



Thailand's Sustainable Literacy Competence in Peripheral School: The Bannongkae School Model

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Received 26 June 2023; Received in revised form 10 August 2023

Accepted 16 August 2023; Available online 14 December 2023

Abstract

This research illustrates a successful case of developing Thai and English literacy of primary students who study in a peripheral school in a rural area of Thailand, i.e., Bannongkae school under Naowarat Thawon's learning approach over 19 years as a teacher and then a director. This article aims to elucidate how the Bannongkae school succeeded in developing students to be competent in Thai and English. Methodologically, this article will employ Jürgen Habermas's sociological concept of lifeworld combined with perspectives of Andre Gunder Frank's dependency theory and Jack Mezirow's transformative learning as its theoretical frameworks to reconstruct the process of learning the Thai and English language as a transformative practice in creating a more effective, more productive, and more just education in Thai society. Meanwhile, Bannongkae school is a research area in this study with a procedure of qualitative approach, in collecting qualitative data with key informants by using in-depth interviews with a director and her staff and using observation of the school context. The findings have three themes: Bannongkae school model as "decolonizing" traditional practices of teaching literacy; its breakthrough beyond poverty, educational inequality, and dependency; and transformative practices based on the educational perspectives. The implication of this research is the successful model of Bannongkae school in improving sustainable literacy competence for peripheral students might be a new classical pathway that the educational policymakers should reconsider to redeem essentialism for the educational practice and policy.

Keywords

Sustainable literacy competence, Peripheral school, Rural student, Lifeworld, Dependency theory

Introduction

Among the educational inequality problems in Thailand, literacy in both Thai and English languages is greatly significant. Not only are the average scores for English proficiency among Thai people low, but they rank as almost the last in the South-East Asian region. Except Laos, other countries such as Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar have higher average scores than Thailand on the English Proficiency Index. Thailand has been ranked at a low or very low level since 2011-2022 (EF Education First, 2023).

Most Thai people are aware of their English skill problem. The Ministry of Education of Thailand has tried to cope with this issue in many ways, such as improving the curriculum using The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (English Language Institute, 2016). However, the overall results have always failed as shown in the Ordinary National Educational Test [O-NET], which assesses Thai students' knowledge and thinking abilities. Its results have revealed that the average scores for English subjects among grade 6 students have been lower than 45% from 2014-2021. Noticeably, the schools that have average scores higher than 50% are typically large or extra-large schools located in urban areas (The National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2023). Generally, these schools received higher subsidies, had higher rates of retention for their directors and teaching staff, could allocate more teachers and each graduated in different degrees, and had attracted students from families with a higher socio-economic status. Unsurprisingly, small or "peripheral" schools are often stigmatized by Thai society as "the origin of the catastrophe".

The Thai educational system, institutions, and staff have been faced with criticism for the low quality of education. Could it be possible that the quality of Thai education is more evenly distributed among different types of schools, such as small and medium-sized schools located in rural areas, especially in literacy of Thai and English languages? Zehner (2017) once suggested that the success or failure of Thai students' English language skills depends largely on the quality of basic education provided in primary schools, and Thai educators should seek out a successful local or community school model similar to Teeraeak's suggestion. Teeraeak proposed that educational research should present a case study relevant with English education in Thailand, specifically focusing on teaching and learning English among Thai non-bureaucrat or elite learners (Teeraeak, 2017). Fortunately, a number of educational personnel in peripheral primary schools, established outside of the urban cities, are not inattentive in coping with the problems of educational inequality and low-quality education.

The first gap of knowledge that appeared from a recent study that explored factors of successful competencies of large-scale schools located in downtown areas of major

provincial cities (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018). Nonetheless, these schools were large-sized schools in the urban area, therefore, the success and efforts of small or middle-sized schools in rural areas were underexplored. In the opposite, this study will focus on the success of a peripheral and small primary school in the rural area that had O-NET test's high average scores in English subject as suggested by Zehner (2017), in order to understand how it has managed to succeed in the face of socio-economic and cultural challenges. In other words, a case in this study is the successful model which is an exceptional case in Thailand that overcoming the structural hindrances such as the problem of poverty and social class.

