

1996-12-01

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### Recommended Citation

Wongsothorn, Achara; Sukamolsun, Suphat; Chinthammit, Pajaree; Ratanothayanonth, Phoolsook; and Noparumpa, Prangthip (1996) "National Profiles of Language Education : Thailand," *PASAA*: Vol. 26, Article 11.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.PASAA.26.1.11

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## **National Profiles of Language Education: Thailand\***

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### **Abstract**

“National Profiles of Language Education: Thailand” aimed to present results of a survey covering five distinct areas, namely, demographic information, the socio-linguistic context, national language policy, the language curriculum and assessment, and finally language teaching and professional support. The survey focussed on the years 1966-1996 and was designed to help establish national economic, social and educational profiles for language learning and teaching in Thailand.

### **Background:**

Besides Thai, English is the most commonly taught language in Thai schools. English is regarded as the most important foreign language as it is the “language for international communication.” About 99% of Thai students begin studying English at the elementary level of education. It is also required for entry into the tertiary level of

education. The communicative approach with an eclectic orientation is favored at various levels of education.

This paper will give results of a survey conducted by Thai researchers from Chulalongkorn University Language Institute on national language education. The paper is in five parts:

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\*This paper was presented at the 11th World Congress of Applied Linguistics, 7 August 1996, Jyväskylä, Finland

1. Demographic, Socio-Economic and Educational Information
2. Socio-Linguistic Context
3. National Language Policy
4. Language Curriculum and Assessment
5. Language Teaching and Professional Support

A number of studies on English language teaching conducted by researchers in Thailand and abroad (Sukwiwat, 1985; Wongsothorn, 1982; Angwattanakul, 1992; Ng, 1987; Scott & Brown, 1995; Abdullah, et al. 1993; Gunarwan & Vanwel, 1990; Noss, 1982, etc.) indicate that the trend in English language education is towards improving students' communicative proficiency through the adoption of methods and techniques which are locally suitable and workable. English language teaching in Thailand and in other Asian countries needs to have a practical orientation in order to cope with new technologies.

It is evident that there is a need for national surveys which encompass demographic, societal, and educational variables such as mass media and international contacts through trade and tourism. Such surveys will help to establish national profiles that will lead to better understanding of current practice as well as practical plans for improvement.

This present survey study was conducted to fulfil a request made by Thailand's National Education Commission (NEC) to Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI) to participate in Phase One of the International Language Education Study Project developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). CULI thus served as the national research co-ordinator for Thailand by providing research expertise and funds for the project.

This project was designed to help establish national economic, social and educational profiles for language learning and teaching in Thailand.

This study's objective was to obtain data at the national level concerning:

1. demographic, socio-economic and educational issues
2. socio-linguistic context or features of language used in the society
3. language policy
4. language curriculum and assessment, and
5. language teaching and professional support.

The survey focused on language situation in the country between 1966 and 1996. It covered a period of thirty-one years, up to the end of the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plans with consideration for the Eighth National Education Development Plan (1997-2001) and the 1996 English Curriculum. Sources for the survey included authoritative individuals and agencies as well as currently available, reliable, first hand printed materials.

### **Choice of Samples**

The samples were selected on the basis of their representativeness and the advice made by the National Education Commission. They consisted of:

### **Individuals and Agencies**

1. Representatives of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, the Department of General Education, the Department of Non-formal Education, the Department of Teachers' Education, the Office of Private Education, and the Tourism Organization of Thailand
2. Representatives of national and international organizations involved in English language education: the American

