



Let Them Play Football: An Investigation of English Program Language Teachers' Maxims

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the beliefs of English language teachers in English Programs (EP) in Chonburi Province, Thailand, and to examine what facilitated or hindered teachers from following their beliefs. Borg's (2003) concept of teacher cognition informed the research, while Richards (1996) work on educational maxims (Empowerment, Involvement, Encouragement, Conformity, Accuracy, Order, Efficiency, and Planning) served as the framework for understanding teachers' belief systems. The study implemented a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase consisted of a 24-item questionnaire, distributed to EP teachers from schools around Chonburi, Thailand, to obtain their maxims. The qualitative phase of the study followed three of these 15 for observations of their classes and post-observation interviews to uncover aspects that adhered to each of the 8 maxims, areas where teachers felt supported in following their beliefs, and areas they felt impeded. The findings showed EP teachers most often held maxims aligned with empowering and encouraging their students and least aligned with conformity. Follow-up observations and interviews showed an incongruence between teachers' identified maxims and classroom practice and highlighted potential causes. Finally, the study identified a potential ninth maxim, the maxim of disengagement, as an emergent qualitative theme.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction, English programs, teacher belief, teachers' maxims, teacher cognition

Introduction

The English language, as a global lingua franca, has, along with other factors, contributed to the spread of English Medium Instruction (EMI) worldwide (Smith, 2023). In Thailand, EMI at the tertiary level is most often branded as International Programs (IP) or International Colleges (IC). At the primary and secondary levels, these programs are known by several names but can be identified

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as English Programs (EP), an educational model in which all or most courses are taught in English. In Thailand, the spread of these programs has created greater demand for teachers to fill EP positions, as well as for English language teachers for these educational models. While EMI definitions exclude English-language courses themselves (Macaro, 2018), the English courses taught within EP programs use different course materials in practice and require a more rigorous course of study. Students in these programs are making choices that prioritize English language proficiency and require a language course to align with that prioritization.

In an effort to support continued professional development in how language is taught in the classroom, knowing who the teachers themselves are becomes crucial. To understand who language teachers are as a profession, we first need to examine language teachers as individuals. The profession is populated by the individual, and the individual is molded by their past experiences. These point to the need to examine teacher cognition (Borg, 2003). It is not possible to understand who teachers are without understanding their teacher cognition.

Teacher cognition is shaped by the interplay of three factors: what educators experienced as students, what they learned about education during their teacher training, and what they have gone through in their professional careers (Borg, 2003; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). As EP programs have spread far and wide, there is an understudied cohort of teachers who work within this educational model. As the call for EP teachers grows, individuals who work in this context are shaped by their job experiences in ways that may be distinct from those of language teachers in other contexts. In addition, EP teachers, selected for language proficiency first and foremost, may be undertrained and lack necessary classroom skills (Richards, 2011). This again points to the potential for a belief system unique to the general English language teacher. The beliefs and practices of these teachers need to be better understood, as their number grows exponentially alongside the EP programs themselves. A secondary concern that necessitates a mixed-methods approach is that past studies (e.g., Kandel, 2018; Li & Walsh, 2011; Manyasi, 2015; Strotka & Koni, 2022) have revealed a pattern of incongruence between teachers' questionnaire responses about their classroom practice and their observed classroom practice.

Literature Review

Teacher cognition as popularly defined by Borg (2003) concerns what teachers know, think, and believe. Teacher cognition, then, plays a huge role in what teachers do in practice. Teacher cognition encompasses the entire mental construct of oneself. At the same time, because teacher cognition encompasses such a large swathe of information, it is beneficial to categorize the ideas a teacher holds and is shaped by into more accessible and comprehensible categories. Relevant to teacher cognition, maxims in education can be seen as a generalizable set of beliefs held by an educator about classroom best practices and how these shape their self-image as a teacher. This study adopted the eight separate categories of beliefs into which teacher cognition could be grouped, as outlined by Richards (1996), as a guiding principle. Richards' (1996) maxims are: the Maxim of Planning, the Maxim of Order, the Maxim of Involvement, the Maxim of Encouragement, the Maxim of Accuracy, the Maxim of Efficiency, the Maxim of Conformity, and the Maxim of Empowerment. These maxims are not defined by teacher cognition, nor do they define it, but they serve to identify generalizable truths and are situated within teacher cognition as an organizational tool.

