

## **A Survey of English Teaching Problems and Wants in Teacher Training of Upper-Secondary English Teachers in Government Secondary Schools in Educational Region 12**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates problems in English teaching and wants in teacher training of English teachers at the upper-secondary level. The study was conducted in government secondary schools in Educational Region 12. A questionnaire, consisting of a rating scale and open-ended questions, was used as an instrument for data collection. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of the questionnaire was .97. The respondents of this research were all 208 upper-secondary English teachers in Educational Region 12. The result obtained was analyzed and summarized as follows: Problems in English teaching occur at many different levels ranging from the fairly serious to the very serious level. The very serious problems are those concerning students and teaching aids. The fairly serious problems are those concerning curriculum objectives, textbooks, teaching methodology, measurement and evaluation, and teachers' English competence. The top-ranked items of the problems of each group are difficulty in making learners achieve all objectives, textbooks which did not have enough content in order to help learners achieve the objectives, teaching by using drama, using computer-assisted language learning, using statistics in testing, inadequate knowledge of western culture, and students' difference in English competence. Besides, English teachers have a great desire for teacher-training programs concerning curriculum objectives, teaching methodology, measurement and evaluation, and knowledge and skills in teaching English. Many aspects concerning teaching aids were found at a medium degree of want in training. Moreover, English teachers prefer a short training course (Certificate) to a long training course (Diploma).

## Introduction and Background

Language is an instrument for communication. Worldwide, English is the language most frequently used in international trade, society and politics and is studied by more people than any other languages (Richards & Rodgers, 1986:1). Since the English language is of worldwide use as an instrument for communication, it is necessary that the English language should become part of the school curriculum.

English teaching has long been established in the Thai educational system. Even though the present curriculum of secondary level does not require English as a compulsory course, students still take English courses in order to pursue higher education. Since English is of great importance, the teaching and learning system should, therefore, be as practical as possible, particularly at the upper-secondary level which prepares students for tertiary education.

However, numerous problems have occurred over the years. The causes of the problems have been all of the factors involved; i.e. teachers, students, schools and curriculum. After the adaptation of the 1981 English syllabus for upper-secondary education prepared by the Ministry of Education, both the public and educators have questioned whether the English syllabus has fulfilled the goals required in the study of English. It has been evident that the graduates from each level have not been sufficiently proficient in the use of English (General Education Department, 1985:18). As a result, the Ministry of Education called for a seminar. The results of the seminar verified that educators still realize the important role of English in Thai society, but something in the present process of teaching and learning English in the secondary schools required revision. This is because in the next ten years Thailand will develop into a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC); therefore, it is necessary to improve the existing curriculum in order to facilitate and assess the expected changes in the fields of

economics, politics, and society as a whole (Ministry of Education, 1991:1)

Recently the upper-secondary English curriculum was adapted to make it more relevant to changing conditions as well as the present and future economic and social needs of the country. The teaching and learning situations have been adapted to follow the newly arranged curriculum. The new English curriculum for this level emphasizes the aspect of English language use for communication. New textbooks were published and a new teaching methodology was also suggested. The curriculum has been put into practice and maintained to the present.

## Rationale for the Study

Secondary education in Thailand is divided into two levels: the lower-secondary level (Matayomsuksa 1, 2, 3), and the upper-secondary level (Matayomsuksa 4, 5, 6). Secondary education is of great importance since it prepares students either for higher education or a career. Usually, most students who finish secondary education tend to further their studies in higher institutions and therefore they study very hard at the upper-secondary level because they basically want to pass the university entrance examination. It is, then, undeniable that teaching and learning at the upper-secondary level plays an important role in providing the best preparation to help those students achieve their goals.

Since English is one of the required subjects in the entrance examination, English teaching at the upper-secondary level should help students as much as possible. And an essential factor for successful English teaching is the effectiveness of English teachers. To help students to further their studies in higher institutions, it is necessary for teachers to teach effectively.

