

TITLE: English Language Development Policy: Foreign Teachers, Hegemony, and Inequality of Education in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Thailand's Participation as a member of the ASEAN Community forces her government to accelerate improvement of her citizens' competency of the English language. The continuing wave by Thai governments to develop and modernize the quality of education has influenced Thai society. Within Thailand, English proficiency has been reported as being inferior to many ASEAN countries. Consequently, Thai state has launched alternative educational policies to elevate the quality of education and English skills of her citizens. Also Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) commenced persuading Thai schools to initiate its English Program (EP) curriculum in 1995.

A portion of the requirements in providing EP is for foreign teachers to teach 5 subjects of Thai curriculum in English. The mythology of foreign teachers and English language development has been combined in Thai society. Eleven years later, the average results of Thai students in English Language, compared to other subjects, were the lowest despite many rules and regulations being produced enforcing schools, teachers, and students to rise above this poor quality status.

This article utilizes Foucault's discourse analysis as its research method to explore the resistances against the power of the Thai state in Thailand's modern cultural phenomena regarding English language development policies, foreign teachers, hegemony, and inequality of Thai education. The facts discovered here help us to re-evaluate rules and institutions and to participate in the formation of a political will where the stakeholders have their roles as citizens to play. This article "is to make windows where there were once walls." Michel Foucault.

INTRODUCTION

"The working language of ASEAN shall be English" was introduced in ARTICLE 34 WORKING LANGUAGE OF ASEAN at the ASEAN Summit in November 2007. In reality, the implementation of English language as the sole working language of ASEAN is due to be formalized at the end of 2015. (Kirkpatrick, 2008)

Poor English language skills of Thai citizens have become "talk of the town" within Thailand, since Thailand's Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was ranked 116th from 163 countries in 2010 (Table 1) (ETS, 2008). In 2012, Thailand was placed 53rd in English proficiency out of 54 participating countries by English First (EF) and was ranked 6th among ASEAN member countries (Sanonguthai, 2014). In 2013, Thailand remained in the lowest group of the English Proficiency Index, compiled by English First's global ranking (ASIAWeekly, 2013)

Thailand's Quality Warning Foundation urged Thai state to improve the English-teaching standard of the country so that the competitiveness in preparation for the ASEAN community in 2015 could be initiated (ASIAWeekly, 2013). There are 3 main areas that Thai governments instigated to elevate the English proficiency for Thai education, namely; policies, institutions, and financial which will be presented further in the next part of this

article. The implication of each area is overly complicated as well as the quality of English language teaching standard discourse. For example, it is displayed in terms of imbalance of a surfeit of curriculum content, inadequate teachers, overload of teacher's responsibilities other than teaching, insufficient teaching materials and equipment, poor budgets spent on teaching-learning to support the goals for English development in the country, inappropriate methods to assess the schools and students, large class sizes, rules and regulations (Baker, 2012)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is a part of my PhD thesis which using Foucault's genealogical inquiries to explore the historical issues of the present in English language education in Thailand. The ambition of genealogy is to "change" that reality, by opening up new possibilities for both thought and action. There are 2 research approaches applied in my research. Firstly, Michel Foucault's genealogical inquiries to open up vital possible issues about English language development conducted by Thai state. Thereafter, Foucault's discourse analysis was used to investigate the ways that Thai state has been using to promote and develop English proficiency of her citizens through official and unofficial documents, laws, news, reports, etc. In addition, discourse analysis was enable me to scrutinize the hidden pictures of the ineffectiveness of Thai state's policies.

TABLES AND GRAPHS

Table 1: 2010 TOEFL Internet-based (iBT) Total and Section Score Means – All Examinees
Classified by Geographical Region and Native Country

Geographic Region and Native Country	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Total
ASIA					
Afghanistan	15	17	21	19	73
Azerbaijan	18	18	20	20	76
Bangladesh	20	20	21	22	83
Bhutan	19	19	22	22	82
Brunei Darussalam	*	*	*	*	*
Cambodia	13	14	18	18	63
China	20	18	18	21	77
Hong Kong	19	20	21	22	81
India	23	23	23	23	92
Indonesia	19	19	20	21	78
Japan	18	17	17	18	70
Kazakhstan	18	19	21	20	78
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of	19	19	19	20	78
Korea, Republic of	21	20	20	21	81
Kyrgyzstan	18	19	21	20	79
Lao, People's Democratic Republic	15	16	18	18	67
Macao	18	18	18	20	74
Malaysia	22	22	21	24	88
Maldives	*	*	*	*	*
Mongolia	17	18	19	19	73
Myanmar	17	17	19	20	74
Nepal	19	19	21	21	79
Pakistan	21	22	23	23	88
Philippines	21	22	23	22	88
Singapore	24	25	24	26	98
Sri Lanka	20	21	22	21	83
Taiwan (Republic of China)	19	18	19	20	76
Tajikistan	14	15	20	17	66
Thailand	18	19	18	20	75
Timor-Leste	*	*	*	*	*
Turkmenistan	17	19	21	19	76
Uzbekistan	18	19	21	20	77
Viet Nam	18	17	18	20	73

Source: ETS <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/TOEFL-SUM-2010.pdf>

RESULTS

The domination of Thai state's power over 3 main areas namely policies, institutions, and financial; have been heavily applied throughout the English language education development in Thailand. The inflexible and flip-flop policies created by powerful institutions have led to be beneficial for schools and students with better financial support. Whereas the schools and students who facing the poverty and lack of support; do not seem to have hope to be developed equally.

