Educational Entrepreneurship in an Intensive English Program in Thailand: A Case Study

Alexander Nanni

Abstract
This case study investigates educational entrepreneurship in an intensive English as a foreign language (EFL) program at a major Thai university. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study draws on data collected in interviews, a focus group, and curriculum documents to investigate educational entrepreneurship in this context. The major findings were as follows: Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning, EFL is a competitive tool for Thai students, use of project-based learning fosters content and language learning, and collaboration among teachers drives innovation.

Keywords
educational entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, EFL, internationalization, Thailand

Introduction
The field of English language teaching in Asia is evolving rapidly. This is partially due to the increasing use of English in tertiary education worldwide (Lei & Hu, 2014); however, two additional factors contribute to changes in English teaching. The first of these factors is the growing use of English as a lingua franca for communication among nonnative speakers (Akkakoson, 2019; Seidlhofer, 2004). This is certainly the case in Southeast Asia, where the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) actively promote English education as a means of enhancing regional communication (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). The second factor is the deployment of rapidly advancing educational technology that is contributing to a broad change in education, including language teaching. Students and teachers now have many more tools at their disposal than in the past. These two factors—the growing use of English as a lingua franca and rapidly developing technology—have caused, and will continue to cause, significant change in language teaching in Asia.

Change creates opportunities for entrepreneurship. Innovation and entrepreneurship are “at the epicenter of the modern global economy” (Lounsbury et al., 2019, p. 1) and have therefore received a great deal of attention from scholars. Various definitions of entrepreneurship exist; many of these definitions emphasize the importance of finding “new means-ends relationships” (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 220) in entrepreneurship. In the context of the changing landscape of English teaching in Asia, both the means—educational technology—and the ends—the purpose of the English being taught—are shifting. As Shane and Venkataraman (2000) explained, “An entrepreneurial discovery occurs when someone makes the conjecture that a set of resources is not put to its “best use”” (p. 220). The researchers illustrated by giving the example of the telephone, which created enormous opportunities for those who first put this innovation to productive use. This study investigated educational entrepreneurship in the current context of language teaching in Asia in which the use of the English language itself and of educational technology are evolving rapidly; however, many Asian educational institutions are slow to change in response to these factors. This creates an opportunity for educational entrepreneurship on the part of institutions that are able to respond. Using case study methodology, this study identified several themes related to the educational entrepreneurship of this particular language program: Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning, development of locally relevant content helps the curriculum to meet students’ needs, use of project-based learning (PBL) fosters content and language learning, and collaboration among teachers drives innovation. As no previous studies had investigated educational entrepreneurship in the context of a language
program in Thailand, this study contributes to the body of research on educational entrepreneurship in various contexts.

**Literature Review**

Entrepreneurship research is a large, accepted, and growing field of academic endeavor (Anderson et al., 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). As the field grows, new theories emerge; researchers “develop new theories that are applicable to the current phase” (Ferreira et al., 2019, p. 182). Definitions of innovation that were presented range from the vague—for example, “the attempt to bring about beneficial change” (West & Farr, 1990, p. 9)—to more specific definitions. Thompson (1965) defined innovation as “the generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services” (p. 2), noting that innovation requires the generation of new ideas. In his definition, innovative organizations (i.e., organizations that conceive and implement new ideas) are distinct from adaptive organizations (i.e., organizations that do not create new ideas and implement ideas conceived by others). In contrast, Weideman (2002) stated that implementing ideas into a new context is innovation, regardless of whether the ideas have already been implemented elsewhere. He argues, for example, that implementing communicative language teaching in Africa decades after it had already become the dominant approach to teaching language in other contexts, is innovative. A further definition was proposed by Bareghheh et al. (2009), who, after reviewing 60 definitions of innovation, proposed the following definition: “Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace” (p. 1334). Morris et al. (1994) also provided a synthesis of prevalent definitions of entrepreneurship:

Entrepreneurship is a process activity. It generally involves the following inputs: an opportunity; one or more proactive individuals; an organizational context; risk, innovation; and resources. It can produce the following outcomes: a new venture or enterprise; value; new products or processes; profit or personal benefit; and growth. (p. 26)

Entrepreneurship and educational entrepreneurship have many definitions, and the choice of definition may determine whether or not certain activities can be considered entrepreneurial. Morris et al.’s (1994) definition is quite flexible: Entrepreneurship takes as inputs “an opportunity; one or more proactive individuals; an organizational context; risk, innovation; and resources” and yields as outcomes a new venture or enterprise; value; new products or processes; profit or personal benefit; and growth (p. 26). This study considers the activities of a language program in terms of several of these definitions of entrepreneurship.

A further definition necessary to this study is that of educational entrepreneurship. Webber and Scott (2008) defined educational entrepreneurship as “the strategic focus on creating short and long-term opportunities for learning that will make a significant difference for individuals and their societies” (p. 1). Their definition of educational entrepreneurship includes six dimensions: innovative behavior, networking, time–space communication framework, local-global perspective, educational organizations as knowledge centers, and integrated face-to-face and internet-based learning. Some key attributes of each dimension are provided, for example, innovative behavior includes “generation of knowledge and skills,” networking includes “information acquisition” and “successful adaptation to changing conditions,” local-global perspective includes “local-national-global cultural literacy” and “principled, reflective, engaged citizens,” the dimension of educational organizations as knowledge centers includes “attention to access, resources, and community needs” and “sites of essential learning,” and integrated face-to-face and internet-based learning includes “competitive environment” (p. 4). Significantly, Webber and Scott’s (2008) definition of educational entrepreneurship emphasizes opportunities for learning as the core objective. This stands in contrast with other definitions of entrepreneurship, which often emphasize the creation of wealth as the major goal of entrepreneurship (Morris et al., 1994).

