

# Mapping Local Students' Proficiency to CEFR Standard and the Investigation on Coursework's Impacts from Students' Perspectives

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## Abstract

This research article explores level of English language proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Thailand. The intact group represents the Thai students from a public university located in central Thailand. The objectives of this study are to assess the level of English proficiency of students and to investigate of courses enrolled by students play a crucial role in mastering their English language proficiency from students' perspective. Instruments used are the redesigned mock TOEIC test administered to 129 students majoring in English. Apart from the test, the semi-structure interviews were conducted with 8 participants from four different years of study. For data analysis, descriptive statistics is employed to explain findings on students' proficiency in English language in comparison to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This study is deemed to be a showcase of local students at a public university in Thailand where the institution is limited to conduct admission test besides the placement test, which extremely influence to learning and teaching of English language. The limitations and suggestions are presented at the latter part for future researcher and further improvement.

**Keywords:** Language Proficiency, CEFR, TOEIC, Investigation

## การเปรียบเทียบผลการทดสอบวัดความสามารถของผู้เรียนในท้องถิ่นกับมาตรฐาน CEFR และการศึกษาผลกระทบของรายวิชาจากมุมมองของผู้เรียน

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้ศึกษาระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในประเทศไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างของ การวิจัยคือผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษชาวไทยจากมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐแห่งหนึ่งที่ตั้งอยู่ในภาคกลางของประเทศไทย การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อประเมินระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน และเพื่อตรวจสอบว่ารายวิชาที่ผู้เรียนศึกษามีผลต่อการเรียนรู้ซึ่งสหท้อนผ่านคะแนนสอบมาตรฐานภาษาอังกฤษจากมุมมองของผู้เรียน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ประกอบด้วยแบบทดสอบเมมเบอร์เจิง (Mock TOEIC) โดยจัดการสอบแก่ผู้เรียนจำนวน 129 คน จำนวนนี้ มีการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกับผู้เข้าร่วม 8 คนซึ่งเป็นผู้เรียนจากสี่ชั้นปีการศึกษา การวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณประกอบด้วยการใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนาในการอธิบายผลการสอบวัดระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน การศึกษานี้เป็นผลการแสดงระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนในมหาวิทยาลัยท้องถิ่นของรัฐในประเทศไทยที่สถาบันมีข้อจำกัดในการรับนักศึกษาใหม่เข้าเรียนด้วยวิธีการทดสอบ ซึ่งนับว่าส่งผลและมีอิทธิพลอย่างมากต่อการจัดการเรียนรู้และการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ นอกจากนี้ในบทความยังได้นำเสนอข้อจำกัดและข้อเสนอแนะสำหรับผู้วิจัยในอนาคตเพื่อการพัฒนาปรับปรุงอีกด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** ความสามารถทางภาษา, ชีอีเอฟอาร์, トイิก, การศึกษาผลกระทบ

## Introduction

English education in many countries especially in the country which use English as a foreign language is an indicator in growth and development in education, economy, society, and culture. Thailand is placed upon the outer group of English language users aside native speakers circle, followed by the inner group of English language users who use English as a second official language (ESL). This underpins the significance role of English language as an international language entailing education industry in the direction to which growth and development is undertaken.

Regardless of the limited opportunities for the university to recruit new students, it is also the institute's responsibility to ensure that their potential graduates are highly qualified in both academic and non-academic skills. In the context of local university recruitment of intake students, this involves conducting interviews and utilising portfolio admissions. Various programmes aim to attract students by either creating their own admission tests or using standardised tests to assess the suitability of prospective students. The primary objective of the university is to fulfill its missions, which include ensuring that non-English major students reach a B1 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level and English major students attain a B2 CEFR level. This applies to students pursuing both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees. It is important to note that determining the appropriate level of language proficiency for students at the start of the recruitment process may be challenging for the university. However, the university remains accountable for helping students achieve the desired Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level. In practice, students are required to enroll in various courses throughout their academic journey in accordance with the programme's requirements.

Thai EFL learners recognise the significance of mastering their English language abilities by actively incorporating it into their everyday routines. Nevertheless, students face constraints and challenges that hinder their exposure to the English language. The practical application of English in real-life situations is often confined to the classroom or restricted to formal educational settings only.

## Context of regional universities in Thailand.

Due to the fact that there are several state universities in Thailand serving educational services in different groups of students, the intake students' admission is varied upon circumstances, competitive environment among the prospective students. The highest tier encompasses universities that excel in providing academic services and possess remarkable intellectual attributes. The second tier comprises regional universities, where

the competitive environment is relatively less intense. Lastly, the third tier consists of private universities, which are not highly competitive in intake admission. Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies between the admission system's nature, student experiences, and the objectives set by the Ministry of Higher Education, Sciences, and Innovation (MHESI) for these universities. Consequently, this circumstance causes the mixture of student's ability in certain programme that is students in the same major or programme of study in the regional, second tier of the university consist of the mixed ability students in classroom.

Educators must give due consideration to the advancements in the recently introduced Asian University Assurance Quality Assurance (AUNQA) system. This is crucial as it ensures that the programmes designed are in line with the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, including specific groups of individuals and organisations such as current students, alumni, faculty members, entrepreneurs. The components of this innovative quality assurance system incorporate a fundamental basis that necessitates evaluation with respect to the actual needs of the stakeholders. These needs are subsequently harmonised with Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) to establish programme learning outcomes (PLO), year learning outcomes (YLO), and course learning outcomes (CLO). Therefore, this present study is designed to provide insightful information on the following research objectives:

1. To assess level of English proficiency of students at a state local university.
2. To investigate if coursework plays a crucial role in mastering an English standardised test score from students' perspective.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review section of this study provides an overview of important subjects related to English language education and international standard language assessment. It aims to identify key elements and offer a comprehensive body of knowledge to support the analysis conducted in this research. The subsequent section examines the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), standardised tests, specifically the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), roles of the test, and the Asian Universities Network Quality Assurance (AUNQA).

