teachers must provide a democratic platform, apply task-based education, and promote critical discussion. These results have demonstrated that critical pedagogy is a promising approach that can make a difference in English education of Thai students.

Methods

Data Collection and Participants

The setting of the research was a rural temple school located in a district of northeastern Thailand, 450 kilometers from Bangkok. Phenomenological approaches were utilized to seek to understand and describe the milieus of a non-traditional school in a rural area of the country. The advantage of using phenomenology in this context is that the researcher gained first-person perspectives and understanding of what happened in the temple school. These communities consisted mainly of people who speak Khmer, Lao, Thai, and Kuy respectively. Despite being linguistically diverse, students were required to use Thai at school, which could be quite problematic for them because Thai might not be their first language, and when English is yet another required language, it is even more challenging. The term "novice" referred to an ordained young boy aged below 20, but "monk" was an ordained managed twenty or older. Both novices and monks were enrolled at the school. Although they might be different in terms of age, some of them shared the same class standing because they had just started. The terms "novice", "monk", "novice and monk students" were used interchangeably to refer to the students.

The researcher visited the school campus twice to observe language classes of Grade 8 and Grade 10. The observation lasted about one hour in each class. Since there were only two to three students in each class, the researcher did not have any strategies to deal with the Hawthorne effect because students didn't have to act according to the researcher's expectation. The teacher kept them engaged in class. In addition, documents such as textbooks, schedules, and notices on the boards were analyzed. There were 49 novices and monks enrolled. Novices and monks in temple schools may not be considered mainstream learners; nevertheless, they deserve quality education equivalent to their conventional counterparts in regular schools. Typically, they come from underprivileged families who want to have children formally educated by ordination and service in the monastery (Charoensuthipan, 2022). Therefore, in order to provide a more inclusive English education for them, this research explored circumstances and challenges that they might encounter by inspecting the situation through the critical pedagogical point of view.

When the researcher visited the school, the COVID-19 pandemic was almost over, but it had an effect since the number of students had declined from 72 in 2021 to 49 at the time of the study in 2022. Among the students, only five resided in the temple where the school is located. The other 44 students commuted from their local temples near villages distributed among the rice

fields. Data were collected from interviews with four novices selected based on convenience sampling, six teachers, an abbot, and a school director. Each interview lasted for about ten minutes. The first interview was conducted with the school director who was the senior abbot well-regarded by local people. Then four full-time instructors responsible for management of paperwork, scheduling, and teaching courses were interviewed. Later, the researcher interviewed two part-time English instructors who were paid hourly because the temple school could not afford to hire English teachers full time. The interviews with the three selected students were conducted while they were taking a break from class. In addition, the researcher went to observe two temples near the villages where he conducted interviews with an abbot and a novice. The interviews were recorded on a smartphone and were later played and reviewed to write up the results descriptively. The results were later sent to the school director (abbot) for examination and to assure the accuracy of interpretation. The results were also reviewed by two English native speaking teachers who previously conducted an English camp for novices and monks at this school. They were experienced and have taught English in Thailand for more than a decade. They served as the specialists giving opinions on the data interpretation and writing up of this research. The researcher then revised the research report according to comments from the experienced teachers. For ethical consideration, the researcher had asked for permission from the director before collecting the data. The researcher also requested and was given consent from students, teachers, and abbots before observations and interviews. The data collected was carefully written and reported without naming the school, the district, or the participants in order to protect their identity and privacy.

Results

Circumstances

A day in the life of monks and novices is quite different from that of regular school students. Every morning, after waking and taking care of personal hygiene, monks and novices gather in the temple's grounds at about 5:00 or 5:30 a.m. Then, they walk into the village to receive food in their alms bowls. In some temples, they board a vehicle because villages might be distant. Then they alight the vehicle just before the village entrance and walk calmly in a row. They stop in front of houses where Buddhists wait to give alms such as rice, food, and donations. After finishing alms round, monks return to the temple and have breakfast from the alms given. Then at about 8:00 a.m., they are driven by pick-up truck or a scooter to the school. They arrive at school at about 9 a.m. and start classes. Usually, they study Buddhism and Pali in the morning. Then, at 11:00 a.m., they have lunch which is provided by the staff of the school. From 12.30 p.m., they study general education subjects, such as mathematics, English, science, technology, etc. At about 4 p.m., classes finish, and they return to their temples. If there are no ceremonies to perform, they meet other monks and novices in the hall to chant in the evening. At about 8:00 p.m., they have their own time in their rooms or quarters where they can do homework and study.

