



## Students' Perceptions on Preparation Strategies Used by Stakeholders:

### A Case of English O-NET Achievement

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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the factors that influence higher O-NET scores of Grade 9 secondary students in Mahasarakham, Thailand, and provides guidelines for good practice, which will hopefully support Grade 9 and 12 students to successfully cope with the O-NET tests and increase their awareness and scores and together with teachers to raise the practical preparation of the O-NET tests in facilitating the students. The participants were 214 Grade 10 students from a school in Mahasarakham province, with the highest O-NET results in the past three years. Data were collected using a close and open-ended questionnaire to probe into the students' opinions on the strategies used by the school, the English teachers, and themselves to prepare for the test. The results indicated that the involved strategies, i.e., school, teacher, and student strategies, positively promoted the increase of the O-NET results. With regards to the school strategies, most of the participants agreed that the three common strategies the school employed in preparing them for the English O-NET were: offering the O-NET bank resources in the library (80.84%), conducting tutorials (75.70%), and providing extra exercise resources in the library (75.70%). The results also showed that English teachers at the school used various strategies, such as teaching relevant lesson contents (79.44%), teaching vocabulary items and language structures (78.50%), and using extra exercises and training strategies in the classroom (70.10%) in preparing them for the exam, and for which they found useful. For student strategies, the findings showed that there were only three strategies that reached high average percentages of student agreement (i.e., compensation strategies (86.45%), social strategies (80.68%), and memory strategies (60.05%). Based on these findings, the guidelines for good practice and the implications for language learning and strategies were proposed and positively supported students to cope with the O-NET tests and increase their scores.

**Keywords:** Language learning factors, Language learning strategies, O-NET, Achievement



## 1. Introduction

According to the Basic Education Core Curriculum (B.E. 2551), Thai students are required to learn English as a fundamental subject from Grade 1 to Grade 12. It is also compulsory that students have to take the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in the final years of their lower and upper secondary school education (years 9 and 12). The O-NET is a proficiency test designed by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), and the test contents are created based on the requirements of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551. The O-NET results have been used as part of the graduating requirements from the basic education core curriculum since 2008 as a mechanism designed to select students to study at a higher level until the academic year 2021. From 2022 onward, the O-NET is not used as one of the graduating requirements nor as one of the criteria for university admission (Ministry of Education, 2021). As the test still exists, the results could still be used for other purposes, such as assessing national student learning and encouraging every school in Thailand to reflect on their students' learning achievement and instigate plans to improve the quality of their teaching and learning.

As the O-NET is a standard-based achievement test, various schools or institutions can also use the test scores to evaluate the quality of both students and schools. Scholars have argued that the O-NET results play two significant roles in the instructive Thai setting: as a watchman for learners and as a hotspot for schools to verify their scholarly responsibility. A low score may reflect the students' ability in academic subjects for the individual student. While the admission system from 2022 onward will rely on GAT (General Aptitude Test) and PAT (Professional and Academic Aptitude Test), the O-NET

results could be used as an alternative source to keep the universities appraised of their potential students' English knowledge level in the process of considering and selecting them for admission. Plus, the results can be used as a guarantee for the schools' scholastic responsibility, which can be used to reflect the school accountability (Sritrakarn, 2021) and is likewise one of the tools for reliability used by guardians or parents (Nammala, 2016). The discussion above implies that O-NET affects all the stakeholders, which include: pupils, instructors, guardians, school chairmen, and strategy creators. Based on the O-NET results, the English proficiency of Thai students is, however, still low. From statistic reports (Secondary Educational Service Area 26, 2020), the recorded average English O-NET scores of Mahasarakham students are lower than the standard level.

**Table 1** English O-NET results of junior secondary school students in Mahasarakham province from 2018 to 2020 (Secondary Educational Service Area 26, 2020)

Years	O-NET Results (%)	
	National Results	Mahasarakham Province Results
2018	29.45	34.95
2019	33.25	29.37
2020	34.38	34.38

Table 1 shows that the students' O-NET results are still unsatisfactory. The low results are consistent with those of many schools in Thailand. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the factors that influence students' higher or lower O-NET test results. With the awareness of this, the present study aims to examine the factors



that influence higher O-NET scores of Grade 9 secondary students and provide guidelines for good practice, which will hopefully facilitate Grade 9 students in successfully coping with the O-NET tests and increasing their scores.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Formal education system in Thailand

A Thai formal education refers to education that contains particular objectives, methods, curricula, duration, and assessments for achievement. First, basic education currently refers to the education that covers the initial 12 years of study, i.e., primary school (six years, Grade 1-6), lower secondary school (three years, Grade 7-9), and upper secondary school (three years, Grade 10-12). The compulsory education covers the initial nine years, from primary to lower secondary school. All students have to complete their studies as the enforced rule of the Education Act of 2003 to a minimum of Grade 9 (Ministry of Education, 2008). Later, higher education is defined as the education at a tertiary level, either at university or college, where people obtain different degrees. To attain this level of education, secondary school students, in their last year (Grade 12), have to complete their final year and gain their Grade Point Average (GPA) to apply for university admission (Ministry of Education, 2018).