### **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**

English as a lingua franca (ELF) denotes the instruction, acquisition, and utilisation of English as a shared medium of interaction or contact language among individuals

with diverse mother tongues. Kachru (1985, pp.11-36) introduced his model, which encompassed the concept of World Englishes thereby paving the way for fresh perspectives on the global dissemination of the English language. Kachru's model, as outlined in his work from 1985, delineated the distribution of English by categorising it into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle.

English language in countries where it is taught as a foreign language (EFL) plays a crucial role as a facilitator for individuals to access various opportunities. It serves as a gateway for users to delve into advancements in their respective professions, engage in the exchange of cultural diversity, and pursue education, among other benefits.

### **Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)**

The present study revolves around Common European Framework of Reference (CFFR) since the principle-based curriculum of the academic programme prescribe the level of proficiency among Thai EFL students. CEFR is remarked international language assessment framework in which teaching and learning of foreign languages worldwide. Council of Europe (n.d., para.1) interprets ranges of learners' differences and classifies three classes of language users upon the proficiency namely basic users, independent users, and proficient users. Brief descriptions are discussed in the following section.

First, basic users include users of level A1 and A2. Basic users possess the ability to comprehend and utilise common everyday phrases and basic expressions that cater to fulfilling specific needs. Basic users can engage in simple interactions, provided that the other person speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to help. They can also engage in simple communication, as long as the other individual speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to provide assistance.

Next, independent users include users of level B1 and B2. Independent users possess the ability to comprehend the key points of clear and standard input on familiar matters that are commonly encountered in various settings such as work, school, and leisure activities. Moreover, they can produce clear and detailed written texts on a wide range of subjects. They are also able to express their viewpoints on a current issue, providing the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

The last is proficient users including users of level C1 and C2. Proficient users possess the ability to comprehend a wide range of challenging and lengthy texts, while also being able to grasp implicit meanings. Furthermore, they exhibit a high level of language proficiency, allowing them to use language in a flexible and effective manner for various social, academic, and professional purposes. Additionally, they can produce

clear, well-structured, and detailed texts on complex subjects, demonstrating a controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.

All in all, CEFR is a universal framework applicable to language proficiency. The Common European Framework of Reference is globally recognised as a standard criterion for foreign language learning and teaching leading to the widespread adoption and greater transformation in language education (Supanya, 2022, pp.33-48). Educational institutions worldwide apply to place students upon levels of proficiency to be performed as language placement test to investigate level of proficiency as well as actively impacts pedagogical practices in educational policy and educational system at both basic education and higher education in Thailand since the year 2014 (Wudthayagorn, 2018, pp.123-140).

### **Standardised Test**

Standardised tests are a form of evaluation that is created and administered consistently for all test-takers. The main goal of these assessments is to measure the skills and knowledge of examinees on an equal basis, thus minimising potential biases that could arise from differences in testing conditions or subjective evaluation. Standardised assessments play a pivotal role in assisting educators and educational institutions in assessing progress and catering to the diverse needs of students (Fulcher, 2010, p.4). Standardised tests are structured and administered uniformly to all individuals taking the test. The main objective of these assessments is to assess the understanding and skills of the test-takers on an equal footing, thereby eradicating any potential biases that may arise from varying test conditions or subjective grading.

Standardised tests are of importance across different sectors, with a notable emphasis on the realm of education. These assessments are primarily employed to evaluate students' academic achievements and the overall efficiency of the educational system. Through offering a uniform gauge of competencies and expertise, standardised tests aid educators in pinpointing areas that require enhancement and adjusting their instructional strategies to better cater to the educational requirements of their students.

In addition, standardised testing plays a crucial role as an assessment tool for educational policymakers and administrators to assess the effectiveness of schools, districts, and the overall educational systems. The information derived from these assessments can provide valuable insights for making informed decisions related to curriculum enhancement, allocation of resources, and implementation of educational reforms.

Standardised assessments such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and the Test of English

for International Communication (TOEIC) are commonly used worldwide. These tests cater to various needs and contexts, with IELTS and TOEFL being popular choices for academic purposes, while TOEIC is favored for assessing professional and career-related language skills.

### **Test of English for International Communication**

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a standardised English language testing which has been popular and well known as an important indicator of EFL proficiency in using English language in an international and communicative context, especially daily life, business communication. The TOEIC Test structure combines seven sections (ETS, online) including listening comprehension and reading comprehension. The first section, listening comprehension, allows forty-five minutes for test execution with the number of one hundred test items in total. There are four parts including Part 1 - Photographs (6 items); Part 2 - Question-Response (25 items); Part 3 - Conversations (39 items); Part 4 - Talks (30 items). The other section is reading comprehension which includes three parts giving test takers seventy-five minutes. This section again covers one hundred test items in total dividing into Part 5 - Incomplete Sentences (30 items); Part 6 - Text Completion (16 items); Part 7 - Reading comprehension (54 items) (ETS, 2024).

