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Enhancing Thai Elementary Students' English and Maintaining Thainess Using Localized Materials: Two Putative Confronting Forces

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Abstract

In Thailand, concerns over the imperative need to improve its citizens' English proficiency and the unsatisfactory English learning outcomes have long been present. In addition, ongoing globalization has raised another concern that Thainess is being eroded due to external influences. This study attempted to compromise these two seemingly conflicting forces by enhancing Thai students' global English and maintaining local Thainess associated with three regions of Thailand. First, a set of instructional innovations for elementary English education was constructed in each region. These were based on prominent characteristics of local Thainess elicited through a questionnaire completed by local community members and subsequently implemented in Grade 4 classes at three schools in each region of Thailand for ten weeks. Next, two separate sets of pretests-posttests corresponding to each instructional set were constructed and administered to assess their local Thainess and English knowledge. Finally, to ensure that the knowledge gained from the instruction was put into practical use, a tour guide simulation task was conducted by the students. The analysis of the test scores demonstrates that localized lessons were beneficial, enhancing their local Thainess knowledge and associated English vocabulary. The accomplishment of the task thus represented their knowledge of local Thainess and English, contributing to a sense of pride

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in their nation and a sense of achievement in their English proficiency and instruction.

Keywords: Elementary education, English instruction, localized lessons, Thai identity, Thainess.

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to use English as an international language (EIL) in both global and local contexts has brought substantial attention to English language instruction. Thailand, thus, needs to confront a range of challenges to improve its citizens' English proficiency. In Thailand, the English language has been recognized as a core subject in schools, being a compulsory subject for all elementary education since the implementation of the 2001 Basic Education Core Curriculum or BEC 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2001). For nearly two decades, various reforms and strategies have been introduced across the entire paradigm to elevate the effectiveness of English language instruction in Thailand. Unfortunately, despite these continuous attempts, a sharp contrast between the imperative need to improve Thai citizens' English and their unsatisfactory performance has constantly been cited (Dili, 2017; Kaur et al., 2016). Specifically, the analysis of English proficiency conducted in 2020 by Education First (EF) reveals that Thailand's English performance remained at an unacceptable level. Among 100 non-native English-speaking countries participating in the survey, Thailand was ranked 89th and thus classified as a very low proficiency group (Education First, 2020).

In addition to the limited success in improving Thai citizens' English skills, the impact of global English on Thai national identity has inevitably emerged as another major challenge facing Thailand (Akkakoson, 2019; Kanoksilapatham, 2018; Kaur et al., 2016). As Kaur et al. (2016) remark, the overall educational reforms undertaken in Thailand were to accelerate the modernization of English education and preserve Thainess. In fact, preserving all aspects of Thai culture and wisdom has been established as one of the goals for students to achieve upon completing basic education (Ministry of Education, 2008). However, in reality, it is quite easy for young Thais to be subjugated by the rapid spread of global English and other western-based influences due to menacing globalization (Sangvanich & Chuppunnarat, 2018). English has infiltrated into the sphere of education and almost every aspect of Thai people's day-to-day activity in the urban areas. Most often, it appears in the guise of something that the younger generation finds more appealing, including films, popular music, and other forms of mass entertainment. It is commonly accepted that languages serve as carriers of culture (Johnson, 2009) and that both language and culture have a vital role to play in identity formation (Phan, 2008), it is not surprising to see more young Thai people these days, particularly those living in urban communities of Bangkok and major cities, being influenced by Western-imposed globalization, leading to a potential threat to Thai national identity.

Considering the challenges facing Thailand, the current study attempts to compromise the two seemingly conflicting forces by examining the role of English education in improving Thai students' global English while also maintaining Thainess using localized instructional materials. Specifically, this study aims to assess learners'

local Thainess and English knowledge and their ability to integrate the knowledge gained in a tour guide simulation task. With the assumption that elementary education is the foundation of all educational paradigms and thus the ideal place to start improving the outcomes of English education (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2019), the objective was accomplished through the implementation of local Thainess-based instructional innovations to Grade 4 classes across three different regions of Thailand for ten weeks. The lessons were constructed based on prominent characteristics of local Thainess as voiced by community members. Two similar sets of pretests-posttests on local Thainess and associated vocabulary were constructed and subsequently administered to determine the impact of the lessons on the students' knowledge of English and Thainess. A tour guide simulation task was also administered to determine whether the students could use the knowledge gained from lesson implementation in a practical and authentic communicative setting. Based on the test scores and execution of the tour guide simulation task, this study provides valuable insights into how the two putatively confronting forces could be integrated and addresses the dire need to ameliorate young Thai learners' global English and instill local Thai identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Elementary English Education in Thailand: Under-achievement and Hindering Factors

The English language has played an important role in the Thai educational system. A wide range of efforts, initiatives, and expensive educational reforms have been implemented to promote English language instruction. The imperative need to improve Thai citizens' English literacy was further strengthened when English was officially designated as the working language of ASEAN in 2007 (Crocco & Bunwirat, 2014). In response to this new challenge, the Ministry of Education, or MOE, tried to enhance the quality of English education in Thailand through the BEC 2008 (Dili, 2017) to satisfy the demands of globalization and to allow Thai students to keep up with the changing landscape of work and required 21st-century skills. As stated in the curriculum, the objectives of English language instruction have been geared towards communicative purposes (Kaur et al., 2016).

