Self-perception of English Proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL Teachers

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Article information	Abstract
	This study aims to examine self-perception of English proficiency of Thai teachers who teach English as a foreign language at the lower secondary level under the framework of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). Moreover, the relationship between the teachers' self-perception and their actual English proficiency was investigated. The respondents of the study were 123 Thai lower secondary teachers from 27 schools around Thailand. The design of this study was quantitative in nature. Thus, questionnaires were used as the key research instrument. The questionnaire items were designed based on the CEFR framework and focused on descriptors of the A1 to B1 levels. The findings showed that Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers had positive self-perception towards their English proficiency. Moreover, there was a slight relationship between their self-perception and their English proficiency using the CEFR levels.

INTRODUCTION

English is widely accepted and used as an international language. The English language has played an important role in Thai education for more than a century (Darasawang, 2007). Various factors must be taken into consideration in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), for instance, choices about which language skills to teach, how to teach, where the language will be used, learning environment, choices of content and materials, and assessment criteria (Graddol, 2006).

English is increasingly important in Thailand. However, there are many concerns to be addressed. The expansion of English in Thailand has occurred in spite of deficient English language education and a lack of English language teaching resources (Baker, 2012). According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2015, conducted by the Education First Language Institute, Thailand is deemed a non-English speaking country with very low English proficiency (Fredrickson, 2016). Furthermore, the English language competence of many Thai teachers and students remains relatively low (Noom-ura, 2013). According to Hayes (2010), the overall perception of the inferior English skills of teachers who failed government English tests has also been a problem in Thailand. However, these need further elaboration and perhaps re-investigation in order to assure the results of these previous studies. Moreover, Thai

teachers are required to have a higher level of professionalism due to the rapid change of globalization, and they must adjust to a new educational development system to enhance their professionalism and bring advantages to the students (Kitjaroonchai, 2013). Thai teachers in public schools are assigned to undergo an assessment under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Test, which is part of an Education Ministry policy to improve Thailand's integration in the Asean Economic Community (AEC) by raising the country's English-speaking standards (The Nation, 2015).

As can be seen, not only students have been urged to improve their English proficiency to get ready for the AEC, but teachers have also been urged to improve their English language skills, as they are the pillars of the education system in the nation (Kitjaroonchai, 2013). According to Chulavatnatol (1997, as cited in Atagi, 2011, p. 26), it is essential to upgrade teachers and teacher education because the teachers play a key role in the education of the youth of Thailand. Lange (1990, as cited in Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013, p. 891) also claimed that language proficiency has been rated as the most essential characteristic of a good teacher. Perceived language proficiency is an important issue for non-native English speaker teachers and has an impact on their professional self-esteem and confidence. So, language proficiency seems to have influence on teachers' feelings. In such circumstances, it is essential to know how teachers feel with regard to their English language proficiency. Jia, Eslami, and Burlbaw (2006, as cited in Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013, p. 890) stated that understanding teachers' perceptions and beliefs is important because teachers, heavily involved in various teaching and learning processes, are practitioners of educational principles and theories.

In Thailand, children are required to attend at least the first three years of high school. Students who study English should have reached A2 proficiency of CEFR at the end of the lower secondary level. Although teachers are required to reach the basic level of an educational degree in order to teach, there are still many teachers whose actual knowledge and ability are unable to fulfill the requirements of CEFR. It is interesting to know what Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers think about their English competence. Thus, this study aims to find out the self-perception of English proficiency of Thai teachers who teach English at the lower secondary level under the CEFR. Their self-perception may directly affect how they talk to themselves, the way they present themselves to others, and their ability to communicate competently with others. Teachers' self-perceptions not only have a substantial effect on their teaching practices and classroom behavior, but are also related to their students' attainment (Grossman, Reynolds, Ringstaff & Sykes, 1985). Additionally, knowing the perceptions of teachers enables one to make predictions about their teaching and assessment practices in classrooms (Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013, p. 891).

Although the Thai government has tried to encourage Thai teachers to improve their English, the viewpoints of teachers have not been examined. It is crucial to gain more information regarding self-perception among Thai lower secondary teachers in order to find out whether their thoughts and feelings regarding their English proficiency affect their communication in English. This study was conducted to answer the following questions:
- Do Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers have a positive or negative perception towards their own English proficiency?

- Is there any relationship between Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perception and their English proficiency?

Why is the CEFR important?