Significantly, Webber and Scott’s (2008) framework focused on the processes and perceptions involved in educational entrepreneurship and not on the specific practices that result. While such practices may be innovative and effective in their particular context, they may not be equally appropriate in other contexts. As Green (2012) cautioned, educational institutions must be cautious when implementing best practices from other contexts, as best practices are “a mere step from . . . ‘one size fits all’” (p. 2). That being said, understanding how educational entrepreneurship is carried out in various contexts may provide insights that could allow educators to adapt to changes in their context.

**Method**

This case study uses general qualitative methods to investigate the processes through which an intensive English as a foreign language (EFL) program in Thailand engages in educational entrepreneurship in response to a rapidly changing environment and to the needs of learners. The research question guiding this study was as follows:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How does one intensive EFL program in Thailand engage in educational entrepreneurship to meet the changing needs of its learners?

This research was conducted in the qualitative case study tradition as described by Yin (2014). As such, it has certain basic characteristics. These include some flexibility of research
design, the consideration of multiple realities, data collection by the researcher, and inclusion of the views of participants as important data (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2012) explained, the goal of qualitative research is to explore a problem and to achieve an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. The choice of the qualitative tradition has deep implications for all aspects of the study. For example, data are collected from a relatively small number of individuals, allowing for depth rather than breadth of coverage. The influence of the qualitative method also extends to data analysis, which involves the creation of themes to explore the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2012). All of these characteristics align with the goal of the study, making qualitative research the appropriate choice.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and documents, which were analyzed through the lens of the educational entrepreneurship framework proposed by Webber and Scott (2008). The interview protocol is included in Appendix A. Data were collected from two main sources: the five course coordinators and a focus group of four teachers. An effort was also be made to choose teachers who represent the overall demographics of the population of teachers from which they are drawn. The course coordinators were interviewed individually because their role in administration and curriculum development allowed them to understand the program’s functioning at the level of curriculum. Of the 21 teachers at the language center, a total of 11 were American, five were British, two were Australian, one was from New Zealand, one was Canadian, and one was Italian. Three of the 21 teachers held dual passports (two were Thai and American, the other was Canadian and American). All received secondary and university education in a Western country. Two of the 21 teachers at the language center were female and the remaining 19 were male. The teachers ranged in age from early 30s to mid-50s. All of the participants had lived in Thailand for a minimum of 3 years and some had resided in Thailand for up to 20 years. All of the teachers in the program had taught for at least 5 years and the mean teaching experience was more than a decade.

The interviews with each of the five course coordinators took place in a meeting room in the office of the language program. Each interview took approximately 1 hr to complete; however, the exact time varied depending on the interviewer and participants. The interviews were recorded using an MP3 recorder. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions are included in Appendix A. Each interview continued until the questions in Appendix A had been answered. Before the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the study and asked each participant to sign an informed consent form. Each participant was also informed that he or she could decline to answer specific questions or stop the interview at any time. At the end of the interview, participants were asked to provide supporting documents (e.g., documents related to the curriculum or teaching materials) relating to points that they raised during the interview.

The focus group session, with the group of four teachers, was also conducted on the premises of the language program in one of the meeting rooms. The researcher and the teachers who participated in the focus group sat around a large conference table. An MP3 recorder was used to record the focus group session. The focus group session lasted approximately 1 hr and covered all of the questions in Appendix A. While the focus group and interviews used the same questions, the participants in each were distinct (each of the five course coordinators were interviewed individually; four teachers participated in the focus group).

Similar to the interviews, the focus group followed a semi-structured format. This ensured that all of the major areas of interest were discussed while also allowing some freedom in the direction that the discussion takes. Before the focus group discussion begins, the researcher explained the study orally and provided an informed consent form for all of the participants to sign. At the end of the focus group, the participants were asked to provide any relevant documents that supported their statements about the topics discussed in the focus group session.

The data analysis had several stages. First, the data were organized and prepared for analysis. After the initial reading of the transcripts, a first cycle coding method was applied. The first cycle coding method was in vivo coding, which “[prioritizes] and honors the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 74). In vivo coding was applied to both the interview transcripts and the other documents. Next, the second cycle coding method of axial coding was applied. This separated the codes generated during the first cycle coding into conceptual categories, reducing the overall number of codes. Major themes emerged, and these themes were interpreted through the lens of Webber and Scott’s (2008) educational entrepreneurship framework.

Results

The research question examines how the language program that is the focus of this case study engages in educational entrepreneurship to meet its learners’ needs, as perceived by the faculty and administrators of the program. The major themes that have emerged from the data are as follows: Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning, development of locally relevant content and language helps the curriculum to meet students’ needs, use of PBL fosters content and language learning, and collaboration among teachers drives innovation and other aspects of educational entrepreneurship. This section explains each of these themes in detail, drawing on specific examples from the data. The major themes appear in Table 1.

Applications of Educational Technology Result in Innovation and Enhanced Learning

Technology is central to instruction in the language program. In recent years, technology has become increasingly integrated into the curriculum. The program requires each
student to bring a netbook or laptop to his or her classes each day. Wi-Fi is available throughout the building and a resource room containing desktop computers, printers, and scanners is also open for students’ use. Even the desks have been chosen to accommodate laptops comfortably and to allow multiple different classroom setups conducive to collaborative tech-based language learning. This wide use of technology is a relatively recent development. One of the coordinators noted the drastic change since his arrival several years previously, saying “when I first came here we had no computers in the classroom, we had overhead projectors . . . [now] we have computers in every classroom, we’ve got Wi-Fi, [and] students bring their laptops.” The vast majority of the interviewees, teachers, and coordinators alike noted the steady increase in the integration of technology.