The second gap identified in previous research is the assumption that high socio-economic status level, social class, children's motivation, and instructional/school factors positively correlated with higher English skills (Linjaroen, Ardwichai, & Chanin, 2009; Phairot, Khemanuwong, Boonthong, Angsuwanakul, & Uampittaya, 2022; Pudmon, Webb, & Wongkittiporn, 2021). It implies that students with a low socio-economic status may not have a strong positive correlation with higher English language skills. Lesaux (2012) suggested that children in low-income families and non-English-speaking homes tend to struggle with literacy/reading skills, and teachers who have to inculcate these children should implement knowledge-based competencies in their teaching methods to facilitate a deeper conceptual understanding of vocabulary knowledge. Knowledge-based competencies are thus significant factors of reading outcomes, particularly among students who growing up in low-income and non-English-speaking families.

Generally, mother tongue is assumed as a barrier of learning English in Thailand. However, this hypothesis is not always true. Previous research has found that using one's mother tongue or a local lingua franca with students from low-income households can foster children' learning literacy more effectively (Hungi et al., 2018; Sailors et al., 2010; Seid, 2018). Evidently, their findings seem capable to explain students' learning literacy of the peripheral school in this case study which has pedagogical approach with a mother tongue language. In short, this approach is a process of transference of phonics sound and focuses on vocabularies in comprehending a text's meaning as explained by Lesaux (2012). The success of this approach in this study-case, seemingly, differs from using one's mother tongue as a form of instruction in other low-income countries and other schools in Thailand. Thus, the successful school in this study should be explored deeply to understand factors of successes and failures in learning English/English literacy in Thai society.

The third gap as identified in the literature emerged from beliefs about non-native English-speaking teachers and their failures in teaching English literacy in Thai schools that have been mentioned generally. The question is that whether there is any evidence of successful English literacy attainment among rural students in small or medium-sized schools

that lack native English-speaking teachers? The previous study by Noom-ura showed that lack of native English-speaking teachers was directly related with failure of teaching English in Thailand (Noom-ura, 2013). Meanwhile, another study even suggested that the absence of the influence of colonial power was an underlined factor of failure in teaching English language in Thailand. In other words, the abilities of Thai teachers that teaching English are incomparable with native English-speaking teachers (Insuwan, 2022).

At present, among a few works that elaborate the development of teaching English in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007; Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011), only Teeraeak (2017, pp. 4-5) stated that Thai policymakers in education had deliberately decreased the number of hour in the curriculum for teaching English in primary schools in 1977. Today, most parents request that English language must be included in the curriculum for their children in the kindergarten or primary levels (from grade 1 to 6). Nidhi Eawsriwong (2004), a well-known Thai historian, illustrated that barriers of teaching and learning English in Thai society since King IV did not come from practices of teachers in the classroom, but the socio-cultural contexts that English literacy was a tool of social status and class expression in Thai society. Eawsriwong (2019) spotlighted that when the Ministry of Education during 1973-1976 launched a new policy of developing the standard of local schools to be equal with the elite schools, Thai bourgeois parents were concerned about the distribution and transferring of resources from elite schools to peripheral schools both in rural and urban areas. Eawsriwong (2019) believed that the political participation of the rural people at present has made the bipolar inequality in distribution of educational resources more difficult, or must has certain forms of measure.

In short in order to fill these gaps of knowledge and questions from the previous studies, this study will explore the successful peripheral school in teaching English and literacy that reflected through O-NET scores of grade 6 students in English subject. Additionally, this study will illustrate how this school can encounter the socio-economically and culturally conditions of educational inequality, poverty, and contexts.

Research Objective

The aim of this study is to explore how Bannongkae as a peripheral school was able to successfully improve the literacy of their students in both Thai and English.

Theoretical Framework

This paper's theoretical framework was designed from reviewing the literature regarding theories for understanding an educational phenomenon and development education. Most of all, this study will employ Jürgen Habermas's concepts of lifeworld and decolonization, Jack Mezirow's dimensions of learning, and Andre Gunder Frank's dependency theory as its framework.

