

## ENGLISH GLOBALIZATION AND A STRATEGY FOR THE ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS”\*\*

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We live today in a global society or as Thais call it, “loke rai prom daen” or “yuk lokapiwat.” What this implies for all tertiary institutions is that any academic institution that ignores English, or does not give full importance to the teaching, study, and use of the English language, does so at its own peril!

It is in this global context that the English language has assumed great importance in many areas today, but, particularly so in the academic area especially at the tertiary or university level.

Looking at this topic from the other direction or angle, it is equally true to say that any policy or strategy for the development of tertiary institutions but which ignores the importance of the English language, that strategy would also be doomed to failure.

Before going to the importance of the English language to the development of a tertiary institution, I would like to share my ideas on a general strategy for the development of tertiary institutions in general first.

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\*\*This “paper” was given at a Seminar on “A Strategy for the Academic Development of Tertiary Institutions”, 23 December, Rajapark College.

## STRATEGY FOR THE ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Firstly, which strategy to follow depends on what we have in mind as the outcome of our strategy - that is - what are our goals - or, to put it plainly, "What do we want the tertiary institution to become in the near future?"

It is my belief that the goal for any tertiary institution in Asia should be that of becoming a first class institution [stabun], a leader in tertiary education, looked up to not only by other tertiary institutions in its immediate area [Thailand], but also by other institutions in the wider sphere such as the Asia-Pacific region.

Secondly, I believe that any strategy for the development of any tertiary institution must include at least two main areas of development: administrative development and academic development. The two go hand-in-hand and, at times, are hard to separate.

Thirdly, in today's global economy, in order to become a forward looking and an effective academic institution, the tertiary institution must emphasize development not only in the area of information technology [IT], but also in the area of the teaching, study and use of English as a foreign language [EFL]. The reason why these two areas are very important to academic development is because both IT and the English language play major roles in today's global society and economy. If a tertiary institution is to grow and assume a place in international education, it must give great importance to these two areas.

The reasons why information technology [IT] has grown and developed so fast in the past ten years or so is apparent. Information technology [IT] has served as a growth engine. The rapid acquisition and spread of knowledge in other areas have been made possible and even enhanced by the advance in and the rapid growth of the development of information technology. But there is another growth engine which is equally important, if not more important. This is the rapid expansion and great importance

of the English language in our modern and global society, resulting in English assuming a greater and wider role in our everyday lives.

## WHY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS SO IMPORTANT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TERTIARY INSTITUTION?

The English language that is so widely used around the world is not only an academic language but also a global or universal language. Not only is English widely used in academic research in many areas but many of the reports on such research are also written about and discussed about in English.

Moreover, much of the international trade and diplomacy throughout the world has been and still is conducted via the English language as media.

The globalization that is part and parcel of the world economy as we know it today is, to a large extent, made possible because of the English language.

English plays a dominant role both as a first language [L1] and also as a second or foreign language [L2] for hundreds of millions of people around the world. Here in Thailand, especially, English plays a major role as possibly the most important foreign language [L2] [see Table 1].

World-wide, it has been estimated that there are over 350 million speakers or users of English as a first language [L1] and another 300 million or so speakers or users of English as a foreign or second language [L2].

Moreover, in the not too distant future, the number of speakers /users of English as a foreign/second language [L2] will catch up with and may well outnumber the number of L1 speakers and users of English. Several factors are behind this rapid growth:

- the need to acquire English as a foreign language [L2] by ever increasing numbers of students going to further their studies abroad in English speaking countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Even students going to further their studies

- in India, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong also need proficiency at a good level in the English language.

- the increasing numbers of asylum seekers or “economic refugees”, who, by the hundreds of thousands each year, seek out new English speaking “havens” overseas.

- English is the native language of two major influential nations, namely, the United States and the United Kingdom.

- English is used around the world in both writing and speech; it has been estimated that three-fifths of the world’s mail and postal service is written in the English language. It should also be noted that world-wide usage of the internet [e-mail, etc] is also conducted mainly in the English language.

## WHY IS ENGLISH SO UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED?

Here again, there are several linguistic reasons. However, the more important reasons are:

- firstly, its writing system is alphabetical in contrast to some other “international” languages such as Chinese. Consequently, English can be easily typed and printed more easily. This in

turn, makes it easier for English to be used in textbooks and the reporting of research and publishing of newsprint.

- secondly, English words are relatively short.

- thirdly, the English language is, in comparison to other languages such as Spanish, French, Italian, etc. relatively free from a complicated inflectional system. Those like myself who have studied Latin, a highly inflected language, readily appreciate this last factor.

## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THAILAND

As you know, there are no second languages in Thailand, at least officially. Moreover, the national language policy has tended to place great emphasis on the study of the national language, namely Thai.

However, with the economic boom of the 1980s, demands for the study of modern foreign languages have expanded both steadily and rapidly. Consequently, there has been a greater need for professional people to be more adept, not only in their own national language, Thai, but also in a foreign language, particularly English.

Because of such needs, English has become not only a tool for trade and modern technology, but also an essential part of professional advancement.

A working knowledge of English is necessary for advancement in the professions. My estimate [based on several sources] of the number of Thai users and speakers of English, mainly as a foreign language [L2], is between 700,000 and a million.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An important part of educational/academic development of any tertiary institution, lies in the resources at hand.

Any tertiary institution that wants to assume its place in the international arena must be willing to pool its resources into the areas which can contribute to its development. Consequently, there must be encouragement and support in the following areas.

