

## English for the Purpose of Reducing the Poverty of Orphans with Disabilities in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study examines the English teaching/learning practices of Christian missionaries who teach Thai orphans with disabilities with a view to developing skills that will enable them to overcome their impoverished condition. The researcher found that older Thai orphans (>14 years) with disabilities evinced higher levels of awareness of their disabilities and are accordingly more engaged in learning English than the other orphans examined. This is because they believe the acquisition of English skills will prove compensatory in view of the paucity of survival skills they now command, thereby enhancing employment opportunities in spite of their disabilities. Conversely, the researcher found that younger Thai orphans (<14 years) with disabilities exhibited lower levels of awareness of the consequences of having disabilities and scarcely saw the need to learn English for the sake of becoming more employable. As a result of demonstrating the role of awareness of disabilities as a major motivating factor for learning English, the researcher concludes that Thai orphans such as those studied can be encouraged to learn English by heightening their awareness that their job opportunities are limited by their disabilities and that becoming skilled in English can provide a feasible means whereby they can obtain suitable employment. The results of this study should prove beneficial to those engaged in sustainable English education and practice in Thai orphanages.

**Keywords:** Orphans with disabilities, English teaching/learning, poverty reduction

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1 Purpose of this study*

The objective of this inquiry is to examine the English teaching and learning practices (in spoken and written modalities) involving Christian missionaries as English teachers and Thai orphans with disabilities—whether late and early adolescents or younger children—as learners of English. The English teachers are engaged in the task of providing these disabled orphans with a marketable skill on the assumption that otherwise they will have an unremittingly impoverished life because of being largely unemployable. Even though such endeavors may appear small in the overall scheme of things, it still seems well to examine how English language learning can become a beneficial tool in addressing severe socio-economic problems and human suffering. To address this task it is first incumbent on us to understand what educational practices would prove fruitful in teaching English to such students. Once we have a firm understanding of the situational logic of teaching English to such students, we can consider whether developing English skills can indeed be a useful adjunct to alleviating problems of poverty, especially those stemming from physical conditions prohibiting ordinary employment, on a sustainable basis. Section 1.2 provides context in which is necessarily briefly discussed questions of disability, attendant poverty and the sustainability of ameliorative programs in regard to Thai orphans. Section 1.3 provides a highly selective review of the expanding role of English learning techniques as applied to Thai orphanages. Finally, Section 1.4 provides a selective review of the literature pertaining to context awareness theory.

#### *1.2 Disability, poverty and the sustainability of ameliorative programs for Thai orphans*

The impoverishment of orphans with disabilities is at crisis level on a global scale. In Thailand, 4.7 percent of children from ages one to seventeen are orphans with disabilities (UNICEF 2006: 51). These children are afflicted with a huge variety of disabilities stemming from a vast array of causative agents or factors. E.g., Thai children have been variously diagnosed as suffering from Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS), other genetic disorders, cognitive disabilities, hemiplegia, traumatic brain injuries,

hearing loss, limb disabilities and impaired vision. This somber state of affairs has become a large social issue in Thailand, as is shown by the copious literature bearing on this issue as it impinges upon the problem of orphans living in impoverished conditions (National Statistics Office Thailand, 2007; Manzanares & Kent, 2006; Maier, 2005). Thai society is confronted with an enormous challenge in having to develop sustainable ameliorative programs for such children. Tragically, children, adolescents, and young adults with disabilities face tremendous obstacles toward actualizing whatever potentialities they have. Recent statistical compilations show that approximately ten percent of Thais with disabilities are not employable, nor do they complete formal K-12 schooling (National Statistics Office of Thailand, 2007). According to official reports from the National Statistical Office Thailand 2007 and the International Labor Organization, it is estimated that 3 percent of the total population—almost two million Thais in Thailand—have one or more disabilities (Pozzan, 2009). The untoward upshot is that incapacity and absence of skills condemns most of the disabled to lives of poverty since they either cannot be gainfully employed or are at best have to endure being severely underemployed. Moreover, those employed among the disabled population earn less than one tenth of Thailand's earned income and own less than one percent of the nation's wealth. This is why reducing the levels of poverty for those with disabilities has been at the core of social welfare development programs. There are many possible answers and potential solutions to issues and problems concerning education, schooling, and training programs designed for people with disabilities in Thailand and elsewhere. However, the current study addresses only the opportunities provided by English education and practice for orphans with disabilities to learn skills necessary for sustaining themselves in Thai society. The idea of teaching English language to orphans with disabilities in Thailand is innovative and can potentially contribute to ameliorating the impoverished conditions of life for at least some orphans with disabilities.

