

Stakeholders' Insights Into Migrant Students' Experiences in a Thai Public School: A Linguistic Ecological Perspective

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Migrant students have been increasing in Thai public schools due to their parents' labor mobility within the ASEAN community. There are, however, gaps concerning roles and responsibilities of educational stakeholders and migrant parents who are key to the migrant students' access and equity in schools. This case study aims to explore stakeholders' insights into learning experiences of migrant students from Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia in language classes at one Thai government primary school in Samut Sakhon province. Drawing upon a lens of linguistic ecology, the results reveal that these key stakeholders were interrelated and influential to the migrant students' learning experience in this linguistically and culturally diverse school. The school administrators and teachers were instrumental in promoting a positive language learning experience for migrant students, who contributed cultural and linguistic diversity to the school environment although they had poor academic performance due to their limited Thai proficiency. Communications between the school and migrant parents were not effective because of parents' language barriers. Professional learning communities (PLC) and school-family-community (SFC) partnerships should be established in order to provide better language teaching and learning experiences for the migrant students and create an inclusive and equitable education for all. These partnerships can be strengthened through the promotion of recognition and awareness raising of linguistic and cultural diversity. This study can potentially address the significant collaboration and engagement from relevant stakeholders, communities, and policymakers to promote harmony, inclusivity, and quality education for migrant students in public schools in Thailand.

Keywords: Linguistic Ecology; Migrant Students; Professional Learning Community (PLC); School-Family-Community (SFC) Partnership; Thai Public School



INTRODUCTION

Due to the rise of linguistic and cultural diversity in educational contexts in Thailand, migrant students in Thai public schools have increasingly encountered academic and social challenges (Nomnian, 2009a; 2009b; Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018a, 2018b). Thai schools have recently become linguistically and culturally diverse as a result of the labor mobility and migration of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Thailand has played a major role in the AEC by promoting long-term socioeconomic development and protection of

human rights of foreign laborers, particularly those from neighboring, least-developed countries including Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, whose labor forces have been rising in various sectors and industries (Kampan & Tanielien, 2017; Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). According to Olivier (2018), Thailand has a range of bilateral labor agreements/MOUs that allow four-year employment with a 30-day interim period for Cambodian, Lao, Myanmar, and Vietnamese workers who are predominantly employed in low-skilled jobs, such as fishing, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, domestic work, and other services.

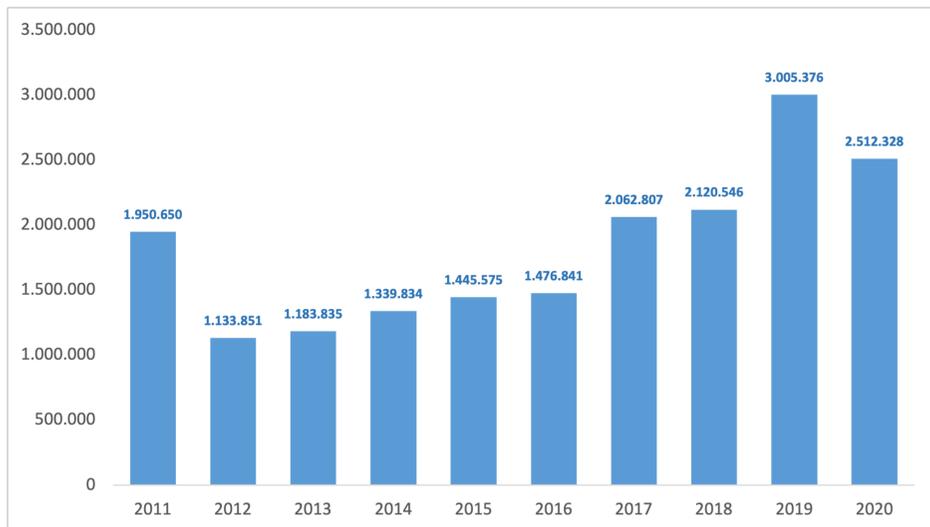


Figure 1. Number of permitted migrant workers in Thailand (2011-2020). (National Statistical Office, retrieved 10 August 2021 from <http://statbbi.nso.go.th/staticreport/page/sector/th/02.aspx>).

As a result of the increasing number of migrant workers in Thailand, there has been an increasing number of migrant children attending Thai public schools (Petchot, 2014). As of July 2005, the Thai government's educational policy permits migrant children to study in Thai public schools for free (Arphattananon, 2012). Despite the inclusion of migrant children in the Thai government's "Education for All" policy, the statistical data regarding the proportion of these children enrolled in schools and their educational attainments are still unclear and questionable (Nawarat, 2019). According to Michael and Trines (2018), inequity and inequality of access in Thai education are linked to socio-economic factors; in particular, those in poor, remote areas, linguistic and ethnic minorities, and migrant communities have markedly lower enrollment and graduation rates (particularly at the upper secondary level) compared to the population as a whole. Education gaps exist between urban/large and rural/small schools, especially as the latter are ones that may suffer from the lack of fundamental infrastructure, budget allocation, preparation, and support from the Ministry of Education (MoE) (Haruthaithanasan, 2018; Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018a, 2018b).

