

# GUIDELINES FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT OF RAJAPARK INSTITUTE'S STUDENTS IN PREPARATION FOR ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine the problems and obstacles in learning English and propose guidelines for English proficiency development of Rajapark Institute's students in preparation for ASEAN Economic Community. The samples were 360 students studying in Rajapark Institute. Most of the samples considered that their English skills were at the weak level (34.2%), medium level (31.9%), good level (18.9%), and very weak level (10.3%). A majority of the samples (84.1%) importantly revealed that their English skills were inadequate for effective communication; whereas, 18.6% considered that their English skills were sufficient for communication at work. Statistically, the students positively expressed their attitudes towards learning English at a preferable level (mean=4.29). Students realized that English is one of the most essential languages for communication that can be useful and beneficial to continue the study in a higher education. The first three problems of students in learning English included the differences of English knowledge level in class (mean = 3.74), students were afraid of being laughed at when they say or answer wrong (mean = 3.74), and students have insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary (mean = 3.74). Noticeably, the students did not recognize that lack of grammar knowledge was not the primary concern (mean 3.59). The guidelines proposed by the students included the institute should provide media channel to broadcast news or entertainment via TV or radio before attending class in the morning or lunch break. Importantly, for more comfortable in learning English, the classrooms are required to audio-visual aids in classes to be used to practice their listening skills as well as increase the communication channels for students to become aware of the importance of English. Finally, students proposed that the institute should provide language proficiency tests to enable students to realize their language proficiency and increase cooperation networks from international organizations.

**Keywords:** ASEAN community; English proficiency development; Problems of English learning.

## Introduction

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) charter article 34 clearly states that "The working language of ASEAN shall be English". In addition to national languages and dialects, all populations and citizens in ASEAN must communicate in English. This is implemented not only in government officers for international affairs, meeting, and communicating but also in all private sectors for a business that must use English as a mutual medium for communication (Suwannatrat, Thansubutr & Kanchananiyot, 2018). As a civilized world which spread throughout the world, there is no any barrier and limitless in geography and culture like in the past decades. It is important that people can go across countries for seeking additional knowledge, business, and work or even searching for a better opportunity for life. For this reason, English plays a very essential role as a medium of communication for ASEAN citizens in the next century (Ornwimon, 2012). Furthermore, Pandamrongsathit, (2013) supports that English is not considered one of the most essential languages that are used to communicate but also, widely taught in schools around the world. It is an international language. In the current context, the influence of globalization and modern technology have made the world narrower, and countries focus on teaching and learning English for various purposes, especially for business.

Furthermore, as a universal language, it is not only used as an official language in many countries but also for communication, commerce, cultural exchanges, education, travel, and business. It is undeniable that English plays very important roles in various purposes especially in hotel business which requires a good command of English skills to welcome customers. Personnel with good English skills seem to gain more opportunities at work.

In the past decades, Thailand put efforts to encourage the use of English in schools according to the policy in 1995, for students to learn English as a foreign language when they entered elementary school, later announced the use of the English language curriculum in 1996 including the promotion to open international schools and English program schools in accordance with the Ministry of Education curriculum that encouraged the use of English as the medium in classroom instruction. However, the policy did not meet preferable result especially in the provincial areas (Suwannatrat, et.al, 2018). It is noticed that countries that give priority to language learning are likely to have more opportunities and advantages than other countries. It is also accepted that sufficient language education is more likely to be employed in foreign companies and given more support from the international organization than people with no language skills (Tejasenasakul, 2012). That is, many companies require personnel or job applicants who can communicate in English fluently and intellectually.

For this reason, English is used more globally than any other language. Teaching and learning English in countries using English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) has improved continuously in order that learners can communicate in appropriate situations as well as their first language like a natural learning. That is to say that there is no need to put emphasis on grammar or language structures at the beginning but focusing on participating and engaging in language learning environments. This practice helps learners improve language skills naturally.