### *1.3 English teaching projects for Thai orphans leading to amelioration of poverty*

The connection between English language learning and Thai orphans with disabilities has scarcely been addressed by researchers. After an exhaustive search of the extant literature, no official Thai government reports have been found that the rate of unemployment of Thai orphans declines in tandem with such orphans having studied English with Christian missionaries or other English teachers. As such, there is a need to conduct nationwide research concerning putative percentage-point declines in unemployment of orphans with disabilities and English language training. This lacuna in the literature is the *raison d'être* for the current investigation. Generally speaking, English ability helps one become more employable in Thailand, not least because tourism is a major industry in Thailand. Thais working in the tourism industry must normally communicate with foreign tourists in English. If so, it is reasonable to infer that Thai orphans with disabilities who learn English thereby enhance their employability. However, it must be owned that there are observers that hold that English language ability does very little by way of enhancing employment opportunities for orphans with disabilities. While acknowledging this negative assessment, the researcher does not consider its full evaluation to be within the scope of the current undertaking. A contrary view is held by Christian missionaries, who accordingly find it important and invaluable to teach English to orphans with disabilities, thereby bolstering the view of optimistic observers that such teaching will mitigate the problem of poverty which so often blights the lives of orphans with disabilities. However, the researcher suspects that this common missionary belief is much too simple, inasmuch as one can find both support for and evidence against such beliefs. As such, this discrepancy warrants further inquiry, the upshot of which may change the way we think about English teaching/learning practices in such cases. Today, being able to communicate in English is a necessary condition for successful international communication (e.g., at international conferences) in addition to providing safeguard measures for the maintenance of economic prosperity and the ensuring a better quality of life on the personal, national, and transnational levels (McCrum, 2010). As already mentioned, it is in this context that English language competence seems obviously fundamental to furthering employment opportunities and in turn reducing poverty for orphans with disabilities in Thailand according to the beliefs of hundreds of Christian missionaries. To help children and adolescents with disabilities to become more employable as adults, some Christian missionaries rely on more than traditional vocational skills training programs. If resources for providing English education accompanied by vocational skill training are made available, it is believed a young orphan with disabilities can grow up safer, become more economically independent and self-sustaining in Thai society. With the assistance rendered to them by Christian missionary English

teachers, it is believed that Thai orphans with disabilities can lift themselves out of poverty and ultimately become agents of change and masters of their own destiny.

Hundreds of volunteers and paid English teachers from English-speaking countries (e.g., Americans and Canadians), organized by Christian ministries and corporations (e.g., Future For Five, Global Service Corps, and Openmind Projects), are sent to Thailand every year and place their faith in the magic of the power of English. Thus, this type of English teaching practice has expanded in orphanages across Thailand (and even throughout mainland Southeast Asia). There is currently every indication that the number of Christian missionaries will continue to grow. Below are given statements from Christian missionaries who consider this widespread belief in helping Thai orphans to learn English as a remedy for poverty.

Table 1. Selected quotations from English speaking Christian missionary teachers in Thai orphanages

A Christian English teacher in a Thai orphanage	<p>“Many of them have physical disabilities, but that does not hold them back from their ability to learn and do well in school. They live in Thailand and yet are surrounded by a huge tourism industry that craves individuals who can speak English. Learning the English language opens up many new job opportunities to the Thai person. For the children at [the name of orphanage removed for confidential reason], it would allow them to one day become independent by giving them a very valuable skill set.”</p>	<p>Source: Future For Five, n.d., available online at its website</p>
An advertisement to recruit English teachers for Thai orphans	<p>“English language skills are increasingly important all across the world. This is especially true for people in developing countries, where having good English skills can open up many new job and education opportunities.”</p>	<p>Source: Openmind Projects, available online at its website</p>

#### 1.4 The theory of awareness context

Teaching the English language to Thai orphans with disabilities involves complex practical and ethical issues for Christian missionaries. The management of care for Thai orphans with disabilities requires compassion, a service-oriented mindset, a co-operative approach, love, openness and more from Christian caregivers. The Christian English teachers deal with strong emotions, obstacles to advocacy, boundaries and professional responsibilities and moral duties. Information concerning disabilities should be given with care and sensitivity when interacting with Thai orphans. One theory that explores how individuals react to emotive ethical issues and sensitive news is the theoretical approach of awareness contexts. Believing that English ability can help Thai orphans with disabilities find better jobs, Christian missionaries cannot always be certain that Thai orphans know why they need to learn English in view of their disabilities and limited job opportunities. Thai orphans are not always certain that the reason why Christian missionaries teach English to them is because of their disabilities and limited job opportunities. Thus, both parties are uncertain whether the other party is aware of the connection between disabilities and English language learning. Many proposals have been put forth by theorists to explain learning practices within, external to, or below the threshold of consciousness. Because this school of thought considers the principal causes of one’s learning behavior to be forces within the individual, the researcher views the major determinants of English learning by Thai orphans to be their awareness of disabilities, which leads to limited job opportunities brought on by the disabilities. Competing views are acknowledged by the researcher as well. Nevertheless, the scope of this study does not permit discussion of learning external to or below the threshold of consciousness. Such issues are too large to receive fuller treatment here in spite of being important. The bibliography suggests sources which do justice to the approaches not considered here. The traditional term “awareness” is adopted as a convenient umbrella term (with several subtypes relating to brain-based, behavioral-based, psychological-based, and psycho-social components) to designate “knowledge or perception of a situation or fact” (as defined online by Oxford dictionaries) in Thai orphans’ minds that lead them to seeing or not seeing a need to learn English (defined so as to suit the context of this study). Awareness is not an all-or-none occurrence (Bandura, 1977). Awareness has been shown to