### 2.2 Language learning assessment in Thailand

Thailand has struggled to gain a high English proficiency from the eighteenth century to the present. Previously, the main English language teaching methods in Thailand were grammar translation and rote memorization (Prapphal, 2008). This made it hard to promote Thai people's English language level as those teaching methods only

focused on translation, drills, and the language structure. Then, the Ministry of Education decided to change the policy and the English language syllabus to emphasize the four broad skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Again in 1996, the syllabus for basic education was changed by the Ministry of Education to focus on the communicative approach with an electronic orientation. This new educational core curriculum aims to promote the student's real-life communication skills in utilizing English language, their academic journey, career goal, and also the comprehension of the other culture. To promote Thai students' English language proficiency, the assessment and test were mainly concerned with measurement to reflect the students' ability, teachers' teaching performance, and the school's management. The MOE posited national testing following the National Act in 1999 to evaluate students' proficiency. The national tests are mainly the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET and Advanced National Educational Test (A-Net). However, the A-Net test, the advanced test that aims to implement the score for entry into higher education, was abandoned in 2010 and replaced with the General Aptitude Test (GAT) and Professional Aptitude Test (PAT).

### 2.3 The Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET)

O-NET is a proficiency test and comprises five major subjects designed by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), including (1) Thai language, (2) mathematics, (3) science, (4) social studies, religions, and cultures, and (5) foreign languages at present. It is essential for the Thai government to propose a national organization to monitor and evaluate the results of its education to investigate the quality and equality of Thai education and whether it can reach the expected standards.



The NIETS sets the objectives of O-NET into four modules: (1) to assess the knowledge and thinking capability of Grade 6, 9, and 12 students according to the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 policy; (2) to assess students' academic proficiency according to the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008; (3) to provide information to schools and reflect their performance to improve their teaching and learning activities; and (4) to evaluate the quality of education of Thailand at the national level (NIETS, 2021). The O-NET scores have been used to apply for Thai university entrance. Even though the admission system from 2022 onward will rely on GAT and PAT, the O-NET results could be used as an alternative screening process for admission to inform universities of their potential students' knowledge of English and their level (Sritrakarn, 2021). The O-NET results reflect schools' teaching quality and are reported publicly every year. For this reason, most schools within Thailand stay cautious and competitively train their students with strategies to support their students and prepare them for this national test.

#### 2.4 Language learning factors

Ellis (2001) posited that the external factors that influence students' language learning could be explained by two main views: social factors and input and interaction. First, social factors such as age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity influence language acquisition, reflecting the learning opportunities that individual learners experience. Second, there are four types of input and interaction: input frequency-output accuracy, comprehensible input, learner output and acquisition, and collaborative discourse and acquisition. The input frequency-output accuracy (caretaker talk,

foreigner talk, and interlanguage talk) emphasizes the imitation of specific linguistic forms and patterns (Ellis, 2001). It provides well-formed and well-adjusted linguistically to the level of development of the learners (Waterson & Snow, 1978). Furthermore, according to Krashen (1985), language learning particularly occurs when learners understand messages or receive comprehensible input. Krashen clarified that learning occurs when unknown items are just beyond the learner's level. This implies that comprehensive and appropriate input is the primary concern with which learners can learn the language. Teacher talk should be understandable in various forms and proper quantities. Swain's hypothesis (1985) is an objection to Krashen's input theory, arguing that while comprehensible input is important, learners will only improve their language level by exposure to meaningful language use. Plus, native and non-native speakers in the process of negotiation and interaction promote acquisition in several ways, for example: through the use of an incorporation strategy (the construction of utterances by borrowing from and extending elements from the preceding discourse), functions (repeating with or without modification some previous utterance), and vertical constructions (building up an utterance over several turns).

Ellis (2001) also proposed three main aspects of individual learner differences, including language learning beliefs, affective stages, and general factors (age, aptitude, learning style, motivation, and personality). The belief of the learning language depends on their experiences, general factors, learning style, and personality. Further, there is a critical period of learning L2, which is the period that is most effective in learning by children, especially in pronunciation. However, scholars also argue that in the



adult age, a learner can also learn quickly and effectively (i.e., Saville-Troike, 2006). By proposing 'anxiety' as one of the crucial affective stages, Ellis further explained that it could be derived from, for example, the unsatisfactory learning performance, test scores, misunderstanding communication, and fear of the evaluation. Plus, an attitude refers to a set of ideas, beliefs, and emotions toward particular things, people, or events. It can reflect that person's behavior and sometimes become the experience (Kendra, 2021). Wiling (1988) also defined learning style as the reflection of the student's cognitive, affective, and psychological behavior in problem-solving and in the learning stage.

