FOCUS MULTICULTURAL LINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Countries in Southeast Asia share the same characteristics of being ethnically and culturally diverse. Indonesia alone, for example, has as many as 300 ethnic groups who speak 240 different languages. Cambodia, with its relatively small population of 16 million, has 36 ethnic and linguistic minorities. To keep a balance between unity and diversity is a challenge that countries in the region share. Compared to the present time, the management of cultural diversity was not an issue in the past. In all Southeast Asian countries, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity has been perceived as a threat to national unity, and education is one of the tools they have used to unify people. Mono-cultural education policies, such as the prohibition of other languages in schools, a centralized curriculum, and the closing of schools set up by ethnic and religious groups, were implemented across countries in the region. These policies deprived ethnic groups and indigenous people of their cultural practices and identities. The result was resentment, marginalization, and at times, persistent conflicts. In recent years, transnational migration around the region has become remarkable, making the issue of cultural diversity even more complicated. ASEAS 14(2) focuses on the movements to reclaim linguistic and cultural rights that have been initiated across countries in the region and examines contemporary issues resulting from the transnational flow of people around Southeast Asia.

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Multi-Lingual and Multicultural Education in Globalizing Southeast Asia

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Countries in Southeast Asia share similar characteristics in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity. Each country is rich with its population of different ethnicities, religions, and languages (Ooi & Grabowsky, 2017). To keep a balance between unity and diversity is a challenge that countries in the region commonly experience. Compared to the present time, the management of cultural diversity had not been an issue in the past. In many vassal states, ethnic groups could retain their linguistic and cultural identities. The existence of cultural diversity among tributary states helped strengthen the power of the overlords (Sattayanurak, 2016). But, in the beginning of the 19th century, this gradually changed. In Thailand, the encroachment of Western imperialism made the ruling classes to initiate nation-building projects. Since then, people of diverse ethnicities and cultures have been subsumed under the same national identity (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005). In other Southeast Asian countries, nation-building projects became prominent after gaining independence following the end of World War II. Most countries relied on the centralized, unitary nation-state model to assimilate people of diverse ethnicities and cultures living within the same territory (He & Kymlicka, 2005). In almost all Southeast Asian countries, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity has been perceived as a threat to national unity, and education is one of the tools that Southeast Asian countries have used to unify people. Mono-cultural educational policies, such as the prohibition of other languages in schools, a centralized curriculum, or the closing of schools set up by ethnic and religious groups, were implemented across countries in the region (Aguilar, 2017). These policies deprived ethnic groups and indigenous people of their cultural practices and identities. The result was resentment, marginalization, and at times, persistent conflicts, as in the case of Muslims in the southernmost provinces of Thailand. However, upon entering the 21st century, a shift in language policies reflecting an ostensible acceptance of cultural diversity has been witnessed in many parts of Southeast Asia. Articles in this special issue document such policy shifts and the movements to reclaim linguistic and cultural rights, as in the case of Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

(MULTI-)LINGUISM AND ETHNICITY IN THE CONTEXT OF NATION-BUILDING

Myanmar is inhabited by 135 ethnic groups, each of which has distinguished languages and cultures. This rich linguistic and cultural diversity has long been

suppressed and dominated by the Burmese majority since the government of General Ne Win rose to power in 1962 (Anui & Arphattananon, 2021, this issue). However, in 2011 when the political landscape of Myanmar changed towards democracy, the linguistic and cultural rights of ethnic groups were acknowledged. In education, this change was reflected in the 2014 National Education Law, which stipulated the integration of ethnic languages and cultures into the mainstream curriculum for the first time since Myanmar gained independence. The article by Anui and Thithimadee Arphattananon (2021, this issue) traces the implementation of the policy in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Mon states. Through interviews with stakeholders, observations in classrooms, and the examination of policy documents and instruction materials, the authors examine the ways in which ethnic languages and ethnic content were included in the primary school curriculum. The study sheds light on the types of content that were included in the curriculum, and the ways they were taught in the framework of the landmark National Education Law. Although the political tide in Myanmar swung back to military rule again after the coup in February 2021, this article documents the positive results of the education policy, which values the cultural and linguistic diversity of ethnic minority groups.

Malaysia's multiculturalism is represented by the rich linguistic diversity of its multiethnic population – Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous groups (Ibrahim, 2007). In Malaysia, 137 languages are spoken, with the official and national language being Malay. The other major languages representing the diverse culture of the population are Mandarin, Tamil, and English (Pillai, Kaur, & Chau, 2021, this issue). Since the country became independent from British rule, Malay was designated as an official language to strengthen the Malay identity and, at the same time, to distance itself from the colonial past. The purpose of promoting Malay language, along with Malay culture and Islamic religion, was to unite and integrate different ethnic groups (Albury, 2021; Ibrahim, 2007). The English language, which had been used in state offices during the colonial period, gradually decreased in importance. Although Mandarin and Tamil could be used as a medium of instruction in vernacular schools,[1] for Chinese and Indian students respectively, the Malay language has been given a more prestigious status as a national and official language, especially since 1970, due to the force of nationalism and Islamic resurgence (Ibrahim, 2007). However, at the turn of the 21st century, a seismic shift in language policy was witnessed in Malaysia. A policy to teach science and mathematics in English known as *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris* (PPSMI, Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English) (Albury, 2021) was implemented under the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. After being in place for six years, the policy was terminated in 2012 through lobbying efforts by nationalist groups (Gooch, 2009). However, when Mahathir Mohamad was re-elected as prime minister in 2018, the policy was resurrected.

In their article, Stefanie Pillai, Surinderpal Kaur, and Meng Huat Chau (2021, this issue) trace the pendulum of language policies in Malaysia that have swung back and forth between Malay and English since 2000. They examine official statements

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1 Vernacular schools in Malaysia provide education for children of Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. Mandarin is used in Chinese schools, whereas Tamil is used in Indian schools as the medium of instruction (Ibrahim, 2007).

regarding the rationale behind language choices in Malaysia to see the stances towards language diversity in the country. Using critical discourse analysis, the authors studied 30,508 articles published from 2000 to 2020 in two major newspapers in Malaysia. They found that globalization and employability, as well as ethnic and national identities, influenced the shifts in language policy. The emphasis on English and Mandarin is based on the belief that proficiency in these two languages will enhance the opportunity to access the globalized world and thus, increase employability. On the contrary, the official statements that support the use of Malay were based on the reasons of strengthening national identity, with an added emphasis on multilingualism. Such statements argue that Malaysians who are proficient in multiple languages are better able to compete in a globalized world. This resonates with the language policies in other Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, the use of Malay and Chinese languages, which had been prohibited in the 1950s and early 1960s as part of nationalist policy, has been promoted in schools in recent years (Arphattananon, 2011). In other words, in a globalized era, proficiency in languages is seen as having productive value that contributes to the economic development of a country.

Ethnic and highland indigenous groups in Southeast Asia suffer from uneven development policies between rural and urban areas, which has resulted in income inequality, making them one of the most economically disadvantaged groups (Clarke, 2001; Gradin, 2016). The agricultural produce that has been their main source of income is unstable in terms of price and yield, and many have left their communities to find jobs in the city. When the tourism industry began to boom in Thailand in the 1960s (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020), catering for the tourist trade has been a new source of income for many highland indigenous groups. Cultural objects such as necklaces, bracelets, costumes, and food products have been commodified. Although this has brought them increasing monetary return, they are on the edge of losing their cultural heritage as the commercialized cultural objects are removed from their original cultural meaning. Thus, a struggle for sustainable tourism has been an issue for ethnic and indigenous groups in the region.

The Karen ethnic group in Doi Si Than (translated as Four Creeks Mountain) in the province of Chiang Mai is one of the many groups that sees their cultural heritage endangered. The villagers have relied on agriculture as a means of living, but the agricultural yields are so uncertain to sustain their living that many Karen villagers, especially the younger generations, have had to move to the city to find – mostly labor-intensive – jobs. The article by Jitjayang Yambhai, Riemer Knoop, and Patoo Cusripituck (2021, this issue) is based on their participatory action research with Karen villagers in Doi Si Than to revive their cultural assets for sustainable living. Through the process of dialogues, the villagers were invited to reflect on the meanings of their cultural heritage and critically examine the ways in which they can harness them for the sustainable development of their community. Based upon the critical consciousness approach (Freire, 2014), the authors used the design thinking technique to enhance community-based learning. Through the process of dialogue, reflection, and decision-making facilitated by the authors, the villagers were able to redefine the meanings of their material cultures, namely chili paste, necklaces, and bracelets, and to capitalize on them to serve as marketable cultural products. Karen communities also make their own spirits that are used on several occasions, such as to start a

sowing or harvest season, or in wedding and funeral ceremonies. In this participatory research, a distilling house for spirits was transformed into an *ecomuseum* where visitors can experience the spirit-making of the Karen communities. The involved Karen communities came up with new design and business models to marketize their cultural products, and identified sustainable ways of living for their communities.

MULTICULTURAL AND MULTI-LINGUAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

The recent increase in the number of labor migrants in Thailand from its three neighboring countries – Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos – has a tremendous effect on education as many migrants bring with them or give birth to children in Thailand. Since the Thai government has approved the enrollment of migrant children in government schools, there has been an increase in cultural diversity in Thailand's educational system. The article by Thithimadee Arphattananon (2021, this issue) explores the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to teach in multicultural settings possessed by teachers in schools where migrant and Thai students study together. From the results of her action research, which included the development and implementation of a training program for teachers in multicultural schools, Arphattananon (2021, this issue) found that teachers who have been trained in the program had higher levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding the education of migrant children compared to those who did not participate in the training program. In Thailand, teachers who teach in schools that enroll migrant children have been put in a 'sink-or-swim' situation as there is no systematic professional development program to support them to teach in multicultural settings. Arphattananon's article points to the importance of having a systematic and continuous professional development program that incorporates elements, such as the rights of education of migrant children, prejudice and stereotype reduction, cultural issues significant to migrant children, and pedagogic approaches for culturally diverse classrooms.

The article by Kulthida Saemee and Jaewon Jane Ra (2021, this issue) explores the perceptions and practices of school personnel and parents regarding language teaching and learning of migrant students from Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia in a Thai government school. Through interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators, and in-classroom-observations, the authors conclude that school personnel – administrators and teachers in particular – play an important role in the learning experiences of migrant students. The article particularly focuses on the communicative functions of language in the school where Thai and migrant students study together, and the role of the Professional Learning Community formed among school personnel and parents as a mechanism that supports the education of migrant students.

The article by Chutiwan Rueangdej and Singhanat Nomnian (2021, this issue) investigates how cultural identities of migrant students are presented in English language textbooks used in Thailand's schooling system. They argue that, although English is widely used across the world, textbooks should contextualize and reflect the cultures in the places where they are being used. Based on their study in a school that enrolls Thai and migrant students in Samut Sakhon province, the authors conclude that English language textbooks should include more content about Southeast Asia to reflect the lives and experiences of students and their families.

The forces of globalization put additional challenges to countries in the region as to how to deal with an increasing diversity brought about by the migration of new groups and the pressing issues of economic and social development. The articles in this special issue illustrate how globalization, characterized as the transnational movement of people and trade, has influenced the shift in education and language policies in many countries in Southeast Asia.

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Ethnic Content Integration and Local Curriculum in Myanmar

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Myanmar is home to over 54.8 million people, consisting of over 100 ethnolinguistic groups with distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical backgrounds. Since Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain, education has been used as the main political tool for Bamar national assimilation, neglecting this rich ethnic and cultural diversity. Myanmar opted for the assimilationist approach in which non-dominant ethnolinguistic nationalities are vanquished through the use of educational instruction, materials, and teachers' education, all of which are 'Bamarcentric', centered around a single ethnolinguistic identity and language in Myanmar, Bamar. Other, non-dominant ethnolinguistic groups in Myanmar have long desired to incorporate their own languages, cultures, and histories into the educational system. In this vein, the National Education Law (NEL), which took effect in 2014, provides the integration of non-dominant ethnic languages and cultural identities into the mainstream curriculum. From this, a modified curriculum framework concerning the integration of indigenous ethnic content was produced in order to promote multicultural coexistence. The present study explores the implementation of the Local Curriculum and integration of non-dominant ethnic content into the curriculum in primary schools through the analysis of the curriculum development process and the integration of non-dominant ethnic content such as local literature, cultural perspectives, and indigenous worldviews. The study was conducted in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Mon states and the Yangon region, where a variety of ethnolinguistic groups reside. Using a qualitative approach, the study drew on findings from interviews with 63 participants, four classroom observations, and document analysis from four states and one region. The study revealed that the implementation of the Local Curriculum promotes multiculturalism and social cohesion.

Keywords: Ethnic Content Integration; Local Curriculum; Multicultural Education; Multiculturalism; Myanmar

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INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is home to 135 ethnic groups, each with its own language, culture, and sociopolitical structure. Although there is controversy surrounding this number, these 135 groups have been designated by the Myanmar government as 'national races' (Clarke, et al., 2019; Lwin, 2011, p. 2). Despite the country's cultural and linguistic diversity, one language and culture, that of the Bamar people, has dominated and has been legitimized in the educational system without recognizing other indigenous groups (Lwin, 2011, p. 4). Although many groups taught

their language and culture both formally in schools and by traditional means during British colonial rule, the teaching of languages and cultures other than Burmese was gradually prohibited starting in 1962 when General Ne Win seized power over the country (Lwin, 2011, p. 2). Recently, however, educational reform in Myanmar has generated momentum towards a new curriculum framework with respect to multicultural education, allowing for integration of local, non-dominant ethnic content. Promoting non-dominant ethnic content in the mainstream educational system thus appears to be a significant historical change.

The political landscape started to change after the 2010 general elections, albeit under the 2008 constitution (designed and implemented by the military). After the elections, the government began to promote various sectors. Education was one of the sectors put on the agenda for the promotion of state development. The National Education Law (NEL) that was approved in 2014 encourages a wide range of reform across the national educational system (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2014). In the National Education Law, 'National Education' is defined as "education that values, preserves, and develops the language, literature, culture, art, traditions, and historical heritage of all the ethnic groups in the nation" (MOE, 2014, art. 2g). It is designated as "free and compulsory education" (MOE, 2014, art. 2w), so that the national and regional governments at all levels provide full support as mandated, so that all school-age children can complete Basic Education.[1] Furthermore, article 44 ensures that the regional governments can exercise authority regarding the teaching of ethnic languages and literature starting at the primary level and gradually expanding to higher grades. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) emerged in 2015, based on article 39(g) of the NEL as well as a comprehensive education sector review (MOE, 2015). The NCF encourages that the Local Curriculum should not be alloted more than 20% of the school day in government schools. Non-dominant ethnic languages, cultures, historical heritages, and regional knowledge, including environmental topics, are to be taught during the Local Curriculum period. The Local Curriculum is designed and taught in accordance with the needs of each state and region by law (MOE, 2014, p. 44).

From late 2012, UNICEF began a nation-wide project on language education and peace-building, titled Language, Education and Social Cohesion (LESC), designed by Australian Consultant Professor Lo Bianco (2016). The language policy review that was undertaken across the country by conducting significant dialogues with the non-dominant ethnic communities and government bodies resulted in the development of the "Nay Pyi Taw Principles", which stipulates broad terms such as "unity, diversity, cohesion, education employment, service delivery, international relation, inclusion communication, and ethnic rights" (Lo Bianco, 2016, p. 17). With the amendment of the National Education Law in 2014, the Curriculum Framework was adapted in 2015 (MOE, 2015). Consequently, the government launched the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2016-2021) and went through with plans to implement a Local Curriculum (MOE, 2016).

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1   The National Education Law, Article 16. (a) Basic Education is divided into the following three levels, aiming to have 12 years of education after the completion of kindergarten: i. Primary Education ii. Middle school Education iii. High school Education (b) Kindergarten will be regarded as the base level of Primary Education (c) In order to complete one of the levels of education listed in sub-paragraph (a) educational competence shall be assessed.

As such, the present study aims to explore the integration of local non-dominant ethnic content and implementation of the Local Curriculum in the mainstream educational system. The current study looks at four states and one region with 24 non-dominant ethnic groups that have started to implement the Local Curriculum in Grades 1, 2 and 3. Some states and regions have not yet begun to implement the Local Curriculum because of various challenges, including the presence of many dialects for one language, lack of awareness about the Local Curriculum development, and a lack of budget. The Local Curriculum was developed in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, and Mon states, with technical support from UNICEF and coordinated by the respective state governments – under supervision of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Ethnic Affairs in each state. Particularly, the Local Curriculum for the West Po Karen and Sgaw Karen groups who live in Yangon, Tenasserim, Pegu, and Irrawaddy regions were developed under the supervision of the Yangon Region Karen Literature and Culture Committee. Even though the study did not consider the entire educational system, looking at the Local Curriculum as part of the system can be helpful as a first step in the process of establishing multicultural education.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION – THEORETICAL ISSUES

This study sought to identify the trend of multiculturalism in Myanmar by analyzing the Local Curriculum development process and considering the integration of non-dominant ethnolinguistic groups' values, literatures, cultures, and worldviews. Multicultural education theories were adapted for the Myanmar context in order to analyze research findings. Multicultural curriculum reform approaches – contribution, additive, transformation, and social action (Banks, 1989) – were used to analyze the characteristics of the Local Curriculum. Moreover, theories of multiculturalism in terms of ideological tendencies, such as conservative multiculturalism (Banks, 2006, 2010; Gay, 2000; Glazer, 1974; Gorski, 2009; Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011; Jaramillo, 1975; Jenks et al., 2001; Williams, 1975), are discussed. These theories shape the scope of the present study, discussing in-depth the concept of the integration and implementation of non-dominant ethnic content.

According to Banks (2008), a key goal of multicultural education is "to help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures" (p. 2). Multicultural education is meant to provide students with cultural content and analytical skills in order to reflect on the sociocultural issues of the surrounding community. Banks argues that a curriculum needs to be reformed in accordance with its sociocultural context since the mainstream-centric (dominant or majority) curriculum often has a negative impact on not only non-dominant ethnic children, but also children whose background is that of the dominant language and culture (or mainstream/majority language and culture) because they have no chance to learn about other worlds (Banks, 2010, p. 234).

However, multicultural education is often questioned during the reform process due to ideological and "political resistance" (Banks, 2010, p. 244-245). Assimilationists such as Glazer (1974) and Williams (1975) think that emphasizing ethnic cultures is harmful as it creates division and separation among members of society, which they

call 'balkanization' (Banks, 2006, p. 118; Glazer, 1974; Williams, 1975). Conservatives are profoundly interested in a fixed transmission of knowledge based on the social order (Banks & Banks, 2007). Hence, the conservatives are frightened by their imaginations as they think that promoting a culturally plural society is harmful (Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011, p. 2).

Liberalists argue that ethnic cultural identities should be promoted in schools, but Jaramillo (1975) thinks that only 'visible minorities' should be included. This is primarily based on the demographic statistical categories in relation to the employment act in the United States. The theory of liberal multiculturalism suggests that teachers should integrate other cultural content and be aware of students' backgrounds. This perspective opposes conservative multiculturalism, since it tries to be dynamic and flexible (Banks, 2010; Gay, 2000). Sometimes, liberal multiculturalism becomes superficial by "celebrating the differences" (Jenks et al., 2001, p. 92) instead of critically analyzing the issues of inequality among cultural groups. Gorski (2009) also argues that the liberal multiculturalists "support diversity programs," "but only in ways that ignore the access implications of difference" (p. 311).

Critical multiculturalists emphasize structural change. They believe that ethnic groups have their own unique learning styles (Banks, 2006, p. 117). Cultural pluralists suggest that the cultures of non-dominant ethnic minorities should not be ignored in teaching and learning, and that educators should be encouraged to use the materials produced by these groups (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Novak, 1975). McLaren (2003) argues that educators should focus on pedagogic steps, social relations, and democratic initiatives in schools. In this approach, teachers are required to transform themselves (Freire, 1998). This means that critical multiculturalists demand not only "recognition of cultural differences" (Taylor, 2011) by celebrating festivals or integrating cultures into a mainstream education, but, also, require a change of style, meaning, and strategy in order to transform the curriculum into one reflecting democratic values.

Thus, many critical multicultural education advocates criticise contributive and additive approaches to curriculum reform, saying that they do not make social change, but only provide a sign of recognition. Torre (1996) stated that the additive approach does not motivate students in learning, creating social change or generating critical thinking skills to enable them to raise their voices in the face of discrimination and inequalities in society. Bishop (1997) also commented that respective ethnic people's involvement in literature selection is much more important in curriculum reform.

It is necessary to note that the situation of cultural diversity is not the same everywhere in the world. For instance, the United States and many countries in Europe have increased diversity due to global migration, while many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar and Thailand, are home to many national ethnic minorities (Tilaar, 2004).

Thus, this paper argues that in Myanmar multicultural theories and practices may not be applicable in the same ways as they are in the West. Particularly in Myanmar, throughout the state-formation process, ethnic nationalities have fought against Bamar nationalism and claim for self-determination. Modern Myanmar is a combination of many nations that were independent in pre-colonial times (Myint-U, 2004; Sakhong, 2012; Williams & Sakhong, 2005). Even during British colonial rule, the frontiers were administered differently. There were, for example, the Chin Hills Regulation

promulgated in 1896, the Kachin Hills Regulation in 1895, the 1919 Act of Federated Shan States in 1920, and the 1935 Burma Act in 1937 (Williams & Sakhong, 2005, p. 11). Sakhong described that "the 1935 Burma Act was applied to the area of the pre-colonial Myanmar/Burman Kingdom, which included the former Arakan and Mon Kingdoms as well as delta areas of Karen country" (Williams & Sakhong, 2005, p. 11).

Since Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain in 1948, Burmanisation has taken root and there is a Bamarcentric approach in all aspects of society, including education. Monolingualism and monoculturalism were the only approaches used in every level of school, and teachers have been used as political tools for many years where they served in a state-building role under the instruction of a one language, one culture and one race ideology, instead of promoting unity through diversity by using ethnic languages and cultures in the school. Myanmar continues to face political conflict with non-dominant ethnic nationalities – the so-called 'natives' (Myint-U, 2004) – that has a significant effect on state-building, as the adoption of multicultural education is about integration of non-dominant ethnic groups' cultures and identities. Thein Lwin (2002) stated that education has been used "as a political tool preventing children from learning how to think" (p. 1). Lwin also noted that "many schools in the ethnic nationality areas do not want to use the curriculum written by the military regime" (p. 3). He argues that the curriculum developed by military government leads to Burmanisation.

Curriculum reform is directly associated with the teachers' roles. Teachers are the leaders in policy implementation (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Therefore, it is crucially important that the teacher be aware of policy changes. The literature reveals that most teachers seemed to face a dilemma when the new policy was enacted because they lacked understanding of it (Wallace & Fleit, 2005). Jackson (1992) states that this was because of the "lack of clarity concerning changes in skill, resources, and motivation" (p. 206).