Drawing upon the "Proposals for the Second Decade of Education Reform (2009–2018)" provided by Thailand's Office of the Education Council (2009), one of the

government's measures is to promote the development of education and learning at all levels. Despite the fact that Thailand has gradually made progress by promoting children's access to primary and secondary schools through a large allocation for increasing the quality of basic education, inequities still exist in terms of the inaccessibility of disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities (Nomnian et al., 2020). School policies and practices, as well as the roles of educational stakeholders in response to linguistically and culturally diverse families and students, are often under-examined (Coady, 2019). In addition, gaps in knowledge concerning the implementation of educational policy, objectives, and services for migrant children still exist, requiring stakeholders' engagement to enhance migrant children's rights to education (Tuangratananon et al., 2019).

The present study investigates the insights of school administrators, teachers of Thai and English, and Thai and migrant parents who can potentially enhance the language learning experiences of migrant students in a Thai primary school in Samut Sakhon province through a linguistic ecological perspective. This study sheds light on professional learning communities and school-family-community partnerships, and raises recognition and awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity. It will help to uphold educational equity and inclusivity of migrant students and their parents to inform educational policies and practices of language teaching and learning in Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic Ecology and Education

The conceptual framework of this study is underpinned by the linguistic ecological perspective pioneered by Haugen (1972). Linguistic ecology (also known as language ecology or ecolinguistics) is the study of languages employed in interactions between language users, who employ various psychological and social factors situated in any given environment to communicate and create relationships leading to the association between humans and their surroundings (Haugen, 1972). The concept of language ecology has been employed in language education research to address issues regarding linguistic rights, legitimacy, diversity, ideology, and identities of language users in response to situated sociocultural, educational, and geopolitical contexts (Nomnian, 2017).

According to Hornberger (2003), linguistic ecology not only examines classroom interactions, but also explores the interrelationships among the languages, their speakers, and other sociocultural factors in the environment. In this study, the metaphor of language ecology can explain and address the complex interactional factors and functions between languages, speakers, and social practices embedded within a particular environment (Mühlhäusler, 1996). Van Lier (2010), for example, employs the ecological perspective in school settings to examine the nature of classroom interaction and educational experience. Wang (2019), for instance, employs an ecolinguistic view to explore the language teaching and learning process as a micro-ecological system with regard to the various elements regarding learners, teachers, language learning environments, teaching objectives, content, and materials.

Drawing upon the complex relationship of language ecology with regard to diverse languages and dialects in Thai history, education, culture, and religion, Thai people perceive standard Thai as the uncontested national language, as it is spoken by members of the higher levels of society (Smalley, 1994). In the Thai educational system, however, the roles of education and language ecology are concerned with Thai nation-state building. Compulsory schools and national curricula reinforce the use of central Thai as a standard/official medium of instruction throughout the country in order to integrate students of diversified ethnic backgrounds to become Thai (Leepreecha, 2007). Based on a UNICEF and Mahidol University (2018) study, inequities in the Thai educational system remain considerably critical not only due to the access of education among disadvantaged groups of children, but also learning outcomes that are dependent on children's geographic, linguistic, and socioeconomic contexts. Children in Thailand who do not use Thai as their first language are positioned as peripheral, excluded, and as underachievers academically and socially.

There are still persisting needs among disadvantaged groups who live in remote areas with poor educational services, and who do not understand the language of instruction (H. R. H. Princess Sirindhorn, 2018). In addition, indigenous languages in Thailand have gradually been marginalized and some have become extinct due to the fact that younger generations of ethnic minority groups do not use their home/mother-tongue languages and prefer to use Thai as the official and national language in their daily lives, education, and work (Morton, 2016; Srichampa et al., 2018). Ungsitipoonporn et al. (2021) claim that "the promotion of Thai as the official and national language and its use as medium of instruction in a formal school system puts small languages under threat" (p. 268). Haruthaithanasan (2018) also asserts that Thailand's current education reforms were poorly implemented with a focus on quantity rather than quality, which could be due to the lack of support from the MoE and its educational agencies for adequately enabling school administrators and teachers to aptly handle educational challenges. According to Keawsomnuk (2017), the education management for ethnic groups and educational institutes depends on interrelated stakeholders who have played various roles and have had different responsibilities; thus, the basic education policy for Thai ethnic groups should be established and contextualized from the locality.

The following sections address key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, and parents, and the intricate roles and responsibilities they have in facilitating migrant students' experiences in Thai educational contexts.

School Administrators

School administrators play an important role in leading, supervising, and supporting teachers' instruction, and students' learning in order to optimize school performance. School administrators should appropriately implement educational innovations and policies that serve both the national curriculum and needs of local contexts. The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) provides a national core curriculum for foreign languages, aiming primarily at English, while other foreign languages, such as French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Pali, and languages of neighboring countries, such as Lao, Myanmar, Khmer, and Malay depend on individual

educational contexts to decide which courses are contextually and locally appropriate (Inphoo & Nomnian, 2019). Primary school students should be able to apply “foreign languages in various situations, both in the classroom and the outside community and in the global society, forming a basic tool for further education, livelihood and exchange of learning with the global society” (OBEC, 2008, p. 253). OBEC’s standards are geared towards developing the learner’s acquisition of a favorable attitude towards foreign languages, the ability to use foreign languages for communicating in various situations, seeking knowledge, engaging in a livelihood, and pursuing further education at higher levels (Nomnian, 2013a). Instructional leadership among Thai school administrators is necessary in order to promote more pre-service and in-service training programs in curriculum and instructional design, and academic affairs management, while also engaging them in consistent school curriculum assessment and development, and instructional supervision. Student achievement should not be measured only by standardized test (O-NET) scores, but in combination with other evaluations (such as performance tests, portfolios, projects), with emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills assessments. Research and development on the proper assessment of student achievement should be compulsory for long-term positive effects (Kaur et al., 2016; Lunrasri & Gajaseni, 2014).

