

## English Language Teaching in Thailand from the Perspective of *Bangkok Post*: A Corpus-assisted Analysis

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### Abstract

The main goal of the study is to investigate the content of news reports on English Language Teaching (ELT) as published by the *Bangkok Post Online*. Informed by a corpus-based investigation of data, a total of 156 news reports on English Language Teaching (ELT), composed of 12187-word types and 209357-word tokens, were downloaded and prepared to be examined using the corpus linguistics software, *AntConc 3.5.8* (Anthony, 2019). The findings revealed 71 keywords with log-likelihood values of at least 100 that were dominated by words relating to ELT and education matters (f=31; 43.66%), setting (f=11; 15.49%), ELT and education stakeholders (f=9; 12.68%), ELT and education physical structures and facilities (f=8; 11.27%), government concerns, offices and officials (f=6; 8.45%), production of language (f=5; 7.04%), and financial matters (f=1; 1.41%). These keywords depict the kinds of information presented by the reporters of *Bangkok Post Online* to their assumed readers. Implications on the use of corpus-assisted analysis in the investigation of ELT big data harnessed online were drawn.

**Keywords** : Bangkok Post Online, Corpus-assisted Analysis, English Language Teaching, Keyword Analysis

### Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand like in many other countries is quite indispensable since the advent of advanced technology and the adoption of the cyberspace have resulted in shifts in business, education, science and technology – all of which necessitate high proficiencies in using the English language (Wiriyachitra, 2002). In 1996, English language was made a mandatory subject for all primary grades (Hilado-Deita, 2015), and ELT gained a permanent status in the Thai Education System, especially with the introduction of the National Education Act of 1999 and National Education Curriculum in 2002, giving English a frontline position in the national intellectual development of the country (Wongsothorn, 2000). Since then the focus of ELT has metamorphosed from teaching English as an academic subject to English as a medium of communication. We argue in this paper that ELT and its incarnations, including its dynamic applications and information on its dissemination are documented not only by research studies but also by media such as online newspapers. Thus, the ultimate goal of this research study is to examine what information on ELT has been reported on online newspapers such as the *Bangkok Post Online* and would like to answer the following research questions:

1. What words with the highest absolute frequencies characterize the English Language Teaching news on *Bangkok Post Online*?
2. What key themes were presented to readers?
3. What words with the highest relative frequencies (keywords) characterize the English Language Teaching news on *Bangkok Post Online*?

The findings of the study may shed some light on information regarding the practice of ELT in Thailand.

### **Related Research**

English language teaching in Thailand is a topic extensively investigated by local and international researchers. Due to space constraints, only a brief non-exhaustive review can be presented in this study.

Research on ELT in Thailand mainly investigated problems (e.g. Punthumasen, 2007), trends and issues (e.g. Prapphal, 2008), teacher's professional development needs (Noom-ura, 2013), teaching language skills Klankrit (2005); approaches in ELT (Khamkhien, 2012; Teng & Sinwongsawat, 2015; Suwannoppharat & Chinokul, 2015), motivation (Kitjaroonchai, 2012), effect of educational policy (Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012) and educational reform (Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2008; see also Fry, 2002), use of technology (e.g. Kongchan, 2012), learning strategies and beliefs (e.g. Vibulphol, 2004), intercultural communication (e.g. Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009), and application of genre pedagogy (e.g. Chaisri, 2010) to name some. During a non-exhaustive review, it was noticed that research studies on Thai ELT focused on data that were taken from the stakeholders such as the learners, teachers, parents school administrators and policy makers as well as from historical data and promulgated educational policies. Examining ELT perspectives as presented in news reports were quite uncommon. Moreover, the examination of big data on ELT using a data analyzer was also not among the concerns of conducted research studies. With the advent of advanced computer technology, big data on ELT such as data from online newspapers can now be conveniently examined and therefore was taken as the main task of this current research enterprise.

### **Methodology**

#### **Data**

Data for analysis were downloaded from *Bangkok Post Online*. A total of 156 news reports on English Language Teaching (ELT) were downloaded and prepared to be examined using the corpus linguistics software, *AntConc 3.5.8* (Anthony, 2019). Initial returns produced 12187-word types and 209357-word tokens. While Thailand has a number of newspapers in national circulation, the data was taken only from *Bangkok Post* since it has the highest daily circulation of more than 70,000 copies. The newspaper is regarded as a highly trusted news and information source for English speaking readers in Thailand and the international community around the world (Statista, 2018). The newspaper publisher also claimed that 60% of the 300,000 unique visitors daily to their online platform are from outside Thailand, with a record for website traffic reaching 1.04 million-page views in a single 24-hour period on 13 October 2016 (Bangkok Post, December 2016). In particular, the news articles on *Bangkok Post Online* newspaper that reported information on English language teaching were investigated for keywords.