- University Alumni Association (AUA), the British Council, the Thailand TESOL, the Education Testing Service (ETS) TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES)
3. Representatives of the Bureau of the Budget, the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, the Office of the National Statistics, the Department of Business Economics, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Department of Immigration Bureau Police
  4. Embassy officials: the American Embassy, the Australian Embassy, the British Embassy, the New Zealand Embassy and the Singapore Embassy
  5. Representatives of cultural institutions: Alliance Francaise, Goethe Institute, and the Japan Foundation
  6. Representatives of governmental agencies involved in public communication: the Mass Communication Authority of Thailand; the Department of Public Broadcasting; and the Department of Business Economics, the Ministry of Commerce, the Bank of Thailand and the Research Division of the Bangkok Bank
  7. The mass media: the Nation, the Bangkok Post, Radio and Research Books, IBC Cable TV, Thai Sky Cable TV
  8. Aksorn Charoentat Publishing Co., Chulalongkorn University Book Center, the Asia Books, Aurum Travel and Service Agency, and Deemar Co. Ltd. (Research firm)
- Printed Sources**
- Information gathered for the study appears in the following sources:
1. The Bureau of Budget, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Office of the Permanent Secretary: Report on the Annual National Budget, 1995.
  2. The Ministry of Education: Educational Statistics for 1995.
  3. The Ministry of Education. The Department of Curriculum of Instruction. The 1996 English Curriculum (Preliminary Draft).
  4. The Ministry of University Affairs: University Entrance Statistics, 1995. Thai Higher Education in Brief, 1995.
  5. Office of National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister: Formal Education Statistics and Indicators in 1986-1991, 1993.
  6. Office of National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister The Eighth National Education Development Plan (1997-2001), 1996.
  7. The Office of the National Statistics. Office of the Prime Minister: Social Indices. 1994.
  8. The Office of the National Statistics, Office of the Prime Minister: Annual Statistical Report. 1994.
  9. Office of the Policy and Planning, The Ministry of Education, Number of Institutes, Teachers and Students in 1993. 1995.
  10. United Nations, Population and Development Integration, Vol. 2, 1989.
  11. Publications of SEAMEO Regional Language Centre:
    - 11.1 Papers on Southeast Asian Languages. 1979.
    - 11.2 Papers on Language Teaching Issues in Multilingual Environments in Southeast Asia. 1982.
  12. Publications of UNESCO:

- 12.1 International Standard Classification of Education. 976.
- 12.2 Statistical Yearbook. 1994.
- 12.3 International Conference on Education 4th Session. Final Report. Geneva 3-8 October 1994.
- 13. Publications of the Office of National Education Commission.
  - 13.1 The National Scheme of Education. 1992.
  - 13.2 Education in Thailand in Brief. 1992.
- 14. Other sources: See References.

The instruments used to collect data were a set of five questionnaires developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in the United Kingdom. Topics covered by this questionnaires were:

1. Demographic, Socio-Economic and Educational Information
2. Socio-Linguistic Context
3. Language Policy
4. Language Curriculum and Assessment
5. Language Teaching and Professional Support

Each questionnaire included approximately 10 main questions. The same instruments were used by 29 other research teams in 29 countries participating in "IEA Language Education Study: Phase I." Data collection took place between January and April 1995. A team of five researchers from the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute took part in data collection. Each researcher was responsible for one section of the NFER Questionnaires.

Interviews and analyses of existing material sources were made. In some circumstances if direct facts and figures were not available, calculation of available figures,

data interpretation and data extrapolation were applied. Since this survey is essentially a fact-finding study, basic statistics, i.e., means, summation and frequency counts, were used. No inferential statistics were applied.

The findings of the research are in five parts as follows:

### **1. Demographic, Socio-Economic and Educational Information**

The information given in this section is not specific to language education, but designed to provide a general context for the national profile. In Thailand, the lower levels of education ranging from primary to upper secondary, come under the Ministry of Education. Higher education at the tertiary level comes under the Ministry of University Affairs.

At the lower levels of education, the number of males who finish their education is higher than the number of females. The percentage of males is slightly above 50% while the percentage of females is below 50%. In contrast, at the tertiary level the percentage of female graduates is higher than 50% while that of males is below 50%.

In terms of social and economic information, approximately 80% of the population aged between 25 and 64 in the labor force have only primary education. At lower and upper secondary levels, the rates are less than 10%. They are 9.82% and 5.86% respectively. Only 5.41% of the labor force in this age range have tertiary education.

The expenditure on all levels of education is 3.3 % of the GDP from public sources and 19.24 % of all public expenditure.

The percentage of public expenditure falls heavily on primary level. It consumes more than half of the total education budget. This is so because primary education is compulsory throughout the country. Therefore, the government has the responsibility to fulfil this education policy by providing free primary education for all. About 29% of the total public expenditure for education is spent at the secondary level while the tertiary level receives only about 13%. These moderate to low figures indicate that subsidies also come from private sectors, organizations or even foreign donors. As for expenditure per student, it is much greater at the tertiary level than at the primary and the secondary levels.