In addition to basic language skills which doesn't mean speakers can only be able to interact, ultimate goals for communicative skills is the ability to use the language to exchange information, narrate situations, give an opinion, and analyze specific topics meaningfully and intellectually. Therefore, after the ASEAN Community becomes a unity, Thailand has encouraged all levels of educational institutions to improve their English proficiency. The ministry of education promotes the English language to be instructed at kindergarten level by proficient teachers. Additionally, the office of the higher education commission requires all higher education institutions to measure students' English proficiency before graduation as well as academic personnel. This is because the educational institution plays an important role in promoting the country's potentiality in terms of communicative skills. Therefore, there are many researchers conducting research to improve learning English in EFL classes, including explore problems and obstacles of English learning, examine the need analysis for English use in various contexts (Nation, 1997, 2001; Ado, 2017; Lewis, 1993; Schmitt, 2010). What's more, to deal with those difficulties and obstacles in acquiring the English knowledge, the scholars and researchers are interested in English knowledge development in EFL contexts. It is a challenge that they attempt to find out the guideline facilitating the English learning (Gardner, 1982, 1985; Ellis, 2008) because the learners' perspective on language learning is one of the factors that play a very dominant role in a process of learning a foreign language.

To achieve aims, understanding the contexts which require English for communication should be taken into consideration in order to be beneficial for English language learning. The university in Thailand has adapted to the development of English language skills and the use of language to communicate in various context, which will be useful for students who are going to graduate. For this reason, the research team is interested in studying the problems and barriers to English language teaching and the need to improve their English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. Although prior studies have explored problems and obstacles of English learning, examined the need for English use in various contexts in practice to my knowledge little research has been conducted. The purposes of this research are to survey the students' attitudes towards English including problems and obstacles in learning and propose guidelines for English Proficiency

Development of Rajapark Institute's Students in Preparation for ASEAN Economic Community in order to prepare the students in competition with other countries in ASEAN.

## Methodology

This research on "Guidelines for English Proficiency Development of Rajapark Institute's Students in Preparation for ASEAN Economic Community" used mixed methods research by utilizing questionnaires to collect quantitative data along with conducting an interview to gain qualitative data consisting of open-ended information reducing the weakness of quantitative data. The populations were the 3326 students studying under the central administration of Rajapark Institute (source: Academic Administration, Rajapark Institute, as reported to the Office of Higher Education Commission, 2017). The sample size was 360 samples, as calculated by using the population formula of YAMANE (1973 cited in Akakul, 2000). The researcher applied stratified random sampling and proportion random sampling in order to calculate the reasonable proportion to be appropriate representatives of the population as follows:

In the study, the researcher administered a set of questionnaires to collect data by applying convenience sampling; 360 questionnaires were answered and returned by the respondents who were opening in the day of data gathering, representing 100%.

Research instruments used in this research were questionnaires and interviewing forms. The preparation processes were as follows: 1) studying the concept of the necessity of English including problems and obstacles in learning English as a foreign language, 2) defining the purposes, the contents of questionnaire, 3) creating a set of questionnaires which included checking the completeness of the questions, reviewing language uses, and clarifying directions in questionnaires, 4) questionnaires and interviewing form were reviewed, revised, and improved by experts; finally 5) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability of the questionnaires was .90.

Data used in the research were collected by administering a set of questionnaires, concerning the English proficiency development of the students in preparation for ASEAN economic community, consisted of three sections. The information in the questionnaire included: section 1) demographic information of respondents 2) a survey on attitudes towards English learning; section 3) students' problems in English learning, and section 4) guidelines proposed by the students for the development of English proficiency of Rajapark Institute's students. The questionnaires distributed were provided in five rating scale. The meaning for each scale was as follows; 4.51 – 5.00 = Strongly agree, 3.51 – 4.50 = Agree, 2.51 – 3.50 = Moderate, 1.51 – 2.50 = Less agree, 1.00 – 1.50 = Least agree. Finally, the researchers interviewed representatives, not prefer to be named and recorded, of the students who volunteered to participate in order to obtain the data and information in depth to support the data collected from the questionnaires.