The CEFR gives a detailed description of learners by skill in a language-neutral format. It is a useful reference document for school directors, syllabus designers, teachers, teacher trainers, and proficient learners. Even among teachers of the same language in similar contexts, there are lots of varieties which can be classified into many levels like beginner, intermediate, or advanced. This variability increases significantly across different languages, in different countries, and with different age ranges of learners (Cambridge University Press, 2013). The CEFR is significant in talking reliably about language levels. Moreover, the CEFR is useful for teachers to understand the different levels of language proficiency. It helps teachers to see more clearly what learners have to work on. The CEFR describes what learners need to be able to do to reach the next level. Teachers can find it useful in showing how different component skills are described at each level. The CEFR framework is used to benchmark communicative language ability in reading, writing, speaking and listening. It can be divided into three levels: Basic users (Level A), Independent users (Level B), and Proficient users (Level C). Each of those bands can also be divided in two, giving six main levels: Breakthrough (Level A1), Waystage (Level A2), Threshold (Level B1), Vantage (Level B2), Effective operational proficiency (Level C1), and Mastery (Level C2).

In Thailand, children are required to attend six years of elementary school and at least the first three years of high school (Angelis & Magana, 2017). The Thai Ministry of Education has set the following English language proficiency targets for students (Maxwell, 2015).
- By the end of Prathom 6 (Grade 6), students should have reached A1 proficiency.
- By the end of Mathayom 3 (Grade 9), students should have reached A2 proficiency.
- By the end of Mathayom 6 (Grade 12), students should have reached B1 proficiency.

The Thai Education Ministry has also tried to apply the CEFR as a test of teachers' English competence to obtain benchmark data for training and also to verify teachers' suitability to replace native-speaking counterparts (Draper & Kamnuansilpa, 2015).

English teachers in public schools are set to undergo the CEFR test, which is part of an Education Ministry policy (*The Nation,* 2015). All secondary school English teachers should have reached a CEFR level higher than the level they teach. Therefore, lower secondary Thai English teachers should be of at least B1 proficiency. Teachers at this level should be proficient in English so that they can teach students to accomplish their expected level.

Self-perception

Hornby (2005 as cited in Srakang & Jansem, 2014) states that self-perception refers to an idea, belief, or an image that you have as a result of how you see or understand something. According to Manz and Sims (2001, p. 110), one of the most crucial beliefs that influences one's capability is their view of their own ability to carry out a task. Manz and Sims (2001,

p. 110) also note that people's ability to perform successfully increases the probability of actually doing it, whereas, negative beliefs decrease that probability. It seems that people's state of mind about themselves really affects their performance. Boone (2001, p. 126) claims that you first have to know yourself well in order to get over yourself. In this study, self-perception is defined as the combination of opinion, beliefs, and attitudes which indicates how Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers feel about their English proficiency.

Significance of teachers' self-perceptions

The significance of teachers' self-perceptions has been highlighted in the field of ELT professionals (Srakang & Jansem, 2014). Barcelos (2003) explained that language teachers' self-perceptions affect what they do in their classrooms. Yu (2004) also notes that teachers' self-perceptions manipulate what they do both inside and outside the classroom. Hence, teachers should be aware of what they perceive and believe when they conduct their class. This means that teachers' self-perceptions are an essential element in how they form judgments or make decisions. Furthermore, Moloi (2009) states that teachers' self-perceptions result in how teachers handle their teaching. Jia (2004) claims that as behavior is led by thought, exploring teachers' perceptions and beliefs helps gain deeper understanding of teachers' classroom behaviors and provides an outline for improving teachers' practices. Therefore, teachers' self-perceptions play an important role in teaching and learning processes. Teachers' self-perceptions not only influence their actions and decision-making, but also provide significant insight into aspects of education.

Related research on non-native English speaker teachers' self-perceptions

A number of researchers have suggested that non-native English speaking teachers encounter anxieties, insecurities, or a sense of inferiority because of their self-perceived inadequate language proficiency (Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2015, p. 3). Tang (2007) stated that non-native English speaking teachers need to boost their language proficiency, and that their poor language proficiency has an effect on their confidence in teaching English. Choi (2007), in accordance with Tang, states that some non-native English speaking teachers think that being a non-native speaker is difficult, and they feel uncomfortable. Besides, Rajagopalan (2005 as cited in Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2015) asserts that non-native English speaking teachers' self-perception of English proficiency, rather than their actual English ability, plays a key role in establishing their confidence in teaching. Moussu and Llurda (2008) reported that non-native English speaking teachers working at primary and secondary school are confident in their language proficiency in general. Additionally, Llurda and Huguet (2003 as cited in Moussu & Llurda, 2008) explained that non-native English speaking teachers show confidence in their language proficiency in general if they have spent some time abroad. Those who had not spent time abroad seemed to think that native English speaker teachers would be a better model for the students.

