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## Situations, Problems, and Needs in Teaching English of Grades 1-6 Teachers in the Central Region of Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the situations, problems, and needs in teaching English of grades 1-6 teachers in five provinces located in the five provinces in the central region of Thailand: Lop Buri, Sing Buri, Saraburi, Suphan Buri, and Ang-Thong in 2016. A questionnaire comprising both open and closed-ended questions was sent to the English teachers in the area and 170 teachers responded back. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were applied to analyze quantitative data whereas content analysis was conducted for qualitative data. The results of the teachers' questionnaire response indicated most participants had no degree in English, but had 1-5 year experience in teaching English. When considering on the teachers' perceptions on teaching English using Likert Scales, their satisfaction was at a moderate level in every item (teaching situations, contents, learning activities, learning materials, and evaluation). Most teachers mentioned that lacking teaching methodologies, contents, and skills in English were of concern when teaching English, therefore, they had their students learn from the programs themselves and sometimes the teachers used the text books to teach. The findings also showed that the teachers needed teaching English training especially the English teaching methodologies and English skills. Lacking qualified teachers to teach English in primary grades was critical particularly with Grades 1-2.

**Keywords:** *situations, problems, needs in teaching, English teaching, methodologies.*

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## INTRODUCTION

English language has been taught through different approaches in every school in Thailand for almost a hundred years, however, the English achievement of Thai students is still not satisfied. Compared to other school subjects, the students' English score has been almost at the lowest level (Problems of Teaching English Language, 2016 & Thomas, 2016). Only 10% of Thai people can use English for communication (English proficiency of Thai people English Language Teachers, Educational Critics, 2015). Sumrit Sukruangrit (1999) stated that lacking teaching skills and a meaningful learning environment were important causes of the students' low achievement. Similarly, Kanya Wuttiketpaiboon (1999) found that English teachers in secondary school in Nakhon Ratchasima province requested training on teaching techniques, teaching materials, and language assessment. Because teachers have a crucial role in developing the students' ability, these teachers need to be knowledgeable and skillful in both English contents and teaching methodologies. To respond to this issue, the Ministry of Education of Thailand launched an important policy to develop Thai people's English ability by setting the English learning standards for all education levels (Implementation of teaching English Policy of the ministry of education to action, 2016 & Ministry of Education, 2015) focusing on improving the teacher's qualification and people's English proficiency.

As a local university serving the local community, the researcher on behalf of Thepsatri Rajabhat Uiversity (TRU) aimed to study "Situations, Problems, and Needs in Teaching English of Grades 1-6 Teachers" in the five provinces of the Central Region of Thailand in TRU's service areas in order to investigate the real situations, problems, and needs of the teachers and implement the information derived to support and help improve the English teachers to be able to teach effectively.

## PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The study was designed to 1) examine the situations, 2) investigate problems, and 3) explore the needs of Grades 1-6 English teachers in Lop Buri, Sing Buri, Saraburi, Suphan Buri, and Ang-Thong. The focus of the study was to discover the real situations which caused problems in the students' English achievement and the teachers' needs. In this study, Situations means the circumstances in which Grade 1-6 English teachers in Lop Buri, Sing Buri, Saraburi, Suphan Buri, and Ang-Thong finds, Problems means matters or situations regarded as unwelcome or needing of the teacher respondents need to be dealt with and overcome, and needs means requirements about teaching English because they are essential. English teaching methodologies comprise the principles and methods the teacher participants used for instruction to be implemented by teachers to achieve the desired learning by students.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was a mixed method research including both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The research population consisted of 170 teachers from 170 primary schools who taught English in grades 1 - 6 in the five provinces of the central part of Thailand (Lop Buri, Sing Buri, Saraburi, Suphan Buri, and Ang-Thong) in 2016. The research instrument was a questionnaire using Likert Scales and open-ended questions. The questionnaire comprised three main parts, teachers' personal information, and teachers' opinion on their teaching potential, and suggestions. The 50 questions emphasized on teachers' potential, contents, learning ability, learning materials, evaluation procedure, and student factor. Similarly, the open-ended questions focused on the teachers' problems when teaching and problems about the students, and the teachers' ideas and suggestions. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were applied to analyze quantitative data whereas content analysis was conducted for qualitative data.