Furthermore, motivation includes integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation was defined by some scholars, i.e., Crookes and Schmidt (1991), as the motivation found in learners who desire to be a part of the target society or community by attaining a similar accent and communicative competence of that community. On the other hand, instrumental motivation refers to the motivation of the learners that have a strong desire to succeed in learning the target language as their future achievement, for example, to promote their professional status or higher education goals and business accomplishments (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2001). Finally, personality may be defined as an individual characteristic of a human being. Based on this, personality has become one of the most significant sub-categories of individual differences because of its concerns about disparities in human behaviors (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998). In a recent study, the focus on personalities is introvert and extrovert learners. Introverted learners refer to the students who prefer to keep silent in class; they usually produce ideas by thinking to themselves

rather than interacting with their peers and instructor. Contrastingly, extrovert learners are social students. They prefer to interact with others and engage in-class activities by exchanging ideas fruitfully.

## 2.5 Language learning achievement

Learning strategies refer to the particular actions, procedures, behaviors, or techniques that the students use to improve their learning ability (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). There have been several studies examining the strategies used by students to learn a second language and foreign languages (e.g., Habok & Magyar, 2018; Pringprom, 2008). The learning strategies were clarified differently depending on the research contexts and purposes. The model proposed by Oxford (1990), including direct strategies and indirect strategies, has been used widely by researchers (Jones, 1998). There are six L2 learning strategies categorized under two criteria which are indirect and direct strategies. Direct strategies were defined as the strategies that directly affect the target language learning and concern the students' mental process in different manners and purposes (Oxford, 1990). First, memory strategies refer to storing and retrieving the information once it requires to be used. Examples of memory strategies are acronyms, rhyming, total physical response, flashcards, and imagination. Second, cognitive strategies aim to aid the student in operating the language resources directly through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, or reorganizing the information to get better schemas. Finally, compensation strategies are the strategies that support the student to fill up the missing knowledge in learning a language by predicting the missing point from the context of listening and reading, using synonyms



and circumlocution, using signals, or pausing words to succeed in the learning task. However, these strategies seem to be limited only to speaking and writing.

Indirect strategies refer to the learning strategies that promote the student language learning by not being directly involved in the target language. Still, it can contribute to helping the students learn powerfully (Oxford, 1990). Meta-cognitive strategies are strategies that students employ in managing the overall learning process. Purpura (1999) revealed that the metacognitive strategies had an essential effect on the cognitive strategies positively. The metacognitive strategies can provide more apparent evidence that students can complete the task by applying it to their learning. Then, affective strategies are defined as the strategies to deal with students' moods, anxiety, feelings, or any emotional requirements. For example, taking a deep breath once there is anxiety and feeling nervous encourages them to have the motivation or a positive attitude in learning, taking the emotional temperatures. At last, social strategies refer to the strategies that promote the student in learning a language by involving in the community to reach the achievement of the learning object.

## 2.6 Previous studies on O-NET

Several studies in Thailand have explored reasons why students had low O-NET results. The great factors that affect Thai students' O-NET scores are the learning environment such as the classroom learning activities or supports (e.g., Srirakarn, 2021; Sukying, Wan-a-rom, & Phusawisot, 2012; Suwathanpornkul, 2015), and different learning styles (i.e., students who learn better when taking information visually, in auditory form, by doing,

or by writing and reading) (e.g., Atchia & Chinapah, 2019; Pootrakul, 2014).

As demonstrated, Pootrakul (2014) examined the effect of leadership style on students' O-NET and GAT scores and found that the two variables (teacher equality and school facilities) resulted in enhancing test scores more than others (school leadership and school principal). Atchia and Chinapah's (2019) study showed partial similarity of the results with Pootrakul's (2014). The dissimilarity included the leadership and principal part, which were considered the key variables that encourage an increase in the student national test scores. Further, Thongphukdee (2017) found that the data management O-NET results that every school had implemented, such as conducting conferences and meetings to inform staff about O-NET results to increase learners' learning. Alternatively, scholars have conducted studies to investigate the alignment of O-NET and the core curriculum or textbooks. Sukying et al. (2012) claimed that the annual O-NET scores reported did not represent Thai learners' actual language proficiency due to teaching and learning English in Thai secondary schools. Similarly, Srirakarn (2021) mentioned that student achievements in O-NET could be influenced by other factors such as the basic education core curriculum or textbooks and found that the basic education and the O-NET test items were only partially related.