### **Roles of the test**

Brown, &Abeywickrama (2018, p.3) defined that testing is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in each domain. Tests can be categorised according to the types of information they reflect. There are five test types including achievement tests: a crucial component test in assessing educational achievement and have a significant impact on the allocation of school funding. Second, a diagnostic assessment is an evaluative tool that aids educators and students in identifying language-related difficulties they may encounter. Third, placement test refers to a test which many higher education institutions utilise to evaluate students' preparedness for college and to place them in appropriate courses. Fourth, proficiency tests are standardised tests that individuals complete to measure their proficiency in comprehending, speaking, and formulating coherent and understandable ideas using the English language. And fifth, aptitude assessment is specifically crafted to evaluate an individual's potential or forecast their capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills with appropriate education and guidance. The primary objective of an aptitude test is to anticipate one's ability to acquire and develop new proficiencies. It serves as a measure of an individual's competence in performing a particular task or activity.

The role of TOEIC test result in this context is therefore as proficiency test and diagnostic test (Hughes, 2002) providing information that will help place students at the level. In this research, the utilisation of TOEIC as a proficiency test holds significant role as it serves the purpose of assessing the English language skills of students majoring in English and determining their proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). From an educational standpoint, attaining a commendable score on the TOEIC examination, which is designed to evaluate English communication abilities in an international context, opens up enhanced opportunities for higher education and career advancement. Moreover, in professional settings, TOEIC enjoys widespread recognition among diverse organisations and companies worldwide, making a TOEIC certificate an undeniable asset for future career prospects.

In addition, the test functions as a diagnostic test as the test is planned to be hosted on an annual basis calling for all students in the programme ranging from freshmen year to senior year. The study findings will provide insight into the deficiencies in students' knowledge related to TOEIC and CEFR scales. As educators and programme committees, the researchers hope that the results will serve as a foundation for curriculum development in the future. Students have the opportunity to track their development by taking the annual test.

Nowadays, with an increasingly globalised economy and work culture, English has become the global lingua franca for the corporate world. Recruiters for in demand positions are attracted to profiles that show a high ability of English language. Candidates are evaluated and appraised based on not only their academic qualifications but also their proficiency in various practical skills such as work experience, computer literacy, and foreign language proficiency, including English language proficiency. It will be a real opportunity to boost candidates' curricular vitae.

Merit of the test is thus examined within the educational setting and has become obligatory for language assessors in formal education, higher education, and informal education, such as tutoring schools, to explore inventive methods to enhance the learning experience and competence of their students. In aligning the TOEIC score with the international CEFR standard, ETS has provided a mapping of these two criteria, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1** TOEIC score conversion table (ETS, online)

TOEIC Minimum Score	Listening Minimum Score	Reading minimum Score	CEFR Levels	
945 pts	490	455	Proficient user - Effective	C1
			Operational Proficiency	
785 pts	400	385	Independent user - Vantage	B2
550 pts	275	275	Independent user - Threshold	B1
225 pts	110	115	Basic user - Waystage	A2
120 pts	60	60	Basic user - Breakthrough	A1

### Asian Universities Network Quality Assurance (AUNQA)

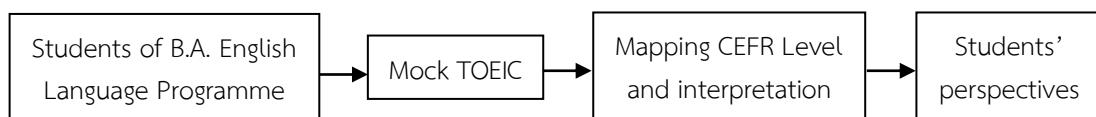
Quality assurance (QA) is a significant arena in higher education management. Eaton (2021, p.181) stated that QA, the internal and external examination of the effectiveness and performance of colleges and universities, has always played a crucial role in sustaining and improving the best of what higher education has done in the past to build the future. The consensus among countries in southeast Asian countries were agreed on 1998 leading the launch of ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUNQA) at programme level version 1.0 in 2006 and the latest version, 4.0, in the year 2020. ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUNQA) is a system for accrediting curriculum quality and standards. The main objectives of AUNQA include: to develop the curriculum to be of the same standard among ASEAN countries; to be a standard for exchanging learners between ASEAN member countries; to aim to increase the quality of learning management for students, teachers, and personnel in higher education institution; to create cooperation with educational quality agencies in other regions to provide a framework Higher education quality standards are consistent; to enhance expertise in quality assurance of ASEAN countries (ASEAN University Network, 2020).

The main components of this quality assurance process involve various stakeholders such as employers, alumni, current students, programme administrators, faculty members, and potential employers. These individuals play a crucial role in shaping the expected outcomes of the future graduates. In Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the focus is on the results of learning, which involve clearly identifying and articulating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners are expected to gain as desired learning

outcomes. OBE requires aligning and prioritising educational elements strategically to ensure that every student succeeds by the conclusion of their educational experience. This includes first determining essential learning goals, then organising the syllabus, instructional techniques, and assessment procedures to secure the achievement of these goals (ASEAN University Network, 2020, pp. 6-11).

### Conceptual Framework

The current study can be visualised within the research framework outlined below, commencing with the recruitment of participants who are students majoring in English Language. Subsequently, they are encouraged to undertake a Mock TOEIC examination. The outcomes of the test are subsequently aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level, utilising a conversion table. Following this, a total of eight participants were selectively chosen to partake in a comprehensive interview (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

### Research Methodology

This research employs mixed-method research design undertaken to investigate quantitative and qualitative enquiries to the research questions. The below sections discuss the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis respectively.