Regardless of held beliefs in the realm of teacher cognition, classroom practice often deviates. This could be based on the need to maintain engagement or any number of other factors (Richards, 1996). Switching from one head to another is a part of teacher cognition and shows flexibility. As argued by Richards (1996), “Teachers presumably have a range of maxims they employ and in any particular lesson choose the ones which seem most likely to help them create a successful lesson.” These contextual factors can lead a teacher to stray from their own belief system as an educator. Importantly, the role of an EP teacher is not to translate a lesson from L1 into English, but rather to require a pedagogical shift in approach towards student-centered education (Dang et al., 2023; Macaro, 2018; Prabjandee & Nilpirom, 2018; Wilkinson, 2012; Yuan et al., 2022). These pedagogical and contextual demands can reshape, challenge, or support a teacher’s cognition, allowing them to follow their maxims or to interfere with them.

Teachers hold maxims to which they claim to be cognitively aligned, but in practice, these are not always evident. Recent research points towards teacher cognition and practice being incongruent. Teachers’ stated beliefs and classroom practice are often times misaligned, with classroom practices not matching up to the teacher’s beliefs (Strotka & Koni, 2022), or their maxims (Kandel, 2018; Manyasi, 2015). Furthermore, Li and Walsh’s (2011) examination of classroom interactions and teachers’ beliefs indicates that beliefs cannot be understood only through questionnaires or interviews, as questionnaires, interviews, and in-class observation revealed three separate sets of beliefs incongruent to each other: a questionnaire revealed one set of beliefs, observations revealed a contrary set of beliefs, and interviews showed yet another set of beliefs. Similarly, a study focused exclusively on the maxim of order found that teachers’ questionnaire responses indicated a belief in the maxim of empowerment that was not espoused in interviews or observed in the classroom (Kandel, 2018).

Previous studies highlight the importance of teacher cognition, teachers’ roles in EP programs, and the need to understand who these teachers are. As EP teachers are likely to be selected differently from other English language teachers, they are also likely to hold different cognitions from other language teachers. Previous research also calls into question the congruence or incongruence between stated beliefs in questionnaires and interviews, as well as the potential gap between stated beliefs and demonstrable beliefs in practice.

Research Objectives

The two objectives of the study were, first, to identify which maxims were held by EP language teachers in Chonburi, Thailand, and second, to discover which factors enabled teachers to follow their maxims and which prevented them from adhering to them.

Methodology

The role of researching teacher cognition is to gain a better understanding of the workforce. The conceptual framework of the current study follows the educational maxims identified by Richards (1996) as groupings of teacher cognition. The study, then, is built around teacher cognition as the larger construct, with identifiable educational maxims nested within it. There is a need for continual, ongoing professional development in professional education. The demands on EP language teachers, as well as their backgrounds, are distinct from those of language teachers in the general

population. Additionally, the contextual constraints are distinct, and the maxims adhered to by instructors could consequently differ from those in previous studies. To provide teacher training moving forward, understanding the population, distinct from general language teachers, is important. By adding to the literature on EP language teachers, EP-specific training could be more effectively designed and implemented.

1. Context and Participants

The study implemented a mixed-methods research design and was conducted in three phases. Participants in the initial quantitative data collection comprised 15 English-language teachers working in the EP context at government schools across Chonburi Province, Thailand. The second phase of the study was qualitative, and the participants were three English-language teachers in EP programs at a government school in Chonburi, Thailand. The three teachers each had one of their teaching periods observed to identify what maxims they practiced in the classroom. A final stage was a follow-up interview with each of the three teachers who participated in the second phase.

Participants in the initial stage of the research were recruited throughout the Chonburi educational area by distributing the questionnaire to school and program heads. The research participants were only those teaching English in government schools in Chonburi's EP context. The qualitative phase of the study selected participants based on a combination of their questionnaire responses, willingness to participate in the next phase of the study, and consideration of their time and schedules.

In the context of Thai education, English courses are divided between the mandatory minimum number of hours all students must study English and additional hours that programs choose to offer as supplemental or elective courses. The minimum required weekly hours of English instruction are known by various names, including "Basic", "Fundamental", "Main" English, and other analogs. Additional hours have no universal nomenclature and names vary widely from program to program, but commonly held additional hours are "supplemental", "ESP", "ESAP", as well as courses named after the basic skills or systems of English (Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Conversation, Grammar) or the specific focus of the course such as Drama, Journalism, Debate and many others. The three observed lessons, one per educator, were held in two fundamental English courses and one additional English course.

2. Research Instruments

2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data in the initial phase of the research. The questionnaire was designed to determine which maxims EP language teachers held, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to assess teachers' agreement or disagreement with the eight identified maxims. The questionnaire was validated by outside experts and consisted of three questions per maxim for a total of 24 questions. Questions were ordered randomly and were not asked in accordance with a specific maxim; rather, each stood as an individual item to the participants. The original questionnaire consisted of 40 potential questions, five per maxim, and was submitted for expert validation. The original goal was to pare down to three items per maxim for greater concision, but additional questions were prepared for expert validation. When all 40 items passed, two questions per maxim were removed from the study based on their

validation scores. This was to provide a stronger set of research questions and to avoid being burdensome and overly time-consuming to participants. Given the number of participants, a standard deviation was taken for reliability.