In Abe (2011 as cited in Lee et al., 2015), the self-perceptions of non-native English speaking teachers who teach English in Thailand are examined, and the findings are interesting. The participants have positive self-perceptions, showing high confidence in their teaching.

They also highly rate their language proficiency, and feel comfortable in teaching English. They, moreover, acknowledge some limitations in their English language performance such as pronunciation, vocabulary, pragmatic knowledge, and accuracy in grammar. They also believe that they are able to teach English and do not suffer from answering students' unexpected questions. They think that language teachers who speak more than one language could understand learners' difficulties better than those who speak only one language. Since they went through a tough time while learning another language, they are able to address their students' learning difficulties by sharing their experiences and strategies in learning another language. They also appreciate non-native English speaking teachers' strengths well, which might be the main reason why they had positive self-perceptions of themselves as English teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A group of Thai lower secondary teachers of English is the focus of this study since they play a vital role to promote Thai students' English skills before completing the lower secondary level as a minimum requirement of basic education in Thailand. In addition, this group of teachers has been required by the Thai government to undergo the CEFR test so as to assess their English proficiency.

A total of 123 Thai lower secondary teachers of English voluntarily participated in this study. They were 34 males and 89 females with ages ranging from 21 to 60. They were from 116 public schools and 7 private schools around Thailand. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 year to more than 20 years. Most of them graduated with a bachelor's degree in education majoring in English. All of the participants have taken the CEFR test with the results ranging from A1 to C2.

Instrument

The research instrument of this study was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (see Appendix) which included two parts: demographic information and self-perception towards English proficiency. The first part elicited participants' personal information in terms of their general and educational background, teaching experience, their use of English and their experiences in taking CEFR tests. The second part consisted of 37 items with a scale of 1 – 5, ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (= 5). All items were used to elicit how the participants perceive their English proficiency. The questionnaire was constructed by adapting the CEFR framework and focusing on descriptive items of B1 level, which is a requirement for Thai lower secondary English teachers. Some items were discarded as they were not relevant to the Thai context. All 37 selected items were broken down into five sub-sections: 1) Overall English proficiency (10 items); 2) Listening skill (5 items); 3) Reading skill (6 items); 4) Speaking skill (10 items); and 5) Writing skill (6 items). Additionally, the reported reliability of the questionnaire in the main study was 0.974.

The questionnaire was entirely in English. All statements were created under the framework of CEFR at A1 to B1 level, which Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers are required to reach. It could thus be assumed that the respondents who were English teachers could understand all of the items and answer them properly. When the questionnaire was distributed, the respondents were given at least two weeks to complete it. It is assumed that due to the ample time the respondents had to answer the questionnaires, they could look up any unknown words in the dictionary.

Research procedures

There were two main stages: preparation and data collection. This study examined the self-perception of English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers. The design of this study was quantitative in nature. Thus, the questionnaire items were employed as a survey instrument which was designed based on the CEFR focusing on descriptive items at the B1 level. The validity of the instrument was established by expert judgment. The expert was requested to comment on the instrument's wording, ambiguities, appropriateness, and readability. Based on the expert's advice, the instrument was modified and approved. After that, the revised version of the questionnaire was piloted with 30 participants who were non-Thai English teachers in Thai government schools: two from Bangkok and twenty-eight from provincial areas. They consisted of different nationalities, for instance, American, British, Canadian, African, Filipino, and Singaporean. These non-Thai English teachers were employed in a pilot study so as to try out the questionnaire based on their comprehension and interpretation of each statement, and how appropriate the design was. Being native English speakers or users of English as a second or official language could be beneficial in giving feedback towards any vague or ambiguous wording in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also analyzed through statistical analysis in terms of percentage, mean score, and standard deviations to explore the self-perception of English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers. The SPSS program as a tool, therefore, was applied in order to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire.