facilitate behavioral changes in learning. If awareness is measured at long intervals, it precedes changes in behavior (Kennedy, 1971). The term “awareness context” was coined by Glaser and Strauss (1964, 1965) to indicate that an interactant in a setting knows about another person with whom h/she or interacting. Awareness includes one’s own identity as viewed in the eyes of others. To be aware entails being informed, conscious, knowing and realizing. Awareness relates to the degrees and levels of understanding and knowledge of facts. It has to do with one’s psychological acceptance of one’s own self. Individual awareness is under the influences of cultural, ideological, political and social forces, as well as society as a whole. Awareness of contexts is by no means fixed. Awareness of contexts changes and transformations result from interactions (see Glaser & Strauss, 1964, 1965, for a more detailed treatment).

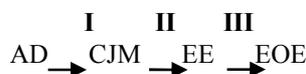
These proposals concerning the contexts of awareness as originally put forward by Glaser and Strauss (1964, 1965) include: 1) Closed awareness, when an interactant does not become aware of his or her impending situation of extreme deterioration (e.g., terminal illness, cancer, HIV/AIDS, disabilities), despite everyone else in his or her social context being fully aware; 2) Suspicion awareness occurs when an interactant suspects that others are aware of his or her deteriorating situation. S/he tries to confirm his or her suspicions; 3) Mutual pretence awareness occurs when both an interactant and others are aware that her/his situation is getting worse. However, each pretends that the other is not aware. 4) Open awareness occurs when both an interactant and others are aware that his or her situation is getting worse. They both have the same knowledge. They both act in a relatively open fashion in respect to the factual situation. Glaser’s and Strauss’s (1964, 1965) theory of awareness context was modified by Timmermans (1994) so as to include: 1) Suspended open awareness occurs when an interactant and others ignore information/bad news; 2) Uncertain open awareness occurs when an interactant disregards bad news and holds on to the chance of a good outcome; 3)

Active open awareness occurs when an interactant and others are fully informed and receptive to the bad news. They all act accordingly. Timmermans’ modification of this theory (1994) recommended that open awareness should be divided into three different contexts. These three different open awareness contexts do not unfold temporally or seriatim in stages. They generally shift back and forth between suspended, uncertain and open awareness of contexts.

## 2. Research methods

### 2.1. Research questions and the central hypothesis (prediction)

Regarding the objective of this study, this investigation seeks to pursue answers for the primary research question along with three sub-research questions. The primary research question asks: Is awareness of disabilities (coded as AD) predictive of engagement in English language learning (coded as EE) for Thai orphans with disabilities? In congruence with the primary research question asked, the central hypothesis is formulated and tested. As a short-hand convenience for the present discussion, the researcher has drafted a diagram (Figure 1) showing the hypothetical relationships between AD and EE.



#### Abbreviated explanations for the central hypothesis

- I.** Awareness of disability leads to the realization of constraints in job markets.
- II.** Constraints to job options lead to engagement in English language learning.
- III.** English language learning leads to enhancement of employability.

*Note.* AD=awareness of disabilities, EE=engagement in English learning,  
 CJM=constraints in job markets, EOE=enhancement of employability

Figure 1. Diagrammatic view of the central hypothesis (prediction)

The central hypothesis is stated as the effects of AD (awareness of disabilities) on EE (engagement in English learning). Although AD is likely only one of the several factors affecting EE, it may operate as a fundamentally crucial mechanism consequential to multiple predictor variables. Further, to take the discussion of the effects of AD effect on EE to a higher logical level—even though figure 1 illuminates important dimensions of the association between AD and EE—it should be noted that the

main predictor (AD) used to predict the complex criterion variable (EE) is based on a combination of three consequential predictor variables (i.e., multiple prediction equations, not a single prediction equation). These include (a) context awareness theory, (b) the realization of constraints in job options caused by disabilities, and (c) the belief that the learning of English can somehow compensate for the lack of skills caused by disabilities. First, after applying context awareness theory in this manner, the examination of the effects of AD on EE should be supplemented by the results of a literature review of (a) the theory of awareness contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1964, 1965; Timmermans, 1994). Secondly, the sense evinced by orphans that their disabilities influence their judgment of job opportunities must be taken into consideration. Hence, it is not surprising to assume that (b) disabilities lead to constraints in the seeking of jobs. Lastly, we should consider (c) the belief that lack of survival skills caused by disabilities can be compensated by English ability when seeking jobs. Moving beyond the main predictor (AD) along with a combination of three other predictor variables (i.e., (a), (b), and (c)) consequential to the main predictor, we should not neglect the fact that the criterion variable (EE) is also influenced by multiple intervening and compounding variables outside the multiple prediction equations formulated in this central hypothesis.