The curriculum documents that course coordinators and teachers provided to support their statements also highlight the importance of technology in the curriculum. All of the course syllabi mention technology in various forms, for example, the requirement that students bring a laptop or netbook to class and that students create a Google account for sharing and receiving documents. The medium chosen for sharing documents after the interviews and focus groups is also significant. With the exception of one document shared by a participant from the focus group, all teachers and administrators chose to share documents using Google Docs rather than paper.

The theme “Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning” can be further broken down into several subthemes: “development of technology skills and language skills,” “innovation using educational technology,” “communication and feedback,” and “concerns about technology.” The subtheme “development of technology skills and language skills” includes technology as both the opportunities presented by newly available educational technology to enhance language learning and the enhanced learning of technology and other skills concurrently with language. The subtheme “innovation using educational technology” highlights the new approaches to teaching and learning that educational technology makes possible. The subtheme “communication and feedback” includes the application of educational technology to communicate and provide feedback in ways that enhance learning. Finally, the subtheme “concerns about technology” touches on disadvantages and possible future impact of educational technology.

Development of technology skills and language skills. As noted by the majority of the course coordinators and teachers, the two primary reasons for this increased use of technology include a perceived need for the development of tech skills and the perceived effectiveness of technology for improving language instruction. A course coordinator explained, “Students need to be up to speed with technology more than they did in the past” and “especially if you’re an urbanite and going to a modern university, as they are, you need to know how to use this stuff.” Several interviewees also mentioned the importance of tech skills for teachers, stating that many of the recent changes in education worldwide have been based on technology. One teacher in the focus group stated, “Technology seems to be the main driver of our profession and our students.” Keeping up with these changes is perceived to be part of a teacher’s job. Another course coordinator noted, “The world around us is going to keep changing, and especially the technology” and that teachers should make use of the “different tools and different approaches” available to help students realize their goals.

After the interviews and focus group had been completed, several teachers provided documents that they believed exemplified the effective use of technology in language teaching. These included multimedia Google Docs for teaching content, examples of exemplary websites and videos created by students, and texts that had been enhanced by adding links to relevant supporting documents. Two teachers also sent links to online resources, Quizlet.com and Dictionary.com, as examples of useful materials that can be used to build students’ vocabulary through games and flash cards.

Innovation using educational technology. The majority of the participants perceived that the increased availability and use of educational technology in the program has allowed innovation. This has taken many forms, including media-based projects, multimedia assignments and documents, and various applications of online services and cloud technologies. Several participants indicated that they perceived the media-based project in the intermediate-level class to be a prime example. In this project, which one of the teachers in the focus group described as an “original idea,” students are assigned a country in the ASEAN and are asked to create a short new story comparing and contrasting an aspect of current events in that country (e.g., education, technology, and politics) with the current situation in Thailand. They first read news articles on Google News, and then write a draft of the script for the introductory news segment. Once their advisor has approved the script, they write interview questions and select an appropriate and knowledgeable person to interview, often a citizen of the country that they are investigating. They record the introductory news segment and the

| Table 1. Themes Emerging From an Analysis of the Interviews in Relationship to Research Question 1. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| - Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning. |
| - English as a foreign language is a competitive tool for Thai students. |
| - Use of project-based learning fosters content and language learning. |
| - Collaboration among teachers drives innovation and other aspects of educational entrepreneurship. |
interviews, and then edit them to create a 6- to 8-min video about the ASEAN country.

Because the students already possess a certain level of tech literacy, teachers do not need to dedicate much class time to teaching the technology. In an interview, one course coordinator supported this stating, “using video and sound and editing . . . just seems natural to them.” Each term, the best student videos from each class are shown in the auditorium on the university campus. Students vote to select the best of the videos shown, and the video that receives the most votes is also shown at the student orientation during the next term.

Participants also perceived that technology also makes other innovations possible. More than half of the total participants mentioned perceived innovations in their interview or focus group sessions. The program makes extensive use of multimedia documents that include video, audio, and text components to cultivate students’ content knowledge and language skills. One teacher in the focus group observed that these multimedia documents have “really changed the way kids understand things,” providing a deeper understanding of the material than other approaches. A sample document is included in Appendix B. In addition, as the students spend a considerable amount of time using their devices each day, integrating technology is perceived to be natural to them. Another teacher in the focus group observed that integrating technology allows the program to “take advantage of what they’re doing anyway” by asking them to engage with online materials. A third participant in the focus group said that the program should “take advantage of the digital form” of educational materials rather than trying to separate students from their devices. In interviews, most coordinators also supported these ideas. One coordinator remarked, “technology is so natural to [the students]” and that the students are quite comfortable using educational technologies in the classroom.

The application of technology includes both custom-made multimedia activities as described above and online materials that are integrated into the classes. A coordinator commented,

Sometimes it’s using the technology to create something from scratch, whether it be an assignment or a worksheet, whatever it might be, a guidebook. In other cases, it’s finding what’s already been created that is out there on the Internet.

The documents that teachers and coordinators submitted after the interviews and focus groups provide examples of both custom-made materials, including videos made by teachers at the center about key content such as common logical fallacies, and other online materials, including YouTube videos about human rights. Several teachers and administrators indicated that the use of such materials is well within the students’ abilities and comfort zones.

**Communication and feedback.** The curriculum in the language program has also integrated online services (e.g., Edmodo) as well as cloud technologies (e.g., Google Docs and Google Slides). These technologies are used throughout the program. Edmodo provides several tools for communication and collaboration, allowing students to join an online class that can be easily managed by the teacher. The interface is similar to that of Facebook, providing students with a comfortable environment for sharing documents and receiving messages and feedback. More than half of the participants noted that using such tools for sharing files and assignments provides several advantages. One course coordinator observed that “it’s so much easier to communicate with students” using technology and that communication with students can be “instantaneous.” This concept is further supported by the statements of two other coordinators, who explained that cloud-based technologies such as Google Docs allow students to “work collaboratively in real time” both in class and at home and “students learn so much more from each other than in the past.”