For data collection, the questionnaire was generated in two formats: using online survey software provided by Google, and a paper-based survey. The online questionnaire was posted and shared to the Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers, and only 18 teachers from 12 schools participated. Meanwhile, the paper-based questionnaire was conveyed to 15 schools in every region around Thailand. About 105 Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers responded to the questionnaire and returned it within three weeks. Then, data was collected for further analysis.

Data analysis

The results of the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively based on the research question by using descriptive statistics for three sub-sections: 1) the perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers for each statement; 2) the types of perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers in five main subscales; and 3) the correlation (using Spearman Correlation) between Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perceptions and their English proficiency using the CEFR levels.

FINDINGS

As a prelude to the results, data on participants' personal information in terms of their general and educational background, teaching experience, their use of English and their scores gained from the CEFR tests are firstly presented.

Regarding their background, 28% of them were males and 72% were females. Their ages ranged from 21-25 (21%), 26-30 (32%), 31-35 (16%), 36-40 (12%), 41-45 (4%), 46-50 (1%), 51-55 (5%), and 56-60 (5%).They were from 116 public schools (94%), and 7 private schools (6%). All of them obtained different levels of educational degrees. To clarify, 74% of them graduated with a bachelor's degree, 23% with a master's degree, 2% with higher than a master's degree and 1% with less than a bachelor's degree. They held an education degree majoring in English (65%), an arts or humanities degree majoring in English (19%), an education degree majoring in non-English (12%) and an arts or humanities degree majoring in non-English (4%). Their teaching experiences were varied. Most of them (47%) had one- to four-year experiences, while the rest had five to eight years (19%), more than twenty years (12%), nine to twelve years (9%), thirteen to sixteen years (8%) and seventeen to twenty years (5%).

With regard to their use of English outside the classroom, 50% of the participants used English every day, whereas 25% of them used English more than 3 hours a week and 17% spent 1-3 hours a week using English. English was used less than 1 hour a week by 7%, while only 1% of the participants stated that they used English once in a while in meeting foreigners. The activities that they mostly did in English during the week included teaching an English class (85%), reading online information (70%), writing texts on social networks (62%), reading printed texts (38%), speaking to non-Thai colleagues (38%), talking on the phone (32%), sending and receiving English messages through email (27%), presenting in meetings and writing reports (16%), listening to music/radio (10%) and presenting at meetings (6%). In addition, the skills that they could perform best, as evaluated by themselves, were speaking (28.20%), listening (27.10%), reading (26.30%) and writing (18.40%).

Regarding their experience in taking the CEFR test, their levels were A1 (N=9, 7%), A2 (N=46, 37%), B1 (N=35, 29%), B2 (N=27, 22%), C1 (N=4, 3%), and C2 (N=2, 2%).

1. The perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers for each statement

The findings were analyzed based on five subscales: overall English proficiency, listening skill, reading skill, speaking skill and writing skill. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' responses to each of the 37 statements in the questionnaire. The Weighted Mean Score (WMS) method was applied (Yamane, 1973) and the criteria for interpreting the findings are as follows:

Mean score ($\bar{x}$)	Interpretation
4.21 - 5.00	Strongly agree
3.41 - 4.20	Agree
2.61 - 3.40	Neutral
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly disagree

Table 1 below demonstrates overall English proficiency of the respondents. The mean scores indicated that most of them strongly agreed that they could introduce themselves and others and could ask and answer questions about personal details ($\bar{x}$ = 4.38, item 2). They agreed that they could communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters ($\bar{x}$ = 4.17, item 5). The respondents also agreed that they could interact in a simple way provided the other person talked slowly and clearly and was prepared to help ($\bar{x}$ = 4.15, item 3), and could also understand and use familiar everyday English expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type ($\bar{x}$ = 4.03, item 1). From these results, it could be concluded that the respondents could communicate well in a simple way with familiar topics, and they preferred using everyday English to English in specific situations.