Currently, there are 22 Teacher Education Colleges and two Universities of Education in Myanmar (MOE, 2015), and 47,363 Basic Education schools with approximately 9.26 million students (MOE, 2016). Han Tin (2008) found that teachers in Myanmar are "highly conservative and traditionalist, and tend to resist change" (p. 114). Han Tin (2008) argues that, although teachers are provided with capacity-building and attend the new teaching methodology orientation training, they still return to the classroom with old, traditional methods after completing training.

METHODS

The research method was determined according to the goal of the study. The aim of the research was to understand the integration of ethnic content and the implementation of the local curriculum. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was utilized, using in-depth interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. The interviews were conducted with 63 participants – 24 interviews were done with indigenous, ethnic focal persons who were in charge of developing the Local Curriculum, and 39 participants were Teaching Assistants (TA) who taught the Local Curriculum in Grade-1 classes (lower primary classes with students aged six or higher) in primary schools. Conducting interviews with those participants was

very important because they were practically implementing the curriculum reform process. The document analysis included the National Curriculum Framework (MOE, 2015), Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (MOE, 2017) and Local Curriculum Textbooks. Four classroom observations were held in Kachin State and Kayah State. Data was collected over the period of four months (October 2019 to January 2020). All participants were purposefully selected for in-depth interviews, as the researcher believed that they could reference their experiences about how they created the Local Curriculum and what they expected from it. The process of data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), which "is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data" (p. 297). Coding, categorizing data, sorting the data into key headings, and listing the topics within each key heading were all performed. Then, the categories that arose in the previous steps were compiled into groups – avoiding overlap, making comments on the groups or results in the previous stage and reviewing their messages and evaluating the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Local Curriculum is intended to reflect 'local needs'[2]. There are 120 hours out of 840 hours per year allotted to the Local Curriculum for the lower primary level curriculum. The Local Curriculum is allotted 14.2% of the curriculum, while 86% of teaching hours are for other subjects. There is also some flexibility in the curriculum according to local needs. The specific content of the Local Curriculum is determined based on the respective region and culture and the language of instruction that is spoken in the area.

In order to implement the Local Curriculum, the Ministry of Education established the Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (LCIP) in 2017, based on article 44 of the 2014 National Education Law (NEL), which provides guidelines for forming implementation committees. According to the analysis of the protocol, Local Curriculum implementation committees were established in each state. These committees were formed with government officials from organizations such as the Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Ethnic Affairs, and State Education Office, as well as retired education officers, university professors, and instructors from teacher colleges. Thus, they were unfamiliar with non-dominant ethnic cultures. The Literature and Culture Committees of ethnic groups, who work with language and the education of ethnic minorities, and who are experts regarding their respective languages and cultures, were not mentioned by name, although such a broad term 'language experts' is used in the protocol to act as representatives from each respective ethnic group.

The extent to which each member was engaged with the development of the curriculum varies from state to state. For example, some top-level government officers have been actively involved throughout the process of developing the Local Curriculum, while others were present only for short periods. In one case, the State

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2   Emphasizing ethnic language, culture and history, persons that are admirable in the regions, natural resources, local business, and basic computer skills to be included in the local curriculum content accordingly. This is defined in the National Curriculum Framework (2015) and the Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (2017).

Education Officer was involved in all aspects of implementation, while in another case the State Government provided only financial support. Although ethnic Literature and Culture Committees (LCCs) were not mentioned by name in the protocol, they took on the role of language experts in the development of the Local Curriculum, providing cultural and linguistic information. Each ethnic group has its own literature and culture committee. As such, local LCCs are the primary resource for all aspects of culture, including language, values, traditions and history.

The aforementioned protocol also elaborates what the Local Curriculum Framework will look like based on the 2015 National Curriculum Framework, dividing the Local Curriculum into two main tracks: ethnic languages, namely ethnic language teaching (ELT), and other social studies, namely local knowledge (LK), as shown in the following table.

Local Curriculum	
Grades 1, 2, and 3	
40 minutes in a teaching period, 5 periods in a week, 120 teaching hours in a year	
Ethnic Language Teaching	**Local Knowledge**
3 Periods per week	2 periods per week
40 minutes per period	40 minutes per period
In respective ethnic languages	In the Burmese language
Content	
Local ethnic language	-ethnic history and cultures
	-regional economic situation
	-agricultural and other relevant content

Table 1. Local curriculum learning areas and time allocation in primary school. (developed based on findings).

The protocol also stipulates that there is to be one Local Knowledge book per state, written in Burmese. Although each state is named after a particular language group (e.g., Kayah State for the Kayah people), there are many different indigenous language groups in each state. As such, there is not enough time or space in the textbook to include each group's (from the respective state) Local Knowledge content. This proved a challenge in negotiating among the different groups as to which content should be included in the curriculum. Furthermore, the language experts responsible for providing local knowledge for the curriculum found it difficult to translate terminology related to their culture and traditions into Burmese. Since local teachers must speak to children in their language rather than in Burmese, this could create difficulties.

The study revealed that there were also members of the committees responsible for developing the Local Knowledge curriculum associated with the government who had considerable influence on deciding what to include in the curriculum. The content for the Local Knowledge portion was collected by the Literature and Culture Committees, passed to the Local Knowledge Development Team (LKDT), and approved by the Local Curriculum Implementation Committee (LCIC), which was comprised of elites – not community representatives. On the other hand, the

ethnic Literature and Culture Committees faced much controversy among themselves regarding the inclusion of local heroes. Some ethnic Literature and Culture Committees wanted to include the heroes who sacrificed their lives for their nation but some did not want to add them. For example, the historic hero Saw Ba U Gyi, who is an iconic hero for the Karen people and who sacrificed his life in 1950,[3] was not included. One interview regarding the inclusion of heroes in the Local Knowledge is quoted as follows:

> Some may think Saw Ba U Gyi should be included in the school curriculum; of course he was a great leader for the Karen people, but not for this nation. (Not) like Mann Ba Khaing, who was assassinated with Bo Gyoke Aung San. He is one who worked for the nation. We must be aware of this. And this curriculum is not for one particular ethnic group, but KNU (Karen National Union) schools might be teaching Saw Ba U Gyi as their leader because he was a Karen leader, but not for the whole Burma. (Secretary of the Yangon Literature and Culture Committee, personal communication, 29 January 2020)

Saw Ba U Gyi was a great leader for the Karen people, but some criticized Saw Ba U Gyi as championing only Karen people, not Karen State. In fact, today's Karen State was created in 1952, two years after the death of Saw Ba U Gyi, and is just a small area that excludes many Karen-inhabited areas (UNDP, 2014, p. 16). The Karen inhabited areas includes "Tenasserim division including Toungoo district, Irrawaddy division, Hanthawaddy division, Insein district, Nyaunglebin sub-district" (Dun, 1980, p. 82-83). Even the name "Karen State" was renamed to "Kayin State" by the military regime in 1989 (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 98; UNDP, 2014, p. 23). Karen leaders demanded a separate state (Myint-U, 2006). The people in the Local Knowledge development team may not be aware of the history of Karen State or they may have a narrow view that the curriculum is to teach about content pertinent to the states of Myanmar.

Symbolically, non-dominant ethnic clothes and instruments were added to the curriculum, which may not be sufficient or generate further analytical skills. Inclusion of notable historical figures (heroes) of non-dominant ethnic peoples, special days and the celebration of non-dominant ethnic cultures in the Local Knowledge are superficial because the content is written in a Bamar (mainstream or majority) perspective, instead of the non-dominant perspectives. Those figures who prominently served the Burmese government were included, but not those who fought for non-dominant ethnic groups' rights and freedoms. In addition, the Local Knowledge content does not reflect on conflict resolution at all. It does not support children in developing critical thinking or reflection on real-life circumstances. Though the superficial inclusion of diversity allows students to gain limited general, surface-level knowledge, as they learn about the simple, visible characteristics of other ethnic groups, they do not learn their perspectives or underlying worldviews. Students have no chance to learn about differences or to understand different cultures. This is another way of stereotyping through education and promoting superficial practices, and can be harmful to children as they might not understand the facts of history.

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3   Observed as "Martyrs' Day" in KNU areas.

On the other hand, the Local Knowledge textbook analysis showed that there is no effective teaching methodology applied in the teaching of the Local Knowledge portion of the curriculum, but that teachers will teach the developed syllabi in a traditional way, focusing on rote memorization instead of promoting critical thinking. Critical thinking means that students can analyze the socio-political inequality in society and the fact that Burmese society is comprised of different characters and power dynamics among the Bamar and other ethnic groups, as well as the oppression faced by those ethnic groups. The National Curriculum Framework stipulates that the Local Curriculum is to promote peaceful coexistence and to ensure sociocultural diversity in order to solve political conflicts. However, the Local Curriculum, particularly the Local Knowledge portion, fails to include such issues because of the fear that the government would not implement it fully. In an interview with the Karen State Focal Person, she expressed that "there is no other thing that can kill someone. We're not putting in content that would violate the law and [lead someone to] commit murder. We only need our freedom to promote our history through education" (Karen State Local Curriculum Development Ethnic Focal Person, personal communication, October 24, 2019). In part because of the many issues involved, Local Knowledge was not ready to be taught in school in the 2019-2020 school year.

As for the Ethnic Language Teaching (ELT) portion, the curriculum was developed for only Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Mon States and not in Chin State. There are over 50[4] (Salem-Gervais & Lian, 2020) languages spoken indigenously in Chin State and no agreement could be reached as to which or how many languages should be included in the curriculum.[5] Altogether, 24 language groups developed their own ELT textbook. These books were made by revising existing learning resources, making them more relevant and employing appropriate language teaching pedagogy, as well as creating new resources that are properly sequenced according to the children's levels of language proficiency. The results of the study revealed that ethnic Literature and Culture Committees were responsible for the ELT portion of the curriculum, including topics based on their respective 'cultural calendar'. A cultural calendar includes various cultural components including food, games, clothes, events, work, tools, history, famous leaders, and the group's flag. Grades 1 to 3 were systematically arranged so that children first develop oral proficiency and then basic literacy skills, introducing all the sounds and symbols of the language. The ELT portion was also developed in a way that the students learn both how to accurately produce language as well as understand that language has meaning and can be used to communicate novel ideas, using primarily stories from the community. The Grade 1 ELT books were launched in the 2019-2020 school year. Thus far, LCCs have taken responsibility to contact school principals and township, state, or national education departments as necessary in order to ensure local ethnic teachers are posted to each school to teach the curriculum, as well as for publishing the ELT books and teaching materials.

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4   Chin language groups are under discussion; the government lists out 53 as Chin sub-groups, which is not accurate. Obviously, 'Chin' itself is also listed as one of the subgroups, and many such as Naga, Tangkhul, Malin, Anun, Lhinbu, and Meitei have never been considered as Chin groups (see also Salem-Gervais and Lian, 2020). Historically, Tangkhul, Malin, and Anun have been considered as Naga people.

5   The author was able to talk with four of the Chin State Local Curriculum Implementation Committee members for one hour.

Regarding this, a focal person revealed in an interview as follows:

> So, whatever we do with MOE is not fully trustable at last. Still not producing the materials and teacher employment which they did up-side-down is visible. We have no materials, like big books and cards. The director of the MOE said that there isn't any budget left. (Focal Person of Gebah from Kayah State, personal communication, 27 October 2019)

The focal person of Shan Ethnic groups stressed that "yes, our work is sometimes like '*Sin Lee Khway Hmyaw*',[6] which cannot be possible" (Focal Person of Shan Ethnic Groups from Kachin State, personal communication, November 10, 2019), and the Focal Person of Jinghpaw also expressed that "the LCC recruited and supported TAs, and when they were promoted to be permanent teachers, they became *Hpaya pyi nyan phyat*"[7] (Focal Person of Jinghpaw from Kachin State, personal communication, 11 November 2019).

The implementation of the ELT portion of the curriculum varied from school to school and depended on the school principal. Many school principals were not aware of the Local Curriculum or that it was allotted a time period in the school day. Some were also reluctant to include ELT during school hours as they were under the impression that local ethnic languages were not to be taught at school during school hours. Some of the teachers appointed to teach the Local Curriculum were posted as part-time teaching assistants (TAs) and language teachers (LTs). TAs and LTs are constantly taken advantage of by the permanent teachers because they are part-time teachers. Being teaching assistants, TAs are overloaded with administration work. Sometimes, permanent full-time teachers take the time allotted for language instruction and teach other subjects, leaving the TAs to teach the ELT after school hours. During interviews, most of the participants used words like 'bothersome', 'overloaded', and 'discriminated' in regards to their work. The teaching assistants who teach the Local Curriculum were insulted by the permanent teachers by using offensive words. They are given a heavy workload, including cleaning the school campus and doing paperwork, which are not supposed to be done by teaching assistants, and, at times, they are told to teach other subjects apart from the Local Curriculum. Focal persons from Kachin State said that they used to relay these problems to the District Education Officer (DEO) but neither the school head nor the teachers received a response, although the DEO said something would be done.

> Regarding the issues, I met with DEO many times to complain. It's not really a complaint but an exchange of understanding. Otherwise, our teachers will have no opportunity to teach. I am aware that most other language groups face that kind of problem. (Focal Person of Shan Ethnic Groups in Kachin State, personal communication, 10 November 2019)

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6   'Sin Lee Khway Hmyaw' is a Burmese saying that means one is hoping for an impossible goal.

7   Hpaya Pyi Nyan Phyat is a Burmese idiom that means the scaffolding is cleared out after finishing the construction of the Pagoda. The meaning is that after completing local curriculum development, no other issues are considered.

> The timetable should be made so that we can teach grade 1, 2, 3 without con-
> flicting with other classes. A proper timetable is needed for language teaching.
> We asked the school headmaster for a time to be specified and he wanted to
> have a set schedule as well but he did not receive instructions from his superi-
> ors so he said that he couldn't. (Focal Person of Tai Lae Literature and Culture
> Committee in Kachin State, personal communication, 10 November 2019)

In cases like these, the local LCC negotiated with the principal and discussed how to include the Local Curriculum in the school day. In some places, however, the part-time TAs were very much appreciated and helped in teaching other classes as well as helping with administrative work in the office. Some TAs were able to adjust their teaching schedules with the headmaster and other regular teachers. One TA from Kachin state said:

> I got to negotiate at school with the other teachers and the head of school. I am
> happy because this curriculum is taught during school hours. I am given the
> last period of the day. So, the students feel bored at that time. The head of the
> school is Jinghpaw. (Teaching Assistant from Kachin State, personal communi-
> cation, 11 November 2019)

As it was stated by Wallace and Fleit (2005) and Jackson (1992), teachers often face a dilemma in implementation because of a lack of understanding the new policy. The study found that the newly stipulated laws and policies were not properly made known to teachers and education administrators at all levels.

LCCs recruited TAs after testing their language skills and they were posted by the government after having received training on language teaching methods and how to use the teaching materials. In some instances, the government did not post a relevant local teacher (e.g., the teacher did not speak the language of the students). There were several challenges in the posting of TAs, as the implementation of Local Curriculum is a new mechanism.

Despite these difficulties, the findings from the classroom observations reveal that the ELT component of the curriculum aids in ensuring active participation from the students and that they understand the lessons. In contrast, previously, when the children's languages were excluded in school and they did not have the opportunity to participate in learning, the children faced many difficulties. Now, the ELT portion aids in student comprehension and in building healthy learning habits, as both the language and content are familiar to them.

Moreover, children from different language groups enjoyed the ELT portion even when there was not a teacher who spoke the language of each of the ethno-linguistic groups represented in the classroom. It was found that children enjoy the Local Curriculum, based on their own culture. Integrating local ethnic content in the cur-riculum encourages social cohesion by promoting multiculturalism from the time children start school.

Based on the findings of this study, Multicultural Education Policy can be described as shown in the chart. The following MEP model can be used as a model of curriculum reform in Myanmar.

Curriculum	Contents	Teachers	Educational aims	Principles
• Use indigenous ethnic language • Use respective ethnic materials • Use multi-ethnic integrated materials • Employ Multi-Strategy Method (MSM) that is culturally relevant teaching style • Aim to help the child to learn how to function effectively within society, his or her ethnic culture, and other ethnic cultures.	• Cultural heritage • Food • Heroes • History (person & process) • Identity • Environment and location • Animals • Natural resources • Agriculture	• Students need skilled teachers who are very knowledgeable about and sensitive to their ethnic cultures and cognitive styles • Multicultural competency is required • Teachers are knowledgeable in language and culture of the students • Equity teaching pedagogy	• Help students learn diversity • Create effective learning • Promote cultural pluralism • No total integration • Not restricted to other cultures • Open society biculturalism • Promote peaceful co-existence and democracy	• Majority & minority emphasis • Group rights are primary • Common ancestry and heritage unify • Marginalized groups have unique learning styles

Table 2. Multicultural education policy (MEP) model. (developed based on findings).

In the MEP model in Table 3, the educational system aims for children to function well within their respective local ethnic culture, and employs teachers who share the same language and culture as the students. It is noteworthy to look at the phenomenon of Local Curriculum implementation amid the curriculum reform process as it occurs in the midst of political transition and social change and in a multicultural context. However, as the LK component of the Local Curriculum does not make use of the local ethnic languages, students will not learn the content well and overall achievement and social change may not be as evident as the ELT portion. The ELT portion has the potential to generate remarkable transformation as local content is presented in the language students understand, ensuring that the children can actively participate in class and learn what is being taught.

In a multicultural society, curriculum reform is necessarily a social reform process and governments often choose to start at the lowest level of content integration approach (Banks, 2006). However, the case of Myanmar is different, as the LK represents a contribution approach, while the ELT is at the transformation approach level, as shown in
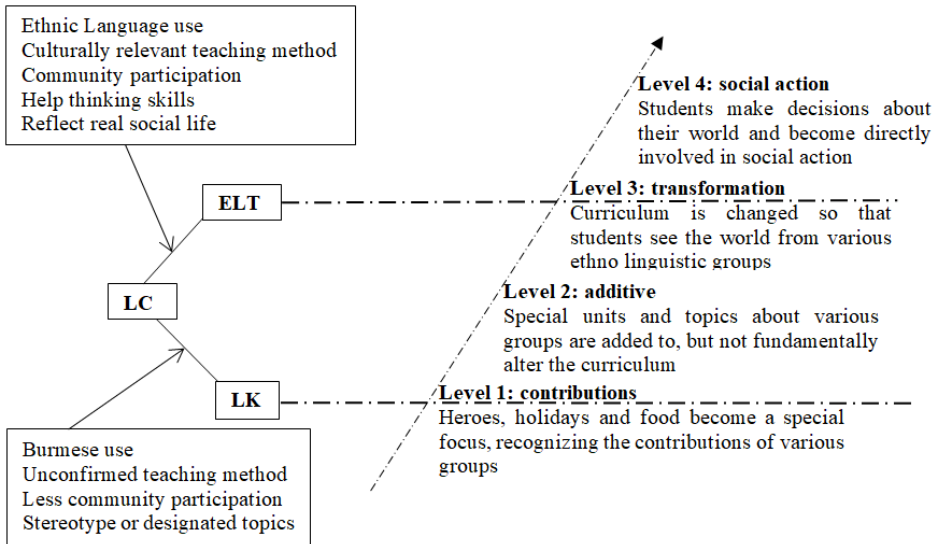
Figure 1. Local curriculum approach level. (developed based on findings).

Figure 1. The time allotment and schedule for the curriculum for the entire school year has been changed. There are 120 hours in a year given for the Local Curriculum, much like a core learning area. The ELT content guides children in learning about sociocultural diversity and problems that often arise in a multicultural society and children are encouraged to engage in problem solving. In classroom observations, it was found that ELT lessons are prepared such that a class writes and talks about their own experiences, or they participate in role play that the teacher has prepared according to the lesson's theme. Then, the teacher facilitates the class in discussion regarding their experiences and the story text so that students gain more knowledge and develop thinking and analytical skills. Respective socio-political markers of different ethno-linguistic groups are taught in ELT lessons, such as the flag, anthem and history of the monarchy and ruling system, intended to help children develop their thinking skills. This can also help children in comparing present life and the past of their people. However, ELT content at the primary level is basic; it does not achieve the aims of the social action approach. In higher grades, as the study reveals, ethnic groups expect to create more advanced lessons about why and how the people of non-dominant ethno-linguistic groups are marginalized. The students are not taught social action skills to balance the power with the dominant group because the curriculum framework was developed so that it focuses on peaceful coexistence rather dissent, rebellion, and tribalism.

The current implementation process and lessons learned should be taken into consideration when implementing the Local Curriculum for upper levels and for other ethno-linguistic groups in other states. The framework for implementation is comprised of four essential parts, all inextricably intertwined and requiring careful attention, as shown in Figure 2 below.

In the midst of writing this paper, the political situation has tremendously changed in Myanmar. The military seized power from the civilian-led government on 1 February 2021. In response to the coup d'état, a civil strike, called 'Spring Revolution'
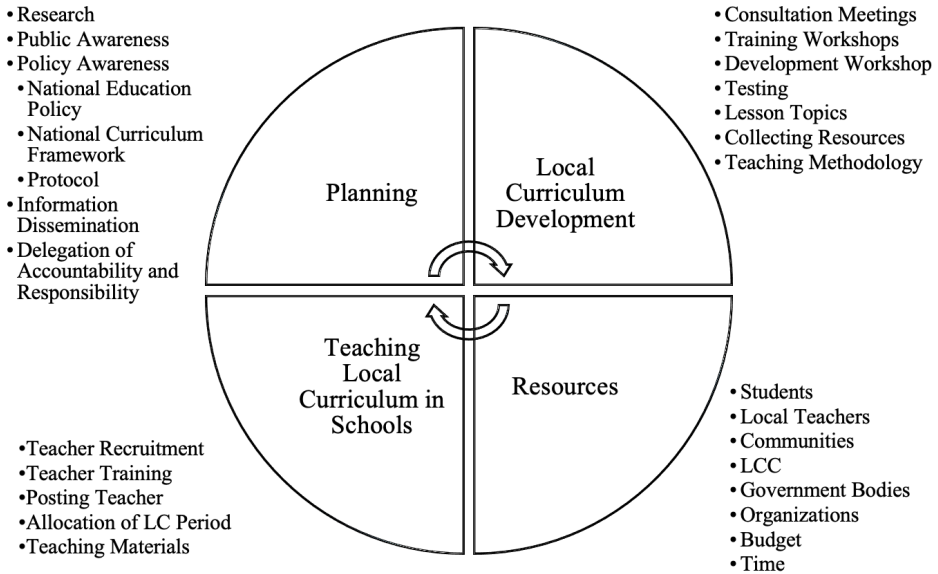
Figure 2. Suggested local curriculum implementation framework.

has been taking place across the country, with the situation worsening daily (Jordt et al., 2021, p. 23). Consequently, the National League for Democracy (NLD) politicians who were elected in the 8 November 2020 general elections established the Committee Representing Pyidaungdsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on 5 February 2021 (Human Rights Council, 2021; Acaps, 2021). Subsequently, CRPH formed the National Unity Government (NUG) on 16 April 2021 (Lilly, 2021) and claimed to be the legitimate government and promised to establish a federal democratic state and to implement federal education. A Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) launched across the country, boycotting all government services that the State Administrative Council (SAC) plans to implement (Karen Human Rights Group, 2021). In this situation, it is uncertain whether this Local Curriculum implementation can be carried on or not. The State Administrative Council (SAC) announced after the coup that they will continue the implementation of the curriculum without any problems. However, civilians continuously protest against SAC, as the CDM campaign calls on citizens to boycott government schools. Thus, obviously, this sudden political change affects all sectors and will negatively impact all socioeconomic development.

