



# DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS





LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The development and enhancement of language and communication skills amongst Thailand's learners and knowledge workers is a key need and challenge stimulating debate, concern and interest from students and their parents to educators and the corporate world.

The teaching and learning of English and increasingly Chinese has been given priority in Thailand's drive towards a learning society. The enhancement and transformation of language teaching for the global knowledge economy is matched by the importance of Thai language development and recognition of the diverse of ethnic languages across Thailand.

The development of effective language skills is a challenge which requires accompanying efforts in curriculum reform, access to ICT and other teaching resources; ongoing professional support; and the development of new standards for teaching and assessment.

Increasingly schools and education institutions across Thailand are demonstrating practical and innovative ways forward as Thailand aims to embrace and equip itself for the age of globalisation whilst fostering a strong sense of its own identity and values.



Quick Facts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There are 289 English Programme (EP) schools in Thailand - Of 115 are private schools, 85% of which are in Bangkok and its surrounding provinces. Whilst there are 158 public schools, of which only 20% are in Bangkok and its surrounding provinces. There are a further 6 EP's at University demonstration schools.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There are currently over 700 higher education programmes undertaken by over 30,000 Thai students fully taught and examined in English Language at 34 local Thai public and private universities. This excludes foreign partnership degree programmes.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There are more than 31,000 teachers of English and other foreign languages in Thai schools. In addition, there are over 1,900 foreign teachers of languages and mainstream subjects throughout schools in Thailand.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There are over 100 International schools providing kindergarten, primary and secondary instruction in English under different international systems. The sector predominantly serves Thai nationals and has doubled between 2000-2006 .</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ All primary school students study English for at least one hour a week while secondary students study at least three hours a week.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ The average teaching time for English teachers in secondary schools is approximately 19 hours per week.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There are 180 English Resource and Instruction Centres (ERICs) in schools nationwide - one for every educational service area in Thailand.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ 175 Model English Teaching Schools have been set up in all education service areas.</li></ul>



STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

During 2006, the Ministry of Education has focused its efforts on the reform of teaching and learning. The overall strategy has six components, one of which is the improvement of language teaching and learning with an emphasis on Thai, English and Chinese languages together with communication skills for social and business situations.

Key policy challenges faced by the Ministry of Education include: raising the level of communication and language skills across all age groups; the overall style and approach of teaching and the move towards student-centred and communicative ways of teaching and learning; the curriculum, resources and standards behind the teaching of Thai, English, Chinese and other languages; teacher capacity and professional development; and the environment for language learning.

Thailand's experience and history in English teaching have prompted a specific five year plan instigated in 2006. This has made the reform of English language teaching and learning a central theme across all levels of education. Key areas to be tackled focus on: Teaching and learning; Teachers; Students; and Communicative English environment. The activities inside of this plan also form the foundations for Chinese language learning.



Priorities and specific activities for English language development, 2006-2010

Reforming teaching and learning towards communicative approaches.	Establishing equity in access to English teaching and learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Create understanding in the changing teaching pedagogies and learning styles.</li><li>◆ Demonstrate and disseminate best practice.</li><li>◆ Raise public awareness.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Extend English Programmes (EP) and Mini EP's in all Education Services Areas.</li><li>◆ Provide teaching materials and standard English textbooks.</li><li>◆ Create Model English Teaching Schools in all districts.</li><li>◆ Expand Scholarship / exchange programmes.</li></ul>
Developing English teaching and learning resources to support communicative teaching approaches.	Creating an English learning atmosphere in classrooms and increasing opportunities for learning outside the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Develop the potential of Thai English teachers and provide support to native English teachers.</li><li>◆ Develop new curriculum and teaching resources.</li><li>◆ Strengthen ERIC centres.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Create activities that support learning outside of the classroom.</li><li>◆ Establish ICT enabled systems and environments.</li><li>◆ Develop Free TV programming.</li></ul>



## FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CURRICULUM

For decades Thailand has placed great importance on the learning of English language inside of the national curriculum. The increased focus in recent years on learner experiences and outcomes has led to a review of the overall teaching and learning approach.

The aim has been to reform teaching and learning to enable learners to communicate and work effectively in English, Chinese and other languages. A communicative approach has been the main focus complementing the overall student centred learning philosophy.

The 2001 Basic Education Curriculum established that the core curriculum for foreign language learning would be English and required for all levels of study until graduation. Other foreign languages e.g. French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Pali are taught at the discretion of educational institutions who can determine the learning process and management systems as appropriate.