The lifeworld concept is a sub-concept of a communicative action theory, which Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist, developed over the last 30 years to explain the systems (bureaucratic, legal, market, monetary powers) that threaten human spheres, particularly the communicative structures in people's daily life. In his perspective, this threatening process is "the colonization of the lifeworld." Habermas believed that elements of the lifeworld have three dimensions: (1) culture, (2) society, and (3) personality. Negative outcomes of these threatening elements were (1) loss of cultural meanings (in the cultural dimension), (2) social anomalies (in the social dimension), and (3) psychopathology (in the personality dimension). Habermas suggested that a possible solution to handle these attacks is establishing consensus and rationality in communication to reach mutual understanding among members of the lifeworld system (Habermas, 1984; 1987). Mostly, individuals in lifeworld conform with their oppressive beliefs/assumptions toward cultures, society, and themselves. Nevertheless, individuals should be aware, emancipate, or even transform irrational practices in their lifeworld.

There are several works that use "decolonization" in the educational setting, especially in the field of critical education and sociological education, for example Ted Fleming's work (2005; 2016; 2020) or other educational scholars (Brookfield, 2010; Finn, Danquah, & Matthan, 2021). In Thai educational settings, the political, socio-cultural, and economic systems have invaded the practices of educational spheres. For example, the educational policy relatively enforced the education core curriculums for all primary schools throughout the country or "one-size-fits-all" policy, but it is evident that these curriculums cannot lead to literally improving students' learning skills. Because the primary schools in Thailand have their own different contexts such as sizes/types, settings, funding, and attribution of students, each school should design its own curriculums, pedagogies, and materials suitable with its local contexts. By connecting the concept of decolonization into the educational setting, Fleming employed this concept to describe how learners and educators can emancipate themselves from the oppressive lifeworld. In other words, how one has to decolonize oneself from the system of oppression to improving the English literacy of rural students in primary level, especially in Thailand.

Jack Mezirow, a pioneer in adult education, had applied Paolo Freire's emancipatory education and Habermas's dimensions of knowledge to theorize "dimensions of learning." He believed that a type of learning that can transform individuals and groups is "communicative learning," thereby individuals can evaluate implications of texts or communication of participants to understand its full meanings (Mezirow, 2008). "Emancipatory learning" can also mean the transformation when individuals became aware of the causes of their traumatic beliefs/assumptions in their lives, which might be oppressed or taken for granted from socialization. As such, individuals should examine,

reflect, and transform critically their beliefs and actions (Mezirow, 2003). The three dimensions of learning are also significant in the transformational process in both individual and collective levels, as stated by Mezirow's transformative learning theory. This study believes that the realm of adult learning, as a process of transformative learning, could help explain the changing educational practices of educators involved.

A developing country such as Thailand is unavoidably deeply posited within the neo-colonial relations between core and periphery. In short, the relationship between developed countries as core/center and underdeveloped countries as periphery has never been an equal exchange. The center always exploits the periphery's resources by the domination and controlling of economic, political, and social structures such as low workers' wages and cheap raw materials, including that the satellites or periphery were compelled to rely on political, economic, and educational policies of First World nations such as US and UK through the financial institutions (The International Monetary Fund) and international organizations, e.g., The United Nations, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Organization. Accordingly, this idea of Andre Gunder Frank helps to frame the inequality forcefully implemented in peripheral schools in Thailand and is vividly illustrated in Eawsriwong's explanation (Eawsriwong, 2004, 2019)

Research Methodology

Research context

A unique-case selection of the school in this study was identified according to the inclusion criteria: (1) it is a peripheral, small or middle-sized primary school in a rural/suburban area; (2) it has achieved high average scores (more than 70%) in English on the O-NET test of grade 6 students during at least 3 years 2017-2021; (3) the amount of students who registered and got the test in those 3 years must be over 10 students; (4) there is a rational, authentic, and empirical process of improving students' English literacy by their teachers, director, or educational staff in the school; and (5) the key informants, including the director, teachers, and educational staff, have expressed their willingness and availability to participate in interviews and to allow the researcher to observe the school's operation. Based on these criteria, the Bannongkae school which is located in the Sakaeo Province of Eastern Thailand was deemed suitable for reaching all the criteria.

Deposited in a pocket of Sakaeo province in the East of Thailand, Bannongkae stands quietly amidst a landscape that is typical for the rural area. The school is located 220 kilometers from Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. The closest city to the school (approximately 30 kilometers) is the scenic Khao Chakan district, Sakaeo Province, decorated with a plethora of abandoned cafés and commercial buildings. There is one narrow asphalted road leading to the school that diverges from the main road and is flanked with dry

grasslands and burnt sugar cane. The area is surrounded by an almost-destroyed temple, small grocery shops, and half-concrete traditional houses. The school's name is displayed on a wooden board, inconspicuously hinged on an upturned dead tree.

