

# **Toward a Language Education Policy for Immigrants in Thailand: Lessons Learnt from Europe and Canada with a Case Study of Phuket Island**

*Saranya Pathanasin and Sureerat Jittasatian*

## **Abstract**

Phuket, the most famous tourist island in Thailand, receives a large number of immigrants, especially from Myanmar, into its workforce. As a result, related immigration concerns are often linked to education. As such, a high number of children of these immigrants are not directly accepted by and assisted with suitable arrangements into local schools despite a linguistic priority which has been accepted internationally as a human right that children should learn in their mother tongue for improved educational success. In this study, the issue is approached by presenting a brief review of mother tongue instruction in Europe and Canada with the aim to posit for Thai policy makers to consider initializing a suitable educational language policy specifically for the children of immigrants in Thailand by employing Phuket Island as a case study. The advantages and drawbacks from western countries could provide lessons for Thailand in coping with the issue. It is proposed that enabling languages in education for immigrant children should be set out with a clear vision and strategy, and that also some educational authority should be decentralized to local governments who can respond effectively to the needs of stakeholders in the areas. Moreover, budgetary and management plans are crucial for successful implementation. Lastly, appropriate international collaboration will drive the policy toward success. Hence, linguistic phenomena within immigration and minorities in Thailand, as well as in other ASEAN countries, could be approached by moving away from the historically European standard language center, as noted by Halliday (2007).

**Keywords:** Language Policy, Mother Tongue Education, European Model, Thailand

## **Introduction**

Located in the Andaman Sea in the South of Thailand, Phuket Island is a world-class tourist destination that attracts travelers from all over the world. In 2016 alone, the number of visitors to the island reached 31 million, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The high number of visitors each year makes Phuket the second most popular destination to Bangkok for the tourism industry in the country. With related positive economic opportunities, there are a good number of non-local workers living on the island, both Thai and non-Thai. The total amount of the foreign workforce in Phuket was over 70,000 in 2016, as recorded by the Ministry of Labor, Phuket province. The demography of the non-Thai workforce in Phuket could be categorized into two groups: expatriates from western countries with mainly strong socio-economic backgrounds, and manual workers from neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia who usually earn only very basic wages. Although all foreigners are theoretically managed by Thai labor and immigration laws, not all workers in the second category stay legally in Thailand.

Legal or not, the foreign workers from the neighboring countries are obviously an important part of the workforce in the tourism and construction industries in Phuket, and they can still often gain a far better income than they could earn in their home countries. Unsurprisingly, such a potential economic situation encourages immigrants to stay for a long time (if not permanently) on the island. For example, in the current decade, approximately 70% of all immigrants in Phuket are from Myanmar and added to that are naturally a considerable number of second-generation Burmese children who were born on the island, and who are growing up in Myanmar communities. Meanwhile, newcomers continually arrive.

Similar to other non-local communities, people from Myanmar tend to stay together. Supporting and sharing, their culture and language are maintained, inherited, and passed to their descendants. According to Holmes (2001:52), it has been seen in several immigration phenomena that the mother tongue languages of the original country are likely to be maintained until the third generation of immi-

grant groups while concurrently the second generation develop bilingualism. Language loss in later generations represents not only the erosion of culture in individuals but also the loss of multiculturalism in society. Therefore, the children of immigrants require support to learn and maintain their mother tongue due to the fact that a linguistic right is also a human right. Therefore, by extension, all children from minorities and all indigenous peoples should be able to assert their linguistic rights as declared by several international bodies (Spolsky, 2004:19).

Attempts to rectify such language challenges have already been made in several nations through varying policies, particularly in western countries. There, children of immigrants have received bilingual education or mother-tongue assisted education; though the outcomes are not often impressive. However, European countries' educational language policies for immigrants are worth considering because we can learn from the past how policies had been translated into practice, and what the consequences were. Although the linguistic ecology in the present study differs from those in Europe, the relative successes and failures could be reviewed for local adaptation.