Chinese has taken on an increasing role inside of the curriculum as well as arousing much interest and enthusiasm amongst students, parents and communities. This is reflected by the growing level of provision and investment by schools, districts and the Ministry of Education.



## FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CURRICULUM

**Chinese Language Learning at Rattanakosinsompot Borworniwet Salaya School** in Nakornprathom Province was selected to establish a Chinese Teaching Centre to support their students and their Education Service Area with support from the Ministry of Education and the Chinese Government.

The school runs an English-Chinese programme for students in Mattayom 4 and 5. There are about 87 students currently studying Chinese 4 hours a week from native Chinese teachers. The school also provides one hour basic Chinese courses per week, non-graded, for students from Mattayom 1 to 3. Chinese conversation courses are provided for people from the community as well as for language teachers from other schools in the community.

**English Language Learning at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT).** KMUTT is a leading innovator in providing English language introducing new methods of teaching utilising the benefits of ICT for the communicative learning.

Nearly all English courses at KMUTT are project and task-based with students communicating via email and through online bulletin boards enabling students to communicate with native speakers.

In addition to benefiting English specialist students, an intensive 10 week English course is provided to all undergraduates in their first two weeks at the University. A Self Access Learning Centre is available to support learning with online and offline resources.



## BILINGUALISM IN BASIC EDUCATION

Bilingualism has been a key policy tool to raise English language standards. Bilingual schools were introduced in early 2002 and involve the study of mainstream Thai curriculum in English with the ultimate goal of improving English proficiency of Thai students.

There are two types of bilingual schools: English Programme (EP) and Mini-English Programme (MEP) schools.

In the MEP, English is used as a medium of instruction for 8-14 periods per week. All subjects can be taught in English according to a schools' readiness, except for Thai language and Social Studies i.e. parts of the curriculum that are related to Thai tradition, culture and law.

In the EP, English instruction is differentiated by stage of study as follows:

- ♦ At pre-primary level, there is a maximum usage of English in 50% of the total learning periods per week;
- ♦ At primary level, English is used in selected subjects including English Language, Mathematics, Science and Physical Education;
- ♦ At secondary level, English is used in all subjects, except for Thai Language and Social Studies.



**Yothinburana School** in Bangkok was the first pilot EP School in Thailand. Since 1998, the school has provided an EP for students from Mattayom 1 to 6. Yothinburana School is a Model EP School. In 2004, 97% of students passed the entrance examination to study at Thai universities whilst all EP students (100%) passed the entrance examination to study at Thai universities in 2005. In 2006, there were 434 EP students in lower secondary and 350 students in upper secondary classes.

## ENHANCING RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The Ministry of Education has improved the language learning resources available to schools and libraries through greater investment and utilisation of ICT. The latter has begun to support new ways of learning and enable students to personalise their language learning process. The Ministry also provides teaching handbooks to train teachers on how to organise activities in Self Access Centres which are seen an important tool in language learning for formal, non-formal and informal education.

One of the key initiatives of the past that has provided the basis for English language improvements has been the English Resource and Instruction Centres (ERICS). ERICS were set up between 1984-1992 under a programme to improve the quality of English teaching and learning English in secondary schools. There are now 180 ERICS around Thailand: one for every educational service area in the country plus eight in Bangkok.

ERICS are housed in secondary schools and act as training and self access resource centres. They have proved to be an invaluable resource for the introduction and dissemination of new language concepts and resources for language teachers in the local community.

**Saipanya Rangsit School** ([www.spr.ac.th](http://www.spr.ac.th)) is a Lab School and one of the 10 Model ERIC centres in Thailand in 2006. It supports the teaching of English for secondary and primary schools in Prathumthanee Education Area 2. The School works closely with local institutes and communities to support the professional development of teachers. The Centre disseminates tools to assess student progress in English and specifically facilitate communicative English language learning for students.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The ongoing support and development of English teachers has been a key part of the overall approach to teaching and learning reform. The focus has been on improving professional development and networking between language teachers along with the introduction of new teaching methods and approaches. The Ministry's initiatives have been complemented by a number of local and international agencies creating communities of practice amongst teachers nationwide to disseminate and share new teaching and learning techniques and resources through both online and face-to-face activities.



**Thai TESOL** (<http://www.thaitesol.org>) is staffed by volunteers and has been working on behalf of Thailand's English language teachers for 21 years with the aim of promoting ELT practice and professionalism throughout Thailand. The association undertakes a number of activities for its 700 plus members including conferences, seminars, scholarships and travel grants, newsletters and projects. In 2002, Thai TESOL won the prestigious World Aware Award for contributions to English teaching in Thailand.

