

Language literacy, language education policy and classroom practices in a Thai primary school context

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Prompted by UNESCO initiatives on promoting world literacy (UNESCO, 2005, 2014), many countries, including Thailand, have launched language education policies to push literacy development forward. Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the policies promoting literacy in Thailand and their implementation at the local level. Language education policy (LEP) documents were analysed together and with regard to the backgrounds of national LEPs. Semi-structured interviews with a superintendent and school teachers were conducted to elicit data concerning the interpretation of policies. In addition, ten Standard Thai lessons were observed to examine how one teacher implemented policy. The data analysis revealed that LEPs in Thailand are top down and positively resulted in raising awareness of the policy practitioners. Despite the fact that they were top-down policies, the findings indicated that the teacher also independently decided on how to teach literacy. These results may imply that an analysis of LEP documents and an investigation of policy implementation may lead to better understanding of how LEPs and classroom practice are intertwined in each context.

Introduction

Literacy is the ability to read, write, view, comprehend, discuss, create, listen and respond in a way that enables individuals to communicate effectively (UNICEF, 2000; UNESCO, 2005, 2014). It is also the ability to apply these skills to connect, discover, interpret and understand both written and verbal information effectively. Therefore, literacy skills are fundamental skills that should be acquired by all — every single child, youth, and adult (Lind, 2008; Richmond, Robinson & Sachs-Israel, 2008; UNESCO, 2014; Kane, 2011).

The impact of literacy can be categorised into two levels: the individual and the national (Kennedy, Dunphy, Dwyer, Hayes, McPhillips, Marsh, O'Connor & Shiel, 2012). First, literacy enables individuals to “function effectively in today’s text-mediated knowledge societies and to make informed life choices” (UNESCO, 2014, p.36). These skills are the foundation for dealing with the problems and the requirements of daily life (e.g. reading signs and instructions) (Liddicoat, 2007; Richmond et al., 2008). Moreover, it may result in access to more opportunities (e.g. education, health, and employment) (Kennedy et al., 2012; Wintachai, 2013). Second, having a population with high literacy skills may bring about the achievement of the development goals of the country (e.g. improved general health, poverty reduction, higher political participation) (UNICEF, 2000; Lind, 2008; Kanne, 2011).

Literacy can also enhance the social and economic development of the country (e.g. Boughton, 2010; The Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, 2015; Burriss, 2017; Durgunoglu & Verhoeven, 2013). Consequently, UNESCO has channelled its efforts into

promoting literacy throughout the world (UNESCO, 2014). The global initiative of UNESCO to accelerate literacy leads to an increasing tendency for governments in many countries to develop literacy campaigns as strategies for national mobilisation (Hanemann, 2015). A literacy program — often associated with the policies and the plans of the government — has been emphasised as one example among many to indicate both the societal and individual advantages of literacy (UNESCO, 2017).

To develop literacy successfully, education is the most important factor. Therefore, education ministries have the prime responsibility for literacy policy (UNESCO, 2005). For example, the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) places the highest priority on enhancing national literacy through education (Office of the Education Council, 2017). Educational institutions are specified to build and develop Standard Thai literacy among Thai citizens (Office of the National Education Commission, 2010). Central authority (e.g. MOE) decisions on the priority of certain languages in society and how these languages should be used and taught is called “language education policy” (LEP), described as “a mechanism for carrying out national language policy agendas” (Shohamy, 2006, p.76).

In Thailand, serious efforts of the government to promote literacy through education have been made for the purposes of eradicating illiteracy problems in the country, maintaining national development, and promoting lifelong learning (Suwanpitak, 2008; Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2015). Therefore, literacy was integrated into national education plans (MOE, 2008; Office of the Education Council, 2017). The MOE specified in the National Education Act (NEA) that Standard Thai knowledge and skills should be taught to Thai people in national educational systems. It has been established as one of the core learning areas of the Basic Education Core Curriculum and students should be able to read and write Standard Thai upon completing basic education (MOE, 2008).