Again, based on the principle that all children have the right to learn and use their mother tongue, an effective policy should be implemented to protect the rights of immigrant children. Needless to say, education is vital for children to grow up to be quality adults in the future who will benefit both individually and society as a whole. Interestingly, the situation in Phuket might represent the overall picture of immigration in other member countries of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) where people from low economic countries move to other countries for job opportunities. The present immigration in ASEAN is somewhat similar to that of in Europe from the 1950s to the 1990s although the relevant policies and environments are different. Children of these Burmese immigrants in Phuket are likely to lose their basic rights in education. Thus, this paper has three aims. First, it is to survey the language policy within the education system in Phuket and understand how it is implemented. And then, relevant lessons learnt from European countries and Canada shall be reviewed. Finally, suggestions on educational language policies are

posited with respect to multi-linguistic situations such as those found in Phuket.

### **Linguistic Ecology: Myanmar in Phuket**

Presently, a lot of people from Myanmar live in Phuket as wage earners and hold non-permanent visas, if indeed they have any at all. Living in Myanmar communities (the biggest one is in the Koh Siray area in Phuket province), they speak Burmese and some other traditional vernaculars. Khieowan (2017) found in her psychological adjustment study that most people from Myanmar did not aim to settle permanently in Thailand, but rather that they gain money and return to their home country in the future. Any potential happiness relied mainly on their well-being at that time, and a partial multiculturalist policy existed that positively affected their adjustment to the society of the host country.

Moreover, it can be seen that the Burmese language is in everyday use. Its linguistic landscape expands to public signs and in some public places; for example, hospitals, banks and ATM machines around Phuket province. However, some Burmese people learn Thai to communicate with employers, friends, and government officers.

Furthermore, the children of these immigrants are being raised to speak their mother tongue at home, and some parents hope that their children will pursue higher education back in Myanmar. Indeed, some Burmese immigrants send their children back to Myanmar where the children go to school under the care of relatives even if Burmese children in Phuket have the right to study in local schools in Phuket according to the notification on the acceptance of students without Thai citizenship issued by the Thai Ministry of Education dated 19th January 2018. However, the opportunity for Burmese children to study in regular schools is rare when compared to children who hold Thai nationality as a result of the socio-economic and social situation in which assistance is needed for them to receive such education. This relies strongly on a supportive attitude from government agents and a clear understanding of their own rights. Finally, most parents are

likely to only expect their children to complete basic education and enter the workforce rather than continue into advanced education.

Nevertheless, not exceeding 1,000 Burmese children enter primary schools/learning centers operated by non-profit organizations where the Burmese curriculum is taught, and the Burmese language is the medium of instruction in sciences, math, social sciences and Burmese language subjects. Students also study one hour of both Thai and English every day in regular class time. Outside class, children may develop bilingual abilities through their mother tongue and Thai. Although the curriculum does allow students to continue their study if they return to their home country, dropout rates are significantly high due to potentially unstable and changeable socio-economic, cultural, or even family and domestic situations. The NGO schools accept all children; legal residents or not.

In summary, it is seen that the significant obstructions to education opportunities for the children of Burmese immigrants are immigration law, curriculum and language. Unsurprisingly, there is no record of these children's performance in Thai government schools because the academic performance of these pupils has not received much attention, especially from educators and curriculum planners. Languages in such regular schools are limited to Thai and English only whereas international schools offer more language choices but not Burmese. This situation should not be overlooked. Immigration law should not prevent children's education, for all children should be able to receive basic education. In contrast, education for such dependents of immigrants should be considered as a part of immigration policy and law. Undoubtedly, knowledge should be attained in their first language for the best success in learning.

To ensure human rights for all children as stated above and by taking the situation of immigration in Phuket, it could be proposed that Phuket could be a possible place to initialize, practice and evolve education programs for immigrant children.

## Thailand's Language Policy: From ASEAN to Local Environments

Thailand has been an active member of ASEAN since 1967. Among the member countries, English has been used as the lingua franca despite not being an indigenous language of any of the member countries. It is clear that English has been promoted throughout ASEAN as a means of communication between people in this region. The role of English as the lingua franca is believed to fit into the multilingual context of ASEAN. All countries in ASEAN therefore promote the study of English through various language policies. The aims of these policies are not only to reduce the diversity but also to empower the economies of the countries on an international level.

Thailand, the only country in ASEAN that has not had a western colonial period in her history, is a country where a significant number of Thai language varieties are spoken by local people in different regions. Among them, central Thai, the so-called Bangkok dialect, is the standard dialect used in the education, government, media and business domains. It is the medium of instruction in almost all schools in Thailand, starting from the initial primary level with English as the second language for all children. According to Kirkpatrick (2012), the Bangkok dialect is so widely used that the number of speakers of the other dialects continually declines; and indeed, some varieties are endangered or already extinct.