In terms of human resources in education, the percentage of teaching staff in the labor force at the primary and secondary levels is much greater than that of non-teaching staff in the labor force. In contrast, at the tertiary level, the percentage of non-teaching staff is higher than that of teaching staff.

As for the ratio of students to teachers, teachers at the secondary level appear to work the hardest. While one secondary level teacher has to be responsible for about 35 students, a primary level teacher takes charge of about 22 students and a tertiary level teacher is assigned only about 13 students.

## 2. Socio-Linguistic Context

Based on seven reliable sources of information in mass media communication in the country, it was found that Thai was the main spoken language used in the Thai society in TV and radio broadcasting as well as in newspapers and magazines. There were approximately 43,000,000 TV viewers, 9,000,000 radio listeners and 20,643,000 newspaper and

magazine readers. It was believed that not less than 90% of the population of Thailand (which is approximately 60 million) can speak Thai. The rest speak their own dialects in their daily life. In terms of the languages used in the media, English ranked second, followed by Chinese. There were approximately 500,000 TV viewers, 290,000 radio listeners and 540,000 newspaper and magazine readers who used English. As for Chinese, it was found that there were approximately 150,000 viewers of Chinese language TV and 310,000 readers of Chinese newspapers and magazines. Compared with the total population of the country, other foreign languages such as Japanese, French, and German were used by a very small proportion, both as the languages spoken in Thai society and in the media.

The foreign languages taught in school and used in the media are: English, French, German, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. English is the most popular foreign language taught in schools and used in the media. There were 13 TV channels broadcasting in English nationally and internationally to approximately 1,700,000 viewers in the country. As for readership, there were approximately 540,000 people reading English newspapers and magazines. Chinese ranked second in terms of popularity as the language taught in schools at all levels and used in the media. The only one TV channel broadcasting in Chinese had approximately 10,000 viewers. There were approximately 310,000 persons reading 12 Chinese newspapers and magazines. Compared with the number of people using English and Chinese, those who used Japanese and German were relatively very few. The figures indicated that there were only approximately 25,000 TV

viewers watching the only TV channel broadcasting in Japanese. Approximately 15,000 students in Thailand read Japanese newspapers and magazines.

Moreover, there were only about 6,000 students watching two TV channels broadcasting in German and about 4,000 students read French newspapers and magazines in Thailand.

The study discovered that English was broadcast for 288.5 hours per month and thus made up the largest proportion when compared with those of French (24.5 hours), Japanese (2 hours) and German (.5 hour). Out of a half of all national broadcast, 50% were devoted to teaching and another 50% to other educational purposes.

In terms of contacts through trade the ten countries with whom Thailand had the most contacts in terms of total trade in goods and service, in rank order, were the USA, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Malaysia, the UK, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, France and Italy.

The volumes of trade in terms of GNP ranged from 9.02 to 0.75, and the percent of total trade ranged from 21.49 to 1.79 between January and October 1994. Very interestingly, English was the most commonly used language in business transactions in both written and spoken modes. In some circumstances, Japanese, Malay, Chinese, German, French and Dutch were also used in both written and spoken modes in business transactions. However, these languages were not used as much or as significantly as English.

Regarding tourism, it was found that during the time of the study the ten countries

most frequently visited by Thai tourists, when rank-ordered by their expenditure, were Switzerland, France, England, Japan, Hong Kong Australia, Korea, the USA, Singapore and Malaysia. In 1995 1,798,000 Thai nationals went overseas and their daily expenditure averaged 212 USD. The language that they most commonly used in the ten countries was English. French, German, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean were also used in some circumstances, but not much.

Tourists from the ten countries that most frequently visited Thailand in 1995, rank ordered according to their expenditure were tourists from Japan, Germany, Taiwan, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, China, Singapore, the USA, and Korea. In 1995, there were 6,951,566 visitors to Thailand. Expenditure per head per day was estimated at 148.39 USD ( USD 1=24.89 Baht)

### **3. Language policy and society**

Thailand has only one official language, Standard or Central Thai, which is used for all communication purposes. The term "Thai" is commonly used in the literature to refer to Tai dialects and languages spoken in Thailand, whereas "Tai" refers to the whole family of Tai languages and dialects spoken in Thailand, Laos, the Shan States of Burma, North Vietnam, Southwest and Southeast China, and Assam in India.