#### **Methodological Framework and Data Analysis**

The research study was composed of two parts: (1) corpus-based keyword analysis (Scott & Tribble, 2006; Scott, 1997) and (2) iterative thematic analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). The corpus-based analysis employed the software, *AntConc 3.5.8*, to examine the data for absolute and relative frequencies. Carreon and Watson Todd (2013; see also Carreon et al., 2013) argued that generally, "words with the highest absolute frequencies are similar across different

texts because these words are most commonly used in English, so relative frequencies of words compared to a benchmark of general English use are more insightful” (p.123). Thus, to compute for the relative frequencies of words, in this paper, the British National Corpus or the BNC (BNC Consortium, 2007) was used as a benchmark.

The BNC was chosen as benchmark since it is a corpus of general English use. When compared against a corpus that is quite specific for a certain area of knowledge, the comparison brings forth the characteristic features of the specific or unknown corpus. Absolute frequencies of words in the corpus medical tourism news reports were compared against their frequencies in the BNC using log-likelihood (Rayson, 2008). Since the corpus is quite small in size, log-likelihood (LL) was used because LL values are not affected by the size of data (Rayson & Garside, 2000). The resulting words with the highest relative frequencies were iteratively categorized into themes (e.g. Krippendorff, 2012). Seven themes were identified: (1) words relating to ELT and education matters, (2) words relating to ELT and education physical structures and facilities, (3) words relating to ELT and education stakeholders, (4) words relating to financial matters, (5) words relating to government concerns, offices and officials, (6) words relating to production of language [involved or informational], and (7) words relating to setting [location or time].

## Results and Discussion

*What words with the highest absolute frequencies characterize the English Language Teaching news on Bangkok Post Online?*

The first stage was to conduct a basic word frequency count to identify the words with the highest absolute frequencies. Table 1 shows the five most frequently used words in writing news on English Language Teaching (ELT) on *Bangkok Post Online*.

**Table 1** Top 5 words with the highest absolute frequencies

No.	f	Word	Examples
1	8359	the	<i>the</i> teacher; <i>the</i> development of children; <i>the</i> campus
2	5106	to	<i>to</i> a write an essay; <i>to</i> immerse; <i>to</i> school
3	4049	and	concrete <i>and</i> abstract; voices <i>and</i> accents; schools <i>and</i> colleges
4	3967	of	need <i>of</i> a good education; choices <i>of</i> careers; ability <i>of</i> children
5	3701	in	child <i>in</i> a class; pupils <i>in</i> a rural school; education <i>in</i> all levels

The high frequency of the article *the* (f=8359) depicts data that was written using long running sentences, where *the* is used to show definiteness of nouns or noun phrases when they are mentioned for the second and succeeding times (e.g. *the* teacher; *the* development of children; *the* campus). The high presence of the preposition *to* (f=5106) were mainly used to indicate a goal (e.g. *to* a write an essay; *to* immerse; *to* school). The elevated frequency of the conjunction *and* (f=4049) reflects the use of conjoined words in news writing (e.g. concrete *and* abstract; voices *and* accents; schools *and* colleges). The high frequency of the preposition *of* (f=3967) indicates belonging to, relating to or connected with **something** or someone (e.g. need *of* a good education; choices *of* careers; ability *of* children). The preposition *in* (f=3701) was commonly used for expressing location and for expressing thoughts while doing something (e.g. child *in* a class; pupils *in* a rural school; education *in* all levels). While the frequencies of these words are high, drawing deep insights from these words is not only problematic but also difficult as they are characteristics of general English use and not specific to news on ELT. Research studies

show that the high absolute frequencies of these five words can be attributed to the fact that they are words that characterize general use in English language and therefore can be found in most genres (see for example Carreon & Watson Todd, 2013 [private hospital website]; Carreon & Svetanant, 2017 [political speeches]; Chaiwong *et al.*, 2018 [negative comments of customers of an OTA]; Premjai, Carreon & Harnmontree, 2018 [American TV series]; and Yu Yuan & Carreon, 2018 [research article abstracts]. Thus, there is a need to investigate words in their relative frequencies (e.g. Carreon, Lamarca & Panes, 2018.)

