

Knowledge Management with English Language Skills in Religious Tourism Destinations, Chiang Rai Province

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Received: June 3rd, 2025; **Revised:** August 5th, 2025; **Accepted:** August 13th, 2025

Abstract

This research aimed to study the community's English language knowledge management in Buddhist archaeological sites in Chiang Rai. It sought to establish knowledge management approaches regarding English skills for communities in these Buddhist archaeological sites, using knowledge management processes. Additionally, it aimed to propose strategies for managing English language knowledge in Chiang Rai's Buddhist archaeological sites. This research was qualitative. The population consisted of 80 monks/individuals from three temples in Chiang Rai province including Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Rong Suea Ten, and Wat Phra That Pha Ngao. The research tools included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that the overall knowledge management of English language skills within the communities surrounding Buddhist archaeological sites in Chiang Rai was limited. Monks, novices, and community members possessed minimal English language knowledge and skills, and there was no formalized knowledge management structure within the community. Additionally, it showed the lack on systematic approach in developing English language skills among personnel and in these Buddhist archaeological sites. The recommendations for improving English knowledge management showed general consensus : all parties agreed on the need for serious implementation of English language skill management in Chiang Rai's Buddhist archaeological sites. This need arose because each temple received a large number of English-speaking international tourists daily. However, communication across the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing remained insufficiently effective. The study emphasized the necessity for strong support and serious promotion to improve these skills in the community.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Religious Tourist Attractions, English Language

Introduction

In the era of globalization, English is regarded as a fundamental medium of international communication. For this reason, English has become a global language used by people around the

world for international communication, both in the public and private sectors, as well as for interpersonal communication among individuals from all corners of the globe. Moreover, English serves as a tool for researching and acquiring knowledge and information in various fields, whether in politics, economics, society, culture, education, health, or many other areas. To achieve English proficiency, learners must engage in consistent practice based on sound language learning principles. Moreover, learners must understand how to learn the language, know strategies for comprehending English, and engage in systematic and continuous practice.

In Thailand, the tourism sector is a vital part of the service industry and plays a significant role in the country's economic system. It generates hundreds of billions of baht in revenue annually. Thailand's tourism potential lies not only in its beautiful landscapes and diverse attractions but also in its high service standards. Kirkpatrick (2008) stated that in 2015, the ASEAN Community was established, and English was designated as the working language of ASEAN. Citizens in the 11 ASEAN countries would need to use English more frequently in addition to their respective national or local languages. When considering the English proficiency levels across ASEAN nations, Thailand is found to be in a concerning situation. To achieve effective English learning, one crucial aspect students must focus on is understanding sentence structures or grammar to a certain degree. Thailand is also capable of providing comprehensive services across the entire tourism industry chain. Chiang Rai Province, being a border economic zone adjacent to neighboring countries, must therefore accelerate the development and enhancement of foreign language communication skills and information services for tourists. This is especially important for monks and novice monks residing in temples that serve as tourist destinations, who need to improve their English communication skills. To address this, knowledge management initiatives and training courses in language and Buddhist-cultural tourism management should be organized for SMEs and other stakeholders. Additionally, efforts must be made to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of preserving Lanna Thai culture and identity, which is known for its hospitality, attentiveness, humility, sincerity, patience, and a service-minded spirit. Furthermore, there is a need to promote distinctive features through ecotourism and to develop safety measures that build confidence among tourists. The researcher observed English language instruction at Chiang Rai Buddhist College, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, which provides education to monks and novices who ordain to study Buddhism. It was found that most of the monk students lacked a basic understanding of English grammatical structures. According to the 2008 National Education Act, Section 22 stipulates that education must be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and that learners are the most important element (Office of the National Education Commission, 2008).