At the elementary level in Thailand, the MOE (2008) states that 40 hours per academic year (i.e., one hour per week) is allocated for English from Grade 1 to Grade 3, and 80 hours (i.e., two hours per week) from Grade 4 to Grade 6. Students who complete Grade 3 should be able to use simple sentences to communicate about themselves and matters around them with a vocabulary size of around 300-450 words. Additionally, they should possess the ability to produce the names and simple terms about festivals, important days, celebrations, and lifestyles of native English speakers. By Grade 6, students should be able to use both simple and compound sentences to communicate, with a vocabulary size of 1.050-1.200 words. They also need to be able to compare the similarities and differences between the festivals, celebrations, and traditions of native speakers and those of Thais. In line with this, a standard of English education based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) was adopted in 2014. Thai students are expected to reach A1 proficiency with

the ability to express themselves in English, using frequently used expressions in everyday situations by Grade 6.

Unfortunately, scrutiny of Thai elementary school students' English proficiency as depicted by a compulsory national standardized test (the Ordinary National Education Test or O-NET) indicates that the expected learning outcomes have long been underachieved. Over the past decade, the scores of the English O-NET have revealed a woeful gap between educational policy and actual outcomes. For example, in Figure 1, the sixth graders' English O-NET overall mean score of academic years 2009-2018 is 33.20 out of 100, with the highest mean score of 39.24 in 2018 and the lowest mean score of 20.99 in 2010. In fact, the English O-NET mean score of each year has been lower than the national expected minimum of 50 points (Mala, 2019). Although some improvements can be seen in certain years, these fluctuations are unquestionably indicative of the unmet goals of elementary English education.

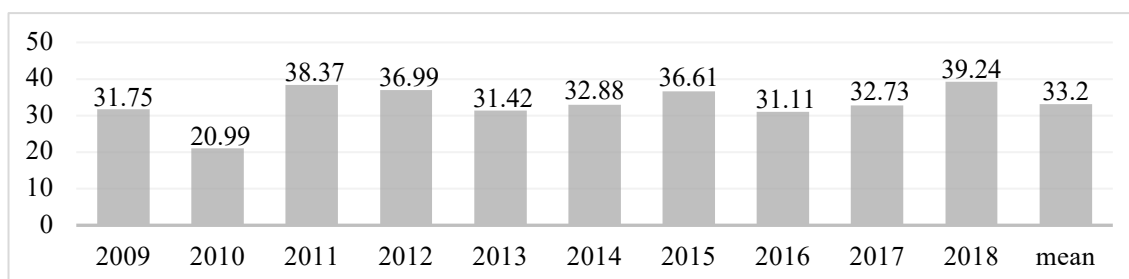


Figure 1. English O-NET English mean scores for elementary education 2009-2018 (Mala, 2019).

Several factors contributing to this undesired performance include students' lack of motivation, limited opportunity to use English outside the classroom, inadequate and inappropriate teaching materials, outdated approaches to teaching, and under-qualified teachers (Dili, 2017; Kaur et al., 2016). In relevance to this study, instructional materials deserve our special attention. According to Riazi (2003), textbooks are considered the next important factor for language learning after teachers because they determine what students are expected to learn. Consequently, textbooks need to be carefully constructed to meet specific educational aims while at the same time scaffolding students' knowledge acquisition (Widodo, 2018). Undoubtedly, the entire process of planning, developing, and revising textbooks addressing students' needs correspondingly in a curriculum is an extremely daunting task.

In Thailand, English language textbooks for elementary education prescribed by the MOE are commercial and designed for a wide variety of English language students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Since Anglo-Saxon writers typically write them, their content is mainly based on the cultural features related to the English language. On the one hand, these commercial textbooks can be used as an effective platform to introduce Thai students to English speakers' cultures. On the other hand, as recently observed by a number of educators (Kanoksilapatham, 2018; Lim & Keuk, 2018; Tomlinson, 2011), these commercial textbooks might not be appropriate for English language students, particularly the young. With their age and limited exposure to the English language, elementary students find it challenging to connect with the materials presented in commercial textbooks, impeding motivation to learn or appreciate the target language. To illustrate, the concept of Easter presented in an English textbook

might be easily understood and appreciated by young English students in urban communities of Thailand; however, this same concept could be quite foreign for young learners in the rural areas of Thailand. Therefore, it would be more beneficial for Thai students to learn English using teaching materials relevant to what they are already familiar with to facilitate the English learning process and instruction (Carson, 2019; Kanoksilapatham, 2018).