Standard Thai is the language of government and official affairs, business, and national mass media (Smalley, 1994; Rappa & Wee 2006; Kosonen & Person, 2014). It is a learned language in the Thai educational system (Smalley, 1994), and all Thai students have to learn it at the primary level (MOE, 2008). Therefore, teachers at basic education levels should be aware of promoting Standard Thai competencies of their students and may be expected to use it exclusively for classroom interactions (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2015). However, not every Thai student grows up using Standard Thai. Rather, they are raised using their home language. Their home languages are regional, ethnic or minority languages (Smalley, 1994). For example, many children in the main regions speak regional languages (i.e. Khammuang - Northern Thai; Pakay - Southern Thai; Lao - Northeastern Thai; and Thaklang - Central Thai) when they are at home (Smalley, 1994). Therefore, the students are typically more fluent and spontaneous with their home languages.

Consequently, the language situation in local classrooms in Thailand leads to interesting question about the ways that the teacher implements LEPs and teaches Standard Thai to local students who do not speak it as a home language. In reviewing previous studies, a few investigations of LEPs in Thailand in relation to Standard Thai teaching and literacy

promoting have been found (e.g. Wintachai, 2013). This study, therefore, aimed to analyse the LEPs on teaching and learning Standard Thai and literacy and to investigate the interpretation and implementation of the policy by a teacher in a Thai rural primary classroom where a home language is still widely used. The research question in this study is “How are language educational policies interpreted and implemented by teachers at the basic education level, where the home language is still widely used?”

The history of language education policy for Thai basic education

Thailand has three main education policy documents in which literacy development has been identified. These documents are the NEA, the National Education Plan (NEP), and the Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E.2551.

The NEA was first established on 19 August 1999 and amended twice in 2002 and 2010 (The Office of the National Education Commission, 1999, 2003, 2010). The act, which has been in use most recently is the NEA of B.E. 2542 (Amended in 2010). The act was set by the government, passed by parliament and approved by the King. This 2010 Act is a consequence of national education reform after the Asian economic crisis of 1997 (Wintachai, 2013). It outlined new initiatives and Thai education reforms for the 21st century. General principles for national education were provided to guide educational institutions to create their own institutional plans.

The National Education Plan (NEP) was created to direct educational operations of all educational organisations, institutes, and personnel to tackle the educational problems of the country in each particular period (Office of the Education Council, 2017). The NEP has been issued at various times since the revolutionary period in which the government encountered problems when changing from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy. Each NEP was produced by the Office of the Education Council under the MOE. The current NEP is the NEP of B.E.2560-2579 (2017-2036) (Office of the Education Council, 2017). It consists of the results of educational development in the past, urgent problems, educational objectives, policy, goals, and operational frames which all educational institutions should follow.

The Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E.2551 (MOE, 2008) was implemented in 2008. It presented objectives and processes for the implementation of the curriculum in basic education. It detailed visions, goals, principles, learner’s competencies, desired characteristics, a summary of learning areas, strands and learning standards, and guidance for teaching-learning activities. Another section was devoted to the eight learning areas (i.e. Standard Thai; Mathematics; Science; Social studies, Regions and culture; Health and physical education; Art; Occupations and technology; Foreign languages) to be studied by all students in grades 1-12. Each learning area section consisted of a rationale on why it is necessary to learn it, a summary of content, a statement of the learning outcomes, and a number of strands.

From the above, it can be said that the three educational policy documents are major policies that influence efforts to develop better education for Thai people. In order to

understand the existing situation of Thai education, this study chose to examine the documents currently used to govern national education, i.e. NEA of B.E. 2542 (Amended in 2010), NEP of B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036), and the Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E.2551.

Language education policy

As previously mentioned, LEPs serve as a mechanism for accomplishing national language agendas (Shohamy, 2006). LEPs are a form of language legislation and discourse regulations associated with language planning and language for education (Hu, 2007; Johnson, 2013). They involve decisions made by central authorities to create, order, manage, and control the linguistic repertoire of the nation (Alexanser, 2003; Shohamy, 2006; Jones, 2013). LEPs may identify the use of a particular language or languages as the medium of instruction, and the decision of which language to teach in educational institutions (Shohamy, 2006; Kosonen & Young, 2009). In other words, LEPs can be redefined as a tool for governing and directing language instruction in a national education system.