2.2 Class Observations

The class observations served as a qualitative tool to observe teachers' classroom practices. Observations were conducted after a participant profile was constructed from questionnaire responses to provide insight into which maxims the observed teachers held. Class observations were conducted from the back of the classroom while concurrently taking notes. The observer's role was that of a non-participant observer.

2.3 Interviews

The interviews that followed the in-class observation served as a qualitative tool. Interviews began by seeking clarification on whether the teacher viewed their observed class as typical or atypical, before proceeding to semi-structured questions designed to elicit their insights into the classroom choices they made. The following questions were unique to each interview and were either related to a note made during observation or spontaneous and prompted by an interesting line of inquiry provided by the educator. Following the interview portion, participants were again thanked for their participation and for allowing the interruption to their daily schedule.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process began with the distribution of validated questionnaires in November of 2023. The 2nd and 3rd phases of the study were conducted in March of 2024. Quantitative data were gathered through the questionnaire, and after allowing time to compile and analyze them to identify trends, the qualitative phases began. Qualitative data were gathered through real-time notes taken during the observed teaching period and recordings of the semi-structured interviews. Notes were descriptive and documented all observed interactions among participants in the class. Teachers' behavior was the focus of the notes, and notes were taken based on a holistic observation of the class delivered, not on the questionnaire. Observations were later weighed against questionnaires to identify congruence and incongruence, but during the instruction period, questionnaire responses were not considered.

The quantitative data were compiled, with each question averaged across all respondents, and each maxim, comprising three separate questions, was also averaged. The qualitative stages began with an observation to gather insights and develop conversation questions for the follow-up interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were then coded for places where a teacher showcased one of the eight known maxims, as well as responses that highlighted the facilitation of teachers to adhere to their beliefs, hindrances that made it difficult for teachers to adhere, and finally responses that aligned with a 9th maxim, which was an emergent qualitative theme in the current research, were coded. Codes were first used to identify the areas where a teacher felt supported or unsupported in following their own beliefs, then to code areas that showcased their maxims, and finally to code for disengagement.

4. Ethical Considerations

The first concern of the current study was to keep ethical considerations and participants' rights at the forefront. Informed consent forms were the first items of the distributed questionnaire, providing a full overview to potential participants. Participants were informed of the aims of the research, the steps taken to ensure their anonymity, measures to avoid the use of personally identifiable data, plans to safeguard and protect personal data during the writing process, and plans for the deletion of all data after a specified period following publication. Before observation and interview, permission from the program manager was also sought in addition to the teachers' consent to participate.

Results

1. RO1: What are the Maxims of EP English Language Teachers?

Table 1 below presents the scores for each of the 8 maxims based on the questionnaire responses. Results spanned from 2.89 to 4.33. The majority of the maxims fell within a much tighter spread, with the Maxim of Order, Efficiency, Planning, Empowerment, and Accuracy all falling between 3.73 and 3.89. Teachers much more strongly identified with 2 of the 3 student-centered maxims than they did with any of the other 6, at 4.33 and 4.31 for the Maxim of Encouragement and the Maxim of Involvement, respectively. As the only administratively-centered maxim, the Maxim of Conformity ($M=2.89$) was the maxim teachers were least aligned with. In fact, Conformity was the only maxim of the eight to fall below 3.0, indicating that, on average, teachers disagreed more than agreed with the Maxim of Conformity.

Table 1

EP Language Teachers Stated Maxims

Maxims	M	SD
Maxim of Planning	3.78	1.31
Maxim of Order	3.73	1.20
Maxim of Efficiency	3.76	1.25
Maxim of Accuracy	3.89	1.11
Maxim of Involvement	4.33	0.80
Maxim of Encouragement	4.31	0.90
Maxim of Empowerment	3.80	0.80
Maxim of Conformity	2.89	0.90

Table 2 below offers a more in-depth look at the maxims of EP language teachers, with all questionnaire items provided and grouped under their corresponding maxims. Given the limited number of participants in the current research, the results are context-specific and exploratory. In certain instances, diametrically opposed conditions scored incongruently. By way of example, when asked about redirecting students back to planned material and therefore away from their own lines of thought as a Maxim of Planning sub-question, teachers strongly agreed ($M=4.40$). Later, as a sub-question in the Maxim of Involvement, teachers again showed strong agreement ($M=4.00$) with

following students' lines of thought when they fell outside the lesson plan. These two thoughts cannot be held simultaneously.