Complicated Policies:

The Ministry of Education is playing the main role to recover the quality of English language skills of Thai students in order to join the ASEAN community. There are 4 different

categories of learning-teaching programs in Thailand namely Normal Thai Program (NTP), Mini-English Program (MEP), English Program, (EP), and International Program (IP). NTP is the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008, eight core subjects from the National Curriculum: Thai language, mathematics, science, social studies, religion and culture, health and physical education, arts, careers and technology, and foreign languages. (Sanonguthai, 2014)

NTP, MEP, and EP are the programs that use Thai Ministry of Education's curriculum. IP is allowed to use foreign curricula i.e. Cambridge IGCSE or International Baccalaureate (IB). Amongst NTP, MEP, and EP; EP has been selected as Thailand's legal and official program to elevate English language proficiency for Thai students. EP has been promoted and has its specific Act to apply EP curriculum within Thai schools. Any Thai schools that would like to run EP curriculum, have to apply and receive permission from the MOE. One of the important rules of EP schools is that five out of eight of the core subjects shall be taught by foreign teachers. In order to employ a foreign teacher, there are many steps to hire him/her legally such as a recognized degree by Teacher Council of Thailand (TCT), required training course by TCT. (English Institute, 2014)

The problems occur with every step when employing a foreign teacher. For instance, there are many countries that do not use the term "Degree" for their undergraduate level. Other terms are used instead. For example, "Diploma", "Advanced diploma", "associates degree" (Private School Association, 2014). Apart from that, in order to improve English language for non-native speakers, the vital well-known skill is "Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language" (TEFL or TESL) (Trinity College London, 2014). However, the essential skill necessary to develop English language is not a part of TCT's requirements to become a foreign teacher in Thailand. TCT's ideal policy is to enforce Thai schools to employ teachers who have obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Education, thereby ensuring that

these foreign teachers have teaching skills. Nevertheless, subject-teachers require different teaching theories and methods to those of language-teachers. Native and non-native teachers can be an issue of language teaching but this is not the case for subject-teaching (Borg, 2006). When the schools combine native English speakers with, for example, mathematics teachers, only in order for the students in EP schools to understand the English language; it seems to make the situation more difficult, complicated, and expensive for the schools to pay for these teachers. Foreign Teachers must obtain the proper types of visa to legally work in Thailand. Problems occur with Thai embassies, consuls, and immigration offices when applying for the correct visa. The rules are changeable with no communication with their clients beforehand. Without the TCT's approval, the visa cannot be issued as it is one of the working visa's requirements. There are too many complaints about the TCT's working speed, unpractical requirements, and complexity of requirements to obtain their approvals.

At Chiang Mai immigration office, the queue to apply and receive the visa is limited to 50 applications per day. As a result, foreign teachers need to go to the immigration office to unofficially queue at around 4:00 a.m. (Pundee, 2015). Thereafter they need to obtain a work permit from the Thai Labour Office. When foreign teachers are working in language schools, they are usually providing a service to the community, not only for students attending a formal school. English language training can be provided at offices, hospitals, homes, or outdoors at English camps. Conversely, the labour regulations state that foreigners shall only work at the address stated on the work permit. Although they are assigned by their language schools to train outside the school, it is implied as breaking the rules and regulations (Labour Law, 1978)

Complicated Institutions:

TCT is playing the main roles of controlling the quality of teachers. Plenty of rules and regulations with regards to obtaining teacher licenses amongst Thai and foreign teachers have been applied throughout Thailand. The National Teacher Act states that it is prohibited for schools to employ teachers who do not have their teacher license. Also this law makes it illegal for teachers who have not got a teacher license to teach in schools. These rules are possible to apply only to schools in big cities especially Bangkok because the teachers can only receive services provided by TCT. Required training is completely controlled and conducted in the capital city or nearby (Ministry of Education, 2015). Poor schools located along the borders of the country where it is so difficult to have sufficient teachers, or in many areas where it is too dangerous to employ ordinary teachers, soldiers are requested to become the teachers instead. It is impossible to follow the TCT's many rules and regulation without this causing concern throughout the country. Complaints and concerns raised by ordinary schools did not seem to receive any positive reaction from TCT, until the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the second daughter of Thailand's current king who is involved in patronizing and running many poor schools along the border of Thailand, called for an urgent meeting with the TCT's committee. She made a direct complaint to the committee about the inflexibility of their system. Then, not long after this meeting, TCT announced some exemptions for her schools (Daily News, 2014). In order to counterbalance the power of TCT, it requires powerful influence from such people as the HRH Princess.

