

English and education in Thailand's Deep South (TDS)

A summary of two primary research investigations into policymaker, practitioner and beneficiary attitudes, challenges, needs and priorities



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Introduction

This report provides a summary of two research projects that were funded by the British Council in 2024 on English and education in Thailand's Deep South (TDS). This summary aims to give a brief insight and overview of the two research teams' work. The authors' original reports should be referred to for citation and further enquiry, and are available upon request.

Languages play a crucial role in teaching and learning. The Bangkok Priorities for Action on First Language-based Multilingual Education (UNESCO, 2023) emphasise how education systems can be strengthened, and student achievement supported through a careful and context-specific approach to languages of learning and teaching (LoLT). Increasingly, the focus has been on the importance of first language-based multilingual education and its staging, impact on learning outcomes, as well as the value of respecting, celebrating and harnessing learners' multilingual identities and competences (UNESCO, 2025). As part of an expanding circle nation, where English is recognised as an international language, Thailand is committed to the development of English as a foreign language. Thailand, like many other Southeast Asian nations, is linguistically diverse. Thailand's Deep South (TDS), which includes the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and four districts of Songkhla Province, presents a unique educational, multicultural and multilingual landscape (UNICEF, 2016). The region has a predominantly Muslim population that primarily speaks Pattani-Malay as their first language, sometimes referred to as 'Southern Thai Malay', and contains more Thai loanwords (and fewer English loanwords) than other variants of Malay. However, Thai and Arabic are also dominant languages in the region, in addition to Melayu (Bahasa Melayu) or standard Malay. There is also diversity in terms of the script used, for example, Classical Malay uses Jawi script and Standard Malay uses both Jawi and Rumi scripts (Samoh & Premssirat, 2021). It is important to highlight that Thailand appears on the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)'s list of State-Based Conflict-Affected Countries (Obermeier & Rustad, 2023). TDS has been profoundly affected by over two decades of ongoing political unrest, rooted in a complex mix of historical, ethnic, religious and political factors, particularly involving the Malay-Muslim population (Binmhadnee et al., 2016; Pherali, 2021).

This unrest has led to a significant loss of life and injury which has contributed to socio-economic marginalisation and isolation in TDS. The conflict, driven by tensions between nationalist and separatist movements and the perceived erosion of Malay-Muslim identity, has not only exacerbated the ethnic and religious divide but also significantly disrupted access to resources and logistics. As a result, the region faces persistent educational inequality, with schools struggling to operate effectively amid the instability and violence (Pherali, 2021; Uddin et al., 2023). Consequently, the region is often viewed as a dangerous zone. The educational system in this region is diverse, featuring Tadika (basic Islamic education centres), Pondok (Islamic religious schools), Islamic private schools and government schools. Each institution maintains distinct cultural and educational philosophies, especially concerning language education. While the global significance of English is undeniable, its role in the multilingual and culturally diverse context of TDS is complex and compelling. In Tadika and Pondok, formal English language education is typically absent from the curriculum, leading to intriguing discussions about the community's views on and aspirations for the English language. Conversely, in Islamic and government schools where English language teaching (ELT) is part of the curriculum, different dynamics affect how English is perceived and valued. This diversity provides a valuable opportunity for exploring how various educational and cultural contexts shape attitudes towards learning English.

The two projects described in this report aimed to address the need for knowledge into the educational landscape of both education in general and English language education in particular in conflict-affected TDS. This report synthesises the findings from the two projects and provides implications of the findings with insights for policy and practice. The original reports elaborate and delve more deeply into the areas highlighted in this summary and are available upon request. Our thanks go to the named authors of these reports and to the people in the TDS of Thailand who provided such important insights and impressions.

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Executive summary of project 1: Education landscape and English language education priorities in Thailand's Deep South: Voices from policymakers

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This qualitative research explores the perspectives of policymakers in TDS on fostering inclusive, high-quality education, particularly in relation to ELT and the ongoing two-decade insurgency. The study highlights the critical need for education policies that are inclusive and contextually tailored to the unique challenges of this conflict-affected, culturally diverse region. The study pursued two main research aims: first, to explore the priorities of TDS policymakers for inclusive and high-quality education; and second, to explore TDS policymakers' perspectives on English, ELT and the two-decade impact of the insurgency on ELT. Conducted in the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala, the study involved thirty key policymakers selected for their influence, cultural understanding and experience in TDS. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, with findings analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Findings

In terms of the priorities of TDS policymakers for inclusive and high-quality education, five themes emerged. First, policymakers stressed the need for inclusive, high-quality education that addresses the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students in TDS. Second, strategies were proposed to enhance education while respecting local customs and promoting equity. Third, prioritising educational interventions in conflict-affected areas was highlighted to maintain opportunities despite ongoing violence. Fourth, the need for improved infrastructure and resource distribution was emphasised to support effective learning. Finally, the importance of resilient, adaptable education strategies to address the challenges posed by the insurgency was underscored.