2.2 Potential Threat of Global English

As English is the dominant global language, every country has devoted considerable resources to English language instruction. Despite the various benefits, there are also notable concerns about the increasing hegemony of English against the speakers' first languages and cultures (Alfarhan, 2016; Hopkyns, 2014). Johnson (2009) states that languages are not only tools for communication but also “repositories of culture and identity” (p. 137). From this perspective, it is unlikely that someone can learn a language without accepting the culture that comes with it. Since English culture is based on the cultures of English-speaking countries, learning English is indeed the process of adopting to a certain extent the Anglo-American way of thinking, communicating, and even living. Similarly, Fiedler (2011) comments that there is an overlap between the role of global English as a “language for communication”, or “a native culture-free code used for practical communicative purposes”, and a “language for identification” in which a speaker learns to integrate into a speech community (p. 79). It can thus be concluded that the element of identification is present, even when the emphasis of using the language is on communication.

The conflicts between enhancing citizens' English and maintaining their own identity through English language learning are potential. For example, in the Arab Gulf countries, more people are ambivalent towards the spread of global English (Alzaben et al., 2019; Hopkyns, 2014). Furthermore, based on a survey conducted in the United Arab Emirates, the strong presence of global English tends to lead to an exacerbated feeling of cultural fragility. Among its effects on local culture and identity, Arabic loss, clothing and lifestyle changes, and desire to be like English speakers are exhaustively discussed (Hopkyns, 2014). However, despite its potential threat, it is widely agreed that the most practical way to diminish the subtractive effects of global English is not to restrict the learning process or remove Western cultural content from English language instruction. Instead, a sense of ownership towards the native language needs to be fostered and encouraged in English language students (Hopkyns, 2014; Lin, 2013). In support of this claim, Holliday (2014) proposes that English language students should “carry their own cultural experience into English and stamp it with their own identities”, instead of feeling anxious that English represents a culture that is incompatible with their own (p. 1).

In Thailand, this problem has also been a subject of discussion (Akkakoson, 2019; Hayes, 2016; Kanoksilapatham, 2018; Kaur et al., 2016). However, the degree of concern towards the potential threat of global English differs across groups of people. As Hayes (2016) states, most undergraduate students in his study readily subscribe to the economic value that English may have on their future careers, yet have very little sense regarding the effects that English may have on their Thai identity. For postgraduate students, positive feelings towards global English remain prevalent. They are still not aware of the concept of language ownership despite their confirmed

confidence that they can make other people recognize their Thai identity through English (Akkakoson, 2019). According to Oanh (2012), serious concerns over the potential risks resulting from an over-emphasis on English are more widely expressed among educators and policymakers who believe that measures should be implemented to maintain the Thai language and culture while developing the use of English as a common means of communication. It is time to reconsider or revise common practices related to English language instruction in Thailand to address these critical concerns. In alignment with other nations, Thai students should be encouraged to learn the English language connected with who they are, who they want to be, and whom they could become.

2.3 Benefits and Current Use of Localized Materials in an EFL Context

As previously mentioned, language and culture are intertwined, and language students cannot succeed if they are not aware of cultural features about the target language (Mishan, 2005; Schulz, 2007). However, this notion has recently been challenged by the rapid growth of EIL. Instead of relying solely on the cultures of English-speaking countries, it is widely believed that more diverse cultural content should be integrated into language teaching to encourage students to interact efficiently in multilingual and multicultural contexts (Chinh, 2013; Labtbc & Teo, 2020). This trend is also in agreement with what has been long proposed by scholars in material development that ideal textbooks should address the learners' community needs, featuring authentic materials, subjects, culture, and language (e.g., Tomlinson, 2011). Correspondingly, more and more non-native English-speaking countries are turning to the use of localized teaching materials constructed by situating English language learning within familiar cultural contexts. As exemplified by Mishan and Timmis (2015), the cultural content can be concrete (national events, landmarks, celebrities) or abstract notions (values, ambitions, family relationships). In Indonesia, for example, in accordance with the government's education policy, English teaching materials have incorporated folktales, myths, and legends, representing national heritage and culture (Irwansyah et al., 2019; Syahri & Susanti, 2016).

Pedagogically, localized materials are highly beneficial in facilitating students through learning a new language (Alptekin, 1993; Nault, 2006). As acclaimed by Alptekin (1993), the two types of knowledge contributing to the effective use of any language are systemic knowledge (the knowledge of the language) and schematic knowledge (the knowledge of content), which are concurrently developed, substantiating each other in language learning. Specifically, the students already bring the schematic knowledge associated with their native language and culture to the classroom in the Thai context. Therefore, if the instructional materials display cultural features of the target language which are incompatible with their schema, these learners are then forced to encounter a "double burden" (Khan, 2016, p. 99). That is, they are compelled to focus on both the language and content. To lessen the learners' cognitive burden, localized materials containing cultural content with which they are familiar can be beneficial, facilitating the learning process and focusing more on the language. In addition, as far as the potential threat of global English is concerned, the adoption of localized materials helps promote the students' sense of language ownership, minimizing the widely shared assumption that English learning is 'a double-edged sword' (Hopkyns, 2014). With the ability to use English in their own

context, the students are led to recognize English as an important instrument to exchange and share information associated with the native speaker norms.