Teachers

Teachers’ roles are correlated with their performance in effective instruction and vice versa; thus, the quality of their instruction needs to be promoted and supported for sustainable student achievement. Students will then have the knowledge and understanding of the stories and cultural diversity of the world community, and will be able to creatively convey Thai concepts and culture to the global society (OBEC, 2008). To promote effective classroom instruction, there are three principles of curriculum design for ethnic minority students: First, the values and goals of the ethnic minority community should be taken into account by the MoE when designing a curriculum and academic development program; second, step-by-step language learning and literacy processes should start with learners’ mother tongues and gradually move to Thai language, with the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing developed and practiced simultaneously; and, third, learners’ sociocultural identities should be preserved (Premsrirat, 2018; Premsrirat & Person, 2018). Hedtke and Zimenkova (2013) suggest that the educational management of schools can potentially enable policy makers and stakeholders to identify the actual problems, leading to the establishment of more specialized and contextualized programs in particular educational institutes that may not be implementing a completely centralized approach according to the national educational management.

Parents

Parents should be partnered with schools, and vice versa, to address issues related to young learners’ developmental needs in order to maximize their learning experiences, particularly for those from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Beauregard et al., 2014; Paik et al., 2019; Vazquez-Nuttall et al., 2006). According to

Gary and Witherspoon (2011), family-school partnerships with parents, communities, and stakeholders are essential for maximizing the potential of students from low-income and minority groups, whose roles should be included in decision making and school governance in order for schools to succeed. Yet, these groups are so unfortunately overburdened and socioeconomically deprived that they are unlikely to engage with school activities and their children's achievement (Gary & Witherspoon, 2011). Ratliffe and Ponte (2018), for instance, state that, although family-school partnerships lead to academic achievement and positive social outcomes for migrant students in Hawai'i, their parents would like to know their children's learning experiences at school, and request school principals to create partnerships and manage cultural mismatches with educators in order to avoid linguistic and sociocultural barriers for their engagement. Because of students' increasing racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in schools, it has become imperative for educators to re-conceptualize and problematize family-school engagement and partnership creation (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2017). Key actors suggested as policy drivers and mechanisms to promote basic education for ethnic groups may include primary education service area offices, local communities, scholars, civil society organizations, and schools or educational institutes.

In summary, the educational stakeholders – namely, school administrators, teachers, and parents – in this study are agents of change whose social practices, performed in a particular public school, can create positive learning experiences for migrant children in order to promote linguistically responsive policies and practices that can support migrant students and their families.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted through an ethnographic lens based on a case study. According to Merriam (1998), case studies explore how individuals naturally behave and participate in their educational settings, such as the culture within a classroom, which can deepen our understandings and interpretations of the meanings for those involved. Case studies are generalizable in a way that they are related to other human beings and their interactions in a certain place and time (Jocuns et al., 2020). This study can be compared to other similar cases where teachers, learners, and parents play roles and are involved in the school's contexts and stakeholders' interactions and relationships in similar ways.

The case study of this research setting was a public primary school situated in Nadee district in Samut Sakhon province. It was chosen because one of the researchers has been working as an English teacher there for more than six years and wanted to explore issues related to migrant students whose presence played a significant role in administration and teaching. This school is located in a geographical area where approximately 260,000 migrant laborers, mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, resided (Ministry of Labor, 2019, p. 13). In 2017, there were more than 2,590 migrant and stateless children, the majority (1,620) of whom were from Myanmar. Seven hundred were stateless and admitted to public schools in Samut Sakhon Education Service Area Office (ESAO) (UNICEF, 2018, p. 27).

This study includes 419 students in total – 145 and 274 at the kindergarten and primary school levels, respectively. There were 29 registered migrant students from grades one to six, as shown in Table 1.

Levels	Lao	Myanmar	Cambodian	Other nationalities
Grade 1	1	1	1	Unidentifiable 1
Grade 2	-	3	1	African 1
Grade 3	1	3	-	Tai 1
Grade 4	1	3	1	-
Grade 5	1	3	1	-
Grade 6	-	5	-	-
Total	4	18	4	3

Table 1. Nationalities of migrant students at a primary school level. (own compilation).

Data Collection

Drawing upon Merriam (1998), an ethnographic case study explores the relationship between society and culture by not only observing practices and behaviors, but also uncovering and describing beliefs, values, and attitudes of those involved within a particular group or context. Ethnographic methods are beneficial for researching complex educational settings where teachers and students interact with one another (Lazar et al., 2017). The data collection process was carried out solely by the first author who has been a teacher of English for more than six years and has recently been appointed as head of academic administration at the school. The nine-month ethnographic study was conducted from December 2019 to August 2020. To accomplish the validity of this study, the triangulation of research tools was used as follows: classroom observation, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

Firstly, only four classroom observations were conducted between 12 December 2019 and 7 February 2020 due to the spread of COVID-19 in Samut Sakhon; thus, the

Education levels	Subjects	Topics	Duration	Student Number	Migrant students
Grade 1	English language	Animals	13.30-14.30	25	1 Lao 1 Cambodian 1 Myanmar 1 Unidentified
Grade 2	English language	Food	13.30-14.30	27	1 Myanmar 1 Cambodian 1 African
Grade 3	Thai language	Thai consonants	10.30-11.30	38	3 Myanmar 1 Lao
Grade 6	Thai language	Debate	8.30-9.30	20	3 Myanmar

Table 2. Classroom observation schedule. (own compilation).

school was ordered to close for a while. The researcher, however, managed to contact four teachers who had migrant students in their classes. These included two Thai language teachers and two English language teachers. These teachers volunteered to join the project as they wished to improve their language teaching with migrant students. They provided lesson plans to the researcher prior to classroom observation. The researcher was then allowed to attend the class according to the date and time suggested by each teacher. The researcher sat at the back of the language classes and silently observed the whole class without intervention. The researcher was able to see and learn not only how language teachers of Thai and English taught, used materials, communicated with students, and managed the class, but also how migrant students behaved and interacted with their peers and their teachers in natural classroom settings. The following table displays the observation schedule for each class.