Focusing on the present situation of upper-secondary English teaching, the latest curriculum has been implemented since 1991 (Ministry of Education, 1991:6). The new

English curriculum for this level emphasizes the aspect of English language use for communication. A new teaching methodology has been suggested and new textbooks have also been published. Certainly, many problems have occurred since those changes. However, no investigation has ever been conducted to survey how far English teaching has been developed according to the new English curriculum, especially at the upper-secondary level in Educational Region 12. Therefore, problems the English teachers are encountering concerning English language teaching procedures and their wants for more training in English teaching need investigation. So far, the implementation of the 1990 revised edition of the 1981 upper-secondary English curriculum has been put into practice for at least three years and completely covered the levels of Matayomsuksa 4, 5 and 6 in the academic years 1991, 1992 and 1993 respectively. Because the new curriculum has now for the first time completely covered all stages of the upper-secondary level, it seems to be the appropriate time to explore the upper-secondary English teaching situation in order to identify whether there are English teaching problems and wants in teacher training so as to find ways to help the upper-secondary English teachers to develop more effective teaching for the benefit of students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to survey the current English teaching problems and wants in teacher training of the upper-secondary English teachers in government secondary schools in Educational Region 12. The study also seeks to identify the current background of English teachers of such a level. Based on the findings, suggestions will be provided as to what should be done to solve the problems and what should be taken into account if the Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Burapha University, Chonburi, is to arrange teacher- training courses relevant to

the wants of upper-secondary English teachers in Educational Region 12.

The study, thus, endeavors to answer the following research questions :

1. To what extent do English teachers have certain problems in English teaching concerning curriculum objectives, textbooks, teaching methodology, teaching aids, measurement and evaluation, teachers' English competence, and students?
2. To what extent do English teachers want further teacher training concerning curriculum objectives, teaching methodology, teaching aids, measurement and evaluation, and knowledge and skills in English?

### **Instruments and Methods**

The survey for the study was carried out through questionnaire in January 1995. The specifically designed questionnaires were sent to 214 English teachers in government secondary schools in Educational Region 12, some by mail and some by hand delivery. Two hundred and eight English teachers participated in the study representing 97.20% of the target population.

The questionnaire consisted of three main parts.

1. Teachers' personal background - 13 items (items 1-13) were constructed to find out the respondents' own background. The last item in this section (item 14) asked them to rank methods numerically according to their usefulness for improving English teaching skills. This type of question is closed.

2. Teachers' problems in teaching English - 82 items (items 1-82) were constructed to find out the respondents' opinions concerning English teaching problems in the following aspects: course objectives (items 1-6), textbooks (items 7-16), teaching methodology (items 17-36), teaching aids (items 37-49), measurement and evaluation (items 50-65), teachers' English competence (items 66-74), and students (items 75-82). They were asked to rate the degree of

agreement on each item. The rating criteria were:

5	=	very strongly agree
4	=	strongly agree
3	=	agree
2	=	disagree
1	=	strongly disagree

3. Teachers' wants in training - 61 items (items 1-61) were constructed to find out the respondents' wants in teacher training on course objectives (items 1-3), teaching methodology (items 4-23), teaching aids (items 24-35), measurement and evaluation (items 36-51), and knowledge and skills in English teaching (items 52-61). They were asked to rate the degree of want in each item. The rating criteria were:

5	=	highest degree of want
4	=	high degree of want
3	=	medium degree of want
2	=	low degree of want
1	=	lowest degree of want

In addition, items 62 and 63 asked the respondents about the specific type of courses desired and the time available. This type of questions is closed, except for "other: please specify" questions which were open-ended.

### **Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings**

As anticipated, the results of this study are consistent with the general findings of previous English teaching problem studies. Like previous researchers, the researcher found significant problems in English teaching among upper-secondary English teachers. At the same time, these present findings reveal more complex patterns of problems than those that have appeared in earlier studies and give a clearer picture of the relationship between English teaching problems and wants in teacher training. These findings are discussed and interpreted in two major sections.

#### **1. Background, Experience and Methods Used to Improve English Language Skills of English Teachers**

From the findings of English teachers' background and experience, it can be assumed that most English teachers in Educational Region 12 have not been trained in teaching English based on the communicative approach while they were studying because the largest number of them are more than 40 years old (42.3%) and they have been teaching English for more than 15 years (58.2%). At that time the communicative approach was not implemented in Thailand. However, approximately half of them have had training in English teaching according to the implementation of the 1990 upper-secondary English curriculum (57.2%). Most of the English teachers who had been trained accepted that they have been able to apply knowledge from training to their teaching at a high level (73.1%).