Furthermore, several participants explained that teachers can efficiently provide feedback about the students’ work. In an interview, one coordinator explained that “it’s so much easier to edit what they produce” using cloud-based services compared with paper. Online collaboration can extend beyond writing and several teachers use online platforms such as YouTube for group video editing assignments. These provide other ways of developing and assessing students’ speaking and discussion skills. Using these tools, students can annotate videos of their own individual presentations or group discussions.

**Concerns about technology.** Half of the teachers in the focus group and two of the course coordinators expressed concerns about the present and future uses of technology both in this particular program and in the wider educational context. One teacher noted that technology grows “exponentially” and another teacher noted that it has “enormous impacts.” As described above, participants perceived many benefits of technology; however, nearly half mentioned at least one drawback of using educational technology.

Several participants perceived that new technologies can be problematic, particularly those that are not intuitive to use. One coordinator explained that he prefers not to “spend too much time telling them how to use a certain piece of technology . . . It has to be fairly simple to use and incorporate into the curriculum.” Another teacher noted that new technologies always require an investment of energy to learn, explaining, “nothing’s easy in terms of technology I think. There’s always a learning curve and there are always challenges” and that the potential benefits must exceed the energy invested. One coordinator, cautioning about the overzealous application of technology, remarked, “If you’re afraid of technology, you’re lost. But at the same time, if you think it’s all about the technology, you’re just as lost” and stressed that appropriate pedagogy is more important than technology.
Although most of the interviewees stated that the program does not currently face any competition from online resources or other forms of internet-based learning, several were uncertain of the future. More than one participant predicted that the program would face increasing internet-based competition in the future and one course coordinator predicted, “there’s the possibility that one day they won’t even need teachers [in the] long term.”

**EFL Is a Competitive Tool for Thai Students**

The majority of the teachers and coordinators interviewed identified the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as a major influence on the students’ needs. The ASEAN has existed since 1967 as a political organization of Southeast Asian states. At the end of 2015, the ASEAN member states implemented the AEC that aims to promote regional economic integration by lowering barriers to trade and encouraging mobility of labor. The official working language of the ASEAN is English and the need for English will almost certainly increase with the integration of the AEC.

Almost all of the teachers and coordinators interviewed perceived that students would need to greatly improve their English to remain competitive in the AEC. This topic featured prominently in the interviews and interest groups. For example, a coordinator asserted, “If Thailand is sort of at the bottom of the rankings in terms of English ability, then students here are going to start losing out on potential jobs.” Teachers and coordinators perceived that the need to improve students’ English was generally tied to the job market. One teacher noted, “[The AEC] will cause a lot of competition and Thai people will be left in the dust basically.” Several coordinators and teachers observed that the need for improved English had been noticed at the highest levels of the Thai government. In the focus group, one participant stated, “I think the whole AEC thing is big. If you look at the Thai government, they’re pushing it. They’re talking about English.”

More than half of the total participants perceived that students are likely to use English in the future for communicating with other learners of English, mostly for business purposes. One course coordinator supported this, noting, “English is becoming the lingua franca of Southeast Asia” and students need to learn “English as it is going to be spoken in this region.” Another course coordinator observed, “You’re not necessarily learning English to speak to an American or British person or an Australian. You’re learning English to do business maybe with Koreans, Japanese, or other Southeast Asian countries.” The end goal of the English as a lingua franca approach is not to provide students with native-like accents or in-depth knowledge of Western culture; rather, the goal is to cultivate students’ ability to communicate their ideas clearly across cultures. This has resulted in a departure from previous approaches to teaching EFL. The goal of English as a lingua franca was succinctly summed up by a coordinator: “It’s buying a train ticket in London, is it?”

The materials used in the language program have been developed to reflect students’ need for content knowledge relevant to the region. Such materials are highly appropriate for the English as a lingua franca approach used in the program, and the regionally relevant content knowledge that the students develop will serve them well in future interaction with other non-Thai individuals. One course coordinator explained the process of constantly revising material to keep them relevant: “Whether it’s talking about energy policies, pollution, or human rights, or . . . business ethics, we are constantly upgrading and improving and making sure that those things are relevant to their lives.”

All of these topics are represented in the multimedia teaching materials submitted by coordinators and focus group participants. Teachers and coordinators in the language program perceived that the relevance of the content taught also has implications for the students’ motivation to learn, as one coordinator observed: “If you can relate those topics into current events that students can actually say, ‘Yeah, this is what’s important about the environment, this is really important. This is really happening in the world around me.’” In addition, the use of current events in language teaching allows the use of authentic materials on the internet. Some teachers integrate news sites into their teaching as a way of cultivating students’ general knowledge. A teacher gave specific examples of how he integrates news into his classes, stating, “I like to encourage my students to read the news, ask them to set their homepage to CNN, or BBC, or Bangkok Post.” Such materials are consistent with the English as a lingua franca approach to language teaching.

**Use of PBL Fosters Content and Language Learning**

The program uses PBL in all of its language courses. During the interviews, each of the course coordinators of the English courses mentioned the use of PBL in their courses, and this is further confirmed by the teaching documents that they submitted and by the course syllabi. According to Thomas (2000), to be considered PBL, five criteria must be met: centrality, driving question, constructive investigations, autonomy, and realism. Centrality means that the project must be a major component of the course. Driving question means that the project must be designed around a question that pushes students to engage with important ideas in a particular content area. Constructive investigations means that answering the driving question must require the development of new skills and knowledge; the project is not merely designed to reinforce existing skills and knowledge. Autonomy means that students must take charge of their own learning to a significant extent; the project is not “teacher-led, scripted, or packaged” (Thomas, 2000, p. 4). And finally, realism means that the project must make use of real-world materials, audiences, and content to the greatest extent possible.
Two course coordinators mentioned the growing prominence of PBL in language teaching. One stated, “[project-based learning] is getting really prominent in the field, and we’ve taken that into our program.” The major projects in the program’s curriculum, which feature prominently in the syllabi and documents submitted after the interviews, are described below.