Now, the civil strike is shifting toward civil war as the NUG formed a People's Defense Force (PDF). The authors believe that the schools in central Myanmar face more hardship at this time and schools in ethnic-dominated areas might be able to continue to sustain their school programs because they have been experiencing this kind of conflict for 70 years, so it is not much different for them. However, this political change is a great turning point that has the potential to enact great changes in Myanmar. The impact of the coup can lead to "balkanization" (Glazer, 1974) wherein ethnic territories, which seem to be the rump states, controlling some part of their territories for many years could legitimately become autonomous states.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studying the Local Curriculum development and implementation process illustrates the opportunities and challenges in implementing a larger multicultural education policy. Through this study, the challenges in integrating local ethnic content came to light. Many lessons can be drawn from these challenges and will be helpful in setting up a multicultural educational policy in Myanmar. This study also shows the process of Local Curriculum development and the integration of local ethnic content into the curriculum and how the curriculum, along with the MEP model, can be adapted for the purpose of social cohesion.

The findings from the research conducted in some ethnic communities concerning the Local Curriculum development process provide practical insight through lived experience in integrating local ethnic content into the curriculum. Thus, relevant government ministries and ethnic leaders or LCCs could benefit from lessons learned thus far in how to take the next steps in developing a curriculum for higher levels and for other ethno-linguistic communities. Conducting research on integrating ethnic content in the local curriculum is of great value to both ethno-linguistic communities and governments, since multicultural educational policy has been more formally applied. Ethnic languages have been allocated as a subject in the curriculum since the 2014 curriculum reform, but not all the ethnic communities were informed and have not developed instructional material.

The author believes that the characteristics of curriculum reform approaches depend on the sociopolitical situation of the country. Historically, ethnic groups in Myanmar have employed their own culture, traditions, heritage, and literature in the respective school systems. Presently, implementation of the Local Curriculum in the formal educational system by employing the literature of ethnic minorities gives hope for sustaining and promoting multiculturalism as the cultural aspects of each ethnic group are fully installed in the lessons in the ethnic language teaching portion.

Recommendations

1. Ethnic Content Integration implementation should be carried out with full participation of local LCCs because they are most responsible and accountable for providing resources, as found in this research. They know what is most relevant to their communities and their children. LCCs should be officially designated as members of the implementation committee prescribed in the protocol. As they play an important role in developing the Local Curriculum, their technical abilities and capacity should be strengthened.
2. Rather than dividing the Local Curriculum in two parts, one in Burmese and one in the respective local language, the entire local curriculum should be in the children's first language. In this way, children can learn the content sufficiently and effectively.
3. The legality of teaching the Local Curriculum in the mainstream curriculum should be well-communicated to local schools, as it is prescribed in the National Curriculum Framework. The policy regarding ethnic language

teaching during school hours should also be communicated to every level of related educational departments. If this is done, the posted language teachers can teach their classes with full confidence while school principals can manage the logistics of teaching the Local Curriculum in their schools.

4. As there are many ethnolinguistic groups in Myanmar, implementing multicultural education through the Local Curriculum can aid in the development of education. The implementation of the Local Curriculum is a turning point in Myanmar and a possible pathway to peaceful co-existence between various ethno-linguistic groups, and national reconciliation. Therefore, content integration in the mainstream curriculum should be supported, both in the budget and through technical support from the government.

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The Ideological Stance of Multilingualism in Education in Malaysia in the Press 2000-2020

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The past 20 years have witnessed major shifts in language and education policy in Malaysia. This reflects a range of social, economic, and political forces that influence and shape the policymaking in this multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Past research has suggested that language and education policies in Malaysia tend to have two main stances and are generally related to Malay (the national language), English, Mandarin, and Tamil. One stance is related to issues of globalization and employability, and the other is related to national and ethnic identities. In view of these stances, this paper seeks to contribute to the discussion and debates on these issues by empirically investigating inherent ideological positions in official statements published in two newspapers in the past 20 years. Specifically, it adopts concepts from critical discourse studies, and uses methods from computational linguistics to examine official statements from a total of 30,508 Malaysian newspaper articles published between 2000 and 2020. The findings indicate that the role of Malay and national ideology, and the global positioning of English continue to be central concerns in the discussion of language and education in Malaysia. In addition, the importance of learning Mandarin is also emphasized. However, indigenous and minority languages are largely absent in the discourses on education policies in the country. The effects of this exclusion are already apparent in the shift to languages like Malay, Mandarin, and English as a first language, and the increasing number of languages considered to be under threat in Malaysia.

Keywords: Education Policy; Indigenous and Minority Languages; Language Policy; Malaysia; Multilingualism

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INTRODUCTION

As a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, Malaysia is a rich site for the study of language and education issues. The Malays make up more than half of the population in Malaysia, followed by the Chinese and Indians who make up about 25% and 7% of the population, respectively (Nagaraj et al., 2015). Malaysia also has many indigenous groups. In East Malaysia, the Ibans are the largest indigenous group in Sarawak, accounting for about 25% of the population in this state, while in Sabah, the main indigenous groups are the Kadazandusun comprising about 30% of the state's population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The indigenous groups in Peninsular Malaysia, also known as

the Orang Asli, only comprise about 0.7% of the Malaysian population, which is a similar percentage to those classified as *others*. The latter generally includes those who do not fall into any of the officially listed racial categories such as Malaysians of Portuguese descent.

Given the diversity of the population in Malaysia, it is therefore not surprising that there are almost 137 living languages spoken in the country (Eberhard et al., 2020). These include Bahasa Melayu, or the Malay language, which is the national and official language in Malaysia, and other Malay dialects spoken in the various states in Malaysia such as Penang, Kelantan and Sarawak Malay. The indigenous languages, which comprise almost 89% of the languages in Malaysia, include those spoken in Sabah and Sarawak, such as Bajau, Bidayuh, Iban, Kadazan, Murut and Penan, and those spoken in Peninsular Malaysia. The latter include Jakun, Semai, Mah Meri, Temiar, and Temuan, and like most of the indigenous languages in Malaysia, are under threat of disappearing (Coluzzi, 2017; Eberhard et al., 2020). Other languages in Malaysia include Chinese languages like Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, and Mandarin, and Indian languages like Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu. There are also homegrown languages due to language contact, such as the three creole languages, Baba Malay, Chitty Malay, and Melaka Portuguese, as well as the colloquial variety of English (Austin & Pillai, 2020).

Despite this linguistic diversity, four languages are dominant in education: Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil. Malay is the main medium of instruction in public education. There are also Chinese[1] and Tamil medium[2] primary schools. This includes provisions that have resulted in an increasing number of private and international schools, where the main medium of instruction is English. In fact, the past 20 years have witnessed major shifts in language and education policies in this country. This reflects a range of social, economic, and political forces that influence and shape the policymaking. Past studies have suggested that language and education policies in Malaysia tend to have two main stances and are generally related to these languages. One stance is related to issues of globalization and employability, and the other is related to national and ethnic identities. Indigenous and minority[3] languages are, however, largely ignored in official discourses surrounding language and education (e.g., Albury & Aye, 2016; Puteh, 2006).

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion and debates on these issues by empirically investigating inherent ideological positions in the official statements published in two newspapers in the past 20 years. Many of these statements were made by politicians and government officers while others by leaders in communities or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While they in no way represent the whole official discourse on language and education, these statements indicate important views and beliefs publicly expressed in the newspaper. At the same time, they also have the potential to shape and influence public opinion, perceptions and/

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1   In Malaysia, Chinese-medium schools refer to those where Mandarin is the main medium of instruction.

2   Tamil is the mother tongue of the majority Indian ethnic group in Malaysia, the Tamils from South India and Sri Lanka.

3   The minority languages are those spoken by a small segment of the population and include Chinese dialects and Indian languages (apart from Tamil), and creoles.

or the actions of policymakers. Using methods from computational linguistics alongside critical discourse studies to identify and examine official statements from a total of 30,508 Malaysian newspaper articles published between 2000 and 2020, we explore the intrinsic interplay between language choice and the associated ideological positions.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION POLICIES IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia has witnessed a few major changes and shifts in policymaking concerning language and education over the past 63 years. The first defining decision regarding language was the institutionalization of Malay as the national language upon independence in 1957 as stated in Article 152 (§1) of the Federal Constitution[4]. This was done with the aim of promoting and creating a common national identity. However, the same act also states that "no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language" (Federal Const. art. 152, §1a). Given the country's British colonial history, English was to be used for legislative matters and legal proceedings. English could also be used in parliament and state assemblies. The use of English was to be allowed for ten years after Independence Day in 1957 "and thereafter until Parliament otherwise provides" (Federal Const. art. 152, §2, 6). Subsequently, the National Language Acts (1963/1967)[5] declared that Malay was now to be the official language throughout Malaysia except in the two new states on the island of Borneo: Sabah and Sarawak. However, the act gave power to the king to permit the continued use of English for official purposes. Similarly, English could still be used in parliament state assemblies and the courts with permission. The latitude given to English in the act caused a considerable amount of dissatisfaction in the Malay community and Malay language groups (Mohd Rus & Sharif Adam, 2008; Roff, 1967).

In relation to education, a common national curriculum was introduced upon independence in a bid to inculcate national values and a national identity (Report of the Education Committee, 1956, also known as the *Razak Report*). However, as previously mentioned, in terms of language, there were essentially four mediums of instruction: Malay in the national schools, and English-, Chinese-, and Tamil-medium national-type schools. While the latter two were allowed to continue at the primary level, by the late 1960s English-medium schools began to be phased out, with the conversion fully completed by 1983 (Puteh, 2006). The 1961 Education Act also resulted in 55 Chinese-medium secondary schools making the choice to turn into national schools in return for government funding (Tan & Teoh, 2015). The remaining schools became independent (private) Chinese secondary schools. The status of Malay as the main medium of instruction in all educational institutions, except for national-type schools, was further reiterated in the National Education Act 1996.

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4   https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10_akta/perlembagaan_persekutuan/federal_constitution.pdf

5   http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act%2032.pdf

Shifts in Language and Education Policy

Emphasis on the use of English in the education sector increased in the 1990s when Malaysia was responding to globalization and aiming to be an education hub for the region (Economic Planning Unit, 1993). English started to be used as the medium of instruction in the increasing number of private colleges in the country (Gill, 2002; Omar, 1996). Then, in view of the increasing importance of English as a language of science and technology, the Malaysian government introduced the teaching of science and mathematics in English in 2003. This was considered as 'a near-reversal' of the initial national language policy by some (e.g., Kaur & Shapii, 2018). The policy was implemented in stages at both primary and secondary education levels. The policy was not popular among language associations, and it was reported that students were performing badly in the two subjects because they failed to understand the content that was being taught in English (Hashim, 2009; Rashid et al., 2017). Thus, in July 2009, the Minister of Education announced that the policy would be gradually phased out. This involved a switch back to the use of the Malay language, as well as Mandarin and Tamil to teach these subjects.

In 2012, a new policy known as MBMMBI, the Malay acronym for *Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language*, was introduced in a bid to create proficient bilingual speakers. This initiative was part of the *Malaysia Education Blueprint* (MEB) 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). To support this policy, roadmaps for both Malay and English language education were formed with time-based strategies and action plans: *Pelan Hala Tuju Pendidikan Bahasa Melayu 2016-2025* (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017) and *English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025* (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

This MEB also called for the acquisition of a third language. At present, more than 300 day-schools and fully residential public schools in Malaysia offer languages such as Arabic, Japanese, French, German, Korean, and Mandarin (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). The list of elective language subjects that upper-secondary school students can take from 2020 includes three indigenous languages (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019), although these are likely to be limited to the areas where these languages are used, and by the availability of teaching and learning resources. These languages are Iban, Kadazanduzun, and Semai. Apart from Semai, which thus far has only been available at the primary level, the other two languages have been taught in primary and secondary schools in two states for more than 25 years now: Iban in Sarawak and Kadazandusun in Sabah.

In 2016, two further programs related to language education were introduced: *The Highly Immersive Programme* and the *Dual Language Programme* (DLP). These two programs can be viewed as extensions of the MBMMBI policy. The Highly Immersive Programme supports students by providing more opportunities for the use of English within and outside the English language classroom, which was among the aims of MBMMBI. The DLP policy offers a choice to schools to use Malay or English for the teaching of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Kaur & Shapii, 2018; Pillai & Ong, 2018). From January 2020, the state of Sarawak began teaching science and mathematics in English to Year One students in all national primary schools, except for Chinese-medium schools. It should also be noted that, as part of the policy

to make Malaysia a regional hub for education, there has been a sharp increase in the number of international schools and institutes of higher education. More than half of the students in international schools, where English is the main medium of instruction, are Malaysians (Nasa & Pilay, 2017). This does bring into question the original aim of having a common curriculum with fully Malay-medium public education at the secondary school level.

Ideologies in Language and Education Policy

A nation's language policy-making is often the result of several factors. Spolsky (2004), for example, highlighted four: national ideology, the role of English in the globalization era, the nation's sociolinguistic situation, and an interest in linguistic minority rights. Gill (2014), on the other hand, identified the following reasons in her analysis of the observed shifts in Malaysian language and education policy: globalization, international economic competitiveness, the need for access to science and technology, and employability. Indeed, these factors mentioned by Spolsky (2004) and Gill (2014) exemplify some of the ideologies inherent in Malaysian language policies. As mentioned previously, by giving Malay the status of the sole national language in the country, the government promoted the national language as a strong identity marker of all Malaysians, replacing the role that English had occupied during the colonial period. The role of Malay as the official national language is not open to dispute as it is enshrined in the constitution. Over the years, this, and the fact that Malay is represented as the main linguistic resource for national integration, have been constantly reinforced by both the governing (which have been predominantly Malay-based) and non-governing political parties. However, the interaction between English as a global language, and Malay as the national language, has been an intrinsic and complex one in Malaysia (e.g., Zhou & Wang, 2017). On the one hand, English is important given its role in ASEAN as its de facto working language alongside its use in ASEAN in a wide variety of domains (Low & Hashim, 2012), its global position, and its value in international trade and commerce. On the other hand, nation building requires a common language to help form a national identity, and Malay, as a language spoken by the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, naturally becomes the language choice (Kementerian Perpaduan Negara, 2021). As Albury and Aye (2016, p. 78) summarize:

> The Malaysian government seems to see itself between a rock and a hard place linguistically as it operates a staunchly Malay-oriented nation-building agenda which affords primacy to Bahasa Melayu [Malay] while operating nonetheless a highly internationalised economy which demands effective English language proficiency amongst Malaysians.

The main shifts in language education policies in Malaysia observed over the past 20 years reflect and capture this tension and competition between English and Malay in the country. The present study, as noted earlier, seeks to explore and understand the inherent ideological positions of language and education issues captured in official statements of these past 20 years, as reported in two Malaysian newspapers (*The Star* and *Malaysiakini*) from 2000 to September 2020.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of the data is based upon concepts adopted from critical discourse studies (CDS), namely, the notions of ideology, power, and access. Van Dijk (1998) refers to ideology as a set of belief systems, social representations, and social practices that are shared by group members. Ideologies are expressed in various structures of text and talk, and often influence the ways in which social attitudes are expressed in various texts, such as in media and policy, among others. Critical discourse analysts argue that all media texts are inherently ideological as the mass media has ideological power that translates into the direct or indirect articulation of ideological stances on specific issues and phenomena (Fairclough, 2012). Connected to ideology are the notions of power and access. Bourdieu (1993) argues that power takes the shape of 'cultural capital', where the power of dominant groups is likely to be legalized through laws, traditions, culture, and consensus. Hegemonic power, then, exhibits itself once it becomes entrenched in tradition and culture, as well as habits and norms. This is significant because hegemonic power can control access to resources (often in terms of knowledge or material things). Hegemonic power also enables specific ideological stances to be exhibited in different forms of discourse where access to the control of a particular type of discourse (in this case the discourse of language and education issues) points to the powerbase of a significant ideology.

The notions of power, ideology, and access have often been used by critical discourse analysts to gain deeper insights into how texts are articulated and how power operates within them. For instance, Woolside-Jiron (2011) employed CDS to explain the ways in which reading policies are taken up in California, arguing that these policies socialize us into accepting certain values and goals while rejecting others. Similarly, CDS enables us to reveal the workings of ideology and ideological stances in media and policy texts on education in Malaysia. These texts would necessarily point the way for people to accept certain ways of thinking about education in Malaysia, and in the process, position people, and language and education issues in very specific ideological ways. The analysis itself is based upon five analytical categories derived from the data, which signify the arguments or reasons by which the support of or objection to a particular language, or to specific language policies is articulated. These categories (which are explained further below) are (1) employability, (2) national identity, (3) ethnic and cultural reasons, (4) globalization, and (5) economic or commercial value.

Methods

The study considered all the articles published in the press in Malaysia from 2000 until September 2020 for official statements that highlighted reasons for language choice and education policy in the country. Initially, the focus was on three main English language newspapers in Malaysia: *The New Straits Times*, *The Star*, and *Malaysiakini*. However, only articles from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* were fully searchable online from January 2000 to September 2020, while the articles from *The New Straits Times* were only available from 2013 to 2020. We therefore focused on these two newspapers to identify official statements on language and education issues.

Methodologically, we employed computational linguistic tools to first identify the related articles, then the prominent categories of analysis. Finally, we embedded ideological concepts from critical discourse studies into the analysis and discussion.

Data Collection

To identify related articles, the following search terms from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* were used:

> *Chinese/Chinese Language, Malay/Malay Language, English/English Language, Tamil/ Tamil Language, Mandarin, Bahasa, Minority Language, Iban, Dusun, Kadazan.*

A web crawler program was developed based on Pyspider, a spider system in Python, to download and gather all these articles in a folder, including details such as URL and date of publication. Based on this method, a total of 30,508 related articles were identified. All these articles were later coded according to the label pattern, *year-newspaper+number*. For example, the coding *2011-TS00028* indicates that it is an article published in 2011 and that it is the 28th article in the collection of articles from 2000-2020 appearing in *The Star* (TS). The coding 2016-MK00862, on the other hand, indicates that it is an article published in 2016 and that it is the 862nd article in the collection of articles from 2000-2020 appearing in *Malaysiakini* (MK).

As this study focuses on official statements in the discussion of language and education issues, the challenge was then to identify and extract relevant statements from all these 30,508 articles. To this end, the search was restricted to those articles that discussed language and education issues based on the word *education*. Further, the computer capacities were exploited where the official statement sentence pattern, *Official Label + Express Label + Language Label + Others*, was created and pattern matching was achieved through Python regular expression. Here, *Official Label* refers to and includes such keywords as *Minister*, *Director*, *Ministry*, *Bureau*, *Association* and *NGO*. *Express Label*, on the other hand, refers to expressive verbs (i.e., *say*, *tell*, *express*, *claim*, *state*, *point out, mention, issue, stress, assert, report, declare, and announce*) and single/double quotation marks. *Language Label* comprises terms such as *English language, Mandarin, Malay, Malay language, Bahasa, Tamil, Tamil language, Chinese, Chinese language, Iban, Dusun, Kadazan,* and *Minority language.* Only sentences that meet all these three requirements at the same time were extracted.

It must also be noted that all these terms were constantly refined in the light of close reading of relevant articles. For example, it was observed that the pronouns *he* or *she* occurred quite frequently in quoted official statements to refer to a particular minister or director in the government sector. Therefore, these two pronouns were eventually included in the Official Label to achieve a more accurate identification of all relevant statements in the newspaper articles. This close, interactive analysis involving both automatic computer search and human observation yielded a total of 2,914 instances of related official statements.

This interactive analysis for data refinement also applied to the identification of official statements associated with ideological positions. Initially, the official statement search was restricted to articles discussing such reasons as standards,

employability, and national and ethnic identities. Upon close reading of some relevant articles in this initial phase, the search was expanded to include such frequently occurring notions as culture and globalization. This generated a larger number of articles containing the official statements relevant to the current study. Another round of random but close reading of articles in this collection suggested additional, important notions such as economic and commercial values. The resulting list of categories of reasons for the debates and discussion of language and education issues in the official statements comprises the following:

a) Employability
b) National identity
c) Ethnic and cultural reasons
d) Globalization
e) Economic or commercial value.

With these categories identified, the sentence pattern for computer processing mentioned before was then revised as *Official Label + Express Label + Language Label + Reason Label + Others*. Based on this revision, a total of 381 relevant official statements were identified. For the benefit of future replication studies, here is the full list of search items used in this study based on the procedures previously described:

a) Employability: job / employ / career / hire
b) National identity: national identit / patrio / national unity
c) Ethnic and cultural reasons: culture / ethnic / root / mother tongue / extinct / indigen
d) Globalization: global / international / worldwide
e) Economic or commercial value: econom / financ / commerc / business

Since the automatic analysis of the corpus is restricted to superficial linguistic features (Sinclair, 1991), the search results of 381 statements were manually checked. Each official statement was checked and examined by two members of the research team against the original article in which the statement was found. This also involved reassigning official statements to the relevant categories upon the agreement of both readers. Through this labor-intensive process, a final total of 131 official statements were identified for the analysis and discussion of this study.

FINDINGS

The 131 official statements were, as noted earlier, based on five categories of arguments or reasons that were used in the statements as arguments in support of or against the promotion of a language or language policy. They are: (1) employability, (2) national identity, (3) ethnic and cultural reasons, (4) globalization, and (5) economic or commercial value. A comparison of the focus of arguments for the promotion of each language is particularly revealing of the ideological stance in the discussion of language and education issues in Malaysia.

Arguments for Language Choice

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis of arguments in support of particular languages in the official statements in the two newspapers considered in this study. There were noticeable differences for reasons of language choice in the debates and discussion of language use and policymaking as reported in the newspapers. The importance of employability, for example, is often cited in support of an emphasis on English (82%) (1) and Mandarin (18%) (2):

1) Mohamed Khaled [Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin] said students entering universities should first have excellent communication skills and a good command of the English language, adding that such students have better employment prospects, particularly in big companies. (2013-TS00851).

2) Earlier, Dr. Fong, who is Human Resources Minister, said employees in the private and government sectors were encouraged to learn Mandarin, as it would help them enter the Chinese market. (2004-TS00252).