How awareness (e.g., awareness of disabilities) is related to learning (e.g., English learning) is a question that has received many answers from literature and real-life examples. From the outset, the reliability of this hypothesis seems to be questioned, because it lacks a robust, standard and structured model. Acknowledging the limits of rationality, however, there is a plethora of research investigating the effects of awareness on one's actions. The researcher searched online databases, refereed journals, and reports which documented and measured the effects of awareness on actions, behaviors and learning experiences. As such, in elaborating this line of thought, we begin by discussing seeing-a-need for learning through awareness-raising. E.g., a selective overview of the process of its manifestation in our human behavior (adapted from Eker, 2005: 18-19) follows: Awareness (concepts, thoughts, thinking, ideas and the like in our mind) lead to feelings and emotions. Feelings and emotions lead to actions (Eker, 2005, suggested that one responds to emotions and feelings faster than thoughts and ideas.) Actions lead to results or outcomes. The same holds true for Thai orphans with disabilities who were studied in this investigation. Likewise, Friedland and Truscott (2005: 550) have asseverated that "tutoring helped adolescents develop a greater sense of awareness as learners, which led to greater commitment to and perseverance" in learning to read and write. As it turns out, adolescent students achieved learning outcomes (literacy skills) by raising awareness as committed learners (through tutoring). In another study, affective awareness is shown to be associated with a positive affective stance to work (see Helson & Pals, 2000, for more details).

Additionally, framed by the central hypothesis, three sub-research questions along with three corresponding sub-hypotheses are formulated and tested. They are stated as follows. Sub-research question 1: Are there any differences between Thai orphans with and without disabilities who were studied in regard to their degrees of engagement in English language learning? By the same token, the same question can be asked: do the Thai orphans with disabilities studied more likely to see a need to learn English than those without disabilities (because healthy Thai orphans have more job options than their disabled counterparts)? Sub-hypothesis 1: disabilities will lead to greater degrees of engagement in English learning. The corresponding null hypothesis to sub-hypothesis 1: there will be no differences between Thai orphans with and without disabilities studied on the levels of engagement in English language learning. Sub-research question 2: Among the disabled Thai orphans studied, are those who exhibit higher levels of awareness of their disabilities more likely to see a need to learn English language than those who displayed lower levels of awareness of their disabilities? Sub-hypothesis 2: the Thai orphans studied with a stronger sense of disabilities are more likely than those with lower-awareness of disabilities to engage actively in English language learning. Sub-research question 3: Among the disabled Thai orphans under study, do those who were reminded of their disabilities in English classrooms (independent variable/treatment: toward open-awareness) appear to be more likely engaged in English language learning than those not reminded (toward closed-awareness)? Sub-hypothesis 3: Among the Thai orphans with disabilities studied, those who received reminder treatment (toward open-awareness who were reminded of their disabilities with sensitivity and care) will be more likely to engage in English language learning to a greater degree than those not reminded (toward closed-awareness).

## 2.2. Data collection and research participants

Table 2. Data sites and sources

<i>10 data collection sites</i>	<i>Multiple data sources</i>
4 orphanages in urban, cosmopolitan and slum areas of Thailand	Internet data/information from Web Sites visual data: photography <i>Survey data:</i> Demographic information, orphan student beliefs and practices questionnaires ( $n=90$ ), and missionary English teacher beliefs and practices questionnaires ( $n=30$ )
6 orphanages in rural areas of Thailand	<i>Interview data:</i> Orphan student interviews (1-on-1 interviews, follow-up interviews, and focus-group interviews), missionary English teacher interviews <i>Field-notes:</i> Researcher field notes (from participant observations and non-participant observations), reflective notes (after field visits) Audiotapes, digital recording, and transcripts of classroom discourses

*Note.* Thai orphans with severe disabilities (e.g., serious hearing impairment, cognitive disabilities, speech impairment, visual impairment), or who are “lost souls” (e.g., glue sniffers, “runners” for drug dealers, alcoholics) are not included in this convenient but biased sample. Thus, any generalizations derived from this study should be made with all due caution.

Table 3. Tabulation of Thai orphans with disabilities (among selected orphan informants assessed)

	Number	Percent
With disabilities	70	77%
Without disabilities	20	23%
Total	90	100%

Table 4. Tabulation of treatment (among selected orphans with disabilities studied)

	Number	Percent
Received kind reminder Treatment (open-awareness)	35	50%
No Treatment (closed-awareness)	35	50%
Total	70	100%

Anchored in field research involving visiting multiple orphanages (i.e., 10 research sites in various geographic location) across Thailand, this inquiry delved into the lives of 90 Thai orphans (given the relatively low sample size, the results must be interpreted with caution) and 30 Christian missionary English teachers. Informants were selected by snowball and cluster sampling strategies, and consented to take part in the survey, interviews, and observations on the basis of their accessibility to the researcher and their willingness to collaborate in this study. Participants ( $N=120$ ) chosen represent three different pre-defined groups, i.e., 70 Thai orphans/English learners with disabilities, 20 Thai orphans/English learners without disabilities of varying ages ranging from six to eighteen and 30 Christian missionary English teachers. Externally defined measures such as physical or mental disabilities, albeit obvious to the researcher and site administrators, may or may not be relevant to the informants when they are in closed-awareness of their disabled condition. The researcher also sees a need to sub-categorize Thai orphans with disabilities studied ( $n=70$ ) by combining objective/etic and subjective/emic approaches to their categorization, because some (physically or mentally challenged) might not be aware of their disabilities. Field-site administrators are consulted by the researcher to compare objective/etic and subjective/emic profiles of disabled informants regarding their awareness of disabilities.