The curriculum of the language program includes several projects: a website for lower intermediate students, a video news project for intermediate students, and several term paper projects for upper intermediate students. While the projects in the language program take several different forms, they follow a similar pattern. The procedure that each project follows is well documented in the teaching documents submitted by the coordinators. A course coordinator described the process as follows: “gathering information, gathering research, outlining, gathering ideas, checking with an advisor, developing those ideas, doing further research, refining things, learning what a reliable resource is, presenting their materials, writing in drafts, getting feedback, and then presenting their overall work.”

Based on the interviews and teaching documents, all of the projects require students to work with an advisor throughout the term, and all involve the completion of several component parts at various points in the term (e.g., outlines, drafts). Furthermore, all of the projects involve some degree of independent research. The website project requires students to write about themselves and about Thailand, including several current news stories. The video project requires students to research another ASEAN country and compare a current newsworthy situation there with the current situation in Thailand. The term papers have varied topics and each requires students to structure their research and writing using a relatively simple framework. This is supported by a course coordinator’s observation that “all four of [the projects] have a framework; they’re all based on a framework that helps students to focus their research and put their research into the appropriate basket in terms of organizing, supporting their ideas.”

As described in the teaching documents and interviews, term paper topics include the discussion of a multinational company in terms of the triple bottom line framework (people, planet, and profit) and the discussion of the human rights situation in a particular country. These projects have been designed to provide students with a solid foundation for their university studies. One teacher in the focus group explained, “The full scope of the project . . . pretty much reflects what they need to be doing in all of their classes at the university.” All of the course coordinators of the English classes perceived that the projects require the development of both language skills and content knowledge.

The interviewees noted several outcomes of the projects, including motivation, self-expression, and autonomy. One teacher mentioned that “the students are more interested and more motivated” because of the implementation of the website project. A coordinator described the outcomes of the video project, saying, “It’s great having this video project. I think that students can express themselves using that,” and “I think [the video project] really helps with the speaking skills. It helps with the presentation skills.” Another coordinator stated that the website project “gets them learning autonomy,” which is one of the criteria for PBL. Overall, the interviews, focus group, and documents all point to the fact that projects have a central place in the curriculum of the language program. They are closely related to the themes mentioned above, as they all involve significant use of technology and are all designed to include relevant content.

**Collaboration Among Teachers Drives Innovation and Other Aspects of Educational Entrepreneurship**

Based on the results of the interviews and focus groups, it is evident that program development in the language program is driven by collaboration among teachers. While the director and the course coordinators do have some formal authority, most decisions regarding changes to the curriculum are made by consensus. The majority of course coordinators mentioned the program’s use of discussion and consensus to make decisions in the interviews and more than one teacher mentioned it in the focus group. A coordinator observed that teachers have “different viewpoints, different skills, [and] different focuses” and that including all of their voices helps to ensure continued innovation. Teachers are encouraged to express their opinions and to try new things. In the focus group, teachers noted that “it’s a very supportive atmosphere here” and that “everybody is approachable.” The development of new ideas is supported by the layout of the office, which contributes to the collaborative atmosphere. This was explained by one coordinator as follows:

The office is . . . we sit really close to each other. It’s not divided off; we’re not divided into cubicles or anything like that, so just the actual, physical layout of the staff office allows for the exchange of ideas.

In an interview, another coordinator stated that “change is possible, change is encouraged, positive change, it happens all the time.” Change in the program occurs through both formal and informal processes.

Change is brought about through several formal processes. Participants in the interviews mentioned several concrete examples, including staff meetings and professional development activities. General faculty meetings are held at the beginning and end of each term. After the end-of-term faculty meeting, teachers from each class meet to make suggestions regarding potential changes. Nearly half of the interviewees made positive comments about these meetings and none made negative comments. One coordinator remarked, “We’re always looking for new ideas. We have an
actual process for that, with the staff meetings.” The interviewees also described the benefits of gathering all of the teachers of a particular class meeting at the beginning and end of the term. These meetings allow changes to be made immediately. A coordinator stated that “most [changes] were formalized in end-of-quarter feedback sessions, where we propose and discuss and usually, immediately approve, or not approve, changes to the way we do things.”

Professional development activities also encourage innovation. At least twice per year, the program holds in-house seminars in which teachers briefly share their research, teaching methods, or materials. A teacher in the focus group described these seminars as events where “people pick some aspect that they’ve been researching or that they’re interested in and present it to the rest of us.” Discussing an online tool that he had shared at a previous seminar, one of the interviewees mentioned that he “wouldn’t have really taken that as far if it wasn’t for having to do it for that workshop. I’d looked at it and thought . . . I’d probably thought about it in the shower or something.” In this case, the seminar provided motivation to develop and share a useful teaching tool in an innovative application. Participants also mentioned annual workshops in which the curriculum is scrutinized. A participant in the focus group stated, “We do workshops periodically, an annual workshop, so we generally get together and do curriculum review.” Multiple participants perceived that these formal processes for implementing change allow opportunities for educational entrepreneurship.

Change also occurs through informal means. Whereas major changes would be introduced through more formal means, minor changes can be made through a simpler process. Almost all of the English course coordinators commented positively on the way that minor changes are made; none commented negatively. A course coordinator explained, “Minor changes, we may have done, sort of, off the cuff, in the office, when we noticed something that was pretty obviously going to be an improvement.” There is significant freedom for teachers to make such minor changes. If these changes are successful, they can easily be shared in the office. A participant in the focus group stated, “I think individual teachers can do things quickly and share them around.” Because of the generally positive atmosphere in the office and camaraderie among the teachers, informal change is quite frequent. A coordinator noted,

There is quite a bit of sharing between the teachers and people just discuss what works . . . we get on well enough as a team where we can kind of reach a consensus and compromise and move things forward.