While the Maxim of Empowerment was a concept that teachers, on average, agreed with ($M=3.80$), it is also the only Student-centered maxim to score below 4.31. This owes to the sub-question regarding classroom control. When students having a need for greater control of their own classrooms was posited, teachers were much cooler ($M=3.20$) than on either of the final 2 empowerment sub-questions, which dealt with teaching content being negotiable between students and teachers and a question on allowing students to challenge and question all aspects of the instruction they receive ($M=3.87$; $M=4.33$, respectively).

An interesting split occurred in the sub-questions related to the Maxim of Conformity. As the only maxim that teachers disagreed with more than they agreed with, the sub-questions are necessarily low. The only item teachers agreed with, albeit slightly, concerned pedagogy and lesson planning. Teachers disagreed with statements about avoiding alterations such as scaffolding for their students and disagreed about avoiding supplemental materials ($M=2.67$ in both instances), but did feel that the managerial level and school administrators should be responsible for setting pedagogy for them as well as handling lesson plans ($M=3.33$)

Finally, excluding The Maxim of Conformity, each of the 7 remaining maxims had at least one sub-item that teachers aligned with at the level of 4.00 or higher. The results are in keeping with Richards' (1996) statement that teachers are likely to have multiple maxims within them and rely on the one they believe is most likely to create a positive outcome in a specific situation rather than being fully committed to following one system in all situations.

Table 2

EP Language Teachers Itemized Stated Maxims

Maxim sub-questions	M	SD
Maxim of Planning	3.78	
I carefully plan all aspects of the lesson.	4.13	1.19
I feel less comfortable when students' questions are outside of the content I have planned.	2.80	1.42
I redirect students back towards the planned lesson.	4.40	0.63
Maxim of Order	3.73	
Respect for the teacher is very important to me.	4.47	1.06
I do not allow distractions in the classroom.	3.73	1.22
I maintain authority throughout the class hour.	3.87	1.25
Maxim of Efficiency	3.76	
I carefully manage the time in the instructional period.	4.33	0.90
The entire teaching period should be utilized for academic input.	3.47	1.30
Students should be given free time throughout the teaching period.	3.47	1.36

Table 2 (Continued)

Maxim sub-questions	M	SD
Maxim of Accuracy	3.89	
Primary focus should be placed on correct output in speaking and writing.	4.00	1.20
Error correction should be explicit (direct) rather than implicit (indirect).	3.93	0.96
It is important to have native speaking teachers lead speaking and listening exercises to ensure correct pronunciation	3.73	1.22
Maxim of Involvement	4.33	
I follow students' interests during the teaching process (planning, preparing, delivery).	4.33	0.90
I welcome and follow students' lines of thought that fall outside the planned lesson.	4.00	0.85
Target language should be adapted to fit into a setting that interests students.	4.67	0.49
Maxim of Encouragement	4.31	
The classroom atmosphere should be relaxed and inviting for students.	4.53	1.06
Interventions (stopping students' language to make corrections) should be kept to a minimum.	3.93	0.88
Maintaining students' confidence level should be prioritized over immediate target language or curricular goals.	4.47	0.63
Maxim of Empowerment	3.80	
Covered content should be negotiable between class and teacher.	3.87	1.19
I allow and encourage students to challenge all aspects of the class (materials, assignments, and instructions).	4.33	0.82
Students need more control in their class.	3.20	1.21
Maxim of Conformity	2.89	
Decisions pertaining to pedagogy and lesson planning should be made by administrators.	3.33	1.45
I use supplemental material sparingly and avoid when possible.	2.67	1.45
Assigned materials should not be altered (i.e., scaffolding).	2.67	1.23

1.1 The Emergence of the Maxim of Disengagement

The maxims identified by Richards (1996) all lay out a set of beliefs that would be widely regarded as positive. Even for maxims such as conformity, which many teachers dislike, the concept of the maxim is positive. Some maxims are student-centered, some teacher-centered, some variable, and some administratively-centered, but all are, for all intents and purposes, positive. During this research, a 9th maxim emerged as a qualitative theme, evident in observations of lessons and in qualitative interview data.

The Maxim of Disengagement is the collection of beliefs that place the highest value on non-interference. A teacher who exhibits the maxim of disengagement is less likely to be multifaceted as Richards (1996) argued that all teachers can and do hold multiple maxims and employ the one in a given lesson most likely to provide a positive learning outcome. Disengagement as a Maxim supersedes the other belief systems and causes a teacher to “unplug” from their work, either in part or in whole.