The need for localized materials has been previously addressed in the Thai English language instruction context. Compatible with this view, Kanoksilpatham (2015, 2016, 2019) and Kanoksilpatham and Suranakkarin (2018) demonstrated that the culture-based English language textbooks allow Thai students to talk about their own culture to others through English. In these studies, Thai learners, especially the young, seem to benefit from localized materials connecting them to their communities. Despite this growing awareness, research in this area is still at a nascent stage, and more empirical studies are needed to verify these scholars' assertions. This study thus aims to highlight the dual role played by localized teaching materials in enhancing Thai students' global English and instilling local Thainess knowledge. As a large-scale study focusing on three regions across Thailand, this study complements previous studies by offering a complete picture of and empirical evidence regarding how localized English materials for elementary education can successfully enhance the learners' English language skills and strengthen their local cultural expertise, contributing to more authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

3. METHODS

This study adopted a pretest-posttest experimental design. The following sections present methodological details to address the concerns over the imperative need to improve Thai citizens' English proficiency and the erosion of local Thainess partly due to the influx of English.

3.1 School Contexts and Participants

This study covers three geographical regions of Thailand (i.e., north, northeast, and south), and each region was represented by four rural area public schools, each from a different province. The 12 public elementary schools were selected as research sites based on four major criteria. First, these schools had to be within possible commuting distance. Second, the schools had to participate in this research for the entire implementation period of 10 weeks. Third, the participating schools had to have the necessary basic technical equipment, including a computer and projector for presenting multimedia materials. Last, the schools needed to be flexible regarding the study hours and classroom time.

The participants consisted of 386 Grade 4 students (9-10 years old) from 12 selected public elementary schools located in different provinces of the three regions. Grade 4 students were purposefully chosen for two reasons. First, since English education in Thai public schools starts in Grade 1, Grade 4 students should have acquired the basic skills in English for this study to build on. Based on this generalized assumption, the students from 12 schools of the three regions were considered relatively homogeneous. Second, unlike students in Grades 5-6, Grade 4 students could focus more on this study because they were free from any national examination obligations or preparation. At this juncture, it should be noted that participating students in each of the 12 schools belonged to a pre-existing intact class with different

levels of English proficiency. As a result, the number of participating students in each school is different. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants in this study.

Table 1. Overview of participants.

Region	Number of students		Total number of students	Provinces representing each region of Thailand
	Male	Female		
North	69	70	139	Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Uttaradit, Phrae
Northeast	50	59	109	Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Roi Et, Mahasarakham
South	67	71	138	Trang, Songkhla, Pattani, Phatthalung
Total	186	200	386	

3.2 Instructional Innovation Development

3.2.1 Thainess-based lessons

Three sets of eight local Thainess-based lessons were developed. The lesson topics associated with the prominent characteristics of Thainess pertaining to each of the three local contexts were prepared to accomplish this objective. At this juncture, local Thainess encapsulates several features representing multiple cultural dimensions, including the art, history, geography, and architecture of each community. Given the relatively young age of the participants, tourist attractions were deemed most appropriate for the lesson topics, being concrete in nature and tangible cultural reference points. Based on an Internet search, three lists of 25-30 popular local tourist attractions were compiled and devised as three separate sets of questionnaires to be completed by residents in all provinces of the three regions. The respondents were asked to select eight of the given tourists' spots they felt represented their region. In short, 4,370 residents from 51 provinces (1,870 from the north, 1,100 from the northeast, and 1,400 from the south) were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires. Upon completion, the popularity of each tourist attraction was then recorded and ranked. The eight most popular sites were identified as the lesson topics, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Lesson topics.

Northern region	Southern region	Northeastern region
Phra That Doi Suthep Temple	Temple and Mosque	Ban Chiang
Rong Khun Temple	Islands in the South	Phanom Rung Stone Castle
Sukhothai Historical Park	Samila Beach	Pha Taem
Thai Elephant Conservation Center	Songkhla Zoo	Phra Thai Phanom
Bhumibol Dam	Cheow Lan Dam	Phimai Stone Castle
Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat Royal Temple	Khiriwong Village	Rocket Festival
Boraphet Lake	Emerald Cave	Bun Pha Wet
Khao Kho	Phromthep Cave	Candle Festival

Based on the chosen topics, eight English lessons for each region were developed, consisting of two parts: vocabulary and sentence reading. Given the significant role of vocabulary in language learning (Folse, 2011; Martinez, 2014), the first part of each lesson consisted of ten vocabulary items closely associated with the lesson content and essential to each lesson (Graves et al., 2014; Schmitt, 1997). Their corresponding L1 translation accompanied the words introduced; the practice was facilitating and beneficial (Joyce, 2015). The target words were deliberately recycled

in each lesson and across the lessons when appropriate and applicable to allow the students to review vocabulary as often as possible (Nation, 2001). For example, the word ‘temple’ initially appeared in Lesson 1 and reappeared in a number of subsequent lessons of the northern lessons.

