

## English-Teaching Problems in Thailand and Thai Teachers' Professional Development Needs

Sripatum Noom-ura<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Language Institute, Thammasat University, Thailand

Correspondence: Sripatum Noom-ura, Language Institute, Thammasat University (Rangsit Campus), PathumThani 12120, Thailand. Tel: 66-2-696-6008. E-mail: sripatum.n@gmail.com

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### Abstract

This study surveys problems with English language teaching and learning and the professional development (PD) needs of high-school teachers in three provinces of three Secondary Educational Service Areas in Thailand. Both closed-and open-ended questionnaires were employed. The data was analyzed by frequency distribution and percentage; the problems and PD needs are herein presented from highest to lowest ranking. The study's results may possibly be generalized so that local organizations and institutions of higher education can provide appropriate assistance and improve the English teaching situation in Thailand in general.

**Keywords:** English teaching problems, professional development, PD needs, education, Thailand

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1 English Education Failure in Thailand*

Thai students spend twelve years studying English in primary and secondary schools, but the results are questionable. When compared to people in neighboring countries, Thais' English proficiency is relatively low. The 2010 Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) showed that Thailand ranked 116<sup>th</sup> out of 163 countries. The Netherlands topped the list with an average score of 100 out of 120, followed by Denmark and Singapore with the average scores of 99 and 98 respectively. The international average score was 80 but the Thai average score was 75, which was a little higher than the average scores of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar, but was trailing far behind other ASEAN countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. On the 2011 report, the Thai average score was still the same, 75 (Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL, 2011-2012).

In addition, in the most recent Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2012) released in October, 2012, Sweden and Denmark ranked first and second, Singapore twelfth, and Thailand 53<sup>rd</sup> – the world's second-lowest rank (above only Libya) – with an average score of 43.36 and labeled "very low proficiency".

When the English-proficiency test results within Thailand were examined, the O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) revealed that the English average scores of Thai primary school students in 2010 and 2011 were, out of 100, 31.75, and 20.99 respectively. The average scores between 2009 and 2011 of 900,000 lower secondary-school students were 32.42, 26.05, and 16.19 respectively. Among 350,000 upper secondary-school students, the English-language average scores (2009-2011) were 30.68, 23.98, and 19.22 (O-NET reports, 2012). These poor results were controversial. Some doubted the consistency and validity of the tests, while others questioned the teaching and learning practices in English-language classes in Thai schools.

#### *1.2 Causes of Failure*

Upon examining the English-language classes, many researchers pointed to a few main factors contributing to the failure of English-language teaching-and-learning: unqualified and poorly-trained teachers, poorly-motivated students, learners of mixed abilities in overly large classes, and rare opportunities for student exposure to English outside of class time (Dhanasobhon, 2006; ONEC, 2003).

Wiriyachitra (2002, citing Riyasen, 1997) compiled the causes of difficulties in English language teaching and

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