**Online Communities: Access English** (<http://access.britishcouncil.or.th>) Access English is a British Council Thailand coordinated virtual community for Thai teachers of English across all Thai education sectors. It was launched in 2001 as a mailing group designed to develop a community of English language teachers in Thailand. To date, there is a thriving community of 1,500 teachers sharing best practice and resources across schools and universities in Thailand.

## LIFELONG LEARNING

Formal and non-formal education investments have been coupled with policies to extend access and resources for language learning to support lifelong learning in the community. Extending language learning amongst adults has also been a key part of wider governmental activities to promote tourism and Thailand as an investment destination for foreign companies.

### Basic English Courses for Drivers

The Bangkok-Noi District has focused on improving the English skills of taxi and tuk-tuk drivers enabling them to communicate with tourists through basic conversational English. More than 1,000 drivers, 90% of whom are taxi drivers and the remainder tuk-tuk drivers have been trained. There are 15-20 drivers, in each cohort receiving 30 hours of tuition. The project is supported by the Thailand Taxi Association and the rotary club.





## LANGUAGE AND DIVERSITY IN THAILAND

The fostering of Thailand's culture and diversity through the promotion of Thai language and local dialects is an important component of the overall programme of language and communications development.

This approach has been particularly important in the Southern Border Provinces where students use Jawi (local Malay) in their daily communication. Around 85 percent of the people in the three southern border provinces are Muslims whilst the rest are Buddhists - 62% speak Jawi followed by 20% who speak a mix of Thai with Jawi, and 17% who speak Thai as their first language.

The current Ministry of Education policy in the region is for students in secondary schools to learn two languages with Jawi coupled with integrated and systematic links with Thai language. The Ministry plans to promote bilingual instruction (Thai-Jawi) in primary schools by providing appropriate curricula and instructional media. There are currently 12 pilot schools identified for the Bilingual Project.



For non-formal education and lifelong learning purposes, Jawi courses are provided for civil servants, soldiers, policemen and the general public. Other foreign languages, notably English and Chinese, are also taught under the scheme. As well as supporting the development of a learning culture amongst the public and officials the programme strives for effective communication, appreciation and understanding of national and regional languages as an important basis for harmony and conflict resolution in these communities.

## LANGUAGE AND DIVERSITY IN THAILAND

### **Bilingualism in the Southern Border Provinces**

Yaring School in Patani Province is one of the 12 Bilingual Pilot schools. This school is a primary school with 1,220 students. The project began in the 2006 academic year with new pre-primary students.

The project aims to strengthen the effective learning of Thai language through greater use and recognition of the Jawi language. Students are allowed to communicate freely in Jawi with their teachers and friends. This is complemented by the teaching of Thai language through songs and tales. The project has helped young students to adjust more effectively to a new learning environment. Students are happier and more willing to learn in a bilingual environment reflected by lower drop-out rates amongst new students.





## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVES ONLINE



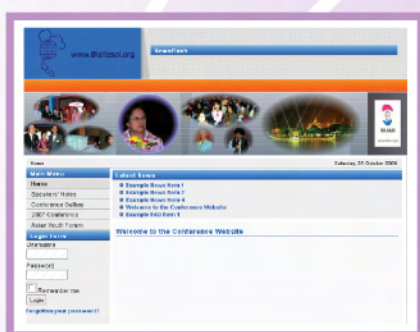
### Professional Development for Teachers of English.

<http://access.britishcouncil.or.th>



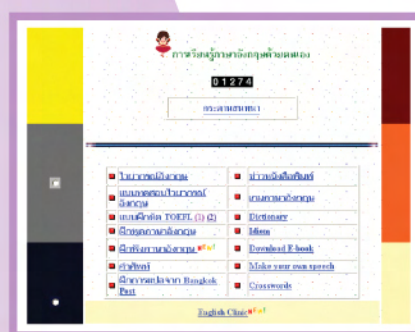
### English Learning Resources in Higher Education:

<http://www.eldc.go.th>



### Professional Development for Teachers of English.

<http://www.thaitesol.org>



### Lifelong Learning - English online learning website for the general public to learn English online.

<http://www.bic-englishlearning.com>

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### In-depth information

Further in-depth detail on the education system can be found inside the excellent "Education in Thailand 2005/2006" booklet produced by the Office of the Education Council available to download from [www.oec.go.th](http://www.oec.go.th).

### Contact Details

This publication is one of six publications focusing on Thailand's learning society aspirations. Specific information on the work of the Ministry across the different sectors of education is available at:

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