Although Thailand's tourism sector significantly contributes to the national economy through its diverse attractions and high service standards, limited English proficiency remains a pressing concern. With English designated as the official working language of ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2008),

the ability to communicate effectively in English is important, especially in border provinces (Chiang Rai) that serve as cross-cultural gateways. The low English proficiency levels observed among key tourism stakeholders, such as monks and novices in temple-based tourism sites, highlight the urgent need for targeted language interventions. These strategies not only promote language acquisition but also enhance the capacity of local actors to deliver culturally rich, informative, and engaging experiences to international tourists. Furthermore, integrating English-language training with Buddhist cultural content enables monks and SMEs to present Lanna Thai heritage more effectively, fostering cultural preservation while meeting global tourism demands. By equipping tourism service providers with both linguistic tools and contextual knowledge, knowledge management in English ultimately strengthens Thailand's competitive advantage in cultural and ecotourism, while supporting sustainable community development and international connectivity.

For this reason, the researcher has taken this opportunity to conduct a study titled *“Knowledge Management with English Language Skills in Religious Tourism Destinations, Chiang Rai Province”* as to aim to contribute to the preservation and transmission of Buddhist archaeological heritage for future generations.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the current practices of English language knowledge management in communities surrounding Buddhist temples that function as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province.
2. To analyze strategies and processes used for managing English language skills within these communities.
3. To develop practical guidelines for improving English language knowledge management in Buddhist religious tourist sites in Chiang Rai Province.

Literature Review

1. Knowledge Management in Tourism

Knowledge Management (KM) has become an essential strategic tool in the tourism industry, enabling stakeholders to acquire, organize, share, and apply knowledge effectively (Buhalis, 2000; Cooper, 2006). In tourism destinations, KM facilitates better coordination among stakeholders, enhances service quality, and fosters innovation in response to changing visitor needs (Cooper, 2006). Particularly in cultural and religious tourism, knowledge assets including cultural narratives, heritage interpretation, and community wisdom are critical to enriching tourist experiences. In addition, Dwyer et al. (2009) emphasize that KM in tourism must encompass both tacit and explicit knowledge to support sustainable destination development.

2. Religious and Cultural Tourism in Chiang Rai Province

Chiang Rai, located in northern Thailand, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and religious landmarks, including temples such as Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Rong Suea Ten, and Wat Phra That Pha Ngao. These sites not only attract domestic pilgrims but also serve as important destinations for international tourists interested in Buddhist art, rituals, and philosophy (Cohen, 1984). Religious tourism in this context demands communicators who possess both cultural knowledge and language skills to convey complex traditions accurately and respectfully. Monks and novices, who often serve as informal cultural ambassadors at these sites, frequently face challenges in English communication, limiting their ability to engage meaningfully with foreign visitors (Boonmatun and Huttayavilaiphan, 2025).

3. English Language Skills in Tourism Communication

English functions as the lingua franca of global tourism (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Proficiency in English among tourism personnel is therefore essential for effective cross-cultural communication, particularly in interactions with international tourists. A study by Natsewee & Kaewnopparat. (2021) have highlighted how language barriers negatively impact service quality and visitor satisfaction. In ASEAN, English is considered as the official working language (Kirkpatrick, 2008), member states face increasing pressure to improve their populations' communicative competence in English. In addition, Thailand has consistently ranked low in regional English proficiency indices (EF English Proficiency Index, 2022), pointing to an urgent need for targeted interventions, especially in sectors directly linked to international exchange.

4. Cultural Preservation and Learner-Centered Education

The application of KM and English training in religious tourism must align with the preservation of local cultural identity. Lanna culture, deeply rooted in values such as humility, hospitality, and spirituality, remains central to the tourism appeal of Chiang Rai (Tekhanmag et al, 2021). Educational initiatives should therefore be designed to maintain cultural authenticity while promoting global communication competencies. According to the Ministry of Education Thailand, learning must be based on the principle that all individuals are capable of self-development. This perspective supports the development of learner-centered, context-specific language and knowledge management programs that empower local communities to participate meaningfully in the tourism economy (Office of the National Education Commission, 2008).

Research Framework

This research focused on studying the knowledge management with English language skills in religious tourism destinations, Chiang Rai province. Based on the literature review above, the research framework is shown in Figure 1.