Thailand can be divided into four major dialect areas. The four regional Thai dialects are Northern Thai (Kam Mueng, Yuan), Northeastern Thai (Isan, Lao), Central (Standard Thai) and Southern Thai (Pak Tai).

Standard Thai is the main language of instruction in all Thai schools in the country. Recently, however, a few international schools

using English as the medium of instruction have been established. For better integration of minority language groups into the main stream of Thai society, the Thai Government recommends that the Thai language be their major avenue to national integration at all levels of education. This is politically sound as a means of promoting national identity and unity. Standard Thai is compulsory for all levels of primary and secondary education and Thai students are required to take Thai language tests in their university entrance examinations.

Officially there are no second languages in Thailand. In practice, two commonly used foreign languages that almost attain the status of second languages in certain parts of the country are Pattani Malay and Chinese (Tae Chiu). Due to successful cultural blends, Chinese and Malay children find education and career opportunities opened through Thai medium education. It is evident that language diversity in Thailand requires assimilation rather than maintenance.

National language policy in the past has tended to lay great emphasis on the study of the national language. Now, demands for the study of modern foreign languages have been increasing since the economic boom of the 1980's. This has created a demand for individuals who not only are qualified in their chosen area of professional expertise but also can communicate with their foreign colleagues or customers orally and in writing with a reasonable degree of fluency. Thus, English has become more than just a tool to gain access to modern technology; it is now viewed as the key to professional advancement as well.

### **Language Education System Organization of language education in schools**

According to the 1992 Thai National Scheme of Education, foreign languages are

optional from Primary 5 through the upper secondary level (the structure of the Thai educational system follows a 6-3-3 plan, whereby a six-year primary school is compulsory, followed by a three-year lower secondary and a three-year upper secondary school, meant for those who are occupation-bound as well as those who are college-bound).

The Eighth National Education Development Plan : 1997-2001 comments on the insufficient time for foreign language curriculum (p. 40). The need for more hours of English has become apparent. For the 1996 English curriculum, English is compulsory from grade 1 onwards. The purpose of this curriculum is to provide Thai students with the opportunity to continue their English learning without interruption from primary to secondary education.

The Eighth National Education Development Plan (1997-2001) also acknowledges the significance of information superhighway and the role of information technology in education and adopts the concept of globalization of education (p.7). Foreign languages, particularly English, will play a significant role in serving the emerging needs of new society and the new generation of students.

According to the present curriculum (1990), there are eight languages taught as a subject. They are Thai, English, Japanese, German, Chinese, Pali and Sanskrit, French and Arabic. However, not many schools can offer students these languages except English because they are seriously lacking language teachers. Therefore, only English is taught in most language classes at all class levels. Approximately 80% to 95% schools teach English Prathom Five for 5 periods of 20 minutes per week. At the secondary level of



education, it is taught for 4-8 periods of 50 minutes per week.

In Thailand, Thai is mainly the medium of instruction at all levels of education. All Thai students are required to study Thai in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. Although only some students in tertiary education are required to study Thai as a subject, Thai is mainly used as the medium of instruction for teaching-learning purposes at this level, too. Exceptions are made in some institutes which are "international" or "universal" and some special university programs which adopt English as the medium of instruction. At pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education, Thai is used for 30-35 periods of 20-50 minutes per week as the medium of instruction. Language teaching and learning in Thailand may be divided into two main categories: Thai language education and foreign language education.

Standard Thai is the most important language in education. Apart from being taught and learnt as a subject, it is also used as the medium of instruction in all levels of education. It is taught and learnt in terms of skills, subject matter, and cultural heritage. The curriculum is normally divided into three streams: language skills, literature, and linguistics, integrating career education with liberal and humanistic education.

At the present time, the following are the foreign languages taught in Thailand:

#### **CLASSICAL LANGUAGES**

Pali, Arabic, Sanskrit, Khmer, Mon

#### **MODERN LANGUAGES**

English, Chinese (Mandarin), French, Japanese, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Korean, Modern Arabic, Vietnamese

The names of the languages are arranged in order of the number of people studying the language; for example, English is the most widely studied modern language and most widely used international language for both academic and occupational purposes. Students may choose to learn English as early as in grade 3 or 5.