Classroom observation is a means of assessing teaching practices and learning behaviors taking place within natural classroom settings (Frey, 2018; Parra & Hernández, 2019). Classroom observation is believed to enable researchers to realize teachers' beliefs and actual practices, which can be juxtaposed with interviews in order to gain greater validity in the findings (Schoenfeld, 2013).

Secondly, participant observation was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to see how migrant students behaved naturally in their school settings, such as the school gate, cafeteria, school hall, and forecourt (see Table 3). Having been an English teacher at this school for more than six years, the researcher participated and observed on-going activities and behaviors of migrant students, Thai students, and teachers within a particular setting, which could provide in-depth understanding of migrant students' language learning experiences in the school. Participant observation is a qualitative research inquiry into understanding a group whose identities, beliefs, and practices are commonly shared at a particular sociocultural and political context by directly experiencing, closely observing, and carefully taking field notes regarding things happening in their natural settings (Allen, 2017; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Kawulich, 2005; Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020). The total time of observation was 220 minutes per school day. Table 3 showcases the regular observation schedule on a daily basis.

Activities	Locations	Duration	Time
Welcome students	School gate	6.00-8.00	120 minutes
School assembly	The forecourt of the flagpole	8.00-8.30	30 minutes
National anthem ceremony			
Morning prayer			
Meditation			
Daily announcement			
Lunch	Cafeteria	11.30-12.30	60 minutes
Evening prayer	Multipurpose Hall	15.30-15.40	10 minutes
Total			220 minutes

Table 3. Daily observation schedule. (own compilation).

Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted following the classroom and participant observation sessions. Upon the approval from a school principal,

participants were contacted and informed about the research project. A purposive sampling was employed with 22 key participants, namely, school administrators, teachers, and parents, as shown in Table 4.

Participants	Number
School Administrators	
- School director	1
- Head of general administration	1
Teachers	
- English	2
- Thai	2
- Math	1
- Science	1
- Social Studies, Religion and Culture	1
- Arts and Music	1
- Health and Physical Education	1
- Occupation and technology	1
Parents	
- Thai	5
- Migrant	5
Total	22

Table 4. Number of participants. (own compilation).

These participants were contacted by the researcher who explained the research objectives and contributions they could offer. Once they agreed to take part in the interview, they were given a written, informed consent form and notified of research ethics prior to the interview. School personnel were invited to the interview session in a meeting room. It is noteworthy to point out that both Thai and migrant parents were familiar with the researcher, who they knew as their children's teacher. They were then confident and comfortable to be interviewed. The interview sessions with the parents took place at a common area in the school where parents could meet the teachers for consultations about their children.

Each interview was conducted between 30 and 60 minutes, and digitally recorded with the permission from all participants. Thai was used in the interviews. The migrant parents could speak Thai to some extent as they had been working in Thailand for a while. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and then translated from Thai to English. The transcripts were cross-checked by the researchers to ensure their validity, and prepared for analysis. This study was approved by Institutional Review Board for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (COA.No.2019/11-448).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to explore emerging key issues arising from interview transcripts and classroom and school observation field notes. The thematic analysis followed clearly defined steps in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps assuring validity and rigor. The analytical procedures of this study were

familiarizing with collected data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining and naming themes, and writing up the report. The data from classroom observation field notes, school observation field notes, and interview transcripts were gathered, read thoroughly, and coded manually to examine issues regarding the roles of three key stakeholders stated in the literature. They were then coded and collated into the main themes, namely, school administrators, teachers, and parents.

FINDINGS

Drawing upon qualitative data based on school and classroom observation field notes and semi-structured interviews, the findings of this study reveal three key stakeholders – school administrators, teachers, and parents – whose roles impacted on the migrant students' learning experience in this linguistically and culturally diverse school.

School Administrators' Roles

School administrators in this study were the school director and head of general administration. The school director strictly followed the MoE policies and implemented equal opportunities for all students regardless of their nationalities.

I am aware of and obliged to the National Education Act, in which the state provides foreign children with equal access to education and opportunities to study in government schools without charge like Thai children. Both Thai and migrant students are recruited and admitted to study in this school equally. (school director, 25 December 2019)

Despite the school's obligation to the requirements of the OBEC curriculum, the promotion of cultural diversity was limited as there were few activities concerning migrant students.

The school has not yet established guidelines to promote coexistence in a multicultural society in a very concrete way. The school adheres to the basic education core curriculum 2008 (revised 2017) without adapting the school curriculum to the cultural context. With regard to organizing events during the school year, there is only ASEAN Day on which migrant students can perform their ethnic identities. (head of general administration, 25 December 2019)

The school administrators were, however, aware of the presence of the migrant students who should be engaged within the school environment and society. Yet, one of the obvious constraints the migrant students encountered was Thai language as it is the medium of instruction used in all required subjects in Thai basic education.