Table 1
Mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers'
self-perception towards overall English proficiency

Overall English proficiency	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. I can understand and use familiar everyday English expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.	4.03	0.73	agree
2. I can introduce myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details.	4.38	0.65	strongly agree
3. I can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.	4.15	0.71	agree
4. I can understand English sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance.	4.00	0.75	agree
5. I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.	4.17	0.67	agree
6. I can describe in simple terms aspects of my background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.	3.98	0.78	agree
7. I can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.	3.96	0.76	agree
8. I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.	3.80	0.76	agree
9. I can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.	3.94	0.66	agree
10. I can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.	3.92	0.69	agree

As for listening skills, as shown in Table 2, the mean scores showed that most of the respondents agreed that they were able to recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning themselves, their family and immediate concrete surroundings when people spoke slowly and clearly (= 4.03, item 11). They could also catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements (= 4.02, item 13), and could understand the main point of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. (= 3.94, item 14). It can be noticed that the participants thought they were able to listen well when confronted with familiar words, basic phrases, or short messages.

Table 2
Mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers'
self-perception towards their listening skill

Listening	$\overline{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
11. I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	4.03	0.76	agree
12. I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance.	3.80	0.75	agree
13. I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	4.02	0.78	agree
14. I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.	3.94	0.79	agree
15. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	3.76	0.77	agree

According to Table 3, the mean scores of participants' reading skill showed that the respondents strongly agreed that they were able to read very short and simple texts (= 4.31, item 17) and could understand short simple personal letters (= 4.20, item 19). They also said they understood familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues (= 4.18, item 16). It could indicate that the participants thought themselves capable of reading short and simple texts in various kinds of materials related to everyday English.

Table 3
Mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers'
self-perception towards their reading skill

Reading	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
16. I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example, on notices and posters or in catalogues.	4.18	0.66	agree
17. I can read very short and simple texts.	4.31	0.70	strongly agree
18. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables.	4.05	0.75	agree
19. I can understand short simple personal letters.	4.20	0.69	strongly agree
20. I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job- related language.	3.98	0.74	agree
21. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	4.08	0.67	agree

As for speaking skills, in Table 4, the mean scores showed that most of the respondents agreed that they could use simple phrases and sentences to describe where they lived and people they knew (= 4.17, item 27). They also could ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics (= 4.07, item 23), and could communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities (= 4.07, item 24). In addition, they agreed that they could interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help them formulate what they're trying to say (= 3.97, item 22). It can be interpreted that the participants believed they could speak well about something simple like their routines, familiar topics, and familiar activities.

Table 4
Mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers'
self-perception towards their speaking skill

Speaking	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
22. I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say.	3.97	0.75	agree
23. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	4.07	0.75	agree
24. I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities.	4.07	0.82	agree
25. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	3.91	0.79	agree

26. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.	3.84	0.77	agree
27. I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	4.17	0.71	agree
28. I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	3.94	0.78	agree
29. I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes, and ambitions.	3.95	0.79	agree
30. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.	3.96	0.78	agree
31. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	3.83	0.74	agree

For writing skills, as shown in Table 5, the mean scores showed that the respondents strongly agreed that they could write a short and simple postcard (= 4.25, item 32), could write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need (= 4.16, item 34), and could also fill in forms with personal details, for example, entering their name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form (= 4.13, item 33). This could mean that most of the participants thought themselves able to perform well in short and simple writing tasks related to their routines and everyday life.

Table 5
Mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers'
self-perception towards their writing skill

Writing	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
32. I can write a short and simple postcard.	4.25	0.71	strongly agree
33. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	4.13	0.74	agree
34. I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need.	4.16	0.76	agree
35. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	4.08	0.77	agree
36. I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.	3.98	0.76	agree
37. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	4.01	0.80	agree

To sum up, the findings show that Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers agreed that they could perform their English communication well in all four skills. The five ranks of their self-perceptions can be described as follows. The highest rank indicated that Thai lower secondary English teachers perceived that they could introduce themselves and others and could ask and answer questions about personal details. The second-highest rank indicated that they were able to recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning themselves,

their family and immediate concrete surroundings when people spoke slowly and clearly. The third-highest rank showed that Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers could read very short and simple texts. The fourth-highest rank indicated that they agreed that they could use simple phrases and sentences to describe where they lived and people they knew. Lastly, the fifth-highest rank showed that they perceived that they could write a short and simple postcard.

2. The types of perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers in five main subscales.

The five main subscales – overall English proficiency, listening skill, reading skill, speaking skill, and writing skill – were also measured in order to find out the level of perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers. The types of teachers' self-perception are considered from mean scores and analyzed as follows:

Mean score ($\bar{x}$)	Interpretation
4.21 - 5.00	Highly positive
3.41 - 4.20	Positive
2.61 - 3.40	Neutral
1.81 - 2.60	Negative
1.00 - 1.80	Highly negative

A high score indicates positive self-perception, whereas a low score indicates negative self-perception.