### Research design

The current study explores language proficiency level of English language majored students in the 2023 academic year and aims to emphasise the use of TOEIC test result as a main indicator reflecting their competence in English language. Mixed method research is undertaken to elicit both quantitative data: students' proficiency in English language. This variable is demonstrated through the result of Mock TOEIC test to be later elaborated in the instrumentation section. Another research enquiry is qualitative data: students' perspectives towards the impact of coursework they have enrolled in relation to the result of their proficiency level.

## Participants

In response to the research questions, the English major students at a regional public university located in the central province of Thailand constitute the population of this research. The participants who participated in the current investigation were chosen based on the purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria for participants comprised of students who are English major students and non-native English speakers, leading to a total of 129 participants out of 137 active students in the present academic year.

Recruiting participants from 4 years of study: freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior, summed the number of 129 (table 2). The TOEIC, being an internationally recognised standardised test, is not restricted to a specific demographic of test takers. This allows participants to evaluate their English language proficiency and identify areas of weakness, thereby providing clear guidance on areas for improvement within the programme.

**Table 2** Participants' profile of Mock-TOEIC Test

Participants	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total
Male	9	4	13	10	36
Female	32	23	14	24	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>129</b>

## Instrumentation

The instrumentation section outlines two main instruments used in gaining data from the target participants namely quantitative research instrument and qualitative research instrument. There are Mock TOEIC test, CEFR conversion table, and in-depth interview form respectively.

## Mock TOEIC

The test specification of this mock TOEIC has been designed following the structure of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) (ETS, Online). There are two sections including one hundred items of listening comprehension test and one hundred items of reading comprehension test. In total, there are two hundred questions items (table 3). Due to copyright reasons, we find it critical that the trademarked label of TOEIC is unable to be claimed in this research. Thus, the specification of the test is adopted in searching authentic materials in the publishing market to retain validity and reliability in assessing students' proficiency level in CEFR scale instead of adopting existing standardised tests currently available in the market.

Moreover, the current investigation utilises the Mock TOEIC test due to the lack of validation in terms of test validity and reliability for the in-house English Proficiency Test. Consequently, it becomes challenging to assert that the said in-house English Proficiency Test possesses the same level of quality as other in-house tests like K-StEP of King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB) (Wimolkasem et al, 2020, pp. 86-102) or Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP) (Wudthayagorn, 2018, pp. 163-180), which are meticulously aligned with the CEFR standard scale of language proficiency.

The compilation of question items includes sampling question items and comparing them to the authentic TOEIC test items published in commercial books and internet. This practice was employed to verify if the design and adaptation of the said standardised test is that of qualified as a proficiency test.

Furthermore, the researchers place significant emphasis on content validity, in addition to enhancing the validity of test administration (Hughes, 2002, p.215). As part of the item-object congruence (IOC), experts in the respective fields of study were invited to thoroughly evaluate question items, test format, and test contents (table 3). These improvements aim at retaining quality of the test validity and reliability.

**Table 3** Test Format

	TOEIC (ETS, Online)	Mock-TOEIC
Listening	Photographs: 6 items	Photographs: 6 items
	Questions - Response: 25 items	Questions - Response: 25 items
	Conversations: 39 items	Conversations: 39 items
	Talks: 30 items	Talks: 30 items
Reading	Incomplete Sentences: 30 items	Incomplete Sentences: 30 items
	Text Completion: 16 items	Text Completion: 16 items
	Single Passages: 29 items	Single Passages: 29 items
	Multiple Passages: 25 items	Multiple Passages: 25 items

Concerning language assessment, the item object congruence (IOC) is conducted aiming to present validity and reliability attributes of the test administration. Three experts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics are invited to validate set of Mock TOEIC Test. All experts are English language teachers at both public and private universities in Thailand. They possess extensive experience in teaching English preparation courses for TOEIC tests and have personally taken the test at least once. These experts' qualifications and firsthand experiences contribute

to the credibility and reliability of the compiled Mock-TOEIC test. In addition, criteria used in validating the instrument include four consecutive aspects: 1. Number of items are similar to authentic TOEIC test; 2. Test format is similar to authentic TOEIC test; 3. Difficulty level of the sampling question is appropriate; and 4. Test administration is similar to authentic TOEIC test (i.e. seat, venue, examinees, quality of test paper) (Table 4).

**Table 4** Score of Item-Object Congruence Index of Mock TOEIC

Item	Expert			Total	IOC	Interpretation
1. Total number of test items are like authentic TOEIC test.	+1	+1	+1	3	1	Accepted
2. Test format is like authentic TOEIC test.	+1	+1	+1	3	1	Accepted
3. Difficulty level of the sampling questions is appropriate.	+1	0	+1	2	0.66	Accepted
4. Test administration is like authentic TOEIC test.	+1	+1	0	2	0.66	Accepted

The result from IOC shows that the redesigned Mock TOEIC is appropriate for using as a proficiency test undertaking with the target students to find out their English language proficiency test in CEFR scale. Based on the recommendations, the researchers adjusted the test administration in the extent of test venue, and technical aspect including audio quality. No matter if the result was already higher than 0.5, the researcher decided to improve the administration practice by improving the test instructions, layout print seat, venue, examinees, quality of test paper.

### Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interview has been widely used in social sciences (Mashuri, &et. al, 2022, pp.22-29). Semi-depth interviews can significantly gain much in-depth information in nature. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to develop in-depth accounts of experiences and perceptions with individuals. Its quality is deemed flexible in practice, iterative, and so on. Cresswell (2013, p.163) introduces steps to developing interviewing as qualitative research instruments. Steps applied to conduct the semi-structure interview session include:

1. Decide on the research questions
2. Identify the interviewees
3. Determine the type of interview
4. Use adequate recording procedures and
5. Design and use an interview protocol or interview guide
6. Refine the interview questions
7. Determine place for conducting the interviews
8. Obtain consent
9. Stay to the question during the interview.