LEP could be conceptualised as a multiple-layered process (Johnson 2009, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Johnson claimed that the policy process includes a connection of creation, interpretation, and appropriation. In terms of policy creation, the LEPs of many countries are created by the highest national education authorities (macro-level or top-down policies). Policy creation can also occur at other levels, i.e. at the meso-level (e.g. regional educational administration office) and at the micro-level (e.g. schools). The LEPs produced at these levels are bottom-up policies (Johnson, 2013). Policy interpretation involves the ways that policy agents understand the authorial intentions presumed to be behind the policy text (Johnson, 2013). The interpretation of a policy may be varied according to a personal set of prior knowledge and the beliefs about language of individual agents (Jones, 2013). The other process is appropriation — a way that policy agents incorporate the policy into their own patterns of action (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009; Johnson, 2009, 2013). The appropriation of policy may rely on the implementational and ideological spaces unique to a particular context (Johnson, 2013). It can be the same or in a line differing from the intention of policy makers (Levinson et al., 2009; Jones, 2013). Situated in this conceptualisation of policy, it is important to note that LEP can be driven by diverse policy agents across multiple layers of policy creation, interpretation and appropriation.

Research on LEPs has increased over the decades. Previous studies of LEPs in many countries: South Africa (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Gordon, 2009); Timor-Leste (Taylor-Leech, 2013); Vietnam (Nguyen, 2012); Lao PDR (Cincotta-Segi, 2011); Uganda (Altinyelken, Moorcroft & Van Der Draai, 2014); and Jamaica (Nero, 2014) have provided growing knowledge about LEPs in different corners of the world. The situations of policy implementations and current educational challenges that were affected by those LEPs have been reported. For instance, Wildsmith-Cromarty & Gordon (2009) uncovered that in South Africa, teachers admitted that the home language was used in classroom instruction even though LEPs required the use of English as the medium of instruction.

Cincotta-Segi (2011) found that the national LEPs of Lao (L2) as a medium of instruction resulted in a variety of literacy teaching responses (i.e. an exclusive use of Lao, a mixed use of Lao and the mother tongue, and an exclusive use of the mother tongue) in the primary classrooms of non-native Lao students. The study concluded that LEP can be appropriated in an unpredictable way by teachers in their local context. In practice, they may appropriate, resist, and/or incorporate the official policy into their own approaches. Moreover, Altinyelken et al. (2014) investigated Uganda's local language policy in education. Their study showed that policy stakeholders (e.g. teachers, parents and national authorities) argued heatedly about the policy, although the use of home language promoted the development of children's literacy skills and participation in a classroom. They were more attentive to the policy limiting their children's future academic success.

Based on the previously reviewed scholars (e.g. Shohamy, 2006; Johnson 2009, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2015) and the evidence from previous studies, it may be concluded that LEPs in diverse nations, and the ways that policy actors implemented them in practice, differ according to their individual contexts. So far, there are a few studies that investigated LEPs and/or the practices of LEPs in the context of Thailand (e.g. Wintachai, 2013; Draper, 2015). We, therefore, sought to investigate LEPs of language literacy and the implementation of those policies in Thailand. Our study was set to capture the implementation of Thailand's LEPs across multiple levels. Thus, it firstly analysed national policy documents in order to understand the LEP creation at the national level. Then it examined the interpretation and appropriation of the policies at the local level. Interviews with a superintendent and a teacher and classroom observations were used together evidence about policy interpretation and appropriation in a classroom.

Methods

The present study was a case study research, which aimed to investigate the LEP implementation by a teacher in a Standard Thai classroom in a rural school in Northern Thailand.

Context of a rural primary classroom in Thailand

This study was conducted in a Grade-1 Standard Thai classroom at a government primary school in Phrae Province. The school is about 550 kilometres from Bangkok — the capital of Thailand (The Provincial Strategy and Information Division of Phrae Province, 2014). It is located in a rural and mountainous area, with most of the population making their living from agriculture, such as growing rice and other crops. In terms of language background, most teachers and students speak Kammuang or Northern Thai — the regional language — as their first language and at home, and they learned and used Standard Thai at school (Prapasapong, 2009).

Standard Thai and Kammuang are significantly and somewhat systematically different in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar (Smalley, 1994). Vocabulary seems to have significant differences. A lot of Kammuang vocabulary is easily understandable as corresponding to Standard Thai, but hundreds of words carry entirely different meaning.

For example, the word “guava” in English is pronounced [faləŋ] in Kammuang and [mākɛɛw] in Standard Thai. These two languages are also different in terms of the systems of tones, e.g. the word “cloth” is pronounced [phãa] in Kammuang, but [phâa] in Standard Thai (Smalley, 1994). Regarding grammars, Kammuang and Standard Thai are largely similar, but they are not entirely so. Some words are formed from the same elements into two languages, but the order may be reversed (e.g. the word “river” is [náambɔɔ] in Kammuang, but [bɔɔnáam] in Standard Thai. In sum, Kammuang and Standard Thai are mostly the same; however, some minor differences may create barriers to comprehension.