- encouragement and support [by this I mean both administrative, academic and financial support] for the teaching staff to pursue and take an active part in academic activities such as the writing/publication of English language texts and academic articles in English, the encouragement and support of staff to attend and later contribute to international [English language] seminars and workshops overseas. Such support should be at both the under-graduate and graduate levels.

- the development of one of the tertiary institution's important resources: that of the library including the use of the internet as a research tool. Both can contribute a great deal to research work and academic development and support for both teachers and students. A first class institution must have a first class information and library source.

- there should be a "student self-access resource center." The use of English language "CD-ROMS" can contribute to student English language practice and proficiency. [Moreover, the use of CD-ROMS are also likely to help attract new students.]

This is also important to a "student centered or learner centered study environment". In a learning environment like Thailand where students do not have the advantage of "immersion in English" which countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, India, etc, enjoy, the need for and availability of such "student self-access centers" are even more pressing, particularly in a "learner-centered" study environment.

- expansion of the student intake and of well-qualified teaching staff. The two, of course, go hand-in-hand.

- there should be a special library committee to assist in the development of the library. In particular, there should also be a "new acquisitions officer" whose function is mainly to ensure that the institution's library/resources are up-to-date.

By working in conjunction with each department [particularly the English Department since 80 per cent of all academic publication are in English], the "new acquisitions officer" can help ensure that the library resources are up-to-date and serve the academic/research needs of both the teaching staff and students [both graduate and under-graduate levels].

- again, if the institution is to be able to effectively communicate with overseas institutions on a regular basis and become internationally recognized, the establishment of an "international relations unit" or as Thais call it, "vitesampant," is quite an essential part of the institution's academic development.

Although I have stressed the two growth areas of I.T. and English [and Foreign Relations], this is not to say that other areas such as research, and other disciplines are unimportant. Far from it. Moreover, in today's globalization, there is an increasing need for joint ventures between universities around the world to co-operate and work together in the various disciplines.

In the end, it all boils down to one thing really: the financial backing which the institution would be willing to provide for such academic development projects.

However, I believe that the advantages and benefits that the tertiary institution would receive by supporting and implementing such academic projects and activities would be tremendous and would far outweigh the costs.

### Appendix Notes: Table 1

Table 1. The Geographical and Numerical Distribution of L1 and L2 Speakers or Users of English. .

Looking at Table 1, you will see that I have separated speakers or users of the English language [both as L1 and also as L2] into 5 broad categories:

A, B, C, D, and E.

Category A groups together the countries which are the traditional bases of English where it is the primary language.

It is in Category A where the largest number of L1 speakers and users of English reside [322.0 million]. Note also that in Category A, there is a substantial number of L2 speakers and users of English [almost 40 million].

**In Category B**, the Asian region is grouped together with the largest number of L2 speakers and users of English [114.5 million], according to my estimates based on several sources. Note that this figure does not include China. Note also that the number of L1 speakers of English in this region is relatively small at 1.5 million and that the number of L2 speakers in this Asian region at 114.5 m. far outnumbers the L1 figure.

**In category C**, we have the African region with a smaller but still considerable number of L2 speakers and users of English at 73.8 million.

**Category D** consists of the Oceanic region which includes some small islands in the Pacific such as Guam, American Samoa, Papua New Guinea, etc. But, note that even in such remote places, L2 speakers and users of English [some in the form of Pidgin English] outnumber L1 speakers of English by five to one.

### Category E (the residuals).

We therefore arrive at the figures stated at the beginning of this paper, that is, a grand total of 650 million or so speakers or users of English divided into two large groups of 350 million L1 English speakers and 300 million L2 English speakers, making a grand total of 650 million speakers and users of English [both American English and British English].

In other words, currently in global terms, L2 speakers and users of English make up over 85 per cent of the number of L1 speakers and users of English.

Hence the statement that “It is very likely that in the not too distant future, the number of L2 speakers and users of English may well outnumber that of L1 speakers and users of English” is quite a realistic one, particularly keeping in mind that one of the largest users of English as a second language is India.

It is in this development and expansion of English as a foreign or second language that provides the future development of the English language.

Table 1. Geographical and Numerical Distribution of L1 and  
L2 Speakers and Users of English. [1]

A. MAJOR ENGLISH

SPEAKING REGIONS [2]	L1	L2	Total English Speakers
Australia	15.3 m.	2.1 m	17.4 m
Canada	19.7 m	6.0 m	25.7 m
New Zealand	3.4 m	0.2 m	3.6 m
United Kingdom	56.9 m	1.1 m	58.0 m
United States	226.7 m	30.0 m	256.7 m
SUB-TOTAL	322.0 m	39.4 m	361.4 m

B. ASIAN REGION ENGLISH SPEAKERS [3]

1.5 m	114.5 m	116.0 m
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C. AFRICAN REGION ENGLISH SPEAKERS

5.1 m	73.8 m	78.9 m
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D. OCEANIC REGION ENGLISH SPEAKERS

0.1 m	0.5 m	0.6 m
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E. OTHER ENGLISH SPEAKERS [RESIDUAL]

21.3 m	71.8 m	93.1 m
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GRAND TOTAL OF	350.0 m	300.0 m	650.0 m
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ENGLISH SPEAKERS

- [1] Estimates of [L1] and [L2] English speakers are based on various sources. The exact numbers are likely to be larger.
- [2] Countries where the majority of English native speakers [L1 speakers] reside. These are the traditional bases of English where it is the primary language.
- [3] The figures do not include China.

### Bibliography

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