One interviewee observed the importance of learning from other teachers, even implying that informal sharing may be more effective than formal professional development. Another interviewee emphasized the importance of voluntary collaboration, noting that it cannot be forced:

It is a fact that many of the people in the office are actually friends as well, but at least, in the office, there is a professional, cooperative working atmosphere. People share resources, share ideas, encourage people, fill in for people. That is extremely helpful. That is not something that you can just institutionalize or make a rule about, or anything like that. That is just sort of one of those intangibles that is created by the personalities in the office. That is very significant in keeping the program going and improving.

Collaboration through both formal and informal means has been an important driver for change, allowing the program to develop to meet the student’s changing needs as perceived by teachers and coordinators at the language program.

This section has addressed the research question by investigating how an intensive EFL program in Thailand engages in educational entrepreneurship. The first and most prominent theme that emerged from the analysis of the data is that the program engages in educational entrepreneurship by applying educational entrepreneurship in innovative ways to enhance students’ learning. Further themes emerged, including the development of locally relevant language and content to meet the students’ needs, the use of PBL to facilitate students’ learning of language and content, and the role of collaboration among teachers to drive educational entrepreneurship.

Discussion

This case study of an intensive EFL program in Thailand has provided insights into educational entrepreneurship as it is practiced in this particular context. The field of English language education continues to evolve due to economic, technological, and pedagogical changes, and developing an understanding of how educational entrepreneurship can allow institutions to take advantage of new opportunities created by these changes.

The landscape of education in Asia is changing rapidly. This is particularly true in Thailand, where the Ministry of Education has been attempting major reforms since around the time of the economic crash in 1997 (Terwiel, 2011). Since the implementation of the Education Reform Law in 1999, the Thai government has attempted to increase educational institutions’ autonomy and enhance student-centered learning; however, these efforts have met with uneven results and the reform efforts are still ongoing (Hallinger & Lee, 2011). More specific to language teaching, the prestige of English has been increasing, and it is now the highest prestige second language in Thailand (Buripakdi, 2011). Contributing to change in education, educational technology has continued growing in availability, power, and diversity.

Entrepreneurship in the Language Program

As mentioned in the literature review, Morris et al. (1994) proposed a flexible definition of entrepreneurship, where the
inputs are “an opportunity; one or more proactive individuals; an organizational context; risk, innovation; and resources” (p. 26). The inputs in the language program are consistent with Morris et al.’s (1994) definition. The changes to the Thai educational context as a whole, to educational technology, and to the students’ needs for English as a lingua franca provide an opportunity; several proactive individuals are involved in the program’s activities; the program is an organization; there is risk involved; significant educational innovation takes place; and resources are devoted to the process.

These inputs are evident in the themes presented above. The opportunities presented by educational technology are related to the theme “applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning” and the associated subtheme of “innovation using educational technology.” The changing need for English among Thai students appears in the theme “EFL is a competitive tool for Thai students.” Proactive individuals are connected with the subtheme of “communication and feedback” and the theme of “collaboration among teachers drives innovation and other aspects of educational entrepreneurship,” and risk is associated with the subtheme of “concerns about technology.”

Morris et al. (1994) also listed possible outcomes, some of which are evident in the language program. New ventures, for example, the courses for civil servants or for visiting Japanese students, are created (although no new enterprises have yet been created); value is created through the more efficient use of resources; new processes have been implemented and new products, in the sense of new courses, have been created (although no new physical products have been created); profit has grown steadily and many individuals have benefited from the program’s activities; and the program has grown steadily.

The outcomes that Morris et al. (1994) included in their definition are also evident in the themes that emerged from this study. New processes can be seen in the theme, “use of project-based learning fosters content and language learning,” and personal benefit (in this case for the students) can be seen in the subtheme, “development of technology skills and language skills.” In short, the program does seem to practice educational entrepreneurship as defined by Morris et al. (1994).

The majority of participants in this study understood innovation to mean the implementation of ideas that are new to a particular context, regardless of whether the ideas have previously been implemented elsewhere. Nearly all of the participants in the study stated that the program was innovative; however, only a minority gave examples of novel ideas that had been conceived in the program. The remainder of the examples of innovation that they mentioned were novel to the Thai context but had already been implemented elsewhere. These actions could certainly be considered innovative under West and Farr’s (1990) definition of innovation as “the attempt to bring about beneficial change” (p. 9); however, other definitions of innovation would exclude most of the changes made in the language program.

Whether these changes are innovations or not depends on the definition of innovation. There is precedent in the literature for classifying these changes as innovations. For example, Weideman (2002) described a similar situation: the implementation of the communicative approach to language teaching in the African context decades after the approach had become dominant elsewhere. Other definitions, such as Thompson’s (1965) definition, would classify the language program’s actions as adaptive, not innovative, as it was, with few exceptions, only implementing ideas that were conceived elsewhere. If the program is not seen as innovative, it could be seen as implementing sound pedagogical principles (e.g., student-centered learning) into a new context. All of the examples of innovative behavior mentioned by the participants are nontraditional in the Thai context. In either case, namely, innovation or adaptation, participants perceived that the center is attempting to “bring about beneficial change” (West & Farr, 1990, p. 9) to meet the students’ needs.