Regarding TDS policymakers' perspectives on English, ELT and the two-decade impact of the insurgency on ELT, five key themes were identified. First, English was seen as crucial for personal and regional development in TDS, offering opportunities for global communication, higher education and careers. Second, concerns about the disconnect between national ELT policies and TDS's specific needs highlighted the need for more relevant practices. Third, barriers to effective ELT were identified, including stakeholder roles, grammar-focused learning, lack of cultural content in teaching materials, insufficient integration of local culture, a shortage of qualified teachers, and the dominance of Thai in classrooms. Fourth, the study identified key success factors including leveraging loanwords, such as the words *besin* (Malay) and *basin* (English) or *slepas* and *slippers*, integrating Islamic cultural content, embracing multilingual contexts, and incorporating translanguaging pedagogy, student-centred

methods and technology. It also emphasised project-based learning, supportive classrooms, and peer interaction to enhance communication. Finally, the ongoing insurgency's impact underscored the need for conflict-sensitive, adaptable educational approaches that support local identity and global competencies.

Recommendations

1. Design ELT policies that are flexible and responsive to the unique cultural and linguistic contexts of the regions

ELT policymakers in TDS should prioritise the development of curricula that integrate local cultural elements in a dynamic and reflective manner, directly related to students' lived experiences. This approach is essential for creating an educational environment where students feel connected to the material, thereby enhancing their engagement and motivation to learn. This can be achieved through further engagement with ELT educational stakeholders, including policymakers, teachers, school administrators and students, along with support from the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC).

2. Encourage community engagement in the development and implementation of language policies

Policymakers should actively involve local communities in these processes to ensure that policies are contextually relevant and supported by those they impact most directly. The involvement of community members in the policymaking process helps to bridge the gap between national educational standards and local cultural realities. The study's findings demonstrate that when communities are involved, the resulting policies are more likely to be effectively implemented and sustained, as they resonate with the cultural and linguistic realities of the local population.

3. Provide better training and resourcing of teachers and administrators

Teachers and school administrators in conflict-affected regions are on the front lines of education, facing the daily challenges of delivering effective instruction amid ongoing instability and resource constraints. The study highlights the critical need for these educators to be equipped with the necessary tools, training and support to implement modern, student-centred teaching methodologies that are culturally relevant and adaptable to the local context.

Executive summary of project 2: The interplay of English language education in the Deep South of Thailand: Roles, challenges, needs and policy

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This study investigates the complex dynamics of English language education in Thailand's Deep South, focusing on the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. It employs a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with teachers, students, administrators and community leaders from various educational institutions in TDS, and a survey with English teachers, students and employers across the region. The primary aim of this research is to understand the current state of English language education in the Deep South of Thailand, particularly how it is influenced by local culture, language and socio-political factors. The study explores the roles of English within the region, the challenges faced by key educational stakeholders, and how well national language policies align with or diverge from the needs of local communities. Additionally, the study seeks to propose guidelines for further engagement and development of English language education in the region.

Findings

There are six main themes. Firstly, English is valued as a key tool for academic and professional advancement, particularly for communication in trade, commerce and higher education. However, its use in daily life remains limited, with Pattani-Malay, Thai and Arabic being the dominant languages. The majority speak Pattani-Malay as their first language (L1). Thai, being the official national language, is commonly learned as a second language (L2) for educational and commercial purposes. Meanwhile, English is typically a foreign language, becoming an L3, albeit with limited opportunities for practical application outside the classroom. Secondly, national English language education policies, such as national testing through the O-NET, fail to account for the region's unique cultural and linguistic context. These policies emphasise standardised assessment and overlook region-specific needs, contributing to a disconnect between national educational goals and local realities. Thirdly, schools in the Deep South face a shortage of qualified English teachers, limited access to resources and outdated teaching materials. Teachers struggle to balance exam preparation with communicative, student-centred instruction. Additionally, there is a strong reliance on traditional grammar-based methods, which hinder the development of real-world communication skills among students. Fourthly, while there are efforts to incorporate local cultural contexts into English instruction, tensions between local traditions and Western cultural aspects of English education create challenges. Teachers often face difficulties in reconciling local values with the content of English lessons, which can lead to resistance or disengagement from students. Fifthly, many schools, especially in rural areas, lack essential materials and technological