Participants

The participants consisted of an Educational Service Area superintendent, a teacher, and 17 students. The superintendent was a 54-year-old female, assigned by Primary Educational Service Area 2 of the province to participate in this study. The volunteer teacher participant was a 39-year-old female. She had taught Standard Thai to Grade-1 students for 11 years. She was born in the district where the school was located and grew up speaking Northern Thai as a home language. The participants included 17 students in a Grade-1 classroom of the teacher participant. The students were between 6-7 years old. All students spoke Northern Thai as a home language. Otherwise, two students spoke Northern Thai along with other home languages, i.e. Standard Thai and Southern Thai.

Research instruments

Data sources of this study included LEP document collection, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Documents concerning Thai LEPs were collected and studied to gain background on policy creation. Semi-structured interviews with the superintendent and the teacher were used to elicit and obtain information about policy process, understanding of the superintendent and the teacher about the LEP essences, and their decisions on the policy implementation. Classroom observations with video-recording were to capture and indicate the actual practice of the teacher in teaching Standard Thai literacy.

Data collection and analysis

After obtaining permission from the Educational Service Area Office, the school, the teacher, and the parents, the process of data collection was started. The first researcher started collecting the data at the school by observing and interviewing. The data collection was divided into two phases. The first phase was conducted in December 2014. In this stage, ten Standard Thai lessons were observed and the teacher was interviewed. The interview in the first phase aimed to ask the teacher about her code-switching in the observed classes. To clarify and elaborate LEP appropriation, the second phase was done in March and April in 2017. We had semi-structured interviews with the superintendent and the teacher. The interviews were conducted in Standard Thai, transcribed, and translated into English by the authors. Then, data analysis was done based on Johnson’s framework (2009, 2013).

Table 1: A summary of data collection and analysis

Policy processes	Instruments/ data	Research procedure	Data analysis
Creation	Policy documents	Collecting LEP documents: 1. NEA of 1999 (Office of the National Education Commission, 2010) 2. NEP of B.E.2560-2579 (Office of the Education Council, 2017) 3. The Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E. 2551 (MOE, 2008). 4. Handbook for literacy policy implementation (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2015)	Reading documents and identifying the relevant content concerned with Standard Thai teaching and learning.
Interpretation and appropriation	Semi-structured interview with the superintendent	Interviewing a superintendent with audio recording for 25 minutes.	Listening to the recording, identifying and extracting how the superintendent interpreted and appropriated the LEPs.
	Semi-structured interview with the teacher	Interviewing a teacher with audio recording for 30 minutes.	Listening to the recording of the teacher's interview and identifying how the teacher perceived and understood national LEPs.
	Classroom observations with video recording	Observing and video recording ten fifty-minute lessons of Standard Thai.	Watching the video recordings and identifying how the teacher taught in the classroom in relation to literacy promotion.

Results

The researchers primarily analysed national educational documents to gather background on national LEPs. The findings are presented according to John's framework of policy process: creation, interpretation, and appropriation (Johnson, 2009, 2013).

Creation of LEPs on language literacy

There have been three educational policy documents enacted to govern the operations of national basic education. They included the following: 1) the NEA; 2) the NEP; and 3) the Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E.2551. These policies were imposed in the form of written documents and distributed to educational organisations (e.g. Educational Service Areas) and institutions (e.g. schools). With regard to policy creation, it was found that the policies were fundamentally set out to outline national education initiatives. Specifically, one of the initiatives was devoted to enabling achievement in literacy.

Promoting Standard Thai literacy

In NEA (Office of the National Education Commission, 2010), there were explicit policy statements prescribing the need for providing fundamental literacy skills within the national education system. The required basic literacy skills comprised the skills in Standard Thai and Mathematics. Consider the following quotation.

Education through formal, non-formal, and informal approaches shall give emphases to ... knowledge and skills in mathematics and languages, with emphasis on proper use of the Thai language” (in Section 23, Office of the National Education Commission, 2010, p.11, from the English version of NEA).

This policy statement showed that the Act was specifically designed to advocate Standard Thai teaching in education systems.