Data were collected through a questionnaire (i.e., responses derived from beliefs and surveying practices) and interviews, descriptive and reflective notes from on-site observations, and excerpts from websites. Self-reported assessments of perceived degrees of AD and EE were assessed to determine informants' degrees of hypothetical association (positive or negative) between AD and EE. To measure the association between degrees of awareness of disabilities and degrees of desire to learn English, the following are examples of self-reported survey questions and interview questions: To what extent does the context awareness of the disabled condition, relate to, affect, influence or shape English learning by Thai orphans with disabilities? To what extent can reminders of context awareness of the disabled condition as an English instructional intervention better serve, encourage or contribute to Thai

orphans' English learning? What ideas do Christian English teachers hold about future job opportunities as measures to reduce the poverty levels of Thai orphans with disabilities in the course of English teaching/learning practices and how do these ideas affect their English teaching? What ideas do Thai orphans with disabilities hold about their future employment opportunities leading to reduced poverty by English learning and how do these ideas affect their English learning?

### 2.3. Data analysis

The qualitative data gathered was analyzed using three lenses: 1) research purpose, 2) research questions, and 3) existing typologies and constructed categories informed by the central hypothesis. Quantitative data obtained were tabulated using SPSS. To determine the effects of AD on the Thai orphans studied *vis-à-vis* their English learning behaviors, the researcher hypothesized that those informants with higher degrees of AD differ from others with lower degrees of AD. To quantify AD, a score between 1 and 3 is assigned to every valid response made by orphans ( $n=90$  including 70 with disabilities and 20 without disabilities) to each question in the questionnaire and interview. Accordingly, 1 represents a range from the least to a lower awareness of disabilities; 2 represents an intermediate or mixed degrees of awareness of disabilities; and 3 represents a range from a higher degree to the maximum degree of awareness of disabilities. In the same way, when measuring degrees of informants' engagement in EE, 1 represents a range from the least engagement in English learning to a lower level focus on English ability; 2 represents an intermediate engagement in English learning; and 3 represents a range from a higher level engagement to a maximum involvement in English learning. For example, when eliciting data concerning the degree of AD, informants who self-reported themselves as having a lower level of awareness of their disabilities received a score of 1; those who identified themselves as sometimes aware but other times not received a score of 2; and those who responded at a higher level or maximum level of awareness of disabilities received a score of 3. Likewise, when asked degrees of EE, informants who reported themselves at the least or lower engagement level received a score of 1; those who identified themselves as between the lower and higher levels of engagement in English learning received a score of 2; and those who responded at a higher or maximum level of engagement in English learning were assigned a score of 3. By averaging their responses across the questionnaire and interview questions, a mean AD index score and a mean EE index score for Thai orphans with ( $n=70$ ) and without disabilities ( $n=20$ ) assessed were obtained.

## 3. Results and discussion

Data analysis demonstrably suggested "yes" to the array of primary and sub-research questions. However, this claim must be qualified to some degree and limiting conditions stated. Evidence seems to appear that there is an increase in EE when Thai orphans are aware of their disabilities, despite the association being weaker for younger orphans with disabilities studied (<14 years) (indicating a lower positive relationship or no relationship) than their older counterparts (>14 years) (indicating a relatively higher positive relationship). By the same token, AD is reliably a strong predictor of EE for older Thai orphans with disabilities (>14 years) under study. Explanations of findings, along with interpretations and explanations of the results, is provided in section 3.1, followed by the discussion of the significance of the results in section 3.2. Section 3.3 deals with data that provide evidence against the conclusions of the researcher.

### 3.1 The hypotheses confirmed

The mean degree of EE index score for older orphans (>14 years) studied ( $n=30$ ) divided by higher (3), intermediate (2) and lower levels (1) of AD confirms a small but significant, linear and positive relationship. Correlations between awareness of disabilities ( $M=1.47$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ) and engagement in English learning ( $M=2.04$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ) among Thai orphans studied, at modest but significant levels, were statistically significant, suggesting a "yes" answer to the primary research question (i.e., Is awareness of disabilities predictive of engagement in English language learning for the Thai orphans with disabilities studied?). Moreover, Thai orphans with disabilities studied displayed higher levels of engagement in English learning than those without disabilities, suggesting a "yes" answer to sub-research question 1 (i.e., Are there any differences between Thai orphans with and without disabilities studied in regard to their degrees of engagement in English language learning?).

