

2. Related Studies

Classes with students of homogeneous level of ability facilitate the teaching design and management. They enable teachers to "focus on the problems and learning points appropriate for that level of students" (Brown, 1996: 11) and hence, to concentrate on bringing the group forward at a similar pace. It seems that most institutions giving the service of teaching required English courses have realized the importance of this as can be seen from the fact that many attempts have been made to put students into groups of homogeneous English language ability. Some chose to administer a test to measure the students' English ability while some opted out for the results of EEE.

2.1 Placement Test or EEE -- Which Is More Cost-Effective?

PSU attempted to administer what was called a "screening test" with the hope that it would be able to place students in appropriate groups of ability so the lower ability group could be assigned more learning hours/week with more individual attention than those with higher level and thus, possible to level out the differences in the level of achievement at the end of the first semester. Exceptionally good students were exempted from the learning (Roskopf, 1976). The results of the screening test were then compared to the results of EEE, both direct and national, to prove its reliability and consistency. The administration of the screening test proved difficult and complex as the number of students grew larger. With the information collected over time about the relationship between the results of the screening test and that of

EEE, the department then switched to using the EEE scores to put students into groups according to their ability within their own discipline.

However, with the present syllabus structure which requires every student to achieve the same minimum required English proficiency through FE I and FE II coupled with the fact that the students enter the university with a wide range of level of English proficiency as shown in Table 1, it is crucial for the department to find ways to accommodate such a large population with diverse levels of language ability. There needs to be a way of finding out who need an extra preparatory course and with what level of English language ability students should be exempted from the required courses so that the goal of English language courses can be achieved despite the differences at the start.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of PSU Students' EEE Scores in Academic Year 1999

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
EEE Score	2094	21	98	48.60	12.02

In a study on the relationship between the results of EEE, an English placement test and FE achievement tests of first year Kasetsart University students, Getkham (1991) found that there were strong positive correlations between EEE results and English placement test results and between the EEE results and FE achievement test results (.84 and .87 respectively). However, the correlation between the EEE results and the FE achievement test results was stronger than that between the English placement test results and the FE achievement test results. The Multiple Regression Analysis revealed that EEE was a better predictor of achievement than the English placement test. A study conducted at Suranaree University of Technology (Thipsuwankul et al, 1999) also indicated that there was a high correlation between EEE and an English placement test.

Walailak University chose to use a placement test to assess the students' ability when entering the university (Moudraia, 2000) and there has been no attempt to find out the relationship between EEE results and its placement test.

Besides all the above documented studies, attempts to place students into groups according to their English language ability have been made at various institutions. Based on interviews conducted during October 2000, the information obtained could be summed up as follows:

Table 2: Attempts to Place Students According to Their English Ability at Various Institutions

Institution	Tool Used in Placing Students	Beginning Year	Notes
Kasetsart University	EEE Score	1994	A placement test was used up to 1988 before the EEE score was adopted after a study revealed that the correlation between the EEE score and the placement test score was strong.
Thammasat University	EEE Score	1995	A placement test was used up to 1994 before the EEE score was adopted after it was found that the results of EEE and placement test were similar. Placement tests also posed a problem of students not doing the test according to their real ability either because they wanted to be placed in a course lower than their real ability so it was easier for them to earn good grades or they did not want to be exempted and, hence, deprived of an opportunity to study English.
Burapha University	EEE Score	1999	Before 1999, all students studied the same required courses. There were no attempts made to place them in ability groups.
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi	EEE Score	2000	Before 2000, all students studied the same required courses. There were no attempts made to place them in ability groups.
Srinakharinrajwrot University	Placement Test	2001	In 2000, the EEE score was used to place students, but in 2001 a placement test was tried. In 2002, it appears that the EEE score will be used again since a study by the Language Institute of Chulalongkorn University revealed that there was no difference in using either the EEE score or the placement test score as a placement tool.

It seems that most of the institutions involved in the teaching of required English courses have tried using both EEE scores and placement test scores to put students into different ability groups. Using a placement test is complex and requires a lot of effort both in the production of the test and the administration. Students have to come to take the test at the same time and teachers need to mark the papers in a very limited length of time so the grouping can be done and the teaching and learning can begin as soon as school starts. So, when it is evident that both EEE and the placement test have similar discriminating power or in some cases, EEE can do even better, it is sensible to use the EEE scores as a tool to place students into groups according to their ability as this can be done before the beginning of the academic year. The next logical question is exactly how the EEE scores could be used to place students in different ability groups. In other words, what are appropriate criteria or cut-off points and how can they be established?

2.2 Criteria for Placing Students in Required English Courses

Among the institutions surveyed, two of them, namely Suranaree University of Technology and Walailak University, use a placement test as a tool for putting students in required English courses. Their placement criteria are presented in the following table:

Table 3: Criteria for Placing Students in Required English Courses Based on Placement Test

Institution	No. of Required English Courses	Score	Required English Course	How Cut-off Points Were Specified
Suranaree University of Technology	5	0-45	English I	as seen appropriate
		46-65	English II	
		66-79	English III	
		80-89	English IV	
		90-100	English V	
Walailak University	5*	0-69	English I	as seen appropriate
		70-84	English II	
		85-100	English III	

*Only the first three courses require placement of students into appropriate ability groups.

Many institutions have used the EEE scores to place their students in different ability groups. However, the scores specified for each level were different. Some were based on the study formally conducted while some were based solely on observations and experience gained from the previous years. The number of courses required at each institution is also different so the assignment of students to courses was different too as can be seen from the table below:

Table 4: Criteria for Placing Students in Required English Courses Based on EEE

Institution	No. of Required English Courses	Score	Required English Course	How Cut-off Points Were Specified
Burapha University	2	0-49	English 101	as seen appropriate
		50-100	English 102	
Srinakharinrawit University	2	adjustable	Same course but with different levels of texts	as seen appropriate
Thammasat University	2	0-40	Remedial course	as seen appropriate
		41-63	English 171	
		64-79	English 172	
		80-100	Exempted	

Institution	No. of Required English Courses	Score	Required English Course	How Cut-off Points Were Specified
Kasetsart University	3	0-40 41-60 61-81 82-100	English 111 English 112 English 113 Exempted	as seen appropriate
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi	3	The lower 1/3 of all students The upper 2/3 of all students	English 101 English 102	as seen appropriate with the help of information about the students' performance in the previous years

It should be noted that most of the institutions based their decision on factors such as the overall performance of all students in each academic year, the performance of students in the previous years, and physical facilities that can accommodate them. In most of the cases, teachers play a key role in making the decision. To the researchers' knowledge, there have been no attempts to statistically and systematically establish the cut-off points for placing students in appropriate required English courses.