resources such as smart TVs, computers and updated English textbooks. This limits the ability of teachers to adopt modern, engaging teaching methods and hinders the overall effectiveness of English instruction. Finally, there is a pressing need for professional development opportunities for English teachers, who often face heavy workloads and limited support. The study highlights the importance of regular training, particularly in communicative language teaching and the use of digital tools, to improve teaching quality and student outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Develop region-specific tailored English language education policies

Develop policies to reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Deep South. Prioritise practical communication skills and provide more autonomy for schools to adapt curricula to local needs.

2. Improve teacher recruitment and retention

Offer competitive salaries, benefits and professional development opportunities to attract and retain qualified English teachers, both Thai and foreign. Focus on recruiting teachers with cultural sensitivity and an understanding of the region's unique context.

3. Enhance professional development

Provide ongoing training for teachers in communicative language teaching methods, digital pedagogy and culturally responsive practices. Ensure that professional development programmes are accessible and tailored to the specific needs of teachers in the Deep South.

4. Increase resource allocation

Invest in updated teaching materials, technological infrastructure and digital tools to improve the quality of English language instruction. Conduct needs assessments to ensure that resources are allocated to schools in the most underserved areas.

5. Foster community and cultural engagement

Encourage the integration of local cultural elements into English language instruction to make lessons more relevant and engaging for students. Develop culturally relevant teaching materials that celebrate local traditions and values while exposing students to global perspectives.

Education landscape and English language education priorities in Thailand's Deep South: Voices from policymakers

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Key priorities for inclusive and quality education

TDS policymakers cited many priorities, mostly on the religious, cultural and moral socialisation aspect of schooling but also on the economic returns. These included: ethical behaviour and a moral foundation for students in the region; integrating Islamic education with general education to ensure students' development of their strong moral and ethical foundation, enhancing their ability to make wise life choices; integrating cultural and religious aspects into the curriculum to make education more relevant and engaging for students, fostering pride and commitment; incorporating vocational education and life-skill training at an early age, to equip students with essential skills for their future careers and ensure a balanced approach between general education and vocational pathway; aligning education with local industry needs to prepare students for job opportunities right after graduation, thus contributing to local economic development; effective English communication skills; critical thinking and problem-solving skills; and digital literacy.

1. Strategies for enhancing inclusivity and quality

TDS policymakers emphasised the importance of aligning the curriculum with the local context and cultural diversity to enhance students' engagement and make education more relevant to their lives. They advocated for adjustments to the curriculum so that English and other subjects become integral to students' daily lives (OBEC's curriculum reform is ongoing), rather than just classroom topics. Involving the community and families in the educational process was seen as crucial for creating a supportive learning environment and enhancing education quality. Enhancing teachers' skills, particularly in English communication, was also seen as crucial for improving education quality, as it provides students with valuable real-world communication experiences.

2. Prioritising educational interventions in conflict-affected areas

The top priority in ensuring education access and quality was the safety of students and teachers, essential for continuous learning. Consequently, TDS policymakers stated that educational models must adapt to the instability in conflict zones by involving the community and parents to strengthen the learning environment during tough times. Additionally, flexible learning options and psychological support systems were cited as vital for maintaining educational quality despite ongoing instability. Moreover, policymakers stressed the importance of incorporating peace education into the curriculum to foster a culture of understanding and contribute to long-term conflict resolution. Furthermore, integrating technology and remote learning solutions was viewed as essential for minimising educational interruptions and ensuring that students can continue their studies despite physical barriers. Finally, it was stressed that students' psychological and emotional needs should be addressed.