Table 6
Average mean scores and standard deviations of Thai lower secondary
EFL teachers' types of self-perception in five main subscales

Self-perceptions of English proficiency	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
1. Overall English proficiency	4.03	0.54	Positive	3
2. Listening	3.91	0.65	Positive	5
3. Reading	4.13	0.59	Positive	1
4. Speaking	3.97	0.62	Positive	4
5. Writing	4.10	0.66	Positive	2
Overall teachers' perception towards their English proficiency	4.03	0.54	Positive	

As shown in Table 6, the average mean score of self-perception of English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers was 4.03, which demonstrates that Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers had positive self-perceptions of their English proficiency. Considering the mean scores of each part, they could be arranged in order of their perceived level from the highest to the lowest: 1) Reading (4.13), 2) Writing (4.10), 3) Overall English proficiency (4.03), 4) Speaking (3.97), and 5) Listening (3.91). It was found that all of them represent positive self-perception.

3. The correlation between Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perceptions and their English proficiency on the CEFR test scores

Mean scores for the types of perceived English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers in five main subscales and their CEFR test scores were correlated in order to indicate the relationship between their self-perceptions and their English proficiency.

Table 7
Results of the analysis using Spearman's correlation

Self-perceptions of English proficiency	Correlation coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	The strength of the correlation
1. Overall English proficiency	0.224*	0.01	weak
2. Listening	0.185*	0.04	very weak
3. Reading	0.141*	0.11	very weak
4. Speaking	0.145*	0.10	very weak
5. Writing	0.166*	0.06	very weak
Overall	0.175*	0.05	very weak

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 reveals that there was a significant positive correlation between Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perceptions and their CEFR test scores (r=0.175, p<.05). However, their correlation was very weak. This indicates that there was a slight relationship between the self-perceptions and the CEFR test scores. In other words, those who had gained good CEFR test scores were likely to have positive self-perception towards their English proficiency.

DISCUSSION

From the results obtained, discussion will be incorporated in this section by highlighting two key points: the positive self-perceptions of Thai lower secondary teachers' English proficiency and the relationship between their self-perceptions and their CEFR level.

Regarding Thai lower secondary teachers' positive self-perceptions towards their overall English proficiency including all four skills, this could possibly be influenced by their educational background, their own experiences in using English, and familiarity with simple and routine tasks in English. Focusing on educational background, 84% of the participants graduated with a major in English. Receiving a degree in English could strongly reinforce their perceptions that they have been trained well and gained more opportunities to use English, which could result in their positive perceptions towards their English proficiency. In addition, their own experiences in English exposure would enhance their self-perceived English proficiency. To clarify, when people are exposed to English more and more and continuously, it is more likely that they gradually attain English skills to some extent, which in turn enhances their self-perceived mastery of the language and confidence. From the supported data in questionnaires, more

than 50% of the participants used English to communicate every day, and more than 80% of them used English in their teaching and many activities done outside class continuously, namely, reading online information, writing texts in social networks, reading printed texts, speaking to non-Thai colleagues, talking on the phone and sending English messages through emails. These activities usually relate to their simple routine tasks and familiar topics, which do not require a high degree of English competence. These are reasons why they self-perceive positively towards their English proficiency. The finding is also in line with Moussu and Llurda's study (2008), which found that non-native English speaking teachers working at primary and secondary schools are confident in their language proficiency in general. In addition, Abe's study (2011) also supports the present study that non-native English speaking teachers who teach English in Thailand have positive self-perceptions of themselves as they rated their own language proficiency at a high level.

Regarding the significant relationship between the self-perceptions of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers and their CEFR level, surprisingly, 56% of the participants could reach the expected B1 level which is in contrast to the past studies (Noom-ura, 2013; Hayes, 2010) which indicated Thai teachers' poor grasp of English language. It is likely that their obtained CEFR levels in the present study had an impact on their self-perceptions towards their English proficiency. The table below illustrates this idea.