**Table 1: Sample proportions**

He descriptive statistics basically employed to analyze quantitative data were percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

## Results

The results of the study on "Guidelines for English Proficiency Development of Rajapark Institute's Students in Preparation for ASEAN Economic Community" showed that 360 samples answering questionnaires were 197 males (54.7 %), 157 females (43.6%). A majority of the samples

Faculty	No. of student s	Sample size	Perce nt
Business Administ ration.	2716	295	81.9
Engineering	323	33	9.2
Public Administ ration.	153	18	5.0
Liberal Arts	134	14	3.9
Total	3326	360	100.0

are working in private companies (38.1%), 12.5 % works on their own business, 12.2% works in the government organization, 11.7% in the state enterprise, and other 25.6%. In addition, 39.7% of the samples were exposed to English 1-5 years, 18.6% were 6-10 years, 18.1% were more than 15 years, and 3.1% were 11-15 years respectively. There were 20.6% that were exposed to English less than 1 year. Most of the samples considered that their English skills were at the weak level (34.2%), the medium level was 31.9%, the good level was 18.9%, and very weak was 10.3%. Only 4.7% defined their English skills at an excellent level.

Noticeably, a great number of the samples (84.1%) importantly revealed that their English skills were inadequate for effective communication in speaking and listening skills; whereas, 18.6% considered that their English skills were sufficient for communication at work.

**Table 2: Students' attitudes towards English Learning**

	Students' attitudes towards English	M.	S.D.
1	English is the language of the world communication in the world.	4.49	0.76
2	English is the language that characterizes as educated people.	3.98	0.99
3	English knowledge allows you to gain recognition and respect from the society.	3.99	0.94
4	English language training gives you the opportunity to participate in international activities in the region.	4.27	0.84
5	English knowledge of English gives you the opportunity to seek knowledge from various sources.	4.26	0.85
6	English proficiency is a benefit to higher education.	4.46	0.78
7	English knowledge is useful for traveling abroad.	4.45	0.84
8	English knowledge helps to communicate with foreigners effectively.	4.45	0.77
9	English knowledge increases your chances of competition.	4.30	0.82
10	English knowledge helps to read newspapers, magazines and English documents.	4.31	0.85
11	English knowledge helps to listen to the radio and watch movies in English.	4.26	0.82

<b>Students' attitudes towards English</b>		<b>M.</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
12	English knowledge can be used as a tool for further knowledge.	4.26	0.86
13	English is an important and necessary language.	4.33	0.80
14	English knowledge is one of the key factors for job applications in organizations.	4.26	0.83
15	Knowledge of English makes you progress and succeed in life.	4.19	0.86
<b>Total Summary</b>		<b>4.29</b>	<b>0.84</b>

As shown in table 2, totally, the students showed positive attitudes towards learning English at the mean 4.29, agreeing that English is essential. They agree that English is the language of the world communication (mean = 4.49), that can be useful for higher education (mean = 4.46), and English knowledge is useful for traveling abroad, and helps them communicate with foreigners effectively (4.45); while the lowest mean (3.98) English is the language that characterizes as educated people.

**Table 3: Students' Problems in Learning English**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Students' Problems in Learning English:</b>	<b>M.</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
1	Experience and expertise of the instructor	3.78	0.91
2	Qualifications of the instructor.	3.93	0.86
3	The ability of the instruction to explain the lesson to students.	3.75	0.95
4	Teaching experience and expertise in teaching English of instructors.	3.77	1.00
5	The ability to explain the lesson to the learner.	3.81	0.94
6	Instructor's ability to sequence lessons from simplicity to difficulty.	3.79	0.92
7	Management of teaching activities to suit learners' ability.	3.77	0.95
8	Instructional activities to Enhance English Proficiency of Students.	3.78	0.96
9	The ability of the instructor to link the lesson content to the current situation.	3.74	0.94

Students' Problems in Learning English: <b>M.</b>		<b>S.D.</b>
<b>Teacher</b>		
10	Instructor's ability to motivate students.	3.71      0.92
	<b>Total Summary</b>	3.78      0.91

As shown in table 3, instructor's involvement in introducing other sources of knowledge was considered to be the students' problem on learning English (mean = 4.23), qualification of the instructor (mean = 3.93), and the ability to explain the lesson to the learner (mean = 3.81); whereas, instructor's ability to motivate students seemed not to be the students' problems (mean = 3.71).