After the test result was announced, eight students were invited to join the in-depth interview session. Two students from each year of study including the low performer (A1) and high performer (B1). The researchers aim at gaining in-depth data concerning students both low performing students (A1), which are major proportion according to the result, and high performing students (B1). Considering the male student in his junior year who is classified as a B2 test taker, it is noteworthy that he is subsequently excluded due to his exceptional performance and rarity.

One-hundred twenty-nine students including freshmen to seniors students. It is believed that students' voice from 4-year of study would well reflect their perspectives on the coursework they have enrolled in before attending the test (table 9) Their reflections might reflect differences and are believed to be influenced by their experiences.

The participants of the second data collection session were acknowledged for their own performance prior to the session started. The enquiries to this part seek to understand if courseworks prescribed in the degree programme plays a role in advancing students proficiency toward the task.

### **Data collection**

As previously mentioned, the participants were recruited and invited individually to take part in the test. Additionally, they were motivated by being informed about the test's structure and the advantages they could obtain as test takers, such as the opportunity to experience a standardised test without any cost. This also allowed them to assess their own strengths and weaknesses for personal improvement.

Quantitative data to be collected include interval data of Mock-TOEIC test result, average score (M), and standard deviation (S.D.). To obtain quantitative data, the redesigned Mock TOEIC was administered during the last week of October 2023. This period was after the end of the first semester (June-September) and before the

start of second semester (November-February). The test venue is an air-conditioned classroom equipped with audio speakers. To guarantee the accuracy of the listening comprehension test, a supporting technician was invited to regulate the sound levels within the examination room. The classroom offers a total of fifty folding chairs with tablet arms, ensuring that test takers can sit comfortably and perform their test tasks efficiently in a formal environment reminiscent of the authentic TOEIC test ambience.

Qualitative data gained consists of transcripts obtained from the semi-structured interview session. This interview session took place in the initial week of November 2023, marking the commencement of the second semester of the academic year 2023. The participants were requested to allocate a time frame of twenty to thirty minutes for the semi-structured interview. All the interview sessions were organised in the students' lounge, commonly known as the common room. This venue is equipped with air conditioning, and the participants were encouraged to unwind and feel comfortable to actively contribute to the interview sessions. At the commencement of the session, the participants were informed of their right to leave the interview, which was implemented to safeguard their rights and uphold ethical considerations. They were informed that their constructive comments will be greatly contributed to and only academic purposes that is programme revisions and design of extra-curricular activities. Further details are as well additionally described in the ethical considerations section.

### **Data analysis**

The analysis phase is conducted once the tests have been administered. Descriptive statistics are utilised to interpret the results of the tests. The application of quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics allows for the presentation of Mock-TOEIC test results in relation to the CEFR scale, with the mean (M) and standard deviation (S.D.) being employed. The content analysis was also employed with the transcript gained from the semi-structured interview sessions. The findings of this analysis are presented in a table format, and further elaborated upon in the subsequent sections.

### **Results**

This section portrays findings to the research questions we posed that seek to understand level of proficiency according to CEFR scale. Results presented in table with number of test takers in differences of gender, and level of CEFR in conversion from the Mock-TOEIC test result. The following section presents the results in table of freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior, and overall, respectively.

Freshmen have a tendency of proficiency into level A2 as the biggest proportion of 60.97% (25 students) followed by A1 of 36.58% (15 students) followed by B1 2.43% (1 student) as seen in table 5.

**Table 5** Mock TOEIC Test result of Freshmen Students

Student	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Male (n=9)	1	7	1	0	384.44	176.06
Female (n=32)	14	18	0	0	253.13	101.53
Total (n=41)	15	25	1	0	281.95	131.21
Percent	36.58%	60.97%	2.43%	0%		

Sophomore year have tendency of proficiency into level A2 as the biggest proportion of 59.25% (16 students) followed by A1 of 26.62% (8 students) followed by B1 11.11% (3 students) as seen in table 6.

**Table 6** Mock TOEIC Test result of Sophomore Students

Student	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Male (n=4)	0	3	1	0	380.00	171.80
Female (n=23)	8	13	2	0	297.83	145.06
Total (n=27)	8	16	3	0	310.00	148.65
Percent	29.62%	59.25%	11.11%	0%		

Junior year have tendency of proficiency into level A2 as the biggest proportion of 70.37% (19 students) followed by A1 of 14.81% (4 students) follow by B1 11.11% (3 students) and B2 3.70% (1 students) as seen in table 7.

**Table 7** Mock TOEIC Test result of Junior Students

Student	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Male (n=13)	2	7	3	1	437.31	207.08
Female (n=14)	2	12	0	0	300.00	95.43
Total (n=27)	4	19	3	1	366.11	170.98

**Table 7** Mock TOEIC Test result of Junior Students (Continue)

Student	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Percent	14.81%	70.37%	11.11%	3.70%		

Senior year have tendency of proficiency into level A2 as the biggest proportion of 70.58% (24 students) followed by A1 of 20.58% (7 students) and B1 8.82% (3 students) as seen in table 8.

**Table 8** Mock TOEIC Test result of Senior Students

Student	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Male (n=10)	2	6	2	0	357.00	143.65
Female (n=24)	5	18	1	0	309.79	103.00
Total (n=34)	7	24	3	0	323.68	116.18
Percent	20.58%	70.58%	8.82%	0%		

The below table presents aggregate numerical data of all students: freshman year to senior year (Table 9).