As regards methods used to improve English language skills, many of them tend to improve their English skills by reading English textbooks (44.7%), reading English newspapers (24.5%), and reading English journals (19.7%), respectively. This shows that English teachers always try to improve themselves, particularly in the skill of reading; therefore, they may not have a problem with English language competence in reading.

In light of the findings, most of the respondents have had experience in teaching English for a long time and have a bachelor's degree in English. Based on the researcher's viewpoint, it is necessary to equip English teachers with the appropriate level of required qualifications in teaching according to the new curriculum. This is because English teachers who have a high educational level, qualifications and experience in teaching will be able to teach more effectively. Especially, English teachers who have a chance to participate in a training course or seminar in curriculum use will be able to apply the knowledge from their training process effectively. As Ogman (1991:95) found, "teachers who have high qualifications, understand curriculum, participate in training and practice teaching English according to new

teaching methodology will be able to teach effectively.”

## **2. Problems and Wants in English Teaching**

This section presented problems and wants in English teaching as perceived by English teachers. The most importance was attached to the course objectives, textbooks, teaching methodology, teaching aids, measurement and evaluation, English language competence, and students' severest problems or difficulties and greatest wants. This information provided some guidelines as to which items should be found in an teacher training course. Therefore, the discussion of problems and wants in English teaching in this section is divided into seven parts in order to correspond with the research tool as follows:

### **2.1 Problems and Wants Concerning Course Objectives**

The results show that about half the English teachers have received training in English teaching according to the implementation of the 1991 revised edition of the 1981 upper-secondary English curriculum. The teachers found slightly serious problems concerning analyzing the objectives of the curriculum to serve as guidelines for choosing teaching content according to the curriculum objectives, and bringing theory and principles in communicative language teaching to use in the teaching/learning process. These findings imply that the previous training may have partially helped English teachers in dealing with the new curriculum; therefore, they did not have very serious problems concerning them. However, it was found that training concerning bringing theory and principles in communicative language teaching to use in teaching/learning process was greatly wanted. It could, then, be concluded that the previous training might not have been sufficient, so English teachers want further training. It was also found that making the learners achieve all objectives was

difficult for English teachers and course objectives which aim too high caused a rather serious problem. Such problems indicate that English teaching may not reach the goal.

### **2.2 Problems and Wants Concerning Textbooks**

The findings obtained indicate that no problems concerning textbooks are very serious. The fairly serious problems are that textbooks do not have enough content in order to help learners achieve the objectives, do not encourage learners to use language outside the classroom, and do not relate to the objectives of the curriculum. However, those problems are not serious for English teachers because they have the opportunity to adapt or supplement the lessons since they do not have to proceed right through the textbooks. Those results imply that English teachers are forced to depend on course objectives more than textbooks. In addition, it was found that some explanations in the teacher's manual are not clear. Apart from this, English teachers have problems concerning the content which does not allow for supplementary activities. With all these problems to face, it is no wonder that the teachers stated a high degree of want in training concerning arrangement of activities supporting the lessons in textbooks. This means that English teachers have a high interest in arranging activities relevant to the content in textbooks.

### **2.3 Problems and Wants Concerning Teaching Methodology**

It was found that the very serious problem concerning teaching methodology was teaching by using drama. Other problems, found to be fairly serious, are: the difficulty in arranging activities supporting the lessons and emphasizing writing, listening and speaking, the difficulty in arranging activities to enable learners to seek further information, teaching by using role-play activities and teaching learners to write according to process writing. However, the time provided (four periods/week) does not

affect their teaching since most of them said that the amount of time provided is suitable enough to help learners achieve course objectives. Moreover, English teachers have a problem concerning the difficulty in arranging student-centeredness in communicative English teaching. Such findings suggest that English teachers might not have sufficient training in communicative English teaching. Although most of them hold a bachelor's degree in English and have studied English teaching methodology, the time when they attained the degree was before the practice of the communicative approach in Thailand. This is because the majority are more than 40 years old, and they have been teaching English for more than 15 years. Therefore, it could be assumed that most English teachers were not trained in teaching English based on the communicative approach while they were studying. Moreover, only about half of them have received training in English teaching according to the implementation of the 1990 revised edition of the 1981 upper-secondary English curriculum based on the communicative approach. It is obvious that such training is not sufficient for communicative teaching, since English teachers still have various problems concerning teaching methodology. It was also found that English teachers wanted training concerning teaching methodology at a high level. The desire for training concerning the communicative approach and methodology in English teaching and arranging activities emphasizing the reading, listening, and speaking abilities was found to be higher than any others. However, only teaching by using drama, which was found to be a very serious problem for English teachers, did not call for training. That is because it was not popularly used among English teachers because of its complexity and students' low English competence. Based upon wants in training concerning teaching methodology, it is obvious that English teachers should receive further training, particularly in

the communicative approach, in order that they will be able to deal with problems which occur in communicative English teaching.