	Total		Employability		National Identity		Ethnic and Cultural Reasons		Globalization		Economic or Commercial value	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Malay	26	20	0	0	18	82	7	32	0	0	1	3
English	50	38	9	82	1	5	0	0	32	68	8	28
Mandarin	46	35	2	18	2	9	8	36	14	30	20	69
Tamil	6	5	0	0	1	5	4	18	1	2	0	0
Minority languages	3	2	0	0	0	0	3	14	0	0	0	0
Totals	131	100	11	100	22	100	22	100	47	100	29	100

Table 1. Reasons for language choice in the newspapers (2000-2020). (own compilation).

English (68%), and, increasingly, Mandarin (30%), have also become the focus of emphasis in the country due to their global value:

3) Being a global language, young people should make sure that they are proficient in the English language, said Deputy Education Minister II P. Kamalanathan. (2013-TS00124).

4) "Having mastery of the English language prepares students for the rapidly changing globalised world", said EON Bank Bhd senior executive vice president and Group Business and Investment Banking head Peter Y C Chow. (2011-TS00806).

5) Najib [Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak] said Mandarin is important in linking Malaysians to the global community. (2011-TS00021).

6) "Tomorrow's global language is Mandarin, so we must move towards this in collaboration with all these industries and foundries", he [Human Resources Minister M. Kulasegaran] said after a working visit to the ITI here yesterday. (2018-TS00234).

Similarly, these two languages have been the primary languages named to offer economic or commercial value, with Mandarin accounting for 69% of the total official statements and English 28%:

7) "Like it or not, English and Mandarin have commercial value and language skills are important for a country like Malaysia, whose export industries play a vital role to its economic growth", said party president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek after attending a Chinese New Year celebration organised by Taman Soga MCA branch here on Saturday. (2013-TS00099).

8) Dr Chua [MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek] said languages such as Mandarin and English have commercial value, and a good command of both languages would enhance one's competitive edge. (2013-TS00087).

As expected, national identity is predominantly used as an argument for a focus on the Malay language, accounting for 82% of the total official statements in this category:

9) "Proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia will help us carry our national identity to enable Malaysians to communicate and integrate with other communities in this country", Najib [Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak] said when opening the new school block of SJK Chung Hua No. (2017-TS00198).

10) He [Information, Communications, Culture and Arts Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim] also said that championing Bahasa Malaysia as the national language should not only be the responsibility of the Malays, but the other races as well. "Our national language can be the vehicle for racial unity and communication to facilitate the realisation of 1Malaysia involving all the communities in the country." (2009-TS02008).

Further, ethnic and cultural reasons were put forward as arguments for a focus on Mandarin (36%), Malay (32%), Tamil (18%), and minority languages (14%):

11) "The national language and English are important but other languages such as Mandarin and Tamil should also be learnt." Muhyiddin [Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin] said by understanding the languages, Malaysians could better appreciate the way of life, values and cultures of the country's various races. (2010-TS00050).

12) Earlier, Maszlee [Education Minister] had said that the creation of the Standard Malay Language Framework developed by national language experts would be a big boost to the speakers of the Malay language in the context of culture and language aspirations. (2018-MK01398).

13) "It is about the soul, culture and heritage of the community", said Pathi [Tamil educationist SP Pathi], a lawyer who is also editorial advisor to Tamil monthly. (2003-MK01136).

14) Gobind [Communication and Multimedia Minister Gobind Singh] said he was very happy with the celebration themed 'Bejalai Betungkatka Adat, Tinduk Bepanggalka Pengigat' (know your culture and roots in the Iban language), which also saw the participation from the Dayak community of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. (2019-MK01331).

Reasons for the Promotion of Particular Languages

When the data for reasons for each language choice were examined, several interest-ing insights were obtained. Table 2 presents an overview of the reasons.

	Total		Malay		English		Mandarin		Tamil		Minority languages	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Employability	11	8	0	0	9	18	2	4	0	0	0	0
National identity	22	17	18	69	1	2	2	4	1	17	0	0
Ethnic and cultural reasons	22	17	7	27	0	0	8	17	4	67	3	100
Globalization	47	36	0	0	32	64	14	30	1	17	0	0
Economic or commercial value	29	22	1	4	8	16	20	43	0	0	0	0
Total	131	100	26	100	50	100	46	100	6	100	3	100

Table 2. Reasons for the promotion of particular languages in the newspapers (2000-2020). (own compilation).

We first turn to Figure 1 for the results of the analysis of reasons for the promotion of the Malay language.
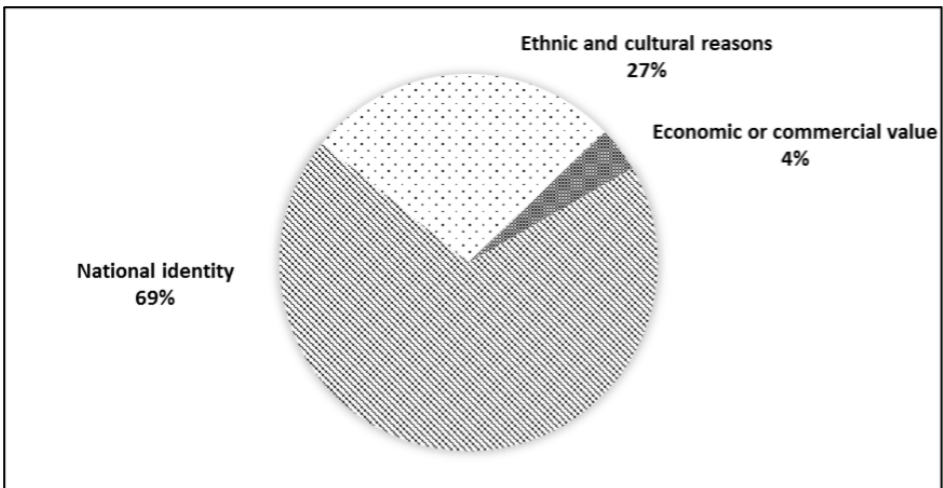
Figure 1. Reasons highlighted in official statements for the promotion of the Malay language. (own compilation).

As can be seen from Figure 1, national identity was the dominant reason in the discussion of the promotion of the Malay language, accounting for 69% of all official statements associated with it:

15) "Proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia will help us carry our national identity to enable Malaysians to communicate and integrate with other communities in this country", Najib [Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak] said when opening the new school block of SJK Chung Hua No. (2017- TS00198).

16) He [Chief secretary to the government Ali Hamsa] added that the government was making various efforts to empower Bahasa Malaysia without marginalising English. (2013-MK01487).

Ethnic and cultural reasons are also used in support of the Malay language:

17) "English is important for knowledge and international communication while Bahasa Malaysia is important for national identity, culture and heritage", she [Dr Nik Safiah, a guest researcher at Malay Studies Academy] says, stressing that problems arise only when one language is judged to be superior over another. (2011-TS00800).

18) Dr Rais [Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim] said that his ministry would embark on several language culture education programs to revive and protect Bahasa Melayu as the nation's heritage. (2004-TS02066).

Turning now to English, we find that globalization accounts for more than half (64%) of the reasons expressed in all the official statements associated with it. This reflects the global language position of English (see Figure 2):

19) In his [Prime Education Ministry deputy director-general Datuk Dr Amin Senin] speech, Dr Amin said that in this modern era, the English language is an international language and Malaysian students need to improve their English in order to compete on an international level. (2013-TS00856).

20) "English is used internationally, and it enables us to communicate easily with people from other countries", said Orando Holdings managing director Datuk Dr Eng Wei
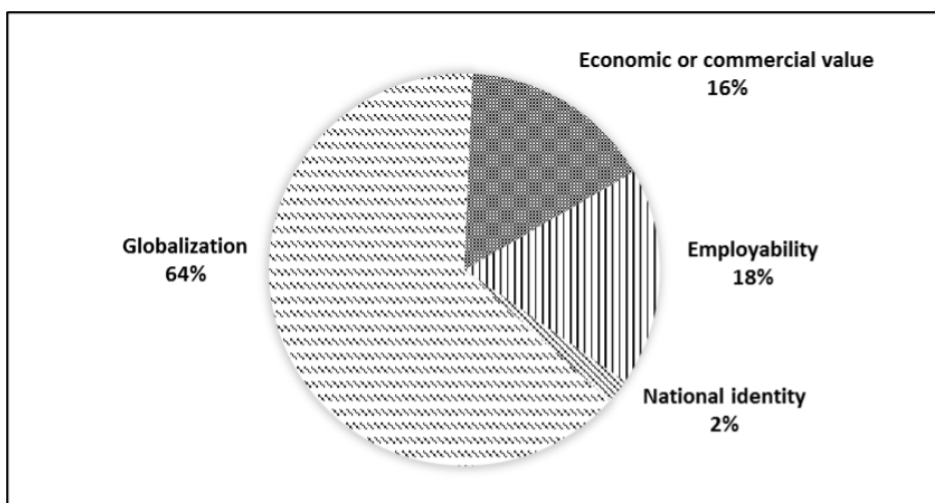
Figure 2. Reasons highlighted in official statements for the promotion of the English language. (own compilation).

Chun as he stressed the importance of the English language. (2014-TS01093).

21) Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today urged Malaysians to master the English language as it is vital for success in a globalised world. (2004-MK00699).

In addition, Malaysians were urged to master English to make themselves more competitive in the job market and to drive the economic growth of the country, citing reasons of employability (18%) (22) and economic or commercial value (16%) (23):

22) He [Sarawak Yang Dipertua Negeri Abdul Taib Mahmud] expressed the fear that more than 20,000 fresh graduates from Sarawak would have difficulty getting employed due to their inability to master the English language. (2016-MK00862).

23) British Trade and Investment director Tony Collingridge said competency in the English language is essential in Malaysia's drive to be an innovative, high income and high value-added economy. (2013-TS00907).

Mandarin, on the other hand, has been promoted for three main reasons. It is emphasized for its economic and commercial value (44%) (24), for its increasingly important role in a globalized world (31%) (25), and for its ethnic and cultural value (17%) (26) (see Figure 3):

24) Citing the Mandarin language as an example, he [Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar] says Mandarin is not only the language for the Chinese ethnic group, but also an important economic language in this globalised world. (2013-MK00372).

25) Najib [Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak] said Mandarin is important in linking Malaysians to the global community. (2011-TS00021).

26) "The national language and English are important but other languages such as Mandarin and Tamil should also be learnt." Muhyiddin [Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin] said by understanding the languages, Malaysians could
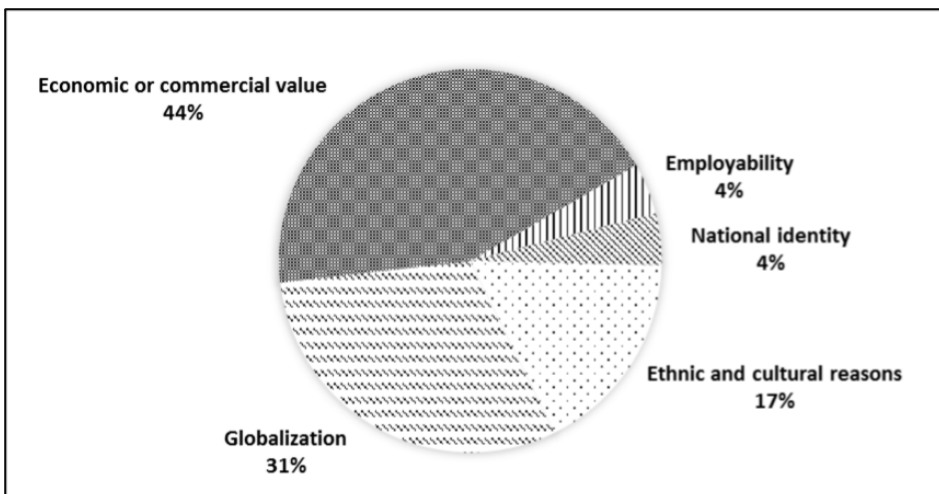
Figure 3. Reasons highlighted in official statements for the promotion of Mandarin. (own compilation).

better appreciate the way of life, values and cultures of the country's various races. (2010-TS00050).

From the newspaper articles analyzed, it was found that only a small number of official statements were made in this period related to the promotion of the Tamil language (Figure 4) and minority languages. A frequently cited emphasis on Tamil (67%) is for ethnic and cultural reasons (27). This same argument is the only reason found in the data in support of the minority languages (28):

27) Kulasegaran [DAP national vice-chair M Kulasegaran] said Indians should demonstrate support for Tamil education because the language is a repository of their culture. (2014-MK00321).

28) Gobind [Communication and Multimedia Minister Gobind Singh] said he was very happy with the celebration themed 'Bejalai Betungkatka Adat, Tinduk Bepanggalka Pengigat' (know your culture and roots in the Iban language), which also saw the participation from the Dayak community of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. (2019-MK01331).
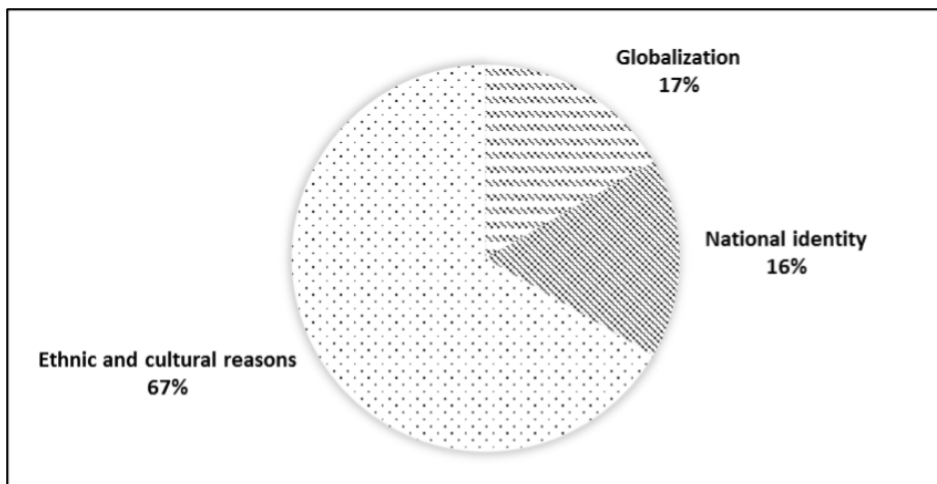
Figure 4. Reasons highlighted in official statements for the promotion of the Tamil language. (own compilation).

DISCUSSION

The results from the analysis of the official statements in the newspapers published from 2000 to 2020 suggest that English and Mandarin have often been represented ideologically as two major languages enjoying a global prominence with economic and commercial value. Having a good command of English has further been highlighted as offering the additional advantage as far as employability is concerned. The discursive connections between employability and the two languages of English and Mandarin appear to stem from current socio-economic practices that prioritize the ideologically-loaded language privilege of English and Mandarin. Mandarin is privileged specifically in terms of the

affordances it presents with access to the economic market of China, which, in turn, promotes economic power for individuals. The high value accorded to Mandarin has also been reported in other Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore (Starr & Kapoor, 2021) and Indonesia (Hoon & Kuntjara, 2019). While Mandarin is not a lingua franca in Malaysia or in any of the other Southeast Asian countries, it is already perceived to hold a substantial amount of symbolic power in terms of knowledge-based socio-economic development in connection to China, one of the largest markets in the world.

English, on the other hand, is privileged because of the power it holds within global contexts as a lingua franca. Ideologically, English holds a significantly powerful position socio-politically as a shared language across the world. The symbolic power of socio-economic development that English wields has cemented its position as a business lingua franca, where English forms the frame of reference for communication and knowledge sharing in the global business world, and in the development of a knowledge-based society. Such a stance is also evident in Singapore and the Philippines (Tupas, 2018). The tension between policies that highlight English language education or even English as a medium of instruction is not peculiar to Malaysia (Kirkpatrick, 2012). The tensions in Malaysia emerge from the dissenting voices of Malay, Mandarin, and to a lesser extent, Tamil language educationists. They can also be heard from parents, with those of the urban middle-class more likely to be pro-English medium instruction (Yap, 2015). These voices can be powerful enough to force language education policies to shift, as with the end of the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English policy and the introduction of the Dual Language Policy in Malaysia.

It is interesting to note that, despite the predominant role of English in relation to the growing power of ASEAN (e.g., Hashim & Leitner, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Low & Ao, 2018), there was no indication of this emphasis in our media data. What was emphasized in the media texts instead was an apparent competition between English and Mandarin in terms of the privilege granted to both these languages. We can see here that not only are English and Mandarin given prominence in terms of employability; they are also privileged in terms of being global and international languages, thereby affording access to the global world. The achievement of economic and knowledge-based power for Malaysians is premised upon the value of the access that proficiency in English and Mandarin provides for Malaysians. Fairclough (2012) argues that knowledge drives economic and social processes, and that "the generation, circulation, and operationalisation of knowledges in economic and social processes" (p. 3), in turn, drive change in society. We argue that the prominence of both English and Mandarin in our findings stems from the ideologically laden perception that both languages are seen as drivers for the generation, circulation and operationalisation of knowledge, and, thus, afford access and opportunities for individuals to become members of a knowledge society.

Malay, on the other hand, is predominantly the language choice emphasized for reasons of national identity for the country. This is perhaps unsurprising given the status of Malay as the national language. The significance of national identity in relation to Malay is a socio-political representation of national unity in Malaysia. This is common in many countries as part of the decolonization process, and, as Tupas (2018) points out, "Southeast Asian social policies have largely been anchored in the desire to promote and perpetuate particular forms of nationalism" (p. 154).

At the international level, however, there is very little discussion about the value of Malay' for a global community or in global trade and demand. While there are some official statements from the newspapers that suggest plans and efforts by the Malaysian government to develop the Malay language into an international language, Malay is represented primarily in terms of its value to national identity. Legitimizing Malay as a crucial element of national identity is an ideological stance precisely because linguistic identity is intrinsically tied to the notion of a nation-state and belonging to that nation-state. While there are also occasional voices found in our corpus of official statements, which consider the four major languages in Malaysia to be 'part and parcel' of the national identity in the country, by large Malay is the language that is given prominence in the construction of the Malaysian national identity. As noted earlier, nation building has always been a focus in the discussion of language choices and education policies in Malaysia. In this sense, Malay has always had a symbolic function in the country, being the mother tongue of the Malays who are the largest population of Malaysia (Kaur & Shapii, 2018).

The emotional attachment to language is real and is often the result of a language being intrinsic to the culture and ethnic identity of a particular group of people. As shown in this study, ethnic and cultural reasons are often used in support of Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. In fact, this was the only reason identified in this study for the promotion of minority languages. In this regard, Albury and Aye (2016, p. 71) argue:

> The domestic sociolinguistic situation only influences policy in so far as Malaysia's response to its ethnolinguistic minorities is limited to minimal linguistic rights in the education system. This limited acceptance of linguistic diversity continues a tradition of protecting what Malaysian law sees as the supremacy of Malay culture and language.

While language and education in Malaysia have always been closely linked to issues of ethnicity, one interesting observation is that the promotion of Mandarin has increasingly been disassociated from an ethnic-based argument, and emphasis on the language is instead placed in light of the rise of China as a super economic power. The findings indicate that there exists a perceived competition between language choices and emphasis in education policy in multi-ethnic and multicultural Malaysia. This is particularly evident in the case of English and Malay, and English and Mandarin, as discussed earlier.

A final important observation in the analysis of the official statements is the increasing emphasis on producing multilingual Malaysians instead of focusing on one language at the expense of others in the country: that is, Malaysians have been urged to be proficient in several languages to be able to compete globally and to help the nation to achieve the status of a developed country. This stance has been consistently represented in the media, and points once again to the access to power that multilingualism can offer individuals, both educationally and economically.

The future challenge for the country, it seems to us, is how to move away from a monolingual lens in policymaking to a multilingual and multicultural perspective (e.g., Smidt et al., 2021; Tham et al., 2020) in line with the final observation made above. That is to say, the education system in Malaysia is still largely monolingual

in both conceptualization and practice, reflecting what Tan (2005, p. 49) has called 'linguistic segregation' as far as individual schools are concerned:

> Whereas education through different languages is widely accepted in Malaysia, each individual school is mainly seen as operating through *one* medium and is thus a monolingual school except that other languages may be taught as subjects. Therefore, particular schools are labelled as Malay- or Chinese- or Tamil-medium schools.

In fact, in one of official statements from our data, Dong Jiao Zong (DJZ), the umbrella body for the management of Chinese schools in Malaysia, was quoted to have commented that the initial plan of language policy of the country in 1957 was with a multicultural and multilateral focus:

29) DJZ contended that the education system is intended to be based on multi-culturalism and multi-lateralism. It backed this by quoting the Education Ordinance 1957: 'The educational policy of the federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of people other than Malays living in the country'. DJZ said the 1960 Rahman Talib Report and the Education Act 1961 have 'twisted and changed the multi-cultural and multi-lateral education system into a unilateral one' that was now in practice, under the Education Act as amended in 1996. (2011-MK01537).

The idea of an education system based on a multilingual and multicultural perspective is, however, a complex one and requires an informed approach to its conceptualization and implementation. As García and Tupas (2019) point out, many schools have been rather successful in "teaching for monolingualism, even when on the surface bilingualism is the goal" (p. 402). It is beyond the scope of the current paper to discuss this issue in detail. Interested readers may gain insights into what we mean by a multilingual and multicultural perspective by referring to Nieto (2010), García and Li (2014), Cook and Li (2016), De Houwer and Ortega (2019), and Tham et al. (2020).

We do, however, acknowledge that the findings we have reported have their limitations. First, as previously mentioned, this study focused only on two newspapers to identify official statements on language and education issues: *The Star* and *Malaysiakini*. Future research might explore the extent to which the observations reported here based on the two newspapers hold true more widely. Second, while this is beyond the scope of the present study, we note that it is always useful to have further insights into the issues discussed in this paper through, for example, interviews with different stakeholders. This would allow an exploration of how ideologies are shaped as a result of various socioeconomic and political factors. In addition, official documents by the government may be examined to ascertain the extent to which certain ideologies projected in the media are in line with what was officially published, conveyed and constructed by the relevant, responsible government bodies. This would contribute to a better understanding of the ideological stance of multilingualism in education in the country.

CONCLUSION

A consideration of the language and education issues in Malaysia over the past 20 years, seen through the official statements in the two newspapers considered in the present study, suggests an emphasis on the strengthening of the status of Malay as the national language. At the same time, the impact of globalization, economy, and employment opportunities contribute to a continued emphasis on English and a renewed interest in Mandarin in the country. Language policymaking appears to be centering upon the relationship between English and Malay, largely neglecting the requirements of other languages, which are marginalized due to their minority status. The languages and cultures of minorities, such as Malaysian Indians and the indigenous people, are broadly excluded from the discussion. All these seem to aggravate the problem in seeking uniformity due to economic globalization and nationalism (cf., Watson, 2007), rather than preservation and celebration of local knowledge and culture through multilingual education. While there is a token acknowledgement of the need to preserve minority languages and culture, this is not framed in concrete processes, leading to a deepening gap between the privileging of English, Mandarin, and Malay at the expense of other minority languages (Ariffin, 2021).

