

The state of English as a subject (EaS) in the higher education institutions in Thailand

By Burapha University
for British Council



Project report

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Acknowledgements

This research project was conducted to illustrate the state of English as a subject in Thailand, which could be a preliminary step towards future research and actions aimed at elevating the English language proficiency of students in higher education institutions. It is a great opportunity to have been awarded the research grant from the British Council Thailand.

We would like to express our gratitude to all stakeholders and supporters of this project.

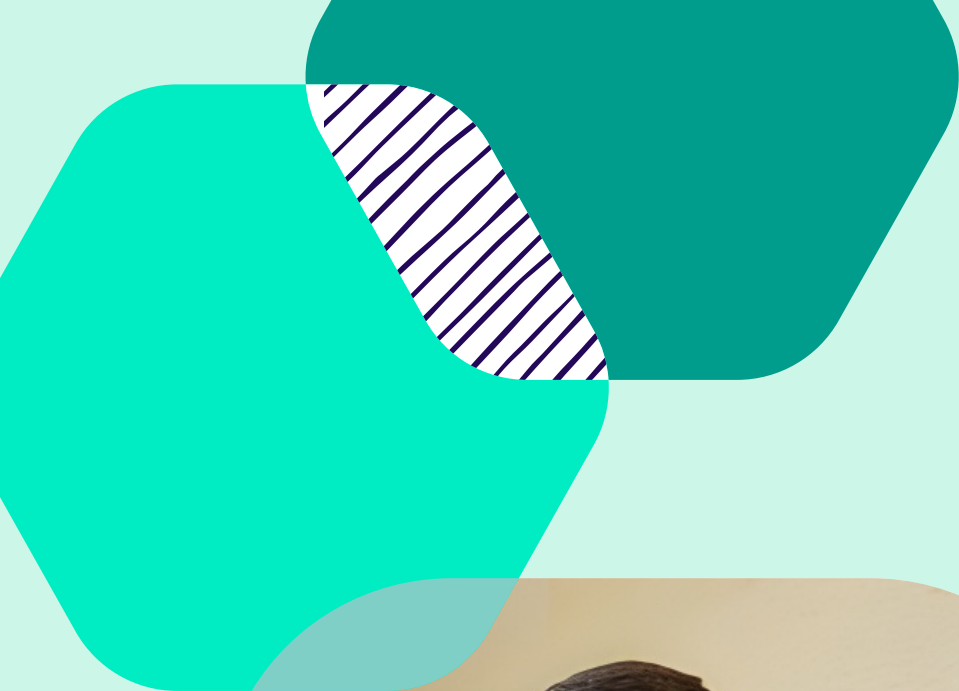
We are extremely grateful for the completion of this groundwork in English as a subject in higher education institutions in Thailand, which would not have been possible without the support and guidance of Assistant Professor Sudaporn Luksaneeyanawin, our project consultant.

Thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) for their attention to the project. We must also thank the Association of Professional and Organizational Development Network of Thailand Higher Education (ThailandPOD) for their support in data collection.

We appreciate the constructive advice from Associate Professor Thanita Lerdpornkulrat, Assistant Professor Soamshine Boonyananta and Assistant Professor Denchai Prabchandee in developing the instruments. We would like to acknowledge the help of our research assistants, namely Chareeya Thepbol, Kittikhun Kittibadeesakul and Pakamon Ruamsuk, in collecting data and arranging all the meetings.

We also extend our sincere thanks to the informants of the survey and focus groups, as well as all the stakeholders who attended the meeting at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI). Without the information and insights generously shared by them, this project could not have been completed.

We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to the British Council for the scheme and unwavering support to explore English as a subject at the tertiary level in Thailand. Many thanks to our supporters from the British Council Thailand, namely Pattanavimol Israngkura Na Ayudhya, Ewan MacRae and Ekkarat Subannarat, for their insightful suggestions.



Foreword

English language skills are critical for young people in Thailand to pursue personal and professional development, and to engage with their peers around the world.

A knowledge of English opens incredible career opportunities, especially in science and research sectors where the majority of the world's knowledge is recorded and reported in English. As the working language of ASEAN, and one of the most widely spoken languages of international commerce, English drives trade and investment and international relations, supporting economic growth and development.

A knowledge of English provides access to global ideas and innovation, and allows Thai ideas and Thai innovation to be shared with the rest of the world, boosting Thailand's international standing and soft power.

And a knowledge of English connects people throughout the world through arts, culture and ideas. It's a hugely valuable component of a mother-tongue-based multilingual education policy. And it acts as a bridge between people and cultures, underpinning greater understanding, driving greater trust, and therefore supporting greater peace and prosperity.

Thailand has made great strides in education development, with near universal rates of completion for basic education, a 10-year trend of increasing average years of schooling, and youth literacy rate (age 15–24) for the main student age group at university which is 98.2 per cent. But despite English being a compulsory subject in the Thai curriculum, English language skills in Thailand remain low. The Royal Thai Government has recognised English language as a priority for supporting economic growth, and the UK is proud to support

Thailand's ambitions to improve the quality of English language teaching, learning and assessment.

The research contained herein is a great example of how combining UK and Thai expertise can deliver tangible benefit for Thailand's higher education system.

Recognising the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation's (MHESI) targets for English language in higher education, this study explores the connections between policy and practice. It draws insights from extended primary research with institutions and academics, and provides clear recommendations for practitioners, heads of faculty and departments and policymakers.

An important thematic thread is that of the need to provide an equitable provision of English language teaching, learning and assessment across higher education institutions in Thailand, to ensure that English remains an enabler to development and not a gatekeeper to opportunity. I hope that this research contributes to understanding and addressing these critically important issues.

As we approach the 170th anniversary of UK-Thai relations in 2025, the British Council is proud to be working with the Royal Thai Government through the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation to support better teaching, learning and assessment of English in Thailand's higher education sector. Education cooperation and collaboration is an important part of the UK-Thailand strategic partnership and roadmap, towards which this research contributes.

My sincere thanks to the researchers, colleagues and friends at the MHESI who have led and contributed to this publication.

Danny Whitehead,
Country Director of the British Council in Thailand

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Outline



English as a subject in Thailand

- Course design
- Objectives of the EaS courses



HEIs' learning of English policy

- Budget allocation
- Teacher qualifications
- Extra-curricular activities

Teaching and learning approaches

Assessment of/for/as learning

- Classroom assessment
- Exit examination: English language requirement

Progress vs attainment

- The development of students' English proficiency level
- The curriculum design
- The pedagogy and assessment 'as' and 'for' learning



Conclusions

Recommendations for stakeholders

1. Policy on English language development in higher education
2. Learning management goals
3. Assessment and evaluation

Executive summary

Enhancing English language proficiency of university students is one of the goals of the MHESI (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation). An official announcement of MHESI (2024) urges the universities to support students to reach a specific target level of English, CEFR B2. It is necessary and urgent for all stakeholders (i.e. policymakers, university administrators, teachers, students, parents and communities) to design a precise action plan and exercise the policy to be practical.

The present study illustrates the state of English as a subject (EaS), encompassing the policy on English language and implementation, curriculum and course design (which involve learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches and assessment), the support and budget allocations, teacher qualifications, as well as exposure to English language such as extra-curricular activities.

The online survey was distributed to 143 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Thailand. The responses of the survey were from 51 HEIs, i.e. public universities, private universities, Rajabhat universities and Rajamangala universities. Focus group meetings were subsequently conducted in different parts of Thailand to gain more insightful information and to discuss with the stakeholders. A stakeholder meeting, comprising representatives from MHESI, universities in Thailand, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education (SEAMEO) Regional Centre specialising in higher education and development, RIHED (Regional Institute for Higher Education Development) and related organisations, was arranged to provide recommendations to the stakeholders and policymakers.

The findings show a mismatch between the policy goal to achieve English language learning proficiency at B2 and the on-the-ground picture and execution across most HEIs in the study. This target level of English proficiency, when viewed next to the extent of English language exposure (e.g. the hours and means by which students learn English as a subject in HEIs, including the extra-curricular activity) is argued to be at odds with each other. Opportunities to be exposed to English language (whether online or in person) and the space, time and ability to move beyond passive English language rote-consumption, to discussing it alongside its appropriate behaviours and forms in real-world situations (meta-linguistic knowledge), should be promoted. The support offered by HEIs varies primarily due to their respective financial resources. Similarly, the landscape of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and content-language integrated learning (CLIL) as trends of English as a subject (EaS) in HEIs should be seen within the context of university teacher training in English language teaching, learning and assessment generally.

It is important to highlight and recognise that HEIs in Thailand have autonomy and should be seen within their own particular contexts, including student intake, institutional culture, the surrounding communities and the financial support available, all of which strongly influence their practices in developing students' English proficiency. As such, there is no attempt in this study for a 'one-size-fits-all' goal to be applied to HEIs. Instead, a nationwide learning outcome should be set in collaboration with the outputs defined by HEIs.



บทสรุปสำหรับผู้บริหาร

การเพิ่มพูนสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนในระดับมหาวิทยาลัยเป็นหนึ่งในเป้าหมายของกระทรวงการอุดมศึกษา วิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (อว.) โดยกระทรวงฯ ได้ออกประกาศฉบับ พ.ศ. 2567 ให้มหาวิทยาลัยส่งเสริมสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนให้ถึงระดับ B2 ตามกรอบมาตรฐานการประเมินความสามารถทางภาษาจากประเทศในกลุ่มสหภาพยุโรป (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: CEFR)

ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย ซึ่งได้แก่ นักนโยบาย ผู้บริหารมหาวิทยาลัย ครู นักเรียน ผู้ปกครอง และชุมชนทั้งหลาย ควรตระหนักถึงความจำเป็นเร่งด่วน ร่วมออกแบบและขับเคลื่อนแผนดำเนินงานให้เกิดผลเชิงรูปธรรม

การศึกษานี้อธิบายสถานภาพของการจัดการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ (English as Subject: EaS) ในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยที่ครอบคลุมนโยบายในการจัดการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ การออกแบบหลักสูตรและรายวิชา (ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องกับผลการเรียนรู้ วิธีจัดการเรียนการสอนและการวัดผล และประเมินผล) การสนับสนุนและการจัดสรรงบประมาณ คุณสมบัติของครูผู้สอน และประสบการณ์การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ เช่น การเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมนอกหลักสูตร เป็นต้น