According to the NEP of B.E.2560-2579 (2017-2036), the government implemented this plan to accelerate the progress of an advocacy literacy campaign (Office of the Education Council, 2017). The document analysis indicated that the government aimed to eradicate illiteracy among basic education students and to enhance the skills of students in order to prepare them for the future. The required skills included basic literacy skills (i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic skills) and other essential skills (e.g. critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills).

In response to initiatives for human resource development in the 21st century, current education shall emphasize to master the 21st century learning skills... the essential skills for the 21st Century comprise the skills called 3Rs+8Cs... The 3Rs includes reading, writing, and arithmetic while 8Cs are critical thinking and problem solving; creativity and innovation; cross-cultural understanding; collaboration, teamwork and leadership; communication, information and media literacy; computing and ICT literacy; career and learning skills, and compassion (Office of the Education Council, 2017, p.80, first author's translation).

Another key national policy document was the Basic Education Core Curriculum, subsequently developed in line with the NEA (MOE, 2008). Through the curriculum analysis, explicit policy statements related to literacy were found. The Basic Education Core Curriculum emphasised providing knowledge and skills in Standard Thai to students and developing their communication capacity.

The following goals have consequently been set for achievement upon completing basic education: ... *knowledge and skills for communication*, thinking, problem-solving, technological know-how, and life skills (MOE, 2008, p.5 in the English version of the Basic Education Core Curriculum)

The Basic Education Core Curriculum is aimed at inculcating among learners the following five key competencies ... *communication capacity, capacity to receive and transmit information, linguistic ability and skills in expressing one's thoughts, knowledge and understanding, feelings and opinions for exchanging information and experience*, which will be beneficial to oneself and society... (MOE, 2008, p. 6 in the English version of the Basic Education Core Curriculum)

One point of discussion is that Standard Thai was specified as one of the core learning areas in basic education and placed as the first subject in the curriculum. This may imply that policy creators emphasised developing and promoting Standard Thai literacy as one of the priorities of basic education. The ultimate goal of Standard Thai learning is an achievement of the ability to use language for communication.

Thai language skill requires training in language use for purposes of communication, effective learning and application in daily life.” (Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E.2551, MOE, 2008, p.42 in the English version of the Basic Education Core Curriculum)

Interestingly, the curriculum requires Thai youth to learn Standard Thai because it is a national treasure and a symbol of Thai identity. In other words, learning Standard Thai was not only the way to build the skills in Standard Thai, but it also helped to inculcate the students with an appreciation of the language that represents Thai culture, wisdom and national identity (MOE, 2008).

The contents are divided into ... Thai Language: knowledge skills and culture in language application for communication; delight in and appreciation of Thai wisdom; and pride in national language (MOE, 2008, p.10 in the English version of the Basic Education Core Curriculum)

After examining three policy documents, the current study found consistency in these official documents in terms of promoting Standard Thai literacy in education. The findings suggested that the Thai government and other educational agencies accepted the importance of literacy skills, so all young Thais are provided opportunities to achieve literacy through basic education.

Policy delivery process

In addition to the three main documents of national LEPs, the researchers analysed the handbook for literacy policy implementation. It was distributed to the school by the Educational Service Area. It includes policy statements about promoting literacy, which were announced by the Office of Basic Education Commission (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2015). A campaign of a territory free of illiteracy in basic education was launched by 2015 and for preparing Thai children and youths for the 21st century.

To the extent of the successful policy implementation, the handbook detailed the crucial principle of education management, which describes educational agencies (e.g. people, families and community committees). The agencies involved in the policy implementation process are shown in Figure 1, which shows that the process of implementing LEPs in Thai basic education had multiple layers. The policy creation occurred at the national level, by the MOE and Office of Basic Education Commission. Then, it was introduced to Educational Service Areas — the educational sub-sector authorities governing education at the provincial level. This sub-sector is in charge of receiving LEPs from the upper level and conveying them to the policy actors at the local level (a school and a teacher). At this

level, parents are also encouraged to be a part of the literacy promotion process with their children.