Following the word list was a reading section comprising 5-7 English sentences totaling 60-80 words. The target words presented beforehand were included, allowing the students to practice and naturally contextualize the newly acquired words (McCarten, 2007; Nation, 2001). These sentences covered various details about each tourist attraction or lesson topic, including geographical details, historical accounts, and popular festivals. Precautions were taken to accommodate the young students’ limited English proficiency. For instance, all proper names were transliterated into Thai and placed in parentheses beside their English equivalents. In addition, certain language constructions (i.e., passive constructions, extraposed ‘it’ constructions, or complex sentences) were intentionally avoided. The lessons were finally validated by two Grade 4 English teachers in each region for their difficulty level and two native English speakers for language accuracy.

In addition to the lessons, colorful slides with animation and 10-minute video clips corresponding to individual topics produced at the actual sites were constructed to scaffold the students’ learning process. Furthermore, audio recordings at an appropriate speed for the students were created and inserted into the slides to partly compensate for the lack of exposure to authentic spoken English. Berk (2009) suggests that this incorporation of multimedia materials was intended to accommodate the learning needs of young students, who are likely to prefer visual learning. In addition, these multimedia materials allowed the young students to connect to the content they were learning, potentially facilitating language learning, and reinforcing their local culture. The Appendix illustrates Lesson 2 of the southern region, featuring *Samila Beach*.

3.2.2 Other instruments

In addition to the three sets of lessons described, other instruments were constructed: pretests and posttests on local Thainess and English vocabulary, handouts, and a scoring rubric for the tour guide task. Forty items of Thainess pretests and posttests written in Thai were generated from the eight lessons to assess the effectiveness of the instructional innovations regarding the students’ local Thainess knowledge before and after exposure. To exemplify, Figure 2 gives the English translation of the five test items generated from the lesson on *Pha Taem* or Painting Cliff, one of the famous tourist attractions in the northeast. As shown in Figure 2, the students were to complete the blanks in Thai.

<p>Pha Taem (Lesson 6): Northeast</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In order to conserve Pha Taem, the National Park Department has designated it as a _____. 2. Pha Taem is in the province of _____. 3. Pha Taem is a high cliff with a number of paintings about _____ years old. 4. The paintings found at Pha Taem are _____ in color. 5. Pha Taem is the spot that people can see _____ before anybody else in Thailand.
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Figure 2. Pretests and posttests on local Thainess.

In addition to the Thainess tests, similar English vocabulary pretests and posttests were developed to measure the students' English knowledge associated with their own region. Five items from each lesson yielded a total of 40 items. The tests focused on their ability to match the meaning (represented by the picture) with the word read aloud to them twice. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the students in the northern region were to choose the target word representing 'temple' from the four pictures. Both the Thainess and vocabulary tests were validated by two Grade 4 English teachers to verify that the tests were not too intimidating for Grade 4 students.



Figure 3. Vocabulary pretests and posttests.

A tour guide simulation task was administered to ensure that the students could practically integrate their Thainess and English vocabulary knowledge. Handouts with six colorful pictures associated with individual lessons were produced as visual clues to scaffold this task. A scoring rubric was constructed to assess the students' performance of this task. Table 3 shows a total of ten points for each tourist attraction divided into three components: 'Content' (4 points), 'Vocabulary' (4 points), and 'Intelligibility' (2 points). At this juncture, both content and vocabulary were considered essential because the task would not have been possible without these two components. In turn, without intelligibility, what was produced by the students would not have made sense. Given the students' age and limited opportunity to actively communicate in English, the expected outcome of the tour guide task was set at only 50 percent of the total score (i.e., 40 out of 80 for eight lessons).

Table 3. Scoring rubric.

Category	Scale	Scoring criteria
1. Content (4 pts)	0	No production of information related to the topic.
	1	One piece of information about the topic was mentioned.
	2	Two pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.
	3	Three pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.
	4	Four or more pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.
2. Vocabulary (4 pts)	0	No language output and no vocab produced.
	1	Minimal language output with the mastery of 1 word.
	2	A moderate amount of language with the mastery of 2 words.
	3	A substantial amount of language output with the mastery of 3 words.
	4	A satisfactory amount of language output with the mastery of 4 words or more.
3. Intelligibility (2 pts)	0	Language output contains no intelligibility due to no production of language.
	1	Language output can be understood with some difficulty.
	2	Language output can be understood with minimal or no difficulty.