Kirkpatrick (2012) applied Kachru's three concentric circles in explaining the situation in English usage in ASEAN. In his paper, Thailand was placed in the expanding circle where English is used as a foreign language. Thailand, with a population of about 66 million people is no exception. It usually represents itself officially as monolingual, however, it also follows the trend with a policy that all children learn English at schools since primary 1. Likewise, Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017) pointed out that English holds the position of a foreign language in Thailand despite its long history in Thailand. English is included directly and indirectly in several relevant policies; for instance, the National Education Acts 1999 and 2002, the National Language Policy 2010, the Commission of Higher Education Policy 2016. By examining Thai students' scores on standardized

international tests such as TOEFL which are lower than students in other ASEAN countries, Baker et.al (2017) claimed that the policy which adheres to an Anglophone model is not suitable to actual multi-lingual communities in Thailand.

In 2018, an important step in Thailand language policy was taken by the Thai Royal Society. A proposal has been drafted to cover six language policies. Firstly, Thai language for Thai people and Thai language as a foreign language is a policy to improve Thai language teaching and learning. Under this policy, mother tongue education shall be promoted with the objective to assist young learners who speak local dialects to comprehend the Thai standard dialect for their higher education. Secondly, vernaculars in Thailand shall be preserved to maintain and enrich the multicultural environment. Thirdly, foreign languages (especially English and languages spoken in neighboring countries) will be promoted for the purpose of economic development. Fourthly, non-Thai workers should learn Thai language to communicate and gain basic social benefits, life security and information. Fifthly, language for disabilities will be developed systematically. Lastly, the Thai language for translation and interpretation will be standardized.

By looking into the linguistic ecology in Phuket, the area is actually a multi-linguistic community where local people use the Bangkok dialect in the official domain and southern Thai dialect as a vernacular. Other languages such as Russian, German, Chinese, French, English, just to name a few, are spoken in expatriate communities whereas the Burmese language is a language of immigrant labor. In fact, in the education domain, primary and secondary schools in Phuket do offer several curriculums to suit the demands of both Thai and non-Thai families living on the island. For example, most schools in Phuket are local government schools where students study in the Thai curriculum using the Thai language as the medium of instruction, and English is a subject. Besides those, there are a number of international schools where British, American and French curriculums are offered. The medium of instruction in these international schools is based on western languages, and students learn the Thai language as a subject. In addition, primary students in some schools learn Chinese

as a third language since the Chinese economy is flourishing in the current decade, and the number of Chinese tourists visiting Phuket is significantly high. Thus, Chinese has become another language of opportunity that many parents would thus like their children to learn.

It could be pointed out that the languages in education here in Phuket engage with economic power. According to immigration law in Thailand, a parent can apply for a resident visa if they have children enrolled in any school in Thailand. Therefore, some foreigners enroll their children in international schools for both their children's education and their own residential visa.

Ironically, non-Thai parents have many options for their children's education in Phuket. However, the options are limited to languages mainly attached with economic power rather than politics or demography. Thus, children with parents who have strong socio-economic backgrounds can opt to learn in whichever curriculum and in whatever language they prefer whereas the children of neighboring country minorities generally cannot.

### **EU Model: Lessons to be Learnt for Thailand**

It has been more than 50 years since people from Turkey, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Morocco, Africa and China, just to name a few, started to migrate into Europe for seemingly better work-life opportunities. Taking the case of Turkish immigrants as an example, their settlement in several European countries is now permanent. The third generation of these immigrants lives in the host countries and speaks the language of the host countries. Immigrants in Europe often preserve their inherited cultures and languages while blending themselves into new cultures and adopting the languages of the host countries. On the other hand, the host countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden receive immigrants both similarly and differently. The similarities can be seen mainly in terms of economics and immigration. Generally, Turkish immigrants who first migrated to the host countries in the 1950s were an important workforce through the ongoing industrial revolution. These laborers were

in demand, so the host countries provided them with visas. Living in the host countries, Turkish people raised their children speaking Turkish at home. Unsurprisingly, these children developed bilingual competency mainly from schools and everyday communication. By now, the third generation of Turkish immigrants is mother tongue speakers of the languages of the host countries. This phenomenon is not unexpected, however, is interesting. Throughout the process of language shift and maintenance in immigration in western countries, there were several policies and practices that should be reviewed especially in education schema.

