

# A STUDY OF READING QUESTIONS IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS AND NATIONAL TESTS

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## **Abstract**

The lack of English language proficiency of Thai students has been acknowledged for years, and this is reflected in the national test scores i.e. O-NET, GAT, and GET, all of which fall below 50%. The question of concurrence between testing and teaching was raised when the revision of national curriculum (B.E. 2551) was implemented in prototype schools in 2009. Reading comprehension skills, in particular, were given attention as it contributes to other skills and overall learning. The aim of this study is to seek the connection between reading questions in the tests and textbooks in Thai schools. For this purpose, Barrett's taxonomy (Pearson, 2009) was adapted. The findings indicate that Inferential Comprehension is dominant in the tests, but Literal Comprehension is dominant in the textbooks. However, there is a partial agreement between the tests and textbooks in terms of high-order questions such as Inferential Comprehension, Evaluation, and Appreciation. The findings imply that the design of tests and textbooks should be reviewed to reflect the effectiveness of the curriculum and learning, which will possibly improve test scores in the national tests.

Textbooks are the most reliable source of learning English for non-native English speakers. Therefore, they are widely used by schools. Nowadays, there are plenty of commercial English textbooks that are produced for English language education worldwide. However, it is generally agreed upon that learning a second language pedagogy is influenced by the socio-cultural frame of reference of the learners, and the objectives of learning vary from place to place according to curriculum design. Selecting a good textbook that suits the learning context and curriculum is challenging

for schools. This study provides further information to people who are involved in the textbook selection of all levels of educational supervision.

**Key words:** English, Reading comprehension skills, National test scores, textbooks, Thailand.

## Introduction

The English language has become very important to Thai people since the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) was established leading to AEC (2015). However, the failure in English language education studied by Prapphal (2001), Education First (EF Index) (2012), and Jobstreet.com (ASTV, 2013) is reflected in the national test scores i.e. the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET), General Aptitude Test (GAT), and General Education Test (GET). The mean scores appear below 50% of the total score: O-NET ranges 19-32% (2005-2013), GAT ranges 31-36% (2010-2013), and GET ranges 28.5-31% (2011-2015) (NIETS). Although the tests are different in terms of their purposes, the scores are far from satisfactory.

This problem has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Education (MOE), and measures have been put in place, such as hiring foreign teachers to teach in English Program (EP), more in-depth training of teachers, and revision of the national curriculum (B.E. 2551) in which the learning objectives are clearly stated. However, the alignment between the new curriculum and student learning has never been evaluated in a systematic way.

This study aims to ascertain the connection between English language learning and the curriculum by examining the alignment of textbooks and the tests. In particular, reading comprehension questions were focused on due to the fact that reading comprehension scores accounted for around 50% in national tests. Moreover, reading comprehension ability has an impact on other language skills.

Past studies done by multiple researchers have examined the causes of inadequate reading comprehension skills in Thai students. As revealed by Uttayawalee (1999), Yimwilai (2008), and Chuanram (2011), there is a lack of reading skills and strategies in students such as being able to identify the