#### **2.4 Problems and Wants Concerning Teaching Aids**

The findings show that most problems concerning teaching aids are very serious. The problems of inadequate knowledge of the use of computer-assisted language learning and multimedia are more serious than the others. Others are inadequate knowledge of the use of slides with tape recorders, slides, video tapes, and inadequate knowledge of how to produce teaching aids by using technology. Those facilities are not popularly used among teachers because they neither know how to use them nor realize how helpful they are in teaching. Moreover, English teachers expressed their view that they lack the opportunity to use a language laboratory and sufficient audio-visual aids. It is possible that schools might not have an adequate budget to supply those facilities, especially, the language laboratory and computer-assisted language learning which have a cost much higher than the others. Also, most schools are in provincial areas far from an educational center; therefore, some facilities are not available.

The other problems are fairly serious. These are: the inadequate knowledge of using tapes, pictures, word cards, and of producing simple visual aids. And training concerning production of simple visual aids such as word cards and pictures was found to be at a lesser degree of want than training concerning production of teaching aids by using technology. Moreover, training concerning using computer-assisted language learning was found to be at a high degree of want. This could be explained by the fact that the simple visual-aids as such are not as popular, since new technology has brought various teaching aids. Therefore, it is not unusual that English teachers have a high interest in using new equipment and other

supplementary materials in spite of the insufficiency of audio-visual aids in schools.

### **2.5 Problems and Wants Concerning Measurement and Evaluation**

The findings obtained indicate that English teachers have a very serious problem in using statistics in testing. Other problems which are fairly serious are: the analysis of test items, evaluating before learning to serve as guidelines for arranging or dividing group activities, and making listening and speaking achievement tests. Moreover, some said that constructing tests to measure communicative ability and constructing tests to cover the learning objectives are also serious problems. Such findings indicate that English teachers have not been sufficiently equipped with the knowledge of measurement and evaluation. It was also shown that English teachers have great wants in training concerning all aspects of measurement and evaluation, especially making listening, speaking, reading and writing achievement tests in order that they can have effective tests.

### **2.6 Problems and Wants Concerning English Language Competence**

In the light of the findings, English teachers have hardly any serious problems with English language competence. The fairly serious problems were found in knowledge of western culture, listening and speaking skills. The reason that English teachers do not have very serious problems concerning English competence might be that most of them hold a bachelor's degree in English. Therefore, English teachers are confident enough in their language competence. Besides, the question concerning methods used in improving English language skills showed that English teachers always tried to improve themselves, particularly in reading. However, it was found that English teachers have a high degree of want in training concerning English competence particularly regarding listening and speaking

skills, and transmitting information in English. Further training in the reading and writing skills are not wanted as greatly as those mentioned earlier. The reason might be that English teachers usually practice reading and writing on their own. However, as the objectives of the English curriculum emphasize teaching for communication, it is necessary for English teachers to be fluent in using language skills especially listening and speaking skills. Therefore, those skills are greatly wanted.

In addition, problems concerning English grammar were found to be less serious than the others. The degree of want was also not as high as the others. This is because most English teachers might have sufficiently studied grammar while they were studying. Noticeably, English teachers are also interested in getting knowledge of classroom research in order to get results to improve the teaching/learning process. As a result, undoubtedly, English teachers have a great desire for training and would like to continue studying at a higher level in order to brush up their knowledge and skills in teaching English.

In the light of these findings, it could be concluded that the level of teacher's proficiency in the use of English for communication is far from satisfactory. The most desirable qualification was fluency in using language skills since they still needed to develop the ability in the language skills. Therefore, English teachers should be trained to gain more knowledge.