If migrant students request to transfer to grades 5 and 6, they should have Thai language skills. If they are unable to listen, speak, read, or write Thai, they will have poor achievement results at the Ordinary National Education Test

(O-NET). Because Thai language is the basic language used in the test, in both Thai language subjects and other subjects, such as mathematics and science. (head of general administration, 25 December 2019)

Without Thai language competence, communication misunderstandings between teachers and migrant students as well as parents emerged.

Language affects the communication not only between teachers and students, but also between school personnel and parents. There are some communication struggles caused by language differences. (head of general administration, 25 December 2019)

Although language was key for learning and communicating, the migrant students in this school were diligent, well-behaved, and self-disciplined, as they were more mature than other Thai students.

Most migrant children in this school are of good character, kind, and often volunteer to help teachers and at schoolwork. In terms of academic achievement, they tend to study well, because of their diligence, determination, and responsibility. Because most of them are older than the criteria of average Thai students, they are more mature than Thai students in the same class. (head of general administration, 25 December 2019)

Drawing upon school observation fieldnotes, the school setting is an emerging theme, as it provides another perspective related to migrant students who played a significant role in the school landscape where teachers and students interacted with each other, developed a sense of belonging, and constructed identities of personal and social selves. The school ecology seemed common to all Thai people, as it portrayed a generic view of public schools in Thailand with morning rituals including singing the national anthem and praying.

In the morning, school administrators, teachers, and students sang the national anthem, chanted, and worshiped the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Muslim students sat quietly and did not need to pray to the Buddha. (school observation field note, 20 December 2019)

There were, however, Muslim students – a religious minority group – who were allowed to sit in silence without chanting and worshipping the Buddha. This demonstrated that Buddhism is a default religion authorized by school policy and accepted by teachers and students without question. In addition, all students were required to make a vow to be good citizens and well-behaved people.

Then the students made a vow: “We are Thai people, grateful for the nation, religion, and the king. We, the students, must behave within the school discipline. Be honest with ourselves and others. We, the students, must not hurt ourselves and others.” (school observation field note, 20 December 2019)

One practical solution to language difficulties is to learn the first language of migrant students via a teacher exchange program with other teachers who were able to speak and teach such ethnic languages.

The school will benefit if teachers and school personnel learn Myanmar, Lao, and Cambodian languages from these migrant students. Teachers and school staff can also build good relationships with parents and the communities around the school. (school director, 25 December 2019)

Migrant students' first languages were so essential that learning their languages could provide keys to unlock their hidden problems, establish closer relationships between teachers and students, and create better understanding of their learning experiences at school and in society.

The school will encourage teachers to learn the national language of the students being taught. They may also organize a program to exchange Thai teachers with Myanmar teachers teaching Myanmar children at schools located in the temple area not far from the school. (school director, 25 December 2019)

In addition, the head of general administration suggested that activities regarding language and culture exchange should be created, and that intercultural and cross-cultural understanding between migrant and Thai students would be appreciated.

The school should add activities that allow students from diverse backgrounds to exchange cultural knowledge with each other. The activities may be organized in Myanmar, Lao, and Cambodian languages along with Thai and English language activities. (head of general administration, 25 December 2019)

Although cultural activities might not accommodate migrant students, the school administrators recognized migrant students' existence and valued their diverse cultures as resources and assets that could create mutual understanding for all.

In the school's basic educational establishment committee, the Ministry of Education requires representatives of parents, teachers, communities, representatives of the local government organizations, alumni representatives, representatives of local religious organizations, experts, and the school director. In our case, the school is a multicultural school, representatives of parents of other nationalities may be required to participate as part of the school's basic education institution committee. (school director, 25 December 2019)

Regular parental meetings were also considered important as they enabled a better understanding of school policies and practices that would directly affect their children. Closer school-parent collaboration and effective communication could be created and strengthened. It was, nevertheless, understandable that migrant parents did not have permanent jobs and constantly moved to work in other areas, and, thus, had to take their children out of school and transfer them to other schools.

Migrant parents are always in [sic] mobile for job seeking. Consequently, migrant students are unable to study continuously as their parents request for transferring the students to other areas and schools throughout the academic year. (school director, 25 December 2019)

Migrant parents, however, did not inform the school with regard to the official document required for the school transfer.

Migrant parents take the student back to the country without notifying the school. Initially, it is the duty of the school to monitor why students are absent from school consecutively and try to contact the parents in order to solve problems to a certain extent. The school has to deal with the paper work and procedures to bring students back to school, as the parents do not come to deal with students' school transfer procedures. (school director, 25 December 2019)

To summarize, the school administrators strongly agreed that multiculturalism existed in this school. They recognized their roles of policy implementation conforming to the Ministry's requirement. They were, nevertheless, challenged by migrant students' linguistic barriers that had to be overcome by raising the awareness of migrant students' languages and culture. It is, thus, important for school administrators to recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of migrant students in order to implement inclusive educational policies for all, rather than a standardized curriculum that assumes the homogeneity of students.

Another issue was the ineffective communication between the parents and the school. This might be due to the less known rules and regulations of the school that were often too complicated for parents to comprehend or follow. It may, therefore, be advisable for the school to engage migrant parents on a school board in order to create cultural space where problems can be shared and solved. It is, thus, imperative for the school director and head of general administration to establish the collaboration between Thai and migrant parents.