From the literature, previous studies on O-NET focused on the Grade 12 level (Atchia & Chinapah, 2019; Pootrakul, 2014; Srirakarn, 2021; Sukying et al., 2012). Besides, only one study investigated the factors that influenced students' higher scores on O-NET tests, i.e., Suwathanpornkul (2015), and the focused level was Grade 12. The study examined the strategies used by the schools that received high O-NET results and, from



the findings, set up a model for other schools to follow. Suwathanpornkul claimed that teachers and students are one factor affecting students' O-NET achievements together with other factors, such as parents. The study by Suwathanpornkul has provided the initial guidelines for good practices to support students' achievements. However, a limited number of studies still investigate the factors that promote the students' testing proficiency. This implies that further research is still needed to prepare students for a good O-NET result. In particular, more studies should be conducted to focus on the lower level (i.e., Grade 9) to prepare students at an early stage for the O-NET assessment in the final year of their secondary school education. Given that, in many ways, the language people speak a guide to the language in which they think (Hunt & Agnoki, 1991), the investigation of the stakeholders who have influenced students' success in achieving higher O-NET results would lead to some useful guidelines and strategies for other schools to implement. To respond to this need, the present study aimed to investigate the strategies used by schools in Mahasarakham, of which Grade 9 students have been observed to achieve high English O-NET results. The findings from the study were expected to confirm previous literature and be useful for other schools seeking the strategies to improve their students' O-NET results or any assessments that students have to encounter (for example, GAT or PAT). The following research questions were formed to guide the study:

1. What are the factors influencing the high English O-NET results of Grade 9 secondary school students in Mahasarakham province?

2. What could be the guidelines for good practices to prepare students for the English O-NET tests?

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1 Participants

The present study included 214 students who responded to the questionnaire, with 147 females (68.69) and 67 males (31.31%). There were 171 students (79.90%) in the normal classes and 43 students (20.10%) in the gifted classes. The age range of the participants was 15-16 years old, with more 16 years old students (66.82%) than 15 years old students (33.18%). Most of the participants had learned English for at least ten years. Students' grade point averages (GPAs) were between 3.80 and 4.00, considered high level. When asked about their Grade 9 O-NET score results, a significant number of the students (38.31%) received the English O-NET scores at a level of more than 50% of the total score (100%). Most of the participants had learned English for at least ten years. All participants were students at an extra-large school operated under the Office of Basic Education Commission and the administration of Mahasarakham University in northeastern Thailand. As far as the quality of teaching and learning was concerned, students had achieved high academic achievements and attained the highest O-NET scores of English in Mahasarakham in the 2016 academic year. Based on the school's strong academic background, the students were selected as the focus group in this study to investigate their attitudes towards the strategies used by three stakeholders (the school, English teachers, and students) to prepare them for the English O-NET test.



#### 4.2 Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect the data in the present study was developed based on the framework of second language acquisition by Ellis (2001) and from the previous study (Pootrakul, 2014). The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Thai to aid students' understanding of the questions. It included three main sections related to the factors (school, English teachers, and students) that potentially affect the students' O-NET achievement. The first part of the student questionnaire focused on their personal details. It consisted of questions that elicit the background information of the students, for example, gender, age, time spent learning English in school, grade point average, O-NET results, etc. The other two sections in the questionnaire were related to the school and English teacher strategies. Both consisted of two minor parts: the strategies used by the two agencies and the open-ended section, asking the participants to provide additional information on other strategies that were not identified in the yes-no sections. The third part of the questionnaire focused on the participants' opinions based on their beliefs and comprehension of the strategies they used to prepare for and promote their achievement in the O-NET exam. The open-ended question was also provided to gain additional comments or opinions from the participants.

The content validity based on the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was rated by three experts to achieve validity. The experts reviewed each item of the questionnaire and provided feedback, and the questionnaire was valid. The content validity was rated by three experts (All items  $> 0.5$ ). Plus, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.78, which was acceptable.

#### 4.3 Procedures

The selected school was first contacted. The research proposal was submitted to the school to inform them of the purpose of the study and the data collection procedure and approval. To create a complete understanding of the research project, the researcher arranged meetings with all participants. The questionnaire was then distributed to Grade 10 students.

#### 4.4 Analysis

The questionnaire results were analyzed descriptively using percentages to elicit the participants' views of the factors that influence their high English O-NET scores and answer the research questions. The following sections provide clarification on how each research question was answered. The responses from the questionnaires were analyzed to the descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to answer research question 1 (What are the factors influencing the high English O-NET results of Grade 10 secondary school students in Mahasarakham province?), Then, the statistical findings gained from the responses to research question 1 were further analyzed to set up models of school practices to answer research question 2 (What would be the guidelines for good practices to prepare students for the English O-NET tests?). Eventually, the relevant findings were analyzed to propose guidelines and suggestions of strategies for other schools to prepare their students for the O-NET test or other national tests that students have to encounter.