3.3 Implementation and Assessment of the Instructional Innovations

The implementation of the instructional innovations covered ten consecutive weeks (two hours each) in a classroom setting. The first week was set aside to administer the two pretests on Thainess and English vocabulary (20 minutes each). Upon completion, an overview of the target region was presented, including the number of provinces in the region, certain keywords related to geographical information, and famous tourist attractions. The researchers subsequently delivered the eight lessons from Week 2 to Week 9. Common instructional procedures in each weekly class were as follows. First, the handouts were distributed to introduce the topic to the students. Then, the video clips were presented to provide additional visual input regarding the appearances of individual topic sites. After that, PowerPoint slides containing the vocabulary and sentences were projected onto a screen. Some strategies and activities were used during instruction, including repetition, drills, and games to highlight the pronunciation and meaning of the target vocabulary. As for the reading section, references to what the students had seen in the video clips were made to help them better understand the meaning of individual sentences. Different strategies were employed to reinforce the instruction, including asking the students to describe the pictures on each slide without looking at the handouts at the end of each class.

The students were required to complete three tasks on Week 10 to assess the effectiveness of the eight-week instruction: a Thainess posttest, a vocabulary posttest, and a tour guide simulation task. After completion of the posttests, each student performed the tour guide task of a given tourist attraction. With a set of six pictures for each tourist site in front of them, the students were encouraged to integrate their local Thainess and vocabulary knowledge to perform the tour guide role. The students were allowed to describe the pictures in any order with no time limit. Upon completion of a topic, the students were free to proceed to any new topic they desired.

Four researchers from each region served as assessors for individual topics to assess the students' tour guide task performance. In addition, to ensure inter-assessor scoring consistency using the constructed rubric, the assessors independently watched and graded recordings of eight students voluntarily performing the tour guide task from Lesson 2, describing the pictures seen on the slide in front of the class. The high inter-assessor agreement (96%) suggested congruency among assessors and confirmed the feasibility of the rubric.

3.4 Data Analysis

Three data sets were collected: the Thainess pretest and posttest scores, the English vocabulary pretest and posttest scores, and task scores of tour guide simulation. The pretests and posttests on local Thainess and vocabulary were marked. For the Thainess test, spelling was not penalized if the answers were comprehensible. The Thainess and English vocabulary test scores from the four schools in each region were similarly analyzed using descriptive statistics. As described earlier, given the students' different levels of English proficiency, a normal distribution of their test scores could be assumed. Therefore, a paired-sample *t*-test was conducted on the students' mean scores in each region to determine whether their performance before and after the lesson exposure was significantly different. For the tour guide simulation task, the students' total tour guide scores from the four schools in each region were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Finally, the overall scores and the scores on each rubric component were analyzed to provide a comprehensive picture of students' tour guide task performance.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Local Thainess Knowledge

Based on the Thainess pretest scores in Table 4, the students' mean scores in the north, south, and northeast were 6.36, 6.50, and 4.22, respectively (out of 40). These numbers indicate that the students across the regions of Thailand, particularly before exposure to the instruction, generally displayed minimal local Thainess knowledge. Some students even had no knowledge of tourist sites in their region.

Table 4. Pretest scores on Thainess knowledge (40 points).

	Northern region	Southern region	Northeastern region
Minimum	0	1	0
Maximum	15	25	11
Average	6.36	6.50	4.22

Analysis of the posttest scores in Table 5 shows that the students' mean scores rose to 25.82, 17.49, and 24.93. Some students in the north and northeast achieved the full score of 40. The comparison of the pretest and posttest scores demonstrates that the students in all three regions performed much better after their exposure to the instruction. A paired *t*-test conducted on the pretest and posttest mean scores indicated a significant increase in the mean scores at $p < 0.05$ ($t = -27.96$, $t = -16.08$, $t = -31.19$), highlighting the positive impacts of the instructional innovations in developing the students' Thainess knowledge.

Table 5. Posttest scores on Thainess knowledge (40 points).

	Northern Region	Southern Region	Northeastern Region
Minimum	5	3	0
Maximum	40	38	40
Average	25.82	17.49	24.93

4.2 Vocabulary Knowledge

In congruence with the Thainess test scores, before their exposure to the lessons, the students in each region had relatively limited vocabulary knowledge. Their pretest mean scores in Table 6 were only 13.94, 14.39, and 12.84. While most students scored better on the vocabulary pretest than on the Thainess pretest, some students in the north and northeast seemed to have no knowledge of English vocabulary associated with the local tourist attractions, scoring zero.

Table 6. Pretest scores on vocabulary knowledge (40 points).

	Northern Region	Southern Region	Northeastern Region
Minimum	0	1	0
Maximum	29	31	27
Average	13.94	14.39	12.84

After lesson implementation, the posttest mean scores in Table 7 were 29.42, 25.48, and 31.5, with some students in each region achieving full marks. A paired *t*-test comparing the pretest and posttest scores demonstrated a significant increase in the mean scores at $p < 0.05$ ($t = -23.92, -27.52, -17.99$), suggesting a significant impact of the localized materials on the students' vocabulary knowledge. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the localized materials implemented to these young learners allowed them to connect to the lessons, facilitating mapping the English words learned to the local contexts.