“But because I’ve been here for a long time, I know how to work around [the Ministry of Education {MoE} strands and indicators] learning outcomes. Actually, my learning outcomes are not related to what I am doing.” - (Teacher C)

“The learning outcome, don’t care about it.” - (Teacher C)

“But for that basic English, actually I’ve got twenty learning outcomes. I’m actually only using three. And that’s it. That’s what I told the foreigners, don’t mind it.” - (Teacher C)

“They’ve got a problem with their curriculum, learning outcomes, but with me, I don’t care about it. I use the book - and I won’t use, I know it - I will not use everything that’s in the book. - (Teacher C)

“But for that learning outcomes curriculum, I know it’s wrong, but I don’t care about it.” - (Teacher C)

Here, Teacher C exhibits aspects of disengagement towards an area of her work she feels is frustrating and out of her control. In this narrow understanding of disengagement, this is an area most teachers could hold beliefs in disengagement and still maintain their own personal maxims. Teacher C has disengaged from the Ministry of Education’s learning outcomes which she found to be confusing, frustrating, and unhelpful early in her career. She advises new teachers to do the same. She has not, however, disengaged from her teaching beliefs or what she holds as how to best serve her students. In this sense, she uses disengagement in areas as a tool, but she does not adhere to disengagement as a belief system.

In contrast, Teacher B exhibits a much broader form of disengagement:

“Students are very tired in the end of the semester, and teachers are tired too. Of course we are less serious.” - (Teacher B)

“[11th and 12th grade students] I never take iPads from them because they’re kind of adults.” - (Teacher B)

“[12th grade] you shouldn’t control them.” - (Teacher B)

Teacher B is showcasing disengagement by ceding her place to set rules in the upper secondary classroom.

“I [have] only [been teaching] 1 year in [this] program. Students are very clever and I don’t give homework. Never. Because they don’t have time for homework. They have extra classes after school. They always, like, extra English lessons, so they don’t have time for homework. I think it’s

enough for them. They have many teachers who speak only English, so many subjects in English, so I never give homework.” - (Teacher B)

“I never give them extra. [...] because I understand that it’s just a waste of time. They can have a rest and all of them, all students, have extra classes after school, so they are already busy. I don’t give homework. We can complete everything in one lesson. [With 8th grade], I have 3 lessons a week, and actually, It’s enough. Sometimes, really, I can waste like one class.” - (Teacher B)

“Sometimes we even, yeah, I open like just short animation movies.” - (Teacher B)

Teacher B again disengages from her students learning by highlighting how she views homework as a waste of time, her assigned course load as a waste of time, how her students do not have time to complete homework, and by highlighting how many other sources and other teachers are already covering their English education.

“I can feel that they’re very skillful in English, really. Especially, especially some students from [the 8th grade class] They’re very good in English, with the American accent. And, for example, if I’m not a native speaker, they are better [than the teacher] because they have this. You know this.” - (Teacher B)

Teacher B has disengaged from her class by saying they are already skilled enough and have advanced levels for 8th grade students. It is compounded by a belief that because some students can speak with a native accent that they are more knowledgeable than the teacher.

“Sometimes we give them free time. Free time, I mean, if they want to go play football - because we have this activity - it’s no problem if they skip a lesson. No, because it’s better for them too, because, all students, they understand English and they speak really very well. Very well. Even for some [8th grade students], they have level advanced, like boys. Fourteen years, fifteen years.” - (Teacher B)

Here, Teacher B showcases disengagement in full. She has ceded not only her role as an educator or facilitator; she has ceded her time to the football pitch.

“It is better to come to [an 11th grade class] because they already [are] silent. They already can complete everything. Just, ‘No, teacher’. Like, ‘do you want to play the game just one time?’ Because they repeat, ‘Oh, just give us a task.’” - (Teacher B)

Finally, Teacher B showcases a preference for older classes, specifically 11th grade classes which are soon to be taking university entrance exams, as they are ready to work and at times the students even need to prompt the teacher to stop wasting time and give them a task to complete.

Teacher B exhibits the maxim of disengagement fully as it is identified and presented in this research paper. Whereas Teacher C disengaged mentally from certain aspects of administrative tasks in order to best adhere to her maxims, Teacher B has replaced all aspects of their teacher cognition and self-professed maxims with the wholly self-evident maxim of disengagement. Teacher B stated on their questionnaire responses to strongly believe in building students’ involvement in the class, but these comments provide an example of her own students literally begging for an actionable lesson they could learn from rather than playing games. These requests are met with trips to the football pitch from Teacher B. Teacher B stated beliefs in empowering her students, but they strip their agency and say that they already know enough English and should focus on other things. Teacher B stated they strongly encourage students, but in practice they steer their students away from their work and ambitions.