## RESULT

Considering the teachers' personal information, the reserach findings showed that most teachers teaching English in the primary schools in the five provinces were 50 year old (46.47%) females (88.23%). Most teachers received a bachelor degree (73.53 %) and taught Grades 4-6 students. Eighty – eight percent of them had received training in English teaching and 17.65 % had 6-10 year experience in teaching English. When considered by their educational degree and major, it was found that only 25.29% of the teachers received a bachelor degree in English and 9.41% had a master degree in educational administration. The teachers reflected their opinion on the situations of their English teaching potential as seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Teachers' Opinion on their Teaching Potential

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Teachers' ethics & Morality	3.57	1.47	High
2	Teachers' personality	3.51	1.35	High
3	Professional development	3.36	1.03	Moderate
4	Teaching preparation and punctuation	3.36	1.11	Moderate
5	Classroom management and problem solving	3.27	0.87	Moderate
6	Knowledgeable in using technology in teaching	3.24	0.97	Moderate
7	Knowledgeable in English contents.	3.22	0.89	Moderate
8	Knowledgeable in teaching methodology	3.21	0.88	Moderate
9	Knowledgeable in creating and selecting materials for teaching	3.17	0.81	Moderate
10	Classroom research for developing students' learning	3.13	0.79	Moderate
	Total	3.30	1.02	Moderate
	%	66.08		

Table 1 showed that the teachers' opinion on the situations of their English teaching as a whole was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$  or 66.08 %). When considered by descending order, there were teachers' ethics & morality ( $\bar{X} = 3.57$ ), teaching preparation and punctuation ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ), classroom management and problem solving ( $\bar{X} = 3.27$ ) knowledgeable in using technology in teaching ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ), knowledgeable in English contents ( $\bar{X} = 3.22$ ), knowledgeable in teaching methodology ( $\bar{X} = 3.21$ ), knowledgeable in creating and selecting materials for teaching ( $\bar{X} = 3.17$ ), and classroom research for developing students' learning ( $\bar{X} = 3.13$ ) respectively.

Table 2 Teachers' Opinion on their Ability in English Contents

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Able to integrate ethics, morality, and the sufficiency economics approach with the subject contents	3.44	1.11	Moderate
2	Able to design and manage contents relevant to students' ability	3.36	1.00	Moderate
3	Able to select interesting and meaningful contents for students	3.33	0.91	Moderate
4	Able to apply the contents to real life and integrate to other subjects	3.33	0.89	Moderate
5	Able to manage learning activities covering the contents and relating to the learning objectives	3.32	0.93	Moderate
6	Able to clearly explain vocabulary, contents, and concepts of the teaching topics	3.30	0.95	Moderate
	Total	3.35	0.96	
	%		66.90	Moderate

Table 2 highlighted the teachers' opinion on their ability in English contents as a whole which was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.35$  or 66.90 %). When considered by descending order, there were ability to integrate ethics, morality, and sufficiency economics approach with the subject contents ( $\bar{X} = 3.44$ ), design and manage contents relevant to students' ability ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ) apply the contents to real life and integrate to other subjects, select interesting and meaningful contents for students ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ), manage learning activities covering the contents and relating to the learning objectives ( $\bar{X} = 3.32$ ), and clearly explain vocabulary, contents, and concepts of the teaching topics ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$ ) respectively.

Table 3 revealed that the teachers' opinion on their teaching potential and learning activities as a whole was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.27$  or 66.90 %). The highest three items included the application of child-centered learning approach ( $\bar{X} = 3.38$ ), the relation and response to the expected learning outcome ( $\bar{X} = 3.32$ ), and using various learning activities ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$ ), whereas the development of students' creative thinking, analytic thinking, and synthesis thinking ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ), the

encouragement of students to communicate with the teachers about their understanding ( $\bar{X} = 3.21$ ), and the application of integrated learning and project work ( $\bar{X} = 3.21$ ) were rated as the lowest items respectively.

Table 3 Teachers' Opinion on their Teaching and Learning Activities

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Apply Child-centered learning approach	3.38	0.98	Moderate
2	Relate and respond the expected learning outcome	3.32	0.99	Moderate
3	Apply various learning activities	3.31	0.86	Moderate
4	Encourage students to learn and develop their own potential individually	3.31	1.02	Moderate
5	Provide students opportunities to find alternative ways for their learning or problem solving	3.31	1.01	Moderate
6	Relate and respond to the students' interest	3.30	0.87	Moderate
7	Apply appropriate teaching processes	3.30	0.89	Moderate
8	Emphasize students' responses and ideas	3.28	0.98	Moderate
9	Use questions to encourage students' thinking	3.27	0.82	Moderate
10	Apply appropriate learning activities relating to contents, contexts, and students	33.25	0.95	Moderate
11	Promote self-learning and suggest learning resources to students	33.25	0.98	Moderate
12	Develop students' creative thinking, analytic thinking and synthesis thinking	23.20	0.87	Moderate
13	Encourage students to communicate with the teachers about their understanding	3.21	0.89	Moderate
14	Apply integrated learning and project work	3.21	0.77	Moderate
	Total	3.27	0.92	
	%		66.90	Moderate

