THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ERA OF THAILAND 4.0

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Abstract

In the paradigm shift to Thailand 4.0, English language teaching and learning in higher education inevitably plays a crucial role in this economic transformation as it is one of the key drivers of development and innovation. Without efficient English proficiency of its citizens, Thailand's economy will not be able to transform to a high-income nation or compete with other countries in the global market. Therefore, it is a challenging task for higher education to produce a new generation workforce with high English language skills, in addition to other skills, namely stronger problem-solving, analytical reasoning, and ICT, which are in line with the Thailand 4.0 era.

This paper reveals the trends, especially online learning, in English language teaching and learning in the era of Thailand 4.0. Challenges in utilizing those trends in the context of language teaching and learning in Thailand will be addressed. However, those challenges are taken as an opportunity for change in English language teaching and learning toward Thailand 4.0.

Keywords: Sustainability, English Language Teaching and Learning, Thailand 4.0

1. Introduction

As Thailand is transforming towards the new era of economy 4.0 which is based on "the technological concept of cyber-physical systems and the internet of things" (Schuster and others, 2015, p.1), English skills are crucial for the learners who will be future employees or entrepreneurs in the Thailand 4.0 era where a "Value-

Based Economy," based on innovation, technology, creativity, and trade in services, is emphasized. In this era, Thailand as a country of traditional farming, traditional SMEs, traditional services, buyers of technologies, and unskilled labor will be shifted to smart farming, smart enterprises or startups, producer of technologies, high value services, and knowledgeable workers or high skilled laborers. With all these "smart phenomena," most information and knowledge available in cyberspace is in English, and businesses will be executed electronically in English with customers from various cultures and countries. Inevitably, English language teaching and learning in higher education will have a great burden both in producing high quality and skillful graduates ready for the Thailand economy 4.0 era and its own transformation to Education 4.0 where digital technologies have a greater role inside and outside the classroom.

Technological advancement has brought in new theories and approaches of teaching and learning. New theories and approaches are then set as policies to be followed. Evidently, with the teaching and learning of English, the roles of teacher and learner are transformed. This transformation may be considered a challenge. The challenge is to create ideal graduates who meet the needs of the workplace 4.0 era. Another challenge is the readiness of both teachers and students for such change. It is yet doubtful whether or not the English education system can even leap up to the next ladder of evolution of 4.0 successfully and equally throughout the country and be able to assist the country to reach Thailand 4.0. This paper, however, takes those challenges as an opportunity for positive change. It attempts to raise awareness of such evolution and the potential means for effective English teaching and learning, not for Thailand 4.0 per se but also for sustainable English teaching and learning.

2. Objectives

(1) To explain the relationship among economy, education, and English language teaching and learning in terms of their evolution in different eras.

(2) To explore the challenges of English language learning in Education 4.0.

(3) To investigate the sustainable means of English teaching and learning in Education 4.0.

3. The evolutions of Thailand 4.0, Education 4.0, and English language teaching and learning

Thailand 4.0 was proposed by the government in order to develop Thailand as a high-income country through innovations based on the knowledge and application of science and technology (Languepin, 2016, p.1). Once the plan was announced, Education 4.0 has been mentioned and promoted at all levels, especially in Higher Education. Here it plays two crucial roles in (1) involving in research and development for the new body of knowledge and innovations and (2) empowering students to produce innovations, which eventually result in economic growth (Chaiyaroj, 2016). Based on the country's policies, economy and education are co-existing and co-evolving while economic growth depends on education.
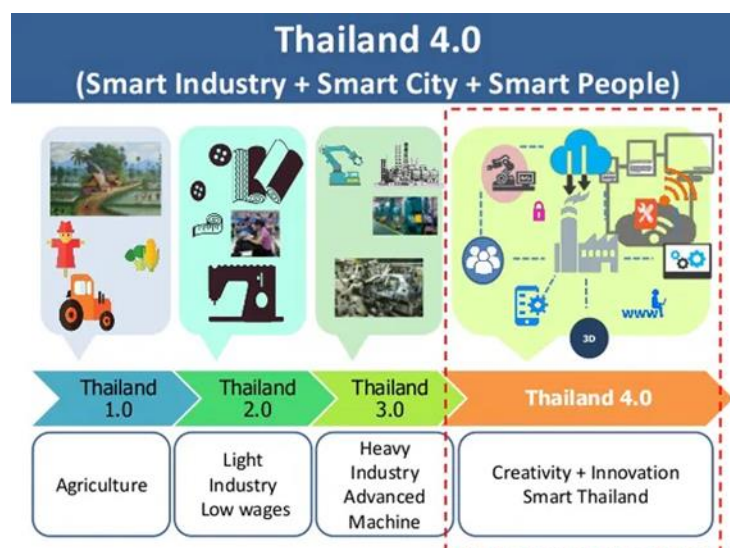
Figure 1: The model of Thailand 4.0 (Thailand Tech Show 2016)