2. RO2: What hinders or facilitates teachers' ability to adhere to their maxims?

The second research objective was addressed through the qualitative phases of observation and interview. A few themes developed pointing towards the areas teachers struggled with follow-through and what they felt most supported their ability to follow their own maxims.

2.1 Facilitation of Adherence

2.1.1 School Administration as a Facilitator

"But this school is really supporting me [...] with materials whenever I request something. [...] The last time it was like 25,000 [baht]. [...] so that's why I'm staying. - (Teacher C)

Here, Teacher C expresses the financial support her class receives from the administration any time she requests materials for use in the classroom. Further, this level and type of support has led Teacher C to choose to stay with the employer rather than seek other opportunities.

"Here they don't really care about, like, if I'm a native or non-native." - (Teacher A)

Teacher A is expressing the acceptance the school has shown for teachers from different backgrounds

"Frankly, in terms of curriculum? No." - (Teacher A)

In response to the prompt "is there anywhere where you feel you need more support", Teacher A indicates she has been fully supported.

"They allow me, like they let me go to seminars and actually." - (Teacher C)

Teacher C indicates continued professional development as a means of support.

"I love thinking, I love researching about teaching strategies. I'm experimenting with teaching strategies." - (Teacher C)

Teacher C has felt supported to take on classroom action research and grow as an educator.

"I'm not like, pinned, on curriculum and have to follow it 100%. No, I can actually be creative here. [...] if I see that, for example, I can spend more time teaching grammar and my students need that, I would skip listening or writing [to create time to work on grammar] - (Teacher A)

Here, Teacher A has conflated the curriculum with the assigned learning materials, but expresses support from the administration to deviate from the book and following or craft lessons more targeted to student needs.

2.2 Hindrance of Adherence

Hindrance to one's maxims was felt by educators from a much larger range of sources in comparison with where they felt support. EP English language teachers felt they were limited in the ways they could follow their personal beliefs as an educator by: lack of belief in their efficacy; their teaching materials; discipline and classroom management issues; and while it was often mislabeled by teachers with less experience in Thai education, the Thai Ministry of Education's core curriculum's lack of alignment to their teaching materials was an identifiable hindrance.

2.2.1 Lack of Belief in Teacher Efficacy as a Hindrance

"Actually, I just want to tell you, the first few months, actually, they didn't want to accept me, because I'm not a native speaker. So, I told this school, 'Try me. If I can't do anything, then fire me.'" (Teacher C)

In contrast to the feelings of Teacher A, who did not see her non-nativeness as an impediment, Teacher C did face challenges. This could be related to personal interpretation or the growth of the industry, as Teacher C has been with the school for significantly longer and hiring policies may have shifted between the beginning of Teacher A and Teacher C. Furthermore, Teacher C felt initially like her being a non-native was limiting her opportunities which can be a hindrance to teacher cognition when there is a lack of belief in her efficacy.

“We do everything for students. We support them.” - (Teacher B)

By supporting and doing everything for students as a school policy, Teacher B was hindered from allowing students to make self-determinations and become more self-reliant.

2.2.2 Teaching Materials as a Hindrance

“The curriculum is the Bible [...] I think it’s [the school’s curriculum]. We have different books from the ministry curriculum.” - (Teacher A)

Teacher A indicates that the coursebook she has been assigned is the bible, indicating all decisions and work output must go back to the material.

“I love the curriculum [at the school]. It is very interesting, engaging [...] but the books for some of our students are way too easy. [...] I teach a few native speakers here [...] Like, I have to teach a native speaker kid who speaks better than me, and I have to teach him, like, the words ‘dangerous; or ‘beautiful’, and that does not make any sense.” - (Teacher A)

Teacher A faces challenges from the learning material in that it is not designed to meet the needs of an advanced class or advanced students.

“I think [from] 10 units [in the schools National Geographic text book], only 4 units that I was able to use.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C was hindered by the intersection of the programs chosen text book range and the Ministry of Education’s curricular guidelines. The textbooks are not designed to match up with the curriculum leaving units that do not adhere to the curriculum and curricular goals that are not covered by the book as well.

“I don't know [if I] should give those students who are advanced more difficult exercises? And I tried it once. I don't know. I couldn't do that. It would be too time consuming [...] so I stopped doing that.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C was limited from following her belief due to the intersection of time and learning materials. She is unsure of what to do with advanced students who are beyond the level of the learning materials, but stops short of making individual learning plans due to how time consuming it would be.

“They cannot follow [the] book, you know? Or lessons. It's boring for them.” - (Teacher B)

Teacher B cannot adhere to a belief system related to learning materials because she finds them to be ill-fitted to her students’ interests.