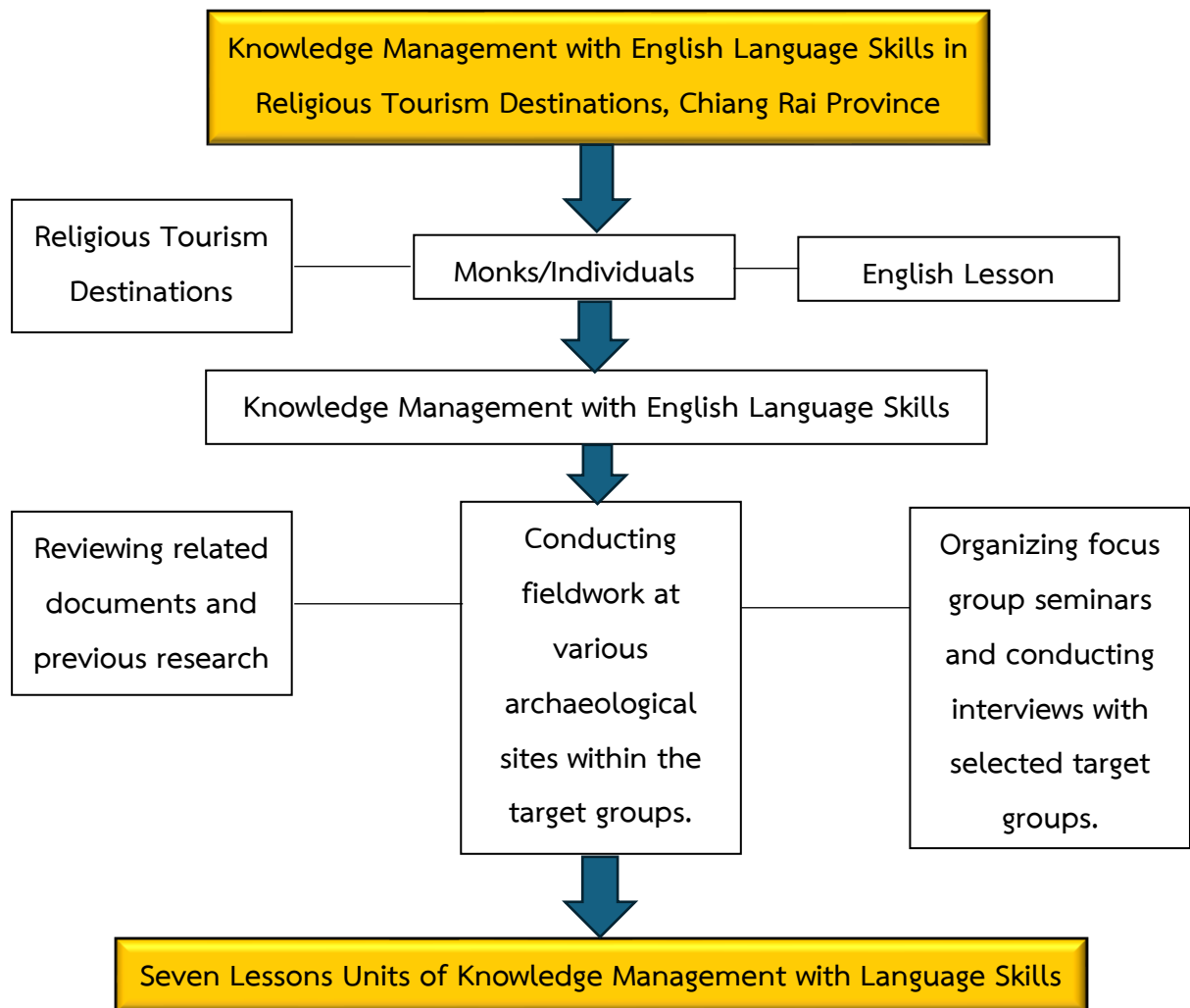


Figure 1 Research Framework

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This research project employs a survey and qualitative research approach. The researcher utilized the following methods : 1) Reviewing related documents and previous research, 2) Conducting fieldwork at various archaeological sites within the target groups, and 3) Organizing focus group seminars and conducting interviews with selected target groups.