Education policies respond to the needs of the society and country in various eras (Harkins, 2008). In the era of Economy 1.0, education 1.0 had emerged to respond to the needs of agricultural society with the so called "download" education 1.0 where a dictation method of teaching was heavily used. The interaction was performed in the linear means merely between teachers to students in a classroom. After this era, Economy 2.0 was introduced due to the industrial revolution and required Education 2.0 to help with this fast industrial and economic growth. The concept of teaching in this era was teaching to learn with the "open access" of the Internet in learning activities. The present era of Economy 3.0 is the derivation of globalization where people are quickly connected and information is rapidly exchanged through ICT. This fast development influences Education 3.0 where knowledge is co-constructed and transmitted through ubiquitous technology and interactive learning (Moravec, J.W. (2008) cited in Harkins, A.M. (2008)). The derivation of Economy 4.0 has brought Education 4.0 with it, which emphasizes learning from anywhere and at any time in the era of the Internet of Things (IoT). According to Harkins (2008, p.1), to achieve Education 4.0 where students are able to produce innovations, they need to be able to move away from memorizing what they have learned (Education 1.0) to being able to produce knowledge (Education 3.0) with the aid of the Internet (Education 2.0).

Similar to other fields of education, English language education in Thailand has been following the same policies. Based on Darasawang (2007), the history of English language education in Thailand shows that it has been playing an important role for the country's economic and technological developments since the reign of King Rama V. The approaches employed in the teaching of English has been changed from rote learning and grammar/translation to communicative language learning considering English as a medium of international communication. Besides, English language education in the past decade has changed due to the fast growth and developments of information technology. Therefore, the products of the technology have been employed in-class and outside of class to facilitate the teaching and learning of English to suit the lifestyle of learners. It can be seen that English language education 2.0 in Thailand started during the education reform in 1996. English

language education 3.0 arrived with the National Education Act of 1999 when English was taught as a foreign language to help the country to develop its economy in the era of globalization. Technologies became part of English language education emphasizing learner-centeredness allowing learners to acquire knowledge and practice at their own pace and potential everywhere. Consequently, syllabus design, various educational approaches with the assisting ICT tools facilitate the teaching and learning of English and reinforce communicative language teaching methods. As for the Education 4.0, English is crucial. It is essential to then investigate the trends in English language teaching and learning in Higher Education in the era of Thailand 4.0, which is described in the next section.

4. Challenges of Online English teaching and learning in Thailand Education 4.0

Since Thailand Education 4.0 was launched by the government in 2016, ICT tools and educational applications have been heavily employed in classrooms in order to help elevate students' English proficiency. Many learning approaches have been implemented; and online language learning platforms have been promoted and reinforced. Hybrid or blended learning approaches and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) have been introduced to English language education around the world. The implementation of online learning ideally creates opportunities for students to learn and promote student centeredness; however, it also brings major challenges to both students and teachers. Are Thai teachers and students at tertiary level ready yet for the transition from Thai education 3.0 to Thai education 4.0? According to Wittayasin (2017), it is a challenging task which "can't be achieved through traditional thinking or conventional action" (p.30). Other challenges can be explained as follows:

For students, based on Kuama and Intharaksa's (2016) literature reviews, cognition, metacognition, technical anxiety, and learning styles and preferences of students are the four major areas of challenges to English language education. First of all, students need to know how to operate effectively in online courses with multi-dimensional learning tasks and complex content. Secondly, students need to possess self-regulation. Thirdly, students need to have Internet skills so that they will not feel anxious or frustrated when they encounter difficulty while studying online. Lastly, students need to have online learning strategies. Based on the authors' experience, Thai students seem to struggle with all of them. It is very challenging for Thai students to be able to study effectively through the online platform. As part of Thai culture, students are generally passive, like to study with peers and need a lot of assistance from teachers regardless of what educational level they are at. The most serious challenge is that Thai students have never been taught to learn independently (Pagram & Pagram, 2006). Another challenge is students' learning motivation. According to Kuama and Intharaksa's (2016) research findings, motivation for online learning, especially for low achieving students, is decreased, which affects their English proficiency. The possible answers to this low English proficiency and lack of motivation by low achieving students are "the overall course design and the quality of the online learning tasks" (p.71). Solihati & Mulyono (2017) suggested that the practice of online learning (such as Hybrid learning approach) and activities should not replace face-to-face instruction. Instead, they should be used as learning tools and resources for outside the

classroom. Fernández and Belmonte's (2017) research proved that blended learning is an effective alternative teaching approach to traditional face-to-face classroom instruction, which promotes autonomous learning in second language education. In the Thai context, however, students would either "sink or swim" in the online learning environment, especially when using teaching approaches that require students to independently work on their own. This can be explained in Barr's (2018) research study which pointed out that Thai undergraduate students were not ready for full online learning. Autonomous learning is truly a good concept to follow; however, as it seems, it takes time for Thai students to be able to learn independently due to the lack of self-regulation and discipline. Barr's (2018) research results revealed that face-to-face interaction was needed for the enhancement of students' language learning performance, motivation, engagement, and positive relationship between the teachers and students.

For teachers, teaching in the era of Thailand 4.0 requires them to be able to operate their teaching on a digital platform, and be innovative in terms of course design and instructional activities that can facilitate students' English language skills. The former is a fundamental requirement that online teachers should be able to handle technology effectively. As for the latter, the role of teachers will need to change. The design of a course in Education 4.0 will need to cater for the use of technology so that students can top up English language skills from anywhere at any time. Hence, teachers become facilitators, course designers, and mentors. With online instruction, assessment is also a challenging issue. Teachers need to change their usual assessment tool from summative assessment to that of formative in order for students to be regularly informed through feedback of their own learning when they study online.

With the aforementioned major challenges in English language teaching and learning in Thailand education 4.0, the authors believe that there is a possibility of change for the sustainability of English language education in Thailand.

5. The sustainable means of English teaching and learning in Thailand Education 4.0

To make English teaching and learning in Education 4.0 and beyond, or in the midst of any circumstances such as COVID-19 pandemic sustainable, the authors suggest that the aforementioned challenges are good opportunities for future change as follows:

(1) Change in the role of teachers. The role of teachers has evolved in the digital learning platform, from being sage on stage to facilitator, course designer, and mentor. Therefore, universities or institutes need to prepare teachers to be able to teach online. Training sessions, namely online course design and assessment, innovative teaching materials and activities, the use of technologies, and management of students' behaviors in an online learning environment are needed as English language teachers need to be up-to-date with the current trends, best practices and evaluative methods of English language teaching (Parab, 2015). An essential skill for teachers in online teaching is course development or course design, because they need to use both art and science or logic in making the online learning effective and meaningful to students, such as the flipped-classroom approach.

(2) Change in learners. First of all, students need to have an intrinsic motivation to learn. As mentioned previously, Thai students, even in higher education, are not self-regulated, responsible or disciplined for their own learning; therefore, it is important that Thai students need to be physically and emotionally ready for a hybrid or online learning environment. As stated by McCotter (2008), students can engage well in class activities and can do well academically when they are intrinsically motivated. They need to become an active agent of their own learning in order to achieve academically.