Table 8 shows average mean scores of self-perception of English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers divided by their CEFR level. Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers who achieved at least a B1 level tended to rate themselves higher than teachers who achieved an A1 or A2 level. This is almost certainly why they rated themselves at the high scales (4-5), especially those who were more competent than B1 level, since they had already assessed their own performance through the use of the CEFR test. Furthermore, by referring to the statements used in collecting data for this study, which are "can-do" statements focusing on CEFR at A1 to B1 level and by its nature, all CEFR statements are based on survival and everyday English, not academic English. For example, "I can introduce

Table 8
Average mean scores and standard deviations of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perception in terms of CEFR level (N = 123)

Self-perceptions of English proficiency	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
	N=9	N=46	N=35	N=27	N=4	N=2
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$
1. Overall English proficiency	3.97	3.87	4.08	4.23	4.08	4.35
2. Listening	3.98	3.73	3.93	4.15	3.8	4.40
3. Reading	4.17	3.99	4.20	4.23	4.25	4.42
4. Speaking	3.84	3.88	3.95	4.17	3.98	4.35
5. Writing	4.19	3.94	4.10	4.31	4.25	4.42
Overall	**4.02**	**3.88**	**4.05**	**4.22**	**4.07**	**4.39**

myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details", "I can write a short and simple postcard", "I can read very short and simple texts" and "I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know." The respondents would feel familiar with these kinds of activities, and in turn rate themselves at the high scales accordingly.

This result also verifies the previous studies that have reported significant relationships between teachers' self-perception of efficacy and their confidence in English language proficiency (Chacón, 2002, 2005; Lee, 2009; Shim, 2001 as cited in Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013). This result is also similar to another study (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008), which showed that the higher the teachers' self-perceived proficiency in language skill, the more effective they felt. This suggests that improving an individual person's self-perception of English language proficiency can enhance their English performance.

In addition, some factors from the participants' personal data in the first part of the questionnaire, namely, gender, age ranges, and teaching experiences, were further analyzed for what presumably causes the weak correlation. It turns out that only gender was found to be significantly and positively correlated with their self-perceived English proficiency (r=0.208, p<.05), albeit with a weak correlation. This could possibly predict the contribution of the slight relationship between their self-perceptions and the CEFR test scores. The following Table 9 illustrates this idea.

Table 9 shows average mean scores of self-perception of English proficiency of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers categorized by their gender. Thai male lower secondary English teachers tended to rate themselves higher than female teachers in all CEFR levels.

Nevertheless, 72% of the participants in this study were apparently females. The results obtained might be influenced by female responses which result in the contribution of the weak relationship between their self-perceived English proficiency and their CEFR test scores.

Table 9
Average mean scores of Thai Lower Secondary EFL teachers' self-perception in terms of CEFR level categorized by their gender

Self-perceptions of English proficiency	A1		A2		B1		B2		C1		C2	
	Male (N=4)	Female (N=5)	Male (N=11)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=8)	Female (N=27)	Male (N=10)	Female (N=17)	Male (N=1)	Female (N=3)	Male (N=0)	Female (N=2)
	$\bar{x}$		$\bar{x}$		$\bar{x}$		$\bar{x}$		$\bar{x}$		$\bar{x}$	
1. Overall English proficiency	4.00	3.94	3.95	3.85	4.53	3.95	4.29	4.20	4.70	3.87	-	4.35
2. Listening	4.00	3.96	3.80	3.71	4.45	3.77	4.26	4.08	4.60	3.53	-	4.40
3. Reading	4.29	4.07	4.33	3.88	4.48	4.12	4.25	4.23	4.83	4.06	-	4.42
4. Speaking	3.83	3.82	4.05	3.83	4.28	3.85	4.20	4.15	4.50	3.80	-	4.35
5. Writing	4.13	4.23	4.09	3.89	4.61	3.94	4.38	4.28	5.00	4.00	-	4.42
Overall	**4.06**	**4.01**	**4.05**	**3.83**	**4.47**	**3.93**	**4.28**	**4.19**	**4.73**	**3.85**	**-**	**4.39**

N=123 (Males = 34, Females = 89)

This result is in line with a previous study that gender influenced teachers' self-efficacy which was not only different between males and females but also that male teachers had higher self-efficacy than female teachers did (Odanga, Raburu & Aloka, 2015). This result is also in accordance with the study of Moalosi and Forcheh (2015) which revealed that males in Molepolole College of Education aged between 25-29 years showed a higher teacher efficacy in all three subscales which are student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies and efficacy in classroom management.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH STUDIES