## 5. Results

### 5.1 Students' views on factors influencing their high O-NET results

The findings report on student opinions on the factors that have influenced their high O-NET scores and are discussed based on the different sections of the questionnaire, namely: school strategies, teacher strategies, and student strategies, to answer research question 1: What are the factors influencing the high English O-NET results of Grade 9 secondary school students in Mahasarakham province?

**5.1.1 School strategies.** The first part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate students' attitudes toward the strategies used by the school to prepare them for the O-NET test. From the findings, most of the participants stated that the school offered a resource bank of O-NET tests used in previous years in the school library (80.84%), invited external speakers to conduct intensive English tutorials for grade 9 students (75.70%), and provided a bank of extra exercises to practice in the school library (75.70%). Many students (65.89%) reported that the school offered awards for students who achieved the highest English O-NET scores, while some students (37.38%) advised that the school uploaded past O-NET tests on the school website as an alternative source to practice. Most respondents stated that the school invited external tutors to train and prepare them for the O-NET test (84.16%).

A few students also mentioned other strategies made by the school, for example, the encouraging speeches made by the school director before the O-NET test (1.98%) or the display of useful English vocabulary boards in different corners of the buildings (0.99%).

**5.1.2 Teacher strategies.** The 'teacher strategies' section aims to investigate the participants' attitudes toward the strategies used by Grade 9 English teachers to prepare them for the O-NET test. The results showed that the teachers used different strategies in the classrooms to prepare students for the English O-NET and that students showed a high level of agreement for each strategy listed in the questionnaire.

Most of the participants agreed that Grade 9 English teachers prepared them for the O-NET test by teaching necessary language structures (83.64%), preparing the lesson contents which are relevant to the characteristics of the English O-NET exam (79.44%), and including special vocabulary items that were frequently found in the past English O-NETs in the classroom instructions (78.50%). Other students (74.77%) also added that the teachers included strategies or techniques for coping with the English O-NET tests and exposed them to practice extra exercises in the classrooms (70.10%). About half of the respondents (55.14%) also mentioned that the teachers offered awards to students who achieved the highest O-NET scores. The findings from the yes-no section were also consistent with student responses in the open-ended section. For instance, most of the students in this section reported that their teachers trained them on the techniques and strategies to cope with the test items (42.86%) and emphasized the vocabulary knowledge in the classroom (12.99%). Some of the responses (2.60%) also noted that the teachers encouraged them and indicated how important the O-NET results would be for their future careers.

**5.1.3 Student strategies.** Students' strategies were included as one part of the questionnaire. It required

the students to tick 'yes' or 'no' in front of the different strategies they could have used to prepare for the test: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The results are reported in percentages of the student agreement, and the average percentage of each strategy will also be reported to compare among other sub-categories of student strategies and identify the most frequently used strategy by the students.

**Memorizing strategies.** According to Oxford (2003), memorizing strategies include learners linking one L2 item or concept with another to manage test items. To examine whether students used memorizing strategies to prepare for their O-NET test or not, the questionnaire was divided into four sub-sections of the potential strategies. The findings of student responses are presented in Figure 1.

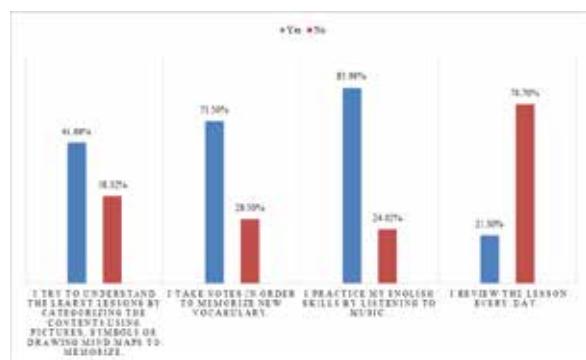


Figure 1. Memorizing strategies (Average percentage: 60.05)

From the findings, students used different memorizing strategies to prepare for the O-NET, and the average percentage of their agreement on the listed strategies (by saying 'yes' to the statements) was 60.05%. Most of the participants stated that they practiced English by listening to music (85.98%),

reviewed the lesson every day (78.70%), and made themselves understand the lesson by drawing mind maps (61.68%).

**Practicing strategies.** Practicing strategies include the direct ways students use to facilitate their own learning. The questionnaire, including four statements, was used to investigate the strategies used by the participants. The findings are shown in Figure 2.