While past research has also suggested that national ideology and the international role of English have been central concerns in language policy development in Malaysia (e.g., Albury & Aye, 2016), our study further shows that the discussion and debates have now extended to acknowledge the importance of learning Mandarin *in* and *for* Malaysia, with China emerging as an economic and political superpower in the world, and the advantage of developing multilingual capacities. An implication that emerges from this finding is that policymakers need to think about how this multilingual focus can be strengthened, realized, and promoted in making the education system more inclusive and diverse. This, we believe, will be an important agenda for the country to ensure that the focus on Malay, English, and Mandarin is not at the detriment of other languages. In fact, the findings indicate that there need to be more conversations surrounding minority and indigenous languages in Malaysia, addressing in particular the type of support that can be provided to encourage their use and maintenance. At the same time, a true understanding of what multilingual capacities entail is warranted.

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Participatory Engagement for Sustainable Innovation in Karen Communities

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This paper reports on heritage fieldwork by the Mahidol Cultural Anthropology Museum, carried out from 2019 to 2020, with a group of four Karen villages in Doi Si Than, or 'Four Creeks Mountain', a valley in the remote Northwest of Thailand. The research aimed to find and introduce sustainable business models in Karen ethnic communities using essential heritage products and intangible practices. Additionally, the community offers an example of Thai integrated farming, which we analyzed as a case of innovative, intergenerational heritage practice, and that we helped turn into a more sustainable economic mainstay of the community. The method used throughout the process was participatory action research blended with social design, as well as building on a long-term engagement. As a theoretical framework, we adapted Design Thinking to Paulo Freire's Education of Liberation model to create an eclectic 'Four Creek Mountain' approach in order to do justice to local circumstances and establish a shared set of explicit social values. We compared the results with de Varine's concept of the ecomuseum to find a suitable action perspective. The findings show that local heritage practices can successfully be used to re-engage communities with today's broader society on the condition they are embedded in intergenerational co-operation based on trust, and with social designers (urban curators) acting as connectors, thus ensuring the community's ownership of the process.

Keywords: Ecomuseum; Heritage; Karen; Social Design; Sustainable Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

iCulture is the name of a working group within the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA) at Mahidol University (Nakhon Pathom, Salaya Campus, Bangkok). Using the collection and databases of its in-campus Cultural Anthropology Museum, iCulture has developed and now operates a mobile museum for social engagement based on the philosophy of RILCA as an academic institution committed to sustainable social development across Thailand.

As part of a university institution, iCulture aims at using a cultural approach for the benefit of mankind in the fields of rural development, museum studies, and social engagement. iCulture started this integrative endeavor by carrying out anthropological research in the Doi Si Than area, Phrao District, in the Northeast of Chiang Mai province in Northern Thailand. From 2009 onwards,

we have visited this particular region five times, together with some 60 students in total in the course of our yearly fieldwork training. In addition, we defined the research subject to include social inequality, which is of high concern in the area, caused by a dwindling agricultural sustainability of the community. This is one of the major challenges in Thai society and considered by many the main obstacle to sustainable development. iCulture has integrated its academic research and learning mission through ethnic community development projects, creating what we called an *ecomuseum community*, and by carrying out participatory action research for and with a Karen ethnic group that call themselves *Pgaz K 'Nyau* (*S'gaw* or *Skaw* in written English).

This participatory action research is an example of optimum participation (Mikkelsen, 1995), which means the people involved became partners in the research on an equal footing. According to Britha Mikkelsen (1995), participants at this level are both "self-mobilizing" and "catalyzing change" (pp. 58-61). To us researchers, this meant we had to act as much as possible in symmetric relations. Our research participants acted as free agents in analyzing their issues and exercising ownership of the solutions. We only helped in conceptualizing problems and proposing appropriate conceptual frameworks to share in an intergenerational way.

In iCulture, we applied de Varine's and Riva's (2017) elements of the ecomuseum concept, developed since the 1970s as part of the New Museology, to a Thai context. The basic idea is to use museums and museal tools for community development, whether rural or urban. In addition, the word 'development' is taken here in the definition of Nederveen Pieterse (2010), namely as a form of collective learning. In that sense, development does not mean the transfer of knowledge and/or technology from experts to a (lay) community, but rather describes the very process of creating knowledge. Instead of a finite, modernist project in a transactional sense, it is an ongoing process geared towards enduring social impact.

From such a developmental perspective, this research project can be considered a pedagogical practice regarding the cultural heritage of the members of an ethnic community. Since we operate within the Freirerian educational framework of the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2014), the participants are invited to freely act and reflect in order to find solutions to their problems. This process of knowledge co-creation Jack Mezirow called transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). We strive to enhance the capacities of the people in the area towards full competency and ability to perform the 'design' of a new way of life and live their lives in a consciously valued manner.

Doi Si Than (Four Creeks Mountain) is the name of a Karen cultural district in Phrao district, Chiang Mai. Karen people settled there in the 1960s, in a group of four villages dispersed along four creeks. Nowadays, the people living in the area are facing severe socio-cultural disruptions. They indicated at the start of this research project that the need for increased cash income is slowly destroying their cultural assets. One of the factors exacerbating this process is what may be regarded as 'cultural passivity', consisting of only little-developed 21st-century skills such as critical and creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Their absence hinders innovations and contributes to a silent cultural disruption. iCulture endeavored to counter this situation by creating conditions for the development of critical thinking and creativity skills,

with a view to enabling the Karen villagers to find solutions for their families' and community's daily problems. We found that what works for the people involved in this situation is to create a community platform as well as learning tools with which to develop a better quality of life. For this reason, we proposed an ecomuseum approach as a platform for cultural innovation. We worked on the assumption that the Karen villagers have a potential to find ways based on these sustainable transformations to more successfully live their lives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The direct goal of this project was to find ways to contribute to the emancipation of the Karen villagers who find themselves in a state of social/economical oppression, deriving from a lack of choices in the realms of being and doing, and who are facing restrictive living conditions not under their own control. Adopting an ecomuseum approach, we focused on the idea of a museum as a learning platform for and with the community. Therefore, educational programs became the main tools. The idea of a Freireian school, developed in the 1970s (Freire, 2014), fitted the context because of its educational aim of liberating people. In it, problem-oriented education is used for letting participants acquire the competence to solve their own problems. Nowadays, Design Thinking is the approach for communal problem solving. Design Thinking processes encourage teams of creators together with clients to discover their problem on the go and to learn and share in an integrative way. It is in this conceptual framework that we tried to combine and, wherever possible, to integrate Paulo Freire's vision on education of liberation with Design Thinking (D school, 2020). Our innovation is that, together with the Karen villagers, we developed a fusion by applying this framework to dealing with heritage (objects, place making, economy) – a sort of action research, which Schwarz (2016), and Schwarz & Elffers (2010) call sustainist heritage enhancement.

More practically, in our approach we discerned three stages of pedagogical heritage practice, which echo both Freireian pedagogy and Design Thinking. Combining these two, we tried to encourage our participants to take back control of their conditions starting with their own heritage practices (see Figure 1). This involved a process of action and reflection. We made sure our spokespersons first identified key-elements in the tangible and intangible cultures that link with urgent economic issues for their community. Subsequently, we asked them to select which of these they considered essential for their identity and way of life, and then to work on them going through the following set of steps.

First of all, the Design Thinking concept was brought in for solving the problem at hand. We invited the participants to find alternatives to the actions they had selected. This was part of the empathizing stage, aimed at trying to understand deeply. Then, villagers had to come up with new ways to preserve cultural heritage. This we may call *conscientization*[1] (Freire, 2014), referring to the use of critical and creative thinking. This is the stage of defining problems and ideating a way to solve them that

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1 Conscientization is a translation of the Portuguese term *conscientização*, which is also translated as consciousness raising and critical consciousness. The term was popularized by Brazilian educator, activist, and theorist Paulo Freire in his 1968 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

urges the villagers to think about what they want to do in order to re-include cultural heritage into their daily lives. After that, villagers created quick prototypes based on eye-opening alternatives. As a means of working with villagers who best learn by first doing and then reflecting, Freireian techniques are well suited. The focus was on the possibility to develop products based on Karen traditional heritage knowhow and then to create a prototype for real-life products and services in the community. We made sure all possibilities of economic value enhancement were present. For the last step, testing the prototypes, much attention was paid to underscoring the heritage value of the activities and products. User experience processes were launched several times in order to determine whether the respective product and service were satisfying. The cyclic character of our Doi Si Than approach both reflected the ethically progressive nature of the Freire educational model and used the potential for solving concrete local situations that is so prominent in the Design Thinking method. The result may be considered sociocultural innovation.
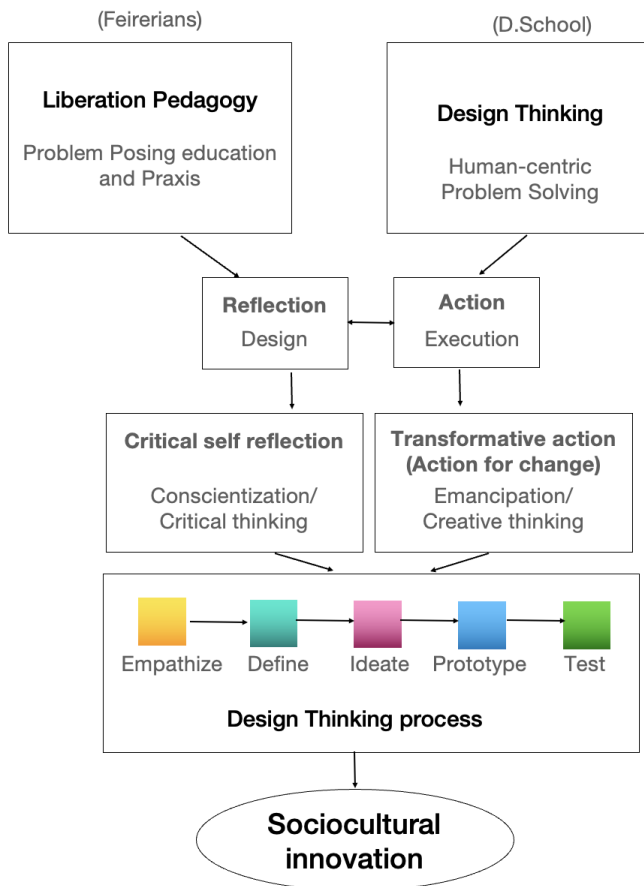
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for participatory research in the Karen community. (figure by the authors).

CO-CREATING ACTIVITIES WITH THE COMMUNITY

The following section describes the activities that were organized with the Karen community at Doi Si Than from 2019 to 2020 – that is, exploring essential heritage practices and objects suitable for addressing key community concerns and pro-totyping them to the next level. We also report and analyze how, in doing so, an ecomuseum-like environment was created by curating cultural objects, stimulating placemaking, and empowering sufficiency farming, all contributing to a new, sustainable economic model. Before this, however, it is necessary to briefly sketch the background and physical context of the Karen location and our relationship with it.

The Karen Community in Doi Si Than

The villagers of Doi Si Than, at the northern end of Srilanna National Park between Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, belong to the S'gaw Karen ethnic group, who speak a Tibeto-Burma language established some 2,000 years ago. Of the around half million Karen people in Thailand, around 300,000 are S'gaw Karen, living in the northern part of the country along the Myanmar border. In the villages of our research, rice crops are the subsistence staple. Yet, most of their income derives from commercial agriculture such as corn, vegetables, and fruits. Middle-aged villagers and teenagers also work in big cities, for example Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Household expenses run to around THB 150 per day, or THB 55,000 per year. Against a median year-ly family income of THB 100,000 to 120,000, this means not more than one child can get proper education, as schooling fees run between THB 30,000 to 50,000 per person a year. Through education, children are expected to emancipate themselves from agriculture and advance to higher levels of income, preferably in the city. That poses a challenge. Previous research (Ichikawa, 2019) points out that Karen people in this area strongly believe in traditional culture. In the beginning of the research, we had a conversation with participants about the present situation of Karen life, which showed that most Karen are Thai citizens, which means they have access to formal education, primary health care services, and infrastructure for basic needs. As one of their defining virtues, Karen people indicate the freedom to follow their own beliefs and values. Their former self-subsistence mode of agricultural production has been transformed through inclusive government projects, by which most Karen have been assimilated into Thai society. In that wider context, they face social inequity and pov-erty, and have to work hard at high risk, low income, and comparatively high levels of uncertainty. Since there are not many alternative choices, many have had to migrate to the city even though common labor wages are low there. Due to the economics of scale, the village agriculture has turned to monocrops based on the predominant use of chemicals, which are also detrimental to the environment, especially forests. The yield from agricultural produce has been uncertain, causing the villagers to addition-ally buy food and life necessities.

Our research intervention was aimed at restoring economic resilience through a cultural approach. In response to our invitation to articulate which aspects of local culture they appreciate most, research participants showed themselves proud of a whole range of cultural objects and practices connected to ways of living that

harmonize with the natural environment: spirit drink,[2] food preparation, bamboo handicraft, natural dye, and weaving. They agreed that they wished to transmit cultural knowledge but were also willing to transform it to have it better suit the next generations and the sustainability of their lives. They expressed the belief that preserving cultural roots will help their offspring to better live their lives in a transforming society. They made us conclude that the way to conserve intangible heritage is to develop a whole range of objects that, though new, will remain related to the current physical Karen context, thus affording meaning sharing with future generations. For this, we adopted a pedagogical heritage practice on the cultural platform of an ecomuseum – as we shall now show.

After we had been working with the Karen ethnic community at Doi Si Than for over a decade, in 2019, a Thailand Research Fund grant enabled us to expand our experiences. It was entitled 'Developing Ethnic Groups Through an Ecomuseum Approach', our choice of words indicating we were developing, in a co-creating process, a learning place that would rely on and be about the natural, cultural, and economic living environment of the community. We closely adhered to the three pillars of ecomuseology: territory, or sense of place; broad participatory governance, or community involvement; and opening up the heritage discourse to global contexts in a flexible way – the three being connected on a process basis, not through any given project (Davis, 2011, p. 134; de Varine, 2017, p.194). We shall deal with this point in more detail below.

Prototyping an Ecomuseum

The main result of this pedagogical heritage practice is that participants created an innovative cultural heritage preservation method using the ecomuseum concept. We developed a learning route through three of the four villages involved. A map (see Figure 2) with a strong visual design articulated the idea of the Doi Si Than territory. In it, each village has its own engagement (learning) center for both tangible and intangible heritage through participatory workshops. Outside visitors were expected to and did learn about local heritage practices using multiple sensory approaches, whilst creating their own meaning of the experience(s) they underwent.

The tangible and intangible cultural heritage aspects most valued in the Karen communities we dealt with can be analyzed under three headings: objects (material culture), placemaking, and economic practice. During conversations, discussions and participatory observations, we found aspects of material culture – the first category – especially significant to the people of the community to be the mortar for producing *mue sa to* (Karen chili paste), home-made bracelets and necklaces. Taken together, the villagers said these three categories of objects well represented their life. At the same time, these items seemed to easily lend themselves to receiving added value and up-marketing. If supported by local branding, we assumed it would not be difficult to have them function within a successful, creative local economy. The second category, placemaking, here means a way of creating a learning place. It consisted

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2 Cultural drink: in Karen culture, spirits play an important role in every ritual, therefore, drinking is a cultural practice.

of converting a private house into a public platform for engagement with local values through distilling a local cultural drink. Lastly, as an example of cultural practice, we found one family of participants in the village that had created their own sufficiency farm. Below, we explain in detail what it is, how it works, and why we think it is successful.

Objects: From Object to Cultural Product

Of the tangible cultural objects, mortar and pestle are an everyday household article. Old-style mortars used to be hand-made from teak wood, and some families in the village still possess one of these although most are now made from bamboo. Mortar stands for the Karen way of food preparation, in particular *mue sa to,* which is made by pounding chili and mixing it with other ingredients. Given the predominance of eating together, the mortar is a key household object in every Karen family. The pestle used for pounding ingredients in the bamboo mortar is made from an even harder kind of wood.

Mue sa to is the signature Karen chili paste (see Figure 3) included in almost every meal and food combination. There are two kinds of *mue sa to,* wet and dry. Karen chili has become popular with a degree of spiciness. The chili is mixed with garlic, salt, and *ma-kan,* a local pepper. To prepare it, grilled chili and grilled garlic are mixed and pounded in the mortar. After other ingredients are added, together with almost any kind of meat or vegetable, it is pounded and served. *Mue sa to* comes in seasonal varieties,

Figure 2. Map of Doi Si Than Ecomuseum. It covers four villages (Bann Lom, Bann Mae pa kee, Bann Pang bua, Bann Kee mha fah)[3] with an indication of intangible and tangible heritage aspects in each of them. (drawing by the authors).

3 (1) Bann Lom has a check-in spot for visitors, from which to join workshops for making natural dyes, or brewing cultural drink, while conversing with local Karens or visiting the site (rice field, temple, coffee plantation). (2) Bann Mae pa kee has an exhibition ground and hall. Karen kitchen and coffee house offer cooking and tasting experiences. Through a check point community, forests, and orchards can be visited. (3) Bann Pang bau offers an exhibition on rice processing and Karen crafts (weaving, bamboo). Karen lifestyle can be undergone at a fireplace in a traditional home. (4) Bann Kee mah fah offers learning opportunities of Sufficiency Economy farming (orchards).

Figure 3. *Mue sa to*, signature Karen chili paste in a bamboo container made by a villager. A version based on local recipe, with logo and packaging designed by iCulture, is sold on Facebook and in iCraft, the museum shop of RILCA's Vivid Ethnicity museum caravan. (photo by the authors).

depending on typical ingredients, leading to various types the year round. It is safe to say *mue sa to* represents the essence of Karen food culture. During this research, the Karen of Doi Si Than modified the meaning of the mortar and *mue sa to* to serve as cultural products that could be marketed and sold to the public.

Bracelets and necklaces are traditional Karen handicraft products. There are different kinds of bracelets and necklaces, the older ones having beads made from the seeds of local trees. In our research project, we invited women to co-create stylish accessories. As a result, after four interventions over the course of one season, half a dozen village women were able to revive their almost forgotten knowhow, and created accessories in new forms (see Figures 4 and 5).

We found that this process helped villagers to put their memories to use in the present world. The process showed how the women engaging in this handicraft were able to build on their own art, expanding it into different designs, shapes, and sizes. These bracelets and necklaces have become popular gifts for Karen and Lua ethnic groups in other villages in Chiang Mai, too. They are displayed in our mobile *Vivid Ethnicity* museum caravan and shop.

Placemaking From Consumption to Place

A highly praised S'gaw Karen heritage practice is the preparation of a local alcoholic cultural drink used in numerous rituals. Every family makes their own for different occasions, such as praying to the nature spirits before sowing and harvesting, welcome and leave-taking rituals, and in wedding and funeral ceremonies. All of our participants agreed that, over time, the cultural drink had become the most

Figure 4 (left)**.** Different styles of handmade bracelets designed by women in the village. (photo by the authors).
Figure 5 (right)**.** A Karen woman who re-created Karen necklaces in new forms. (photo by the authors).

significant feature of the group's heritage, representing the core of their ethnic identity. In order to tease out some storytelling, we created a learning workshop about the Karen cultural drink by turning a private home into a cultural place. In the living room, a check-in point was created for visitors to learn about the process of cultural drink distilling, overseen by women. Visitors were invited to experience the distilling process on their own. During the lengthy boiling stages of the process, they could wander around in the village and learn about Karen horticulture, visit a village temple, or play a game with kids. On returning to the cultural drink check-in point, they could take a sip of the fluid just made. We gathered information on how visitors had learned from the hands-on experiences, participating in the making of the drink and the conversations accompanying it. We also observed how they engaged in spontaneous conversations with the Karen people. We found that they enjoyed, appreciated, and were impressed by these interactions.

Cultural Practice: Sufficiency Economy

While conducting the Ecomuseum research project, at the margin of one of the villages, we came across a family that practiced farming on the basis of sufficiency economy.[4] The family concerned, consisting of five members, had chosen to live away from the village and had transformed their former mono-crop fields into something based on a different model. The family owns nine buffalos, and plants different kinds of edible trees and vegetables. They breed three kinds of fish in different ponds and

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4   Sufficiency economy is a philosophy based on the fundamental principle of Thai culture. It is a method of development based on moderation, prudence, and social immunity, one that uses knowledge and virtue as guidelines in living. Significantly, there must be intelligence and perseverance, which will lead to real happiness in leading one's life.

raise a handful of pigs and a score of chicken.[5] As a result, they spend very little on daily food, except for feasts. All members of the family help to create such integrated farming,[6] commonly referred to as an aspect of sufficiency economies (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2007). The son had graduated from a vocational school in Chiang Mai, but allegedly was not happy with living in the city and, atypically, had decided to come back to his home village to start experimenting in ecological agriculture. It was he who reintroduced the rotating crop and the mixed, diversified ecology, in co-creation and on an equal footing with his father.[7] Their project had started two years previously and both had been aware it was a long-term undertaking, professing to be familiar with and admirers of the concept of sufficiency economy.

Engaging in Conversations

From numerous dialogues we had with the villagers,[8] we were able to get an idea how they conducted heritage activities in the past. "This one I made when I was a child ... I can do this", said one woman who had fashioned traditional Karen bracelets (Doi si Than, 19 October 2019). Over the course of three months, she created a range of new designs, mixing multicolored beads in a process we think she just experienced as a fun play. Reminding her of her childhood and connecting her to enjoyable experiences, the work with the objects, or so we understood, enabled her to add value to them and share her creations with other people.

  Process is an important notion here. During the making of the chili paste *mue sa to*, many things are happening. The father of one family told us that, during the process, he sings a *mue sa to* song of his own creation. He added:

> Mue sa to is the heart of food for Karen people. We are happy to make this. Every house will always have it in most of their meals. It is us. The most important part is that we, as a family, will be together and eat together at each meal. Many conversations will take place during the meal. (Doi Si Than, 14 September 2019)

When we talked to the woman who ran the cultural drink distillery in the village, she explained that:

> Being Karen, you need to use the cultural drink in all rituals . . . As long as you are able to make the liquor, the rituals will survive. Most important is that cultural transmission takes place in the village. If we do not do it, the younger

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5   Karen people count only big chickens, and small ones are left out.

6   Integrated farming means working on the basis of a broad diversity of livestock, vegetables, and fruits as a condition for sustainability through risk diversification.

7   The equal footing is important. In other families, we found a hierarchy among generations. Mostly, the father would be master of the house and in charge of all and everything. In this case, father (age 50) and son (age 23) worked together on something they both believed in, trying to learn from their experience.

8   We took notes during and after unstructured conversations; songs we occasionally recorded on videotape. Both were used with the consent of the persons involved.

generations will not know about the process of making this cultural drink. It will fade away. (Doi Si Than, 7 December 2019)

These two examples illustrate our broader deduction that, for the Karen, one of the key values of food lies in its social quality of bringing people together.