3. Infrastructure and resource allocation

Stakeholders place a significant emphasis on the importance of infrastructure and resource allocation in ensuring effective education delivery in conflict-affected regions. They consistently highlighted that robust and well-maintained educational facilities are crucial for providing stability and safety to students in volatile environments. Infrastructure development is viewed as part of a holistic approach to education, where safe and conducive learning environments contribute significantly to the psychological well-being of students. Additionally, stakeholders believe that resource allocation should extend beyond basic necessities, incorporating modern tools and technologies that enhance the educational experience. There is a recognition that in today's context, especially in conflict zones, digital resources are essential to effective learning. Developing educational infrastructure is not merely about creating physical spaces but about establishing environments that foster learning and psychological well-being. This perspective is particularly critical in conflict zones, where students face significant stress, and having a safe, well-maintained place to learn can make a substantial difference.

4. TDS strategies for education in conflict-affected regions

Ensuring access to education was seen as vital by policymakers. To tackle these challenges, policymakers proposed several strategies, including improving teacher quality through continuous training and implementing conflict-sensitive education programmes. Continuing professional development was seen as essential in preparing teachers for the unique challenges posed by conflict. Furthermore, equipping teachers with specialised skills in conflict-sensitive education was viewed as crucial for effectively managing teaching and learning in environments disrupted by unrest. They also underlined the importance of creating safe learning environments by ensuring physical security, providing safe transportation, and establishing protected zones around schools. This can be implemented by engaging local community members in monitoring efforts by establishing a neighbourhood watch programme or involving parents and volunteers in keeping an eye on the safe zones during school hours. They mentioned how the need to ensure safety and continuity in education has fostered stronger collaboration between schools and the community, creating a supportive environment for students and teachers. They also underscored the importance of resilience and preparedness among students, teachers and the educational system, helping to mitigate the effects of future disruptions. Finally, the insurgency has prompted the creation of specialised educational programmes that provide psychosocial support and tailored curricula for students affected by the conflict, ensuring their educational needs are met.

Key findings on TDS policymakers' perspectives on English, ELT and the two-decade impact of the insurgency on ELT

1. The role of English in TDS

The findings from this study emphasise the critical role that policymakers in TDS attribute to English as both a tool for individual advancement and regional development. Policymakers in TDS view proficiency in English as essential for students to access global knowledge, secure scholarships and pursue better job opportunities. The ability to speak English is perceived as a way to transcend local constraints and access broader opportunities on a global scale, which aligns with global trends recognising English as a gateway to wider opportunities in non-native English-speaking regions. Moreover, the study reveals that TDS policymakers highlight the strategic importance of English in driving economic and social development. However, this focus on English for economic growth also raises concerns about reinforcing socio-economic inequalities.

2. Factors affecting ELT failure and success in TDS

A. Failure factors included: roles of stakeholders; overemphasis on grammar-based learning; cultural content in teaching materials; lack of integration of local cultural content; shortage of qualified teachers; and Thai language dominance in ELT classrooms.

From these factors, two excerpts from the interviews are especially telling. With regard to the roles of stakeholders, one policymaker reported:



When administrators and teachers don't truly value English education, it leads to a situation where students receive inconsistent and low-quality learning experiences. This results in students not developing the necessary language skills effectively, which can have long-term impacts on their academic performance and future opportunities.

Interview, Provincial Islamic Committee, Pattani



In terms of the lack of integration of local cultural content, one policymaker shared:



Honestly, when we teach English without incorporating local cultural knowledge, students tend to lose interest and motivation to learn. Without making connections to their own cultural experiences, the language feels less relevant, which can lead to disengagement and a lack of enthusiasm in the classroom.

Interview, Islamic Private School Administrator, Pattani

B. Success factors included: linguistic similarities between Malay and English; integrating Islamic cultural content in ELT; multilingual-cultural contexts; and incorporating translanguaging pedagogy.

3. TDS policymakers' views on the insurgency's impact on ELT

The two-decade-long insurgency in TDS has profoundly impacted ELT, causing severe disruptions that have led to school closures, safety concerns and a shortage of qualified teachers. The findings of this study indicate that these disruptions have directly affected the continuity and quality of education, contributing to a noticeable decline in English proficiency levels across the region. This decline is particularly troubling given that English is increasingly seen as essential for accessing broader educational and economic opportunities. The lack of consistent schooling and the absence of qualified teachers have meant that students in TDS are significantly disadvantaged compared to their peers in more stable regions. This aligns with previous research that underscores the negative impact of conflict on educational outcomes, particularly in language acquisition (Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011).