Bingol (2012) overviewed different policies and practices in four important host countries; namely: Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden where the number of Turkish immigrants was significantly high. There are both remarkable successes and failures to deconstruct. The cases of immigrant language management in Europe, therefore, are fruitful for both linguistic scholars and policy makers. In brief, the advantages and drawbacks of language policies in education in Europe plus Canada can be considered based on several research projects in the field (Ghosh 2004, Spolsky 2004, Axelsson 2005, Driessen 2005, Gogolin 2005, Nusche et.al 2010, Bingol 2012) along with the present situation of immigrant children's education in Thailand.

Similar to Thailand, Germany claims itself to be a monolingual country despite the fact that there are lots of varieties of German spoken in the country. Germany did not have bilingual education until 1964 when the language of immigration program started (Gogolin, 2005). Before the implementation of the program, the children of minorities, however, had not been completely neglected. On the other hand, Germany carried a policy of monolingual education where all children studied with German as the medium of instruction and were measured by similar assessments. Its objective was to assist all children from all cultural and language backgrounds in pursuing higher education in Germany. Furthermore, a monolingual education was a way to integrate all the people in Germany. However, records show that language was a challenge for children who did not speak German as their mother tongue. A special program, namely 'Deutsch

als Zweitsprache' – German as a Second Language, was used to assist students. However, the program was not successful (Gogolin, 2005).

Being a member of the European Economic Community, Germany followed a trend in providing mother tongue language education for minority peoples. According to Gogolin (2005), the program which started in 1964 had two main objectives: to promote social integration in the duration of the immigrants' stay in Germany, and to preserve their cultural identity. However, it is known that the program had another hidden agenda which was to foster the rotation-perspective. In other words, mother tongue language education in German was to encourage Turkish immigrants to return to their home country. In Germany, the mother tongue language education was conducted by Turkish teachers who were sent to Germany by the Turkish government.

The success of the program could be seen in the fluency of children speaking Turkish language and original country cultural preservation. Nevertheless, the rotation-perspective was not an achievement. A lot of children grew up and are still currently living in Germany. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that a drawback of the mother tongue language education program was the discouragement of social integration. In addition, there were some limitations on the program's practice such as politics, budget and management.

The situation of immigrant children in Germany in the 1960s was comparable to that of Thailand nowadays. That is to say, the children of immigrants have a language barrier to overcome to achieve full success in education. The difference is that Thailand does not have any language program to assist these children. Consequently, there is no explicit policy to preserve the culture of any immigrant groups. The concern about social integration mentioned in the Germany scenario is also not the case in Thailand.

Another interesting example regarding this topic is the mother tongue education system in the Netherlands. According to Driessen (2005), Mother Tongue Instruction (MTI) began in the 1960s with two primary objectives: to prepare the children of immigrants to

return to their home countries, and to maintain their cultures. In this host country, Turkish was the biggest immigrant group, followed by Morocco, Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin-America, and so forth.

Similar to Phuket now, non-local residents in the Netherlands at that time also consisted of those with high socio-economic foundations from other European countries such as Germany and Belgium, and those with a lower socio-economic status such as Turkish, Surinamese, and Moroccan, etc. However, MTI focused more on the immigrants in the latter group. This point differs from Thailand where bilingual education focuses more on immigrants with a higher socio-economic status while the other group seems to be overlooked.

Incidentally, the objectives of MTI were reviewed in 1980. Since the children of minorities tended to stay permanently in the host country, the Dutch government provided mother tongue education to assist minority children to be quality members of the country as well as to help them maintain their cultures. Although this policy was beneficial to the immigrant learners, it was found that their academic performance was significantly lower than Dutch children. Again, the Dutch government changed the policy in the 1990s to decentralize power to municipalities, and later to the schools. The project was not successful because of politics, finance and management. In addition, the immigrant home language has been seen as a barrier for Dutch society integration.

It appears that governments could learn from the case of the Netherlands that even though policies were revised for improvement and the implementations were on both national and local levels, the success and failure were mainly based on the objectives and management. Clearly, the objective to prepare immigrants to return to their home countries has proven to be unfitting. Moreover, the Dutch seemed to unsuccessfully manage the project, both nationally and locally.