Table 7. Posttest scores on vocabulary knowledge (40 points).

	Northern region	Southern region	Northeastern region
Minimum	15	3	0
Maximum	40	40	40
Average	29.42	25.48	31.57

4.3 Tour Guide Simulation Task

The students were encouraged to integrate the two types of knowledge gained from the instruction in practical and authentic use by individually taking part in eight tour guide tasks. Based on the scoring rubric, 10 points were allocated to each of the eight units, making a total of 80. From Table 8, some students in the north and south achieved full marks, whereas the maximum score by a northeastern student was 74. In contrast, the minimum scores across the three regions ranged from 0 to 6. These findings suggest that the students' task performance varied, distributing widely across different proficiency levels. Some students performed very well, while others had some difficulty. It should be noted that this tour guide simulation task requires the students to produce language output based on the knowledge that they previously acquired. This finding thus clearly demonstrates that additional support and encouragement might be indispensable to scaffold the performance of a production task. However, despite the relatively low scores, the students' average scores imply that most students were somewhat able to satisfactorily complete the task at the expected level of performance (i.e., gaining a total score of at least 50% or 40 points).

Table 8. Students' tour guide overall scores (80 points).

	Northern region	Southern region	Northeastern region
Minimum	6	0	0
Maximum	80	80	74
Average	41.25	40.24	44.37

Their scores for each rubric category were also analyzed to gain further insight into the students' performance. At this juncture, the students' average scores in Table 9 reveal some interesting trends and patterns. Of the three scoring categories (content, vocab, and intelligibility), the average vocabulary score of northern students was higher than that of the content scores, yielding a consistent result with their performance on the Thainess and vocabulary posttests. The students in the other two regions, however, were able to score better in the content. This finding seems to suggest that, with no or limited exposure to the target language, inconsistency between learners' knowledge gained and their ability to use it practically can always occur. It is advised that strategies to increase learners' retention should be employed in future research. However, the overall picture supports the proposition that most students in all three regions succeeded in integrating sufficient information for the tour guide tasks. As shown, the content mean score of the north and the vocabulary mean score of the south were slightly lower than 16.00, or fifty percent of the total 32 points. In terms of intelligibility, the average scores were 9.76, 8.00, and 8.28 out of 16, indicating that the students seemed to be able to make themselves understood.

Table 9. Students' average tour guide task scores in each category (80 points).

	Northern region	Southern region	Northeastern region
Content (32 points)	13.69	17.92	19.00
Vocabulary (32 points)	17.81	14.32	17.10
Intelligibility (16 points)	9.76	8.00	8.28

5. DISCUSSION

This study addresses the two putative confronting forces in English language instruction: enhancing Thai learners' global English and fostering local Thai identity. The analysis of the test scores demonstrates that localized lessons were beneficial, enhancing their local Thainess knowledge and associated English vocabulary. The successful execution of the tour guide task shows that the two sets of knowledge were not confronting but complementing, allowing the students to express their local Thainess knowledge through English.

Based on the findings, the current study generates crucial pedagogical implications. First, for material development, localized materials yield diverse positive impacts. A plausible explanation could be that students' pre-existing schema is activated when exposed to teaching materials. That is, being in the area, students are probably aware of the tourist attractions' existence. Therefore, once exposed to the materials developed, they generally find the material content quite familiar and authentic, thus facilitating learning. Furthermore, given the familiarity of the content, the English language associated with such is more comprehensible. In short, what is called a "double burden" by Khan (2016, p. 99) referring that the language and content are no longer intense, yielding positive outcomes instead.

At this juncture, scrutiny of English textbooks used in Thai public elementary schools is appealing. Typically, English commercial textbooks are chosen by the MOE and subsequently prescribed to public schools nationwide. These commercial textbooks are written to be used in diverse global contexts; most of the content involves the cultural features of native English speakers (e.g., Christmas celebrations, four seasons, and big cities like New York and London). As a result, the textbook content can be unrealistic and discouraging, especially to young Thai learners, or even teachers, who have no or limited exposure to the target culture of the English language. Moreover, it is almost impossible for the students to connect themselves to the lessons, not understanding why they are required to study English.

Recently, some nations in Asia have focused on material development. For example, Malaysia (Nambiar et al., 2018), Indonesia (Irwansyah et al., 2019; Syahri & Susanti, 2016), and Japan (Carson, 2019) have launched initiatives to integrate national cultural features into English lessons. The findings of this study are in alignment with what is being practiced in these nations. Given the scope of this large-scale study on elementary education, it is expected that in the future, more extensive and systematic attempts will be made to produce a series of Thainess-based English textbooks that are appropriate and beneficial to Thai students throughout the entire paradigm.