ทั้งนี้ มีการส่งแบบสำรวจออนไลน์ไปยังสถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา (Higher Education Institutions: HEIs) จำนวน 143 แห่งในประเทศไทย โดยสถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาจำนวน 51 แห่งที่อยู่ในกลุ่มมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐ กลุ่มมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชน กลุ่มมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏ และกลุ่มมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏได้ให้ความอนุเคราะห์ตอบแบบสำรวจ นอกจากนี้ยังมีการสนทนากลุ่ม (focus group) กับตัวแทนผู้บริหารและครูผู้สอน จากกลุ่มมหาวิทยาลัยที่อยู่ในภูมิภาคต่าง ๆ ของประเทศไทย เพื่อให้ได้รับข้อมูลเชิงลึกมากขึ้น จากนั้นมีการประชุมร่วมกับผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียเพื่อรวบรวมข้อเสนอแนะให้แก่กลุ่มผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียและนักนโยบาย โดยมีตัวแทนผู้เข้าร่วมประชุมจากกระทรวงการอุดมศึกษา วิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (อว.) ในประเทศไทย องค์การรัฐมนตรีศึกษาแห่งเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ หรือซีมีโอ (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization: SEAMEO) ศูนย์ภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ว่าด้วยการอุดมศึกษาและการพัฒนาของซีมีโอ (The Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development: RIHED) ตลอดจนองค์กรอื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง

ผลการศึกษาพบความไม่สอดคล้องกันระหว่างนโยบาย การสนับสนุนให้มหาวิทยาลัยส่งเสริมสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนให้ถึงระดับ B2 และการพร้อมของการจัดการเรียนรู้ของสถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาจำนวนมากทั่วประเทศไทย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับกำหนดระดับสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษ ของผู้เรียนให้ถึงระดับ B2 กับระดับของประสบการณ์การรับภาษาอังกฤษ (เช่น ชั่วโมงและวิธีการที่ผู้เรียนเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในสถาบันนั้น ๆ รวมถึงกิจกรรมนอกหลักสูตรต่าง ๆ) ดังนั้นโอกาสในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ (ไม่ว่าจะเป็นช่องทางออนไลน์หรือเรียนรู้ในห้องเรียน) การให้พื้นที่ และเวลาในการเรียนรู้ รวมถึงความสามารถของผู้เรียน ในการก้าวข้ามจากการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษแบบท่องจำและสื่อสารด้านเดียวไปสู่การเรียนรู้ที่นำภาษาอังกฤษไปใช้ได้ ในสถานการณ์การสื่อสารจริง (ซึ่งแสดงถึงความรู้เชิงอภิภาษาศาสตร์ของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ) จึงควรได้รับ การสนับสนุนจากผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย ผลการศึกษายังพบอีกว่าการสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน ในสถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษานั้นแตกต่างกันมาก โดยความแตกต่างนี้เกิดจากงบประมาณของสถานศึกษานั้น ๆ ที่ได้จัดสรรเอาไว้แตกต่างกัน ในขณะเดียวกัน ภูมิทัศน์การจัดการเรียนการสอนโดยใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อกลาง (EMI) และการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษา (CLIL) ซึ่งเป็นแนวทางในการจัดการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษที่กำลังได้รับความนิยม ควรได้รับการผลักดันในรูปแบบของการฝึกอบรม ทั้งด้านการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ตลอดจนการวัดผล และประเมินผลตามแนวทางดังกล่าว

จากผลการศึกษานี้ สิ่งสำคัญที่พึงตระหนัก คือ สถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยนั้นมีอิสระ ในการบริหารจัดการการเรียนรู้ในศาสตร์ต่าง ๆ และมีบริบทเฉพาะในแต่ละแห่ง ไม่ควรจะเป็นการรับนิสติดนักศึกษา วัฒนธรรมองค์กร ชุมชนรอบ ๆ มหาวิทยาลัย และแหล่งทุนสนับสนุนต่าง ๆ ทั้งหมดนี้ล้วนมีอิทธิพลต่อการลงมือ พัฒนาระดับสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนในมหาวิทยาลัยทั้งสิ้น การศึกษานี้ไม่ได้มุ่งกำหนดเป้าหมายเพียงหนึ่งเดียวสำหรับทุกสถาบันการศึกษา หากแต่สนับสนุนให้มีการกำหนดผลลัพธ์การเรียนรู้ระดับชาติ (nationwide learning outcome) และผลิตผล (output) ที่เกิดจากการหารื้อร่วมกันอย่างจริงจังของหน่วยงานต่าง ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง

Background

The Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) announced the English language development policy in 2016 (Thee Sor Tor 0506/Wor 553). According to this announcement, all higher education institutions (HEIs) were requested to set the language policy of the institutions with the plan to develop learners' language proficiency and development goals.



With no particular level of English required by OHEC, the announcement suggested individual institutions decide their target goal.

According to such an announcement, students were expected to master a certain level of English and to have a working knowledge of English, since the language provides them with access to information around the world and brings them up to date with global situations. This also helps prepare the country for taking part in the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community (also ASEAN +3, namely China, Japan and Republic of Korea) (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017), and is a means to fulfil its Thailand 4.0 economic goals and attract inward investment as the hub of Southeast Asia and ASEAN, with a competitive edge over other nations. Regarding students' English proficiency, standardised testing was also expected to be employed to assess undergraduates' English proficiency levels and readiness to be a part of the country's workforce. Accordingly, HEIs across Thailand were then motivated to implement their own strategy for how, institutionally, they would approach the OHEC's language policy. As a result, plans and practices following the 2016 policy directive from the OHEC

have been varied. Even though HEIs offer the English language as a compulsory course for all undergraduates (Taladngoen, 2019), some have offered Fundamental English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Work courses to fulfil their General Education (GE) requirements, but others have not yet included them as the GE. Another case in point is that many HEIs employ different tests as the requirement for the students' graduation, including tests designed and developed in-house. Meanwhile, the curricular and pedagogical designs, university-based teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) and training, language learning environment and activities, facilities and budget allocations by the HEIs are not readily apparent. In 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI, 2021) launched the human capital development plan (BE, 2021–2027), which included English proficiency as one of the development goals (Higher Education Plan, p. 58). It serves as one of the indicators of success in higher education, and hence is crucial to examine the state of the HEIs and explore their outstanding praxes in language proficiency development. The aim of this study is to provide the sector and HEIs across the country with up-to-date industry-specific information and areas of importance to better set goals and targets for positively contributing to Thailand's ambitions and strategic plans.

This present study aims to illustrate the connection between the language policy from the ministry and institutions (i.e. the macro level) and at the implementation level (i.e. the micro level). According to Luksaneeyanawin & Boonyananta (2020), the former refers to the government's policy (e.g. OHEC and MHESI) as well as the HEIs' language policy (e.g. exit examinations, budget allocations and curriculum designs). The latter, meanwhile, is comprised of pedagogical designs, ICT support and assessment methods.

Research design

Research questions

1. How do the HEIs set the policy and play a role in the curriculum development towards the development of students' proficiency level?
2. What do descriptors, objectives, assessment modes and learning outcomes of the EaS courses aim to achieve?
3. What teaching and learning approaches of the EaS are promoted?
4. How aligned are the learning outcomes with the assessment criteria?
5. What are the best practices and problems found in the HEIs?

Research methodology

This is a mixed-method study that surveys the HEIs around Thailand and conducts focus group discussions to further investigate the HEIs with outstanding practices in the EaS.

1. Participants

The participants were key informants from public and private universities in Thailand. The target participants were directors of the language institutes, language centres, heads of the language departments, deans of the faculties, vice presidents for academic affairs or other senior positions in charge of managing the English language courses at the institutions.

Out of 143 HEIs in Thailand, the target group of participants were stratified by locations and types of universities. The online survey was distributed to HEIs in all parts of Thailand, i.e. central, north, south, west, east and north-eastern. There were 51 responses (of a possible 143) from HEIs, covering public universities, private universities, Rajabhat universities, specialised and professional institutions, to the survey (See Table 1).

Categories	Total HEIs in Thailand	Respondents
Public universities	36 (25.17%)	18 (35%)
Rajamangala universities	9 (6.29%)	9 (18%)
Rajabhat universities	38 (26.57%)	11 (22%)
Private universities	60 (41.96%)	13 (25%)
Total	143 (100%)	51 (100%)

Table 1: Total HEIs across Thailand and proportion respondents

The respondents from the online survey were invited to join the focus group meetings. They were from different parts of Thailand covering public and private universities. Out of six focus group meetings, 51 informants from 29 HEIs participated in the sessions.

The voluntary nature of participation in this research allowed each participant to discontinue participation, without penalty or loss of benefits. A participant was able to leave the research study at any time.

2. Instruments

This study employed two research tools: a survey and a focus group interview. These served as the primary instruments for collecting data and meeting the objectives of the study. The survey was the primary tool for collecting data at a macro level (i.e. government and institutional policies). The focus group interview served as a complementary tool to the survey and provided a more in-depth examination at the micro level (i.e. implementation and practices).

2.1 Questionnaire

The online questionnaire consisted of four parts: (1) information regarding the HEIs and the respondents; (2) curriculum structure, overview of curriculum, the EaS for non-English major students, the EaS for English major students; (3) pedagogical approach; and (4) university/institute's policy in the development of students' proficiency level. The respondents acknowledged that their personal information was used as the invitation to the focus group.

All given information was kept confidential, so the findings were presented without revealing any individual information.

2.2 Interview questions

The interview questions were employed to elicit further information from the focus groups. The interview topics included the curriculum and pedagogical design of the HEIs, learning and teaching approaches, the support of the HEIs in language learning (e.g. ICT, environment, etc.), the exit examination policy, and the problems and solutions for language learning in higher education.

3. Data collection and data analysis

This section outlines the procedures used for data collection, including the methods and tools used, as well as the procedures used for data analysis. The data was obtained from online resources, survey, focus groups and a stakeholder meeting (See Figure 1).