This routine might be interrupted due to the religious services that they perform in the community. For example, they may need to chant for funeral ceremonies. Usually, funeral ceremonies are held for three to five days before cremation. Monks and novices are invited to chant *parittas* or protective verses in the morning. Although novices are not usually invited to chant in the evening, they are told by the abbot to go if there are not enough monks. Therefore, on many occasions, monks do not walk into the village to receive food and donations in the morning. They take breakfast at the funeral after chanting to bless the dead. Additionally, in the evening after returning from school, they prepare to chant again at dusk for the funeral. The host usually puts donations in envelopes for the monks and novices. The evening ceremony typically lasts until about 7 or 8 p.m. When they return to the temple, if they still have the energy, they would study and review their lessons.

Challenges

According to the teachers interviewed, students came to class late often because they were engaged in Buddhist activities and ceremonies. Some students miss classes regularly due to personal disposition. Time allocated for studies is the first predicament. Many subjects are scheduled for novices and monks to learn. Thus, it is difficult to be outstanding both in the religion-oriented subjects and the general education subjects. They spend only half the day learning English, Math, science, and social studies. They do learn, but it is not easy to gain distinction. In addition to time, the declining number of students is disheartening. In some grade levels, there were less than five students. Even though the director asked teachers to go to villages' primary schools to advertise the education opportunities offered at the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School, only a few students showed interest. Several factors appeared to cause the deterioration, such as economic status, parental demand, and faith in Buddhism. It was sensitive to mention these issues because each individual had his reasons to study in the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School. For example, one novice said that he was ordained because his parents asked him to. On the other hand, another novice stated that it was his desire to be ordained, and his parents agreed. Nevertheless, the number of teenagers who wish to lead a monastic life has dwindled dramatically. In the meantime, primary schools in rural areas far from cities have offered education at the lower-secondary school or higher than Grade 6 level; therefore, disadvantaged teenagers are able to attend schools located not far from their homes. Consequently, this eases children to enter regular secondary schools rather than temple schools.

According to the abbot (director), in addition to recruiting students by advertising and counseling, the temple school annually organizes a summer camp in which teenagers, children, and adults are ordained and educated for about two weeks. They undergo experiences similar to novices and monks in the temple. Normally, parents who are Buddhists willfully authorize their children to participate in this camp because children do not go to school in the summer, and it is a chance to appreciate monastic life. It is also believed that when the parents die, they would go to heaven if their children were ordained as a novice or monk. Hence, 40 to 60 new novices or monks are seen each summer. After the camp, the director hopes some novices and monks remain in the monastery; however, almost all of them leave because they have school to go back to or jobs to return to. Currently, about 50 Buddhist temples are located in the district, but the number of monks and novices fluctuates. Some temples have more than ten novices or monks, while some temples have only a few. According to regulations, each temple must consist of four monks in order to be qualified as a religious site. When an exceptional student graduates from the temple school, he usually continues education at a college or university of his choice. If he remains ordained, he can continue higher education at a Buddhist university campus in the provincial city 40 kilometers away from the school. The abbot prefers that monks commute to university because there are not enough of them to provide religious services in the area.

Apart from limited time to study and decreasing student numbers, teachers encountered other complications. Because teachers have been hired officially according to the act specifically related to the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School passed by the legislature, they now have more security in their work; however, for several reasons, their salaries still depended on the school budget based on student numbers. It might take some time for the government to process direct payment from the Comptroller General Department. Full-time teachers were sufficient in most areas. Only the science and English subjects required part-time teachers because the school might have insufficient budget. Full-time teachers also had to manage the school. There was no secretary. Teachers usually took responsibility for many tasks, such as recruiting students, hiring part-time teachers, providing transportation, coordinating with the community, correspondence with related government units and other temples, preparing reports for quality assurance, writing and grading academic documents, etc. When there were events organized by temples in the area, the director requested that teachers take novices from the school to join the events.

English Teaching and Learning Situations

Chronic Attendance Dilemma

According to one part-time English teacher, the situation was quite dismal. The environment seemed not conducive to learning because students were too few in some grades. Some of them were also consistently absent from classes. Their reasons for absence were varied. Sometimes, there was no transportation. They also had to regularly join Dhamma camps to learn the Pali language and attend seminars on Buddhism. The classroom atmosphere was different from that in regular school. While regular school classrooms have 30 to 50 students, the classrooms at the temple school had only three to five students. In some levels, there were only two, and students seemed to take turns missing class. This resulted in the problem of discontinuous study. They didn't study as much content as they should. Even though students had textbooks, they did not have the chance to listen to the audio played in the class sessions while teachers explained the lessons.

On the issue of study time, there was a difference in opinion among the teachers interviewed. The senior full-time teacher, who used to be a monk and studied in this school, did not view the students' religious duties and services as a factor that really affected studying. If the novices and monks had worked harder on their assignments and school related matters, they would have achieved better, he believed. Therefore, it is necessary to instill accountability and reliability. This senior teacher also commented that the students' English skills were still very limited. He wanted them to be able to communicate proficiently. Therefore, if the novices and monks spent more time on their own learning and practicing more, their speaking and vocabulary would improve. Another part-time teacher also commented that novices and monks were generally not different from regular school students. Some of them studied hard, but some others were not interested in English. When these students graduated with high-school certificates, only a few continued education at the tertiary level. Others usually left the monkhood and school for work. Thus, different students had dissimilar goals in their lives.