As we approach the entrance wall, a cluster of old buildings would appear. One building has been recently renovated and serves as the administrative building, where teachers and the director prepare piles of new books and exercises for the upcoming semester. As we explore the landscape, we saw a cafeteria, a seminar room, a playground, and kindergarten classrooms. Across the courtyard, we came across another two-story classroom building with a small concrete sports arena and a dying-grass football field. These classrooms are designed for students from grade 1 to 6. A library or first aid room are notably absent. Nevertheless, each classroom is equipped with a television that is capable of connecting to an IPad or laptop, and all devices can access a high-speed internet connection.

Bannongkae school was established in 1976 at Wang Nam Yen district, Sakaeo province. Originally a small-sized school that served 70-80 students from the village, it is now a middle-sized school (120-710 students) that has 11 teachers and can support 240 primary students from Bannongkae village and adjacent districts. And it is notable that there is a strong demand for parents from other provinces, including Bangkok, to put their children apply for the seat in this school as a consequence of the school's success as reflected in the results of O-NET test in English subject of grade 6 students during 2016-2020 with the highest average scores, above all large-sized schools in Sakaeo and other provinces of Thailand.

Data material

Given the purpose of this research was to explore and explain the educational phenomenon within the Bannongkae school context, this study used a case study approach, which, according to Yin (2014), is used to examine and offer in-depth analysis of a bounded context.

Participants included the director and 11 teachers and educational staff from the Bannongkae school. Data were gathered through two research instruments: (1) semi-structured interviews with the director as a main key informant and teachers; and (2) informal dialogues and fieldnotes, which the researcher's recorded from observations and activities during the fieldwork such as chatting with teachers and students in the cafeteria, attending the director's lecture, observing a demonstration of the director's teaching methods, and discussing with visitors from other schools who were visiting the Bannongkae school during my fieldwork. Both research instruments were reviewed and suggested by two educational sociologists and an anthropologist from the field of English language. The validation of qualitative result in this study employed peer debriefing and member checking.

The analysis in this study is based on analytical framework with an iterative process of reduction, synthesis, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The initial step of data analysis started with transcribing the interviews and reading through all materials. Data were, then, categorized with inductive and deductive codes from emerging raw data, the literature, and the theoretical framework. Thus, identifying and explaining themes of this study was an attempt to elucidate how the Bannongkae school as a peripheral school could succeed in English literacy, and how their students could continuously receive high scores on the O-NET English test over the past 6 years.

Ethical Approval

The proposal for this study was approved by the office of the Institutional Review Board, Naresuan University (NU-IRB) on April 3, 2023 (Certificate of approval no. P2-0068/2566).

Findings

The findings section is divided into three main themes: (1) Naowarat's approach as "decolonizing" traditional practices of teaching literacy; (2) its breakthrough beyond poverty, educational inequality, and dependency; and (3) transformative practices based on educational perspectives.

Naowarat's approach as decolonizing traditional practices of teaching literacy

Regularly, this theme would emerge in the observational data of both the directors and teachers. Here, I will start with a short life-story of the current director of Bannongkae school from my fieldnote before explaining Naowarat's approach which led to decolonizing practices of teaching Thai and English literacy of this peripheral school from the conventional practices in teaching Thai and English literacy as dictated by the ministry's guidelines.

Since 2016, Naowarat Thawon has been the director of Bannongkae school, where she is a pioneer of innovative teaching methods to foster sustainable Thai and English literacy of grade 1-6 students, particularly in the rural context. Bannongkae school under Naowarat's wing was awarded the Best Practice School in the small-sized school tier by the Basic Education Commission in 2017. In the awarding ceremony, the Thai prime minister praised her educational practices through a national television program. Since then, hundreds of nation-wide schools, especially private schools, have expressed their interest in Naowarat's literacy practices. Consequently, the director has to arrange the lecture and demonstration of her pedagogical strategies every Friday, both on-site and online. Additionally, Naowarat has developed functional learning materials, such as flash cards with colorful letters and phonics books both in Thai and English. These materials are strikingly

different from typical books and exercises used for Thai and English literacy in primary schools throughout Thailand.