Teachers' Roles

Thai teachers played an essential role in clarifying why learning Thai language was important for migrant students who encountered communicative challenges in education and social contexts. Communicative language teaching methods were employed to promote students' communication and participation. Thai language was used as a medium of instruction.

I explained to the students that the words we use in Thai may not be original Thai words. Sometimes, it might come from other languages because people are constantly communicating with each other, not just with people of the same nation. There is a cultural exchange. We learn each other's languages to understand each other, and it will be easier to become friends. (Grade 3 teacher of Thai language, 8 January 2020)

Migrant students' classroom participation depended on individual learners' learning styles and abilities. Two male students from Myanmar and Laos were active and outspoken, while a Cambodian female student was a slow learner and needed help from the teacher.

A Myanmar boy is talkative, participative, and assertive while Thai students are afraid to speak and do not dare to answer. He always answers and finishes the work first. (Grade 3 Teacher of Thai language, 8 January 2020)

A Lao boy always raised his hand to answer. The teacher called for answers and complimented him, but tried to spread it out to other students to have the opportunity to answer as well. (classroom observation English class, 19 December 2019)

A Lao girl is a slow learner and has problems with spelling and reading. While friends write down on the board, I will ask her to practice spelling one on one. As for Thai students, there will be no problems with spelling and reading aloud. (Grade 3 teacher of Thai language, 8 January 2020)

The extracts above suggest that the teachers paid attention to migrant students by providing opportunities to answer and join classroom activities, like other Thai students. Communicative language teaching methods enhanced students' interactions so that everyone could be part of the classroom environment. Teachers could facilitate conversations between Thai and migrant students talking about cultural knowledge and experience, which potentially synergized a better understanding of cross-cultural tradition and practices. The extracts suggest that the teacher paid attention to Thai and migrant students and attempted to give them equal opportunities to be part of the classroom learning environment without feeling discriminated against.

Students volunteered to answer questions and their friends listened to them attentively. The teacher gave them positive feedback and praised them for their participation. (classroom observation of English class Grade 1, 19 December 2019)

There was also paired and group work that enabled both Thai and migrant students to interact with one another. Working in pairs, students were collaborative and helpful. They not only had to accomplish academic tasks, but they also motivated each other. This work in pairs seemed to be an effective teaching method for multicultural classrooms.

The seating arrangement in the classroom is a pairing arrangement. Migrant students are prevented from sitting separately. Students can help, nudge, warn, and encourage their buddies to write and answer questions without considering their nationalities. (classroom observation of English class Grade 1, 19 December 2019)

Teachers played a significant role in facilitating students' learning, managing their discipline, and developing a positive attitude towards cultural diversity through various classroom activities. Debating is one classroom teaching method that enabled

students to work together. Students had to negotiate and decide on their positions regarding the topic “Korean Music Versus Thai Folk Songs”, which was not conflictual or provocative, and so they learned to develop cultural sensitivity and appreciation.

The teacher explained how to debate, then had the students divided into groups, randomly. They helped each other to think about debating, researching and preparing in the final period. The teacher allowed them to choose any topic, except for national, religious, and political matters that are sensitive and can cause violent conflicts. (classroom observation of Thai class Grade 6, 7 February 2020)

As the topic of music was suitable for a debate and matched students’ interests, all students could take part in the discussion and share ideas without feeling offended and being judgmental. The teacher could moderate students’ participation, facilitate their talk, and summarize their ideas for the effective learning outcomes.

The debate topic was Korean pops [sic] versus Thai folk songs, which was about cultural differences. I concluded that music was a matter of personal preference. We had the right to choose music according to our own preferences. And in terms of music culture or whatever culture, we could not conclude whose culture is better because each person has their own identity. (Grade 6 teacher of Thai language, 8 January 2020)

Debate on cultural topics could be viewed as a platform for learning and sharing ideas without definite answers, but rather being open-minded and supportive with one another.

All students vowed, not only in the morning but also before lunch, to pay respect to the farmers’ goodness, and value the students’ fortune to have food available for them.

The students vowed before having lunch that “Every rice is valuable. The farmer is very tired. In this world, there are still people living in poverty and having nothing to eat”. Then the students began to eat. After eating, they lifted the food tray to the food scraps and placed the tray on the stand. (school observation field note, 23 December 2019)

These extracts suggest that the students were constantly trained by their teachers to follow social rules, develop self-discipline, and value themselves and others in order to live in harmony. Thus, the students could recognize how fortunate they were by being given opportunities to live and learn in this school and society. Teachers were instrumental in shaping and constructing supportive and convivial classroom settings through paired and group work for both Thai and migrant students, who each brought their own cultural baggage, and shared with and learned from one another. Classroom practices in this study were underpinned by various implicit factors regarding teachers’ attitudes and cultural knowledge, as well as teaching methods, materials, assessment, and rapport with students. Teachers were required to develop cultural sensitivity, awareness, and tolerance of diverse students’ ideas and backgrounds.

Parents' Roles

Parents in this study were categorized into Thai and migrant parents. They could share thoughts on their children's learning experiences in school. Thai parents were satisfied with the school administration despite the presence of migrant students, as they were familiar with migrant colleagues whose children also studied in this school.

I have a lot of migrant colleagues at the factory. They are good friends. They speak Thai very well. Their belief is Buddhism and they go to temples like us. When they had problems with the school application form for their kids, I helped them out as I wanted their children to learn at this school as well. Their children can gain access to education. (Thai parent 1, 10 January 2020)

Another Thai parent was optimistic regarding the presence of migrant students at the school as they could help Thai students to embrace differences as valuable lessons from both Thai and migrant students. The school was also appraised for accepting all students who lived in the area.