The dialogues offered points that led to a new business model. We found that when the Karen villagers in our project were seen to be trying to preserve their own culture and at the same time to encourage outsiders to come and visit their ecomuseum. The most important part was marketing: how to reach an audience and get them to visit the village? Here, a new way of thinking about existing and novel business models is key. In the beginning, we assumed we could rely on younger generations in the villages to take care of connecting to new audiences, but most of them had already left for the city. It was we, therefore, who had to serve as their platform to reach a wider public.[9]

Lastly, from the many conversations over the entire duration of our project, we came to understand that Karen people prefer to live somewhat removed from the competitive, argumentative mainstream of today's society in Thailand. We feel this spirit of Karenness needs to be recognized in our Vivid Ethnicity presentation of it. The Karen stressed the importance of living with nature and relying on natural resources within an ecological system that is in balance with itself. In communicating with outside visitors to the ecomuseum, they often expressed their wish to communicate this specific aspect of the Karen way of life.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR AN ECOMUSEUM

In the next part, we provide an interpretation reflecting on the following three points: pedagogical heritage practice, cultural transformation, and culture as social design.

Pedagogical Heritage Practice

iCulture has brought what we call pedagogical heritage practice as an intervention for community development. Since the project was aimed at helping ethnic groups develop themselves through an ecomuseum approach, the museum aspects we introduced were primarily meant as learning tools. As to development, we worked at getting a transformative learning process under way. The intended impact of this is increased human capacity in the field of economic self-determination. Such capacity would consist of the power for self-transformation, the ability to design one's own life, and the freedom to live a life of one's own choosing. This ecomuseum project, therefore, is a true human development project.

The way the Karen communities have dealt with their heritage issues is not confined to knowledge or knowhow transmission from one generation to the next. It is rather a process of knowledge co-creation for social impact. What mattered were

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9 Ecomuseums need audiences. In order to have audiences, we needed to promote the village, tell stories of ethnic groups, and have them engage in the value of the place. COVID-19 made us postpone our plans in 2020 to create a digital platform, similar to a mobile application for reservations and payments for the community business.

innovation and branding of traditional products, and opening up of private spaces to the public, all with an eye to social change. Intergenerational learning was key in co-creating this knowledge and knowhow. In addition, we found that, in this process, conversation and dialogue are important, as opposed to more formal instruction. As this is a transformative learning project, a logical question would be what form is best suited for transformation. That is the area of cultural transformation.

Cultural Transformation

The participatory action research we undertook has offered Karen participants the opportunity to truly make a difference. We may say that it brought about social innovation in the community at three levels, as follows.

The process was one of innovating material culture starting from tradition. As ecomuseum expert Hugues de Varine (2017) aptly said: "It's not about valuing a heritage by *giving it* an economic dimension, but to diversify and to grow the local economy by *building* on heritage"[10] (p. 194 ; emphasis added). In addition, it can create even more value in today's global world, with participants being able to substantially enhance their income from a renewed daily life practice.[11]

In the project, we had been building not only a public cultural place but also a platform to communicate and share Karen values of being together. Participants showed pride in their tangible and intangible heritage. There occurred a transcultural learning between producer and customer, mediated by first-hand user experiences.

Another finding is a change of the modes of production. We observed a process of cultural transformation, from subsistence farming to mixed cash crop farming, and then work according to the philosophy of sufficiency economy agriculture. This process is not so much about transferring knowledge or cultural heritage as rather involving the skills of unlearning and intergenerational co-creating.

Culture as Social Design

With the iCulture ideas of engagement approach, focus on people, and low-threshold tools such as a caravan, we acted as social designers (urban curators) in communities we had known and worked with already for a decade, and with whom we had a chance to develop meaningful relationships. The community involved and the iCulture team are partners, with iCulture gaining crucial trust from the community. The Karen participants have come to know us as friends and believe we will bring them something good, a sentiment of faith that is underpinned by the awareness of RILCA's mission to use its resources, while conducting research, to help them develop.

Receiving trust from the community enabled us to develop our research project, which they were willing to participate in. Our role has been to encourage our Karen

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10   Authors' translation, original quote: "Il ne s'agit plus de valoriser un patrimoine en lui donnant une dimension économique, mais de diversifier et de faire croître l'économie locale en s'appuyant sur le patrimoine" (de Varine, 2017, p. 194).

11   During the prototype testing phase, we sold cultural products at the Museum of Cultural Anthropology's shop, Mahidol University, worth THB 150,000.

partners, work with them, and fully involve them in thinking, deciding, and acting out the potential for changes that presented themselves. We have been a catalyst for them starting to think about their cultural heritage, to deal with it and take next steps.

The results are deemed satisfactory according to the pre-set criteria of expected changes in the mindset and new ways for the Karen to sustainably deal with their cultural assets. Participants in the community have shown to transform attitudes and actions with regard to the value of their cultural heritage. They have added value to handicraft products, while the application of traditional knowhow (local wisdom) has changed their perspective. On this basis, and after we checked with the villagers during evaluations, we found it safe to conclude that iCulture worked as an instrument to convince communities to think and act in a way that fits better with their local contexts. We are confident and have confirmed that they are better equipped now to find their own way of living.

Synthesis

When trying to analyze what made the initiatives we just described successful, we noted that the three categories (objects, place making, and practice) are quite different, yet have something in common. All objects singled out as significant are important because the process of making them turns out to be socially meaningful. Key is not the finished product, an object, but the qualities of the process of making it, in this case food, as a process of intangible heritage. The importance of the preparation of cultural drinks demonstrates this as the essence of Karen life. It signifies the prime place of belief and ritual in the wider culture. Learning about the cultural drink is incorporated into the participatory action workshops. Participants learn through multi-sensory experiences and have a chance to shape individual meanings from them. Lastly, integrated farming that follows the philosophy of sufficiency economy is a true sustainist practice because it is an exercise of sharing in the family and community, providing a living from local resources while connecting with a broader context (Schwarz, 2016; Schwarz & Krabbendam, 2013).

THEORETICAL REFLECTION

When a scholar intervenes in a community for the purpose of both unravelling particular socio-cultural issues and effecting social change, she follows a long-standing practice in sociology. Whilst the former is no more than participatory observation to formulate and then test a hypothesis about the – often alien – social reality that is being encountered through study (Geertz, 1973), the latter resides in the realm of social design, which is increasingly being applied by urban curators. Introducing artistic networks, knowhow, and new practices into underprivileged or otherwise challenged areas (communities, neighborhoods), urban curators are catalysts in developments that are characterized by being grassroots, participatory, and localized, and based on principles of reciprocity, connectedness (inclusion), and scale (Schwarz, 2016). At the same time, these initiatives are neither nostalgic, romantic, nor regressive. What we clearly see nowadays – at least up until the COVID breakout

– are indicators of a movement, massive and stretching across the globe, in place-making and social design.[12]

In museums worldwide, this long-term development appears in two shapes. Emanating from the Romance languages area, the idea of an *écomusée* has taken hold, now for half a century, as a countermovement. Deriving from a post-World-War-II revolutionary wave that made itself felt in all parts of European society, a democratic turn also spread over museums, part of a *nouvelle muséologie* that went hand in hand with the rise of community museums (Corsane et al., 2008; Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010; de Varine, 2017; Riva, 2017; Potter, 2017). Born in France, the ecomuseum took a radical step away from universal museums as symbols of the power of the status quo – which we would now call colonial – and proposed instead an idea about museums as local platforms about culture (heritage), nature, economy, and the people constituting it in the territory, the community in fact embodying the very museum and being mirrored in it. Not confined to but especially taking root in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking parts of the world (in French and Italian areas it remained largely national), it later found footholds in Japan, China, Korea, and isolated other places (Riva, 2017). The second shape of this topographic turn, as it were, and separated by surprisingly strict linguistic boundaries, is shown in Anglophone parts of the world. With an often much weaker formal position of government and administration in cultural affairs, museum democratization there developed along different lines and, perhaps, also with some retardation. With precursors in the 1960s, a landslide change was reached relatively late, most visible in the work of Californian museum activist Nina Simon in the early years of this millennium. She brought precisely the requirements and ownership of local communities to the fore that had been already explored by ecomuseum experiences elsewhere (Simon, 2010, 2016). It is perhaps no coincidence that at about the same time, in 2012, an international Association for Critical Heritage Studies came into being, heavily relying on Critical Theory and borne mainly by Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian museum and heritage theorists.[13]

Though use of the term *écomusée* and its derivatives have proliferated over the decades to the point of becoming a meaningless all-purpose word, it is clear that the present intervention-research into the Karen communities of northern Thailand has enough characteristics to qualify as an ecomuseum development. Central to any such process is finding a new balance between society and its environment, or, in the words of the movement's founder de Varine (2017, p. 33):

> The primary meaning of the prefix 'eco' in the term 'eco-museum' as opposed to its use in such general terms of reference as 'economy' and 'ecology', is one that connotes a balanced system between society and the environment: people are central to the existence of social groupings or societies, as they are to human livelihoods and any consequent progress. This was the original meaning of the concept of the ecomuseum as invented in the 1970s.

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12   For an introduction to placemaking, see: https://youtu.be/FmKH7lxt4HQ. For an introduction to social design, see: https://www.dieangewandte.at/socialdesign_en

13   See: https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/. Amongst the founders are Laurajane Smith (Australian National University, Canberra), Cornelius Holtorp (Linnaeus University, Sweden), and Rodney Harrison (UCL, London).

These basic notions are echoed in the Ecomuseum Charter, adopted during the 2016 International Council of Museums (ICOM) General Assembly, which underlines – despite countless local, cultural, and managerial variations – that ecomuseums consider themselves participatory processes that recognize, manage, and protect the local heritage in order to facilitate sustainable social, environmental, and economic development (Davis, 2011; Su, 2008, p. 29-39). It is easy to mistake this for just preservation efforts on a new, now participatory basis. A stern admonition is therefore required that turns the management into an active mode that at the same time is non-exploitative but rather conducive to integrating it into a new, sustainable socio-economic fabric.

But there is perhaps more to it than just analyzing the Doi Si Than project in terms of recognized ecomuseum developments and ticking various boxes to prove so. Analyzing placemaking initiatives across the world[14] has made it clear that (1) the act of making things by yourself is a condition for ownership and significance and (2) heritage-making is part and parcel of participatory, inclusive processes geared at creating sustainable living environments for all (Knoop & Schwarz, 2017). Requiring awareness of a sense of place then is just another way of acknowledging the role and potential of heritage – not as any external given but as an emergent quality of a participatory meaning-making process. Things do not have meanings by themselves, they acquire them in human interaction processes.[15] Social designers then function as catalysts for engagement and connections, initially providing platforms (sometimes maintaining them durably) for new narratives to be performed on. Community members act as experts of their own knowledge and knowhow production and of their own tangible and intangible heritage practices, being engaged in co-creating processes as a base activity. This trend has been recognized as a *socialization* of heritage (Janssen, 2014). The result, it appeared unequivocally, is characterized by a very long trajectory, often as long as a decade, of engagement, commitment, and building of trust – leading to the recognition of the platforms as safe places (Knoop & Schwarz, 2017). The platform, in this case the iCulture caravan Vivid Ethnicity, was in fact spontaneously referred to, both by the Karen villagers and educational visitors in the city, with precisely that term.

CONCLUSIONS

This research concerned a project of local community development. Our aim was and is to help people to have more choices of lifestyle, which will increase a community's sustainability in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The researchers engaged with villagers at Doi Si Than in order to enable them to investigate and identify problems, then create and find solutions based on their own heritage. In the end, the villagers did create ideas and prototypes. These regarded new cultural objects, places, and new ways to perform and share cultural practices. We claim this to be sociocultural innovation, with which to improve the quality of life, through sustainably shifting life conditions from a survival to a sufficiency mode.

In both the Pedagogy for Freedom and the Design Thinking that we applied,

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14   See for example: https://www.dieangewandte.at/socialdesign_en and https://opensource.com/business/10/8/openideo-new-experiment-open-innovation.

15   For a similar rethinking of meaning, see Russell and Winkworth (2009).

critical thinking played an important role. The participants actualized their 'pain points' and scrutinized them in a critical reflection of the reasons why these may have occurred. A major cause was found in the inability of their own culture to adapt to a contemporary context. They felt this needed to be acted upon. Participants tried to design and execute a new way of life by creating objects and engaging in placemaking and new cultural practices. For many, transforming their traditional heritage-making in this way offers a remedy to problems they experience. Critical thinking is here, therefore, seen as helping them to open up tradition and rituals to the future.

We researchers acted as facilitators who both co-created with the local community and encouraged their members to do so. We acted as mediators to connect to a broader public. The entire village became a place for the new cultural practices, turning into an ecomuseum. The villagers' acting and reflecting in the research can be interpreted as balanced and sustainable self-determination.

Among the many things we learned there are some that others may pick up and adapt elsewhere. We phrase them below as recommendations.

1. A social-design intervention is about the future, not the past. Using 21st-century skills is therefore key, especially problem solving, and creative and critical thinking.
2. Engaging with communities requires long-term (10 years) and step-by-step strategies for growing authentic relations based on mutual trust.
3. Communities are not to be told what to do, but rather pointed in a general direction on the basis of trust. If the core target is to have people regain autonomy, they have to be able to decide for themselves and set their own pace.
4. The ecomuseum is a means, not an end. The trick is that *context* is part of the *subject*, the margin becomes the center. The critical success factor consisted of creating affordances that induce villagers to develop themselves and live in a more sustainable way by using their heritage and knowhow to create new services and products not only for their own community but also benefitting the outside world.
5. Curatorial skills are needed to keep the community alert. For the ecomuseum to work as a strategy for self-development, an actor is required to run the museum and to connect public audiences and villagers. Facilitators guide processes with a view to the longer term.
6. Narratives should be kept open for continuous meaning making (branding, heritage, signification) and by diverse storytellers.

Our own position is that we wish to put our institution, network, knowledge(s) and knowhow to the benefit of a sustainable development of mankind, driven by our passion – as exemplified by our iCulture team in the Vivid Ethnicity caravan – and based upon the idea of doing, thus connecting to an activist maker culture that we see growing around us all over the world. The Karen groups we have connected to and that now work with us teach us how we can live more sustainably with nature. In reverse, we assist them to gain respect and to exercise their human rights by providing a platform and interface for sharing knowledge, knowhow, and insights, thereby contributing to their becoming less unequal.

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Teaching Migrant Students From Myanmar: Professional Development Program to Facilitate Multicultural Competence for Teachers

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In recent years, the migration of people from Myanmar into Thailand has increased tremendously. Since 2005, when the Thai government officially allowed migrant children to enroll in Thai government schools, there has been a steady increase in the number of migrant students. In such a context, it is imperative that teachers develop multicultural competence, or the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to work with culturally diverse students. However, teachers in Thailand reported that they have not been trained in the knowledge and skills to teach in multicultural classrooms. The study has two main objectives. Firstly, it attempts to design a multicultural education training program that incorporates modules that will lead to building and strengthening teachers' multicultural competence. Secondly, it implements the training program, and measures the level of multicultural competence of teachers who received the training by comparing them to those who do not receive the training. Results revealed that teachers appraised the module about cultures of migrant students and the module about the rules and regulations in enrolling and graduating migrant students as the most useful. Results from an independent-samples t-test showed that the overall multicultural competence level of teachers who participated in the program was significantly different from those who did not participate; teachers who took part in the training demonstrated a higher level of multicultural competence compared to those who did not participate.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity; Migrant Students; Multicultural Competence; Myanmar; Professional Development

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, migration of people into Thailand has increased tremendously. In 2018, the number of non-Thai residents was around 4.9 million, increasing from 3.7 million in 2014 (United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, 2019). Among these, the number of labor migrants from neighboring Southeast Asian countries, namely Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia, accounted for 3.9 million, or 80% (Harkins, 2019). These newly arrived migrants add to the country's ethnically diverse population, making Thailand one of the most culturally diverse countries in the region.

The migration of people into Thailand poses a challenge in many areas, especially in education. Since 2005, when the government officially allowed migrant children to enroll in Thai government schools, there has been a steady increase in the number of migrant students in schools (Figure 1; Office of Basic Education Commission, 2018). In 2011, approximately 58,000 migrant students from Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia were enrolled in Thai government schools. In 2018, this number increased to 96,207 (Office of Basic Education Commission, 2018). Among these, migrant students from Myanmar constitute the majority. According to the academic year 2018 data, schools in Chiang Mai enrolled the largest number of migrant students, followed by those in Tak, Kanchanaburi, Chiang Rai, and Samut Sakhon, respectively.
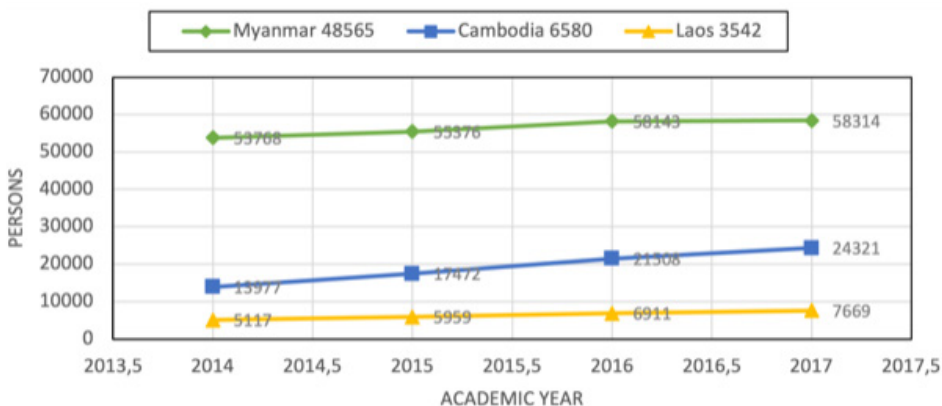
Figure 1. Number of migrant students in Thai schools (2011-2018). (https://portal.bopp-obec.info/obec60/lison).

In Thailand, public attitudes towards migrant workers are not favorable. Reports of migrant students and migrant workers, especially those from Myanmar, being the target of ridicule and racism have circulated in mass media and the academic world. For example, studies on the opinions of Thai people towards migrants from Myanmar reveal that Thais regard migrant workers from Myanmar as disease carriers, threats to their lives and property, and competition for jobs and resources (Sunpuwan & Niyomsilpa, 2012; see also, Hall, 2011). These negative attitudes towards migrant workers from Myanmar were exacerbated by the surge of COVID-19 cases in Samut Sakhon province in the late December of 2020 (Reuters & Bangkok Post, 2020)..

In schools as well, migrant students bring with them linguistic and cultural diversity that teachers and school personnel are not used to (von Feigenblatt et al., 2010). It is revealed that teachers' negative attitudes and low expectations of minority students, curriculum content produced from the perspective of the majority, and instructional practices that are insensitive to students' cultures all affect equality in the education of ethnic minority students (Banks, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). In such a context, it is imperative that teachers have knowledge about students' cultures as well as the implications of cultural diversity on education. Teachers should develop skills to formulate a culturally relevant curriculum and teach in a

culturally responsive way. They also have to demonstrate positive attitudes towards students from other cultures since it will directly affect students' self-esteem and academic performance (Battle, 2017; Yuan, 2017). All of these constitute multicultural competence, or the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to live and work in a multicultural society (Banks, 2009; Bennett, 2001; Hladik, 2016).

Although multicultural competence is instrumental for those who work in multicultural settings, teachers in Thailand reported that they have not been trained in the knowledge and skills to teach in multicultural classrooms (Nawarat, 2018; Yanyongkasemsuk, 2017; Yongyuan et al., 2010). Many schools that enrolled migrant students have resorted to a business-as-usual approach without adjusting the pedagogy or curriculum content to match with the cultures of the students. Most schools, citing the rationale of neutrality, report that they use the same curriculum – the Basic Education Core Curriculum – formulated by the Ministry of Education for Thai and migrant students, as it does not favor the culture of one group over the other (Arphattananon, 2012). Up until present, professional development for teachers of migrant students in Thailand has been provided in a haphazard manner either by academics from universities or social workers from non-profit organizations. The Thai government, while stipulating a policy aimed at access and budget allocation, left all the decisions on instruction to schools. Without receiving systematic training, teachers are left on their own to try to understand the cultural differences that migrant students bring into their classrooms, including ways to integrate them into their teaching. Instructional techniques thus vary depending on the experiences, beliefs, and backgrounds of each individual teacher. Their understanding of the rights of migrant students to access public education also varies. This affects their practices, including admission of migrant students into schools, follow-up, and provision of support for migrant students and parents.

Recognizing that professional development in multicultural education is necessary but still lacking in Thailand, this study aims at developing a model of professional development that promotes multicultural competence for teachers who teach in schools that enroll migrant students. The study has two main objectives. Firstly, it attempts to design a multicultural education training course that incorporates modules that will lead to building and strengthening teachers' multicultural knowledge, skills, and attitude. Secondly, it measures the level of multicultural competence of teachers who received the training by comparing them to those who did not receive the training. Results from the study can be used as a guideline for developing and improving multicultural education professional development for teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multicultural Competence: Multicultural Knowledge, Multicultural Skills, and Multicultural Attitudes

Scholars in the field of multicultural education emphasize the importance of multicultural competence and have proposed that multicultural competence be taught as one of the basic skills in schools in a world that is becoming more diverse (Bennett, 2001). Multicultural competence, used interchangeably with intercultural competence, is

defined as the ability to interact and understand people who are ethnically, racially, and culturally different from oneself (Banks, 2009; Bennett, 2001). People with multicultural competence are open-minded and without cultural or racial prejudice. Being aware that one's worldview is not universal, people with multicultural competence refrain from using solely their own worldview to judge the behaviors and practices of people from different cultures. Multiculturally competent persons know or are eager to know about the ways of life of diverse cultural groups as well as the distinctive characteristics within those groups. They possess the ability to interpret communication, both verbal and nonverbal, as well as the cultural cues given off by different cultural groups (Byram et al., 2002; Fatini & Tirmizi, 2006).

Multicultural competence consists of behavioral and cognitive skills that people demonstrate when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Byram et al., 2002; Fatini & Tirmizi, 2006; Hladik, 2016; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000). Multicultural knowledge refers to knowledge of other cultures such as history, values and customs as well as knowledge of one's own culture (Association of American College and Universities, n.d.). Knowledge about one's own culture includes cultural self-awareness where individuals identify rules and biases that their culture creates. Knowledge about other cultures includes an understanding of elements such as history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, beliefs, and practices that are important to its members. Teachers need to know how to create a supportive school and classroom environment where students' cultural identities are valued (Nieto, 2004). Hladik (2016) stresses the importance of knowledge about how racism, prejudice, and ethnocentrism are generated and affect students. Teachers also need to have knowledge about children's rights, as well as government policies and regulations on the admission of migrant students into schools. However, because one's pool of knowledge about other cultures is limited, Byram et al. (2002) point out that skills and eagerness to seek out knowledge about other cultures are as important as the knowledge itself.