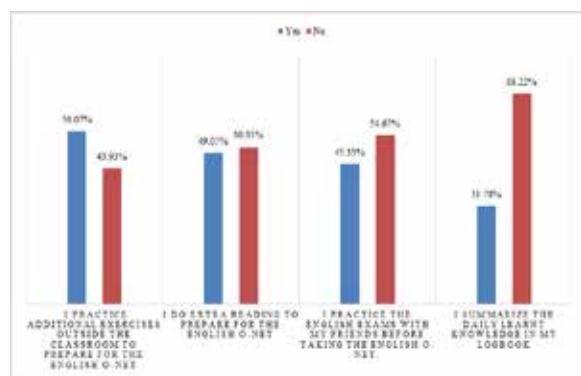
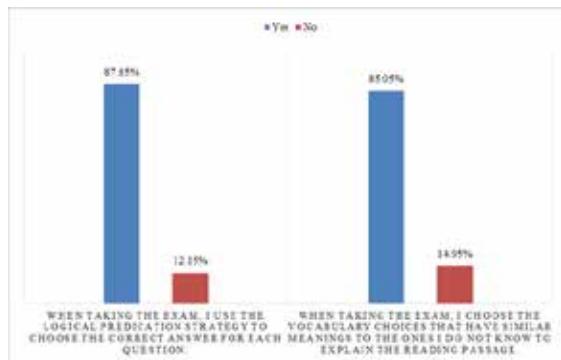


Figure 2. Practicing strategies (Average percentage: 45.56)

The average percentage of student agreement with the statements was 45.56%. The strategy that attained the highest agreement was "I practice additional exercises outside the classroom to prepare for the English O-NET" (56.07%). In contrast, other strategies received agreement from students at levels lower than 50 percent, i.e., doing extra reading, practicing exams with friends, and summarizing the daily learned knowledge (49.01%, 45.33%, and 31.78%, respectively).

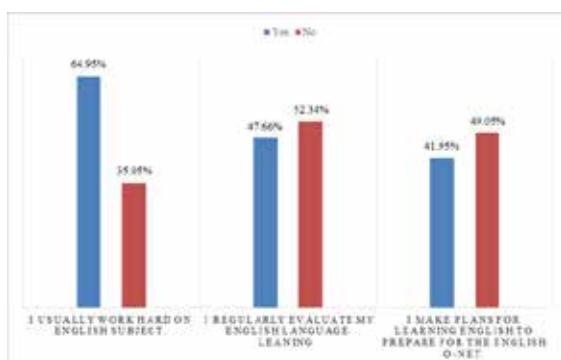
**Predicting strategies.** Predicting strategies include using other strategies to support when students cannot recall the knowledge or vocabulary (Pringprom, 2008). The questionnaire included two statements for the students to respond to. The findings are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Predicting strategies (Average percentage: 86.45)

Most students used both predicting strategies, showing a high average percentage of the two strategies at 86.45 percent. In other words, the two common strategies used by the students when taking the O-NET test were using the logical prediction strategy to choose the correct words and choosing the vocabulary choices that have similar meanings to the ones unknown to understand the reading passage.

**Self-monitoring strategies.** Self-monitoring strategies include the ability of learners to manage their own learning to achieve their learning goals. To explore students' self-monitoring strategies, the statements included three possible strategies that they might use. Figure 4 below presents the three strategies and the student responses.

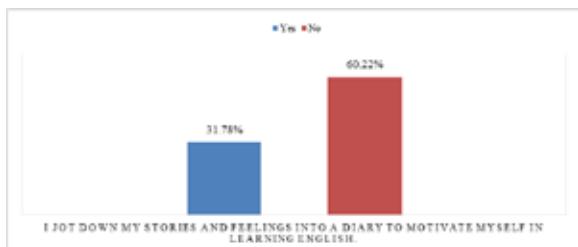


**Figure 4.** Self-monitoring strategies (Average percentage: 51.40)

The results illustrated the average level of student agreement with the three provided strategies of 51.40%. A significant number of students agreed that they usually work hard on their English subject (64.95%). However, student usage of the other two strategies (evaluating their own learning and making plans for their English learning) was below fifty percent (i.e., 46.77% and 41.95%, respectively).

#### **Reviewing strategies.** Reviewing strategies

include the feelings or attitudes toward learning English, which may influence students' learning. There was only one statement in the questionnaire for students to respond to, i.e., "I jot down my stories and feelings into a diary to motivate myself in learning English." The result revealed students' low level of agreement with this item (31.78%), as seen in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Reviewing strategies

**Coordinating strategies.** Coordinating strategies include learning English by associating oneself with other people through different social activities. The findings showed that most of the participants often used all three coordinating strategies, with an average percentage of 80.68. Students stated that they learned English by actively participating in group work with friends (90.65%), exchanging knowledge with classmates (78.50%), and asking teachers when they are not clear about English

subjects (72.90%). The findings of their responses to the three statements are presented in Figure 6.