I think it is a good opportunity for my children to learn with migrant students so that they can learn to live in a diverse society and respect one another. I think the school provides equal opportunities for all children to gain access to education. (Thai parent 3, 14 January 2020)

A Muslim parent also felt satisfied with the school administration in terms of tolerance and acceptance of students' religions. The school was considered a safe space where parents and students could assume their religious identities.

My child is Muslim but getting on well with Buddhist and migrant classmates. There is no discrimination. My child can be excused from Buddhism activities. I think the school respects all religions and takes care of all students very well. (Thai parent 2, 13 January 2020)

It is clear that the school was a sanctuary for migrant parents who needed a school for their children to receive education. The children were also fortunate to be taken care of by their teachers very well. Because migrant parents did not have an educational background in Thai schools or know Thai language, they could not help their children with assignments.

The school permits migrant children to study like other Thai children. I think, it is very good. At first, I was worried about which school I should send my kid to. The teachers are very caring and helpful with all documents. I do not have high education so I can help my kid with homework only a little. My children have to help each other to do homework. (Cambodian parent, 27 January 2020)

My child joined this school from Grade 1 without attending a nursery. At first, he could not read or write Thai like his classmates. I do not know how to teach

him. But the teachers here were so kind that they tutored him for free before the school starts, at lunch, and in the evening after school. Now, he can catch up with his classmates. (Myanmar parent, 21 January 2020)

Similarly, a Lao parent noticed that her child could easily adapt to the school culture and participate in all school activities.

My child has no problem with adjusting to the school and gets along with her Thai classmates. She attends all school activities like other students. (Lao parent, 23 January 2020)

One Myanmar parent expressed the wish that his child should acquire Myanmar language skills that would be useful once his family returns home. It is interesting to note that the migrant student's first language is still perceived as valuable because the parents could not teach as they worked in Thailand. Some Myanmar parents also decided to live and work in Thailand temporarily.

I would like my kid to learn Myanmar language when he finishes grade 6 because it is the language used in Myanmar. I would like him to know many languages. I am not sure if he will continue studying in Thailand as I plan to live in Thailand no more than 10 years. I will return to Myanmar. (Myanmar parent, 23 July 2020)

A key issue both Thai and migrant parents encountered was communication with the school through traditional public relations channels and through new media like a LINE social media group.

There are some communication problems between the school and both Thai and migrant parents. In the LINE group, parents often have questions about the school activities. (Thai parent 3, 14 January 2020)

Yet, migrant parents needed language support as they could not read Thai very well; thus, they often asked for assistance from Thai parents to help with translation. It is, therefore, important for the school to fill in this linguistic gap to serve the needs of migrant parents. Consequently, the school landscape would become multilingual and a valuable asset for all to embrace linguistic diversity.

I would like the school's public relations to have other languages, like Myanmar and Lao, to translate announcement, signs, boards, and document, so that we could understand them without having to ask Thai parents to help us with translation. . . . If there are multilingual public relations, there would be more migrant students in the school. (Myanmar parent, 27 July 2020)

Thai and migrant parents in this study were content with the school administration and teachers with regard to academic support, extra-curricular activities, and recognition of language and cultural differences. Communication between the school

and the parents, however, needed some amendments in terms of clear information and translation of public notifications that was deemed necessary to migrant parents. The school should recognize the opportunities to be gained from migrant parents whose involvement could strengthen rapport between teachers and parents, lead to students' positive learning experiences, and result in effective school-parent partnerships.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Drawing upon the findings of this study, the discussion and implications suggest three key issues regarding establishing a professional learning community (PLC), strengthening school-family-community (SFC) partnerships, and promoting recognition and raising awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in these partnerships.

A professional learning community (PLC) can be viewed as a group of educators who are committed to continuous, collective and collaborative endeavors by undertaking various initiatives to improve their professions, and students' performance through reflective dialogue, practices, and a shared sense of purpose (Chua et al., 2020). This concept has recently been promoted as an educational policy initiative in Thailand (Kitrungraung et al., 2018; Office of the Education Council, 2017). The PLC in one school requires school networks and community partnership in order to connect with other PLCs and learning sources, and to enhance teacher and student development. School administrators are instrumental in promoting a positive school culture and effective professional learning communities for teachers, whose impact may lead to school improvement (Carpenter, 2015; Maitreephun et al., 2020). Effectively facilitated PLCs can establish mutual professional values and promote cultures of learning that warrant culturally and linguistically diverse students' educational equity and access (Slack, 2019). Nevertheless, the school practices and curricula prescribed by Thailand's basic educational policy are not suitable for migrant students' sociocultural and linguistic circumstances; and thus, migrant students are unlikely to continue to higher levels of education (Arphattananon, 2012). It is, therefore, important for school administrators and teachers to recognize the presence of migrant students in schools, as they play important roles in creating linguistic and cultural diversity within the school. Comprehensive teacher training and professional development would be one of the key factors in improving the whole educational system and students' learning outcomes, as well as their school experience (Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020). With regard to culturally diverse educational contexts, employing a critical, multicultural perspective towards professional development should emphasize justice, teacher support, and reciprocal understanding among students, families, and communities (Szelei et al., 2020).