Nevertheless, the part-time teacher stated that one of the major problems causing students to not be able to use English was inadequate time spent studying basic knowledge such as vocabulary, listening and grammar. The classes were interrupted often by religious duties and services that the students had to join. They usually made an attempt to attend classes in the morning, but they frequently had to leave school at about noon because of the need to attend ceremonies. Even though the teacher set up online classes to make up for lost time, not all students joined the online classes. Students could master a limited number of English words. It seemed that they do not have any chance to speak English outside the classroom. The community was Thai and other local language-speaking. The only time that they spoke English was during class time. Therefore, class time was crucial for them if they wanted to excel, since it was the only time that they listened to English dialogues, uttered words, and wrote anything in English.

Textbooks and Classroom Activities

The English textbooks adopted such as, *New Frontiers* and *New World*, were parallel with English classes in regular schools. The books featured four skills content, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The English teachers would start by playing the audio and video supplied by the publishers, and students would listen to vocabulary, write the words they hear, answer questions, repeat what they hear, and match the questions they hear to answers. Students were also encouraged to speak using the dialogues provided in the textbook. After that, they followed pre-reading activities, including listening and repeating the introduced vocabulary, matching words to their definitions, and matching pictures with words. These were followed by reading short passages before answering reading comprehension questions. In the writing section, they looked at pictures, completed words, filled in the blanks with the best vocabulary, and wrote

sentences. Since the students' backgrounds were varied, class progress could be sluggish so teachers had to choose only some units in the textbook to cover. It was usually too arduous to study all the contents in the text in one term. The duration of term was similar to that of the regular school. The first term started in May and ends in September. The second term began in November and lasts until March. In the middle of the term and at the end of each term, the teachers administered exams which were mostly multiple choice. Usually, there was no summer session. One of the part-time teachers also informed the researcher that she had to conduct class online several times to make up. She used Google Meet to deliver the content. Generally, she set time in the evening so that more students could participate using their smartphones.

Individual Differences among Students

Another challenging aspect of English learning and teaching in the temple school was individual differences. The unique variance was age because temple schools allow monks who might be much older to attend classes to earn a high-school credential. Among the students, some were senior monks aged over 50. These students lacked educational opportunities when they were younger and were ordained later in life. They were not keen on using technology for education, but they paid attention well. According to the teacher interviewed, these students showed satisfactory learning outcomes because they attended classes regularly and did their homework. They were motivated to earn a high-school certificate and gain knowledge; thus, they seemed to be more studious than some younger novices. However, some older students might have to make extra effort to learn using technology, such as smartphones and computers, with which their younger peers might be more acquainted.

This heterogeneity did not include only age or maturity but also responsibilities. Teachers commented that a few students excelled in English. They earned good grades because they were more responsible. They also had a good background since they were studying in primary school. Even though they missed some classes, they followed-up on assignments and lessons. Therefore, their learning outcomes were more satisfactory or even excellent. However, some students still had a certain troubled attitude towards English. When learning, they might become bored with or indifferent to the lessons. The teacher had to keep them from being distracted using games and active learning techniques. In addition, since English was usually scheduled late in the afternoon at about 4 to 5 p.m., they might feel tired as they had had a full day of sitting, listening, and speaking already. This affected the quality of learning. They might be compelled to learn because of obligation. If there was too much pressure, they might choose to leave the classroom. Therefore, it was a delicate and complicated matter dealing with a heterogenous group of students.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research was conducted to examine the circumstances, challenges, and approaches to providing inclusive English education for novice monks in a rustic temple school. The research revealed many problems such as decreasing number of novices and monks, limited time for study, and lack of resources. Resolutions to these problems can be very intricate because of many issues involved such as politics, economics, religion and culture, but there is a good possibility of making English education in temple schools outstanding and close to the international standard. First, a long-term solution should be implemented; for example, building a robust, bustling and sustainable economy to attract those who have moved to cities to return to their hometowns and reduce the impacts of global capitalism (Pennycook, 2008). The government also needs to promote agricultural businesses because farmers cannot make adequate profits from their produce; therefore, they have had to relocate to where opportunities exist. If the price of rice and crops grown by farmers is justly increased, fewer farmers would abandon their land. Currently, the majority of the residents are senior citizens. A balanced distribution of population could assist in generating a more sustainable economy and community. It is hoped that when the number of

teenagers increases to the same level as before, there will be a satisfactory number of them choosing to become novices and monks and gain education through the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School. This will contribute to a lively school atmosphere more conducive to learning English. This finding corresponds to that of Thitavisttro (2018) which revealed that the environment in the temple schools should be developed so that it is conducive to education. Students may need peers to collaborate, interact, and learn from one another. If there are only a few fellows, the ambience may be depressing.