**Table 9:** Mock TOEIC Test result of All Students (Freshmen – Senior)

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	Mean	SD
Freshmen (n=41)	15	25	1	0	281.95	131.21
Sophomore (n=27)	8	16	3	0	310.00	148.65
Junior (n=27)	4	19	3	1	366.11	170.98
Senior (n=34)	7	24	3	0	323.68	116.18
Total (n=129)	34	85	10	1	320.44	142.17
Percent	26.15	65.38	7.69	0.77		

The above table presents the average TOEIC score of students in freshman year is 281.95 out of 990 (S.D. 131.21). The average TOEIC score of students in sophomore year is 310 out of 990 (S.D. 148.65). The average TOEIC score of students in junior

year is 366.11 out of 990 (S.D. 170.98). And the average TOEIC score of students in senior year is 323.68 out of 990 (S.D. 116.18).

### Students' Perceptions on the Test

The result of the Mock TOEIC was promptly declared after the administration of the test. The announcement was disseminated through the online platform of Google Spreadsheet, which is part of the Google Service for Education subscribed by the host university. Students were able to conveniently access the provided link and review their placement score. A total of eight students, consisting of two purposive participants from each year's group, were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The objective of these interviews was to further explore the qualitative aspects of the students' perspectives regarding the alignment of their English language placement test results with the international standard: CEFR, as well as their perceptions toward the coursework they had enrolled throughout the academic year. Participants' profiles are demonstrated in table 10.

**Table 10:** Participants' Profile of the semi-structured interview

Name	Gender	Year	Listening Score	Reading Score	Total	CEFR
Alpha	F	Freshman	145	50	195	A1
Bravo	M	Freshman	380	365	745	B1
Charlie	F	Sophomore	110	30	140	A1
Delta	F	Sophomore	430	310	740	B1
Echo	M	Junior	165	50	215	A1
Foxtrot	M	Junior	400	310	710	B1
Golf	F	Senior	115	65	180	A1
Hotel	F	Senior	400	265	665	B1

Prior to the interviews, each informant was asked to confirm if the list of coursework below was that of the enrolled in the previous semester. Lists of course titles were printed and presented to the students during the interview session. This was done as the students often struggle to remember the course titles. Instead, they tend to associate courses with the names of their instructors. The lists of major course titles are presented below.

Freshmen Year: 1. Listening and Speaking in English, 2. Reading Strategies, 3. English Structure in Context, 4. Introduction to Linguistics, 5. Interpretive Reading, 6. Inter-cultural Communication in English Speaking Countries.

Sophomore year: 1. English Writing Strategies, 2. English Phonetics, 3. Business English, 4. Introduction to Literature, 5. Public Speaking, 6. English Creative Writing, 7. English Semantics, 8. English for Local Community Studies, 9. English for Mass Media.

Junior year: 1. English Academic Reading, 2. Morphology and Syntax, 3. English Prose Selection, 4. Introduction to Translation, 5. English for Hotel Personnel, 6. Comparative study of English and Thai, 7. English poetry Selection, 8. English-Thai translation, 9. English for Tourism, 10. English for Airline Personnel

Senior year: 1. Children's Literature, 2. Thai-English Translation, 3. Thai Studies, 4. English for Tour Guides, 5. English for Secretary and Office Management, 6. Independent Study, 7. Language and Culture.

In summary, students enrolled coursework in each academic year are classified into different categories based on the requirements of the programme. These categories include receptive skills, productive skills, linguistics, and literature. The qualitative analysis focuses on these major courses, while general education courses (GE) are excluded from the analysis. This is because the objectives of GE courses do not align with the development of language proficiency.

Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with high performers and low performers were coded and analysed. The findings from these interviews provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of participants. Below are key observations regarding their impression on coursework.

### **Voices from the High Performers**

#### **Receptive Skills**

High performers expressed their impression toward those courses enhancing their receptive skills. They expressed that the courses play roles in enabling them to read and listen to authentic materials in English language effectively.

'I think those Listening and Speaking courses like Inter-cultural Communication, English Phonetics, Business English, Public Speaking, English Semantics have helped me enhance TOEIC listening skill because listening and speaking skills are important because they are the basis of verbal communication. Both speaking and listening skills are required for casual conversation and learning. These skills are also important in most career fields.' (Participant: Hotel, senior)

‘I’d like to advocate the following courses: Reading Strategies, English Structure in Context, Interpretive Reading, Introduction to Linguistics, English Writing Strategies, Introduction to Literature, English Creative Writing, English for Local community Studies, Mass Media English help me enhance reading skill. I believe I could read more effectively because of those courses.’ (Participant: Delta, sophomore)

### **Productive Skills**

Test takers are not assessed using genuine speaking and writing test tasks in TOEIC test. Nevertheless, they realised that their ability to produce language is indirectly evaluated through certain test format, for example the incomplete sentence in reading comprehension. The following impression toward productive skills courses expressed by the participants.

‘I endorse Translation course because I learned how to analyse English sentences. I had to correctly understand the sentence I read before translating into Thai.’ (Participant: Foxtrot, junior)

‘Literature courses gave me chances to read tons of reading material. At the same time, I could practice express my thoughts towards the reading lists and my interpretations by writing and expressing my opinion in classroom.’ (Participant: Delta, sophomore)

### **Voices from the Low Performers**

There are 34 students who are placed in the low performers level, with 15 of freshmen, 8 sophomores, 4 juniors, and 7 seniors. As the teachers and programme committees, these participants are of particular interest due to their inability to reach the expected level despite enrolling in courses during the previous academic semester and year. Furthermore, as a student majoring in English and soon to be a graduate, achieving an undesirable level of performance is unlikely to be advantageous in the future job market. The following are perspectives shared by participants who have been placed upon low performers (A1).