Naowarat was a former physical education teacher who had a negative attitude towards English during her time as a young student at a Catholic school in Western Thailand. Partly, this was due to failing grades and punishment from her English teacher. After completing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology from Srinakarinwirot University in 2006, Naowarat was assigned by her former school director to prepare students for the O-NET test. Initially, she used a hit-and-miss method striving to prepare her students for the test, as she was unsure how to improve their Thai and English literacy skills. Consequently, Bannongkae school's O-NET scores ranked almost last that year. Accordingly, Naowarat began restudying English with a Phonic English course, purchasing English language learning books, and consulting with Thai and Australian friends who were English teachers about the nature of pronunciation in English. Reading self-improvement books encouraged Naowarat to develop a growth mindset and believe in her ability to learn English. As explained above, she began to observe and address Thai and English literacy problems in her classrooms at the root level seriously since 2013.

Shortly, Naowarat had developed a teaching method for Thai students to succeed in English literacy by using a mother language-based approach, which connected and transferred phonic sounds from Thai to English. She believed that students must start first with reading and speaking their mother tongue, Thai. To help students learn Thai more effectively, Naowarat reconstructed the sound of Thai consonants and adapted a new process of learning. For example, the traditional sound of "ນ" is "gor-gai," which is applied to "gor," and the traditional sound of "ຸ" is "khor-kai," which is applied to "khor," and the traditional sound of "ຈ" is "ngo-ngu", which is applied to "ngo," and so on.

To reduce students' cognitive load, teachers should not attempt to teach all consonants, vowels, and tones simultaneously. The Thai language has 44 consonants, 32 vowels, and 4 tones. Instead, they should select some simple consonants and vowels to lead learning vocabularies in word lists that were identified by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Ministry of Education, Thailand.

The most significant technique in Naowarat's approach is the use of colors to identify different letter roles in Thai words. Naowarat and her staff found that students struggled to differentiate between letter roles in a word, as Thai words are composed of consonants, vowels, final consonants, and tones. Therefore, she developed a color-coding system for letters, which can affect student's recognition and is more attractive than using only one color throughout a book, such as black. The color codes of Naowarat's method are: black for consonant; red for vowel; blue for final consonants; and green for tones (Figure 1). The practicum of reading color-coded letters is set by fixed order: reading aloud the

technique, starting with black, followed by red, blue, and green letters. This reading pattern promotes young learners' sense of amusement, their attitude toward learning language, and their trust of teachers. By following this technique, thereafter students could read all the Thai words in her word lists with ease.



Figure 1 Naowarat's phonics method by using a color-coded system

Note: Reprinted from "Public relation of Bannongkae School", by Thawon, N. 2022, August 27. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/bannongkaschool/photos/>

Naowarat not only improved Thai literacy, but English literacy too. She emphasized the connection between Thai phonics and English phonics. For example, the "ນ" in Thai is transformed from "gor" (ກອ) into "ger" (ເກອະ) as "/g/"; while "ບ" (bor) (ບອ) becomes "ber" (ເບອະ) as "/b/"; and "ຟ" (for) is changed to "fer" (ເຟອະ) as "/f/". To facilitate this process, Naowarat has produced practice books that utilize color-coded letters (see figure 2).

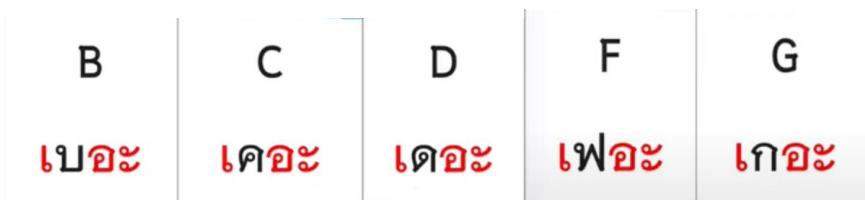


Figure 2 Connection between Thai phonics and English letters in Naowarat's model

Note: Reprinted from "English vocabulary reading practice 1", by Thawon, N., 2021, p. 1, Chonburi, Thailand: Chonburi Printing.