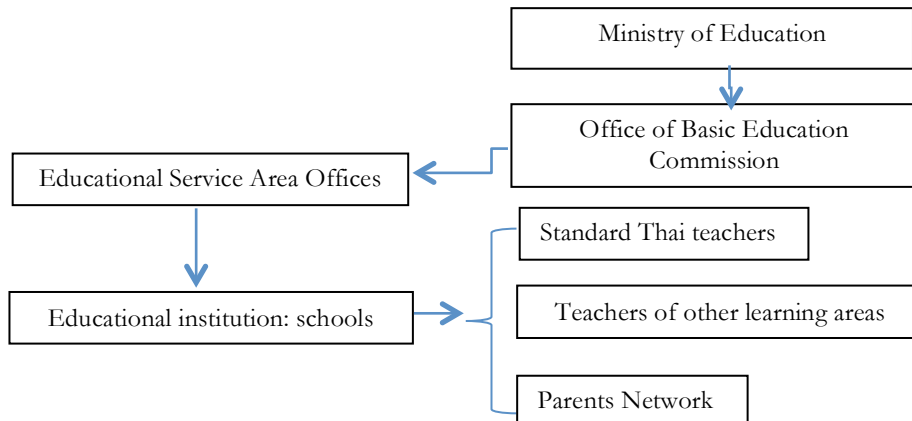


Figure 1: A summary of policy process

Policy interpretation

The findings of how the policies were interpreted by the involved agents (i.e. a superintendent and a teacher) can be grouped and presented into the following topics.

Superintendent’s and teacher’s policy perception

The interview data reflected that the superintendent perceived the goals of the LEPs and priorities on Standard Thai teaching. The government initially aimed to elevate the language and literacy skills of primary school students. In particular, the promotion of reading and writing abilities were at the heart of teaching and learning.

Excerpt 1:

Researcher: Could you tell me about the policies on Standard Thai language teaching and learning for basic education levels?

Superintendent: I knew that the newest government policies were set for resolutions of illiterate students in the country. The ministry wanted us to develop all Grade 1 students to be able to read and write in Standard Thai within the academic year of 2015. Also, we should improve Grade 2 students in their ability to read and write. They should read and write fluently upon completing Grade 2. (Recorded interview: 2.4.17)

Similarly, the teacher participant reflected that she understood and perceived the intentions of the current government policies on teaching Standard Thai. She was aware that the goal of teaching was to develop students’ literacy skills and language use.

Excerpt 2

- Researcher: Can you tell me what you know about the national policies for Standard Thai teaching and learning?
- Teacher: Okay. Now, the Ministry asked us to focus on developing Standard Thai literacy among students. This policy was launched and implemented through the provincial educational service department and the school. Currently, they have been urging teachers to arrange learning activities and/or remedial Standard Thai courses for students. The school accordingly has responsibility for developing the projects to promote literacy skills among the students. The government aims at enabling all Thai children, 100% of the students, to read and write in Standard Thai. So, I have to teach students to be able to read and write in Standard Thai (Recorded interview: 12.3.17).

The superintendent and the teacher provided an accurate picture of the goals of national LEPs and the major priorities for teaching Standard Thai to Basic Education students. Therefore, it can be concluded that they perceived, understood and were concerned about the policies for promoting literacy and teaching Standard Thai.

Policy appropriation

In order to answer how the LEPs were put into action at the local level, this section will present the results of the policy appropriation.

Appropriation activities of the superintendent

The findings revealed that the superintendent was the key person in delivering LEPs to schools and classrooms. The superintendent appropriated the policies in such a way to reinforce the implementation of these policies at school and in the classroom. She undertook her duties in supervising Standard Thai teaching; conveying government policies to schools and teachers; and observing Standard Thai classes at each school.

Excerpt 3:

- Researcher: How are national policies implemented in schools?
- Superintendent: The Office of Educational Service Area took part in receiving the policies from the Office of Basic Education Commission and conveyed them to all of the schools under us. In the Educational Service Area, we have a team of educational administrators responsible for supervising, developing, supporting and reinforcing the educational development of each particular subject. Like me, I am an educational administrator who supervises Standard Thai Language teaching and learning in every school in Education Service Area 2 in Phrae. Generally, I communicated with schools and teachers about what the government wanted them to focus on Standard Thai language teaching. My team and I occasionally visited schools to observe classroom teaching (Recorded interview: 2.4.17).

The next excerpt is provided to show more details about her appropriation activities. In Excerpt 4, it can be seen that the superintendent closely worked with schools and teachers and provided them with academic support.

Excerpt 4:

Researcher: Can you tell me more about the duties of education superintendents?