### **Recent Pandemic**

The recent COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2019 and has greater impacts on language learners’ experience in language classrooms worldwide. Similar to negative experiences contributed by participants in the study of Wicanpricha (2021, p.133), causes from weak internet connection, distraction from synchronous classroom, the lack of face-to-face interaction are main obstacles students experiences in their English

language classroom during the mentioned pandemic. The following are the responses provided by participants regarding the late pandemic.

‘I don’t think I had an effective listening class when I was in high school because I recalled internet connection made the delay to video and audio played by the teacher.’ (Participant: Charlie, sophomore)

‘I remembered myself enjoyed listening to audio in high school but when I studied listening by Zoom during the pandemic, I was very annoyed with technical problems.’ (Participant: Golf, senior)

‘When my teacher assigned breakout rooms on Zoom, we (students) were not really participating each other. Everyone was muted.’ (Participant: Echo, junior)

### **Testing Anxiety**

Learners’ anxiety is profound among the results as well as the primary assumption of the researchers as a teacher of the test takers. It was first assumed that the results would reflect the ability of students’ level of academic achievement as well. That is the higher GPA a student has, the more Mock TOEIC score they may gain.

Several female students, based on their academic profile, did not achieve satisfactory results compared to their peers and demonstrated a lower level of proficiency according to the CEFR. This situation has been observed by the researcher who revisited their scores and compared them to their academic grade point average (GPA). This underlines the findings which Kösters, &et al. (2024, p.76) found that female students elicit higher test anxiety than male students. Educators might be encouraged by this phenomenon to seek to understand learner behaviour when it comes to teaching students to achieve standardised test and preparations. Materials in classroom and teaching techniques might be major concerns as in Pan, &Innami (2017, pp. 1-27) who investigated the material instructed in class focused on the practice of test preparation and the four basic skills but did not engage in enough activities to help students to acquire skills such as oral communication that are often used at work.

### **Discussion, Conclusion, Limitation and Suggestion**

#### **Discussion**

Taking consideration into uplifting students’ proficiency as the ultimate objective of the present study, students were granted chances to annually attend standardised test without cost. The institution could at the same time monitor students’ progress in developing and mastering language skills throughout the years of attainment by hosting such validated and reliable testing events regulated in formal manner. By making

this an annual routine, it would help reduce students' anxiety and enhance test takers' experience in taking tests in formal environments. The test itself can perform its role as both proficiency test, placement test, and even diagnostic test to help educators improve flaw underneath the test results.

### **Spotlight to the Seniors**

According to the quantitative findings presented in prior section, we have seen remarkable elements of score elicited by the test result in the senior year result (table 8). Almost of the participants are at A2 level with 70.58 percent (n=24) followed by A1 level with 20.78 percent (n=7). That is around ninety percent of students in senior year are still basic users according to CEFR scale. Reflecting on the language exposure journey, this badge was admitted into the programme in the academic year 2020 (B.E. 2563), commencing in June 2020 amidst the initial wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to the shift to synchronous online learning for all classrooms that year. Students in this badge had returned to physical classrooms in 2022, adhering to state-mandated guidelines related to pandemic instruction. Based on this information, it becomes evident that all coursework students who were enrolled in their freshman and sophomore years pursued their studies exclusively through online mode during the academic year 2020-2021.

The same scenario is observed among the participants in junior year, with 70.37 percent (n=10) corresponding to the A2 level, and 14.81 percent (n=4) corresponding to the A1 level. The students in their junior year experienced the repercussions of state-imposed lockdowns due to the pandemic, which had an impact on their final year of high school (2020) and their initial year of university (2021). Nevertheless, they have resumed their studies on campus in the academic year 2022.

The impact of synchronous learning on students and educational systems during the pandemic is believed to have been significant. This effect may have been felt worldwide, particularly in tertiary education where learning management was greatly affected. The disruption in education necessitates careful consideration, and it is the duty of practitioners and educators to comprehend the situation and devise innovative solutions. This responsibility extends not only to the current pandemic but also to potential future scenarios.

### **Future Direction of the Curriculum**

The findings, both quantitative and qualitative, have brought into question the revision of the curriculum in light of the outcome-based education (OBE). As the

programme committee, we have consistently expressed apprehension regarding the programme's outcomes, particularly in relation to the university's goal that prospective graduates in English major are expected to attain a B2 CEFR level of English proficiency after graduation. The quantitative analysis revealed that students who have been part of the language degree programme for a certain period are still struggling to meet the proficiency standards. Courses are seen as interventions designed to help learners achieve the desired learning outcomes. In accordance with Bloom's Taxonomy, programme administrators or committees, who are also the stakeholders included in the curriculum revision process, may need to review the course content in the curriculum to verify the suitability of the course sequence.

In addition to analysing qualitative data, this study triangulated and examined the viewpoints of students across various proficiency levels to highlight the crucial role of courses in providing them with the necessary skills for standardised testing. Furthermore, student feedback emphasised the importance of considering different modes of study to accommodate various learning styles.