“Sometimes I create even, like, more difficult grammar for my students, because I have to teach them present simple. Present simple! Everybody knows present simple. So, I have to create something else, [...] Which is okay for me as a teacher, I have the experience of like stretching the lessons.” - (Teacher A)

Teacher A again faces hindrance related to under-leveled materials for her class.

“That’s the problem that until now, I don’t know how to solve. Because some students, those who are advanced, they could finish the activities, I mean, better and quicker than the group. Waiting for this group that wants to catch up. That’s the one that I don’t have a solution here for the meantime.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C faces the obstacle of a mixed level classroom where the book is not challenging enough for the top of her class but still is useful for others.

“And of course, also using the books. We have to use the books, because the students pay for those books.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C expresses a desire to use other materials she finds more useful or appropriate but is beholden to the book out of a financial responsibility to her students and their families.

2.2.3 Discipline and Classroom Management as a Hindrance

“But some of the classes are [a big handful]. Like, super handful, yeah. So, in that case, I would prefer a little bit more of help, from, from the school.” - (Teacher A)

“I am a teacher with like, almost 10 years of experience teaching in different countries, and I have to say in Thailand, [...] it can be challenging to handle the classroom in terms of behavior.” - (Teacher A)

Teacher A encountered hindrance in her beliefs related to classroom management. Despite having a wealth of experience as a teacher, lacking experience within the specific context and culture of the country made the issue more challenging.

“For me, it's not good to follow the book because it's not interesting for students. Actually, yes. But if you don't follow the book, actually it will be [a] very noisy class, because if you follow the book, they follow [the] program, they can complete everything. [...] actually, you give the task and they can do it. And if you don't follow a book, for example, [if] I make a presentation and make a game, oh my god, it's very messy, you know? And it's very difficult to control them” - (Teacher B)

Teacher B highlights the hindrance and the resulting lack of follow through on their stated beliefs. Because they view the assigned material as boring, they would like to provide supplemental materials. Because supplemental materials make the class harder to control, she prefers to stick to the book.

“But for writing, that I don't give homework for writing tests, because they will be using chatGPT or google, so as much as possible, writing it should be on paper, that's what I'm doing.” - (Teacher C)

“[...] the biggest problem for me in the classroom, those are the devices: phones and tablets. If the classroom [...] [if it] is boring, I will have to handle the devices. [...] and sometimes it's like [a] physical fight there. You have to actually like, take those.” - (Teacher A)

“All students from our programs, they have iPads. That's very bad, actually, because they don't use iPads for study. [...] they have iPad, like they just use [it] for playing games” - (Teacher B)

Teacher A, B, and C are all met with similar hindrances to their maxims in terms of the proliferation of technology. Teacher A seeks to make lessons more interesting to limit the use of devices, Teacher C limits the types of assignments she can give to avoid AI generated works being turned in, and Teacher B faced challenges in the classroom related to devices and games.

2.2.4 Thai Education and the Ministry of Education as a Hindrance

“It's problematic because they are graduating. They don't need these scores, are you aware of that? That the [the 9th grade class level], this second semester, they don't need this course, actually.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C is hindered in her practice in part related to the nature of Thai education. The scores of the final semester of 9th and 12th grade courses are not placed on application transcripts for upper secondary or university, respectively. The scores for her students are less a motivating factor.

“That’s a problem of the Thai [system] But I’m a foreigner, so I, I have to [accept it].” - (Teacher C)

“They’ve got a problem with the curriculum, learning outcomes. [...] but for that, learning outcomes, curriculum, I know it’s wrong.” - (Teacher C)

Teacher C feels a hindrance related to her place in the culture as a foreigner and her inability to easily make sense of the nationwide core curriculum.

“I notice with the foreigners, they will say, ‘I don’t know what the learning outcome is. [It’s] not related. It’s so difficult.’ I always tell them, ‘Use the book. Use what you have.’” - (Teacher C)

As a result of these hindrances, Teacher C, as an experienced voice and leader at her school, advises new teachers to ignore the core curriculum and follow their assigned learning materials.

Discussion

The first research objective was met by providing data on the self-identified maxims of EP English Language teachers. EP program language teachers showed strong agreement to the three student-centered maxims (Empowerment, Encouragement, Involvement). In contrast, teachers showed a strong aversion to the maxim of conformity and demanded more autonomy in the workplace. Finally, flexibility in teachers’ beliefs was evidenced by the strong responses to each of the maxims in at least 1 sub-question.