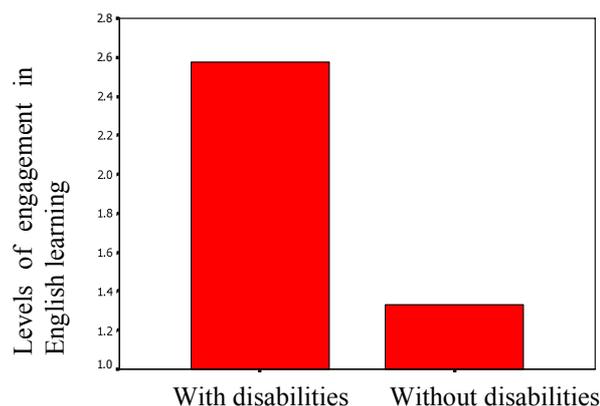


Figure 2. Bar charts for differences in engagement in English learning between Thai orphans with and without disabilities assessed

Table 5. Percentage of hypotheses supported and unsupported by respondents

		<i>Percentage of self-reported responses to the central- and sub-hypotheses</i>			
		N=70 (OD)	N=20 (OW)	N=30 (CE)	N=120 (TN)
Hypothesis confirmed & supported	Strongly agree	85	20	66	70
	Agree	7	80	16	21
	Undecided	0	0	0	0
Hypothesis disconfirmed & unsupported	Disagree	8	0	7.5	8
	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0

*Note.* Key to symbols: OD=orphans with disabilities, OW=orphans without disabilities, CE=Christian English teachers, and TN=total number of respondents

Additionally, data suggest a “yes” answer to sub-research question 2 (i.e., among disabled Thai orphans studied, do those who exhibited higher levels of awareness of their disabilities more likely to see a need to learn English language than those who displayed lower levels of awareness of their disabilities?), thereby confirming the sub-hypothesis 2 (i.e., Thai orphans studied with a stronger sense of disabilities are more likely than those with a lower-awareness of disabilities to engage actively in English language learning). Computation utilizing chi-square tests gives a value of 90.940, with an asymptotic significance or probability value of .00, thereby indicating a positive relation between the level of awareness of disabilities and the degree of engagement in English learning. This also means that—as based on chi-square computation—the probability of this distribution having occurred by chance to be less than .00. Further, data analysis suggests a “yes” answer to sub-research question 3 (i.e., among disabled Thai aware of their disabilities in English classrooms (independent variable/treatment: toward more open-awareness classrooms) appear to be more likely engaged in English language learning than those not reminded (toward closed-awareness classrooms?)), thereby supporting sub-hypothesis 3 (i.e., among Thai orphans with disabilities studied, those who received reminder treatment (toward open-awareness: reminded of their disabilities with sensitivity and care) will be more likely to engage in English language learning to a greater degree than those not reminded (toward closed-awareness)). When measuring the correlation between awareness contexts (open-awareness and closed-awareness) and engagement in English learning, data are revealed that informants who received open-awareness treatment more likely demonstrated higher degrees of engagement in English learning than those in closed-awareness classrooms.

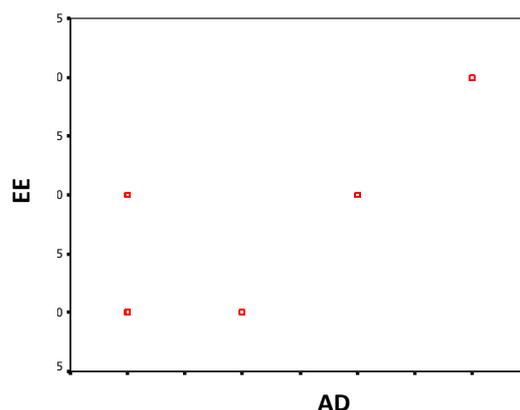
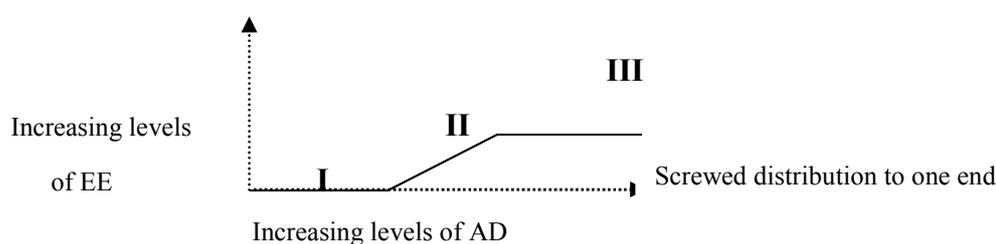


Figure 3. Scatter plot chart showing a positive relationship between awareness of disabilities and engagement in English learning



**I:** The flat portion at the bottom left of Fig. 4 is the period during which younger orphans/informants studied (<14 years) are not aware of their disabilities and do not consider English ability to compensate disabilities as militating against future employment.

**II:** The slopping portion is the period with which older orphans/informants studied (>14 years) at different ages become aware of their disabilities and considered the possibility of compensating for their disabilities by obtaining English ability prior to seeking employment. This confirmation also implies that the increase of AD effect on EE is linear and continuous.

**III.** The flat portion at the top right is the period in which the ceiling effect commences, because some older orphans/informants studied (>14 years) displayed the maximum level of AD. By the same token, since they do not perceive they have any other options, they rely solely on their developed English ability to compensate for the skills they lack caused by disabilities when seeking employment in the job market. This finding also implies that the effects of AD on EE may not continue to increase as the subjects grow older.