**Table 4: Students' problems in learning English**

	<b>Students' problems in learning English</b>	<b>M.</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
1	Students have insufficient knowledge of English grammar.	3.59	1.01
2	Students have insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary.	3.74	0.96
3	Students lacked listening and speaking skills for communication.	3.72	1.02
4	Students lacked the ability to read short English essays.	3.64	0.99
5	Students lack the ability to write short English paragraphs.	3.68	1.04
6	Students do not seek opportunities to practice their English skills outside the classroom.	3.71	0.94
7	Levels of English knowledge of the students in the class are different.	3.74	0.94
8	Students are afraid that their friends will laugh when they say or answer wrong.	3.74	0.99
9	There are many students in the class; the practice of language skills is not thorough.	3.63	0.98
10	Levels of English knowledge of the students in the class are different.	3.84	0.90
	<b>Total Summary</b>	3.70	0.98

As can be seen from Table 4, levels of English knowledge of the students in the class are different was considered the problems of their learning English (mean = 3.84), this may come from the years of English that they were exposed to. Other three problems of students in learning English were the levels of English knowledge of the students in the class are different (mean = 3.74), students are afraid that their friends will laugh when they say or answer wrong (mean = 3.74), and students have insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary (mean = 3.74). Noticeably, the students did not recognize that lack of grammar knowledge was not the primary concern (mean 3.59). However, the result totally revealed that they agreed that one of the problems of learning English was from their own problems as well (3.70).

**Table 5: The methods of teaching English required by the students**

	<b>Preferable Teaching Methodologies</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
1	Provide lecture and classroom practice in English.	4.03	0.76
2	Use the English language in-class instruction.	3.93	0.79
3	Provide teaching and learning activities in both Thai and English.	4.07	0.85
4	the lessons were taught by Thai instructors.	4.06	0.88
5	Provide an opportunity for self-study and group discussion in English.	3.99	0.88
6	Provide opportunities for students to practice listening skills from the media.	4.00	0.83
7	Provide opportunities for students to practice listening skills in the laboratory outside of class.	3.95	0.87
8	Provide students with the opportunity to practice in pairs and group activities using English for communication.	3.89	0.93
9	Provide opportunities for students to practice listening - speaking English skills with foreigners outside of class.	3.88	1.00
10	Provide opportunities for students to receive advice from instructors on individual errors and mistake.	4.01	0.90
<b>Total Summary</b>		<b>3.97</b>	<b>0.87</b>

The statistic results in the table 5 showed that the first five methods of teaching that the students preferred were both Thai and English should be used in class activities (mean = 4.07), the lessons were taught by Thai instructors (mean = 4.06), and the institute provides lecture and classroom practice in English (mean = 4.03), provide opportunities for students to receive advice (mean = 4.01), and practice listening skills from the media.(mean = 4.00) respectively.

**Table 6: Guideline for learning and teaching English proposed by students**

	Guideline for ELT	M.	S.D.
1	The faculty should add English courses in every curriculum in order to provide opportunities for students to practice their listening and speaking skills (in addition to English course in GE).	4.13	0.78
2	Institute should continuously provide English language training in every semester to increase English skills and knowledge and skills.	4.04	0.79
3	Institute should support faculties to have English projects to increase their knowledge and skills.	4.01	0.92
4	Institute should increase the communication channels for students to become aware of the importance of English.	4.11	0.77
5	Institute should provide English language training programs in the laboratory for self-study.	4.08	0.91
6	Institute should provide language proficiency tests to enable students to realize their language proficiency.	4.09	0.87
7	Institute should increase cooperation networks from international organizations.	4.09	0.90
8	Institute should increase cooperation networks with foreign universities in student exchange programs.	4.06	0.90
9	The institute to broadcast English news on TV or radio in the morning before attending classes	4.69	6.04
10	Institute should install with audio-visual aids in classes to be used to practice their listening skill	4.14	0.88
Total Summary		4.07	0.87

The results in table 6 showed the most important information in this study on “Guidelines for English Proficiency Development of Rajapark Institute’s Students in Preparation for ASEAN Economic Community”.

The guidelines proposed by the students statistically showed that they considered English is one of the most important languages. The first five aspects which were considered to be important: students’ opinion proposed to be useful guidelines for English skill development surprisingly showed that they required the institute to broadcast English news on TV or radio in the morning before attending classes (mean = 4.69); the institute should install with audio visual aids in classes to be used to practice their listening skills (mean = 4.14; the faculty should add English courses in every curriculum in order to provide opportunities for students to practice their listening and speaking skills (in addition to English course in GE) (mean = 4.13), the institute should increase the communication channels for students to become aware of the importance of English (mean = 4.11); finally, they proposed that the Institute should provide language proficiency tests to enable students to realize of their language proficiency and increase cooperation networks from international organizations (mean = 4.09)