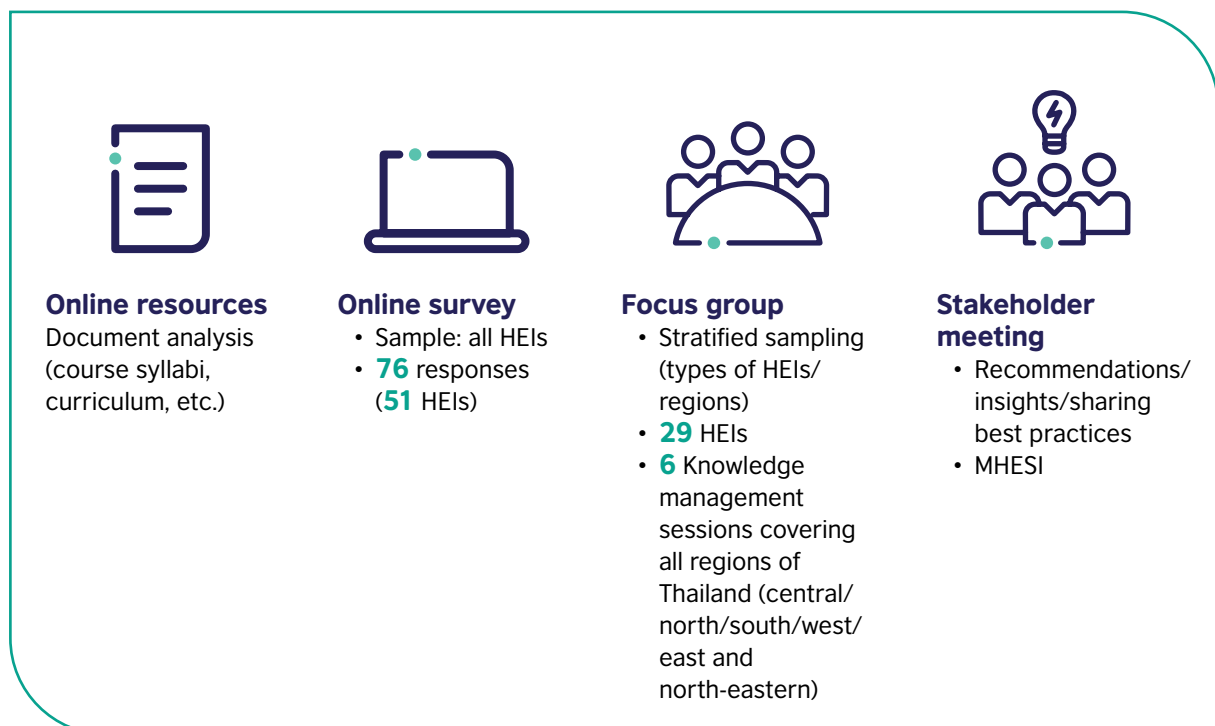


Figure 1: Sources of data collection

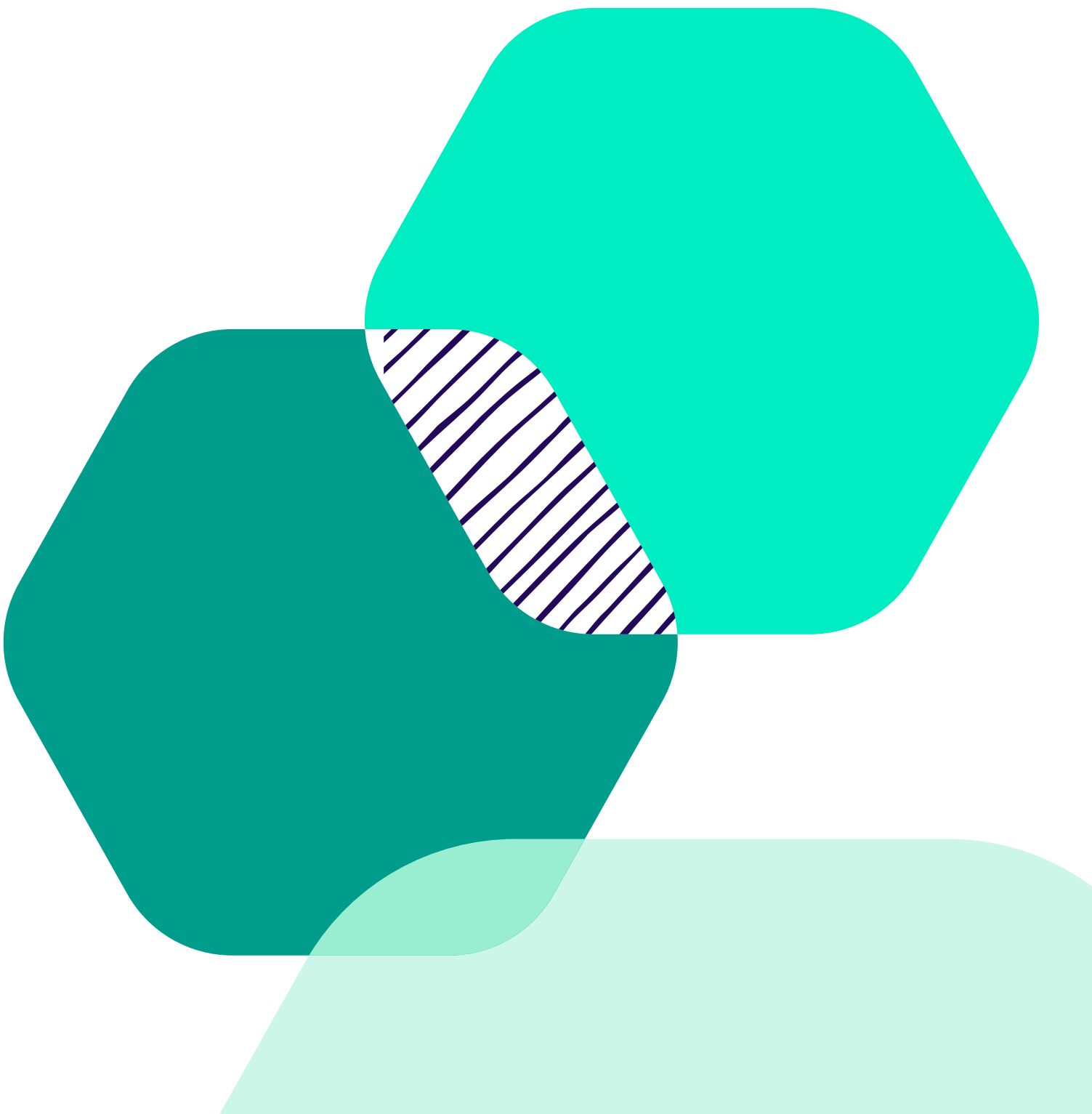
The information about language policy, curriculum structure and course syllabi of the HEIs retrieved online was taken into consideration and analysed.

The online survey was distributed to all HEIs through the connection of Thailand Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network and

partner organisations. The informants from all types of HEIs and different parts of Thailand responded to the survey. The findings from the questionnaire were analysed to find frequency and other numerical data, which described the state of the EaS. In addition, qualitative data such as curriculum and pedagogical designs and institution policy was summarised.

The representatives from 29 HEIs that responded to the survey were invited to join the focus group meetings. The participating HEIs were from different parts of Thailand (i.e. central, north, south, west, east and north-eastern) and different categories of institutions (i.e. public, private, Rajamangala and Rajabhat). Six sessions of the focus group meetings were conducted on site at the meeting rooms in different parts of Thailand. The researchers arranged a meeting close to the location of the informants.

We analysed the data from the online survey and the focus group interview. The preliminary findings were presented at the seminar (research dissemination). The seniors from lead institutions were invited to join a seminar and discuss the preliminary findings. More in-depth information and suggestions for the EaS in HEIs in Thailand were shared.



Findings and discussion

1. English as a subject in Thailand

According to Galloway (2016), English as a subject (EaS) refers to formal English language learning where home language is the medium of instruction. The English language is commonly learnt as a compulsory subject. In Thailand, EaS courses are foundation courses for all undergraduate students. The findings suggest that either Thai or English are used as the medium of instruction. The designs of the courses and the objectives of EaS are presented in the following section.

1.1 Course design

Based on our online survey and focus group results, all four groups of HEIs considered their curriculum designs of EaS courses as the roadmap to guide learning management and assessment management policies. In general, EaS courses in the two main areas are offered in all HEIs across Thailand. These two main areas are English for Communication (known as foundation or general English) and English for Specific Purposes (ESPs). There are three factors affecting how the EaS courses have been designed. These are: (1) head management sector or the centre or department/faculties/institutes that are responsible for English courses; (2) numbers of required credits or courses, either compulsory or elective courses, for English major and non-English major students to be eligible for their graduation; and (3) English course exemption.

As for (1), historically speaking, it appears that in the earlier years, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Faculty of Education were responsible for all EaS courses from foundation English to ESPs. Later, the Language Institute and Language Centre have been included to take charge of several EaS courses, both foundation English and ESPs. Currently, we can see in all HEIs a shift from the mentioned faculties to the Colleges

of General Education (GE), GE centres or other faculties where English language may not be their specialisation. The issue of who is qualified as the head management sector of each EaS course seems to depend on the courses' content, whether they are foundation English or ESPs, and not on the nature of the courses as mandatory or elective. It seems that non-specialists in English could design and deliver their EaS courses in the form of content-based English courses. As an example, an institution assigns the Engineering faculty to develop English foundation courses for their students. Such courses could be considered English as a medium of instruction (EMI). However, it is noted that many of the course developers and teachers had no training in EMI.

As for (2), our findings see the impact of the new curriculum that causes the reduction of GE courses' credits. Students in the four groups of HEIs can take 24 credits for GE courses or eight English courses rather than 30 credits or 15 English courses as was previously the case prior to 2002 (Darasawang, 2007). In addition, the contents of GE courses can be integrated into any major programme courses taught in English. Of the eight English courses, six must be mandatory English courses, such as English for Communication courses. Interestingly, we notice a revised EaS course name in many of the HEIs to include the term intercultural, as in English for Intercultural Communication. This means that the current practice in designing the EaS curriculum across HEIs reflects the awareness in authentic multicultural settings of communication or workplaces, which are vital for the development of Thai learners of English. Despite the learners' greater exposure to English proving a higher level of English proficiency, it is evident that current Thai undergraduate students seem to take fewer English courses than the students 20 years ago. In addition, the findings showed that public universities tend to offer both compulsory and elective English courses more when compared to private, Rajamangala and Rajabhat universities.

Categories	Compulsory	Electives
Public universities	6 to 12 credits (2–4 courses)	6 to 12 credits (2–4 courses)
Private universities	3 to 10 credits (1–4 courses)	3 to 9 credits (1–4 courses)
Rajabhat universities	2 to 9 credits (1%, 3 courses)	2 to 9 credits (1%, 3 courses)
Rajamangala universities	3 to 12 credits (1%, 4 courses)	3 to 9 credits (1%, 2 courses)

Table 2: Number of credits and courses across HEIs

As for (3), every group of HEIs offers English courses exemption. The four groups share a common exemption policy based on the English test results of the two test types: in-house tests and international standardised tests. The students will be allowed to be exempt from some or all English courses when they have current proof (valid for two years from test-taking dates) of either one of the two tests not lower than the CEFR B2 level. Interestingly, the group of public universities is more likely to allow 100 per cent English course exemption when the learners show current proof of English CEFR B2 level. It could be the proof from in-house tests and international standardised tests that are equivalent to such level. Rajamangala universities, although offering English courses 25 per cent less than the public universities, do not encourage their learners to be exempt from English courses. The group only allows for some elective English courses to be exempted or about 20 per cent. Both private and Rajabhat universities allow English course exemption at 70 per cent when the students show current proof of English CEFR B2 level.

A closer look at the content of these EaS courses found an interesting insight: not only is the content claimed to continually emphasise learner-centred English education, but the current focus in designing these courses is also raising awareness of intercultural communication and increasing learners' intercultural competency to shape the learners' global citizenship skills. Interestingly, since the Thai learners' English proficiency levels range from A1 to B2 level in each HEI and across HEIs, it is a challenge for HEIs and the stakeholders in charge of this matter. In our findings, the EaS input tops up the learners' current English knowledge by: (1) providing extra textbooks for students to explore more or extensive reading tasks; (2) offering more digital access for students to learn English any time they want to; and (3) providing support to students with tutoring sections from English specialists or scholarships to spend time studying English abroad.