Educational Entrepreneurship in the Language Program

For the purposes of this study, educational entrepreneurship is understood through Webber and Scott’s (2008) 6-point conceptual framework: innovative behavior, networking, time–space communication framework, local-global perspective, educational organizations as knowledge centers, and integrated face-to-face and internet-based learning. They noted that educational entrepreneurship aims to provide equitable access to education and has the goal of “promoting growth in social and human capacity” (Webber & Scott, 2008, p. 1). The language program engages in educational entrepreneurship as it is presented in Webber and Scott’s (2008) framework. The program innovates, particularly in its applications of educational technology; it networks productively with other institutions, utilizes various forms of communication to enhance efficiency, has a local-global perspective as it develops individuals’ cultural knowledge and engagement with important regional and global issues, and integrates face-to-face and internet-based learning in all of its courses.

The element of the framework that is least evident in the program’s activities is “educational organizations as knowledge centers” (Webber & Scott, 2008, p. 4). The program’s relationship with the wider community is underdeveloped, a shortcoming that will be discussed in the following. The program’s overall mission is also in line with the purpose of educational entrepreneurship proposed by Webber and Scott (2008). Although the program must take in revenue to remain operational, the primary goal of the program is to educate, to “[promote] growth in social and human capacity” (Webber & Scott, 2008, p. 1). For all of these reasons, the program can be seen to be engaging in educational entrepreneurship as defined by Webber and Scott (2008).
Summary of Findings

This study has both managerial and theoretical implications. The most direct implications of this study would be for the various stakeholders of the language program. The areas in which the program is most effective in using educational entrepreneurship to meet students’ needs, for example, innovation and integrating internet-based and face-to-face learning, have been identified, as have the areas in which the program needs further development, such as its relationship with the community. This will be useful in the program’s future development. The study’s findings also have implications for teachers and administrators in other language programs in Thailand, ASEAN, and Asia. The findings are particularly relevant to educators in developing countries, where rapid economic change and globalization are likely to correspond to change in the means and ends of language teaching. The themes and findings that have emerged from this study could be useful to administrators leading their programs through such change and to teachers striving to understand and meet their students’ changing needs.

This research has limitations. It involved a case study at a language center in Thailand, and the results may not be generalizable to other institutions because of the use of a single case study. That being said, an effort has been made to provide adequate description, so that readers will be able to discern which insights or conclusions could be applied in their context. In addition, the cultural context of the research is significant. Thai culture differs from many Western cultures in many ways, including the perceptions of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and authority. While certain results of this research might be generalized to institutions independent of context, this should be done cautiously. In particular, the challenges that institutions in culturally dissimilar countries face would probably differ.

The definitions of entrepreneurship and educational entrepreneurship that this study has selected must also be considered. While these definitions were chosen after a thorough literature review and are not inherently limiting, their use limits the degree to which this study can be compared with other studies on entrepreneurship or educational entrepreneurship. Because of the variation in the definitions of entrepreneurship, the body of research on this topic is a “hodgepodge” (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 217). When comparing the results of this research with other studies of entrepreneurship or of educational entrepreneurship, the definitions of these key terms that each study uses must be scrutinized.

Following on this single case study, a multiple case study would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Such a multiple case study could be conducted either among several language centers in Thailand or several language centers in the ASEAN. Including language programs in other ASEAN countries would greatly improve the generalizability of the results.

Further research could also follow up on the same language center. Such research could gain greater depth by including additional stakeholders, such as students and their parents, in the data collection and analysis. This would provide an additional means of verifying whether the teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions (e.g., regarding the students’ preference for teacher-centered or student-centered learning) are accurate.

Conclusion

This case study has investigated how one language program in Thailand engages in entrepreneurship to meet its students’ needs. Data collected through interviews and focus groups were analyzed using in vivo and axial coding. Themes emerged in each of the areas of interest and these themes were distilled to the following takeaways: Applications of educational technology result in innovation and enhanced learning, development of locally relevant content and language helps the curriculum to meet students’ needs, use of PBL fosters content and language learning, and collaboration among teachers drives innovation and other aspects of educational entrepreneurship. These findings were interpreted through the lens of Webber and Scott’s (2008) educational entrepreneurship framework. The major findings were consistent with the framework, which was useful both in understanding the program’s current efforts at educational entrepreneurship and directions in which it could develop in the future.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Students’ needs

1. How are the students’ needs today different than they were in the past?
2. Are changes in the available educational technologies and in students’ tech literacy relevant to language teaching?
3. Are there any differences in terms of the purpose for which they are learning English? Is there any difference in terms of the type of language that they will need?
4. Are there any differences in terms of the Thai educational system? Does the current political situation in Thailand or in Southeast Asia influence the students’ needs?
5. Are any of the students’ needs not met? If so, why aren’t they met?
6. Will the students’ needs continue to change? What changes do you predict in the near future?
Educational entrepreneurship

1. Does the program engage in innovative behavior? If so, please give some specific examples of innovative behavior that it has engaged in.
2. Does the program encourage teachers to generate new knowledge and skills? If so, please give specific examples of knowledge and skills that have been generated.
3. Has innovation in the program helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
4. Does the program network with other institutions? If so, how is this done? Which institutions influence the program?
5. How does the program find out about changes in the environment (e.g., changes to university or government policy, changes in students’ needs, or changes in the field of education)?
6. Has networking helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
7. What modes of communication are used within the program? What modes of communication are used to communicate with parents, students, and other stakeholders outside of the program?
8. Are the modes of communication used by the program changing?
9. Have changes in the modes of communication helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
10. Does the program help students to become aware of important regional and global issues? If so, how is this done? Specifically, which issues are integrated into the curriculum?
11. Does the program help students to become better citizens of the world? If so, how?
12. Has raising awareness of important issues helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
13. Does the program help to meet community needs? If so, which needs?
14. Does the program involve faculty, staff, students, and parents in meeting community needs? If so, how does the program involve them?
15. Has community involvement helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
16. Is the program using internet-based learning? If so, give specific examples.
17. Has the program faced any competition because of internet-based learning? If so, how has this competition influenced the program?
18. Has integrating face-to-face and internet-based learning helped to meet the needs of the students? If so, how?
19. Do you have anything else to add? Is there anything important that we haven’t covered?
20. Do you have any questions for me regarding this study or the topics we’ve just discussed?