Another emerging concern to Thailand's education is inequity or disparity. This issue has been addressed nationally, and there seems to be no end to it. However, inequity is exacerbated when referring to rural area Thai learners of English. Whereas urban students seem to enjoy being exposed to the English language daily through diverse forms of entertainment, such a scenario is unlikely to happen in rural areas. Therefore, based on the findings here, it becomes clear that rural students can enjoy the privilege of possessing the knowledge of their own locality, which provides a stimulus to interact in English, sharing it with foreign tourists.

Even though this study focuses on elementary education, practical solutions to improve Thai learners' English for the entire paradigm can be generated. Based on the principles adopted in this study and instructional innovations are concerned, Thai students will be gradually exposed to other instructional materials loaded with Thai national culture, the target language culture, and global culture. In so doing, the students will be proud of their own local culture and identity and capable of making comparisons and contrasts when encountering other cultures, sharpening their cultural sensitivity and increasing competency in multicultural or multilingual contexts. These findings thus potentially substantiate previous scholars (e.g., Chinh, 2013; Corbett, 2003; Graddol, 2006) that being intercultural cognizant is a prerequisite to being a global citizen.

It cannot be claimed that the benefits of the localized materials result only from the local Thainess-based content. The material development must be systematic and well-organized. As demonstrated in this study, local community involvement allowed us to identify three representative sets of tourist attractions accurately and convincingly and subsequently identify three English lessons. Moreover, meticulous care was executed in choosing the target words of each lesson. Graves et al. (2014) note that frequent, meaningful, and accessible words were prioritized and included in the lessons. Recycling of words can maximize learning benefits and reinforce what was previously learned and be taught (Nation, 2001). When possible, recycling the

target words strengthened their existing knowledge and compelled them to feel more familiar, eventually using the words actively in the subsequent tour guide task.

In addition, the materials developed in this study are accompanied by multimedia materials. Even though the lessons focus on local tourist attractions, it does not mean that these students have visited them. Multimedia materials were used as scaffolding to compensate for this potential lack of worldly experience. In this study, students requested to view the multimedia materials again when time permitted. Without the multimedia materials, the lessons might have been too dry and remote for them to connect with or visualize. The availability of the multimedia materials thus contributed to sharpening their vivid experience, something that paper materials could not offer. Therefore, the multimedia materials could be manipulated as a wonderful tool to reinforce what was learned in class. For example, the availability of the multimedia material allowed multiple viewings to be possible and facilitated the learners' appreciation of the sites. Moreover, the multimedia materials could be paused to elicit student responses and participation when necessary. Finally, the multimedia materials provided visual clues for the students, which could be imprinted in their memory for an extended period.

Finally, one of the communicative tasks highlighted throughout this article is a tour guide simulation task. This task is deemed appropriate for Thai learners in a Thai context for some reasons. First, English is not used daily throughout most regions of Thailand, and thus opportunities to use English must be created. Next, tourism seems to offer one of the best opportunities to highlight cultural features. Tourism is a channel that allows students to justify why they need to learn English instruction. Third, the English language in Thailand has attained compulsory subject status; however, as reflected by this study, English is an indispensable and invaluable tool for Thai people to share their local cultural knowledge with others, particularly foreign tourists. Finally, the tour guide task has great potential because it can be easily adapted to be more challenging and more authentic to accommodate more advanced Thai English learners.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to enhance young learners' English and maintain Thainess using localized instructional materials. After the exposure to such materials, the students significantly improved both local Thainess knowledge and English vocabulary associated with local Thainess. Similarly, the tour guide simulation task performed generally revealed positive outcomes. However, certain caveats are in order. For example, vocabulary knowledge was receptively estimated, requiring the students to match the words heard with the pictures visually presented. Therefore, a more challenging task requiring them to use the words learned in context would be quite insightful. The tour guide simulation task administered in this study could be considered a means that approaches this direction.

Additional studies along this line of research are needed to elucidate the impacts of localized instructional materials. For instance, studies on the long-term effects of the localized materials and their impacts on English learning motivation will help provide informed decisions about upgrading Thai learners' English.

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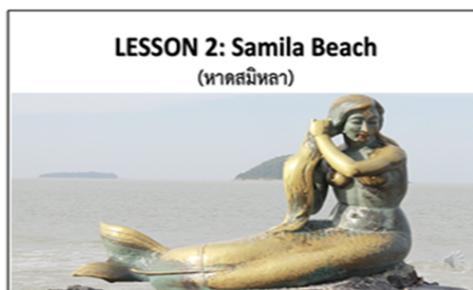
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APPENDIX

บทที่ 2

Samila Beach (หาดสมิหลา)



Vocabulary	
beach	ชายหาด
town	เมือง
lake	ทะเลสาบ
sand	ทราย
pine	ต้นสน
tree	ต้นไม้
island	เกาะ
far	ไกล
mermaid	นางเงือก
statue	รูปปั้น