In contrast to the claim of the learner-centred design, which is supposed to offer the learners in the HEIs (entirely) a new way of seeing and thinking about English language through active participation in the learning process and empowering them to use English in the world of work, we found two types of the EaS curriculum design. These are score-reaching content design and course-credit allocation design. These two designs are considered the pain points of the content management policy we will discuss further.

The score-reaching content design refers to the design that supports the learners to achieve a higher

score when taking international standardised English tests, such as TOEIC, TOEFL and IELTS. It means that the higher the scores in these tests the learners or the test takers achieve, the higher the English proficiency levels they exhibit, which in turn reflects the OHEC broad policy mentioned earlier. However, grade attainment measures such as these cannot fully reflect or represent the students' learning experience within the HEI, nor their readiness to transition to work in their subject-major area (ESP) to employers' expectations, or their readiness for the demands of postgraduate study (EAP), with the length of texts and lengthy, research-based essay writing. The course-credit allocation design could be described as any content or activities that each HEI creates to assist their students, and guarantees the students' graduation with all required English courses. This design seems to equate to the saying in Thai 'pay in full and earn the degree'. This course-credit option may be internally valid, but how it may be valid beyond the HEI is not certain (e.g. the asymmetry between an HEI and employers remains a concern). The new employees are expected to possess CEFR A2 to B2 in reception and production mode (It-ngam et al., 2023).



While score-reaching content design and course-credit allocation design may be viewed as fulfilling the OHEC 2016 mandate, this may not be fully equipping bachelor's degree graduates, the workplace or graduate study programmes with a true reflection of the English skills expected and in demand.

For instance, in the course-credit allocation design, how productive skills are assessed remains a question.

We need to revise the current content management policy to offer the effective learner-oriented EaS as one that includes rethinking a bidirectional relationship between learners and their real-world setting. It may be time to flip the pyramid of the EaS content management policy in Thailand to showcase the top-down design rather than the bottom-up one. This will allow the top-down design to focus on content, such as global trends, learners' career paths and global citizenship skills, together with hands-on activities more intensively, while embedding the four-skill-based approach.

1.2 Objectives of the EaS courses

To explore the objectives of the EaS courses, content analysis of the course descriptors found in 31 EaS courses offered across HEIs in Thailand was employed. This was to identify the keywords in the course descriptors that reflect the use of teaching approaches, focus of language skills and promotion of global citizenship. AntConc, a corpus analysis programme, was used to investigate the frequency of keywords and the co-occurring words that existed in the course descriptors. The course descriptors of 317 EaS courses exhibited a total of 14,728 words (tokens).

Of 14,728 tokens, we identified the keywords and the co-occurring words in our data, by selecting a set of appeared keywords related to teaching approaches (i.e. 4Cs (Communication, Culture, Content, Community), project-based, task-based, problem-based, Global Englishes, active learning, grammar-translation, communication), language skills and global citizenship, from the statements in the online survey.

As exemplified below, the selected keywords included communication, culture, for/to, community, project, task, problem, global, Global Englishes, active learning, grammar, structure, communicative, interact, listening, speaking, reading, writing, understand, time and place and situation. This content analysis is illustrated as follows:

‘for communication’

The keyword ‘for communication’ occurred repeatedly 180 times across the descriptors. The keyword ‘for communication’ was used in the texts in three different aspects: (1) the use of language for communication; (2) practice to use the language for communication; and (3) the focus on language. The exemplifications are as follows:

(1) The use of language:

- ‘The use of non-verbal communication’
- ‘The use of English for specific purpose to communicate in particular contexts’
- ‘The use of English for communication at the workplace’
- ‘The use of vocabulary and grammar for communication’

(2) Practice to use the language:

- ‘Practice using English for communication’
- ‘Practice communicative skills’
- ‘Practice English communicative skills’

(3) The focus on language:

- ‘Vocabulary, expressions, basic sentence structure for communication’
- ‘Structure and culture of native speakers for communication’
- ‘Intermediate level of structure and culture of native speakers for communication’

‘culture’

The keyword ‘culture’ occurred 46 times in the texts. ‘Culture’ was identified differently in the descriptors, e.g. culture of native speakers, multi-culture, global culture, cross-culture communication.

‘structure’ and ‘grammar’

‘Structure’ repeatedly appeared in the course descriptors 40 times. Most instances of ‘structure’ co-existed with the words that reflect the knowledge of language, e.g. ‘basic sentences’, ‘complex sentences’, ‘advanced’, ‘intermediate’, ‘grammar’, etc.

The keyword ‘grammar’ existed 60 times in the descriptors of all courses. It is interesting that grammar knowledge is specified as a major focus in many courses and that learners are required to extensively study the rules of English grammar. The use of grammar in context seems to gain less attention from the course developers than knowledge of grammar. There were a few courses that integrated the use of grammar in situations and through doing tasks.

The findings show that the purpose of compulsory English courses in the HEIs involves English for communication and English for specific purposes. Due to the policy to reduce the numbers of credits of undergraduate programmes in Thailand, the number of English compulsory courses was reduced from three to four courses to one to two courses. Most HEIs currently offer two English compulsory courses; however, there is an HEI that does not stipulate any English compulsory course in the degree programme at all. This means that the students in this HEI are not required to learn English at all throughout their four years in the HEI. For the other HEIs, the students are able to get exemption in most universities for one or all English courses if they pass the particular level of the international standardised tests, e.g. TOEIC, IELTS and TOEFL (ITP) or institutional English standardised tests. As for the learning outcomes, the findings do not clearly reflect these. It seems the learning outcomes depend on the evidence of students’ achievement in passing the above-mentioned tests at certain levels or through their achievements in various assessment modes.

2. HEIs’ learning of English policy

This policy governs the four groups of HEIs to provide EaS courses that reflect the students’ set achievement at the end of the learning process, from within a course to exit examination. To implement this learning of English policy, all four groups of HEIs follow three aspects: (1) to allocate both general and special budgets for the EaS learning; (2) to recruit the EaS teachers; and (3) to provide extra-curricular activities.

2.1 Budget allocation

As for (1), all four groups of HEIs have created a foundation to support an increase in Thai learners’ English proficiency levels, and reach the set achievement by allocating both general and special budgets for the two main purposes. The two include: (i) provision of textbooks and electronic devices for anywhere, anytime English learning; and (ii) professional development seminars for instructors. The four groups report on special budgets allocated to units or departments for English language learning improvement. It is noteworthy that responses from private and Rajabhat universities suggest a greater emphasis on budget allocation in this comparison than in the other two groups. The higher special budget allocation could reflect an urgent demand to accelerate the learners’ English proficiency levels by attempting to (re)boost those initiatives for improvement.

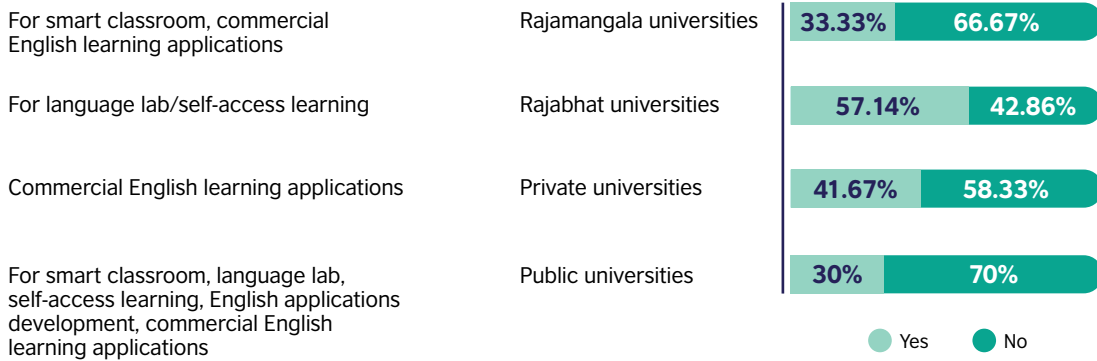


Figure 2: Aims of budget allocation across different types of HEIs

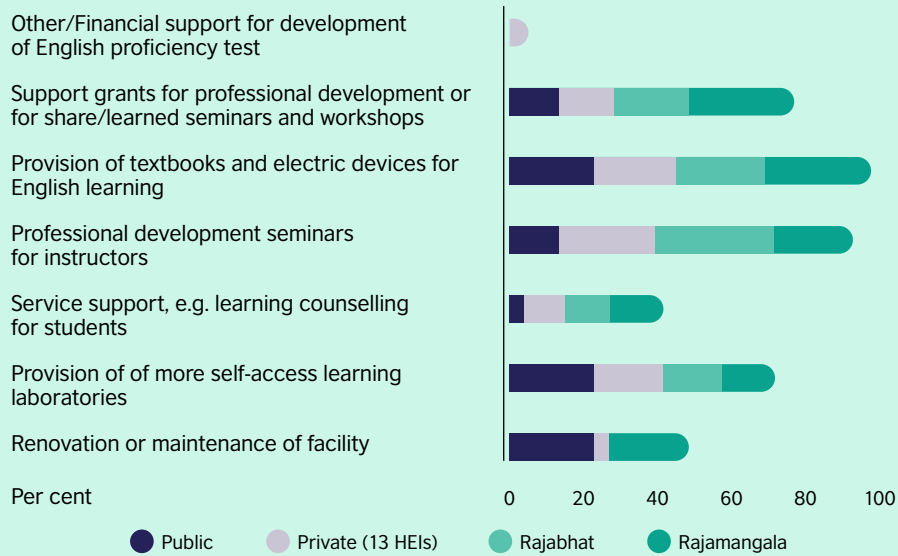


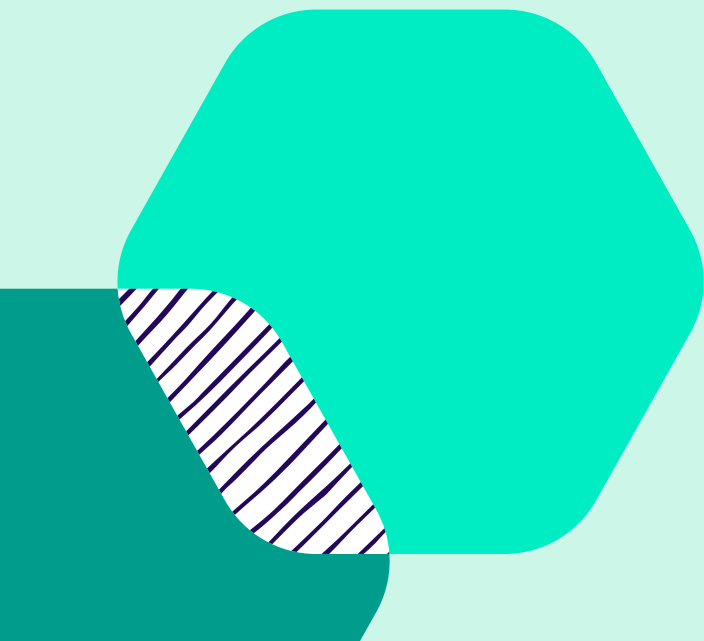
Figure 3: Types of support for teachers and students among HEIs

The results from our online survey also show several other areas that the HEIs allocate their budget to for improvement. These include developing smart classrooms, language labs, self-access learning, English application development and commercial English learning applications. The group of public universities tends to allocate the budget and focus on all aspects mentioned, while the private university group is more likely to focus on smart classroom development and commercial English learning applications. The Rajamangala universities focus their attention on improving commercial English learning applications, while Rajabhat universities tend to focus more on the development of language labs and self-access learning. Such allocations could reflect either the HEIs' plan to provide frequent/intensive English exposure to the learners or the

variation of the Thai learners' needs to increase their English proficiency levels through various means.