As for short-term solutions, students should be encouraged to be autonomous learners. Promoting student agency might be the potential key to success. As Zyphur (2020, p. 34) suggested, “both learner agency and critical pedagogy are concepts that promote student responsibility and respect the student’s right and potential to take action for change”. This could be the answer to problems of individual differences among the students. Some monks are adults, but many novices are still teenagers. Therefore, their mindsets may mismatch. Especially for English learning, some students have better backgrounds than others. It is very complex for the teachers to provide the right content for everyone. While some lessons may be too tough for some students, they might be too simple for others. Some students missed classes often. Therefore, self-regulated learning is necessary to make them responsible and aware of their own accountability. Self-regulated learning develops students’ appreciation of their identity and a sense of belonging. When students use agency or have an active role in their learning, they depend on motivation, desire, self-efficacy, and a growth mindset to steer towards achievement. This empowers them to act with a sense of purpose, which guides them to thrive and succeed in society.

This leads to another strategic approach to inclusivity which is to deliver lessons and interactive exercises to facilitate self-paced learning. It can be online or on-demand, but the lessons must be relevant to the core curriculum, so that students can apply what is learned to accomplish program requirements. As revealed by Sarato (2021), technology and equipment should be improved and applied to teaching and learning. With supervised use of technology, students can learn at their convenience, which compensates for lost class time. Applications can be designed to build vocabulary skills. Virtual conferencing can also connect them to peers, both in the same school or other schools in the country. Some novices in other areas such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai may be more fluent in English, so they can learn from each other through meeting via virtual conferencing programs. This can support an encouraging learning atmosphere. There should also be mentors who can monitor, evaluate, and offer feedback. This is in line with the findings of Chanwongduen, et al. (2020) which showed that there was a need for supervision of, follow-up on and support for teaching and learning activities. In this research, it was found that the temple school did not have a full-time English teacher. The two teachers who were responsible for classes were affiliated with the district’s regular high school. They already have their own duties and commitments at their workplaces. Thus, it might not be easy for them to oversee all activities at the temple school. Therefore, the government should provide a full-time English teacher as a mentor for the novices and monks so that they can receive feedback. The mentor could propose study goals, plans, course objectives, skill sets, and evaluation criteria. The issue of English language assessment is also crucial. Since there are individual differences among novices and monks, the examination and measurement should be based on assessed students’ backgrounds and the skill sets applicable to their levels in order to make progress. It might not be effective if the instructor uses a one-size-fits-all curriculum.

Another important issue is the English textbook used which is based on the availability in the market provided by publishers. Although the language genres and stories might follow international standards, the content and themes may reflect the lifestyles of people in the dominant culture. This may lead students to reject their own traditions in favor of western doctrines. The schoolbooks, therefore, should be written and designed so that the matters and vernaculars are pertinent to local traditions and ways of life. It would not only motivate learners to learn but also promote aspects of minority cultures (Zyphur, 2020). The area where this temple school is situated is rich in cultural heritage, including music, food, art, and literature. If these valuable customs are

recognized, accepted and celebrated in English and integrated into lessons and exercises, students would easily comprehend and appreciate their own cultural identity. Even more, lessons for communicative language teaching can be geared toward local places such as markets, farms, the village, etc. There is still a great amount of English vocabulary associated with local manifestations that students need to master before they move on to college.

For the limitation of this research, there were some constraints on the research design since it was conducted by using phenomenology which might have been exploratory, subjective, and tentative. The data were also collected mainly from convenient sampling. Therefore, some preconceptions might have influenced the interpretation of the data. Another setback is that this research was conducted only in a rural temple school, thus the result might not be generalizable to similar schools in the cities. There might be different circumstances and challenges in other temple schools. Further research may be done by using different research designs and data collection methods such as large-scale standardized exams, questionnaires, mixed methods, and triangulations.

In conclusion, novices and monks who gain education in alternative schools have the chance to further their education at a higher level. However, their opportunities to achieve the desirable success might be hindered by obligations and a deficiency of resources. For example, instead of having sufficient qualifications to be admitted to a program of their choice, they may have to study in whatever major that their score can allow. In addition, some students might struggle when they study in college and are somehow prone to failure and risk of dropping out. It is one of the obligations of faculty members in universities to reach out to schools to prepare college-bound people. It might be too late to wait until they enter a college program because they need to complete hundreds of credit hours both in the general education scheme and their major field of study. Each course demands a solid background knowledge of English. All things considered, universities must extend economic, technological, scholastic, and cultural support to prepare students in temple schools in order to expedite their further success in college.

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