

**Christian Belief and English Language Teaching :
A Case Study of Christian English Teachers in Thailand**

**ความเชื่อคริสเตียนและการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ :
กรณีศึกษาครูคริสเตียนที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย***

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate influences and correlations between the Christian faith and English language teaching of Missionaries in Thailand. A research question explores the religious statements leading Evangelical Christian teachers to integrate their Christian faith into their classroom practices. Ten missionary teachers in a Christian language school in Bangkok were selected for this investigation. Data were obtained by semi-structure interviews supported by classroom observations.

Data Analysis results have shown three emergent themes influencing the participant teachers to integrate their Christian faith into teaching. These themes are divine mission (sharing faith with the world), divine creation of humans and divine calling (purpose in life). This research illuminates the interrelationship of teacher's personal religious beliefs and their classroom practices as well as enhances understanding of the intersections of Christian faith and language teaching in Thailand.

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพล และความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างหลักความเชื่อของคริสเตียนและการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของมิชชันนารีในประเทศไทย จุดประสงค์หลักของคำถามวิจัยเพื่อศึกษาหลักความเชื่อของอิวานเจลิคัลคริสเตียนที่ส่งผลต่อการถ่ายทอดความเชื่อของครูมิชชันนารีที่เข้ามาสอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย โดยงานวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษามิชชันนารีจำนวน 10 คน ที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษในโรงเรียนสอนภาษาแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพมหานคร ผู้วิจัยได้เก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์

เชิงลึกรูปแบบกึ่งมีโครงสร้าง และการสังเกตชั้นเรียน ผลการศึกษาแสดงแนวความคิดหลัก 3 ประการที่มีอิทธิพลไปสู่การถ่ายทอดความเชื่อในการสอน คือ การทรงสร้างของพระเจ้า พันธกิจในฐานะผู้เชื่อ และการทรงเรียกจากพระเจ้างาน วิจัยนี้แสดงให้เห็นถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความเชื่อทางศาสนาในส่วนบุคคลของครูผู้สอน และการถ่ายทอดในการสอน อีกทั้งช่วยสร้างความเข้าใจที่ดีขึ้นสำหรับจุดเชื่อมโยงระหว่างความเชื่อคริสเตียนและการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของมิชชันนารีในประเทศไทย

Introduction

Christian mission services in the form of English language teaching have clearly been active in Thailand (Christian Volunteers in Thailand, 2014; Komchadleuk, 2013). Christian missionaries played a vital role in Thailand's education to a great extent (Chaiwan, 1976). Christianity is directly relevant to English language teaching because Christian missionaries have played a major role in spreading English in Thailand throughout the history (Chaiwan, 1984; Saiyasak, 2003). However, little research on teachers' religious beliefs has been conducted as the dimension of professional teachers' knowledge in an English language teaching context. Moreover, research in this area is merely in a beginning state of examination. Specifically, to the best of researchers' knowledge based on research on this topic, TESOL research in Thailand has not yet been explored in the aspect of teachers' personal religious beliefs in relation to teachers' professional knowledge. In an attempt to fill this gap, Thailand will be chosen as a research site.

Theoretical Framework

Teachers' knowledge as explained by Borg (2003) is "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching. Teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003: 81).

Teachers' belief and Teaching Practices

A research trend in teacher education continues to explore how teachers know what they know and the way they practice what they know in classroom settings, including their perception of good teaching. (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005).

Freeman and Johnson (1998) stated that teachers' knowledge related to teaching is not merely guided by their theoretical and pedagogical skills. Instead, teachers also have their prior experiences, personal values, and beliefs which can shape their classroom practices.

Moreover, the goals teachers pursue are of importance and might be the reason behind the means by which teachers organize their classrooms as well as the teachers' individual interpretation of classroom processes (Nespor, 1987).

Elshtain (2002) recognized that teaching can reflect the religious perspective of the teacher. If teachers' religious convictions are robust, it is essential to embody who teachers are and what teachers do.

Recent research also suggested that spiritual and religious beliefs which are usually omitted need to be included in the research on teachers' knowledge as "they already fit the area of inquiry the field has defined for itself" (Baurain, 2012).