2.2 Teacher qualifications

As for (2), the aspect of teacher qualifications is common among the four groups of HEIs. The four groups reported hiring both native Thais and non-Thais as English teachers, based on their English proficiency, teaching experiences, personality and 'human relations' (how sociable a candidate appears). There are two additional qualifications found, although not prominent. These involve having experiences in special training related to English or teaching English and possessing certificates in teaching English (ELT).



Categories	Non-native	Native
Certificates in Teaching English (ELT)	17 (6.72%)	32 (11.9%)
English proficiency	65 (25.69%)	52 (19.33%)
Teaching experiences	60 (23.72%)	60 (22.3%)
Experiences in special training related to English or teaching English	15 (5.93%)	22 (8.18%)
Personality	49 (19.37%)	52 (19.33%)
Human relations	47 (18.58%)	51 (18.96%)
Total responses	253	269

Table 3: Teacher qualifications (non-natives vs natives)

2.3 Extra-curricular activities

As for (3), the findings suggest that an active learning approach is mentioned as the method for this learning of English policy. As a supplement to the approach, all four groups in HEIs provide extra-curricular activities as per Table 4.

Extra-curricular activities	Responses (%)
Renovation or maintenance of facility and/or providing spaces for the activities	37 (19.07%)
Provision of more self-access learning laboratories	29 (14.95%)
Service support, e.g. learning counselling for students	27 (13.92%)
Workshop for students	46 (23.71%)
Provision of textbooks and electronic devices for English learning	35 (18.04%)
Supporting grants for students or providing English-speaking places for internship during summer break	20 (10.31%)

Table 4: Extra-curricular activities in HEIs

Based on focus group interviews, the top three activities that the four groups have in common are English camps, English clubs and competitions (e.g. debate or toasters' clubs).

Overall, we could see an ambitious attempt to recruit English professional instructors, and select supplementary learning of English that seems to increase the students' English proficiency levels, while reflecting the learner-centred English education. However, the questions are whether this policy is effective and how the policy of assessment of learning is laid out.

3. Teaching and learning approaches of EaS

In English language teaching (ELT), an approach represents the underlying theory or philosophy that guides how we teach. It serves as a structured framework, outlining fundamental concepts and objectives. On the other hand, a method refers to the specific techniques, strategies and activities that teachers use to put the approach into practice in the classroom (Brown, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This distinction is essential for understanding the complexity and adaptability of ELT. It is crucial to recognise and navigate these shifts in teaching methodologies and approaches over time. One significant transformation is the development of different approaches and methodologies in response to the needs of various historical periods (Harmer, 2015; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Over time, numerous teaching approaches, methodologies and instructional tools have been introduced, but many of them have become outdated (Chinokul, 2021).

In relation to our study, the selection of ELT approaches in higher education in Thailand is influenced by several critical factors. Education policies, the specific types and focus of universities, teacher qualifications, class sizes, budget allocations and the availability of information and communication technology (ICT) support all play pivotal roles in shaping the management and implementation of teaching approaches. Additionally, factors such as skills focus, engagement in extra-curricular activities and the integration of instructional media contribute significantly to the overall landscape of English language instruction in higher education in Thailand. These elements collectively impact the strategies and methods employed, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the educational environment in the country.

Based on the survey findings, it is observed that active learning and a communicative approach are universally adopted across all four types of institutes in Thailand, with project-based and task-based methods also prevalent in English language instruction. The teaching of general English courses consistently emphasises the development of all four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. As courses progress to more advanced levels, a shift occurs with a deeper focus on reading and writing, while listening and speaking skills gain prominence in specialised areas such as work-related courses or selective courses, particularly those focusing on presentation skills. In terms of instructional media, we observe that all four types of universities predominantly use commercial textbooks for general English courses. Additionally, compiled documents and authentic materials are widely employed. There is also a promotion of alternative learning resources, including platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, as well as online exam preparation websites.

Concerning extra-curricular activities, all HEI types allocate funds for learning spaces and facilities. Self-access learning laboratories receive financial support from three types of institutes, but not private universities. Notably, public and Rajabhat universities allocate additional funding for textbooks and electronic devices, while private and Rajamangala universities prioritise funding for student workshops. It is worth mentioning that private universities, particularly, emphasise service support, such as learning counselling for students.

In terms of assisted ICT, both public and Rajamangala universities allocate funds for language labs and self-access learning. Smart classrooms receive funding from both public and private universities. Public universities, potentially influenced by research and development initiatives, place strong emphasis on the development of English applications. In contrast, private and Rajamangala universities allocate funds for commercial applications used in teaching and learning English.

Regarding the teaching and learning approach, there appears to be a contradiction between the information derived from quantitative and qualitative data. The findings of the content analysis reveal an interesting observation regarding the application of teaching approaches. Upon analysing course descriptors retrieved from English courses, it was observed that while frequently used keywords such as 'communication', 'communicative', 'task' and 'interact' suggest an emphasis on interactive methods, there is a notable recurrence of words such as 'structure' and 'grammar', each appearing 40 and 60 times, respectively. The term 'structure' often co-occurs with language knowledge-related terms such as 'basic sentences', 'complex sentences', 'advanced', 'intermediate' and 'grammar'. The keyword 'grammar' appeared 60 times across all course descriptors, signifying a significant focus on grammar knowledge in many courses, requiring learners to extensively study English grammar rules. Interestingly, the use of 'grammar' in contextual situations tends to receive less attention compared to the emphasis on grammatical knowledge. Only a few courses integrate grammar through practical tasks and real-life situations.

Therefore, despite the online survey indicating that all institutes employ communicative, project-based and task-based approaches in English teaching, a closer examination of course descriptions suggests that, while communication and interactive approaches are promoted broadly, the underlying emphasis, as revealed by the content analysis, leans toward grammar learning.

This aligns with information obtained from the stakeholders meeting, where feedback from graduate users indicates that a considerable number of university graduates struggle with effective English communication. This raises concerns about the emphasis on learning *about* English rather than focusing on the practical and effective use of the language in higher education.

Nevertheless, as per the synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative data by the researchers, the identified challenges within the learning management system in this study can be delineated as follows:

1. Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning:

Addressing challenges such as large class sizes and the qualifications of both Thai and non-Thai English teachers remains a significant hurdle in many universities. How can we improve the quality of language education in light of these obstacles?

2. Shifting attitudes among teachers and students:

Encouraging teachers to embrace technology, such as AI, in the classroom rather than fearing its misuse, can lead to more effective learning experiences. How can we help educators recognise the benefits of integrating technology into teaching practices? Similarly, altering the mindset of Thai students to view English not solely as an exam subject but as a vital tool for global communication/citizenship is essential. How can we foster a perspective that sees English proficiency as a gateway to opportunities beyond academic assessment?

3. Bridging the digital divide:

Disparities in access to technology between urban and rural students exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly evident during the pandemic when remote learning became prevalent. How can we provide support to students in rural areas, such as community colleges, who lack resources such as personal mobile phones or reliable internet connectivity?

4. Remaining relevant amid rapid change:

In a world characterised by swift transformations and disruptions, how can English language learning in Thailand adapt to stay pertinent? Should the current approaches be disrupted to meet the evolving needs of learners in a rapidly changing global landscape?

As we delve into strategies for ELT, it becomes clear that disruption is necessary to adapt teaching and learning paradigms to the demands of the modern world. To remain relevant amidst the rapid evolution of technology and educational methodologies, robust support and guidance are essential. It is imperative that we cultivate a dynamic learning environment capable of seamlessly integrating the fast-paced advancements in technology.



4. Assessment *of/for/as* learning

Assessment in EaS courses is exercised to either investigate students' performance (summative) or to help students to learn and practise (formative). The assessment modes could also be identified into assessment of learning (AoL), assessment as learning (AaL) and assessment for learning (AfL). The conventional method of assessment (i.e. AoL) is conducted to examine students' learning achievement after a period of instruction. On the other hand, AfL and AaL are more learner-centred assessments (Black & Wiliam, 1998). AfL is similar to formative assessment, but at an institutional level, producing data on a cohort's current ability with the intention to inform the LMS, for example. It relates closely therefore to formative assessment, at the classroom level, which aims to then improve student progress by providing responsive feedback and adjusting the instruction to match students' learning

needs. AaL requires students to actively participate in the process of assessment. Students engage in their own learning with self-assessment, self-reflection and self-regulation, related to critical thinking.

The following section illustrates the classroom assessment of EaS courses in HEIs. The findings reveal that AoL (summative assessment) is more prevalent than AfL (including formative assessment) and AaL. In addition, the implementation of an 'exit examination', which has been enforced due to the announcement of OHEC (2016), is discussed further.

4.1 Classroom assessment

The results show that HEIs are independent in creating their guidelines for English language assessments, covering both in-class and competency examinations. The classroom assessment primarily uses grade systems, including letter grades A–F and S/U grades. The most popular grading systems in the HEIs in Thailand are as follows:

Percentage/passing scores	Grade	Description
80–100%	A	Excellent
75–79%	B+	Very good
70–74%	B	Good
65–69%	C+	Fairly good
60–64%	C	Fair
55–59%	D+	Poor
50–54%	D	Very poor
0–49%	F	Fail
Depends on the course	S	Satisfactory
Depends on the course	U	Unsatisfactory

Table 5: HEIs' grading system

According to the survey, universities assess students in compulsory and elective English courses using letter grades ranging from A to F for the evaluation of the EaS. Table 6 shows that using the letter grade (A–F) system in English as compulsory courses and elective courses is very common across types of courses (GE and electives) as well as the groups of students. Either non-English major students or major

students are given grade A–F ranging by scores (See Table 5). A few courses offer S (Satisfactory) and U (Unsatisfactory), which will not affect the GPA of students. The rationale for giving A–F is that the English courses are important for students so that students need to dedicate to the courses. The courses that offer S/U are designed to offer exposure to English language to students.