4. ELT opportunities arising from the insurgency

Despite these significant challenges, the findings also reveal that the ongoing conflict has driven resilience and innovation within the education sector. For example, educators in TDS have developed flexible, context-specific teaching methods to adapt to the challenging environment.

Recommendations

1. Flexible and responsive ELT policies tailored to regional, cultural and linguistic contexts of the regions in which they are implemented

The study's findings suggest that ELT policymakers in TDS should prioritise the development of curricula in all school types under OBEC that integrate local cultural elements in an authentic, dynamic and reflective manner, and in a way that is directly relevant to students' lived experiences. This approach is essential for creating an educational environment where students feel connected to the material, thereby enhancing their engagement and motivation to learn.

2. Encourage community engagement in the development and implementation of language policies

Policymakers should actively involve local communities in these processes to ensure that policies are contextually relevant and supported by those they impact most directly. The involvement of community members in the policymaking process helps to bridge the gap between national educational standards and local cultural realities. When communities are involved, the resulting policies are more likely to be effectively implemented and sustained, as they resonate with the cultural and linguistic realities of the local population.

3. Provide better training and resourcing of teachers and administrators

Teachers and school administrators in conflict-affected regions are on the front lines of education, facing the daily challenges of delivering effective instruction amid ongoing instability and resource constraints. The study highlights the critical need for these educators to be equipped with the necessary tools, training, and support to implement modern, student-centred teaching methodologies that are culturally relevant and adaptable to the local context.

The interplay of English language education in the Deep South of Thailand: Roles, challenges, needs and policy

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Key priorities for inclusive and quality education

NEEDS ANALYSIS

FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION (ELT) IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND



REGION-SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Develop and implement tailored ELT policies that prioritise practical communication skills, address the unique linguistic and cultural diversity, and allocate resources accordingly.



TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Implement a comprehensive strategy to attract and retain qualified teachers. Offer competitive salaries and benefits, provide professional development, create a supportive working environment, offer cultural sensitivity training for NESTs, and ensure safety measures.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

Provide regular and accessible professional development programmes to enhance English proficiency, pedagogical skills, and effective teaching methodologies.



INCREASED RESOURCES AND BUDGET ALLOCATION

Increase financial investment in English language education to address teacher shortages, update teaching materials, and enhance technological infrastructure. Provide up-to-date textbooks, supplementary materials, and access to digital resources.



PRACTICAL AND ENGAGING TEACHING METHODS

Shift to student-centred, communicative, and engaging approaches that emphasise real-world language use. Incorporate interactive activities, real-world scenarios, and technology-based tools.



INTEGRATION OF LOCAL CULTURES INTO ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

Incorporate local cultural elements into English language instruction while exposing students to diverse perspectives and global issues. Develop culturally relevant teaching materials and integrate local traditions into the curriculum.



BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Invest in technological infrastructure, provide access to online resources, and train teachers in digital pedagogy to create a more equitable and engaging learning environment.



SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Increase collaboration and support from both governmental and private sectors to address challenges and improve English language instruction. This includes funding, policy support, and partnerships to enhance educational outcomes.

Key findings from interviews with teachers, students, administrators and community leaders

1. Multilingual dynamics and the role of English

TDS is a region with high linguistic diversity, where Pattani-Malay, Thai and Arabic predominate, and there is a nuanced role of English amid these dominant languages. While English is not widely used in daily life, it is recognised as valuable for global communication, academic pursuits and other professional opportunities.

2. National ELT policies and their limited impact

There is a complex policy landscape, where national-level initiatives such as O-NET assessments coexist with a lack of region-specific policies. This results in limited impact on English proficiency, as national policies often prioritise other educational goals such as learning Thai and fail to address the unique context of the Deep South. For example, one teacher shared:



...even though I'm an English teacher, I was forced to teach Thai to these students. It's like this issue is the school's top agenda, not just at the school level, but also at the regional level!

Teacher, Public School, Narathiwat

3. Socio-economic and cultural barriers to English language learning in the Deep South

Multifaceted challenges hinder students' English language acquisition. These include limited exposure to English as it feels distant from their daily lives and community context, socio-economic disparities, negative perceptions of the language, and the predominant use of Thai as the medium of instruction. One factor that exacerbates this issue is the fact that while parents positively view English, students may feel Thai is more advantageous, and this could adversely affect student motivation in learning English:



English is super important for this generation, really, really important. The language will definitely provide many great opportunities for my kids in the future. They can get a good education, go to university in Bangkok, or even further their studies in other countries and have good careers with well-paid jobs.