### **2.7 Problems and Wants Concerning Students**

In regard to the results of this study, problems of students' different background of English competence and students' lack of practice to apply knowledge were found to be more serious than the others. It could be assumed that students might not have been sufficiently educated in each class level; therefore, their English competence at the secondary level is not at the appropriate level. It

could be further assumed that the objectives of each of the earlier class levels might not have been achieved since students' English competence level is lower than the level required for the class. Moreover, there are too many students in each class, most of which consists of 41-50 students. Such findings suggest that, in such an over-sized class, English teachers might not have an opportunity to stimulate motivation or to create a good learning atmosphere; therefore, students show little interest and lack confidence. These factors affect students' development of communicative skills. As Littlewood (1981:93) points out, "the development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and to relate with the people around them".

The overall findings also imply that students are very poor in English competence and do not participate in class. The over-sized classes reveal the problem of physical constraints. All these problems are very serious. The training programs then should include techniques in presenting lessons so that students will show interest and their English competence will improve. Also, the techniques of organizing students in over-sized classes should be introduced.

Based upon the overall findings, it is obvious that most problems concerning English training do exist but not at a very serious level. Surprisingly, it was found that English teachers have great wants in training concerning such problems. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that English teachers are actually active and want to gain more knowledge and new ideas. Despite the fact that the problems investigated are not very serious, English teachers still have a high degree of want for training concerning those problems. Since English teachers show high interest in teacher training, it is worthwhile providing teacher-training programs for them.

The present study also specifies the types of teacher-training courses desired if they were to be offered by the Department of Western

languages, Burapha University. It was found that English teachers prefer a short training course to a long training course. A short training course of three weeks was most desired. Only a minority of English teachers prefer a long training course (38.5%). Therefore, a short training course of three weeks should be considered.

### **Suggestions for Further Solutions**

1. Since the results of the present study indicate that most English teachers have never had a study visit abroad and only half of them received in-service training in the country, it is, therefore, suggested that English teachers have more opportunities to participate in the programs designed for English teachers either in Thailand or abroad.

2. Since the results of the study indicate that textbooks do not cover all course objectives, it is, therefore, suggested that English teachers should find other supplementary books or documents to teach in class because teaching does not have to follow right through textbooks so they have the opportunity to adapt or supplement the lessons. Moreover, it is suggested that a resource center providing facilities in English teaching should be established for English teachers in every province in Educational Region 12, not only in Chonburi which is the headquarter of this educational region.

3. It is a good idea to provide standardized achievement tests for English teachers in Educational Region 12.

### **Implications for Organizing Teacher-training Courses**

In the light of the present findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the demand for teacher training is at a great level. Therefore, it is truly worthwhile for the Department of Western Languages, Burapha University, Chonburi to organize teacher-training courses for upper-secondary English teachers in Educational Region 12. In this study, the



researcher has proposed a general outline which can be taken as a guideline when organizing the courses. The following are suggested as items that should be taken into account.

The data obtained show that English teachers would like to take a short training course of three weeks (Certificate) rather than a long training course (Diploma). When considering the number of English teachers interested in participating in a long training course, the percentage of English teachers who want a long training course is rather low (38.5%). Therefore, it is suggested at this point that only short training courses be offered. However, if a long training course is organized, it should be at a different time in order that it might be convenient for English teachers who would like to attend both.

In addition, while conducting teacher-training courses, instructors should be aware of the teaching programs that English teachers can encounter in their real life situations. This is because the instructors' responsibility is to encourage English teachers to apply what they have learned from the training to their class. Therefore, it is advisable that all instruction be given in relation to realistic situations.

It is recommended that the course organizers realize that English teachers have

problems with teaching aids, students' low English competence and lack of interest in learning English, large numbers of students, difficulties in teaching methodology and testing. Moreover, the course organizers should be aware of the English teachers' background. It was found that most teachers are not acquainted with communicative language teaching. However, most of them have experience in teaching English for more than 15 years. Such long experience of English teaching may cause some of them to act contrary to the new style of teaching and depend on their own style instead. Although the age of most English teachers who teach at the upper-secondary level is more than 40, it is expected that those teachers will deal fairly well with the new approach of English teaching because they greatly want training in teaching according to the communicative approach and they would like to apply such knowledge to the teaching/learning process.

Realizing those problems, the course organizers then should develop a realistic course which is practical in nature. Without a realization of those problems, the course organizers may develop courses which are too academic and not applicable in real situations.

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