Table 4 Teachers' Opinion on Teaching and Learning Materials

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Using textbooks, handouts, and teaching and learning materials	3.33	0.96	Moderate
2	Applying various materials for teaching	3.29	0.88	Moderate
3	Connecting materials and subject contents to support students' learning effectively	3.29	0.90	Moderate
4	Applying new technology for teaching	3.28	0.93	Moderate
	Total	3.30	0.92	Moderate
	%		66.08	

Table 4 showed that the teachers' opinion on teaching and learning materials as a whole was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$  or 66.08 %). When considered individually, using textbooks, handouts, and teaching and learning materials were at the highest level ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ), while applying various materials for teaching and connecting materials and subject contents to support students' learning effectively were equal ( $\bar{X} = 3.29$ ), and applying new technology for teaching ( $\bar{X} = 3.28$ ) was rated the least.

Table 5 indicated that the teachers' opinion on evaluation procedures as a whole was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$  or 66.16%). The evaluation procedure relevant to the contents and learning objectives was rated the highest ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ), whereas the application of pre-test, while-test, and post-test was the least ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ). When considered by descending order, there were the evaluation procedure relevant to the contents and learning objectives ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ), reliability and effectiveness of the evaluation criteria ( $\bar{X} = 3.35$ ), using authentic assessment ( $\bar{X} = 3.34$ ), evaluating students' knowledge, process & skill, and attitude ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$ ), using various assessment instruments and methods ( $\bar{X} = 3.27$ ), and conducting pre-test, during-test and post-test ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ) respectively.

Table 5 Teachers' Opinion on Evaluation Procedure

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Evaluation Procedure relevant to the contents and learning objectives	3.36	0.96	Moderate
2	Reliable and effective Evaluation criteria	3.35	1.04	Moderate
3	Authentic assessment	3.34	1.03	Moderate
4	Evaluating students' knowledge, process & skill, and attitude	3.30	0.93	Moderate
5	Using various assessment instruments and methods	3.27	0.93	Moderate
6	Apply pre-test, during-test, and post-test	3.24	0.92	Moderate
	Total	3.31	0.97	Moderate
	%	66.16		

Table 6 Teachers' Opinion on Students' Learning Behaviors

	Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Opinion
1	Be punctual and attend class	3.40	1.01	Moderate
2	Be well-prepared and ready before class	3.34	0.90	Moderate
3	Engage in learning activities	3.30	1.02	Moderate
4	Be enthusiastic for self-learning	3.30	0.89	Moderate
5	Work with others	3.27	1.00	Moderate
6	Be individually successful in learning	3.26	0.83	Moderate
7	Apply lessons learnt from class to real life	3.24	0.88	Moderate
8	Produce/ create learning products	3.21	0.86	Moderate
9	Use analytic thinking or produce learning products using high level thinking	3.16	0.82	Moderate
	Total	3.28	0.95	Moderate
	%	65.53		

Table 6 showed that the teachers' opinion on students' learning behaviors as a whole was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.28$  or 65.53 %). Being enthusiastic for self-learning was rated the highest level ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$ ) whereas using analytic thinking or produce learning products using high level thinking was rated the lowest level ( $\bar{X} = 3.16$ ). The highest levels were being enthusiastic for self-learning, being well-prepared and ready before class, engagement in learning activities, and being enthusiastic for self-learning whereas the lowest levels were applying lessons learnt from class to real life, producing or creating learning products, and using analytic thinking or produce learning products using high level thinking.

The content analysis of the open – ended questions asking about teachers, subject contents, learning activities, materials, evaluation, students, and teachers’ needs highlighted that most teachers were not confident when teaching English because they lacked knowledge and skills in English as well as teaching methodologies. Considering about the subject contents, they were concerned that they couldn’t complete the contents on time because of time limitation and the content difficulty. Additionally, the students were shy and didn’t like to engage in learning activities whereas the teachers didn’t have time to prepare learning activities and lacked learning materials. Lacking appropriate learning materials and technologies to support English teaching and learning became the critical problems of all teachers as well as the students’ negative attitude and interest towards English. Furthermore, most students in small schools in rural areas had poor English background since most of them were from a poor family. The evaluation procedure was not problematic for most teachers while teaching English methodology, project work, pronunciation, games & songs, and teaching materials & innovation were significantly needed.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, the followings are discussions covering the three main aspects. Results of the teachers’ opinion on their teaching potential pointed out that most teachers rated their teaching potential at a moderate level. Interestingly, their knowledgeable in English contents, teaching methodology, teaching materials, and classroom were rated at the lowest level. In particular, the teachers’ opinion on their teaching and learning activities and subject contents was often shown as their prior concern. This can be inferred that lacking of subject contents and teaching methodology of the teachers are the critical issue of English development in these areas and maybe in Thailand as well.