Parent, Public School, Pattani



I'm not really concerned much about my daughter's grades in other subjects, but English! If she does well in English, I strongly believe she'll survive and do great things in life. You know, there aren't many opportunities here in the three provinces, no jobs, no work; the economy hasn't been very good. I don't want my daughter to suffer or be in a poor situation. If she can't find a job elsewhere, she can stay here and get a job as an English teacher in the province; it's a stable and good job.

Parent, Public School, Yala



When students know the teacher is Thai, they usually switch to speaking Thai in the classroom because they assume that since the teacher is Thai, they should be able to speak Thai as well. I've tried incorporating English in my lessons, but I found that most students struggle to understand, start skipping classes frequently, and eventually stop attending altogether.

Teacher, Public School, Narathiwat

4. The role and challenges of foreign teachers

There is a perception that teachers from countries where English is a native or official language could enhance the English language learning environment in TDS. However, this perception also links to the significant challenges of recruitment and retention due to security concerns, as well as cultural barriers for both teachers and students, with some suggesting potential benefits from recruiting teachers from Muslim-majority countries.

5. The critical shortage of Thai English teachers

There is a critical shortage of qualified English teachers in the Deep South, a crisis attributed to safety concerns, recruitment challenges, and a limited pool of local candidates. This shortage not only places significant burdens on the few existing teachers, who often face overwhelming workloads, but also compromises the overall quality of English language education in the region.

6. Barriers and aspirations for the professional development of English teachers

The need for ongoing professional development for English teachers is particularly acute. However, logistical challenges and heavy workloads as barriers to teacher participation in training programmes are key concerns.

7. Divergent approaches and real-world needs in English language instruction

There are contrasting approaches to teaching and learning of English, from practical communication skills to exam-focused instruction. This gap between school-based education and the real-world language needs of the community prompts parents to seek additional English classes outside of school.

8. Balancing English education with local cultural contexts

Educators in TDS are navigating cultural sensitivities while integrating English language instruction with local traditions. This approach aims to enhance the relevance and acceptance of English education while fostering cultural pride.

9. Resource challenges and innovations in English language teaching

The heavy reliance on government-approved textbooks and the financial constraints that limit teachers' ability to access or develop supplementary learning materials means materials and materials development is an obstacle.

10. The digital divide and technological barriers in English language education

The lack of technological resources and infrastructure, which hinders effective English instruction and creates an unequal learning experience compared to better-equipped regions, is a concern.

11. Stakeholders' call for external support

There appears to be a collective desire among educators, parents and community leaders for additional support from government and external agencies to enhance English language education. Stakeholders emphasise the need for language exchange programmes, teacher training and resources to address existing gaps in language proficiency and academic preparation.

Key findings from survey of English teachers, students and employers

1. Roles of English in the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand

English plays a significant role in TDS, not only as a global communication tool but also as a means for economic opportunities and educational advancement. Despite the prominence of Melayu, and students' prioritisation of Thai as their L2, English is still viewed positively by parents and stakeholders as essential for trade, commerce and higher education. However, integrating English into daily life and its relevance to local cultural contexts remains a crucial area for exploration. This aligns with its status as a global language necessary for international trade and academic pursuits (Keyuravong, 2010).

2. Policy of language education in the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand

The policy landscape governing language education in the Deep South of Thailand is characterised by ambiguity and inconsistency. Vague policies contribute to challenges in implementing effective English language instruction strategies. A comprehensive analysis of existing policies is necessary to understand their impact on educational outcomes and to propose targeted reforms that align with local needs and cultural diversity. The findings highlight the need for clearer and culturally responsive policies to improve English language education outcomes in the region. This aligns with the observations of Assalihee and Boonsuk (2022), Rattanayart (2007), and Binmhadnee et al. (2016), who noted that the national basic education core curriculum is overly broad and generic for Thai learners nationwide. They argue that some criteria do not appropriately match the multicultural context in which local students reside. Furthermore, implementing the core curriculum is particularly challenging in the three border provinces, where English learners often have low proficiency levels. However, it should be noted that the curriculum is currently being redeveloped and will soon be introduced by OBEC.