Evangelical Christian

The operational definition of Evangelical Christian is based on Bebbington (1989), which identifies Evangelical Christian belief as characterized by quadrilateral namely Biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism. Firstly, Biblicism focuses on the Bible as the word of God and its inerrancy in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. Secondly, crucicentrism focuses on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Thirdly, conversionism focuses on the concept of being born again and is affirmed by Evangelicals as an experience resulting in significant life change. Finally, activism refers to the work of the individual in sharing his or her faith. One particular aspect of activism is that Christians are driven to be a witness to God, to share His goodness and the good news of salvation with the world. As Jacques (2010) stated "Evangelism is the

inevitable fruit of genuine faith".

This research mainly focuses on Evangelical activism as it provides the key to understand the concept of Christian witness, which tends to be the issue behind the missionwork in the field of English language teaching.

The idea of implementing beliefs into practice suggests a process in which the beliefs exist fully formed before the translation process begins. It is worthwhile to include Protestant Christian statement of faith, the religious background of the participants in this study as a framework.

Protestant Christian Statement of Faith

The faith statement provided by the Southern Baptist Church, the Christian denomination who established the school where this research was conducted, can provide a framework for faith and learning integration. Related topics will be quoted from the Southern Baptist Convention (2000) as follows :

God : There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe.

Man : God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man ; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Salvation : Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Evangelism and Missions: It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Stewardship: God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions.

Religious Liberty: God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it.

Methodology

The study investigates the interconnectedness between the teachers' personal religious beliefs and teachers' knowledge as manifested in teacher practices at the ground level. Participants were ten Evangelical Christian English teachers in a Christian English language school in Bangkok. The research question is, "what are the religious

statements that lead Evangelical Christian English teachers to integrate their faith into their teaching practices?" The research question posed sought to shed some lights on the aspects of Evangelical Christian beliefs that encouraged Christian English teachers to share their faith in their profession and how these teachers view the interactions and interrelationships between their religious beliefs and their professional lives. Particularly, the focus has been placed on Evangelical Christian teachers and the concept of Christian witness in Evangelical Christian belief.

This study took a qualitative approach, for it was explorative in nature and involved the need for rich description of the participants. The major advantage of employing interviews as a data collection tool lies in its strength as a strategy to elicit information from participants in regards to elements in the discourse that we cannot directly observe, such as feelings, thoughts and intentions (Merriam, 2009).

Ten participants were recruited from a non-profit Evangelical Christian English language school in Bangkok, Thailand. The volunteer teachers were selected based on their confession of faith. The participants were broadly categorized as Evangelical Christians and were regular members of Protestant Christian churches. The participants (see table1) were a group of American volunteer English Teachers. All Participants received training prior to their teaching. Two participants had also graduated with a degree in Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Table 1 Profile of the Participants

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Age
1	Sarah	F	American	50
2	Joshua	M	American	52
3	Grace	F	American	61
4	Olivia	F	American	46
5	Mark	M	American	42
6	Sam	M	American	65
7	Hannah	F	American	58
8	Jack	M	American	29
9	Anna	F	American	30
10	John	M	American	26

Regarding the measuring instruments, the researchers were informed by the theoretical framework-faith-learning integration-while devising research instruments. The main research methods were a single-sited investigation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, both of which were complemented by supporting data taken from classroom observations. One-on-one in-depth interviews with participants were considered favorable for this study compared to group interviews. Individual interviews were more likely to yield the personal views of the participants when certain levels of confidentiality and trust were required and established (Bernard, 2006). Furthermore, one-to-one conversational verbal reports provided by participants offer massive amounts of information and knowledge to the interviewer.

A standardized structured format was adopted in which each participant was asked the same questions. Carefully worded and considered interview questions were written in advance since they were to be asked during the interview. These interviews were based on a written interview guide (Varghese and Johnston, 2007). In this study, the researchers prepared a list of interview questions as the interview guide to explore participants' experiences and perspectives. Each of these interview questions was seen as the starting point for further discussions and exchanges of information between the researchers and the participants. (Please refer to Appendix A for the interview protocols of the present study). During interview sessions participants were asked to be digitally recorded. Text-transcription was conducted by the

researchers and the full verbatim transcription was completed within a month after interview data were collected when the interviewer's memory was still fresh.

Data analysis methods adopted in this study were pertinent to the research questions and the data collection method. Researchers employed thematic analysis. According to Given (2008), thematic analysis is seen as a data analysis strategy employed in the qualitative research. It provides many benefits in the analysis of qualitative information. Interview transcripts were thematically coded by the researchers using the QDA Miner, qualitative research software, with codes sorted into related groupings or domains. The process of analysis included careful reading, coding, sorting codes into topically related groupings, and identifying main

themes. Triangulated approach was employed to enhance the validity of the findings. Three rounds of data collection were employed in the present study; a preliminary interview, observations and final retrospective interviews.