2. Population and Target Groups

The population in this study consisted of sample groups from three temples located in Mueang District, Chiang Rai Province. These temples were selected for their cultural and historical value. From each temple, 10 monks or individuals were chosen, totaling 30 participants. In addition,

50 individuals comprising youths, staff, and volunteers were included to facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange. The total number of participants was 80.

3. Research Instruments

In this study, the researcher employed open-ended interview questionnaires. The process of developing the research instruments involved the following steps

1) Studying information related to knowledge management through English language skills in Buddhist temples that serve as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province, including relevant literature and interviews with individuals involved in English language knowledge management. This information was used to inform the development of the research tools.

2) Creating open-ended interview questionnaires on the topic of knowledge management through English language skills in Buddhist temples that serve as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province. The researcher adapted the instrument from Phra Khru Wimon Silpakit's original tool to suit the context of this research, and it was validated by experts in the field.

3) The research instrument was validated by conducting a trial with 10 third-year monk students from the Faculty of Humanities, majoring in English, enrolled in the course "Comparative Studies of English and Thai." The trial was conducted in the form of a focus group seminar. After the trial, the completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness, and the data was recorded in a computer system for analysis and processing.

4. Data Collection

The researcher and research assistants personally collected the data through focus group seminars held at Chiang Rai Buddhist College. Target participants for the interviews were invited from three temples in Mueang District, Chiang Rai Province, selected for their cultural and historical significance. From each temple, 10 monks or individuals were selected, totaling 30 participants. In addition, 50 participants, including youths, staff, and volunteers, were invited to contribute to the exchange and dissemination of knowledge. The total number of participants was 80.

5. Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data gathered from the focus group discussions. The analysis focused on identifying the needs and perspectives of the participants regarding knowledge management through English language skills in Buddhist temples that serve as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province. The findings were compiled to support the development and sharing of English language knowledge related to Buddhist archaeological sites in the province.

Results

1. The results of the investigation of the current practices of English language knowledge management in communities surrounding Buddhist temples that function as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province.

The results showed that each of the studied temples contains at least one archaeological site, such as the principal Buddha image in the ordination hall (*ubosot*) or a pagoda (*chedi*). However, regarding knowledge management within the communities, specifically the basic English communication skills of personnel in Buddhist temples that serve as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province, there is currently no concrete or structured community-based knowledge management in place.

When compared with theories or concepts of community knowledge management, it was found that the abbots, temple committees, and administrative boards lack sufficient knowledge about the archaeological elements present within their temples or communities. For instance, they are generally unable to explain the historical origins of these sites or provide evidence or documentation about them.

Additionally, when foreign tourists visit the archaeological sites in the communities, local residents are often unable to provide explanations or historical context in English. During focus group discussions aimed at gathering community input, it was revealed that there is no clear or systematic approach to community knowledge management in the target Buddhist temples. There are no formal plans or organized programs in place; actions are generally taken on an ad-hoc basis without strategic planning.

2. The results of analyzing the strategies and processes used for managing English language skills within these communities.

The results found that the monks, novice monks, and local communities situated around archaeological sites possess a low to very low level of English language proficiency. Specifically, personnel within temples that house archaeological sites, as well as surrounding community members, demonstrate limited skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English. Regarding the development processes for English language skills among monks, novice monks, and communities near these archaeological sites, the study revealed that in most cases, no structured language development initiatives are in place. There are no formal plans or programs designed to train monks, novices, or lay community members to provide English-language information services to tourists. However, nearly all temples have personnel prepared to offer services in the Thai language.

As for the community's English language knowledge management in Buddhist temples that serve as tourist attractions in Chiang Rai Province, the findings show that, in general, none of the temples have clear or systematic English knowledge management strategies. However, there was only Wat Phra Kaew, which demonstrates some level of organization in this area.

3. The results of development of practical guidelines for improving English language knowledge management in Buddhist religious tourist sites in Chiang Rai Province.

The results revealed that each temple shared relatively similar strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, depending on their environmental context. Regarding the channels for disseminating and exchanging English-language knowledge about archaeological sites, the results were

largely consistent across the target group. All stakeholders agreed that there should be a serious and systematic effort to manage English language knowledge in temples that serve as Buddhist tourist destinations in Chiang Rai Province.