*What key themes were presented to readers?*

Scott (1997) argued that only key keywords should be interpreted in a corpus-assisted investigation. To make sure only key keywords are considered, only words with log likelihood values of at least 100 were taken. There were 71 keywords with log-likelihood (LL) values of at least 100 and these were categorized into seven themes. The frequencies and percentages of keywords categorized in each theme are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2** Frequencies and percentages of keywords categorized in each theme

Theme	f	Percentage
Words relating to ELT and education matters	33	46.48%
Words relating to ELT and education physical structures and facilities	8	11.27%
Words relating to ELT and education stakeholders	10	14.08%
Words relating to financial matters	1	1.41%
Words relating to government concerns, offices and officials	6	8.45%
Words relating to informational production of language (Biber et al. (1998)	2	2.82%
Words relating to location	11	15.49%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100%</b>

The categories show that the 71 keywords with log-likelihood value of at least 100 are mainly words relating to ELT and education matters (f=33; 46.48%), location (f=8; 11.27%), ELT and education stakeholders (f=10; 14.08%), ELT and education physical structures and facilities (f=8; 11.27%), government concerns, offices and officials (f=6; 8.45%), production of language (f=2; 2.82%), and financial matters (f=1; 1.41%). Table 3 below presents the keywords with their absolute frequencies, log likelihood values or relative frequencies, themes and some examples.

*What words with the highest relative frequencies (keywords) characterize the English Language Teaching news on Bangkok Post Online?*

**Table 3** Keywords categorized by themes (f=frequency; LL=log-likelihood)

Keywords	f	LL	Examples
<i>Words relating to ELT and education matters</i>			
english	1216	5301.12	<i>English</i> competence; <i>English</i> teachers; <i>English</i> literacy
education	910	3285.16	bilingual <i>education</i> ; higher <i>education</i> ; business <i>education</i>
language	634	2217.22	second <i>language</i> ; official <i>language</i> ; <i>language</i> skills
teaching	423	1767.98	<i>teaching</i> professionals; <i>teaching</i> qualifications; <i>teaching</i> style
learning	328	1191.34	<i>learning</i> ability; <i>learning</i> process; <i>learning</i> English
international	403	972.96	<i>international</i> body; <i>international</i> school, <i>international</i> degree
proficiency	106	919.02	low <i>proficiency</i> ; <i>proficiency</i> courses; <i>proficiency</i> in English
skills	204	569.56	thinking <i>skills</i> ; management <i>skills</i> ; communication <i>skills</i>