Naowarat's approach to English literacy is slightly modified by incorporating the using of numbers, which are subscripted with English vowel letters. A color-coded system is still employed in the presentation of consonant phonemes. Given that "a/A" as a vowel letter in English can be pronounced in four different sounds in Thai (ເອ [ə], ເອ [ɛ], ແອ [ɔ], and ແກ [ɑ]), students are thus taught to remember how to pronounce English vowel letters

through a combination of numbers and mnemonics. For instant, “ a_1 ” represents “ແອ” [/ $\ddot{\text{a}}$ /], “ a_2 ” represents “ເອ” [/ ɛɪ /], “ a_3 ” is “ອອ” [/ o /], and “ a_4 ” is “ອາ” [/ a: /]. With the mnemonics technique, students can foster their memory retention; and they are encouraged to link English vowel letters with numbers and Thai vowel letters, phonics, and meaning such as reciting that “ແມ (as a_1) ເສ (as a_2) ພອ (as a_3) ສາ (as a_4)”. Meaning that “ແມ” [/ mæ: /] refers to “mommy,” “ເສ” [/ hɛɪ /] refers to “to enjoy,” “ພອ” [/ pɔ: /] refers to “daddy,” and “ສາ” [/ ha: /] refers to “to laugh” (Figure 3).

a1 ออກເສີຍເປັນ ແອະ ແອ	ເທກນີກາຣຈຳຄືວ ແມ່ = ສະແອ
a2 ออກເສີຍເປັນ ເອ	ເທກນີກາຣຈຳຄືວ ເສ = ສະເອ
a3 ออກເສີຍເປັນ ອອ	ເທກນີກາຣຈຳຄືວ ພອ = ສະວອ
a4 ออກເສີຍເປັນ ອະ ອາ	ເທກນີກາຣຈຳຄືວ ສາ = ສະວາ

Figure 3 Connection phonics between Thai and English vowel letters in Naowarat's model

Note: Adapted from “*English vocabulary reading practice 5*”, by Thawon, N., 2021, pp. 3-4, Chonburi, Thailand: Chonburi Printing.

In her approach, Naowarat applied an underline (_) of syllables to signal word stress such as “apple” and “banana”. This technique is also combined with using vivid pictures in her books. However, the positions of numbers change slightly from subscription to superscription in her intermediate level book (as shown in figure 4). Naowarat's strategy is that learners must pronounce the final sound of words with an English or American accent; for instance, reading the word “cat” by spelling it out as “c (kor) at (at) cat”. Once students can read English words fluently using symbols (underline, colorful pictures, numbers, and color-coded phonemes), these symbols will be eliminated and replaced with traditional representations of black text for both Thai and English words. Finally, students can read vocabularies and are able to progress autonomously to reading sentences, paragraphs, and short stories.



Figure 4 Using underline, colorful picture, numbers, and color-code letters in Naowarat's books

Note: Reprinted from "English vocabulary reading practice 6", by Thawon, N., 2021, p. 5, Chonburi, Thailand: Chonburi Printing.

As such, Naowarat's approach differed immensely from traditional teaching styles which do not use techniques such as color-coding letters, numbers, underline, as well as a mother tongue language to transfer phonic sounds between Thai and English language.

Breakthrough beyond poverty, educational inequality, and dependency

In this section, the researcher explores whether poverty, educational inequality, and not being under a direct colonial power have had an impact on English literacy of peripheral students. Initially, with my experiences in teaching and monitoring pre-service student teachers studying English, I found that students tend to attribute the causes of failures of English literacy in peripheral schools with socio-economic factors and the teaching method of English teachers. Moreover, most of the pre-service student teachers believed that English literacy also depends on factors such as educational systems, national curriculum, school management, parenting styles, family's poverty, caring of parents, or even the kindergarten teacher of students. Nonetheless, previous research has revealed that failures of learning English and O-NET scores in English were the effect of several factors: low socio-economic status of the family, small-sized/peripheral schools, shortage of school resources, inaccessibility of information through the internet, lack of teachers, and unequal distribution of teachers' workload (Linjaroen, Ardwichai, & Chanin, 2009).

Unmistakably, these factors of failures cannot threaten a peripheral school. The empirical phenomenon of Bannongkae school [where Naowarat accomplished lifting rural students' Thai and English literacy over 19 years] proved that coping with this literacy problem is possible without eliminating those exogenous factors, for example, poverty of students' family, educational inequality, and not being under a direct colonial power. In Naowarat's perspective, the primary role of being a teacher is to enhance students'

potential to become self-directed learners, and use English to explore and acquire knowledge globally through social platforms by their own selves, in accordance with the educational policy of subsidizing high-speed internet for government schools. Even though some children might not know their own needs or occupational purposes in the future, Naowarat' English literacy practices help them to their identity, career path, or academic skills.