Relating to the findings of Sangkapan, Boonprakarn, & Krairiks (2015) indicated that lacking teaching materials and ability to use and create teaching and learning materials was crucial as shown in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Most teachers complained that they didn’t have enough technology, teaching materials, and insufficient knowledge to create them. This findings highlighted an unequal opportunity of the students in small rural schools with a small budget when compared to the big rich school in the city.

Regarding the result of the student factor, most teachers agreed that their students had very low English background and a negative attitude towards English. Many students were very shy and not active to participate in learning. However, the reason why the students didn’t like to engage in learning activities may be due to the teachers’ teaching methodology. Moreover, coming from poor family, the parents did not have time or enough knowledge to support their children’s learning at home. It is evident that these students had insufficient support from both teachers and family which had become a severe issue in their English development. Importantly, teachers need to be able to encourage and build up students’ positive attitude towards English because people normally learn better when they feel positive about it (Harmer, 2015). Therefore, pleasant relation

between teachers and students is critical for promoting the students' attitude as well as various meaningful and interesting learning activities and atmosphere.

The findings clearly have impact on teacher education particularly with Grades 1-6 English teachers who have no degree in English. According to the research results, the teachers' subject contents and teaching methodologies extremely need to be developed besides technology, teaching materials, and insufficient knowledge for creating learning materials. Teacher education organizations, therefore, should improve the quality of these teachers by giving them intensive training focusing on subject contents and teaching methodologies. In addition, training the teachers to use technology for teaching English effectively and to create learning materials and design learning activities should be conducted in order to enhance the teachers' quality. In the past, most training for English teachers was focused on teaching methodologies, regarding the findings, English proficiency (English degree) and teaching ability need to be prioritized. To develop students' English achievement, the teacher training organization or the government need to prioritize the qualification of Grades 1-6 English teachers because children learn language very quickly and effectively at this stage.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

According to the research findings, the suggestions on developing teachers teaching English without a degree in English and teaching English are below:

1. Since the government is unable to produce qualified English teachers to support schools immediately, therefore, the best things to promote English learning is to develop available teachers to be able to teach effectively through intensive training and coaching organized by teacher professional development organizations. .
2. The training curriculum for the unqualified teachers should thoroughly include English contents and skills, teaching methodology, teaching materials, and evaluation.
3. The government should support necessary learning materials and technology such as supplementary books, learning programs, internet, etc. to help promote the students' English learning.
4. Teachers should organize various activities and build the English learning atmosphere to interest the students and change their attitude towards English.
5. The government immensely has to set up a plan to produce adequate qualified English teachers to teach English effectively and then send them out to all schools.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

1. There should be future research on situations, problems, and needs in teaching English for Grades 1-6 Teachers in a larger area or all regions of Thailand in order to get more insight and implement the findings to others.
2. There should be future research on situations, problems, and needs in teaching English of Grades 7-12 or in higher education levels in a larger area or in all regions of Thailand.



3. Based on the teachers' needs, future research may be conducted on teaching English training and manuals to develop the unqualified teachers.

## CONCLUSION

Situations and problems in English teaching is critical because of the limitation of qualified teachers and materials. What happen when teachers without degree in English have to teach English as a foreign language? Certainly, they are not confident in English contents and skills, they don't know how to teach and evaluate the students' learning. Consequently, they are seriously in need of intensive professional development, firstly in the English contents and skills to establish their confidence in English, and then teaching methodology particularly with the four main skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To be able to teach English effectively, they require understanding about learning evaluation and using materials. The factors affecting the students' learning mostly are caused by the teachers' limitations, on the other hand, the teachers complain about the students' poor background, interest, and attitudes towards English.

To fundamentally change the situation, teachers must undergo training that will promote their English ability both in contents and teaching methodology. Importantly, the students need to be encouraged to promote a positive attitude toward English through meaningful learning activities, for instance, games, songs, English camps, project work, etc. When the students love English, they will pay more attention and concentrate on their learning. The research findings point out the urgent requirements of English developments for unqualified teachers who teach English in small primary schools. The results answer the questions why these teachers should be improved and this will lead to a sustainable development of English proficiency of Thai people's in the future.

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