Appendix B

Sample Multimedia Document

Urbanization

Warmup discussion. Before you begin any other exercises, discuss the following questions in a small group.

1. What is the biggest city you have been to?
2. Do you live downtown, in the countryside, or somewhere in the middle?
3. What are the positive effects that people obtain by living in a city?
4. As cities continue to grow, what are the negative impacts that affect people?

Previewing vocabulary. Read the following sentences and see if you can guess what the words in bold mean.

1. Many city residents find it difficult to relax in cities because they are such busy and noisy places to live.
2. Everyone has a different perspective, so you should never assume that everyone thinks the same way you do.
3. Every relationship experiences conflict at some point because it’s impossible for two people to always agree, which sometimes results in arguments.
4. Cities usually contain a diverse range of people from all around the world.
5. Many cities have symbolic landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Parthenon in Greece.
6. Businesses usually promote themselves by marketing their names and products through the media.
7. Governments usually facilitate a good quality of life for the majority of citizens by providing decent infrastructure and facilities.
8. Unfortunately, many children are abandoned because their parents simply cannot afford to take care of them.
9. City smog is a relatively new phenomenon that has only existed for the past couple of decades as the number of cars and the amount of pollution has steadily increased.
10. A growing city does not mean that everyone is economically better off.
Comprehension questions. Read these questions before you watch this video from Khan Academy. Take notes while you watch the video and then come back to answer the questions below.

1. What are rural, urban, and suburban areas?

2. What is a megalopolis?

3. Why do people move to urban areas?

4. Why do people create separate communities in cities?

5. What is suburbanization?

6. What are the problems of living in the suburbs?

7. What is rural rebound?

Main theories of urbanization. Listen back to the video again if necessary or look at the video transcript and then describe each of the main theories of urbanization in the table below.

| Name of theory          | Description of theory |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Functionalist theory    |                       |
| Conflict theory         |                       |
| Symbolic interactionist theory |             |

Group discussion—positive and negative effects of urbanization. In groups, using your own background knowledge and information from the video, discuss the positive and negative effects of urbanization.

| Positive | Negative |
|----------|----------|
|          |          |

Categories of city dwellers. Listen back to the video again if necessary or look at the video transcript and then complete the definition for each type of person living in a city.

| Category           | Definition |
|--------------------|------------|
| Cosmopolites       |            |
| Singles            |            |
| Deprived and trapped |           |

Group discussion—planning a city. In groups, discuss the effects of planning and not planning the design and layout of a city.

Think about:

1. Why are cities growing so fast?
2. Who are the worst affected city residents and why are their lives so difficult?
3. How can better planning make cities a better place to live?

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Alexander Nanni https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1099-585X

References

Akkakoson, S. (2019). Thai language learners’ sense of English ownership. PASAA, 58, 235–263.
Anderson, B. S., Wennberg, K., & McMullen, J. S. (2019). Enhancing quantitative theory-testing entrepreneurship research. Journal of Business Venturing, 34(5), 105928.
ASEAN Secretariat. (2009). Roadmap for an ASEAN community, 2009-2015.
Bareghhe, A., Rowley, J., & Sambrook, S. (2009). Towards a multidisciplinary definition of innovation. Management Decision, 47(8), 1323–1339. http://doi.org/10.1108/0025140910910984578
Buripakdi, A. (2011). Thai journalists’ views on the notion of World Englishes. Journal of English as an International Language, 6, 59–80.
Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4th ed.). Prentice Hall.
Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. Sage.
Ferreira, J. J. M., Fernandes, C. I., & Kraus, S. (2019). Entrepreneurship research: Mapping intellectual structures and research trends. Review of Managerial Science, 13, 181–205.
Green, J. H. (2012). Transfer of learning and its ascendency in higher education: A cultural critique. Teaching in Higher Education, 18, 365–376. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.719155
Hallinger, P., & Lee, M. (2011). A decade of education reform in Thailand: Broken promise or impossible dream? Cambridge Journal of Education, 41(2), 139–158.
Lei, J., & Hu, G. (2014). Is English-medium instruction effective in improving Chinese undergraduate students’ English competence? International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 52(2), 99–126. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2014-0005
Lounsbury, M., Cornelissen, J., Granqvist, N., & Grodal, S. (2019). Culture, innovation and entrepreneurship. Innovation, 21(1), 1–12.
Morris, M. H., Lewis, P. S., & Sexton, D. L. (1994). Reconceptualizing entrepreneurship: An input-output perspective. *SAM Advanced Management Journal, 59*, 21–21.

Saldana, J. (2012). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Seidhover, B. (2004). English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal, 59*(4), 339–341.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 217–226.

Terwiel, B. J. (2011). *Thailand’s political history: From the 13th century to recent times*. River Books.

Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. http://www.bobpearlman.org/BestPractices/PBL_Research.pdf

Thompson, V. A. (1965). Bureaucracy and innovation. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 10*, 1–20.

Webber, C. F., & Scott, S. (2008). Entrepreneurship and educational leadership development: Canadian and Australian perspectives. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning, 12*(14), 1–14.

Weideman, A. (2002). Overcoming resistance to innovation: Suggestions for encouraging change in language teaching. *Per Linguam, 18*(1), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.5785/18-1-7

West, M. A., & Farr, J. L. (Eds.). (1990). *Innovation and creativity at work: Psychological and organizational strategies*. John Wiley.

Wiklund, J., Wright, M., & Zahra, S. A. (2019). Conquering relevance: Entrepreneurship research’s grand challenge. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 43*, 419–436.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage.