

**A STUDY ON THE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF SENIOR HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE LOWER SOUTHERN THAILAND
THROUGH THE CEFR ASSESSMENT TEST**

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Research Title **A Study on the English Proficiency of Senior High School Students in the Lower Southern Thailand through the CEFR Assessment Test**

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine and assess the English proficiency of senior high school students in the lower southern Thailand according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Four key English language skills: listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading were carried out to describe the level of students' language ability.

A set of four multiple choices CEFR Assessment Test with 80 items was used to obtain the required data. The samples were 500 students on grades 4-6 in seven provinces; Yamane table of sampling ($\pm 5\%$) then was employed to randomize the collected data, becoming the total of 222. The analysis of the data was conducted by the SPSS Statistical Package through the descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, maximum and minimum, and standard derivation.

The research revealed that the "A2" was recognized as the students' level of internationally standard English proficiency ranking but perceived as low proficiency. The students' average score was at 42.71 (53.38%) from the total of 80 scores with the standard deviation at 13.72. The minimum and maximum were found at 17 and 73. The female students' performances were a slightly better than male students, with the mean at 42.94 (53.67%) and at 42.11 (52.63%) respectively.

Keywords: CEFR Assessment Test, English Proficiency, Senior High School Students

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Thitiphong Ketamon

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Unit 1

Introduction

1. Background of the Problem

The national education system of Thailand has been formally and informally imposed by the Ministry of Education for many decades up until the present. The quality of education in Thailand on every single level ranging from kindergarten schools to higher education organizations is still recognized far lower than the expectation of the society and the international level despite a huge number of budgets are spending for educational improvement (Na Mahachai and Aramnet, 2013). When making a comparison of the quality of education of Thailand with other neighboring countries in Southeast Asian Nations recently, the result is quite clear that Thailand is always positioned lower than others. Accordingly, the Thai higher education was just ranked eight last year among 10 countries in this region according to World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2014). When looking back into the past, the situation was also indifferent (Kanchana, 2011). The situation reflects the severe failure of Thai education system undeniable, and this puts up the heavy pressure for Thai authorities in managing the education system. The plenty of budgets is being allocated and invested in order to improve the quality of the education, but it seems like the attempt never fulfill what are being expected. The classrooms are still big with more than 50 students per class in many schools. The situation is not much different between government and private schools because of the system and national mechanism under the control of the government policy, although the private schools are seemingly better in some cases. There are a lot of questions that the Thai society still never has either the clear or explicable answers because the more attempts the government sectors try to narrow down the problems of quality of education with financial support and better human resources in the teaching profession, the more the quality of education is becoming worst and undesirable. The process of teaching and learning English effectively has become an important and toughest work of all parties in educational management.

Teaching English as a second language (TESL) for Thai people has been popular and widely encouraged by every government with the intention to increase the English language proficiency for education development and potentialities for the competitiveness. In fact, this is

not a new thing for Thai society, nor is it a new system of the government. Many schools both private and government ones have modern curriculums and classes are also conducted through a bilingual system (Thai and English). Foreign teachers are recruited and employed in almost all schools in Thailand from the basic education to university levels. Foreign English teachers sometimes are perceived as a symbol of the second language deployment of a school for luring students into studying English. As the results, from the most basic level of teaching English in the kindergartens to the most advanced level on the higher education, the English language is pervasively implemented in every single school or university together with a mushrooming growth of language or tutorial centers. Without doubt, the demand of English language qualified teachers or native English speakers working for Thai education system is also still high, while other options such as the Filipino English teachers, who are probably assumed as the best alternative to replace the native English speakers, are also highly required, especially for the level of basic education (Na Mahachai and Aramnet, 2013). All of these changes and phenomenon are applied to improve the Thai students' English proficiency and reach the intended standard. There is still a speculation that if these strategies are productive and effective enough or not; how much better the Thai students' English language skill are improved and left to reach the expectation, and how long of times they will take. Therefore, to be better or not to be better is a question; and the factors and conditions of time will be the best answer for these questions. Yet there is still a hope if things get better, and the reformation of education system becomes successful.

Under the high pressure and the condition of education reformation, there is a hope that Thai students' English language skills will get better and better not too far to be seen. Unfortunately, the fact is that the performances of Thai students' English language skills so far are really dismal. The English proficiency in Thailand for Thai people is raked at very low proficiency according to the report (Education First, 2015) of Education First, an organization conducted evaluation of global workforce English skills. The report clearly shows that Thailand is at 48 among 63 countries where people don't use the English language as the mother tongue. Just in the ASEAN 10 countries, Thailand is outdoing Cambodia only. This is parallel to the quality of education system that Thailand is at the bottom line of ranking, particularly for the higher education system at the number 8; according to World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2014), Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015. As a result, this may be one of the main causes that weaken

Thai competitiveness on the global economy and other sectors. The ranking could portend the failure of all attempts unless all sectors talk together and find out the solution urgently. Doubts and questions are raised up not just for the scholars in education but also the society. What really happens in Thai education system is what many people really want to know. Before the situation will become so severe to be managed or solved, the government must quickly follow up the problems and impose new strategies for handling the situation on the system of teaching English nationwide. Particularly, for increasing the competitiveness in business completion and the new area of business collaboration in ASEAN, the changes will soon improve the situation and relieve the concern.

Although the English proficiency of Thai people isn't quite famous, the demand of English language learning in Thailand still goes steady. When the most frequently mentioned word "ASEAN" appears on media and the so-called AEC (Asean Economics Community) has been hyped up everywhere, it will become the new issue for everyone under the perception that Thai people must be able to use better English. In fact, the AEC is not a new thing for many countries such as Singapore and Malaysia because they have already become AEC by the means of the English language. In ASEAN, the existing phenomenon of the AEC may only excite for Thai people, and the need of the English language is also hyping up as if it is a national agenda, while other dimensions such as culture, society, and collaboration including education are probably drowned out by the voice of the AEC. The AEC has many aspects to be discussed. It may play more significant roles in business sectors because of business motivation. The perspectives of revenue, profits, market segments, customers, export and import, and figures of GDP etc should be more prominent for all countries rather than language and education preparation. This is because both language and education preparation are out of date to be mentioned in some countries, but Thailand seems to emphasize and concern about the language development. Many organizations in Thailand, private or government; big or small ones, mandate the English language as the second most important language that everyone is required to be proficient. Pictures of the English language training for teachers can be seen in every region of Thailand. We can often see the famous English language training centers provide training for officers and teachers. For example, the British Council, the United Kingdom's international organization, collaborated with the Thai government on the South Thailand Teacher Development

Project to provide classes for the southern English teachers, developing their English teaching skills (British Council, 2013). At the same time, plenty of money is investing in the English language development for people to learn and develop English. It might be true that the proficient English language skills become a key factor that will strengthen competitiveness for Thailand, but that is not the only reason. However, no matter what will turn to be from this attempt, yet this phenomenon should be helpful for Thailand.

To enhance the language proficiency and capability in communicating the English language for Thai people, it has become the urgent matter for Thai Education sectors. The reformation for teaching English has also become the most urgent policy of The Ministry of Education that must be implemented and accomplished soon in line with the development of technology for the emerge of the need of AEC. This substantive matter, in fact, is being pushed by all sectors in education by expecting to enhance potentialities and catch up other nations in time for the world's new economic region and wider community. According to the official announcement of the Ministry of Education recently (Ministry of Education 2014), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is urgently encouraged for all schools nationwide with the high expectation of lifting up the teaching qualities of the English language that will be able reach the standard of the international level, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Since the introduction and implementation of the CEFR to Thailand recently, the results of the launching of this new teaching style must be followed up and also carrying a research to find out if it is really successful or not. The new try and strategies or the trial and error may no longer need for the system of teaching English in Thailand if everything moves forwards smoothly.

The process of evaluation for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in one of most important keys to ensure that all the new teaching strategies, as the national agenda and policy of the government, can effectively improve the quality of teaching English and English proficiency among Thai students. To do this, several kinds of methods and activities can be run to discover the outcomes, and the most convenient method is providing a standard test. There are many English language tests provided for both international and national levels or those are equivalent to the international standard. For example, both TOEFL and IELTS tests are well-known for students who want to continue studying in the native English speaking countries such as the

United States and England and are perceived or hyped as the most standard ones. Other tests, for instance, BULATS or TOEIC (for people who work in an international environment) also play important roles in business organizations as a procedure of job recruitment (Manhattan Review, 2010). In Thailand, these kinds of tests have also been rapidly introduced into education and business sectors because of the existence of globalization. Passing these tests may become one of qualifications for a job hunting and furthering study, and in some cases; they are a basic requirement of graduation. Hence, the employment of a test to follow up the CLT can be conducted through many alternative tests, depending on factors of convenience and financial resources. However, because of the policy of the government which is focused on the CEFR; to measure to the results of English proficiency of Thai students, the CEFR should be the most suitable test due to the directness of contents. The education system of Thailand that is being implemented by the CEFR framework to assess students' English language proficiency in all educational areas will make more familiarity for the learners as well. Furthermore, the outcomes of the test should be the most reliable for studies.

The researcher then is interested in carrying out a research to investigate the results of teaching strategies of the CLT through CEFR test. This is to follow up the results of the performance of CLT in teaching English in Thai schools after such principle has been introduced into schools for almost a year. This will also reaffirm the reliability and appropriateness of the CEFR test whether it is fitted in with the teaching environment in Thailand, although the CEFR test is described as an international standard test for language skills (Cambridge English, 2015). More importantly, the research outcomes will become the answer of the quality of education system at present and the achievement of the endeavor to improve and develop English teaching.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 To investigate and follow up the results of teaching and learning English on the senior high schools in the lower southern Thailand by the CEFR assessment test.
- 2.2 To assess the senior high schools students' English proficiency in the lower southern Thailand by the CEFR assessment test.
- 2.3 To rank the senior high schools students' English proficiency by the CEFR assessment test as to find out the achievement of English skills.

3. Significance of the Study

- 3.1 The study outcome will provide the comprehension on the CEFR Test in the context of Thai Senior School Students.
- 3.2 The results of the research will indicate the appropriateness of the CEFR in Thai Senior School Students.
- 3.3 In addition, the study will reveal the proficiency of Thai Senior School Students, especially in southern Thailand.
- 3.4 The outcomes of the study can be very beneficial for all sectors that get evolved in teaching and learning management for the English language in Thailand, especially as the potential sources of information for planning teaching English.
- 3.5 Related sectors could use the outcomes of the research for planning and developing students' English proficiency.

4. Hypothesis of the Study

- 4.1 The CEFR Test has high reliability to investigate Thai Senior High School Students in Thailand, and the students' language proficiency should presumably be at a moderate or low level.
- 4.2 Different personal factors such as genders and ages of Thai Senior High School Students will make the level of their language proficiency differently through the CEFR assessment test.

5. Limitations of the Study

- 5.1 The total number of participants is 500 students who are studying in the senior high schools in lower southern Thailand at levels 4-6 in seven different provinces: Trang, Phattlung, Songkhla Satoon, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The samples are selected by the "Yamane" formula ($\pm 5\%$), becoming the total of 222 participants.
- 5.2 The data are obtained through the four different skills: listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading only.

6. Definitions of Key Words

- 6.1 **CEFR** means Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It is used as standard criteria for English proficiency test.
- 6.2 **English Language proficiency** means the ability of a person to communicate through the English language. For example, C1 or C2 in the CEFR criteria indicates a professional level.
- 6.3 **Thai Senior School students** mean the senior Thai senior school students, grade 10-12.

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Chapter 2

Reviewed literature

There are five main parts of literature reviews in this section: CEFR Test, Assessment and Benchmark Comparison, the CEFR in Thailand, and Development on Language Proficiency Tests and Related studies of the CEFR.

1. The CEFR

1.1 What is CEFR?

The CEFR or CEF is the acronym of “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.” Since it was used as a framework for assessing language learning achievements of European languages among foreigners, it has been widely spread over other regions of the world. With long period of research over twenty years, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages becomes a framework of reference for learning, teaching, assessment (Council of Europe, 2014). Thus, for more two decades, the CEFR was served as a roadmap for European citizens to learn other languages across Europe. The CEFR has been formed up by the great contribution of all parties worldwide. The “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” handbook is translated into English and published by Cambridge University Press (Language Policy Unit, 2014). The completed version of manual is released and used as set of references for the language proficiency. It is well-known in almost every country at present, including Thailand.

Many projects and researches to empower the appropriateness and standard criteria for the CEFR are still being conducted. The CEFR isn't just originally designed and used for European countries but also in other continents in different parts of the world; it is now available in 39 languages (Council of Europe, 2015). As its clear goals intentionally used as a framework and guideline for developing teaching and learning foreign languages, it is also used as the standard indicators for language assessment and boosting up education quality. Moreover, the CEFR has been integrated into the education systems for more than 40 countries (TOJET, 2012). Other outside European counties such as Japan and even New Zealand have implemented the CEFR as a framework reference for foreign language learning (Wang, 2012). This could be implied that the CEFR may be one of the world's leading language proficiency references at the

present, meaning it becomes popular for teaching and developing quality of foreign language learning.

The CEFR or CEF is accepted as a high standard mechanism for developing the language proficiency which is usually meant the process of teaching, and leaning evaluation foreign languages. Apparently, it is being used as a standard test for measuring language proficiency in teaching English as foreign langue as well as an international benchmark for language proficiency (Cambridge, 2015). The CEFR is designed into six levels of references (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) according to the level of language ability. The Council of Europe (2014) indicates that the uniqueness of the CEFR can identify an individual's language use, ability and weakness of language proficiency. The level of language proficiency; therefore, is the completeness of particular levels of ability in communication in a target language through four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A learner's language proficiency gained from his/her learning in teaching and learning activities is the correlation between the learners' background and teachers' facilitations (TOJET, 2012).

The Common European Framework divides learners into three broad groups that can be divided into six sub levels; for each level, it describes what a learner is supposed to be able to do in four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The followings are the scales of CEFR and the description of the assessments.

1.2 Common Reference Levels

Table 1: Global Scale

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
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(Continued): Global scale

Proficient User	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

(Continued): Global scale

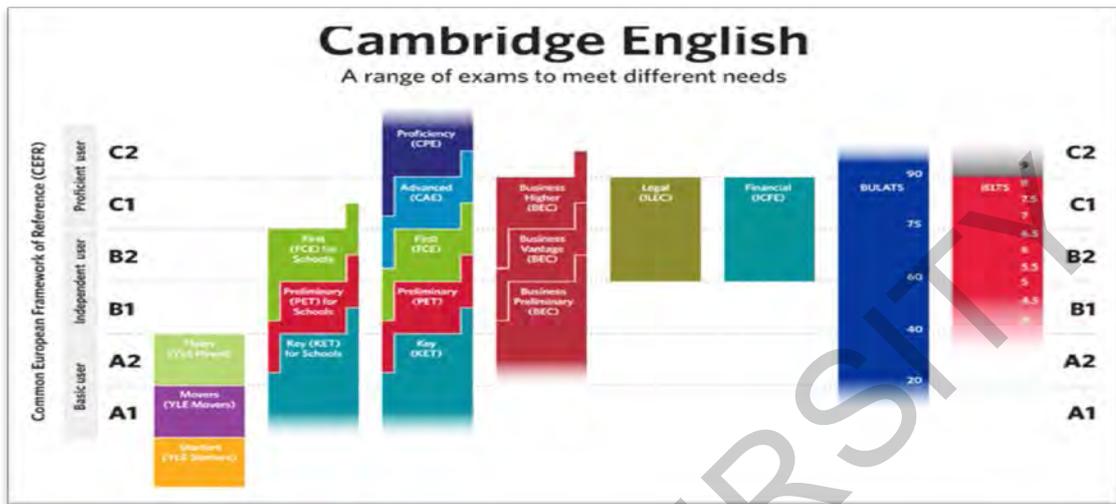
Basic User	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
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Source: Council of Europe (2015)

2. Assessment and Benchmark Comparison

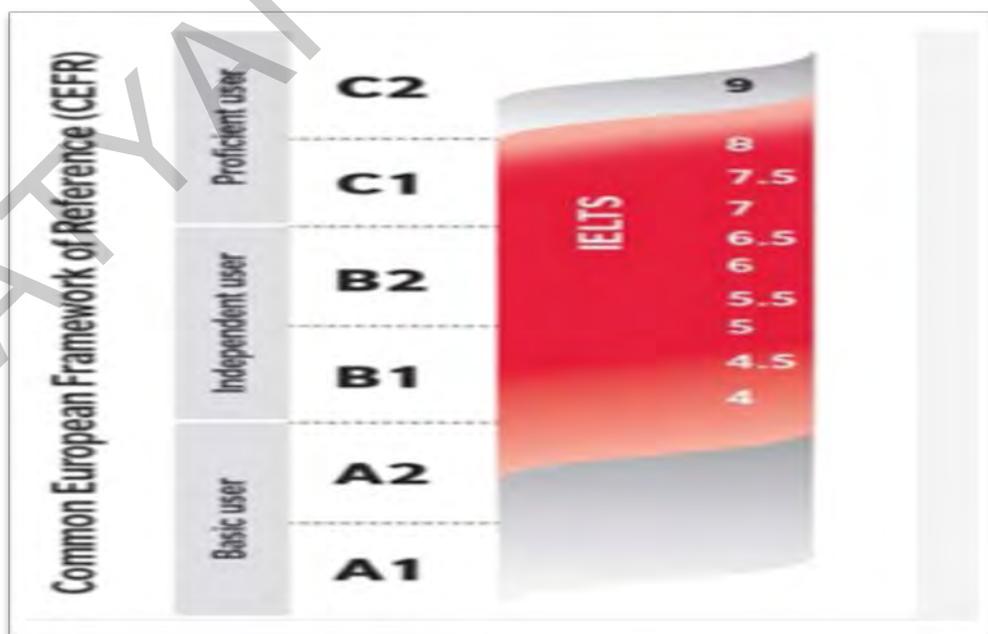
According to (Edwards, 2012) the mark of each part of test be calculated as percentage. The level of 50-60% will identify that a student approach the level (A2). The good users of English must be higher than 60% (B1), while those perform over 80% (B2) will be described as excellent users. On the other hand, students who get lower than 40% (A1), will need to do further studying before taking the test.

The assessment of the CEFR is obviously simple for showing up the levels of the language proficiency because of both the clear explanation and the range of scores. The CEFR criteria will indicate what level the individual will reach. It becomes a very influential benchmark for measuring the real language proficiency (Cambridge, 2014). Due to its reliability and reputation, the CEFR has already become what is claimed as the international standard for assessing the level of the language fluency, and the CEFR has also become one of the top leading benchmarks for the language proficiency test as influential as other famous ones such as IELTS and TOEFL. Publishers always make a reference to the CEFR when they launch a new product and provide some kinds of charts or table for making a comparison between their products and the CEFR criteria, and also with other well-known ones. For example, the “English Profile,” Introduction the CEFR for English; which was debuted in 2011 by Cambridge University, uses the CEFR and other criteria to make the comparison. The following picture shows the different kinds of benchmarks for different kinds of tests which Cambridge English will play the same roles, as other kinds of tests.



Picture 1: Cambridge CEFR (2014)

To insist that the CEFR is a standard of language reference, Cambridge University Press describes the CEFR as international benchmark for language proficiency (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Other educational agencies such as IELTS and TOEFL, on the other hand, also demonstrate the use of the CEFR criteria to pair up their benchmarks as these two pictures show below.



Picture 2: IELTS Scores (2015)

TOEFL Score	IELTS Band	CEFR	TOEFL Score
0-31	0-4		0-56
32-34	4.5	B1	57-86
35-45	5	B2	87-109
46-59*	5.5	C1	110-120
60-78*	6		
79-93*	6.5		
94-101*	7		
102-109*	7.5		
110-114	8		
115-117	8.5		
118-120	9		

Picture 3: Scores Comparison (2015)

To conclude, the CEFR becomes the common reference levels of language proficiency (Morrow, 2004). In other words, it is the global framework for language development and testing which is standardized as a benchmark for describing language proficiency. To achieve a certain level of the CEFR test, a test taker can compare his/her performance with the levels of the achievement of other standard tests, and vice versa.

3. The CEFR in Thailand

3.1 Policy of English Education Reform in Thailand

Originally invented and designed in Europe for more than twenty years, the CEFR is not a new thing for teaching professional people and educational policy makers in many countries around the world; but for Thailand, the CEFR is quite new for the government sectors that look after the national education system before the year 2014. It is not too exaggerated to say that the government and the Ministry of Education are just aware of the need of true education reformation, especially teaching and learning English reformation, if the AEC doesn't appear as the world's new regional economic cooperation by the end of 2015. Unavoidably, the former Education Minister, Chaturon Chaisaeng, called for the meeting and then made up the decision to impose CEFR for the reformation of the learning and teaching of English in some schools this academic year (2015) (Intathep, Lamphai, 2014). The implementation of the CEFR in some schools is a pilot study and beginning of the changes. Speaking on the seminar entitled "Policy on

the Reform of English Learning and Teaching", the former Education Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng said that the seminar was held to discuss the ways to put the CEFR into the real practice for English education reform. "If schools put the CEFR into practice effectively, I believe Thai students' English skills will be improved and students will be able to compete with foreign students in other countries," said Mr. Chaturon Chaisaeng. He also addressed the meeting about more than 100,000 students nationwide were not literate, and there was no need to think about the number of the students who had so insufficient English skills (Intathep, Lamphai, 2014). Therefore, student's communication skills in English lessons will be focused more rather than the grammatical base, while modern electronic devices are also highly encouraged to use in schools to facilitate classroom activities.

The ministerial announcement on English learning and teaching reform (2014) will become an important guideline for developing the national English-language education. Because of the standard of criteria of the CEFR, it is believed that the CEFR will be beneficial for the process of teaching and learning English in Thailand. This is because the new strategy for teaching English from now in Thailand will play more crucial roles on teachers' language proficiency and knowledge and approaches of teaching and learning. Thus, teachers will need to take the CEFR examination to evaluate their levels of English according to Watanaporn Rangubtook, director of the Office of the Basic Education Commission's English Language Institute (Intathep, Lamphai, 2014). At the same time, schools will also need to implement the CEFR to develop the quality of education.

3.2 The Ministerial Announcement on English Learning And Teaching Reform in Thailand

3.2.1 The Implementation of CEFR

One key issue of the announcement of the Ministry of Education (2014) is to focus on the Communicative Language Teaching or CLT, emphasizing on the steps of language learning: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. With the strong determination to lift up the quality of Education and the English proficiency after the introduction of the CEFR, the announcement sets up guidelines for the implementation of the CEFR in English teaching reform as the followings.

- (1) Using the CEFR for teaching and learning English. The curriculum, tests, evaluation, and teacher development will be designed and abided by the concepts of the CEFR.
- (2) The Communicative Language Teaching will be implemented to schools, and the grammatical based teaching will be shifted.
- (3) To encourage teaching English with the benchmarks of CEFR, but schools can employ different teaching techniques.
- (4) To boost up English proficiency
 - 4.1 To introduce different programs according to the need of different kinds of learners: English Program (EP), Mini English Program (MEP), International Program (IP), English Bilingual Education (EBE), English for Integrated Studies (EIS).
 - 4.2 To build up language classes: (Enrichment Class), (Social Interaction), (Academic Literacy), and (Conversation Class)
 - 4.3 To build up the atmosphere and provide activities for encouraging using English such as joining a camp and launch campaigns on English learning environments: English Literacy Day, English Zone, English Corner etc.
 - 4.4 Making conversation courses in English to be general classes.
- (5) Lifting up the ability of managing teaching and learning, focusing on the CLT and developing teachers.
- (6) Encouraging using IT as the significant tools for developing teachers and students' abilities.

3.2.2 The Scopes of using the CEFR for Students

To implement the CEFR, the Ministry of Education provides these guidelines.

- (1) Using the CEFR as key tools for managing teaching and learning/ development into six levels for graduates: A1 for primary schools (Pratom 6), A2 for junior high schools (Matayom 3), B1 for senior high schools (Matayom 6), and B2 for undergraduate students.
- (1) Using the CEFR for developing teachers, for instance, as a self- assessment checklist and assessment tool for finding out teacher's levels of English proficiency
- (2) Writing curriculum to be accorded to the CEFR

3.3.3 The Scopes of using the CEFR for Teachers

- (1) To survey and evaluate levels of teacher's English proficiency
- (2) To develop, follow up, and assist teachers as to increase quality of teaching and learning
- (3) To establish a mechanism for increasing the effectiveness of teaching and learning
- (4) To provide channels for testing teacher's English proficiency

3.3.4 Using ICT

Using Information Communication Technology for education to develop teachers' and student's language proficiency is one of crucial tools of the ministerial announcement. It facilitates the digital learning to students without any limitation. The Ministry of Education set up the policy to encourage using the Information Communication Technology as the follows.

- (1) Encouraging producing e-books, learning applications, standard tests for teachers and students.
- (2) Encouraging producing teaching materials according to the CEFR.
- (3) To produce digital exercises and standard tests.
- (4) To produce online materials for teaching and learning English.
- (5) To research and produce materials for developing teachers and students' English.
- (6) Encouraging using social networks for learning
- (7) Encouraging developing teaching approaches by using various channels of IT.
- (8) To write curriculum and handbooks for running and evaluating an educational camp according to the CEFR
- (9) To strengthen educational areas for setting up effective English camps.

Source: The Ministerial Announcement (2014)

4. Development on Language Proficiency Tests

Since the CEFR was introduced and used as a standard test for a language proficiency test, especially, the English language, many countries have implemented the CEFR into their education systems in order to improve their students' language abilities. Thus, a number of researches and tests have been conducted based on the guidelines of the CEFR. It is true that

other similar standard tests are also popular, and some of them are accepted as the international standard tests for ages; as we know such as IELTS, TOEIC and TOFEL, while other kinds of tests are also equated to these standard tests. With the increase of the use of foreign languages across the world, these tests have played significant roles on language proficient development in almost every country where a foreign language becomes the second important language for business, education, foreign affairs etc. Therefore, the CEFR test and all of other kinds of similar or standard tests will be explicitly designed to evaluate the language proficiency of individuals. The English language proficiency test is also undeniably related these standard tests because of both accessibility and acceptability. However, other testes are also developing to reach the international standards. Hence, researchers and educational scholars keep working to study the language proficiency through the standard tests or using standard guidelines for developing their own tests for their specifically different purposes on teaching and learning foreign languages.

The process of lifting up the quality of leaning foreign language clearly has a lot of benefits for the development of the CEFR by integrating into curriculum and syllabus design and through managing teaching and learning materials. This is obvious that the CEFR plays more important roles than just being a test for foreign language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2014). The international forum on “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities” in 2007 is an apparent example that why the CEFR is increasingly widespread globally (Council of Europe, 2014). “Recalling that in educational matters responsibility lies with the member states, the forum concluded that “rather than vis--vis the Council of Europe, it is towards one's own learners and one's European partners that one has a responsibility for making coherent, realistic use of the CEFR ” (Council of Europe, 2014). The use of the CEFR then has been well-known and become a mainstream of language development at this moment. Another event affirms that the CEFR is being rapidly used and developed is the two-day (28-29 March, 2014) online conference, where more than 600 participants worldwide joint the event, for language teaching on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages held to brainstorm on the important issues such as classrooms, courses, and tests in order to find out the true meaning of learning languages (Seewald, 2014).

5. Related studies of the CEFR

Researches and studies on English language proficiency tests are being continuously done by many people and educational institutions, mainly for developing teaching and learning and assessing individuals' levels of their English language proficiency. Apart from these, the applications of the outcomes of a number of researches as guidelines and suggestions for developing curriculum and managing education systems also play prominent roles. For example, Prapphal (2011) from Chulalongkorn University Language Institute conducted "English Proficiency of Thai Learners and Directions of English Teaching and Learning in Thailand" through the Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP). She found that more than half of students did not reach the levels of English proficiency as required by Chulalongkorn University. Hence, the urgent reform of teaching English in a broad picture must be revised and improved before the unwanted consequences will take place.

Nagai and O'Dwyer (2011) carried out "The actual and potential impacts of the CEFR on language education in Japan" in order to investigate how the CEFR has been applied into language learning in Japan. They claimed that the implementation of the CEFR had both some positive impacts and some drawbacks as well. For instance, the use of the CEFR is useful for score interpretation helpful for improving the standards of foreign language proficiency through developing both curricula and courses. On the contrary, the CEFR is suitable for applying to a specific context because of the issues of validity and distraction to the first language.

Nick Saville (2010), University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, presented a paper "The CEFR: an evolving framework of reference" on the conference of Universität Leipzig, Germany. He pointed out that the CEFR has been become successful in helping users to apply for their own need. The CEFR yet can reflects on the users' performances. And the implementation of the CEFR in different languages and situations helped insist its qualities.

Presenting a paper at University of Antwerp, Belgium, Chen, Mohammadi and Benigno (2013) explained how the CEFR was used to develop a vocabulary list; for example, a number of words required for English reading skill must be at the range of 8,000-9,000 word families. And the speaking skill must be between 5,000 -7,000 word families. By using statistics from a language test, it can indicate the relationship between CEFR and knowledge of vocabulary (Chen, Mohammadi and Benigno, 2013).

In terms of a validity of the CEFR, Michael Corrigan (2013), revealed that the levels of the CEFR could be interchangeable with other different tests because of the same interpretation of the testing results. However, they just have, in fact, the equivalent in some contexts. Michael Corrigan (2013) compared the test results of Cambridge English First (FCE) with an exam of Italian to raise up the issue of reliability.

Denies and Janssen (2011) examined the CEFR “Can-Do Statements as a Means of Self-Assessment” in terms of common understanding on different genders and educational system. To conduct the research, over 40000 students were the sources of data, and participants were asked to use the four can-do statements to evaluate their proficiency on each skill. The study revealed that both issues of gender and educational system were related substantially to the understanding of “Can-Do Statements.” As the result, the interpretation of the “Can-Do Statements” could become somewhat of personal or national benchmark much more than fixed standards.

Wachter and Heeren (2010) developed a language at University of Leuven in Belgium for following the students’ study performance. They figured out that well-designed test could be effective to follow up students’ learning status and could play important roles for providing special need for particular groups of learners. The learners’ academic achievement and the levels of language proficiency were significantly related. Constructing a practical test, the CEFR might not have a crucial role on the preliminary stage; but on the other hand, the basic requirements of each skill for a specific group of learners were more essential.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

“A Study on the English Proficiency of Thai Senior High School Students in Lower Southern Thailand through the CEFR Assessment Test” is intentionally conducted to survey and measure the ability of the English Language. The CEFR Assessment Test is used as the tools to obtain the data in four common different skills: listening, grammar, reading vocabulary, and reading while just only speaking and writing are not brought into the study due to the limitations of management and resources. The research will purely assess students’ level of their English proficiency according to the CEFR standard test and be varied by each skill. The procedures of this study, therefore, consists of the following descriptions of steps.

1. Source of Data

The main sources of data in this research are primarily senior high students from the seven provinces of lower southern Thailand: Trang, Phattlung, Songkhla Satoon, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

2. Population

The total number of participants is 500 students who are studying in the senior high schools on grade 10-12 in seven different provinces.

3. Samples

The samples are selected by “Yamane” formula ($\pm 5\%$) where the entire population used to analyze were exactly 222 participants, according to the Yamane table of sampling.

4. Research Criteria

The research will be conducted through the CEFR Assessment Test to find out the levels of English proficiency and also average into percentage. Then the result will be described according to the levels, genders, and skills.

5. Collecting Data

A set of four multiple choices CEFR Assessment Test is used to collect the required data by providing students opportunity to take the test in four skills which are listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. The first pilot test is used to test the students with the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha Method) at $\alpha \geq 0.748$. The second pilot test is used to test the students with the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha Method) at $\alpha \geq 0.832$. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient then will be finally used to find out the reliability of the test at 0.819.

6. Analyzing Data

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to analyze the obtained data through descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, maximum and minimum, and standard derivation. Personal data, for example, ages and genders will be exclusively focused on through percentage and mean, as to pinpoint the details of performances.

Chapter 4

Finding

“A Study on the English Proficiency of Thai Senior High School Students in Southern Thailand through the CEFR Assessment Test” is systematically conducted to assess the levels of the English language proficiency of senior high schools in the lower southern , according to the CEFR exam in four language skills: listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. The description of the finding is showed as the following key points.

1. Frequencies

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
gender	222	1.00	1.00	2.00	284.00	1.2793	.03018	.44966	.202
ages	222	2.00	1.00	3.00	497.00	2.2387	.04291	.63938	.409
scores=80	222	56.00	17.00	73.00	9482.00	42.7117	.92112	13.72443	188.360
levels	222	2.00	1.00	3.00	478.00	2.1532	.03462	.51578	.266
listening=20	222	14.00	4.00	18.00	2670.00	12.0270	.18249	2.71899	7.393
vocabulary=20	222	17.00	3.00	20.00	2467.00	11.1126	.26511	3.95002	15.603
grammar=20	222	17.00	.00	17.00	1791.00	8.0676	.28936	4.31140	18.588
reading=20	222	18.00	2.00	20.00	2533.00	11.4099	.31820	4.74113	22.478
Valid N	222								

The statistics of the table above show the results of the analysis in various areas, but some basic ones should be specially pointed out in order to understand the overall picture of the study. First of all, the mean of the total scores (80) is at 42.71. Clarified by the four skills, the mean of each skill is appeared as the following figures: the listening skill at 12.02, the vocabulary skill at 11.11, the grammar skill at 8.06, and the reading skill at 11.40. The standard deviation of the total scores of 80 is shown as the listening skill at 2.71, the vocabulary skill at 3.95, the grammar skill at 4.31, and the reading skill at 4.74. Both the minimum and maximum numbers of the figures are paired as these results. The minimum and maximum of the total scores are 17.00

and 73.00. The minimum and maximum scores from the total 80 are 17 and 73. Divided separately, the listening skill is at 4.00 and 18.00, the vocabulary skill is at 3 and 20, the grammar skill is at 0.00 and 17, and the reading skill is at 2.00 and 20.

2. Genders

Table 3: Genders

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	female	160	72.1	72.1	72.1
	male	62	27.9	27.9	100.0
	Total	222	100.0	100.0	

From the total number of 222 participants according to Yamane formula, 72.1% (160) are female students and 27.9 (62) are male students.

3. Ages

Table 4: Ages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16	25	11.3	11.3	11.3
	17	119	53.6	53.6	64.9
	18	78	35.1	35.1	100.0
	Total	222	100.0	100.0	

The range of ages among the students is from 16 to 18. The sixteen years old students are 16 (25%) while the seventeen ones are 119 (53.6%), and the eighteen ones are 78 (35.1%). This means most of them are averagely at seventeen years old.

4. Proficiency

The table clearly shows that most of the students (71.2%) from the total 222 are at "A2" while 6.8% at "A1" and 22.1% at "B1". Therefore, this indicates that the students' English proficiency is still lower than the benchmark where they are expected to reach "B1" for the senior high school level.

Table 5: Levels of Proficiency

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A1	15	6.8	6.8	6.8
	A2	158	71.2	71.2	77.9
	B1	49	22.1	22.1	100.0
	Total	222	100.0	100.0	

5. Performances of Genders

Table 6: Different Performances

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores	female	160	42.9438	14.09413	1.11424
	male	62	42.1129	12.81150	1.62706
Levels	female	160	2.1500 (A2)	.51640	.04082
	male	62	2.1613 (A2)	.51831	.06582
Listening	female	160	12.1000	2.83109	.22382
	male	62	11.8387	2.41711	.30697
Vocabulary	female	160	10.9938	3.99764	.31604
	male	62	11.4194	3.83918	.48758
Grammar	female	160	8.2125	4.38033	.34630
	male	62	7.6935	4.13933	.52570
Reading	female	160	11.5313	4.77141	.37721
	male	62	11.0968	4.68590	.59511

The different performances (mean) between the female and male students are presented on the table 5. It shows that there is just a slightly different mean between girls 42.94 (53.67%) and boys 42.11(52.63%); whereas, the level of both gender is at the same level (A2). Closely looked at each skill, the listening skill appears for girls at 12.10 and boys 11.83, the vocabulary skill at 10.99 and 11. 41, the grammar skill at 8.21 and 7.69, and the reading skill at 11.53 and 11.09.

Unit 5

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

1. Conclusion

For many decades, the Ministry of Education of Thailand has tried so hard and invested plenty of budgets to improve the quality of Thai education with the intention of making the educational system reach the international standards or as other neighboring countries, but it seems that all kinds of these attempts are far from intended outcomes. Just among the countries in Southeast Asian Nations, Thai education quality is ranking as number eight according to World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2014). Particularly on the English proficiency worldwide, Thailand is at 62 out of 70 countries where English is used as the second language (Education First, 2015). In the wake of this failure, all sectors of both private and government still have the same toughest problem to be solved without delay. Although their attempts have become more actively in past few years, the educational management of Thailand and quality of education in every level cannot still be seen concretely. One of the most intensified strategies implemented by the government is to increase students' English proficiency; it has been urgently added to the conundrum of educational quality management.

The management of teaching English as a second language (TESL) for Thai has been raised up as the national urgent agenda for many governments by recruiting more number of foreign English teachers. Thus, they often symbolize the development of education and English at schools or universities although the English proficiency of Thai people is ranked at very low proficiency according to the report (Education First, 2015) of Education First, EF English Proficiency Index, at 62 out of 70 countries; accordingly, in the ASEAN countries, Thailand is outdoing only Cambodia.

The emerging of ASEAN and AEC (ASEAN Economics Community) has become a great pressure for the Ministry of Education and government to increase the competitiveness by the means of the English language development. Trainings and programs for teachers' English development are actively provided such as the British Council collaborated with the Office of Basic Education, southern regional area, to enhance English teaching skills (British Council, 2013). Urgently needed to reform the English language proficiency and get ready for students, the

Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 2014), has implemented the so-called “Communicative Language Teaching” (CLT) strategy for all levels of education and the CEFR as the urgent strategy for improving the quality of teaching English nationwide.

To follow up some outcomes from these strategies as the preliminary inspection, the CEFR implementation must really be assessed through students’ English language proficiency, especially the level of basic education. This is because the key information will be useful all sectors to either adjust or make changes for the process of English teaching management. Therefore, it is so necessary for the researcher to carry out a research to investigate the results of these new teaching strategies after they have been introduced into schools for almost two years in the environment of Thailand. More importantly, the research outcomes will be the indicators of the quality and performance of students’ English proficiency and the achievement of educational management.

So far the investigation of senior high school students’ English proficient in lower southern Thailand, it can draw a conclusion on each aspect in the following key points.

1.1 Mean

It is obviously clear that the overall picture of the students’ English proficient is just over 53.38% (42.71 marks) of the total scores (80 marks). Divided by each of skills, the mean of the listening skill is at 12.02 (total of 20 marks), the mean of vocabulary knowledge is at 11.11 (total of 20 marks), the mean of grammar knowledge is at 8.06 (total of 20 marks), and the mean of reading skill is at 11.40 (total of 20 marks).

1.2 Maximum and Minimum

The results of the maximum and minimum of both the overall picture and each separate skill can be concluded as the following description. The minimum score of this study (total scores 80 marks) is at 17 while the maximum score is 73 (total scores 80 marks). The listening skill is at the minimum of 4 (total of 20 marks) while the maximum reaches at 18 (total of 20 marks). The vocabulary skill is at the minimum of 3 (total of 20 marks) while the maximum reaches at 20 (total of 20 marks). The grammar skill is at the minimum of 0 (total of 20 marks) while the maximum reaches at 17 (total of 20 marks). The reading skill is at the minimum of 2 (total of 20 marks) while the maximum reaches at 20 (total of 20 marks).

1.3 Gender

The total number of participants of this study is 222 senior high school students, sampling by Yamane table of sampling. The number of female students is 160, and the male students are 62.

1.4 Ages

The range of the ages of this study is from 16 to 18. The number of 16 years old students are at 25 (11.3 %), 17 years old students are at 115 (53.6 %), and 18 years old students are at 78 (35.1 %).

1.5 Level (CEFR)

According to the CEFR level of English performances on this study, A1 is at 6.8 % (15 students), A2 is at 71.2% (158 students), and B1 is at 22.1% (49 students).

1.6 Performances of Different Gender

The mean of female students' performance is at 42.94 (total of 80 marks) while the male students is at 42.11 (total of 80 marks). The level of the CEFR band for female students is at A2 (2.15) while level of the male students is also at A2 (2.16). The female students performance the listening skill at 12.10 (total of 20 marks) while the male students is at 11.83 (total of 20 marks). The female students performance the vocabulary knowledge at 10.99 (total of 20 marks) while the male students are at 11.41 (total of 20 marks). The female students performance the grammar knowledge at 8.21 (total of 20 marks) while the male students are at 7.69 (total of 20 marks). The female students performance the reading skill at 11.53 (total of 20 marks) while the male students are at 11.09 (total of 20 marks).

2. Discussion

According to the objectives of this study, the researcher has investigated the English language proficiency of senior high school students in lower southern Thailand by focusing on four main skills: listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Using the CEFR standard test with the reliability at $\alpha \geq 0.748$ for the pre-test, $\alpha \geq 0.832$ for the post (Cronbach's Alpha Method), and the reliability of the test at $\alpha \geq 0.819$ according to Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Therefore, the tool used to obtain the data is at the high level of reliability. The outcomes of the study can be statistically described and interpreted as very potentially important

information for education management, yet another process to be cautious and concerned because the rank of English proficiency in Thailand is very low (Education First, 2015). Apparently appeared as important indicators for all sectors of education development, the research finding will be beneficial not only for education stakeholders but also for students themselves. The results of the research can be seen as two sides both positively and negatively. Ones may see them as a setback and failure of education management and the English language teaching while others may view as facing up with the truth and will empower them to work harder for improving the system. Thus, the advantages of the outcomes then can be utilized into several dimensions, ranging from education policy to the effective classroom management. This will also raise up awareness of the quality of English and education for Thai society more since the first reform between 1996 and 2007 which put emphasis on teacher development (Noom-Ura, 2013).