teach	119	484.89	<i>teach</i> students; <i>teach</i> English; <i>teach</i> high school level
learn	168	457.09	<i>learn</i> a lesson; <i>learn</i> a foreign language; <i>learn</i> and practice
educational	144	423.01	<i>educational</i> benefits; <i>educational</i> aids; <i>educational</i> reform
online	65	367.75	<i>online</i> classes; <i>online</i> coaching; <i>online</i> module
foreign	190	315.97	<i>foreign</i> teacher; <i>foreign</i> students; <i>foreign</i> policy
speaking	113	277.66	<i>speaking</i> and listening; <i>speaking</i> abilities; <i>speaking</i> skills
vocational	60	261.93	<i>vocational</i> courses; <i>vocational</i> schools; <i>vocational</i> training
improve	107	252.79	<i>improve</i> education; <i>improve</i> English; <i>improve</i> quality
academic	95	237.91	<i>academic</i> capacity; <i>academic</i> standard; <i>academic</i> support
classes	99	229.62	ESL <i>classes</i> ; mandatory <i>classes</i> ; attend <i>classes</i>
curriculum	95	222.58	national <i>curriculum</i> ; bilingual <i>curriculum</i> ; core <i>curriculum</i>
programme	151	179.18	degree <i>programme</i> ; training <i>programme</i> ; bilingual <i>programme</i>
reform	86	173.43	<i>reform</i> agenda; radical <i>reform</i> ; <i>reform</i> strategies
programmes	86	165.38	study <i>programmes</i> ; study <i>programmes</i> ; exchange <i>programmes</i>
taught	68	163.84	languages <i>taught</i> ; courses <i>taught</i> ; <i>taught</i> by native
languages	64	162.66	minority <i>languages</i> ; Asean <i>languages</i> ; local <i>languages</i>
chinese	69	157.44	<i>Chinese</i> business; <i>Chinese</i> conversation; <i>Chinese</i> descent
subjects	88	143.96	core <i>subjects</i> ; mainstream <i>subjects</i> ; <i>subjects</i> in English
technology	110	143.76	digital <i>technology</i> ; develop <i>technology</i> ; education <i>technology</i>
speak	89	134.19	abilities to <i>speak</i> ; <i>speak</i> English; <i>speak</i> a foreign language
qualified	53	132.48	<i>qualified</i> expatriate; <i>qualified</i> faculties; <i>qualified</i> teacher
study	149	129.42	<i>study</i> abroad; <i>study</i> materials; <i>study</i> English
quality	123	126.11	boost <i>quality</i> ; high <i>quality</i> ; poor <i>quality</i>
degree	91	117.7	international <i>degree</i> ; college <i>degree</i> ; joint <i>degree</i>
<i>Words relating to ELT and education physical structures and facilities</i>			
schools	625	2443.46	international <i>schools</i> ; rural <i>schools</i> ; public <i>schools</i>
school	685	1718.2	<i>school</i> activities, primary <i>school</i> students; language <i>school</i>
universities	174	831.94	private <i>universities</i> ; Thai <i>universities</i> ; Asian <i>universities</i>
university	314	802.77	<i>university</i> admissions; <i>university</i> education; <i>university</i> entry
campus	49	253.01	main <i>campus</i> ; satellite <i>campus</i> ; Bangkok <i>campus</i>
classroom	72	249.26	<i>classroom</i> instruction; school <i>classroom</i> ; proper <i>classroom</i>
college	99	141.41	<i>college</i> activities; technical <i>college</i> ; international <i>college</i>
institutions	77	131.44	tertiary <i>institutions</i> ; research <i>institutions</i> ; local <i>institutions</i>
<i>Words relating to ELT and education stakeholders</i>			
thai	845	8439.87	<i>Thai</i> accent; <i>Thai</i> graduates; <i>Thai</i> students
students	976	4708	<i>Thai students</i> ; young <i>students</i> ; international <i>students</i>
teachers	577	2503.32	<i>Thai teachers</i> ; trained <i>teachers</i> ; qualified <i>teachers</i>
thais	136	1484.31	educated <i>Thais</i> ; optimistic <i>Thais</i> ; accessible to <i>Thais</i>
teacher	219	652.32	<i>teacher</i> quality; <i>teacher</i> assistance; <i>teacher</i> shortage
native	120	484.68	<i>native</i> English; <i>native</i> speakers, <i>native</i> teachers
student	171	472.11	<i>student</i> assessment; <i>student</i> recruitment; <i>student</i> participation
children	362	408.93	motivates <i>children</i> ; underprivileged <i>children</i> ; slum <i>children</i>
parents	177	288.56	competitive <i>parents</i> ; migration of <i>parents</i> ; affluent <i>parents</i>
speakers	71	250.4	<i>native speakers</i> ; non-native <i>speakers</i> ; authentic <i>speakers</i>
kids	60	140.63	Thai-educated <i>kids</i> ; country <i>kids</i> ; urban <i>kids</i>
<i>Word relating to financial matters</i>			

baht	138	1514.4	billions of <i>baht</i> ; high-earned <i>baht</i> ; 20 billion <i>baht</i> <i>Words relating to government concerns, offices and officials</i>
prayut	55	657.66	PM <i>Prayut</i> ; <i>Prayut</i> government; <i>Prayut</i> administration
ministry	161	559.96	Education <i>Ministry</i> ; <i>ministry</i> launched; <i>ministry</i> source
visa	71	459.93	<i>visa</i> application; <i>visa</i> approval; <i>visa</i> runs
immigration	49	197.82	<i>immigration</i> bureau; <i>immigration</i> policies; <i>immigration</i> staff
gen	53	149.84	<i>Gen Prayut</i> ; <i>Gen Prem</i> ; <i>Gen Surayud</i>
democracy	56	101.85	promoting <i>democracy</i> ; modern <i>democracy</i> ; lack of <i>democracy</i> <i>Words relating to informational production of language</i> (Biber et al., 1998)
said	721	221.81	Mr Teerakiat <i>said</i> ; decision-makers <i>said</i> ; several schools <i>said</i>
their	850	125.26	<i>their</i> education; <i>their</i> kids; <i>their</i> parents <i>Words relating to location</i>
thailand	718	6547.77	education in <i>Thailand</i> ; stay in <i>Thailand</i> ; promote <i>Thailand</i>
bangkok	204	1701.05	central <i>Bangkok</i> ; located in <i>Bangkok</i> ; schools in <i>Bangkok</i>
asean	76	571.85	<i>Asean</i> community; countries in <i>Asean</i> ; universities in <i>Asean</i>
country	295	395.33	foreign <i>country</i> ; entering the <i>country</i> ; visit the <i>country</i>
asia	104	360.26	Southeast <i>Asia</i> ; countries in <i>Asia</i> ; schools in <i>Asia</i>
countries	198	341.92	neighboring <i>countries</i> ; advanced <i>countries</i> ; member <i>countries</i> campuses in <i>Singapore</i> ; work in <i>Singapore</i> ; return to
singapore	67	326.87	<i>Singapore</i> establish <i>Malaysia</i> ; imported from <i>Malaysia</i> ; made in
malaysia	54	273.98	<i>Malaysia</i> New Zealand aid; New Zealand school; New Zealand
zealand	81	271.43	classroom
global	75	199.16	<i>global</i> citizenship; <i>global</i> economy; <i>global</i> market
china	72	128.48	mainland <i>China</i> ; universities in <i>China</i> ; influence of <i>China</i>