## Conclusion and Discussion

1. Demographic information of the sample: samples answering questionnaires were 197 males (54.7 %), 157 females (43.6%). Most of them are working in private companies (38.1%), 12.5 % works on their own business, 12.2% works in the government organization, 11.7% in the state enterprise, and other 25.6%. In addition, 39.7% of the samples were exposed to English 1-5 years, 18.6% were 6-10 years, 18.1% were more than 15 years, and 3.1% were 11-15 years respectively. There were 20.6% that were exposed to English less than 1 year. Most of the samples considered that their English skills were at the weak level (34.2%), medium level (31.9%), good level (18.9%), and very weak was (10.3%). Only 4.7% defined their English skills at an excellent level. Furthermore, a majority of the samples (84.1%) importantly revealed that their English skills were inadequate for effective communication in speaking and listening skills; whereas, 18.6% considered that their English skills were sufficient for communication at work.

2. Students’ attitudes towards English leaning: statistically, the students positively expressed their attitudes towards learning English at a level of strongly agree. Students realized that English is one of the most essential languages for world communication that can be useful and beneficial in various contexts. In an interview, they also support that English knowledge can be useful for them to continue the study in a higher education and for traveling abroad. In addition, it also helps them communicate with foreigners effectively such as giving directions or tourist information.

Furthermore, the students concern that English knowledge is not only one of the key factors for job applications in organizations but also increases your chances of competition (Tejasenasakul, 2012; Ritthirat & Chiramanee, 2014)

3. Problems of students in learning English: students concern that the instructor is one the most influent factors affecting their learning because the instructor plays a major role in teaching. The instructors should not only teach them but also facilitate and encourage students in learning. What’s more, the qualification of the instructors who have the ability to explain the lesson to the students to make the lesson easier and enjoyable is rare. Therefore, qualifications of the instructor should be taken into consideration because not all instructors who know English can teach English.

In addition to problems relevant to the instructors, students themselves expressed that the problems and obstacles in learning English also come from their own problems. As can be seen from table 4, the results showed that levels of English knowledge of the students in the class are different. Some of the students who are weak at English may not follow the lessons while other students understand the lesson. This may be one of the factors influencing English learning of the students. This may come from the years of English that they were exposed to. Other three problems of students in learning English were that students were afraid of being laughed at when they say or answer wrong; they have insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary. Noticeably, the students did not recognize that

lack of grammar knowledge was not the primary concern. However, the result totally revealed that they agreed that one of the problems of learning English was from their own problems as well.

Problems in teaching English in Rajapark Institutes mostly occur when the students think that the lack of various methods of teaching that can encourage students to learn English. This perspective is in accordance with the need for the integration of various techniques that can help students understand the lessons more easier by creating motivations and interests of learning English for students, applying interesting technologies for learning and teaching such as media, games (Muangkaew, 2013; Nikolov, 1999;).

4. Guides for English Proficiency Development of Rajapark Institute's Students in Preparation for ASEAN Economic Community: surprisingly, the primary guideline proposed by the students is that the institute should provide media channel to broadcast news or entertainment via TV or radio before attending class in the morning or lunch break. This may be because the surroundings or atmosphere in the institute is too quiet, which doesn't motivate students to be an active learner.

Importantly, for more comfortable in learning English, the classrooms are required to audio-visual aids in classes to be used to practice their listening skills as well as the faculty should add English courses in every curriculum in order to provide opportunities for students to practice their listening and speaking skills (in addition to English course in GE). In addition, the institute should increase the communication channels for students to become aware of the importance of English. Finally, students proposed that the institute should provide language proficiency tests to enable students to realize their language proficiency and increase cooperation networks from international organizations.

Concerning the guidelines for English proficiency development, the institution should create the learning environment in order to motivate the students to realize the importance of learning English (Muangkaew, 2013) such as making English guideposts, English club, or English learning laboratory. In addition, the institute should formulate a clear policy in learning English by adding English courses in the curriculum which provides opportunities for students to get familiar with English and practice English skills (Nation, 2001; Ado, 2017; Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, The English camps/clubs taught by the native speaker should be organized in order to provide opportunities for students to become involved and aware of the importance of English in preparation for ASEAN economic economy.

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