Interestingly, the decentralization of power to local government was also applied in Sweden where mother tongue instruction was first established and managed by the government in the 1970s (Axelsson,2005). The primary objective was to provide education

for all children in all minority groups. According to Axelsson (2005), the program was successful in the beginning; however, the proportion of students enrolled in mother tongue instruction decreased in later decades. In the 1990s, the government decentralized this policy to municipalities who made the mother tongue instruction into an option for schools. Since the numbers of students in mother tongue instruction were low, it was not worth it for schools to offer the program. Interestingly, Hill (1995 cited in Axelsson 2005) pointed out that family support possibly carried more weight and value than the actual language of instruction. That is to say, if parents supported their children to study in the mother tongue program, children would be likely to do well at schools. In contrast, if parents were not confident in the program, children might discontinue in the program, resulting in lower performance.

Actually, in the case of Sweden, mother tongue instruction was not also a hidden agenda for a rotation-perspective policy but rather supported students in a multicultural society. However, budget and management were the obstacles to success. This again emphasizes that budget and management are the keys for mother tongue education programs. Even if decentralization is applied, the different practices in different municipalities and schools could be seen as a difficulty.

The last country in Europe to be reviewed here is Denmark where there has been a high proportion of immigrants from Turkey, the Middle East, and Iran, etc. Despite the significant number of children who do not speak Danish as their first language, Denmark did not provide mother tongue instruction for the children of immigrants. According to Nusche et.al (2010:35) mother tongue instruction in Denmark would have to cover more than 100 minority languages. Therefore, it has been far more difficult to implement. Moreover, the education goal was set by the government for all students in Denmark to receive world class education, and the values of non-western languages were not positively recognized therein.

Unsurprisingly, the children of immigrants in Denmark perform significantly lower in the academic arena according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) PISA reports in 2006.

The attitude towards mother tongue education in Denmark is somehow similar to that in Thailand where the mother tongue languages and cultural backgrounds of immigrants are not valued in schools, and there is no mother tongue instruction provided to assist students from immigrant families. In addition, there are no arrangements in mother tongue instruction with the aim of helping the children of immigrants with low socio-economic background in both countries.

In conclusion, in terms of achievement, statistics show that the children of immigrants in Denmark, as well as in other European countries reviewed here, performed lower in schools when compared to native speaker children in the host countries. Unfortunately, there is lack of official records to be able to compare the achievements of the children of immigrants in Thailand and Thai native children. However, it could be expected that Thai children would do better than immigrant children, based on the afore-mentioned countries and examples.

Following the above European examples, attention is turned to Canada where the bilingual environment, especially in Quebec, has received interest and focus in many linguistic studies. This paper pays attention specifically to the language in education policy in Quebec where the majority of people have French ancestry. According to Ghosh (2004), selected immigrants entered Quebec in the 1990s. The high number of immigrants and the economic power of English speakers were viewed as a threat to the Francophone milieu in Quebec. With the perspective of being 'masters of our own house', laws and regulations were issued to guarantee that French would be the official language in Quebec. The well-known Law 101 obliged all children to study in the French curriculum if their parents were not English native speakers. Definitely, French is used as the medium of instruction in French curriculum schools. As a result, French is continually re-established in Quebec. The drawback of this success, however, should be mentioned. Many other immigrant children had to study in the French curriculum, and their needs have not been answered.

The continued success of French in Quebec has resulted from the fear of a threat to Francophonie and French speakers' desire to domi-

nate their own society. It could be seen in this case that an important factor that drives language policy to success is the demand of people. In fact, the demand shall be responded to on the condition that people hold political and economic power. In the case of Thailand, the demands of immigrants such as those from Myanmar are only on micro level; for instance, the hope that their children could receive education in their mother tongue is not echoed by governmental policy.

As can be seen here, the European and Canadian governments initialized several policies regarding to mother tongue education for immigrants throughout the 1950's to 1990's. All policies described are presented in the summary shown in Table 1 (below.)