Results

Patterns in the data were analyzed and constructed into a coherent narrative addressing the central research question. Analyzing and interpreting the data revealed three emergent themes concerning the doctrines of Christianity which lead participants to undertake religious integration.

Figure 1 shows the summary result of the central research question, three main themes leading Christian English teachers into faith sharing.

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Figure 1 A Wheel Drive
(Religious Statements that Lead Christian English Teachers to Integrate Faith into Teaching)

Divine Mission (Sharing Faith with the World)

The Evangelical Christian statement of faith (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000) under the topic of evangelism and mission clearly stated :

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Joshua, for example, mentioned Jesus Christ's commandment when asked about sharing his religious faith in classrooms: "Jesus said go and tell others. It is all about honoring, expecting and trusting."

Olivia also mentioned the same matter, but she explained it as "the way Jesus Christ asked us to walk" in which she meant Jesus Christ's commandment, sharing faith with the world. She said "I feel like it is an opportunity to witness about who Jesus is in the presence of all in the way that Jesus asks us to walk"

Participants mentioned their main purpose for coming to Thailand is sharing the message of faith to the local people. They showed strong motivation for evangelism and viewed faith sharing as a primary reason for entering the teaching field. However, they are also concerned about their professional responsibilities; for example, they consider covering the lessons they were assigned to teach as being primarily important. In short, the core value of Christian belief regarding the great commandment of Jesus Christ and the mission was one important factor promoting participants to share faith in their classroom practices.

Divine Creation of Humans (Doctrine of Creation, Love and Sin)

The doctrine of God's love and humans' sin became another major finding as an approach for participants to integrate faith in their classroom practices. Christians believe that God creates humans in His own image and He loves everyone. Christian love seems to be the heart of Christian doctrine. According to the Evangelical Christian statement, "God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000).

Participants' perspectives reflected the Christian view on the divine creation of humans in that all men are created according to God's own image. Every one of us is unique and special, and deserves to be treated with respect and care. This theme emerged as one of the prominent factors for the reason the participants would like to share faith and choose to integrate their faith in their practices. They believed God loved their students and so did they. They wanted to help students not only academically, but also spiritually. One good example is from Anna, who connected her Christian doctrine and reason for staying:

God loves the Thai people just as much as He loves the American or anyone else... So we can tell them that God wants their people to know that He loves them too... You know, it's not just a western religion ... that's why we love them and why we wanted to be here

Hannah for example, explained the reason why she cared about spending time with students and showing the love of God for them: "So I am genuinely interested because they are made in God's image. They are special and they have a story to tell." she made an effort to show God's love and share the message of God's creation to her students as she mentioned "The student comes first and we try very hard to show them that God created them. Jesus loves them and we love them. We are here to help them" Sarah also made a good conclusion here when she

In the same vein, another volunteer teacher, Olivia, also explicitly explained that she explained the way she viewed her relationship with students:

So for me, my Christian faith is to love God, love others as much as you love yourself. So if I love God then I receive or I feel loved by God. Then I have the incredible capacity to love others. And also I need to love myself, which means I need to be confident and secure and comfortable with differences and feel very secure in myself. By being loved by God then I can share His love to anybody in any situation.

Divine creation of humans and the doctrine of God's love are deeply rooted in the hearts of the participants in this study as they sought to pass this message on to their students and make the love of God known to their students either implicitly or explicitly.

Divine Calling (Purpose in Life)

Christians believe that humans were born with purpose in life and each individual has a call or mission from God. Talents are gifts from God. It is each and

everyone's responsibility to grow and make those gifts benefit others. As the statement of faith (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000: 13) explained:

Stewardship: God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions.

8 out of 10 participants reported that they became English teachers because of their spiritual callings, and they were given the gifts of language and teaching to benefit others and to share the message of God both overtly and covertly. Mark, for example, expressed feeling called to teach and he viewed teaching as his spiritual gift:

God gives me the gift to be a teacher. So this is an expression of my gift in the Bible; it is called a spiritual gift. I feel that being the teacher actually is an expression of a gift that God gave to me, so it brings me a lot of happiness and a joyful heart when I am able to use the gift that God gave to me. It is my calling.

Sam also claimed that his desire to come to Thailand to teach English was motivated by his faith:

I wouldn't be teaching if I didn't come to Thailand. And I wouldn't come to Thailand if I didn't have a call of God. So I think it also links back to God. He has all plans and purposes for everyone and that plan and purpose brought me to Thailand ... I didn't see myself as a teacher, but God called me to do it. So I do it....I do manage the classroom in a way that would express my Christian faith to the most.