This consensus is grounded in the reality that many temples receive a high number of foreign visitors who communicate in English on a daily basis. However, in practice, several challenges remain. These include a lack of genuine participation from all relevant parties, and inefficiencies in all four core English language skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Overall, the current level of implementation is still at a critical and underdeveloped stage.

Moreover, the focus group discussion proposed three approaches for developing skills and facilitating the transfer and exchange of English language knowledge within temples that serve as Buddhist tourist attractions. These three approaches are as follows:

- 1) Providing basic English training for personnel in temples located at historical and archaeological sites.
- 2) Creating a training manual that includes information specific to each historical or archaeological site.
- 3) Conducting on-site visits combined with lectures to allow participants to observe the real context.

Regarding the basic English training for personnel in temples located at historical and archaeological sites, the group agreed that training should be provided to monks, novices, and interested members of the local community. This training should focus on fundamental English skills; speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a practical manner. The training duration should be about 2 to 4 days and may take place at Chiang Rai Buddhist College or at the target temples themselves. The aim is to enhance the English-speaking and listening skills of temple personnel, with trainers providing instruction in both Thai and English.

To test this approach, the researcher conducted a basic English training session with a target group of nine monks and novices (one from each selected temple), chosen for their existing English skills. It was found that five participants were able to communicate and convey information, though they lacked confidence, while the remaining four were still hesitant to express themselves.

As for the training manual that includes information about historical and archaeological sites, the group concluded that such a manual should accompany the training sessions. The manual should contain basic information about each temple, including its history, ancient monuments and archaeological features, architectural styles, sculptures, and murals. This will enable trainees to practice speaking, listening, and reading in both Thai and English.

In addition, the manual should include background on the temple's art and culture — such as wall paintings, the doors and windows of the ordination hall (Ubosot), decorative patterns on the base of principal Buddha images in the Vihara or Ubosot, and other ancient artworks worthy

of study. This content should be provided in both Thai and English, categorized into three groups : sculpture, architecture, and painting.

Furthermore, the approach to managing English language knowledge at Buddhist archaeological sites in Chiang Rai province includes the development of an English curriculum focused on practical, daily use, particularly in the context of religious tourism. This enables communities to apply their knowledge in real-life situations. It also includes creating opportunities for locals to engage and practice English with foreign tourists or volunteers through activities such as cultural exchanges, guided tours, or collaborative projects. Additionally, technology should be integrated into these activities to promote English learning via online platforms or related applications. This will help communities access resources more easily and support ongoing learning.

The researcher has developed seven lesson units, the content of which was derived from the research findings. The details of these lessons are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1 The lesson of knowledge management with english language skills in religious tourism destinations, Chiang Rai province.

Lesson 1 : Introduction to Knowledge Management	
Objective	Understand the basics of Knowledge Management (KM) and its importance in the organization.
Vocabulary	Knowledge, Management, Organizational Learning, Intellectual Capital
Activities	1. Group discussion on what knowledge management is and why it matters. 2. Watch a short video on KM basics and discuss key points.
Content	Knowledge of the 7-Step Knowledge Management Process and Its Application
Lesson 2 : Knowledge Identification	
Objective	Learn how to identify and categorize different types of knowledge within an organization.
Vocabulary	Tacit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge, Knowledge Assets, Intellectual Property
Activities	1. Case study : Identify types of knowledge in a given scenario. 2. Role-play : Team members discuss and categorize their own knowledge.
Content	Basic Communication Skills, Tourist Site Introduction, and Reading and Writing Archaeology-Related Documents

Table 1 (Cont.)