The second component of multicultural competence is skills to live and work in a culturally diverse environment. Skills are generally divided into empathy and communication – both verbal and non-verbal. Empathy means the ability to interpret experiences when being in contact with other cultures from multiple perspectives, as well as the ability to sympathize with the feelings and experiences of people from other cultural groups. Skills in verbal and non-verbal communication range from a minimal understanding of verbal and non-verbal languages of other cultures to a complex understanding of the cultural codes that underpin the communication. Besides these skills, teachers need to know how to integrate information and examples from students' cultures into subject areas and classroom teaching (Banks, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). Teachers should be able teach in ways that help students develop positive intercultural attitudes and promote academic achievement in students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

Byram et al. (2002) stated that multicultural attitudes are the foundation of multicultural competence. Multicultural attitudes include curiosity about other cultures and open-mindedness, which means the ability to suspend prejudice when encountering people from other cultures whose beliefs, values, and behaviors are different from one's own. Individuals who possess a multicultural attitude are able

to "decenter and relativize" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 7) their values and beliefs when encountering other sets of cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors. Teachers who teach students whose cultures are different from their own should have positive attitudes and high expectations for students, as it will affect students' academic performance and self-concept (Banks, 2008). Not only do they have to possess a multicultural attitude themselves, teachers should also cultivate positive attitudes among students from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups (Banks, 2008; Stephen & Stephen, 2004).

Professional Development for Multicultural Competence

Parkhouse et al. (2019) reviewed 48 publications on the effectiveness of multicultural professional development and concluded that in order to have long-lasting impacts on student achievement and to change the practices of teachers, the training program has to incorporate the following characteristics. First, the duration of the program needs to be substantial and extended. Multicultural education professional development programs should have a clear focus on specific subject matters and target specific groups of students. Second, the training agenda should be in line with educational policies at the district, state, or national levels. Third, teachers should be actively involved in the training process. Collective participation that emphasizes a learning community, rather than individualized learning, is likely to be more effective, especially when enacted as a part of a total school reform process. One of the challenges that most multicultural education professional development programs face is to get teachers to develop consciousness and be aware of stereotypes and prejudices against those from different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

Upon reviewing 28 studies on professional development in teaching, Kennedy (2016) found that program design – such as program duration, topics, and activities – is less likely to link to program effectiveness compared to the pedagogies employed in the program. Pedagogies that are geared towards active learning have proven to be more effective than lectures. Effective professional development programs tend to use facilitators who have long experience working with teachers and are familiar with the issues that they face. While it is important that professional development programs provide information about the cultures of ethnic minority students, they risk stereotyping or essentializing ethnic cultures as static. Scholars suggest that instead of focusing on cultures as static artifacts, professional development programs should also focus on the struggles and resistance of the groups against racism, discrimination, and unfair treatment (Leistyna, 2001). Moreover, members of the ethnic groups should be invited to facilitate the training (Parkhouse et al., 2019).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Multicultural competence, which comprises multicultural knowledge, multicultural skills, and multicultural attitudes, as well as the research on effective professional development for multicultural education reviewed in the previous section, serve as a conceptual framework for this study. The researcher used the qualities of these three components of multicultural competence as a guideline to develop a training

program for teachers and formulate questionnaire items to measure their multicultural competence after the training. Guided by the research on effective professional development (Kennedy, 2016; Leistyna, 2001; Parkhouse et al., 2019), the training program was divided into four modules, namely: 1) rights to education of migrant children; 2) cultures of migrant students from Myanmar; 3) prejudice and stereotype reduction; and 4) pedagogic approaches to teaching migrant students (Figure 2). Module 1, rights to education of migrant children, aims to develop knowledge regarding the rights of children to receive education and related laws, rules, and regulations. Module 2, culture of migrant students from Myanmar, as the name suggests, aims to develop teachers' knowledge of the cultures of migrant students and families from Myanmar. Module 3, prejudice and stereotype reduction, explains the meaning and causes of prejudice and stereotypes as well as classroom activities and lesson plans to develop positive attitudes among migrants and Thai students. Activities to help teachers reflect on their own stereotypes and prejudices were also included in this module. Module 4, pedagogic approaches to teaching migrant students, introduces culturally relevant instructional methods and provides a chance for teachers to practice formulating lesson plans that integrate information about the students' cultures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was divided into two phases: 1) developing multicultural competence through a training program; and 2) evaluating teachers' multicultural competence level after the training. Samut Sakhon province, located in Bangkok, was selected as the research site because it has the second largest number of migrant workers from Myanmar in the country. Due to resources, time, and accessibility, five government schools with the highest number of migrant students from Myanmar in the province were purposively selected as target schools. All of the teachers and principals from the five schools were called on to participate. In total, 80 people, comprising 78 teachers and two principals from the five schools, participated in the research.

In the first phase, the researcher used a training program to develop multicultural competence for teachers. The four-day training program, spanning over the period of three weeks, included the four modules described above (Figure 2). The format of the training included lectures by the researcher and invited speakers, group discussions to share experiences and opinions regarding the issues of migrant student dropout, placement of migrant students in appropriate classes and the necessity of culturally relevant teaching, as well as hands-on activities that asked teachers to plan the lessons that incorporated students' cultures. The data from all the activities was video-recorded. Experts in curriculum development from the Provincial Education Office and academics who specialized in the ethnic cultures of Myanmar were invited as facilitators. A former migrant student from Myanmar was invited as a guest speaker to share her experience studying in a Thai school. Officers from the Provincial Education Office were invited to explain the rules and regulations for enrolling migrant students. Due to restrictions on teachers' work, training was conducted at the weekends. During the small-group activities, the researcher deliberately arranged the groups so that they comprised members from different schools so that teachers could exchange experiences with colleagues from other schools.

Module 1: Right to education of migrant children (6 hours)

- ➢ Law concerning the right to education of migrant children in Thailand
- ➢ Government policies regarding the enrollment of migrant children in Thai government schools
- ➢ Rules and regulations in enrolling migrant students
- ➢ Dropout prevention strategies

Module 2: Culture of migrant students from Myanmar (6 hours)

- ➢ Ethnic groups in Myanmar and their cultures
- ➢ Migration history of migrants from Myanmar to Thailand and the province
- ➢ Food, languages, and customs of migrants from Myanmar

Multicultural Knowledge

Module 3: Prejudice and stereotype reduction (5 hours)

- ➢ The root cause of prejudice and stereotype
- ➢ Classroom practices to reduce prejudice
- ➢ Voice of a former migrant student in Thai schools

Multicultural Attitudes

Module 4: Pedagogic approaches for migrant students (7 hours)

- ➢ How to integrate students' cultures into lesson plans
- ➢ Instructional techniques in culturally diverse classrooms
- ➢ Formulating the culturally responsive lesson plan (practice)

Multicultural Skills

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the training program. (author's compilation).

In the second phase, the post-intervention-only design was used to measure the multicultural competence of participating teachers at the end of the training. Seventy completed questionnaires (87.5%) were obtained from 80 participants. The multicultural competence mean scores of the participant group were compared to those of the comparison group. In order to assure internal validity that the differences in mean scores were due to the training, five schools in Samut Sakhon province that have similar characteristics as the participant group were selected as the comparison group. The number of migrant students, number of teachers, age distribution, and teachers' experiences working in multicultural schools served as criteria in selecting the comparison group. After the comparison group was identified, the same questionnaire was distributed by postal mail to teachers in the comparison group. Seventy-seven questionnaires were returned. However, after eliminating those with missing data, 65 completed questionnaires were analyzed. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the level of multicultural competence of teachers who had participated in the training with that of teachers in the comparison group. One weakness of the study is that the researcher did not examine the relationship between the independent variables – characteristics of teachers such as their age, educational backgrounds, grade level taught, and experiences teaching in multicultural schools – and the dependent variable, which is their level of multicultural competence. Future research can examine whether the attributes of teachers such as their teaching experiences, or the subjects and grade levels that they teach affect their level of multicultural competence.

Data Collection Instrument

Guided by the three components of multicultural competence and drawing from items in the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (Henry, 1986), the researcher designed a questionnaire to measure the multicultural competence of teachers who participated in the training. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part asked for demographic data, that is, age, years of teaching in multicultural schools, level of education, and grade level taught. The second part of the questionnaire, which measured levels of multicultural competence, comprised 35 items: 15 items to assess multicultural knowledge; 9 items to assess multicultural skills; and 11 items to assess multicultural attitudes . Teachers were asked to rank their level of multicultural competence based on the five-point Likert scales of strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The third part of the questionnaire contained open-ended questions asking respondents to freely add their opinions or comments. Three academics from a Thai university who specialized in multicultural education were asked to evaluate the items listed in the questionnaire for content validity and objective congruence using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. Only the questionnaire items that recieved a score higher than 0.5 were used. The revised questionnaire was tested with 30 teachers who were not participants in this study. Cronbach's Alpha, as a coefficient of the questionnaire's reliability, measured 0.915. The Cronbach's Alpha for each sub-scale are as follows: 0.812 for multicultural knowledge; 0.797 for multicultural skills; and 0.844 for multicultural attitudes.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to collecting data, the study was approved by the university's Institution Review Board[1]. The study was conducted according to ethical guidelines for research with human subjects in social science. Participants' autonomy and privacy were protected; participants signed an informed consent to indicate their willingness to participate. Any identifiable data was not collected.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results of the study are divided into two parts: 1) the demographics of the participant and comparison groups; 2) the level of multicultural competence of the teachers who participated in the training compared to those who did not participate.

Demographic Information of Participant and Comparison Groups

Table 1 shows the demographic data of teachers who received the training and those in the comparison group. Both groups were similar in terms of age distribution, educational backgrounds, and prior experiences in multicultural education training.

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1   IPSR-IRB Certificate of Approval No.2020/05-215.

Teachers who participated in the training		Teachers who did not attend the training (comparison group)	
Variable	**Sample** (N=70)	**Variable**	**Sample** (N=65)
Gender		**Gender**	
Female	59 (84.3%)	Female	53 (81.5%)
Male	11 (15.7%)	Male	12 (18.5%)
Position		**Position**	
Teacher	68 (97.1%)	Teacher	63 (96.8%)
Principals	2 (2.9%)	Principals	2 (3.2%)
Age		**Age**	
Below 30	30 (42.9%)	Below 30	37 (56.9%)
31-40	30 (42.9%)	31-40	11 (16.9%)
41-50	7 (10%)	41-50	11 (16.9%)
Above 50	3 (4.2%)	Above 50	6 (9.3%)
Received multicultural education training in the past 5 years		**Received multicultural education training in the past 5 years**	
Yes	8 (11.4%)	Yes	4 (6.2%)
No	62 (88.6%)	No	61 (93.8%)
Education		**Education**	
Lower than B.A.	3 (4.3%)	Lower than B.A.	2 (3.1%)
B.A.	54 (77.1%)	B.A.	51 (78.4%)
M.A.	11 (15.7%)	M.A.	12 (18.5%)
Higher than M.A.	2 (2.9%)	Higher than M.A.	0
Experience teaching in multicultural schools		**Experience teaching in multicultural schools**	
0-5 Years	48 (68.6%)	0-5 Years	41 (63.1%)
6-10 Years	13 (18.6%)	6-10 Years	9 (13.8%)
11-20 Years	8 (11.4%)	11-20 Years	8 (12.3%)
More than 20 Years	1 (1.4%)	More than 20 Years	7 (10.8%)
Grade level taught		**Grade level taught**	
Kindergarten	16 (22.9%)	Kindergarten	10 (15.4%)
Grade 1-3	23 (32.9%)	Grade 1-3	24 (36.9%)
Grade 4-6	22 (31.4%)	Grade 4-6	27 (41.5%)
Grade 7-9	7 (10%)	Grade 7-9	4 (6.2%)
not teaching	2 (2.8)		

Table 1. Demographic information of participant and comparison group.

Multicultural Competence of Teachers Who Participated in the Training as Compared to Those Who Did not Participate

Multicultural components	Group	Mean	SD	t	df	sig	Mean Diff
Multicultural knowledge	Participant (N=70)	3.847	.409	2.326	117.696	.022*	.19436
	Comparison (N=65)	3.652	.548				
Multicultural skills	Participant (N=70)	3.859	.442	1.349	133	.180	.11343
	Comparison (N=65)	3.745	.533				
Multicultural attitudes	Participant (N=70)	4.035	.730	3.525	123.631	.001*	.49800
	Comparison (N=65)	3.537	.896				
Overall multicultural competence	Participant (N=70)	3.909	.382	3.647	133	.000*	.26898
	Comparison (N=65)	3.640	.472				

*$p < 0.05$

Table 2. Independent sample t-test of the multicultural competence levels of participant and comparison groups. (author's compilation).

In Table 2, the participant and comparison groups' levels of multicultural competence are presented. Using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), the mean scores of the second part were calculated and interpreted as follows: 4.01-5.00 = excellent; 3.01-4.00 = good; 2.01-3.00 = average; 1.01-2.00 = poor; and 0.01-1.00 = very poor. The mean scores indicated that the level of multicultural competence of the teachers who participated in the training and those who did not participate were both at the level of good. After breaking up into individual components, the mean score of "multicultural knowledge" and "multicultural skills" of the participant group were at the level of good, while "multicultural attitudes" was at the level of excellent. For the comparison group, the mean score of all components were at the level of good.

At 95% confidence level, there were statistical differences between the overall multicultural competence levels of teachers who participated in the training and those who did not participate. Teachers and principals who took part in the training demonstrated a higher level of multicultural competence ($M = 3.909$, $SD = .382$) compared to those who did not participate ($M = 3.640$, $SD = .472$). Breaking this down to each multicultural component, there were also statistical differences between the level of multicultural knowledge and multicultural attitudes of the teachers who underwent the training and those who did not ($p < 0.05$). Teachers who participated in the training had a higher level of multicultural knowledge and more positive multicultural attitudes compared to those who did not participate in the training. For multicultural skills, although teachers who took part in the training showed higher mean scores ($M = 3.859$, $SD = .442$) compared to those who did not participate ($M = 3.745$, $SD = .533$), the difference was not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

Findings show that teachers who participated in the training had higher levels of multicultural competence compared to those who did not participate. The study

carefully selected a comparison group that had similar characteristics as the group that received the training. Thus, the effect of the training is undeniable. Teachers who participated in the training program highly rated the program's interactive pedagogy. This is congruent with what scholars who studied effective professional development have recommended (Kennedy, 2016). Among the three components, multicultural knowledge was the area that teachers needed to be trained on most. According to teachers, knowledge of rules and regulations in enrolling and graduating migrant students is the most necessary since they are very complicated and constantly changing. Misconduct in this area would affect migrant students' opportunities to continue their education or to apply for citizenship. It is important that officers who are knowledgeable about this issue serve as facilitators or speakers in this module. Teachers also revealed that they found the training module about the cultures of migrants from Myanmar very helpful in designing and formulating lesson plans and learning activities. Most teachers rarely knew about the migrant families' ways of life, especially how they valued education of their children. Knowledge in this area would help teachers deal with dropouts and provide advice on students' future courses. Teachers who participated in the training suggested that the training program should include a half-day visit to learning centers[2] or migrant communities.

During the training, teachers had a chance to listen to the experiences of migrant students, including the racism that they faced inside and outside of school. This helped increase their awareness of how discrimination and racism worked against migrant students. However, as stated in previous research, multicultural attitudes cannot be changed overnight (Aboud, 2009; Banks, 2008; Byram et al., 2002). Therefore, the sustainability of the training to develop teachers' attitudes is questionable. The literature about effective professional development emphasizes that the training program should occur for extended periods (Parkhouse et al., 2019). However, with their tremendous workload, teachers voiced that they preferred a 12-to-15-hour weekend training. To maximize the effect of the training program without causing extra burden on the teachers, this study recommends that professional development for multicultural education should be embedded in the school policy and built into the action plans of schools, so that it weaves into the everyday practices.

CONCLUSION

In today's globalized world, the transnational flow of people will continue. The situation where migrant students study together with Thai students will continue. The cultural diversity that students bring with them will challenge the monocultural teaching that teachers are used to (von Feigenblatt et al., 2010). It is necessary that teachers know their students' cultures, have the skills to incorporate students' cultures in their teaching and possess positive attitudes for students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is the basis of multicultural education, which respects cultural diversity and equality for all students. Teachers need to be prepared to teach students from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Classroom interventions

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2 "Learning Centers" are found by civil society organizations to provide education for migrant children. Most learning centers are not officially accredited by the Thai government.

such as cooperative learning, which requires group members to work towards the same goal, can help reduce prejudice and stereotypes (Sleeter & Grant, 2003). Teachers play a key role in educating students to have multicultural competence. Professional development that prepares teachers to teach in culturally diverse contexts is indispensable (Alismail, 2016; Lander, 2014). Currently, there is no organized professional development for teachers who teach migrant students in Thailand. Each school and each individual teacher has to seek opportunities for professional development. As seen from the results of this study, professional development had positive effects on the multicultural competence of teachers. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the Ministry of Education or responsible authorities provide systematic and continuous professional development for teachers who teach migrant students throughout the country. This study focuses on migrant students from Myanmar in Samut Sakhon province. Future research should expand the findings from this study to migrant students from other nationalities who study in other provinces. The questionnaire developed in this study can be used to study the multicultural competence of teachers who teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds elesewhere in Thailand.

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Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Content in English Language Textbooks Used in Multicultural Classrooms at a Thai Primary School

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Textbooks have always played a significant role in the field of English language teaching (ELT). They are the main source that conveys cultural values and information in the language classroom. However, compared to the increasing number of migrants in Thailand, and particularly migrant children in Thai public schools, ELT textbooks have yet to properly take into consideration the reality of the multicultural Thai context. English is currently the most widely used lingua franca in the world, which means that it is shaped by a large number of non-native speakers in various multilingual and multicultural settings and local contexts. Thus, it is no longer sensible for ELT to be solely associated with Anglophone cultures. This study is based on observations in classrooms and semi-structured interviews with three Thai teachers of English at a government primary school in Samut Sakhon province in Thailand. Findings demonstrate that there is a strong need for more cultural content related to ASEAN countries in English textbooks, especially in multicultural schools. Furthermore, this study addresses implications for future ELT practices and materials for Thai primary schools in light of the continuously growing diversity within Thai society.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; Intercultural Awareness; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Multiculturalism; Thai English Textbooks

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing number of migrants from ASEAN countries coming to Thailand and several issues concerning these migrant children in Thai schools have been raised. One of the main concerns is that there have not been appropriate cultural representations reflecting the reality of the multicultural Thai context in school textbooks. Recent studies have demonstrated that the curricula, textbooks, and other educational materials are generally not relevant to the cultures of migrant children, and in the case of English language textbooks, the majority of the content displays native speaker cultures, disregarding multiculturalism in Thailand and other Asia-Pacific nations (Syahri & Susanti, 2016, Thumvichit, 2018; Yamada, 2010; Yuen, 2011). However, at present, the English language is extensively used as a global lingua franca for

intercultural communication and, in reality, it is rarely associated with native speaker cultures but embraces diverse cultures of speakers from different backgrounds (Canagarajah, 2009, 2011; Jenkins, 2015; Pennycook, 2010).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand how local teachers perceive and convey cultural content in English language textbooks, and to what extent this promotes intercultural awareness (ICA) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in multicultural classrooms. This study is part of a larger project that aims to investigate cultural representations both in written and visual forms in English language textbooks used in a primary school located in Samut Sakhon province where there is a mix of Thai and migrant students from ASEAN countries. This article includes semi-structured interviews of Thai teachers of English as well as classroom observations conducted over one academic semester at a government primary school in Samut Sakhon province. Qualitative content analysis has been employed and findings suggest that ELT textbooks used by public schools in Thailand lack cultural diversity, which ought to be considered a crucial aspect in the language learning classroom, particularly in multicultural contexts. Furthermore, this study addresses implications for future ELT materials and practices in Thai primary schools in light of the continuously growing diversity within Thai society.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN ELT

Culture is a concept too broad and vague to define in simple terms. In general, the most commonly accepted idea of culture perceives it as something that people have in common and that can be differentiated across different groups. People see culture as a set of beliefs, values, and rules that affect how people behave and are useful to understand different dimensions of human behavior (Scollon et al., 2012). However, such conceptions are problematic and create boundaries between people from different groups and disregard "the negotiated, contested, changeable and situated nature of culture" (Baker, 2015, p. 38). Moreover, Scollon et al. (2012) argue that culture should not be highlighted as a thing that distinguishes people from different groups but should be perceived as a heuristic "tool for thinking" (p. 3) when it comes to intercultural communication.

From Kramsch's (1998, 2009) perspective, culture represents membership in a discourse community and the members of this type of community not only share daily practices, histories, values, and beliefs, but are also aware of how to interact within the community. In line with Kramsch, Holliday (2013) believes that discourse is the unique way of communicating in particular groups. Through specialized discourse, insiders of the community can easily distinguish themselves from outsiders. In addition to the sociocultural aspect of culture, Kramsch (1998) proposes cultural imagination. She claims that this common imagining, which is negotiated by language, is an essential phenomenon that influences the way cultural reality is formed in discourse communities. This cultural reality is what controls one's judgement and behavior.

In this sense, language and culture are intricately fused and, thus, it is difficult to separate the two without either losing its significance. At present, the status of culture has progressed to be more hybrid, fragmented, and globalized, owing to the fluid boundaries between lived cultures and the cultures represented through the

internet (Kramsch, 2015; Sifakis & Sougari, 2003). Thus, solely introducing sociocultural norms of Anglophone countries (for exapmple from the UK or the US) in ELT has become obsolete and irrelevant for global uses of English.

Furthermore, when it comes to language learning, textbooks are considered the main source of culture (Zu & Kong, 2009). In other words, it is through textbooks that students encounter cultural information presented by visuals, dialogue, audio, descriptive texts, vocabulary, and so forth. Thus, textbooks are powerful tools that can deliver certain cultural values and meaning to language learners. Consequently, cultural diversity should be vigorously presented in English textbooks so that cultural understanding can be aligned with linguistic skills. In this fashion, ELT would become more appropriate if it was adapted to the sociocultural context of the respective country.

In the past few decades, cultural awareness (CA) has been considered a crucial skill for second language (L2) users when communicating with people from different linguacultural backgrounds (Byram, 2012). Although the notion of CA has provided its usefulness in relation to cultural aspects of language use and teaching, it is still associated with boundaries and distinctive nations. Hence, CA has become questionable when English is now flexibly and fluidly used as a global lingua franca.

Accordingly, the notion of intercultural awareness (ICA), which further develops from CA and takes a more dynamic intercultural framework, has been proposed as an approach to conceptualizing the cultural dimension for ELT (Baker, 2011, 2012). ICA derives from the idea of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which refers to "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (Byram, 1997, p. 71). Thus, someone who has developed ICC is able to "build relationships while speaking in the foreign language; communicates effectively; mediates interactions between people of different backgrounds and develops their own communicative skills" (Byram, 1997, p. 71).