Several key findings really have to be closely taken a look, and they must be the interpretation on mean, minimum and maximum, genders, ages, levels of CEFR result, performances of each gender, and also the overall of these key points

2.1 Mean

With only the mean at 42.71 marks (53.38%) of the total scores (80 marks). It is really obvious that the students' English proficiency is still very low. They are just able to reach upper 50% from the total of 100%. In terms of success, the average scores of 42.71 or 53.38% (A2) cannot and will not be able to claim as being satisfied for education management and testing assessment because A2 is equal to elementary level or "Basic User" according to the CEFR standard (Cambridge English, 2016). Closely looked at a separate skill, the listening skill is at 12.02 (60.1 %) of the total scores (20 marks), the vocabulary skill is at 11.11 (55.55 %) of the total scores (20 marks), the grammar skill is at 8.06 (40.3 %) of the total scores (20 marks), the reading skill is at 11.40 (57.00 %) of the total scores (20 marks). Among these English skills, students seem better in the listening skill, followed by the reading skill, the vocabulary skill, and the grammar skill respectively. However, all of these results of performances are still perceived as unsatisfactory indicators of students' English proficiency. This is because Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2016) claimed that the standard result of a test must have the benchmark of the minimum at 75% of the total questions. Thus, the mean at 42.71 or (53.38%) is quite far from the

benchmark. This is not too exaggerated to say that the English proficiency of Thai students on senior higher schools from this study is lower than the standard without doubt.

2.2 Maximum and Minimum

There is a wide gap between the minimum scores and maximum scores from this study on both the overall picture and each separate skill. The minimum score is just at 17, and the maximum is at 73 (total scores 80 marks). This indicates that the English language proficiency among the students is still very different. One reason might probably be the different opportunities of those students. The students in the city might be assumed as those who have better performances; whereas, those who have either lower or lowest performances could be those who are underprivileged students for educational opportunities and supposed to be in remote areas (ref). This is quite correlated to each separate skill. The minimum score of the listening skill is at 4, but the maximum is at 18 (total of 20 marks). The minimum score of the vocabulary skill is at 3, but the maximum is at 20 (total of 20 marks). The minimum score of the grammar skill is at 0, but the maximum is at 17 (total of 20 marks). The minimum score of the reading skill is at 2, but the maximum is at 20 (total of 20 marks). It is so clear that the gap between the minimum and maximum is indifferent. Either the overall performance or a separate skill, the students with lowest scores are still far lower than those who have highest scores or top scores. The outcomes can be probably concluded that the students in this study are in rural areas, and the results are then unsatisfied. According to Southeast Asian Economic Outlook (2013), both education quality and the quality of teachers in the rural areas have to be developed. This will certainly increase the overall picture of the quality of education in regional areas.

2.3 Gender

One interesting phenomenon from the study is that most of the participants are 160 female students (72.07%), and the male students are just at 62 (27.92%). This situation is quite obvious at almost every level of education in many countries (University World News, 2016). This means female students dominate male students in terms of number in many places all over the world.

2.4 Ages

According to the study, the biggest group of students is 17 years old, and the average age group is also 17. This can be interpreted that the students studying in the area of lower southern

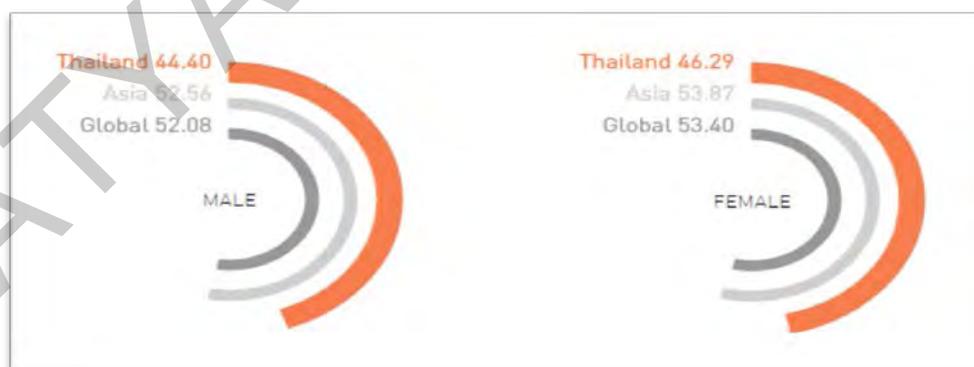
Thailand are mostly 17 years old because 53.6% of them from this study are 17. Therefore, this can be inferred that the average of ages of senior high students should be 17 years old.

2.5 Level (CEFR)

It is absolutely clear that the average of English proficiency from this study according to the CEFR standard is just on the level of A2. The A1 level consists of fewer students only while B1 consists bigger group of students. This phenomenon can be concluded that the English proficiency according to the CEFR assessment for high senior school students in lower southern Thailand is lower than the standard criteria, which is expected to reach at least B1 (Thai Ministry of Education, 2015). Then this can be a great concern to the sectors in education planning and management because the result reflects the failure of English learning and teaching, at least on the senior high schools.

2.6 Performances of Different Gender

The female students' performances (42.94) seem a slightly better than male students (42.11) in overall picture. This result is similar to the research conducted by the organization called Education First (2015), where the female participants (46.29) have a bit higher performances than male ones (44.40). One interesting issue is that the result of this study is also related to the situation of Thai people on the international level, where Thai people are always behind other countries or the world's standard.



Picture 4: Thai Performances (2015)

Focusing on the levels of CEFR band, both female and male students are at A2, but it seems like male students are very slightly better; the female students are at A2 (2.15) and the male students are at A2 (2.16). Another point must be discussed is that female students also have

better performances in the listening skill (12.10/11.83), the grammar skill (8.21.7.69), the reading skill (11.53/11.09); except the vocabulary skill (10.99/11.41) where the male is a bit better. These results indicated that female students in the senior high school students in lower southern Thailand have a better English proficiency than male students and relate to the phenomenon around the world. Insisted by Lumen (2017), he points out that “boys slightly better at math and girls slightly better at reading and literature;” that means, female students are better in language than men in general. However, for teaching a group of students with different genders, integration of several teaching approaches must be employed in order to fulfil each kind weakness of a gender.

3. Suggestions

- 3.1 In this study, the English proficiency of the senior high school students in lower southern Thailand has been investigated. It is necessary to do a further research on other regions of Thailand in order to make comparison with the result of this study.
- 3.2 Either lower or higher than the senior high school students must be investigated too as to make the comparison with this study.
- 3.3 This study just only focuses on the listening skill, vocabulary skill, grammar skill, and reading skill. Other two skills, writing and speaking, must also be investigated as to see the full proficiency of the English language.
- 3.4 English teachers ranging from the basic education level to the high school level might be necessary to be investigated as well by using the CEFR standard.

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