Lesson 3 : Knowledge Creation	
Objective	Explore methods for creating new knowledge in an organization.
Vocabulary	Innovation, Collaboration, Knowledge Sharing, Brainstorming
Activities	1. Group brainstorming session on how to create new knowledge. 2. Reading and discussing an article on innovation in the workplace.
Content	Practical English for Tourist Hospitality and Local Historical Interpretation
Lesson 4 : Knowledge Storage	
Objective	Understand how to effectively store and organize knowledge for future use.
Vocabulary	Knowledge Repository, Database, Documentation, Archiving
Activities	1. Interactive quizzes on different knowledge storage methods. 2. Practice session on organizing information in a knowledge management system.
Content	Storing information in an online database, manuals, or systematically organizing learning materials from libraries or local learning centers helps preserve knowledge for future use.
Lesson 5 : Knowledge Sharing	
Objective	Develop strategies for sharing knowledge within an organization.
Vocabulary	Best Practices, Mentoring, Communities of Practice, Communication Channels
Activities	1. Group activity : Develop a plan for sharing knowledge in a given scenario. 2. Practicing Oral Presentations on the History of Archaeological Sites in Chiang Rai
Content	An Overview of the Historical Background of Archaeological Sites in Chiang Rai
Lesson 6 : Knowledge Application	
Objective	Learn how to apply knowledge effectively to solve organizational problems.
Vocabulary	Problem-Solving, Decision-Making, Knowledge Transfer, Best Practices
Activities	1. Case study : Apply knowledge to a real-world problem. 2. Role play : Simulate a meeting where team members share and apply their knowledge.
Content	The application of English language skills in welcoming tourists and conducting local activities involving English, combined with integrated learning approaches, promotes ongoing skill development and facilitates their use across diverse real-world contexts.

Table 1 (Cont.)

Lesson 7 : Knowledge Evaluation	
Objective	Assess the effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives and identify areas for improvement.
Vocabulary	Metrics, Evaluation, Feedback, Continuous Improvement
Activities	Create a knowledge management evaluation plan. Peer review : Evaluate the effectiveness of a KM strategy using provided criteria.
Content	Evaluating the effectiveness of English language learning and identifying areas for enhancement, such as assessing community communication skills, measuring tourist satisfaction, and improving teaching methods or materials to align with changing needs, is vital for continuous improvement.

Discussion

The researcher identified three key points for discussion as follows:

The first point concerns the art and architecture of the temples. It was observed that, in the process of knowledge management within the temples, through surveys and the study of existing local knowledge from nearby communities as well as from the archaeological sites themselves, common characteristics were found across various temples. These characteristics can be categorized into three main areas : (1) mural painting, (2) sculpture, and (3) architecture. The researcher organized the information into these three categories to align with the context of each site, making it easier to use for educational and interpretative purposes for visitors and learners at those archaeological sites. This approach is consistent with the study by Jaima et al. (2013), which focused on developing a model for cultural tourism in Chiang Rai suited to senior and foreign tourists.

For mural painting, the researcher examined wall paintings such as depictions of the Buddha’s life, the Vessantara Jataka, and zodiac-related stupa murals inside the ordination halls, along with intricate designs on ancient artifacts like antique scripture chests and old pulpits in the Hong Luang Saeng Kaew Museum at Wat Phra Kaew.

Regarding sculpture, the study explored the characteristics of Buddha statues in the ordination halls across various temples, which generally share similar stylistic features, except for Wat Rong Suea Ten, where contemporary Lanna-style sculpture by Chiang Rai artist Phuttha Kabkaew offers a unique interpretation.

As for architecture, most temples in Chiang Rai Province reflect distinct Lanna characteristics. Monastic buildings, including vihara and ubosot (ordination halls), typically feature low-rise structures. When viewed from the side, they resemble a hen sitting on her eggs which is a symbolic design unique to the region. Furthermore, traditional Lanna construction techniques notably avoid the use of nails, showcasing the craftsmanship and indigenous knowledge of local artisans. However, a major concern is the lack of awareness about the value of these ancient sites among some abbots and temple committees. During renovations, original structures are often dismantled and replaced with modern constructions, resulting in the unintentional destruction of valuable heritage and historical artifacts that should have been preserved.

The second point concerns the process of developing community knowledge to provide clear and accurate tourism information. The researcher believes that from this point forward, all sectors and stakeholders should actively and genuinely participate in efforts to preserve and raise awareness of the value of local cultural heritage. Community members should recognize the importance of safeguarding archaeological artifacts that are significant to their own heritage.