The foreign language curriculum may be divided into three main categories: language and skills for communication, literature for arts and humanistic values, and linguistics for the scientific study of language. Foreign language education is in three streams: liberal education, humanistic education, and career or utilitarian education. General English and literature courses are in the first and second streams whereas English for Specific Purposes courses are in the last stream.

According to the 1992 Thai National Scheme of Education, foreign languages are optional from Primary 5 through the upper secondary level. Primary school curriculum offers 2 elective foreign languages--English and Chinese, but the majority of the students select English.

For the Eighth National Education Development Plan: 1997-2001, English will become a compulsory subject starting from grade one. The evaluation of the national curriculum criticized the provision of foreign language education as being insufficient. (The Eighth National Education Development Plan: 1997-2001, p. 40).

The allocation of time to languages is generally the same nationwide. Per week, at the primary level five 20-minute periods of English study are stipulated in the curriculum while at the lower secondary level four 50-minutes

periods are offered and at the upper secondary level eight 50-minute periods are offered. The ratios of English time and total instruction time are 1:15, 2:15, and 4:15 respectively. The percentage of students studying English rises from 80% in the primary level to 95% in the secondary level.

As for teaching materials, schools adopt commercial texts which generally have been approved by the Ministry of Education. Some supplementary materials are teacher-made. Recently, self-study materials have been provided at the language learning resource centers in language development programs throughout the country. Audio and video materials that form part of course materials have been widely used.

### **Links and Exchanges**

Thai students have been involved in various exchange programs such as the Japanese Youth Boat programs, the American Field Service, and homestay in Canada and Australia. Teachers are also engaged in educational enrichment programs offered through the embassies of various nations such as the USA and France to broaden their language and teaching experience in the target-language countries.

### **Language contacts in society and media**

Thailand, like many other Southeast Asian countries, is experiencing a rapid increase in the use of English. It is by far the most popular foreign language in the secondary schools and universities; it is also a compulsory subject in all vocational education. Furthermore, English classes are offered at a growing number of private institutions outside of the public educational system since the students feel that their English knowledge and skills are insufficient for competing in the university

entrance examination as well as for applying for a job. Telecommunications also speed the use of English in homes across the countries. The popularity of CNN News and IBC entertainment and information channels, both in the mother tongue and in English has proven that "globalization" is rapidly taking place here.

### **Policy Options and Trends in Language Education**

As Thailand's role in Indochina has become increasingly more important with the democratization of the political systems in Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and possibly Myanmar, Thai businessmen and academicians have been participating in the affairs of these neighboring countries by serving as business investors, partners, and advisors. At present, English is used as the medium of communication. However, in the future, knowledge of the languages of these neighbors may be crucial in enhancing better understanding.

In conclusion, it seems inevitable that the Thai Government should develop a clearer policy on the teaching and learning of English language and the languages of our neighbors, taking into account the emerging need for these languages.

## **4. Language Curriculum and Assessment**

The textbooks commonly used to teach English at the lower and upper levels of education are not local. These textbooks enjoy about 98 per cent of the market share. Teachers or groups of teachers develop supplementary materials, sometimes with guidance from native speakers of English who are either volunteers or contract teachers.

Language skills at the secondary level are ranked in order of importance as follows:

1. reading skills

2. writing skills
3. listening skills
4. speaking skills

Learning materials usually include a student's book, a workbook, a teacher's book, one or two tape cassettes, a test booklet and, in some cases, a video and a CD.

Each student has his/her own textbook and workbook.

The textbooks listed have been locally produced by publishers who have bought the copyrights.

### **Language Assessment**

Teachers evaluate their students' achievement of the learning objectives according to the specifications set at school cluster meetings. The meetings also set the ratios of formative scores and summative scores, normally at 60:40; however, some schools may use 50:50 or 70:30 ratios.

The formative or process scores (60%) consist of:

- quizzes or progress tests 20%
- mid-term tests 30%
- evaluation of student affective domain 10%

The summative tests are criterion-referenced. The objective test type is employed using multiple choice, matching, and fill-in/completion. Writing tests for core courses at Matayomsuksa levels 3 and 6 are mostly objective-type with sentence completion, paragraph completion, reordering sentences, reordering words, and error correction with no essay writing. In the specific writing-skill course, testing writing is conducted in the same way as in the core courses, but with sentence writing and writing of short narrative or descriptive paragraphs. It should be noted that

very few schools offer writing courses. Teachers themselves determine the contents of testing. Some may test grammar from 60%-80% while others may test it from 40%-60%.