Grading systems	Non-English major		English major	
	Compulsory courses (GE)	Elective courses	Compulsory courses (GE)	Elective courses
Letter grade (A–F)	47 (92.16%)	49 (96.08%)	25 (100%)	22 (88%)
Letter grade (A–F) and S/U	2 (3.92%)	1 (1.96%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
S/U	2 (3.92%)	1 (1.96%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
No. of responses	51	51	25	25

Table 6: The grading systems in English as compulsory courses and elective courses

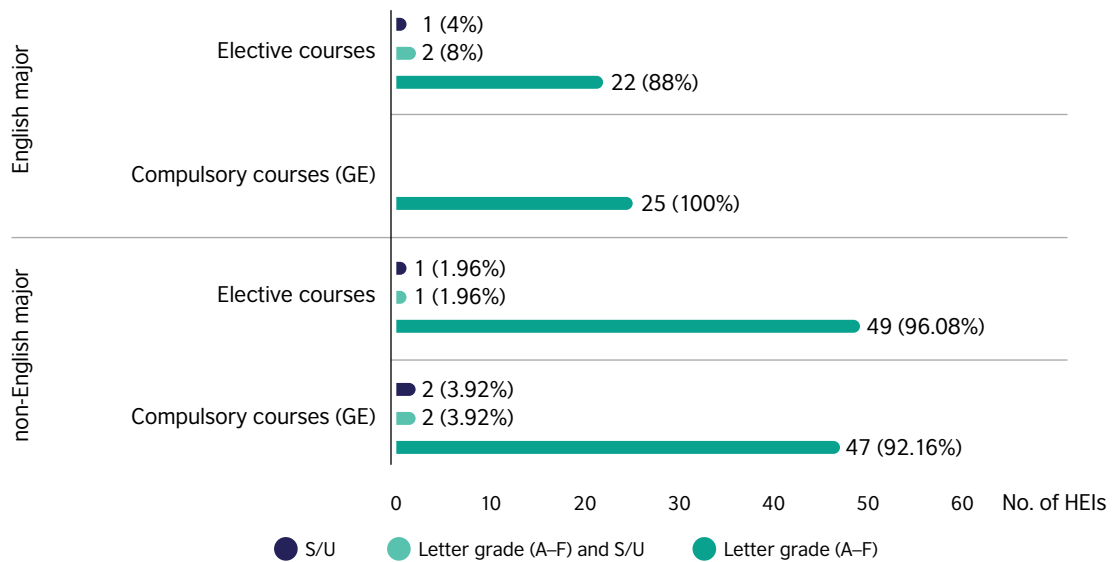


Figure 4: The grading systems in English as compulsory courses and elective courses

The focus group interviews show that classroom assessment is predominantly summative rather than formative. It primarily emphasises language accuracy, ranking students according to their scores, similar to traditional language testing. This kind of assessment appears to go against the ideals of classroom-based or performance-based assessment that focuses on fluency, progress and active engagement. Due to some limitations of management (e.g. class size, budget allocation), the conventional paper-based test (multiple-choice) is one of the common assessment methods. The tests could

include all knowledge of English language, i.e. vocabulary (meaning and spelling), pronunciation, grammar, listening, speaking, reading (comprehension) and writing. The paper tests are administered as summative assessments (mid-term and final examination). The weighed scores of such tests are often in the large proportion of total scores. Apparently, performance-based assessment (e.g. role play, presentation, writing for a specific purpose, etc.) is also employed. The weighed scores of such assessment are not as high as paper-based tests.

4.2 Exit examination: English language requirement

Dating back to 2016, the OHEC launched its language development policy demanding that HEIs in Thailand focus on students' English language proficiency improvement. To implement this broad policy, all HEIs put their emphasis on increasing their learners' English proficiency based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) from A1 to C2. The English language proficiency at the higher educational level of Thai learners has long been assessed through various English tests to measure their language competency. They are also assessed in various contexts ranging from university admission to exit decisions. According to MHESI, its 2024 policy clearly states the expected English proficiency level for Thai undergraduates to be B2, while for graduate students it is C1.

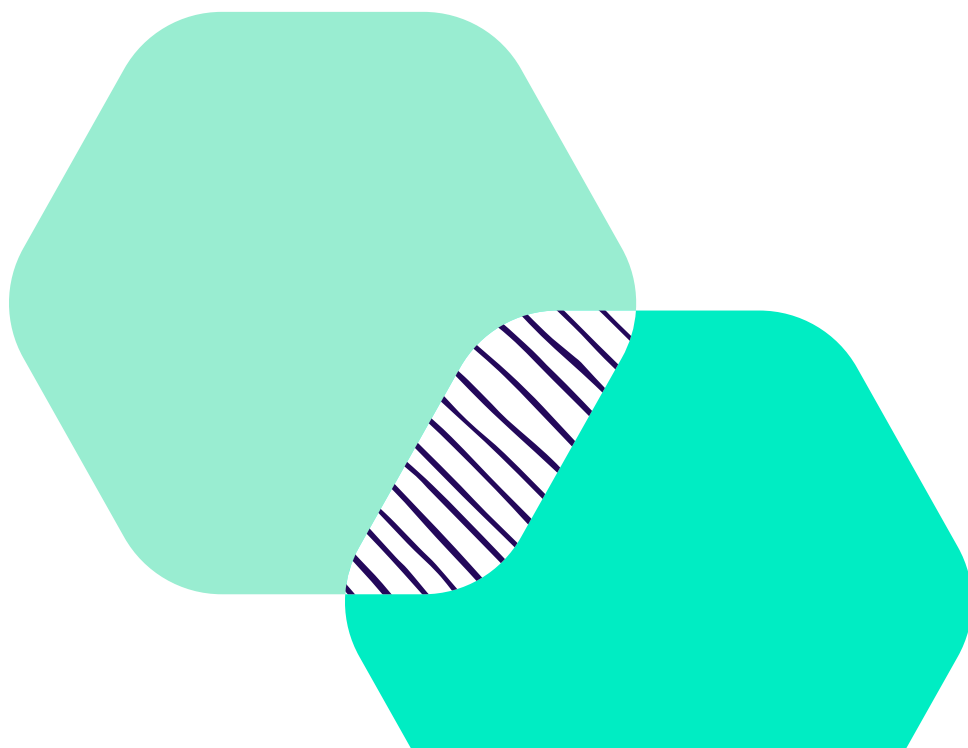
The four groups of HEIs in Thailand include the groups of public universities, private universities, Rajamangala universities and Rajabhat universities. Based on our online survey and focus group results,

the overall Thai learners' English proficiency levels in these HEIs varied from A1 to B1 along the CEFR scale. It means that the HEIs will need to increase these learners' level of English proficiency to meet current MHESI expectations. However, a question could arise of how the HEIs can do so. Would the learners' goals to increase a certain level of English or to reach B2 or above be for communication in general, for content, or for work? All in all, the influences of the CEFR and the broad policy of the OHEC strongly determine HEIs' interpretation of English language development and their EaS intertwined policies. These policies involve content management policy, learning management policy and assessment management policy.

Based on the learning of English policy, the English language proficiency assessment has been conducted in different senses. The findings show that all four groups of HEIs provide English language tests for their students, namely an 'exit examination'. As presented in Table 7, such assessment is administered either to determine students' ability or to force students to achieve target levels before graduation.

Categories of HEIs in Thailand	Administer English language tests	Graduation requirement
Public universities	18 (35.29%)	9 (40.91%)
Rajamangala universities	9 (17.65%)	1 (4.55%)
Rajabhat universities	11 (21.57%)	7 (31.82%)
Private universities	13 (25.49%)	5 (22.73%)
Total	51	22

Table 7: The English language tests administered and the graduation requirement



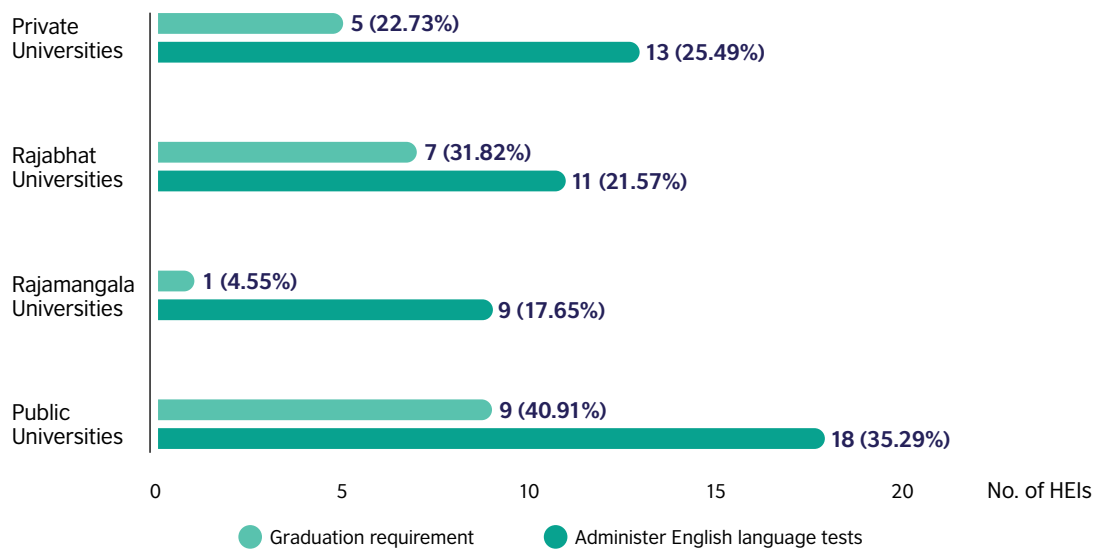


Figure 5: The English language tests administered and the graduation requirement

Since the national policy involves attempts to boost the students' English language standards to enhance readiness for both academic and professional tasks, revisions of English language teaching and learning approaches and requirements for students to take English examinations to assess their proficiency based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) or other standards (OHEC, 2016), the findings of the present study indicate that HEIs have the autonomy to establish their own policies for English language assessment which are, to some extent, related to the learning outcomes.

Based on our document analysis, despite the HEIs' autonomy, the common ground for learning outcomes concerns communicative purposes in daily life communication, different situations or cultures, academic or professional contexts, and online communities such as social media and online business. These communicative purposes include the language competence, including pronunciation, word and sentence usages, and the four skills. The learning outcomes also involve awareness of intercultural competency to shape students' global citizenship.

Regarding proficiency assessment, HEIs have autonomy in the implementation of English exit examinations. As a result of this autonomy, two perspectives exist according to what we found during the focus group and the stakeholder meeting sessions, while we also find that many HEIs have not consistently (and strictly) enforced exit exams as a graduation requirement.



One perspective sees English exit exams as essential for graduation or professional purposes (with passing scores communicated to students and parents and serving as a form of assessment of learning); the end product of learning. Another viewpoint regards exit exams as diagnostic tests, wherein universities offer training or remedial courses to students who fail, allowing them multiple attempts until graduation.

Consequently, from this view, the responsibility for language proficiency assessment falls on both teachers and students. Teachers are expected to devise methods to evaluate their students' proficiency, while students gain insight into their English language usage. Additionally, exams aid teachers in monitoring student progress and serve as a reference for curriculum design and resource allocation for both general and specialised courses. Furthermore, exit exams can be integrated into professional development initiatives, as seen in the use of the TOEIC exam as both academic and professional requirements.