A student asked me about mathematics and how other schools in other countries teach the “addition” [in mathematics]. I said if you know “addition” in English, you can use this word to search on YouTube. After that, she tried and discovered that foreign mathematics teachers also taught addition similar to her Thai teacher. In another example, a boy seemed to be interested in being a mechanic, I encouraged him to search social media. He knew the job title “motorcycle mechanic,” and from there he learnt of its anatomy.

Field note, 9 March 2023

Despite being a small-sized government school with problems such as lack of annual funding, limited human resource, and officiating new staff with unrequired major, Naowarat as the school director discovered how to manage limited resources in her school with high profits. As a result, Naowarat can productively develop human resources by guiding teachers (from all majors) about her Thai and English literacy approach. Succinctly from their interviews, Bannongkae school's teachers are trained by Naowarat and her staff to teach learners with Naowarat's approach.

Even if our teachers graduated from other majors such as Computer, Social Studies, or Physical Education, they have the same characteristic. It is the spirit of being a teacher. Then, I try to cheer up and encourage them to improve their teaching. If I could do that, they can also succeed. Finally, they can teach Thai and English literacy with my methods. They are aware that the teachers are important for the learning of the primary students.

Field note, 15 June 2023

Equally important, non-human resources in the school, such as old buildings and places, were renovated by financing project of her academic services for other schools and educators such as lecture for administrators in private schools and retailing innovative books and materials.

When I interviewed her about whether being not a former colony or being poor can be a significant barrier of English literacy for Thai students, Naowarat opined that being not a former colonial nations is not a hinderance to developing English literacy of her students or herself. But it is undeniably that, the socio-economic status of parents could be a structural problem of education in Thailand. Nevertheless, Naowarat believed that teachers should not

be trapped in poverty issues and should not overexaggerate the effect of social classes of parents on students' English literacy.

Transformative practices based on educational perspectives

From my participant observation, the phenomenon of Bannongkae school could be interpreted into the perspective of educational psychology. And it is arguable that Naowarat's approach was based on developmental psychology and learning theory, especially in brain development with learning English before 7 years old. Since the synaptic pruning of students would develop when they are between preschooler and grade two, teachers need to pique their interests in knowledge of addition and skills about English phonemes, phonics, and vocabularies by using Naowarat's techniques that can improve students' long-term ability to remember information: i.e., using a color-coding system, numbers, mnemonics, underline, and imagery, including rehearsal and connection between Thai and English phonics sounds.

Theoretically, these techniques are usually explained under "cognitivism," which is a learning theory that focuses on the human process of storing and retrieving information in their brains (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Naowarat's approach has cut through students' preoperational thought and limitations of primitive reasoning in early childhood's cognitive development (Piaget, 1964), by reducing incomprehensive explanations of linguistics and phonology in teaching literacy to learners' cognitive load. Furthermore, the self of initiative and industry were cultivated in learners through promoting educational and social competence by teachers and school environments (Erikson, 1963).

In short, teachers' roles in the school with a growth mindset in the field of positive psychology helped students transcend their limited conditions. Naowarat believed that teachers should teach literacy productively and create the positive atmosphere in their classrooms in the manner of a professional teacher who can sing, dance, and tell stories.

Why do Thai teachers in small-sized schools seem to be so tired? Actually, teachers are fatigued because they complain of bad student behavior too much, spending their energy with complaining that cannot change students' behavior and attitude toward subject matters. Our effort that we did is worthy of learners. Our students are comparable to the tree roots that must be strong in order to be alive!

Field note, 15 June 2023

Noticeably, teachers viewed their struggle with teaching rural students as a challenge and opportunity to grow. Consequently, the multiple results manifest tangibly not only in O-NET results, but self-directed learners, financial and material promotion from the government, and connection with other schools.