Superintendent: We sent the national policies to schools and provided them with educational support. We helped the school to plan the development of student's language ability depending on individual problems; conducting academic conferences; having teacher training; providing guidelines for creating teaching materials and innovations; and encouraging teacher morale (Recorded interview: 2.4.17).

It may be concluded from the data that the superintendent took action in implementing LEPs from the meso to the micro level. She directed the schools and the teachers to pursue national LEPs in order to achieve the successful policy implementation.

LEPs in classroom practice

To gain insight into how policies were implemented in the classroom, the findings from classroom observations are included the following section.

Promoting Standard Thai

Our findings indicated that teachers implemented LEPs based on the backdrop of national LEPs. Her policy appropriation in a classroom was consistent with the goals and policy interpretation. In ten lessons, she intended to promote Standard Thai in a number of ways:

- Covering all contents in a course book provided by Office of Basic Education Commission
- Training basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing);
- Employing a variety of teaching-learning activities to motivate and facilitate students to learn;
- Using communicative activities, which require students to use the language as a vehicle of communication and for language practices;
- Emphasising word pronunciation, reading aloud, reading comprehension and writing at the word and sentence level;
- Using Standard Thai as the main language of classroom instruction, including the incorporation of the home language.

It can be seen that teaching was based on conceptions of curriculum content and goals. The teacher focused on teaching skills, providing Standard Thai input and encouraging students to produce output through language practices. Furthermore, it gives a clear picture of how she promoted Standard Thai ability in the classroom; an example excerpt of classroom recording is provided.

Excerpt 5: (Lesson 7: Reading aloud)

Teacher: Everybody, we learned to read difficult words yesterday, right? I asked you to read the words aloud. You could read some words, but there were also many words that you could not read. Let's see. Here are the words that you could not read [The teacher was showing the word card to the whole class] ... Can you read it again?

In Excerpt 5, the teacher asked students to redo practice drills to ensure that her students could read every word they had learned. This is evident in the way that she carefully taught her students to acquire literacy skills. In other words, she actually pursued the primary goals of basic education (MOE, 2008).

Additionally, it was found that the teacher in this study typically used the target language as the language of instruction. Her intention was to use the target language to maximise the exposure of students to Standard Thai speech. Interestingly, it was found that sometimes the teacher used a home language in parallel in the classroom with Standard Thai. For the purposes of home language use, our previous studies that investigated the roles of a home language in this classroom revealed that the teacher used a home language for three main purposes: academic, social and management purposes (Thanyathamrongkul, Singhasiri & Keyuravong, 2016, 2017). The first purpose was to deal with content instructions (e.g. teaching target-language elements and explaining). The second was to build rapport with students and socialising. The third was to handle classroom management (e.g. conducting classroom activities and disciplining students).

The following illustrates home language use in promoting Standard Thai learning, an example of home language utterances (*italic statements*) from the classroom recording is shown below.

Excerpt 6 (Lesson 1: A symbol of repetition in Standard Thai writing)

Pat: Teacher! I already wrote the word you read, but what is this? (Pat is pointing at a repetition symbol) What is it?

Teacher: It's called "Mai Ya Mohk".

Tam: Mai Ya Mohk

Teacher: Yes. *Knock on the head!* (The teacher is knocking on her head.) *And tell yourself, "Repeat it again".*

Students: (Students are laughing.)

Teacher: Again! What does it look like? (The teacher is gesturing the repetition symbol with her hand.) You see? "Mai Ya Mohk". We used it to ... to indicate the repetition of the word that it follows, right?

Students: Yes.

Excerpt 6 is the transcript of the lesson, teaching the use of the repetition symbol, called “Mai Ya Mohk”. One student asked a question. The teacher firstly responded to him in Standard Thai, and then she switched to a home language. The teacher used code-switching as a strategy for explaining the form of the symbol and drawing the student’s attention to her instructions.

Excerpt 7 (Lesson 10: Making sentences)

Teacher: Okay! Here is the subject of the sentence. Can you guess which word is the subject of this sentence? Which word? It is it is the word ‘chăn’ (pronoun ‘I’) ... *Okay, now then! We are about to begin a new game. Oh, wait! Let me shuffle the cards first. Someone might know the answers. Teasing you is fun. This is the final round and your score will allow you to have lunch, okay?*

In Excerpt 7, a home language was used to give a signal and draw the attention of students to the beginning of the game. This suggested that the teacher incorporated a home language in the teaching process to gain the attention of students and their participation.