3. English language instruction in the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand

English language instruction faces numerous challenges in the Deep South, including varying levels of student proficiency and attitudes of students. The findings are in agreement with Binmhadnee et al. (2016), who found that most students who primarily speak Melayu hold negative attitudes towards using English. The shift from exam-oriented to communicative-based instruction is essential but requires substantial support in terms of teacher training, curriculum development and technology integration. The research uncovers challenges in delivering quality English language instruction, which is consistent with Intakaew (2017), who found that Thai students struggle with effective English communication because schools emphasise grammatical instruction and exam preparation rather than developing communicative skills, and Matahae (2016), whose study investigated the expectations and current conditions of English language learning and teaching in the three southernmost provinces. Matahae discovered that while attitudes are an issue, both teachers and students still have high expectations for English education, particularly in the areas of curriculum and content. They believe the English curriculum should enhance communicative skills and be relevant to the local context and societies of the three border provinces.

4. The integration of English language instruction and local cultures

Integrating English language instruction with local cultures is a complex yet critical aspect of education in the Deep Southern provinces. While promoting English proficiency, it is equally important to preserve and celebrate local cultural identities. Teaching methods that incorporate local traditions, values and languages into English lessons can enhance students' sense of identity and pride while facilitating cross-cultural understanding. The integration of English language instruction with local cultures highlights the importance of preserving cultural identities while promoting language learning. This includes understanding the relationships, similarities and differences between the languages and cultures of native speakers and Thai culture.

5. Materials and facilities of English language instruction

The availability and adequacy of materials and facilities for English language instruction vary significantly across schools in the Deep South. Many rural schools face challenges such as limited internet access, inadequate technology infrastructure (e.g. smart TVs, computers), and shortages of updated teaching materials. Conducting a thorough needs assessment is essential to prioritise resource allocation and enhance the quality of English education in underserved areas. The study supports the need for improved access to technological resources such as smart TVs and computers in enhancing English language instruction. These findings are consistent with Binmhadnee et al.'s study (2016), which revealed that Islamic private schools in the three Southern Border Provinces face a lack of adequate educational resources and support due to budget limitations.

6. English teachers in the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand

The shortage of qualified English teachers, both native and non-native speakers, is a critical issue affecting educational outcomes in the Deep Southern provinces. Teachers often face heavy workloads and limited professional development opportunities, and institutions and schools struggle to attract and retain personnel, leading to

turnover and attrition largely due to the region's socio-political environment. Strategies to attract and retain skilled educators, including improved incentives and professional support, are essential for sustaining effective English language programmes. These findings are in line with Binmhadnee et al. (2016), who cited shortages of teachers with specialisms as an issue.

7. Professional development of English teachers in the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand

Professional development for English teachers is crucial for enhancing teaching practices and improving student outcomes. However, limited financial resources and access to training opportunities pose significant barriers. Initiatives such as workshops, seminars and ongoing training programmes tailored to local contexts and needs can empower teachers to enhance their English proficiency and adopt innovative teaching strategies. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, educational institutions and private sectors are essential to support continuous professional growth among educators. The findings are consistent with Binmhadnee et al.'s (2016) results, which revealed that Islamic private schools lack sufficient educational resources and support due to budget constraints, impacting the professional development of English teachers in the Deep South of Thailand.



Recommendations

1. Develop region-specific tailored English language education policies

These policies should reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Deep South. Prioritise practical communication skills and provide more autonomy for schools to adapt curricula to local needs.

2. Improve teacher recruitment and retention

Offer competitive salaries, benefits and professional development opportunities to attract and retain qualified English teachers, both Thai and foreign. Focus on recruiting teachers with cultural sensitivity and an understanding of the region's unique context.

3. Enhance professional development

Provide ongoing training for teachers in communicative language teaching methods, digital pedagogy and culturally responsive practices. Ensure that professional development programmes are accessible and tailored to the specific needs of teachers in the Deep South.

4. Increase resource allocation

Invest in updated teaching materials, technological infrastructure, and digital tools to improve the quality of English language instruction. Conduct needs assessments to ensure that resources are allocated to schools in the most underserved areas.

5. Foster community and cultural engagement

Encourage the integration of local cultural elements into English language instruction to make lessons more relevant and engaging for students. Develop culturally relevant teaching materials that celebrate local traditions and values while exposing students to global perspectives.



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