**Table 1.** Summary of the Mother Tongue Instruction (MTI) Policies in Europe and Canada between 1950-1990.

Country \ Policy	MTI for Higher Education	Cultural Preservation	Rotation Perspective	Social Integration	Decentralization of Power	International Collaboration	Serving Immigrants with a strong socio-economic status
Germany	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
The Netherlands	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Sweden	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Denmark	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Canada	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

## **Suggestions**

With reference to the United Nations' acknowledgement and declaration on linguistic rights and mother tongue education for the children of immigrants and minorities as described in Spolsky (2004:119), the linguistic rights of all immigrants and their families need to be protected as well as the right of the children of immigrants and minorities to receive education in their mother tongue. Correspondingly, the Office of the Royal Society has drafted a proposal on Thailand's language policy for the years 2018-2022. The policy consists of six main areas: Thai language for both Thai and non-Thai citizens, the preservation of Thai vernaculars, the languages of economy and neighboring countries, language for non-Thai workers, language for disabilities, and the Thai language for translation and interpretation. However, the main objective of mother tongue education in the stated policy is to prepare young children in Thailand to comprehend the standard Thai to enable higher levels of their education. Besides, the policy on language for non-Thai workers has the objectives to enhance non-Thai workers' communication in everyday life, preserve basic rights according to the laws, and allow access to social benefits such as health care and information. Unfortunately, the needs of the children of immigrants who live temporarily in Thailand have not been taken into account in the stated policy.

Even though immigrant children in Phuket hold the right as stated by the UN, there is currently no sufficient and effective arrangement for this issue in Phuket despite the government having announced a policy to promote mother tongue or multilingual education for children who are not native speakers of standard Thai, and the children who do not have Thai citizenship according to Fry (2013 cited in Baker et.al 2017), and the notification of the Thai Ministry of Education on the acceptance of students without Thai citizenship and Thai Identification Registration, 2018. There are a good number of Burmese children attending schools in Thailand and who study in the Thai curriculum.

Although most immigrants do not have the intention of staying permanently in Thailand, the phenomenon of Burmese migration is

expected to be a permanent situation in the country as pointed out by Khieowan (2017). It could be proposed that all stakeholders should work together in order to plan this eventuality. Policies should be issued specifically and translated into effective working practices for this group of learners in particular.

To begin with, the policy that allows children with no Thai nationality to enroll in local schools should be practiced more seriously. For instance, the municipalities could be made responsible for surveying these target learners and working with schools in their residential areas to accommodate these children by following the regulations according to the notification of the Ministry of Education stated above. This would make it more possible for children of immigrants to study in local schools where facilities and security are of a decent standard. Having immigrant children in schools also enhances the learning environment when cultural diversity is exploited as a useful resource. For example, students in primary levels could learn about local festivals which are practiced not only in Thailand but also in other neighboring countries and how people in different countries practice similar festivals. Schools could assess students' knowledge on cultural diversity throughout multicultural activities. This will also promote the unity of ASEAN where member countries join together in 'One Vision, One Identity, One Community'.

Furthermore, the policy on mother tongues should extend to students who are from immigrant families living in Thailand. Regarding this, it could be learnt from history that the hidden agenda in mother tongue education policies in Europe for immigrants to return to their countries was not profitable. Mother tongue policies need to be transparent and accountable. Moreover, they should respond to the needs of all stakeholders, such as the host country, the home country, schools, teachers, parents and learners who might not share the same purpose of education with Thai families in pursuing higher education in Thailand's educational system, for example.

In addition, the decentralization policy employed in European countries could be adapted. Whilst still underlining national policy, the power should be decentralized to local administration. In this case,

Phuket is a possible starting area where municipal bodies may arrange mother tongue education programs in its local schools for the reason that there is a sufficient number of Burmese children to cater for. The flexibility in local administration would allow schools to design mother tongue education programs to be suitable for the children in their residential area for instance, to adapt the policy in revising objective, to employed Burmese native speakers to teach in the program, to adopt the Burmese curriculum with Thai language as a second language subject. Students should be evaluated based on the program objective. Besides, Burmese students and Thai students should join in some subjects and activities for social integration.

Moreover, outcomes in mother tongue education programs in European countries proved that budget and management were important factors for success. Needless to say, mother tongue education will not be possible without sufficient budget and resources that local schools shall receive from the government sector. This covers several aspects such as teacher training, teaching resources and educational technology. According to Winsa (2005), the Swedish government allocated a budget for immigrants to learn Swedish at approximately 1,200 Euro per person in 1997. Whereas the Dutch government allocated more than half a billion Euro annually for their mother tongue education program, according to Algemene Rekenkamer (2000 cited in Driessen 2008). In Thailand, the cost for a student to attend a public school is approximately 6,500 Thai Baht per person according to Roman and Chuanprapun (2019). This cost increases for any immigrant child where the cost of living is considerably high, such as Phuket. It might be estimated that the education cost for a student per year might be 20% higher than in other provinces. Since all schools receive the same amount of budget per head for all students, it might be suggested here that the municipalities could be the medium to implement the cooperation between local schools and NGO schools for the best use of their resources and the most effective implementation of the teaching and learning activities. Moreover, it would be reasonable to suggest that the government budget be increased for mother tongue-based education programs for the children of immigrants.