Baker (2011) takes an ICA perspective and discusses how a cultural dimension that reflects global realities can be incorporated into the ELT classroom. He argues that ELT practitioners need to realize the global status of English and its links to diverse sociocultural contexts and, in order to do this, they need "to approach culture in a non-essentialist and dynamic manner" (Baker, 2011, p. 3). Not only language but also culture should be viewed as "an emergent, negotiated resource in communication" (Baker, 2011, p. 3). Baker (2011) provides further recommendations for implementing ICA in language classrooms, which include "investigating the relationships between culture, language and communication through: exploring local cultures; exploring language learning materials; exploring the media and arts both online and through more traditional mediums; making use of cultural informants; and engaging in intercultural communication both face-to-face and online-based communication" (p. 7). English teachers, especially in non-Anglophone, multicultural classrooms, can consider the above recommendations for a more appropriate ELT in a globalized world.

Cultural Diversity in English Textbooks

Many schools in Thailand have been using English textbooks written by native speakers, and these are considered one of the main sources of cultural representation (Greil, 2004). Thumvichit (2018) investigated cultural representations in Thai

secondary school English coursebooks. The findings reveal that, although Thai secondary teachers understand the importance of including intercultural aspects in ELT, Anglophone cultures are primarily represented in all of the coursebooks. Thai cultures in general are absent in the reading-focused activities and only a few pictures related to Thailand were identified. Ziaei (2012) examined an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) book series used in many language institutions in Iran and found out that the books mostly present American and British cultures, excluding any type of Iranian content. Yuen (2011) examined English textbooks at Hong Kong secondary schools to see whether they reflect the current global status of English; the study showed that cultures of Anglophone countries were saliently shown compared to other cultures. In Japan, Yamada (2010) discovered that English textbooks used at a junior high school contain cultural diversity but mainly in the context of Japanese habitants living in Anglophone countries.

Syahri and Susanti's study (2016) shows a different result. They explored nine English textbooks used at a high school in Indonesia and found that five books showed at least some examples of local cultures, while the rest still focused on target cultures (i.e., British, American, etc.). Likewise, Nomnian (2013) investigated the extent to which Thai cultural contents are included in English textbooks published in the UK and used at a Thai secondary school. Results showed that Thai cultures are somewhat represented in the textbooks written by a native English speaker. Consequently, Nomnian (2013) refers to *Thailand's English Language Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008* and emphasizes the importance of equivalently including Thai, regional, and international cultures in English textbooks so that learners would be prepared to use the global language more relevantly to their context. More studies such as these are needed to understand to what extent English textbooks used in Thai or ASEAN schools demonstrate the diversity of cultures relevant to Thai learners in order to improve their intercultural communication skills (Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009; Nomnian, 2013).

Thai Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Contents in the Classroom and English Textbooks

If ELT ought to reflect cultural diversity, teachers certainly play an important role in developing learners' intercultural skills. Messekher (2014) states that, regardless of what cultural dimensions are represented in textbooks, their effectiveness relies upon how they are taught. Likewise, Mahmud (2019) points out that language teachers should integrate local cultures into English language classrooms. The incorporation of local and ASEAN regional cultures in multicultural classrooms is thus a vital aspect that is increasingly taken into consideration.

Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016) looked at Thai secondary school teachers' perception of intercultural competence and to what extent they included this in their ELT practices. Their study reveals that, although teachers acknowledge the importance of developing intercultural skills in the classroom, they do not have enough experience in culturally diverse environments to teach this themselves. Furthermore, the term ICC appears to be relatively unknown to most teachers, making it difficult to implement appropriate methods for teaching intercultural competencies in the classroom. Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) explored how Thai EFL

teachers at a private university perceive ICC, and how this is integrated into their teaching practices. In this study, the teachers seem to have a good understanding of ICC on a surface level; however, they are not fully aware of how to implement an intercultural approach to language teaching. Furthermore, teachers believe that ICC only indirectly helps students with their English communication skills. Jantadej and Charubusp (2018) interrogated Thai secondary school teachers on their perceptions and implementation of intercultural teaching in English language classrooms. According to the results, the EFL teachers place importance on providing intercultural competence training but lack the means to assess students' attitudes and behavior towards developing their skills in this area. According to the above-mentioned studies, it appears that Thai ELT teachers in general stress the importance of understanding different cultures and ICC in the ELT classroom, but they are unaware of how to effectively implement this in concrete classroom practices.

In conclusion, culture and language are interrelated and, thus, in the era of globalization, ELT classrooms (including practices, textbooks, and materials) need to provide different cultural perspectives so that learners can understand the use of English in intercultural contexts. It is firstly important that ELT teachers are able to critically evaluate textbooks and materials that are used in the classroom and make judgements on the level of relevancy to both local and global issues, so that they can adapt their classes. Therefore, this article aims to provide an understanding of how Thai teachers at a multicultural primary school perceive and convey cultural contents presented in their school's English textbooks.

METHOD

Research Setting and Participants

The research setting of this study is a government primary school located in Samut Sakhon province in Thailand. The province has the second largest number of migrant workers in Thailand, coming from mainly three countries – Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos – with the total number of 257,559 migrant workers in 2019 (Ministry of Labor, 2019, p. 13). Thus, the research setting of this study had migrant students in every grade (Grade 1 to Grade 6). There is a total of 45 migrant students in this school and the majority of them are from Myanmar (22 students), followed by Laos (9 students), Cambodia (8 students), and other ethnic groups (6 students). Three teachers (two female, one male) have been teaching English at this school and all of them agreed to take part in the research. All of the teachers were Thai and from the local area of Samut Sakhon province. Below is a table that portrays each participant in more detail (pseudonyms have been used).

Interviews

Before having separate interviews with the three participants, non-participant observations were conducted by one of researchers in the language learning classrooms. The researcher observed six different classrooms from grade 1 to grade 6. At the time of the fieldwork, Helen taught grades 1 and 3; Jack taught grade 2; and Rose taught

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education Degree(s)	Teaching Experiences	International Travel Experiences
Helen	28	Female	BEd English	She has been teaching for two months at the school. She teaches Grade 1 and 3 students. She taught English at a secondary school for four years.	She has been to Laos when she was a pre-service teacher. It was a short field trip to study and exchange cultures with Laos universities.
Jack	25	Male	BEd English	He has been at the school for three months. He teaches Grade 2 students. He taught English at a different primary school for a year.	He has been to Laos when he was an undergraduate student. He traveled there with his Thai friends.
Rose	28	Female	BEd English	She has been teaching English at the school for five years. She teaches Grade 4-6 students.	She has been to Laos, Malaysia, and Japan. She traveled to Laos when she was a pre-service teacher.

Table 1. Participant information. (author's compilation).

grades 4, 5 and 6. Each observation lasted 50 minutes and focused on factors such as the lesson topic, teaching methods, use of textbooks, types of classroom activities and exercises, teacher-student interactions and student interactions.

Data collections involved semi-structured interviews and observations of teaching and learning in classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions towards representations of culture in English textbooks used in this research context. Harrell and Bradley (2009) indicate that "semi-structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided" (p. 27). The interview is the most widely used method in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). Interviews are used to elicit the participants' attitudes, perceptions, feelings, motivations, and behavioral connotations, which are difficult to discover solely through observations (Brewer, 2000; Richards, 2003). Flexible interviews can be more appropriate for qualitative inquiries because they provide more in-depth information about the participant and more elaboration on their stories (Dörnyei, 2007; Silverman, 2011).

In addition, non-participant observations were conducted by one of the researchers in the language learning classrooms. The researcher observed six different classrooms from grade 1 to grade 6. At the time of the fieldwork, Helen taught grades 1 and 3; Jack taught grade 2; and Rose taught grades 4, 5 and 6. Each observation lasted

50 minutes and focused on factors such as the lesson topic, teaching methods, use of textbooks, types of classroom activities and exercises, teacher-student interactions, and student interactions.

This article demonstrates how Thai teachers perceive, teach, and convey cultural diversity represented in the school's English textbooks at a multicultural primary school in Thailand. By conducting interviews and observations, the researchers were able to explore how participants interpret a situation or an issue in a way that cannot be achieved solely through observation (Merriam, 2009). In this study, a digital voice recorder was used during interviews and the language used was a mix of Thai and English. The Thai transcript was translated by one of the researchers. The process of constructing interview questions was as follows:

1. The researchers reviewed the role of textbooks in ELT, the role of culture in English textbooks, and adapted a conceptual framework for textbook analysis;
2. The researchers reviewed and analyzed the school's English textbooks (used for each grade) with the focus on cultural implications (another part of the larger study);
3. The researchers outlined interview questions based on 1) and 2);
4. The interview questions were presented at and approved by the Ethical Review Board, Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University.

1. Were you able to select your own English textbook(s)? If yes, please explain the criteria used to select the textbook(s).
2. How did/do you plan to use the textbooks for each lesson?
3. Do you always rely on the textbooks? Why? Why not?
4. Do you have difficulties using the textbooks? If yes, please explain.
5. What do you think about the cultures represented in the textbooks?
6. How do you present cultural contents in the textbooks?
7. Do you have difficulties understanding cultural contents or images presented in the textbooks? If yes, please give an example.
8. What cultural aspects presented in the textbooks are related to the cultural context of your students?
9. Do you have any suggestions to improve and develop the textbooks? If yes, please specify.

Table 2. Guided interview questions. (author's compilation).

The English textbooks used at this school (see Table 3) were a six-level series of American English language coursebooks for primary school students called *Super Magic American English*, written by Mariagrazia Bertarini, Martha Huber, and Paolo Lotti and published in 2015 by Aimphan Publisher, Thailand.

Analytical Framework

This study employed qualitative content analysis based on an adapted analytical framework. The framework used two concepts as follows: 1) Five categories of

culture: *products*, *perspectives*, *practices*, *persons*, and *places* (Yuen, 2011); 2) Sources of cultural contents adapted from Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) model. The adapted model used in this study contains six layers of sources of cultural contents: 1) *source cultures* (C1), 2) *ASEAN regional cultures* (C2), 3) *Asian regional cultures* (C3), 4) *target cultures* (C4), 5) *international cultures* (C5), and 6) *global cultures* (C6) (see Figure 1).
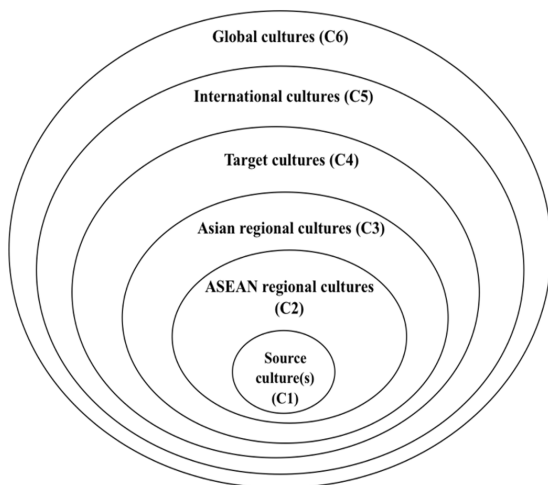

Figure 1. Sources of cultural contents used in this study. (figure by the author).

FINDINGS

Based on interview data, the findings are divided into two themes: 1) the reliability of selected English textbooks, and 2) teachers' perceptions towards cultural contents presented in the English textbooks.

The Reliability of Selected English Textbooks

Helen and Jack were newly transferred teachers when the fieldwork started and, thus, Rose was the only teacher who was present for taking part in textbook selection. She explains the process of textbook selection at the school (Extract 1). Jack still gives some of his own criteria when selecting textbooks in case he has to make a decision later on (Extract 2). It appears that Jack trusts the criteria listed by the government for textbook selection. All participants state that they mostly rely on the topics presented in the textbooks (Extract 3, 4, 5) to create their lesson plans for each class. All participants explain that they have to add more exercises and activities in their lessons. It seems that Rose tries to prepare cultural contents related to the students' contexts separate from the textbooks (Extract 5). This might be due to the fact that the textbooks in general lack cultural contents from ASEAN contexts (see Saemee & Nomnian 2021a, 2021b). Helen mentions that she has to create new exercises and activities by herself based on her own knowledge (Extract 6). On the other hand, Jack and Rose also include exercises and activities from other sources, such as online websites (Extract 7 & 8).

Extract 1

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to select textbooks for your teaching? If so, please explain the criteria used to select them.

ROSE: *Yes. I remember that school officers gave us three sets of textbooks with a list of prices and publishers who had already contacted them. The publishers provided textbook previews. At that time, I was the only English language teacher in this school. So, I had to make a decision. I chose these selected textbooks because they are colorful. They also provide lots of actual things expressed through illustrations. I didn't select the other textbooks because they were not colorful and they contained lots of texts. I think that they would not have been able to draw students' attention. Also, I think that the price was an essential factor when selecting the textbooks.*

Extract 2

INTERVIEWER: What are your criteria for selecting English language textbooks?

JACK: *If I can choose a textbook, I would adopt the standard criteria laid out by the Ministry of Education.*

Extract 3

INTERVIEWER: Do you always rely on the textbooks? Why or why not?

HELEN: *Yes. The lesson plans are based on the topics that are presented in the textbooks. I think that contents are not too difficult for our students in this context.*

Extract 4

INTERVIEWER: Do you always rely on textbooks? Why or why not?

JACK: *I mainly use textbooks. Sometimes, I add more exercises and activities. I think that the textbooks are quite reliable because they have already been assessed.*

Extract 5

INTERVIEWER: Do you always rely on textbooks? Why or why not?

ROSE: *I use textbooks as a primary source. However, I also try to add some new exercises which relate to upcoming events and festivals, such as Loi Kratong; things that you could observe in the classroom.*

Extract 6

HELEN: *I tried to add some activities in my classrooms because the Grade 1-3 textbooks mostly present just vocabulary. So, I have to create extra exercises and activities.*

Extract 7

JACK: *I think that each unit provides only a few contents. So, I usually have to find out some more information on the internet.*

Extract 8

ROSE: *I try to provide more exercises for my students. Apart from using the textbooks, I often download worksheets from the ISL Collective website and give them to my students.*

Teachers' Perceptions Towards Cultural Content Presented in the English Textbooks

Based on the adopted analytical framework (assuming five categories of culture, i.e. products, practices, perspectives, persons, places), the participants predominantly addressed cultural contents related to products and practices (Extract 9, 10, 11). The participants address that the cultural contents in their textbooks are inadequate (Extract 10 & 11). Consequently, they try to provide some more cultural contents in their classrooms.

The participants indicate that the cultural sources represented in the textbooks mostly involve target cultures (i.e., cultures of native speakers of English), such as Halloween and Christmas traditions (Extract 9). The rest of cultural sources – source cultures, ASEAN regional cultures, Asian regional cultures, international cultures, and global cultures – are rarely mentioned in the textbooks (see Saemee & Nomnian, 2021a, 2021b). However, they suggest that the textbooks should contain various cultural aspects from different sources (Extract 12). Thus, every participant considers that cultural diversity is an important element that should be included more in English textbooks. Rose also talks about migrant students' cultures and ASEAN regional cultures (Extract 13). Although Jack does not mention migrant students' cultures, he discusses that Thai culture should be included in English textbooks (Extract 14).

> **Extract 9**
> HELEN: *Mostly, they provide cultural contents in terms of festivals, such as Christmas and Halloween, which in the Thai context people may not pay much attention to. I think that those festivals are international traditions that students should know. Also, food and drinks, and school life of students who have different backgrounds should be represented.*

> **Extract 10**
> JACK: *There is not much cultural content. Sometimes, I try to adapt other sources. I think that the cultural topics represented in the textbooks involve general topics, such as greetings.*

> **Extract 11**
> ROSE: *The textbooks do not provide many cultural contents. I think the textbooks provide different cartoon characters, including Molly, Jenny, Eddy, and Nick. They have different skin and hair colors. I think that Eddy represents African American students. I told my students that we can be friends although we are of different races.*

> **Extract 12**
> HELEN: *I think cultural diversity should be added in the textbooks. They should represent different cultural contexts because English language is regarded as an international language that people use throughout the world.*

> **Extract 13**
> ROSE: *I think we should provide ASEAN regional cultures in our classrooms so that the migrant students will be glad that their friends will get to know their cultures. It's beneficial for every student. They can learn about other cultural identities and their own cultural identity as well.*

Extract 14
JACK: *I think that Thai cultures should be included in the textbooks, such as the famous traditions in Thailand – Loi Krathong and Song- Kran festivals.*

Jack says that he is not familiar with some of the target cultures presented in the textbooks (Extract 15). He gives an example of when he had to do research about a certain cultural topic in the textbook in advance so that he can explain it better during his class. Helen mentions that the teachers sometimes have to skip some exercises and activities in the textbooks because they have to be done using audio CDs, which are not provided (Extract 16). Thus, the teachers have to organize exercises and activities by themselves instead. During this part of the interview, a contradiction has been noticed by Helen. Helen describes that it would be better if students could practice their pronunciation by listening to native speakers' accents (Extract 16), although she is aware of the global status of English and believes that it is important to include cultural diversity in the textbooks (Extract 12).

Extract 15
JACK: *Sometimes, I find some cultural traditions I am not familiar with, such as Easter. I have to find more information and try to understand the background of that culture beforehand.*

Extract 16
HELEN: *Normally, we have a TV and CD player that we can use in our classrooms, but we do not have audio CDs. There are lots of exercises and activities from the textbooks that require using audio CDs. We don't have them, so we have to skip it. Normally, students have to practice pronunciation with a Thai accent. I think that it would be better if we had audio CDs. Students will have a chance to learn directly from the original accent.*

The findings reveal that textbooks are significant factors in ELT because teachers rely on them as a primary source. In summary, every participant points out that the cultural elements represented in the textbooks are inadequate and believes that the textbooks should include more cultural diversity. They suggest that textbooks should provide more cultural content and various cultural sources, such as Thai and ASEAN regional cultures. According to Rose, the migrant student's cultures – Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodian cultures – are not presented sufficiently in the textbooks, which should be the opposite case.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Three Thai ELT teachers mainly discussed cultural content referring to products (e.g., food and drinks) and practices (e.g., greetings and traditions) when asked about the usefulness of the school's English textbooks. The other categories of culture — perspectives, persons and places – were rarely addressed. Based on the sources of cultural content, the participants pointed out that target cultures are extensively represented in the textbooks. The other sources – source cultures, ASEAN regional cultures, Asian regional cultures, international cultures, and global cultures – were rarely brought up during the interviews. Furthermore, every participant suggests

that Thai cultures should be integrated more into the English textbooks. One participant (Rose) also emphasized the importance of including migrant students' cultures and ASEAN regional cultures in English textbooks, as they are used in multicultural classrooms. Although the two other participants did not mention migrant students' cultures and ASEAN regional cultures, they believe that the textbooks should contain a variety of cultural content. Hence, it appears that every participant considers cultural diversity an important element that should be incorporated into English textbooks, which would be a good start for teachers to develop their ICA while also raising awareness in the ELT classroom.

However, when it comes to critically evaluating textbooks, the participants do not seem to have cultural diversity as a main factor in mind for selection. In other words, while they discuss the importance of including diverse cultures in English textbooks, they do not have ideas of ICC and ICA embedded in their criteria for textbook selection (Cheewasuktahworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016; Jantadej & Charuhusp, 2018). Jack appears to have full confidence in the government's criteria for his decision-making process, regardless of whether or not they contain a category related to cultural content, while Rose has taken part in textbook selection mainly based on how appealing (based on colors and intensity of texts) they would be for young learners. Furthermore, Helen believes that it is more advantageous for students to be exposed to native speaker accents for practicing pronunciation skills.

English is currently the most widely used lingua franca in the world, which means that it is shaped by a large number of non-native speakers in various multilingual and multicultural settings and local contexts (Canagarajah, 2009; 2011; Jenkins, 2015; Pennycook, 2010). Thus, it is no longer sensible for ELT to be solely associated with American and British cultures. However, many English textbooks used in both private and public educational sectors in ASEAN nations still predominately represent such Anglophone cultures (e.g., Syahri & Susanti, 2016, Thumvichit, 2018; Yamada, 2010; Yuen, 2011), and the English textbooks used at the school of this study were also American English coursebooks published in the US (cf. Greil, 2004).

This study demonstrates how ELT teachers have the right to take part in modernizing teaching practices and are aware of how to adapt their lessons to make them more relevant. Their role is vital in creating a culturally aware classroom environment, for enhancing students' intercultural skills needed in the era of globalization (Nomnian, 2013). Although, in many cases, textbooks are used as a primary source for ELT, teachers can approach them in a critical manner. Teachers (and even students) should have the opportunity to evaluate and compare cultural content presented in textbooks with their own context (Baker, 2011). Moreover, more studies investigating cultures in English textbooks and teachers' perceptions in ASEAN contexts can gradually help stakeholders of ELT understand the real role of English in a globalized world. Modernizing and internationalizing ELT in the ASEAN region has been long overdue and it is crucial that more and more integration of local and regional cultures are taken into consideration, particularly in multicultural ELT classrooms.

While this study focused on teachers and their views of ELT textbooks in relation to their local context, the sampling of the study was rather small and it did not take into account the development of students' ICA or their ideas pertaining to their language learning materials. Thus, it would be worthwhile to continue this research

with students' perceptions of ELT textbooks and possibly compare different schools and areas around the country.

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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

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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.
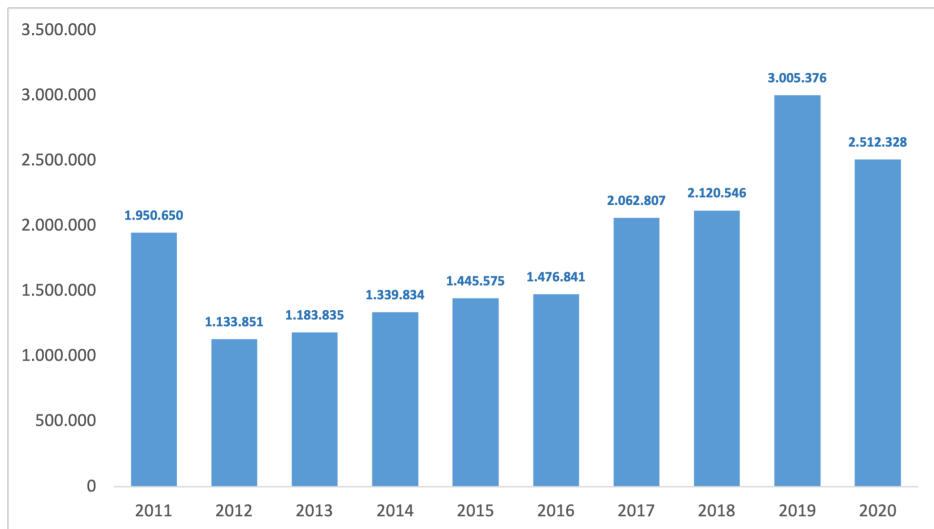

Figure 1. Number of permitted migrant workers in Thailand (2011-2020). (National Statistical Office, retrieved 10 August 2021 from http://statbbi.nso.go.th/staticreport/page/sector/th/02.aspx).

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 National anthem ceremony Morning prayer Meditation Daily announcement	The forecourt of the flagpole	8.00-8.30	30 minutes
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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