The exit examination is categorised differently across HEIs, from placement or achievement tests, diagnostic tests to English proficiency tests. However, it seems to be used most in the latter category. As such, the universities offer the test during the first year, after finishing the compulsory courses, before graduation or at any time to measure the learners' English proficiency levels. The types of tests could include in-house tests (CEFR aligned), commercial standardised proficiency tests (e.g. TOEIC, TOEFL ITP, IELTS, etc.) and commercial placement tests. Among these tests, TOEIC tends to be widely accepted by the HEIs since it could be a passport for the students to enter the workplace.

English language tests	Responses out of 51 HEIs
In-house tests	37 (72.55%)
Testing package from language apps	2 (3.92%)
Placement test	2 (3.92%)
CEFR	1 (1.96%)
TOEIC	27 (52.94%)
TOEFL (IBT, CBT)	15 (29.41%)
TOEFL (ITP)	12 (23.53%)
IELTS	15 (29.41%)
CU-TEP	3 (5.88%)

Table 8: Types of English language tests administered

Among the universities that really enforce 'exit examinations', the passing score is set differently from CEFR A1 to B2.



The findings show that CEFR B1 is mostly the target level that students are expected to achieve.

One of the universities, where an exit examination is a graduation requirement (CEFR B1), communicated with students and parents to clarify the requirements and to point out the benefits of the assessment. It has to be noted that there is a wide range of student English proficiency levels in the HEIs since they have different education backgrounds. Many HEIs encourage students to reach the passing scores by offering training.

Students can take the English language tests (figuratively called exit examinations) during their first year, after completing compulsory courses, before graduation or at any time, with varying levels of support from their institution. There is no clear direction among HEIs of benefits for students who take the test when they are freshers. The focus group interviews reveal that a few universities (with sufficient budget allocation and support from institutional administrators) offer extra-curricular activities, provide a greater number of English courses than other institutions, as well as examine the language development of students.



The stakeholder meeting revealed differing priorities among universities. The question of whether a national (common) standardised method for exit exams is necessary emerges, given that institutions may administer the same exam with varying emphases. The necessity of this standardisation has remained debatable. However, from the meeting, it is suggested that all HEIs must ensure that selected tests provide accurate information to facilitate effective planning and action for improving students' English language proficiency in the long term.

However, in accordance with what we found, the pain points within the proficiency assessment in this study can be discussed. The first issue is that many HEIs are concerned that their students will not graduate if the exit exam policy is strictly implemented. However, the question is whether students' failure in meeting their HEI's English language proficiency requirement is solely attributed to their proficiency level, whether it is linked to the effectiveness of teachers' instructional strategies, or both. The second issue is the direction of language assessment that the teachers pursue. As addressed in the learning management system section, while communicative, active learning and task-based approaches are implemented, the qualitative findings from the focus group interviews suggest a continuing emphasis on grammar or language accuracy in English language teaching. As such, the question is, if implementing

the exit exam as assessment *as/for* learning, how can teachers make use of the students' exam results to come up with appropriate learning outcomes? The third issue is whether students from diverse backgrounds, despite achieving similar scores, are adequately prepared for their future careers. Since the learning outcomes from many HEIs gear their students towards the workforce, the implementation of exit exams needs to account for gauging the students' readiness to their future careers, thus ensuring that when they pass the exam, they can survive in professional contexts. Furthermore, concerns revolve around the reliability and validity of exit exams and questions arise regarding the over reliance on the CEFR framework.

To bridge the gap between the learning outcomes and assessment, one of the unravelling strategies is to prioritise the assessment *as/for* learning along with the implementation of exit exams. Students' proficiency scores can then be used for meaningful purposes, such as informing them of their progress and areas of improvement, applications for careers in international companies or for further overseas education, while at the same time ensuring that assessment *of* teaching is not overlooked. This can reveal how learners and teaching systems perform over time in the curriculum. Teaching assessment can also entail evaluating teachers' effectiveness in imparting knowledge and skills to students.

5. Progress vs attainment

The balance between progress and attainment of students' language learning should be reconsidered. This section discusses the importance of progress in learning language, curriculum design and the pedagogy and assessment 'as' and 'for' learning.

5.1 The progress in learning language

One of the issues found in this aspect is that most universities give the placement test to all Year 1 students, just to inform them of their level of proficiency, but there are no other measures to support their development. The development is left to each instructor to monitor. Tests given are the assessment of each student's learning. There is no comparison between the scores from the placement test and whatever test is used to evaluate them after taking the course or courses.

There are some HEIs that make the most of English language tests. The scores are used to design and provide support to students. Students' proficiency levels are used to set paths in their development. Students that could not reach the target scores are supported either by extra courses, a self-access learning platform or via other activities. Those that have reached the set goal are encouraged to take more elective project-based courses that will enhance their career language.

5.2 The curriculum design

With limitations of course credits, HEIs commonly offer two English courses to their students: 1) English for communication; and 2) English for specific purposes (e.g. career/professional development or academic purposes). Apparently, some HEIs have no guidelines for those low achievers from the courses. There are no strategies to support low achievers or enhance the high achievers in their development. Students are expected to know their own problems and to take care of them by selecting elective courses without any guidance. The findings suggest that grade attainment tends to play a dominant role in taking EaS courses. The courses should be redesigned to promote either progress of language learning or attainment. Another example of attainment is exemption. About 30 per cent of HEIs have exemption policies that state English foundation courses can be waived for students whose language proficiency reaches CEFR B2. It might look beneficial to students to take fewer courses at universities; however, these students miss the opportunities to retain and develop their English proficiency.

Although many universities offer both compulsory and elective course to their students (i.e. English for communication courses and ESPs) and set universal benchmarks for all students, best practices among those universities are with the ones providing both types of courses and allowing their students to freely choose two or more courses as their elective courses for their students' professional/career achievements. The ESP courses in some universities are designed broadly for students in science and technology and in social sciences. Some universities work closely in collaboration with different faculties to design the English for Specific Purposes courses. Some universities encourage their students to achieve excellence by taking special courses or working in projects that will require a high level of English usage.

5.3 The pedagogy and assessment 'as' and 'for' learning

From the survey and focus group seminars, we found that most universities said an active-learning approach and formative assessment were used in their teaching and learning. From the analysis of the 317 course descriptions collected from all HEIs that contributed to the analysis and synthesis of the problems and best practices in pedagogy, we found three main groups of the keywords that signify the approach: (1) the approach focusing on the system and structure of the language at various levels from the grammar to the discourse, i.e. the knowledge about the language; (2) the approach focusing on language and communication; and (3) the approach focusing on the practice or the use of language.

It has not been possible to identify how English is taught in each classroom of each HEI and how assessment is used, and it is doubtful that the assessment *for/as* learning is included in the classrooms. The focus group interviews suggest that the assessment is mainly *of* learning, i.e. to measure students' proficiency. Diagnostic tests are a necessary tool for teachers to enhance students' progress. However, one potential obstacle is teachers' mindsets affecting the assessment practices. According to Dhammarungruang & Wudthayagorn (2021), there are instances where teachers resist adjusting their teaching and assessment to align with policy and practice guidelines and needs. The study argues that the majority of teachers in Thai HEIs view the policy through how it would fit with their contexts. It might be challenging, therefore, to expect assessment 'as' and 'for' learning, especially formative assessment, without building a central consensus.



To some extent, top-down approaches may be a catalyst for a wider embracing of assessment types that develop students' awareness of their own learning progress, as well as bringing it to the teachers' methodologies to tailor their support to meet the individual learning needs of students.

Conclusions

The state of EaS in HEIs in Thailand illustrated in this report may be very similar to other non-English-speaking countries. The top-down approach plays a crucial role in the development of English proficiency of undergraduate students. The factors involved in instruction could be the instructors, students, materials and infrastructure, as well as the ecosystem that supports learning, i.e. society at large, which includes people and digital resources (Luksaneeyanawin, 2007).

As a non-English-speaking country, authentic materials should be considered as language learning opportunities for Thai students. Teachers may also need to put more emphasis on meta-linguistic knowledge, i.e. encourage and develop undergraduate students' willingness, confidence and ability to think about and discuss the English language itself, such as the different ways they can use English and peer-to-peer work on tackling errors and problems.

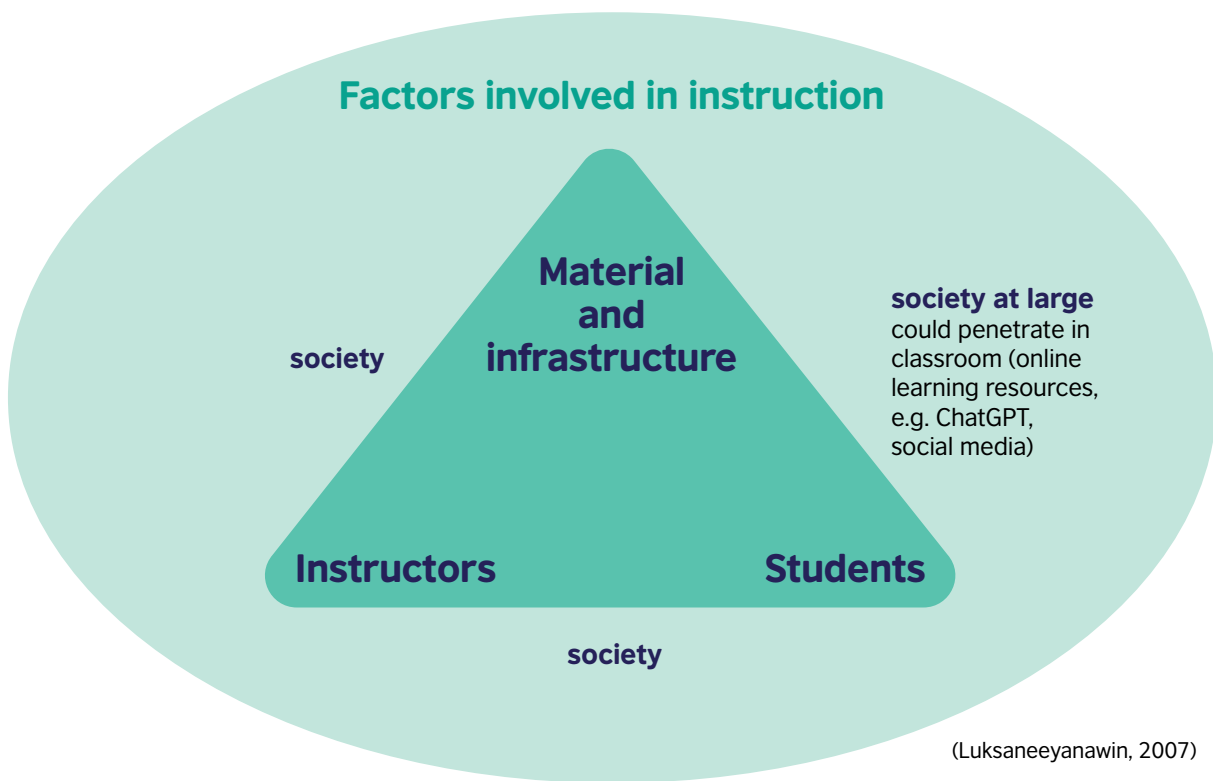


Figure 6: Factors involved in instruction

In trying to follow the MHESI broad policy in English language education, the interactions among three systems (CMS – Content Management System, LMS – Learning Management System and AMS – Assessment Management System) should be considered with the management of technology (Figure 6). The CMS relates to curriculum design in the allocation of content and activities in a specific period of time, in terms of courses and credits during the four years in HEIs. The LMS involves course design, extra-curricular activities and assisted ICT. The AMS is how to use assessment as, for and of learning to reach the goal of the policy. The findings

reveal a wide gap among high- and low-income students. The online resources are essential for all students to be able to access; unfortunately, digital divide occurs. The practicality and accessibility of online language learning resources and channels (e.g. Line application, Zoom) should gain more attention. In addition, central learning units such as libraries could offer more opportunities for self-access language learning, allowing students to immerse themselves in the English language based on their interests. The LMS (learning management system) should be developed to promote language learning, i.e. activity-based learning.