Figure 4. The pattern of bounded AD effects on EE, stretched in a reversed “z” shape for Thai orphans with disabilities studied ( $n=70$ )

### 3.2 Significance of the study

Previous studies have been extremely limited with regard to their direct assessments of the effects of AD on EE. However, this article has provided a relatively large number of insights into the myriad ways and available avenues in which we can provide assistance to Thai orphans with disabilities to learn English as a means of reducing the poverty they would otherwise be forced to endure. The findings of this study, at a modest but significant level, attempted to show that engagement in learning the English language can be enhanced through elevating the levels of AD among older Thai orphans with disabilities with care and sensitivity. This formula means that Thai orphans with disabilities can be encouraged and assisted to overcome poverty in a manageable way with care and sensitivity, on the condition that awareness-raising *vis-à-vis* disabilities leads to English learning and English learning leads to poverty reduction. This view implies that this type of English teaching/learning practice in Thailand’s orphanages can be sustainable and it is hoped can be reproduced at other orphanages across

Thailand and even across mainland Southeast Asia. A more positive and productive way to look at English teaching/learning practices regarding Thai orphans with disabilities studied is to view the phenomenon from a compensation perspective. This explains why AD is linked with EE. That is to say, some Thai orphans with disabilities under study attempt to make good use of their English ability to compensate for their lack of employments skills in confronting the job market. Although there are divergent results between older (>14 years) and younger Thai orphans (<14 years) with disabilities assessed, the good news is that it is now more likely the younger orphans studied will become engaged in English learning by the time they become fourteen years old. This means that after some period of time, orphans under the age of 14 years old now have a chance in the future to reduce the levels of poverty which they would have to endure, so long as they become more aware of their disabilities and start to see the need to learn English in order to compensate for their disabilities as they enter the job market.

### *3.3 The hypotheses questioned: Limitations of the study*

In view of the evidence provided by relatively few items of data, the effects of AD on EE are observed to be comparatively moderate in some cases.

#### 3.3.1 Challenge one: Development of skills other than English

Slightly more than 85 percent of the participants ( $N=120$ ) studied support the hypothesized claim. Nonetheless, this view does not go unchallenged. A claim like this is contested by opposite claims. Data also seem to suggest that higher levels of AD also lead to development of skills other than English (e.g., washing car windows, selling flowers in traffic intersections, and selling drugs), because they do not see an immediate benefit from learning English. Based on the data, this counter-example occurs roughly about 8 percent of the time in regard to 70 Thai orphans with disabilities assessed. Some of the orphans with and without disabilities attended kindergartens run by NGOs, followed by completing a few years of government primary schools. They learned to read Thai and count. However, they showed no or little interest in learning English. Then, they started earning their living on the streets. For some, numbers are far more important than English. Counting quickly in card games, gambling, taking cities buses by recognizing bus numbers, and selling lottery tickets are survival skills, but English is not. Being poor at counting means you go hungry even if you are good at English. While English may have long-term relevance to their lives, it has no immediate relevance.

#### 3.3.2 Challenge two: Uncertain open awareness

Some Christian missionaries, albeit aware of their students' disabilities, maintain closed awareness in English classrooms. Some pretend that disabilities do not exist and hold positive view toward their students' learning outcomes (cf. uncertain open awareness, defined by Timmermans, 1994; see section 1.4). For face-saving reasons (maintaining-face is normative in Thailand; however, space limitations prohibit addressing this cultural component here), orphans are usually not reminded of their disabilities in public unless they are in a close relationship with missionaries who might kindly remind [not in public] them to study English harder (out of good intentions) because of limited job options caused by their disabilities. Some interactions between Christian English teachers and Thai orphans are identified as uncertain open awareness interactions (in view of Timmermans 1994; see section 1.4). They both know that orphans need English ability to increase job options because of disabilities, but they pretend not to observe the disabilities. However, other interactions are identified as active open awareness (in view of Timmermans, 1994; see section 1.4). They both are open to discussing the orphans' disabilities and act in accordance with the truth without pretence. Even if the hypothesized claim is held to be true (see Fig 1. in section 2.1), data are revealed that the majority of Thai orphans studied are not reminded of their disabilities in English classrooms located in orphanages. Thus, orphans studied, most of them (50 out of 70 assessed), will have to become self-aware. This might potentially bring a crisis to the sustainability of the English teaching/learning practices in these orphanages.

#### 3.3.3 Challenge three: A different agenda

The hypothesis (see figure 1 in section 2.1) might become more contestable if one single truth is revealed as follows. Despite most Christian missionaries studied believing that teaching English helps Thai orphans with disabilities find jobs and reduce poverty, (66%, strongly agree; 16%, agree) they ( $n=30$ ) have a different agenda in mind. On the one hand, Thai orphans with disabilities benefit from learning English and English ability has a potential to reduce poverty. At the same time, the ultimate

goal of Christian missionaries, on the other hand, is to convert Thai orphans to Christianity (Protestants hold this view more strongly than Roman Catholics). Instead of learning to speak Thai, it might be easier for Christian missionaries from English-speaking countries to teach English. After Thai orphans understand more English, it will become easier to understand biblical teachings in English. It is logical to speculate that this conversion mindset of Christian missionaries who are also English teachers might affect their teaching outcomes. That is to say, the focus of their teaching might be on the English necessary for understanding biblical passages (this would be, of course, a different form of English teaching/learning than the one assessed in this article) rather than English for finding-a-job purposes or learning English for the sake of poverty reduction.