Further research is needed in order to examine the factors that could contribute to teachers' self-perception, for example, geographical locations, English language knowledge, teaching practices, and supports from schools and government. Furthermore, diverse groups of teachers in different levels of education, namely, primary, upper secondary, and tertiary, could be investigated. It would also be beneficial to know how teachers' self-perceptions influence their English proficiency and their actual teaching practices or students' success. Moreover, an expansion of descriptors of other CEFR levels could be used as a research tool to examine self-perception of Thai lower secondary teachers in ways that may yield more insightful data on English language teaching in Thailand.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the convenient sampling in a particular region of Thailand with a particular group of English teachers, the findings cannot be generalized to all English teachers in Thailand. In addition, this study does not cover a large random population. It would be better if there is a larger number of participants that could contribute to more accurate results. Moreover, with regards to the questionnaire used in this study, Thai translation was not conducted using the original can-do statements from CEFR. Misinterpretation of each statement could somehow result in errors in individual self-perception.

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APPENDIX
Self-perception of English Proficiency of
Thai Lower Secondary EFL Teachers Questionnaire

Part 1: Personal information
Instructions: Please read the statements below carefully and indicate your answer with a tick (✓) or write down your answer in the boxes or spaces provided.

1. Gender:
   ☐ Female   ☐ Male
2. Your age range:
   ☐ 21-25   ☐ 26-30   ☐ 31-35   ☐ 36-40
   ☐ 41-45   ☐ 46-50   ☐ 51-55   ☐ 56-60
3. Type of school you are in:
   ☐ Public school   ☐ Private school
   ☐ Others (please specify) _____
4. Year of teaching experience:
   ☐ 1-4 years   ☐ 5-8 years   ☐ 9-12 years   ☐ 13-16 years
   ☐ 17-20 years   ☐ more than 20 years
5. Level of educational degree:
   ☐ Lower than bachelor degree   ☐ Bachelor degree
   ☐ Master degree   ☐ Higher than master degree
6. Field of graduation:
   ☐ Education majoring in English
   ☐ Education majoring in non-English
   ☐ Art/Humanities majoring in English
   ☐ Art/Humanities majoring in non-English
   ☐ Others (please specify) _____
7. What is your CEFR gained level?
   ☐A1   ☐A2   ☐B1   ☐B2   ☐C1   ☐C2
8. How often do you use English outside the classroom?
   ☐ Less than 1 hour a week ☐ 1-3 hours a week ☐ More than 3 hours a week
   ☐ Everyday   ☐ Others (please specify) _____
9. Base on question 8, what kind of activities are you usually exposed to English in a week?
   You can list more than one.
   ☐ Teaching an English class   ☐ Presenting at the meeting
   ☐ Talking on the phone   ☐ Speaking to colleagues
   ☐ Reading on-line information   ☐ Reading printed-text (i.e. newspaper)
   ☐ Writing reports   ☐ Writing texts on social network (i.e. FB/Line)
   ☐ Writing email   ☐ Listening to music/ radio
   ☐ Others (please specify) _____

10. In your opinion, what skill of English can you perform best? Please rank all 4 skills by writing numbers 1,2,3, and 4; 1 = the best; 4 = the poorest.
    ☐ Listening   ☐ Speaking
    ☐ Reading   ☐ Writing

Part 2: Self-perceptions towards English proficiency
Please read the statements below carefully and tick the appropriate choices that reflect your attitudes and perceptions towards your English proficiency. Use the scale below to answer the questionnaire items.
1= Strongly disagree   2= Disagree   3= Neutral   4= Agree   5= Strongly agree

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5
Overall English proficiency						
1	I can understand and use familiar everyday English expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.					
2	I can introduce myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details.					
3	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.					
4	I can understand English sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance.					
5	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.					
6	I can describe in simple terms aspects of my background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.					
7	I can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.					
8	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.					
9	I can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.					
10	I can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.					
Listening						
11	I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.					
12	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance.					
13	I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.					
14	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.					
15	I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.					
Reading						
16	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.					
17	I can read very short and simple texts.					
18	I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday					

	material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables.					
19	I can understand short simple personal letters.					
20	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language.					
21	I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.					
Speaking						
22	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say.					
23	I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.					
24	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities.					
25	I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.					
26	I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.					
27	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.					
28	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.					
29	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes, and ambitions.					
30	I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.					
31	I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.					
Writing						
32	I can write a short and simple postcard.					
33	I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.					
34	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need.					
35	I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.					
36	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.					
37	I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.					