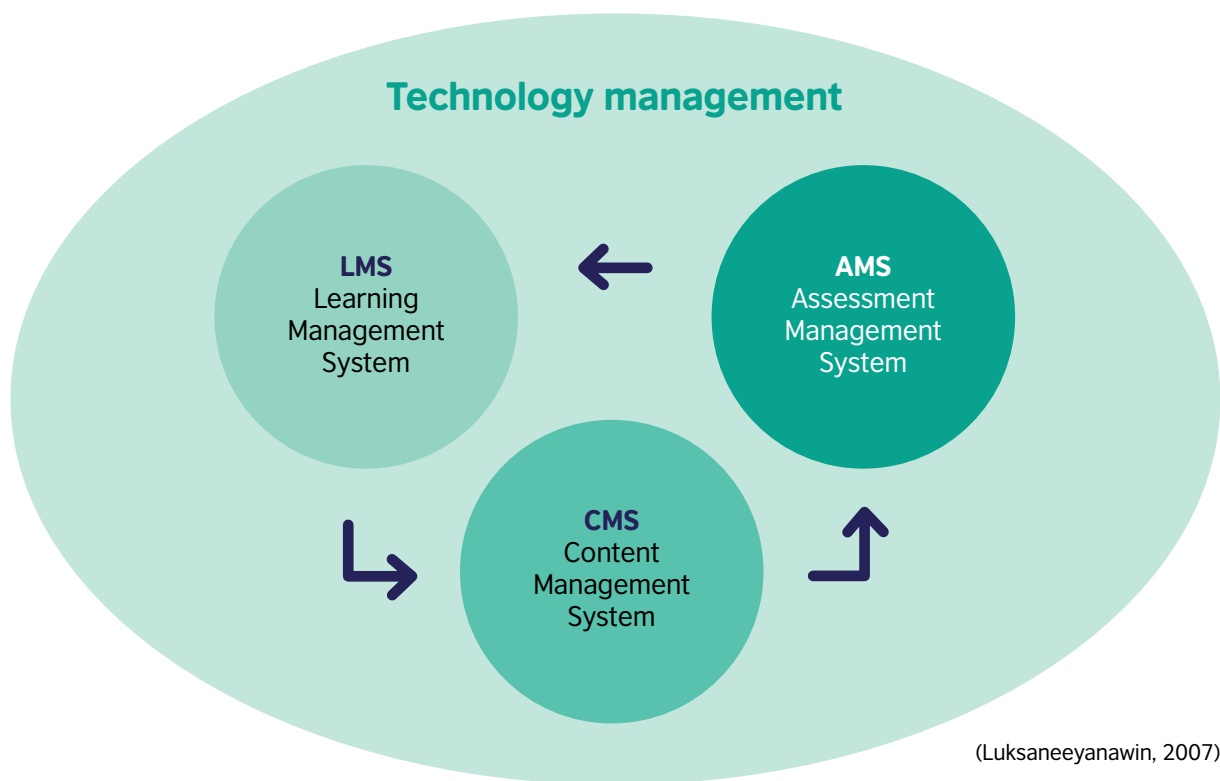


Figure 7: Contexts of EaS

Recommendations for stakeholders

To elevate English language learning in HEIs, the stakeholders may need to take actions on the following issues.

1. Policy on English language development in higher education

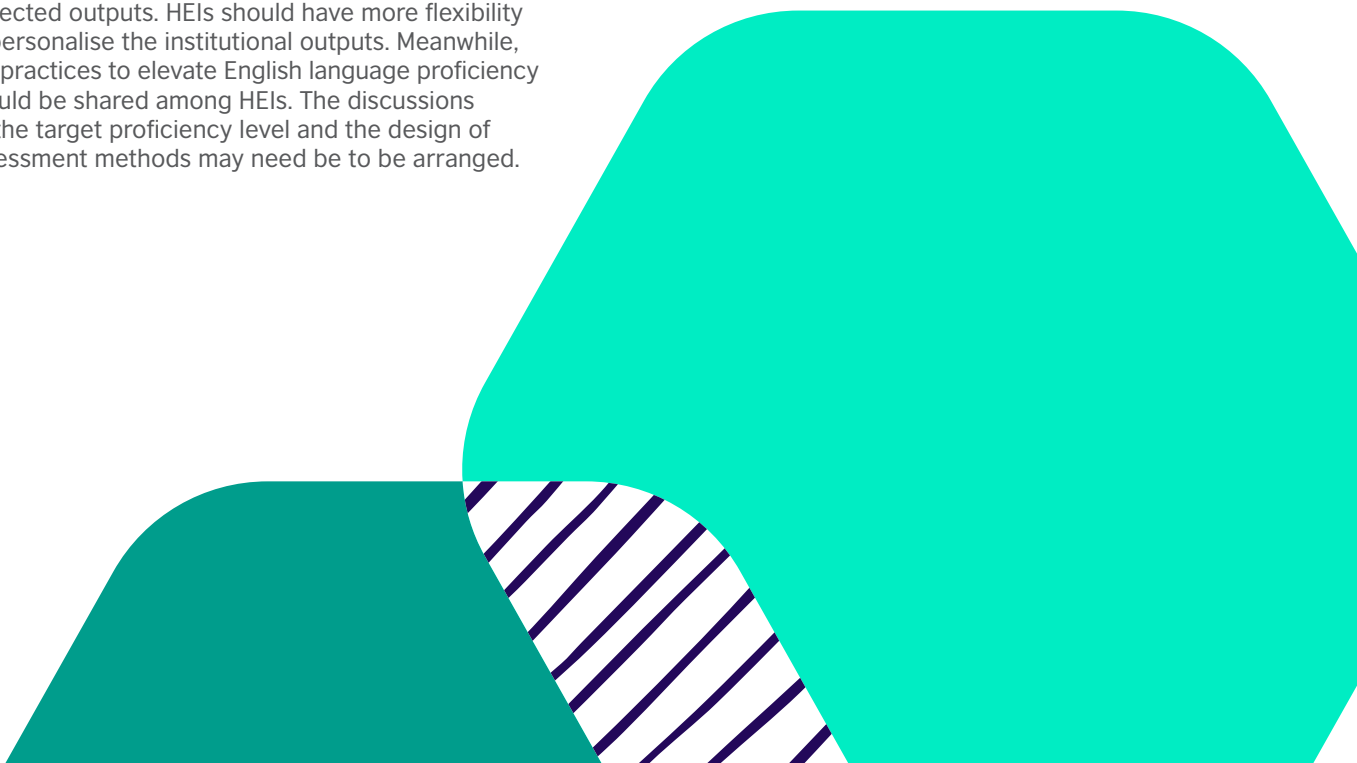
The practical development goals based on the needs of graduate users and stakeholders need to be explored and set. It may not be possible to apply 'one-size-fits-all' across HEIs in Thailand. It has to be highlighted that the HEIs have a wide range of input students (English proficiency and financial background). The learning outcomes should be aligned with the contexts of particular HEIs. More importantly, the HEIs should be engaged in planning the English language learning management of the country. The precise action plans should be developed by all stakeholders.

2. Learning management goals

The recent announcement on English language proficiency development (CHES, 2024) could be a challenging start for all HEIs. When the national outcome is rigid and ideal, it may not lead to the expected outputs. HEIs should have more flexibility to personalise the institutional outputs. Meanwhile, the practices to elevate English language proficiency should be shared among HEIs. The discussions on the target proficiency level and the design of assessment methods may need to be arranged.

3. Assessment and evaluation

Policymakers need to be aware of the impact of assessment. At institutional level, the policy affects teaching and learning styles. If the target level of English proficiency is beyond reach, a deficit model may result in activities solely geared towards passing the exam rather than developing a true confidence and ability to communicate in real situations. Where there is a national assessment plan, learners' development must be at the forefront. HEIs should commit to meaningful and true assessment for learning to appropriate technology management (Figure 7), and teachers need to embrace contingent approaches through formative assessment and formative action to ensure undergraduate students of all prior abilities can expect to progress in their English proficiency during their time at university.



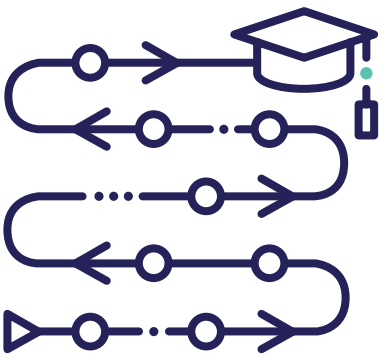

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Appendix

The learning pathway below is based on insights drawn from the findings of the project. It is recommended that assessments be designed to support and enhance language learning. Students should be assessed at various stages: before entering the programme, during the programme,

and prior to graduation, each for different purposes. Additionally, the pathway highlights the importance of English language exposure, as well as the support needed from universities and teachers to facilitate student success.

<p>Learning pathway</p>  <p>Pre-enter the programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic test • To learn the level of English proficiency (students, university) 	<p>In the programme</p> <p>Number of hours of exposure to English, learning to communicate in English and learning content in English (> 200 hours per year)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to use English for communication and/or for specific purposes • Learn content in English • Use English in doing activities, exposure to English-speaking atmosphere • Diagnostic test • Track the development (Every year?) +Special support for border line group • Extra training/English courses <p>Opportunity to study abroad/exchange programme</p>
<p>Support for universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium among stakeholders (MHESI, universities and organisations) assessment as/for/of learning + national/shared test • Case studies from other countries for administrators • Action plans to elevate the English language learning (national level and at the institutional level) 	<p>Before graduation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficiency test to certify the level of English  <p>Support for teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training in ELT/CLIL/EMI • Facilities/online resources

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doi.org/10.57884/HMXT-QT49

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