Also, the programs need to be well-managed by the schools and

local governments who need to work together in planning a curriculum that is best-suited for the learners within a reasonable budget and scope of resources. The achievements of the programs should be evaluated through different criteria throughout the project period, such as analyzing the levels of literacy, and drop-out rates, etc. Finally, research should be conducted to analyze the outcomes of the projects on an ongoing basis.

Significantly, international collaboration between the home country and the host country would drive mother tongue education programs towards success. It is recommended that the two countries should collaborate in several aspects. For instance, having degree equivalence that will allow students to transfer their degrees between countries and continue on the next step of education in another country. In addition, the demand and supply of mother tongue language education could be reflected in a transfer and exchange of materials, knowledge, technologies and human resources between countries. International collaboration could be created to be beneficial to both country collaborators.

In summary, Phuket is proposed to be the start up location for mother tongue education for immigrant children In Thailand. For such an accomplishment, language policy in education in Thailand may need to be reconsidered. Firstly, all children living in the country should be assisted to study in schools, where possible. Following that, lessons learnt from European countries and Canada show that a clear vision and strategy are crucial, as well as effective management. Also, a decentralization policy should be applied to the appropriate plan and management in different regions. Lastly, mother tongue education should not be limited to one single government; international collaboration will strengthen the programs.

## **Conclusion**

Thailand is currently receiving many immigrants from neighboring countries. Although the government has issued an official language policy, there is no explicit policy practice on the education for the chil-

dren of immigrants. The regulations that allow the children of immigrants to study in Thai schools, however, might not respond directly to the needs of these particular learner groups and their parents. Consequently, immigrant children lack education opportunities. Based on the principle that all children should receive education in one's own mother tongue language for the highest possible achievement, this paper has reviewed policies in mother tongue and bilingual education offered to immigrants and minorities in Europe and Canada with the aim of Thailand adopting and adapting such policies to be suitable for the Thai context. In this regard, Phuket could be a place where mother tongue education for immigrant children starts because of the large number of Burmese immigrants living and working in the province.

This paper proposes that regulations should allow all children who are living in Thailand to study in local schools with their mother tongue as the medium of instruction even if their mother tongue language is not a Thai vernacular. The objectives of the policy should not be limited to preparing children to comprehend the standard Thai of the higher levels of Thai education systems but should fully educate them with sufficient knowledge for their projected future lives. Thus, policies on language in education need to be issued by adapting lessons learnt from European and the Canadian governments.

As discussed, there were some significant drawbacks in the policies and practices reviewed above. Firstly, the hidden agenda on a rotation perspective policy was defective in the cases of Germany and the Netherlands. So, the objectives in policies on language in education need to be transparent and accountable. However, the correct objectives alone were not a guarantee for success because there were other difficulties such as politics, budget and management as could be seen in the case of Sweden. Therefore, sufficient budget and resources are crucial. Policy should be translated into inherently possible and manageable practices.

There are, however, positive aspects in the experience of mother tongue education in the western history. Significantly, decentralization of power from national to local levels allowed municipalities to design

suitable curriculums for their learners and the management became more flexible. Furthermore, people's demand for their linguistic rights was strong and was the main dynamic to the change as occurred in Canada. This emphasizes the fact that all stakeholders should have an opportunity and potential role in policy making, including immigrants and minority populations.

In addition, it is proposed that international collaboration between the home country and the host country would benefit all stakeholders. The collaboration can be in the form of curriculum equivalence, teacher training, teaching resources and human resources, etc.

Without an effective language policy for the children of immigrants, a lot of children would lose the opportunity to receive education and knowledge which will be a great advantage to both those individuals and their families, and society as a whole. Attention needs to be paid to this issue in order for the children of immigrants to be able to grow up to be quality members of any society/country in which they may live in the future, and especially in ASEAN. Thus, Ten Nations, One Community.

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