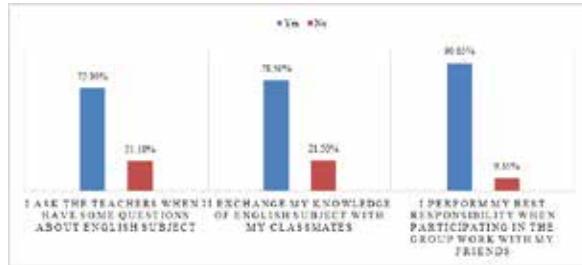


Figure 6. Coordinating strategies (Average percentage: 80.68)

When students responded to the opened-ended question, they reported that they prepared for the O-NET by studying hard (35.16%), practiced plenty of past O-NET tests (18.13%), learned English through social media or entertainment (13.19%), and attended shadow education (6.59%).

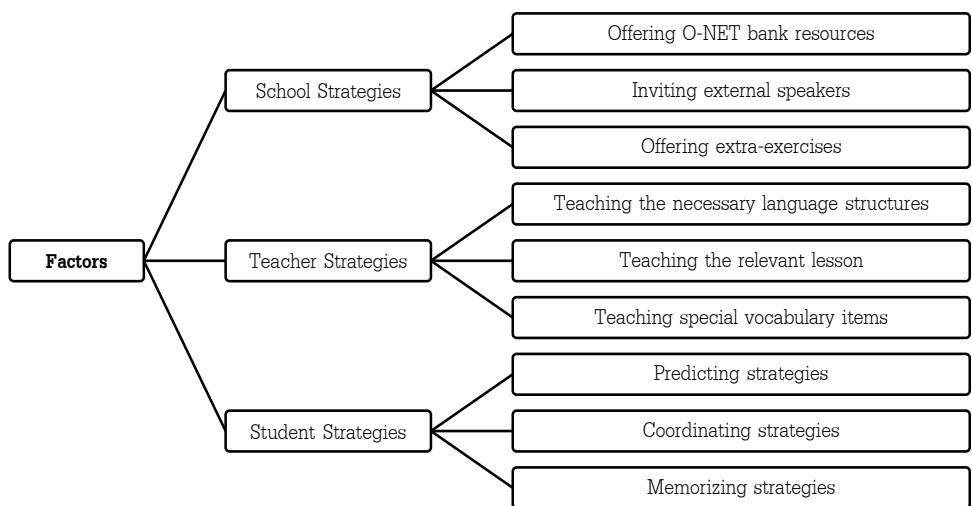
## 5.2 Guidelines for good practice

The section proposes the guidelines for good practice of how different school agencies may prepare students for the English O-NET to answer research question 2: What could be the guidelines for good practices to prepare students for the English O-NET tests? Based on the findings, the strategies used by the three stakeholders will be summarized before proposing the guidelines for good practice. As far as the school strategies are concerned, most of the participants agreed that the three common strategies made by the school to prepare them for the English O-NET were: offering the O-NET bank resources in the library, conducting

tutorials, and providing extra exercise resources in the library. Interestingly, the results showed that English teachers at this school used various strategies (i.e., teaching relevant lesson contents, vocabulary items, and language structures; and using extra exercises and training strategies in the classroom). Plus, students agreed that they were helpful.

For student strategies, the findings showed that only three strategies were rated high on an average agreement (i.e., compensation strategies - 86.45%, social strategies - 80.68%, and memory strategy - 60.05%). Further details of how students prepared themselves by using these three strategies can be summarized as follows.

Compensation strategies: students used the logical prediction strategy to choose the correct answer for each question and decided on the vocabulary choices that have similar meanings to those they did not know to explain the reading passage. Social strategies: students participated in the social activities and social interactions with others to improve their language by performing the responsibility in group work and taking part in the class discussion. Memory strategies: many students practice their English knowledge by listening to music or watching movies in English, trying to understand the lessons learned by mind mapping the information, and taking notes to memorize new vocabulary items. To capture the main strategies made by the three relevant stakeholders in this school context, the different notable strategies are summarized in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Common strategies used by the school, English teachers, and students to prepare for the English O-NET

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the strategies used by relevant authorities to prepare Grade 9 students for the English O-NET test. The findings support the claims made by previous studies that three main factors of school, teachers, and students, play an influential role on students' O-NET achievements (e.g., Limcharoen, Ardwichai, & Chanin, 2009; Suwathanpornkul, 2015), and are equally essential for the preparation of Grade 9 students in Mahasarakham.