Discussion and conclusion

Almost ten years after Naowarat's management in fostering students' literacy competence, this peripheral school proceeded to enhance their educational equality by employing theoretical concepts and perspectives of sociology and education. According to Zehner's (2017) and Teeraeak's (2017) suggestions, Bannongkae school is the educational lifeworld as a successful local school model in Thailand. Evidently, the overall findings from this study have shown that Bannongkae school, as a peripheral school, could succinctly emancipate rural students from Thai and English illiteracy to a noted level of literacy through strategies and techniques of cognitivism. Furthermore, Naowarat's educational practice could surmount poverty, educational inequality, and a colonial discourse in improving their disadvantaged students. Naowarat's Bannongkae model is inspiring and deserves praise, but it does not get rid of the structural obstacles to achieve high quality education built-in the system. This research believes that we can learn from Naowarat and her school in order to push for structural change. Nevertheless, it is still important to emphasize the structural change, such as decentralization, redistribution of resources, and liquidation of the one-size-fit-all curricula.

In the first theme of the result, we found that Naowarat's approach and materials productively emancipated her rural students from illiteracy both in Thai and English, and helped them empirically grow in their achievement of the English standard test for Thai primary students. Evidently, these students are liberated from irrational practices which had long dominated their inculcation through using complete Western frameworks for Teaching English as a Second Language English (ESL) or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). According to Habermas (1987), the decolonized phenomenon of Bannongkae school as an educational lifeworld reflected that Naowarat and her staffs survive the inevitable oppression of the educational system. Additionally, Bannongkae school can flow and overcome the educational policy, i.e., the Ministry of Education requires the schools in Thailand have to apply for O-NET test but many schools elude this test. Conversely, Bannongkae school addresses the problem of Thai and English illiteracy of students, and has achieved its O-NET test's high average scores in English subject for 7 years.

For the second theme, it is evident that Naowarat refused to surrender to educational inequality, poverty, and a colonial discourse which could be defined with Andre Gunder Frank's dependency theory. In other words, the educational lifeworld of Thailand's rural schools is comparable to the periphery that largely depended to the core's distribution of its wealth and resources in an unequal relation, especially when the elite schools would like to maintain their educational resources and are not willingly to allocate them to small/peripheral schools (Eawsriwong, 2019). Nevertheless, Bannongkae school is able to

suppress their difficult condition and achieve its independence from educational bondage, notably through Naowarat's approach.

The third theme can be understood by looking through Jerome Bruner's perspectives of constructivism and discovery learning (Bruner, 1961). It is evident that Naowarat's practice helps students discover concepts or patterns of connecting to their experiences, e.g. guiding students to use English keywords in searching for knowledge and experience on YouTube. Naowarat's evaluations and assessments of English literacy in learners is intentionally asking for meaning of English letters or vocabularies with randomly unstructured patterns. And Naowarat and her staff would devotedly ask students to do their homework in the summer by using the LINE application to assign, demonstrate, and follow up on their progress.

As explained by Appleton et al. (2006) that developed a self-processes model and applied it to educational settings, this process of self-determination in an educational context might help elucidate Bannongkae school's theoretical setting. In short, Naowarat's approach helps both at a school and student level increase the autonomous processes in students; then the cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagements would emerge in students and lead to their successful learning outcome.

Through these educational psychology perspectives, Naowarat's transformations matched precisely with Mezirow's transformative processes (Mezirow, 2008, 2012): disorienting dilemmas of struggling with educational inequality in Thai society, critical reflection of her beliefs and abilities about English, improving her English skills and teaching literacy for rural students, sharing teaching problems with her colleges, encouraging and training staff to teach literacy, and promoting and integrating her approach with other primary schools in Thailand. In other words, Naowarat Thawon is literally a successful transformative educator in a peripheral school hidden in a pocket of Thailand.

To sum up, emerging decolonization of this peripheral school in a developing country such as Thailand is viable and breaks through the traps of poverty and unequal distribution of educational resources. This model is a classical salvation of sustainable educational development, thus educational policy-makers should reconsider using the educational philosophy of essentialism which seems to be ignored in Thailand's education reform as implemented by the National Education Act (NEA) in 1999. Most of all, educators should teach the basic skills of Thai and English literacy in peripheral students to accomplish the standard of global basic education, before applying a learner-centered approach that might be unsuitable for the context of rural students in Thailand.

Research Grant

This research was funded by Faculty of Education Naresuan University 2023 Research Grant (EDU2566-T12).

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