### **Concern Raised over Gender**

There is a tendency that male students consistently outperform female students in terms of scores throughout their academic years. Although these findings may not hold much numerical significance as the setting of this research as previously mentioned did not recruit intake students by hosting admission test. However, educators may still find value in relating them to pedagogical advancements, particularly in the training of English for Standardisation classes. It is possible that students facing economic constraints may not have the opportunity to practice taking the real test unless institutions provide additional support by administering mock tests similarly to the present research.

Upon the conclusion of this study, we can situate the utilisation of TOEIC as an effective proficiency test that also functions well as a placement test. The management of the test administration requires a significant amount of time to uphold the test's validity and reliability. It is recommended that practitioners exert great effort in maintaining these qualities to ensure the meaningfulness of test validity and reliability. By striving to maintain and optimise cost-effectiveness, the programme can interpret the test results as a means of classifying students according to their respective levels. This classification can contribute to the development of subsequent action plans and annual improvement projects. As the results can be aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), students can be categorised based on

their proficiency levels, and schools can utilise these results for a comprehensive analysis of students' performance and progress.

## Conclusion

Standardised assessments play a crucial role in assisting educators determine the proficiency levels of test takers on a universal scale. This established system not only simplifies the process of identifying a student's weaknesses but also enables educators to address and resolve them more efficiently and dependably.

In addition to addressing the research questions, this study has provided a solid theoretical basis for Input Processing (VanPatten, 2012) by highlighting the significance of the curriculum as the main source of input in foreign language programmes. In particular, the input in this context was coursework students enrolled in and under uncontrolled circumstances like the pandemic, learners' styles, and school intake policy. VanPatten (2012) proposed the concept of Input Processing, which elucidates the process in which second language learners enhance their proficiency. This process encompasses three key components: 1. The input, which refers to the language being learned; 2. The internal mental architecture, consisting of linguistic devices and materials; and 3. The processing mechanism, involving cognitive processes through which learners integrate the input with their internal mental architecture.

Applying the Input Processing principle to developing the curriculum integrated with the established Outcome-Based Education (OBE), we could understand that undergraduate students are able to delve into knowledge by starting with remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating (Bloom, 1956). For curriculum developers, malfunction within the input is greatly crucial as their role as learning facilitators will be dysfunctional too when their students fail to meet the target outcomes. The washback of standardised tests should also be maximised to ensure that intake students are challenged to level up their competence at the right pace with the appropriate mode of the comfort zone of learning. To do so, they could delimit the malfunction of input leading to severity toward learners' experiences and eventually the unexpected outcomes.

## Limitations

As introduced in research design and participants' profile, the participants are intact groups who are samples using purposive sampling methods. This is inevitably to label the degree in generalisation is limited since participants of the current study are not the representations of population, the English Language majored students at undergraduate level in Thailand. The findings may somehow shed light to the fact

that students at the same circumstances experience the same context and limitation to exposure of skills and language experience resulting to their level of English language proficiency. The placement test is underpinned to the scenario that the institution limited to placement test. This happens in Thailand in general that institution is unable to place students upon the level of proficiency to administer proper class and assign the right language courses that. However, it can be seen and interpreted from the Mean score of all participants which is an average figure.

In addition, we can anticipate interference occurring between junior and senior students who have experienced their university years solely online due to the pandemic. These years are undeniably regarded as the time they missed out on face-to-face interactions and human connections in a traditional classroom.

The research assumed that the perspectives of participants would be representative of opinions from two extreme levels of proficiency (low performers versus high performers) for a detailed interpretation. Consequently, the secondary analysis included only two levels of students: A1 (low performers) and B1 (high performers), while disregarding B2 (the outperformer). It is suggested that future research should incorporate all levels, including the missing A2 and B2, to provide researchers with a broader understanding of the range of perspectives expressed by students or test takers towards the courses offered by the institution.

Finally, it is recommended that the Mock-TOEIC be trialed through a pilot study. The reliability of this test could have been enhanced if the pilot study had been carried out or if a comparison had been made with other standardised tests using the same group of participants.

### **Suggestion**

Such practice can be made regular and become school policy in which administrators seek to understand how the curriculum affects students' proficiency on a yearly basis. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (MHESI), it is suggested that ELT practitioners take it crucial into consideration to well understand their input students. Metaphorically, the input students are like ingredients to the recipe they, the programme, are processing to refine them into output finery cuisine according to the labelled menu.

Based on the findings of the senior students' result, which the majority are on A2 level scoring above 120 and below 225 in the Mock-TOEIC test, it is recommended that future researchers investigate the viewpoints of students across various proficiency

levels. This exploration will help determine if there are additional discrepancies in their opinions and provide valuable insights related to different levels of proficiency.

Educators must seek potential resolutions that best fit their contexts. The test they may conduct can help just quantify problems into number figuring problematic attributes of their own subjects. Then, it is ultimate roles of us as an educator to come up with resolutions incorporating evidence with tools to present innovative such as bringing about pedagogical practices into classrooms: communicative language teaching approaches (CLT) to enhancing students' learning (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022); solving grammatical competence through test taking strategies (Sadeewong, 2020).

### **Ethical Consideration**

It is crucial to uphold the utmost regard for ethical considerations. The aims of the following practices are to protect the rights of research participants and enhance validity of this research. To do so, all participants are informed before continuing each task regarding their rights to leave the research. They are also assured that the test result will be analysed for the sake of educational purposes and would influence neither their grades nor scores of any subject they enroll in in the semester the test is administered. Their test results will be displayed with the use of pennames which help hidden their true identities. In addition, the interviewees were additionally made aware of their entitlement to exit the session at any given time. The subsequent findings derived from the analysis will be disseminated while ensuring the concealment of their actual identities.

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