In regards to classroom practice, the study showed significant variance between teachers’ questionnaire responses, interview responses, and classroom practice. Potential limiting factors to their ability to follow their own maxims were identified as curriculum-based (from the Thai Ministry of Education) and classroom-management-based. This incongruence is in keeping with the findings of other studies that compared self-identified teacher cognition and the teacher’s classroom practice (Li & Walsh, 2011; Manyasi, 2015; Kandel, 2018; Strotka & Koni, 2022). Another possible explanation for the gulf between questionnaire results and practice is also possible; in the present research, this incongruence was most noticeable in the student-centered maxims of Empowerment, Involvement, and Encouragement. Woods (1996) stated that teachers might claim to hold beliefs they view as consistent with changing paradigm shifts rather than answer based on their true belief systems. As an example, a teacher who believes in strict grammar instruction, divorced from language production, and in rote memorization as best practices in education will surely be aware that modern research has shifted away from these methods. Their classroom practice may still be in keeping with their true beliefs, i.e., rote memorization, but their questionnaire responses might be in line with what they know is expected of modern educators, i.e., a shift towards the teacher as a facilitator. With many forms of education shifting towards student-centered models, this theory is a potential explanation for questionnaire results showing high belief in student-centered maxims when classroom practice does not reflect the same belief system.

Finally, the current research indicates the potential existence of a 9th maxim. The maxim of disengagement is one that might be noticed anecdotally by experienced teachers but has not been shown in research prior. Disengagement can occur in small areas that might be dismissed as “burnout”, but when it is all-enveloping, it becomes something else entirely. Disengagement, as a maxim, is the educational equivalent of laissez-faire economics. Students are already too advanced, students are already good enough, students are already working too hard, students have enough other teachers, students have enough other opportunities, and at the end of this thought process is an English

teacher who argues for the value of football matches over essays, movies over speaking games, or a hands-off approach over structured language practice. The positive connotation of the term "maxim" and the track record of trained educators being strongly dedicated to their profession have obscured the possibility that educators hold negative maxims. The potential prevalence of the maxim of disengagement in a workforce characterized by a language proficiency selection process for new and inexperienced teachers is very real. If the maxim does exist in a pervasive way, the nature of selecting teachers with less training but higher language proficiency, more likely to be from outside of the culture as well as having less contextual job experience makes EP programs particularly susceptible to hire educators who are aligned to the maxim of disengagement.

Implications and Conclusion

Fifteen EP language teachers' questionnaires revealed that their stated maxims were aligned with student-centered pedagogies. Follow-up observations and interviews found classroom practice to be incongruent with stated maxims. Support from the school allowed teachers to adhere more closely to their belief systems, and obstacles, including classroom management challenges and a lack of tools to navigate the Thai Ministry of Education's core curriculum, made it more difficult for teachers to act in accordance with their beliefs.

A leading cause of foreign teachers leading EP classes in government schools in Thailand struggling to achieve maxim adherence was a misunderstanding of the core curriculum. In the future, in-service teachers should have a support system for this issue. A liaison to serve as a go-between for teachers between their school-assigned materials and the national core curriculum would be a beneficial measure. Giving foreign teachers more hours in supplemental courses and assigning the core course to Thai natives would also help alleviate pressure between the two sides. A support system here is likely to be more beneficial than teacher training given the nature of staff turnover. In-service training for classroom management and discipline issues the teachers faced would prove a better use of training hours.

On the topic of staff retention and hiring, with the emergent theme of disengagement highlighted here, it is recommended that the managerial level of the school select teachers, when possible, for traits that run counter to disengagement: A strong background in the field, significant experience in teaching, preferably experience in Thailand, or value they see in the language, on top of others. Disengagement is likely to be a self-limiting maxim, as those who hold this belief system are less likely to be lifelong educators. Those with less experience or no experience are more likely to have this belief system.

The present study was limited in its size and scope. The sample size limits the generalizability of the quantitative results for profiling EP teachers. Time constraints were also a limiting factor, preventing multiple observations of multiple classes to draw a more complete picture of what a typical class instruction period looks like for the observed teachers, and instead relying on teachers to self-report whether the lesson was typical. Finally, while EP programs are becoming increasingly available in government-funded schools in Thailand, they are still mostly operated in private schools, which are more common than public schools in the country. Future studies should not exclude teachers in private education EP settings, as they are likely to have been selected in the

same manner and are in the same cohort. Additional funding and higher salaries in private schools also is likely to show a fuller picture of EP language teachers' profile. Additionally, a much more robust qualitative research component is recommended, with a focus on interviews and practice to address potentially unreliable questionnaire results, especially considering the maxim of disengagement, which needs further research. The unlikelihood that a teacher who believes in the maxim of disengagement would admit to such in a questionnaire makes it an unsuitable means of gaining further insight. A follow-up study implementing a mixed-methods model with qualitative given priority is recommended

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