### 6.1 Strategies used by school and English teachers

The findings showed that the three stakeholders (school, teachers, and students) support Grade 9 students' English O-NET achievements. The conclusions of the student responses also showed the most frequently used strategies by the three stakeholders and are consistent with previous studies on the way of the language learning strategies concepts.

This study's most common school strategies included providing extra learning resources such as a repository of past O-NETs and extra exercises and organizing

additional tutorials for students to practice and prepare themselves. English teachers' most frequently used strategies to prepare students included teaching necessary language structure and vocabulary and training students on all the practical strategies for dealing with numerous questions during classroom instruction. There were three sub-categories of direct learning strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990). These practices by both school and teachers are consistent with the concepts of cognitive learning strategies, which help students operate language resources directly through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, and summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, or reorganizing information to obtain better schemas (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The activities promote cognitive learning strategies by teaching students relevant knowledge content, providing students with alternative resources to practice outside of the classroom, and inviting external tutors to train them in necessary skills.



## 6.2 Strategies most used by students

For students, the commonly used learning strategies to prepare for the English O-NET were compensation (using the logical prediction strategy to choose the correct answer), social strategies (participating in social interactions), and memory strategies (practicing their English knowledge). The use of the compensation technique is consistent with the findings from Pringprom (2008), who investigated the learning strategies used by the first and second-year university students and found that the compensation strategy was one of the most frequently used strategies reported by the participants. The students' active learning styles were reflected during classroom tutorials by using compensation strategies to deal with the English O-NET test. Ellis explained that input characteristics of language learners are of three kinds: caretaker talk, foreigner talk, and interlanguage talk. The caretaker talk includes children's input when learning their first language (L1). Krashen (1985) argues that language learning only occurs when learners understand messages or receive comprehensible input. In this view, learning will occur when unknown items are only just beyond the learner's level. Swain's hypothesis (1985) is an objection to Krashen's input theory, arguing that though comprehensible input may be essential, it is not in itself enough for understanding and is not quite the same as acquisition.

The active learning styles of this learner group are also reflected through their use of social strategies to continue improving their language skills outside the classrooms. Using memory strategies plus implies that students have selected their own way to keep abreast of knowledge. These learning strategies taken by the students

reflect the characteristics of ideal learners and the trends of learning strategies that are necessarily fostered. As the current focus of learning and teaching is student-centered, the findings suggest that the studied school has successfully cultivated the characteristics of independent and autonomous learners within the student body. This could be seen in the students' use of online media as a learning tool outside the classroom or the compensation strategy to deal with different question types when taking the English O-NET test. This learning path is also in line with the Ministry of Education's policy on lifelong learning, aiming to train students to become autonomous learners by making plans and taking control of their own learning process. Other schools may use these strategies to encourage their students to become autonomous and active learners by managing their own way of learning and seeking opportunities to learn outside the classrooms.

## 6.3 Model of good practice

The findings reported in this study are good practices used by the three investigated stakeholders. The results could be useful for other schools to follow. However, adjustments should be made based on the different circumstances in terms of, for example, student levels, availability of learning resources, or budgets. As students at the investigated school were high achieving learners, students from other schools may not be at the same level. Other schools may have to consider which strategies best suit the level of their learners and foster them appropriately. As illustrated, while cognitive strategies were not used quite often by the students at the investigated school, these strategies may better support lower-level learner groups by practicing additional exercises, exams, and extra reading.



School and teacher strategies used in the study context of this research may also be consulted as a model for other schools; however, necessary adjustments should be made. For example, in schools where internet reception is unstable, uploading past O-NETs on the school website may not serve as a practical choice. Instead, the school could provide hard copy repositories of exercises and past O-NET tests in the library.

## 7. Limitations and recommendations

In the context of the investigation, the sample group of this study was limited to only one school. Even though the results of the common strategies used by the three stakeholders in this school could be used as a model for other schools to train their students, the findings were still limited to the current sample and may not be generalized to larger settings or schools with different circumstances. Therefore, further studies investigating the same issues should increase the sample group's size by, for example, including more schools in the study.

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, one main obstacle in this study was that all classes were conducted online during the data collection phase. This could have affected the participants' responses when they read and found some questions unclear and without clarification from the researcher. Furthermore, the online nature made it hard to follow up or coordinate with the relevant authorities to ensure that a sufficient number of targeted participants replied. A further study investigating student opinions toward the strategies used in preparing them for O-NET should therefore include more participants who have the potential to inform on real-life practices, i.e., students from gifted classes. Finally, the present study investigated the strategies used by the three stakeholders from

the students' point of view only; the opinions made by the school administrators and English teachers have not been directly reported. To ensure that the proposed strategies are the fundamental practices used by the relevant stakeholders of the school, future studies should therefore include the opinions of the stakeholders themselves.

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