In the implementation of LEPs at the classroom level, it can be concluded that the teacher did not resist government policies. Her actual classroom practice reflected her effort to build on and to improve Standard Thai literacy skills of the students. However, she incorporated a home language in classroom instruction. Her home language use was to promote learning, to build rapport with students, and to manage classroom activities and discipline.

Discussion

Understanding of LEPs

If Shohamy (2006) mentioned that LEP served as a mechanism for accomplishing national language agendas, based on the findings of our study, we agree. We think that LEPs for basic education in Thailand serve well as a tool to lead policy practitioners to literacy promotion. The findings revealed that the superintendent and the teacher had accurate perceptions of the essence and goals of the policies. The superintendent communicated with schools and teachers in her service area office about these policies and provided them ongoing supervision and direction in terms of teaching Standard Thai, instructional support and training opportunities. The perspective of the teacher participant showed a coherent understanding of the initiatives and policies. Her clear perception of the policy intentions led to an increase in her teaching awareness; it influenced her to take action in terms of promoting language literacy in the classroom. This study suggests that the accurate policy interpretation and effective communication between the educational agents at different levels had an impact on successful implementation.

Flexibility in interpretation and implementing LEPs

We have learned that LEPs on teaching Standard Thai and literacy for national basic education were systematically introduced and implemented with a top-down approach. Although the policies were created by the highest national educational institutions and delivered to the practice level through top-down management, the authorities were also flexible with local policy practitioners. In this study, the superintendent communicated with schools and teachers about policies and provided them with encouragement and support, rather than control their instructional operations. When flexibility was also provided, the teacher had the freedom to think and make decisions about instructional practices that allowed for the achievement of the policy goals. It would not be wrong to say that the top-down approach was fine as long as the policy practitioner had room to make instructional decisions in a way that fitted with her own teaching styles and preferences. Greater flexibility in local classroom practices may allow teachers to use their best professional judgment about judicious combinations of the target language and the home language. We propose that the flexibility in policy interpretation is a factor for effective policy implementation and good educational practice (Sahlberg, 2007).

Implementing LEPs in a specific context

One lesson to be learned from this case is effective communication between policy agents from the macro to the micro-levels. The superintendent visited every school in the service area, despite the fact that it was in a remote area. She informed teachers about national policies and provided numerous types of educational support. By doing so, the policy was acknowledged by the teacher and she had a clear understanding of national policies. The teacher participant demonstrated an awareness of the place and the context in which she was teaching. She did not ignore the situation in which Northern Thai was widely used in this area. On the contrary, she retained the policy goals in promoting literacy and simultaneously incorporating the home language in her classroom instruction and using it as a tool to engage her students in the learning process. She intentionally promoted literacy among students as requested by the policies, but also made use of a home language to maximise the literacy growth of students. In the context in which a home language is spoken widely, the impact of the language policy is not completely predictable, based on the use of only one language or the intentions of its authors (Cincotta-Segi, 2011).

This may be a case that the government needs to take into consideration because each part of the country is unique in terms of its identity, culture and local language. It also suggested that LEPs at the regional or local level should be created to manage, control and promote literacy throughout the nation (Young, 2009) as well as classroom practice in language and literacy, including specific instructions targeting the literacy development of all students (Castro, Páez, Dickinson & Ellen, 2011). In addition, further studies might investigate the policy process and the ways in which policies are implemented in other remote areas of Thailand. Future researchers may consider a larger sample size. They may

observe more classes and elicit information about LEP implementations from more teachers and superintendents.

Conclusion

This study led to the acquisition of an overview of national LEP creation, concept of national education development, key agencies involved in the policy implementation process and LEP practice at the classroom level. Thailand has top-down LEPs. The policies provide the broad framework for promoting language literacy; however, the case of Thailand has shown that policy practitioners have freedom in implementing top-down LEPs. The findings have shed light on a particular way to implement policies. This may imply that an analysis of LEPs and an investigation of classroom practice have contributed to the understanding of the relationship between top-down approaches and what is actually happening at the local level. It would be interesting and beneficial to investigate LEPs and their implementation in other countries. Similar studies in different local contexts may add new information about language literacy policies and indicate the impact of world literacy initiatives by UNESCO (Lind, 2008).

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