The schools set their programs of study according to the curriculum. For example, they set the number of courses that each student has to take per semester. They also require the teachers for each course to prepare lists of learning objectives in the cumulative student records, and to write tests measuring the set learning objectives.

The schools set examination dates and report test results. They also announce the outcomes of learning and grant certificates to graduates at the end of Matayomsuksa three and six levels of education.

The school district and the school region form school clusters and the directors of the provinces' secondary education act as heads of school clusters who are to be informed about and approve the evaluation of every school in the cluster.

At the national level, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the Ministry of Education sets foreign language curricula for the teaching of English, French, German, Arabic, and Japanese. The Department sets the learning objectives for foreign language learning and course descriptions. However, they do not set the syllabi or regulations for testing and evaluation.

### **School-Based Assessment of Proficiency**

In the school system teachers and schools are responsible for evaluating student progress and achievement. Therefore, internal evaluation

is conducted at mid-term, at the end of the term, and at the teachers' discretion. The purposes of testing, besides assessing student achievement, are to improve the teaching/learning process, to maintain records and report on student progress, to obtain remedial information about students, and to promote students. For primary and secondary education a grading scale from 0 to 4 is used:

- 0 = remedial/below the set standard (0-49%),
- 1 = fair/ passing the minimal requirement level (50- 59%),
- 2 = quite good/average (60-69%),
- 3 = good (70-79%), and
- 4 = very good (80-100%).

The passing grade is 1.

## **5. Language Teaching and Professional Support**

Teachers have received their bachelor's degrees and regularly attend in-service training programs to upgrade their teaching skills. The training is offered by the Ministry of Education and other governmental and private agencies.

Universities and teacher colleges also provide in-service training programs. Regional and international bodies such as the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre in Singapore, the British Council, Australian AIDAB and Canada's CIDA have also provided support for Thai language teachers to be trained overseas.

In Thailand, teachers of English at the undergraduate level are formally trained at six government universities and 36 teachers' training colleges located all over the country. Each year about 2,500 students graduate with a major in English, secondary education or primary education and are eligible to become a teacher of English, if they so choose. At the graduate level, there are seven government

universities offering degrees in TEFL and about 100 students graduate each year. Most of them are teachers of English who have chosen to further their education.

Nowadays, not many students want to become a teacher of English because, working in government service, they will earn salaries 2-4 times less than those working in the private sector. Besides, each year a great number of teachers of English retire, and many teachers quit their job to work in the private sector. So there is a shortage of teachers of English in the country now.

At the national level, there are several universities and international agencies providing in-service training for English language teachers, such as AIDAB, the British Council and USIS. Besides these, professional associations, especially Thailand TESOL has regularly organized workshops and seminars on teaching methodology for Thai teachers of English.

Regarding in-service materials development projects which support professional development of teachers, most practising teachers develop supplementary materials for their students, especially university teachers who mostly use materials developed by faculty work groups as their primary course materials. These materials serve as a means of professional promotion for their authors. Materials development can be conducted by a team of teachers or by one or two teachers, and it can be either formally or informally conducted. It is institutional, not national.

At the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, for example, there are on-going materials development projects for Foundation English, English for Academic

Purposes, English for Business, and Technical English courses. The projects involve teachers of these courses who work as a team. Usually, audio and video materials are developed as well.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it may be seen that the two most commonly taught languages in Thailand are Thai and English. English is regarded as the most important foreign language as it is the language of international communication. About 99% of Thai students study English, which begins in the curriculum at the elementary level of education. It is also required for entry into the tertiary level of education. The communicative approach with

an eclectic orientation is favored at the various levels of education. Grammar and vocabulary learning are integrated into the teaching, materials development and assessment.

With the 1996 curriculum, Thai students will be required to study English from grade 1 onwards. This is to cope with the changing national and academic contexts. However, carrying out this new scheme will greatly challenge all Thai teachers, students, schools, and parents. If we are to avoid the pitfalls of the past, it will be necessary to lay sufficient groundwork and to provide adequate preparation of both man and materials in order to ensure future success.

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