Complicated Financial:

The equality of education is one of the common agreements in the ASEAN charter. Thailand's English language development policy has not been managed holistically. Budget allocation policy is one of the important political issues. "Thailand's Education Ministry is

also now working with the British Council to bring 2,000 native English speakers to help. But again, like most government initiatives this tends to lack components conducive to success, the 2,000 new teachers will be hired on a part-time basis only and the schools will have to pay a portion of the teachers' salary. This means poorer schools, which are the neediest, will be without qualified English teachers as in the past." (Saiyasombut & SiamVoice, 2012)

EP curricula forces the EP schools to look for foreign teachers who have degrees in different subject areas, i.e. science, mathematics, etc. in order to improve Thai students' English language proficiency. The ideal language teachers should have the knowledge and skills of teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language (TEFL/TESL) instead of focusing on mathematics, sciences, or the other subjects. According to Borg (2006), it was stated that "in many places in the world, the basic professional qualification for working in language teaching is a TEFL 4-week certification course." This shows that in the financial spending to step up English language ability in Thailand, it has not been worthwhile as the Thai students' English language proficiency results, as recently shown, are still very low (ASIAWeekly, 2013).

DISCUSSION

The discourse of "Educational Quality" and "English Language Development" have been a focal point in Thailand since B.E.2538 .Until now, B.E. 2558, Thailand is still struggling to achieve in either "Educational Quality" or "English language proficiency". Although there are in some parts of the country, where higher educational budgets are involved, such as Bangkok as a capital city, Chiang Mai in Muang District, Phuket, Chonburi, etc.; some wealthy schools where children from good family backgrounds are studying and are providing good quality English language skills to their students. There are some Thai schools

that are excellent and providing free or low-priced tuition, but the students studying in these schools do not represent of the majority of students in Thailand.

Foucault's genealogy and discourse analysis methods reveals discursive practice concealed by the "Educational Quality" and "English language development" discourse used by different institutions of the Thai State. The voice of the people or institutions who have got political and cultural hegemony shout louder and can be heard quicker than the voice of ordinary citizens and institutions. Nevertheless, the HRH Princess's power of speech can only make changes for her educational institutions. Whereas there are many more schools and people facing the same problems. Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory presented "the idea that the ruling class can manipulate the value system and mores of a society"¹.

The association amongst hegemony, institutions, and inequality has been revealed in the form of an endless cycle. Hegemonic power establishes legal rights and rules, as its tools, to support the power of hegemonic institutions for Thai state. The hegemonic institutions, i.e. TCT, define and decide the meaning of "teachers"; or Thai ministry of education sets the "development method" of English language skills for Thai schools. Bourdieu (1991) said that hegemonic power as a continuing process of meaning and identity formation and its processes arise in 'discursive fields'. Only "teachers" who have obtained their teacher licenses are the TCT's teachers. This implies that the TCT's teacher licenses represent the quality of teachers in Thailand which does not reflect, in practice, to the quality of student's educational scores. The complicated ongoing process to attain a teacher license is comparable to a frightening educational ritual and therefore creates a feeling of great pride for the teachers with a teacher license and this compels teachers without a teacher license to search in order to acquire one. A Foreign teacher qualification is falling into the same category as

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony>

the other Thai teacher's qualification. TCT aggressively uses their hegemonic power to judge which universities throughout the world are acceptable or not, whereas NO THAI university made it to the Times Higher Education's (THE) World Reputation Rankings 2015, reflecting the fact that the Kingdom's tertiary education institutes do not yet enjoy solid recognition in the international academic community² (TheNation, March 13, 2015). Foreign teachers and schools who disobey TCT's directions by refusing to gain permission to teach are always punished and this has an automatic affect to the complicated process when obtaining visas and work permits. This makes foreign teachers illegal by law, although their ability to develop Thai student's English language are invaluable. The reality of Thai education society has been reshaped by these powerful hegemonic authorities which is conformity with Mumby and Stohl (1991: 314) stated that "...structure systems (...) such that certain conceptions of reality are organized into everyday practices, while other possible conceptions are organized out".

Finally, I would like to use Foucault's quote to lead my article to the conclusion which he insisted about the reduction of the power of law as it provides three main roles;

- 1) it underwrites a schema of power which is homogenous for every level and domain family or state, relations of education and production
- 2) It enables power never to be thought of other than in negative terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship. Power is what says no. And the challenging of power as thus conceived can appear only as transgression.
- 3) It allows the fundamental operation of power to be thought of as that of a speech-act: enunciation of law, discourse of prohibition. The manifestation of power

² <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Thai-universities-not-recognised-in-worldwide-rank-30255921.html>

takes on the pure form of “Thou shalt not” (Michel Foucault in Cornell, D., 1980: 195).

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