The participants articulated that they felt called by God to teach English in Thailand and made the connection between their spiritual gifts and sharing faith in classrooms. As another example, Olivia, who has been a volunteer teacher in the school for almost ten years and gave up her property and everything in her hometown to settle down in Thailand, emphasized her calling. She explained that she felt the need to share her Christian beliefs including her story of feeling called with students. She said "God brought me here I know He did. I can share the gospel and I am able to share with students that God brought me here."

The Participants perceived "Divine Calling," or the purpose in life, as one of the major factors to work as volunteer teachers so as to utilize their spiritual gifts of teaching to benefit others and at the same time integrate their faith in their classroom practices.

In summary, with regard to the research question-religious beliefs motivating Evangelical Christian English teachers to integrate their faith into their classroom practices-the participants perceived three key themes linked back to the statement of faith in the framework (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000). The first theme is Divine Mission, the responsibility to share the good news with the world. With this faith statement, the participants viewed integrating their Christian beliefs into their teaching practices as a necessity. Moreover, this faith statement was also the main reason for entering the profession. The second theme is Divine Creation, the doctrine of God's creation.

The participants' love for students is also in relation to their faith statement regarding God's creation of all men and God's love for each and every one. Participants' decisions to promote spiritual changes and integrate their beliefs in their teaching are in accordance with their own beliefs and ideologies. The last emergent theme is the divine calling, or the participants' perceived purposes in their lives. The participants' views of teaching in Thailand as a spiritual calling are also consistent with the concept of stewardship in the faith statement. They view that language and teaching are God-given gifts for which they are stewards. The participants' believed they were called by God to be in the country as English teachers and used their gifts to glorify God. So their motivation to integrate their faith in their practices can also connect to the theme of divine calling. From the participants' perspectives, all of these three faith statements motivated them to integrate their beliefs into their teaching practices.

Discussion

The three religious statements are seen as a driving wheel propelling participations to share their Christian faith. The participants saw faith sharing as a commandment from God. This core belief came in to play as one of the factors motivating participants to integrate faith and learning in the classroom. Moreover, four participants in this study, although not sent by any missionary organization, viewed themselves as missionaries, for they felt they were doing missionary work of teaching English in Thailand. According to the statement of faith (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000),

God created man in His own image. Sin separates humans from fellowship with God and causes spiritual death. Christ died for all mankind and offers the free gift of eternal life for whoever accepts Him as Lord and Savior. Based on this belief, the participants' love for their students is rooted in the doctrine that men are God's creation and God's love is for everyone, the participants wanted to share the message of salvation to those who were ready and interested to hear it. In brief, divine creation of men is central to the Christian gospel and is also another major factor that propels participants to integrate their faith in their teaching. Christians are supposed to be servants of Christ and have been given trust to take care of things He blessed them with. As a Christian, everything one owns in life is given from God. Most of the participants feel they are called to come to Thailand and teach English. Participants acknowledge that their ability to teach is a gift from God; therefore, they have to use this gift to benefit others as well as glorify God. Based on the belief, participants were convinced that they were called to teach English, and they were not only working for a school, but they were destined by God. They have a God-given purpose in life to be fulfilled. With this concept, participants feel the necessity to integrate their faith in their teachings. It seemed that the participants viewed their profession as a spiritual calling. As a result, the participants organize classrooms in ways that reflect their faith to the utmost. The goal of teacher here as guided by the core belief of Evangelical

Christianity—Christians are driven to be a **witness to God-influences the way teachers organize and practice in classrooms.**

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This study brings about more understanding of religious beliefs, Christianity, to be more specific, and its impact on language teaching. It also fulfills the knowledge gap exploring the connections of Christian faith and education as well as enhances understanding of the intersections of faith and English teaching. It shows the way Christian faith and English language pedagogy impact each other in a certain way. This paper would directly benefit Christian schools in general. Data from this study can be a framework or guideline for a school's direction and position as well as qualifications of potential teachers. The researchers believe that this study would help to more firmly establish Christian faith and the English language teaching as a legitimate area of inquiry and better inform the practice of Christian teachers. The results have provided further evidence confirming that the teachers' individual religious beliefs and their teaching have impacted each other. The researchers recommend future researchers to include the voice and perception of students taught by the Christian English teachers. It is also highly recommended to extend the research to explore other major religious beliefs in Thailand such as Buddhism, or Islam, to investigate other worldviews and value.

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