This process requires planned and structured management, including monthly meetings to strategize and develop action plans, setting a shared vision and common goals, and assigning clear roles and responsibilities based on individual competencies and appropriateness. It is important that these plans are implemented with clarity, commitment, and continuity. For instance, organizing training programs to develop English language skills for the purpose of sustainably enhancing Buddhist archaeological sites in Chiang Rai is a key step. This approach aligns with the ideas presented by Saising (2011) during the National Workshop on Participatory Research and Development in the Humanities, Liberal Arts, and Cultural Heritage Management, hosted by the National Research Council of Thailand's Philosophy Division. In a breakout group on archaeological and historical heritage at the Chiang Rung Conference Room, Wiang Inn Hotel, Chiang Rai, it was emphasized that archaeological sites and ancient monuments are valuable historical assets that all Thai people should preserve and cherish. They are vital historical evidence that helps affirm national identity and origin.

Therefore, in addition to conservation efforts, an equally important process is the development of knowledge among communities and relevant personnel so that they can effectively communicate and disseminate the value of archaeological and historical heritage to younger generations and tourists alike.

The final issue pertains to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of each temple, with particular emphasis on the observed weaknesses and threats. From the research findings, two major weaknesses were identified as follows:

- 1) Limited community engagement in English language use : Laypeople in the community generally have little or no opportunity to participate in activities requiring English skills. In most cases, the management of archaeological and cultural heritage within temple areas is entirely

delegated to the abbot, while temple committees are typically involved only in financial matters. Responsibilities such as communication, information dissemination, and tourism are often solely handled by the abbot. This management structure is a key weakness, as it lacks mechanisms to inspire monks, novices, or local personnel to engage in learning, promoting, or preserving cultural heritage.

2) Lack of shared access to information : Information regarding archaeological sites is usually known only to the abbot and possibly the temple's lay administrator (waiyawachak) and is not effectively disseminated within the broader community. This sometimes leads to misunderstandings or misinformation. Most community members only receive updates during merit-making events at the temple, rather than through public announcements such as temple loudspeakers or village broadcast systems. This contrasts with rural communities where multiple communication channels promote shared awareness, a point supported by Kunphai and Varaporn (2015), who found that public awareness and participation directly influence local development. Their research in sub-district administrative organizations in Thailand's lower western region showed that 54.9% of local development outcomes could be predicted by levels of public communication and involvement, with local loudspeaker systems playing a key role in political awareness.

As for threats, the research highlighted that while systems and mechanisms may be in place to encourage participation, there is often a lack of continuity and commitment in oversight, follow-up, and evaluation. Many community members are occupied with their livelihoods and lack the time to contribute to preservation or educational efforts, thus placing the entire burden on the abbot. Even when administrative systems are implemented, they may lack sufficient integration across sectors to ensure sustainability.

Recommendations

1. Policy Recommendations

Temples and communities should adopt a "One Temple, One Tour Guide" policy as part of a community-based heritage preservation network. This approach would focus on the development of local personnel in both language proficiency and cultural conservation, ensuring long-term sustainability of the community's cultural heritage. Moreover, government agencies, private sectors, and academic institutions should place greater emphasis on this issue, both at the policy and implementation levels, with commitment and continuity. For example, short-term English training courses tailored for each temple should be organized at least once a month for community network members.

2. Recommendations for Application of Research Findings

1) Archaeological sites and temples that are of historical value should prioritize knowledge management, preserving local wisdom through diverse forms of transmission. This

includes managing language-related knowledge, building youth networks, and cultivating cultural awareness within the community.

2) Communities should be encouraged to take an active role in heritage preservation, by strengthening collaboration among homes, temples, and schools. Emphasis should be placed on developing a sense of local ownership and national identity, using English as a global language to promote and protect cultural heritage.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should explore in greater depth the characteristics of sculptures and architectural styles of archaeological sites found throughout Chiang Rai Province, to enhance understanding and documentation of regional artistic identity.

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