(3) Change in teaching and assessment approaches. This change includes teaching methods, content, and assessment. Planning is the key to successful teaching, especially in an online platform. To motivate students, Mayfield (2020) recommended in his talk during a webinar organized by Cambridge University Press on the topic of "Activities to Engage and Motivate Teenage Learners" that backwards planning of activities is needed. By setting students' learning outcomes, teachers begin their planning with what they want their students to achieve. Prof. Carla Messkill (2020) also suggested in a webinar entitled "Embracing Online Language Teaching" that authentic conversation between teachers and students is crucial in online language teaching. This could be individual, pair, or small groups of students. For content in language learning, it is suggested that the content is both interesting and practical for the students. According to the authors' hybrid teaching experience, Thai students will not benefit from the learning as much as with classroom face-to-face instruction. When online, Thai students prefer the off-camera mode; therefore, teachers cannot know if they are actively learning or not. Based on Banlue's (2015) research findings, online education should be merely an option because his study revealed that the learning outcomes of online teaching is the same as the outcome resulting from regular classrooms. In English language teaching, the authors believe that the majority of Thai students cannot improve their English skills merely from learning online on their own. For teaching and learning to be effective, a one-on-one or small group discussion either virtually or physically is needed. In addition, a variety of activities employed in an online classroom are essential because students will become more motivated to learn.

For English language assessment, formative assessment is highly recommended. There are many types of formative assessments that teachers can utilize in their classroom, for example, portfolio or quizzes offered electronically. According Puarungroj, Pongpatrakant and Phromkhot (2017), they recommended 10 online formative assessment tools, namely EDpuzzle, PadLet, Kahoot, Socrative, Quizlet, Prezi, PowToon, TodaysMeet, CodeMonkey, and GoFormative. Furthermore, the continuous use of these tools is necessary; hence, teachers need to plan the use of formative assessment tools effectively. These online tools can also be utilized inside the classroom or on an online platform. In the Thai context, as the authors have experienced, a formative assessment is highly recommended; however, it should be planned and managed carefully as Thai students are not necessarily honest with their learning. Copying and pasting from other students' work or online sources is commonly practiced among Thai students.

Based on the authors own online teaching experience and review of literature, an online teaching and learning model, adapted from Asst.Prof. Dr. Praweenya Suwannatthachote (2020), is recommended.
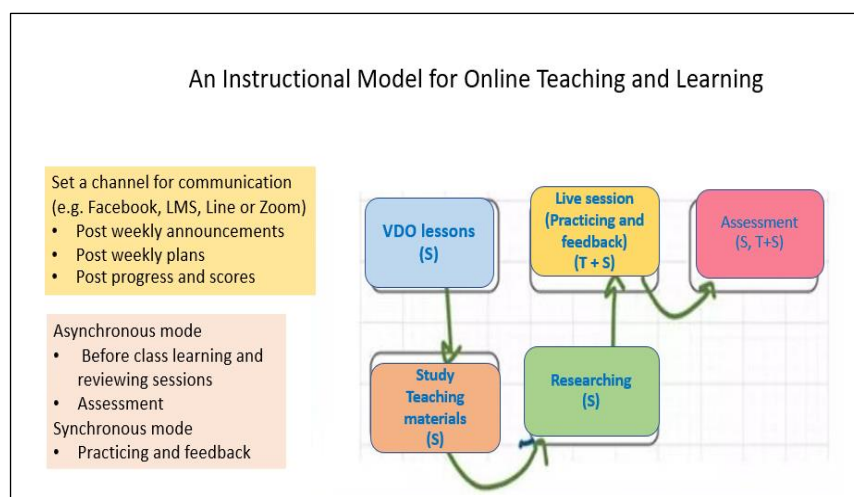
Figure 2: An Instructional Model for Online Teaching and Learning

5. Conclusion

English Language Teaching and Learning in the Era of Thailand 4.0 is challenging as it requires both teachers and students to have an understanding of the modern approaches of teaching and learning. Many digital instructional strategies and tools have been introduced. Most importantly, however, the authors believe that teachers and students are co-learners in the digital learning environment. It is essential that the teachers make the learning environment flexible, interesting, supportive and positive in order to build intrinsic motivation in the students. For students, self-regulated learning is a must in an online learning platform. Finally, a well-designed formative assessment is highly recommended in the Thai context.

6. Suggestion

The authors hope that the English language education in Thailand 4.0 will become fruitful and sustainable if all of the stakeholders are open to challenges and change. It is suggested that more action research is conducted regarding effective course development for an online platform, students' self-regulated learning, and formative assessment. In addition, best practices for online teaching should be investigated and shared in the Thai context.

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