Secondly, connections and partnerships between schools, families, and communities (SFC) can address issues of school diversity and improve diverse student populations' achievements (Arphattananon, 2021; Bekerman & Geisen, 2012; Boethel, 2003; Creese & Blackledge, 2011). SFC partnerships can positively impact students' academic achievements, social integration, and personal growth and well-being at all education levels (Willemse et al., 2018). However, the Thai government neither has a policy to promote or to persuade migrant parents to bring their

children to schools, nor a policy to follow up on migrant students who leave schools (Arphattananon, 2012). School administrators and teachers are instrumental in implementing policies, allocating budgets, planning activities, administering curricula and educational processes, promoting school learning environments, supervising teachers, monitoring school outcomes, and communicating with parents, communities, and relevant sectors in order to meet MoE's requirements and society expectations (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018a, 2018b). Nomnian and Arphattananon (2018a) suggest that a synergy between the government's efforts and all stakeholders' roles and responsibilities can help develop Thai education at all levels to narrow down inequity gaps and promote quality education for all. Parents are also key in promoting students' academic achievement (Nomnian & Thawornpat, 2015). Driessen et al. (2010), however, claim that, on the one hand, ethnic minority parents encounter challenges including incompetent use of the national language, low level of education, and unfamiliarity with the educational system in the receiving country. Teachers, on the other hand, do not possess intercultural communication skills to deal with parents from ethnic minorities; and thus, it is recommended that teachers are equipped with knowledge regarding the linguistic and cultural diversity of students and their parents (Driessen et al., 2010).

Last but not least, recognition and awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in schools, families, and communities is vital for strengthening and harmonizing PLC and SFC partnerships. Building reciprocal relationships between schools, multilingual families and nearby communities is essential for educational stakeholders who can create meaningful partnerships and relational trust is underpinned by families' sociolinguistic and cultural background (Coady, 2019). These collaborations have been suggested by Thai educational policy to promote all groups of Thai and migrant students, regardless of their diversity in terms of socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, to be treated the same. Although migrant children are allowed to enter public education in Thailand, the MoE has neither a policy to encourage parents to bring their children to schools, nor the curricula and courses that are appropriate for their socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic circumstances (Keawsomnuk, 2017). Thailand's MoE policies have authorized school administrators to implement their own rules, regulations, curricula, and teaching materials to accommodate students from diverse sociocultural background (Nomnian, 2013a, 2013b; Saemee & Nomnian, 2021a, 2021b). Nevertheless, unequal power relations between Thai and migrant students in Thai schools still exist and require further examinations in other school contexts (Arphattananon, 2018). Paik et al. (2019), for instance, address the barriers of SFC partnerships, such as cultural differences, roles of parents and teachers, and language difficulties, which can be overcome by key stakeholders, such as teachers, school leaders, parents, and community members. SFC mutual appreciation, trust, respect, and linguistic and sociocultural knowledge should be valued and brought into classroom teaching and school settings in order to improve students' academic and non-academic outcomes (Paik et al., 2019; Wiriyachittra & Nomnian, 2016). Hélot (2017) suggests the acknowledgment of migrant students' multilingual repertoires and their linguistic, cultural, and identity capital as resources for learning, by promoting the emergence of a new linguistic culture in primary schools in order to transform and empower minority speaking

students' schooling experiences. A mutual cooperation between parents, teachers, and administrators can enhance positive student outcomes and learning experiences in multilingual and multicultural schools and society (Norris & Collier, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study explored migrant students' learning experiences in a Thai public primary school in Samut Sakhon province through a linguistic ecological perspective. Drawing upon an ethnographically informed case study, school and classroom observation field notes and semi-structured interview transcripts were employed. The results unveil three key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers of Thai and English, and Thai and migrant parents, who play essential roles in migrant students' personal, academic, and social development in the school environment.

School administrators and teachers were considered as second parents to migrant students, as they not only incubated knowledge and skills for students, but also monitored students' personal growth and behaviors. Teachers and students participated in social practices such as morning assembly, lunch, and cultural activities, which required mutual engagement, collaboration, and interaction taking place within school environment. The study also reveals a mixture of positive and negative incidents that migrant parents addressed in both language classroom and school contexts. They felt that the school provided an opportunity for their children to gain knowledge and life experience, and also appreciated teachers' support and care for their children. They, however, would like the school to translate key messages in their own languages, such as Myanmar or Lao, to ease their understanding of school announcements and activities and so that they could fully participate in order to facilitate their children's adjustment and integration into the school environment.

Through these social practices, all agents were actively involved to meet particular communicative functions through the interplay of language and culture that was beneficial for all. Professional learning communities (PLC) can potentially enhance inclusivity in education by taking migrant students' language learning experiences into account in terms of pedagogy and language support. School-family-community (SFC) partnerships can potentially address quality, equality, and equity of education among migrant students in this linguistically and culturally diverse school. Promoting recognition and raising awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity between these partnerships is vital in sustaining people of different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds to live and learn together harmoniously. These key stakeholders, as change agents, could promote social cohesion and tolerance by living and learning together, which would eventually create harmony in this diverse school setting.

Underpinned by a linguistic ecological perspective, this study unveils the intricate interrelationship between educational and social domains, including school administration, classroom instruction, cultural activities, language barriers, and parents' roles in migrant students' language use and learning experiences in Thai public schools. Linguistically and culturally responsive school policies and teaching practices can enhance both Thai and migrant students' personal growth, academic attainments, sense of belonging, and self-esteem that can enable them to become part of the wider sociocultural and linguistic contexts while living and studying in Thailand.



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