#### 3.3.4 Challenge five: Multiple causes and confounding variables

In combination with the aforementioned limitations, it is reasonable to suppose that there are multiple causes and experiential variables in addition to the one this research investigation considers (illustrated in figure 1 under section 2.1). The researcher could only confidently argue that the degree of engagement in English learning is, to a large extent, because of the AD of the Thai orphans studied (estimated 85% strongly agree,  $n=70$  orphans with disabilities; 66% strongly agree,  $n=30$  Christian missionaries). Some informed readers might list many factors other than AD effects on EE. While they might accuse the author of this article of being naïve and occasionally careless, we cannot deny that the argument proposed in this present article has empirical support. The claims and supporting evidence presented in this study are important in the end, but we must still look at the available evidence to the largest extent feasible. The formula—AD has effects on EE—certainly explains the phenomenon of English teaching practices in Thailand’s ten representative orphanages, but this phenomenon is too complex for a single explanation. This formula holds true in many cases, but not in all. Readers may think that the argument overlooks, ignores and misses key factors that cause Thai orphans to be active or not in learning English, including but not limited to such independent variables such as the orphanage’s location (e.g., urban or rural), characteristics of caretakers (e.g., educational attainment, single or married, teenager or adult) and support available for orphans (e.g., educational, emotional/psychological, material, medical and social support). Readers might consider some causes deserve more attention (e.g., missionaries using activities that are “fun” for the Thai orphans to stimulate their engagement in English learning) than the ones the researcher proposed in this study. Readers are likely to think of counterexamples (e.g., Thai orphans without or with little AD learn English intensively, because 10 out of 20 (50%) orphans without disabilities studied showed strong interest in English learning) and exceptions that undermine the thesis presented in this paper. The researcher acknowledges these counter-examples, alternate explanations and other points of view. Therefore, the author will welcome any feedback and comments, whether adverse or not.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Synthesis of the study

We now take a step back from the limitations acknowledged in section 3.3 and consider the main conclusions of this study. It was tempting to conclude that AD emerges as a strong predictor toward degrees of EE for Thai orphans with disabilities studied. It should be noted that the AD effects on EE seems to only persist across the age span from fourteen years upward, but are restricted for orphans studied under fourteen years of age. AD leads to EE for older Thai orphans (>14 years) assessed, because English ability is believed to help them find jobs. This study indicates that a multiage group (14+) of older participants (85%,  $n=70$  orphans with disabilities, strongly agree; 7%,  $n=70$  orphans with disabilities, agree) agree with this claim. It is observed that English language learning by Thai orphans is in relation to their AD. That is to say, greater engagement in English learning by older orphans (>14 years) concerned with their disabilities shows they take into account that English language ability can be a survival skill in competing in future job markets so as to escape poverty.

Drawing the strands together, this study sheds light on AD in Thai orphans’ EE experience, thereby reporting the possibilities and challenges of English teaching/learning practices in Thailand’s orphanages. By acknowledging the role of AD in EE for the purpose of poverty reduction, Thai orphans can be encouraged to learn English with care and sensitivity. It is the author’s hope to examine the English teaching/learning practices in a wider range of different orphanages in Thailand. Thus, on the basis of this better understanding, we can further help disabled Thai orphans, who are

currently living in poverty, to change their life for the better and help these English teaching/learning practices become more sustainable.

#### 4.2 Future studies for English teaching/learning practices in Thailand's orphanages

The article provides suggestions and recommendations for further refining and strengthening English teaching/learning projects carried out in orphanages across Thailand. Follow-up and longitudinal studies are recommended to investigate the progress of Thai orphans with disabilities who exhibited different levels of AD as measured by different techniques other than those used in this study. This article demonstrates that Thai orphans with disabilities studied showing higher levels of AD are better engaged in their English language learning by virtue of believing that English ability can compensate for disabilities in the job market (reported 85%,  $n=70$  orphans with disabilities, strongly agree; 7%,  $n=70$  orphans with disabilities, agree). However, this one-point-in-time study can hardly determine if this association is still in evidence at different ages, varying growth patterns, an array of maturation levels, work-place status and so forth for orphans studied. This initial association might appear stronger, but may not last over a long period of time. Conversely, for those who initially demonstrate weaker association between AD and EE, this association might produce much stronger and longer effects from a longer term perspective. The English teaching/learning practices reported herein have proved to be amenable to training older Thai orphans with disabilities (>14 years) and developing their English abilities so as to increase their job opportunities. For the sake of helping Thai orphans reduce the levels of poverty they must endure and to encourage English teaching practices by Christian missionaries at orphanages in Thailand so as they shall be more sustainable, it is hoped that this study will provide useful scaffolding for future studies (albeit comparisons and generalizations might differ from study to study).

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