Theme 1 refers to ELT and education matters (e.g. *English* competence [f=1216; LL=5301.12], bilingual *education* [f=910; LL=3285.16], second *language* [f=634; LL=2217.22]). Theme 2 indicates ELT and education physical structures and facilities (e.g. international *schools* [f=625; LL=2443.46], *school* activities [f=685; LL=1718.2], private *universities* [f=174; LL=831.94]). Theme 3 provides information about ELT and education stakeholders (e.g. Thai *graduates* [f=845; LL=8439.87], international *students* [f=976; LL=4708], trained *teachers* [f=577; LL=2503.32]). Theme 4 is concerned about financial matters (e.g. billions of *baht* [f=138; LL=1514.4]). Theme 5 relates to government concerns, offices and officials (e.g. *visa* application [f=71; LL=459.93], Education *Ministry* [f=161; LL=559.96], PM *Prayut* [f=55; LL=657.66]). Theme 6 denotes news writers' informational or involved production of language (e.g. decision-makers *said*, [f=721; LL=221.81, *their* parents [f=850; LL=125.26]). Theme 7 is composed of keywords relating to location (e.g. education in Thailand [f=718; LL=6547.77], schools in Bangkok [f=204; LL=1701.05], universities in Asean [f=76; LL=571.85]). Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 were the characteristic features of the information communicated by the news writers on *Bangkok Post Online*. Put another way, these keywords are useful since they provide a picture of the ELT content of the news reports.

Keywords on Theme 6 denote how information is presented to the readers, which is either involved or informational language production. Biber et al. (1998) posited that involved production is related to a primarily interactive or affective purpose for the expression of feelings

and concerns and with little or no informational focus such as the use of personal pronouns, wh-questions, emphatics, amplifiers and sentences relatives. Conversely, informational production refers to a non-interactive expression, such as the use of nouns in expository and written registers, with the main goal of providing information that is usually carefully chosen instead of interacting. The corpus of this research study, which is composed of news reports, was presented to the readers mainly by using informational production of language. The two keywords under informational production of language are *said* (e.g. Mr Teerakiat *said*; decision-makers *said*; several schools *said* [f=721 LL=221.81]) and *their* (e.g. *their* education; *their* kids; *their* parents [f=850; LL=125.26]). The high relative frequencies of these keywords in the corpus is expected and not surprising since the corpus is a collection of news reports. These words function mainly to provide information that is factual (use of reporting verb such as *said*) and presented in a manner that avoids building interpersonal relations with the readers (e.g. use of the third person pronoun *their*). Pedagogically, together with the concordance of each keywords, they provide some patterns for teaching English for Journalism.

### Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the study was to investigate the English Language Teaching (ELT) information reported on the website of a national English newspaper in Thailand. While the findings reflect the ELT content of the news within a certain period of time including topics such as ELT and education matters, ELT and education physical structures and facilities, ELT and education stakeholders, government concerns, offices and officials, and location, many other areas that could have been included were left out. For instance, news reports that discuss impacts of the advent of digital disruption and advanced computer technology were quite uncommon. There is also a pressing need for news reports on the output of government agencies on ELT development in Thailand. Given the role of English in today's society, ELT and its practices will continue to be influential and hold its grip among educational institutions of all levels especially among countries that use English as a Foreign Language (EFL), so future research studies should examine big data of ELT news reported in these countries to illuminate the kinds of ELT information that are prioritized, and thus, presented to the reading public. Despite its limited focus, that is, focusing only on news reports on ELT in Thailand, we hope that this corpus-assisted big data analysis provides another perspective for understanding English Language Teaching.

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