

# CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND (A Case Study of Indonesian Pre- service Teachers Perspectives)

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**CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND**  
**(A Case Study of Indonesian Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives)**

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## ABSTRACT

Teaching primary students which are commonly referred as young learners is indeed different with teaching adult learners. A variety of researches have been conducted to investigate the challenges in teaching English to young learners (TEYL). This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during their five-month teaching practice in Southern Thailand and how they handled the challenges. Qualitative data were used in this research by using both questionnaire and interview. Purposive sampling was applied in selecting the subject of the study. A number of challenges emerged from several sides, namely from students' side, pre-service teachers' side, and others' side. Students' challenges namely cognitive development, lack of motivation, discipline problems, speaking problems, and writing. While pre-serviced teachers are challenged by their limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques as well as their lack of professional development. In addition, challenges also come from others' side including curriculum/syllabus, school's facilities, class size, and cultural differences. Learning the students' mother tongue is believed as the most significant key to overcome the challenges. Other solutions are also proposed such as learning from/consulting with teacher advisors, using teaching aids/medias, using gestures/mimes, etc.

**KEYWORDS:** challenges, teaching English, young learners, TEYL, pre-service teachers' perspectives

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last few centuries, English has become a lingua franca which makes it one of the most important languages and is learnt in all over the world. Today's globalization era also tends to force people to be able to understand English well since it is used in all sectors such as academic, business, politics, career, etc. In that case, many people consider that an early start in learning English becomes a priority. An early start is strongly connected with age, it can be said that early start

has the same meaning as the age of the child. According to Violetta-Irene (2013), age is an important factor that plays an important role in learning process of a language. Many people believe that the sooner we learn a language is the better. As the results, children start to learn English at younger and younger ages nowadays.

Primary students, who are commonly referred to as young learners, are now in the centre of education and given much more attention (Violetta-Irene 2013). Teachers are given massive material about

how to teach young learners, and many seminars are held in order to be able to improve children's language skills. Pinter in Copland et al. (2014) stated that in many countries, in the early primary grades, English is a compulsory subject. Also, in the countries where families can select a foreign language to be learnt by their children, English is usually the first preference (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014). Thailand is one of those countries.

According to Wongsothorn et al. in Karakas & Boonsuk (2020), in 1921, English has been a mandatory subject for Thai students beyond Grade 4 and has been made compulsory for all primary students after Grade 1 in 1996. Darasawang in Ma'rifah (2020) argued that foreign language teaching in Thailand intends to promote communication, education, business, and cultural spread. Several private and public schools in Thailand have hired and employed a number of native and non-native English teachers (Hickey, 2014) to help the local Thai teachers in teaching English (Ulla, 2018). Therefore, a lot of Indonesian pre-service teachers have been delegated to teach English in an international teaching practice or internship program in Thailand, especially in Southern Thailand, over the last few years.

This research focuses on the challenges in teaching English to young learners based on 10 Indonesian pre-service teachers' experiences of five-month teaching practice in Southern Thailand and how they overcame the challenges. The disclosed challenges are categorized into three sides which are from the students' side, pre-service teachers' side, and others' side.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching practice in Indonesia is well-known as PPL (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan*) that can be conducted in both Bachelor education program and teacher's professional program to provide pre-service teachers to have a real and contextual experiences in applying a set of knowledge, boldness, and skills that can facilitate the accomplishment of teacher's capabilities. This implies the pre-service or practice teachers are college, university or grad students who teach under the guidance of a licenced instructor in order to apply for a degree in education. The length of teaching practice can be varied from 5 to 36 weeks (Jones, 1960). A five-month teaching practice had been experienced by the participants of this study in which they were asked to teach young learners in several cities in Southern Thailand.

The term "young learners" covers a large chronological age span: from 3 to 15 years old (Nunan, 2011); 5 to 12 years old (Cameron, 2001);

or children at the age of 5 to 10 years old (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). It can be concluded that young learners are those of pre-school and primary school ages which are around 3 to 12 years old.

Teaching young learners is entirely different and more challenging compared to teaching adult learners. While adults are much more independent, mature, and of course, knowledgeable, children are just kids who like to play, having fun, and need extra attention. Nunan (2011) said that young learners enjoy fantasy, imagination, and movement. English for young learners (EYL) teacher should be able to create a lively and lovely atmosphere in every class he/she teaches so that students get motivated to join the teaching-learning activities. Besides, the teacher also needs to control and manage the class to run well as it is planned.

Various challenges in teaching English to young learners (TEYL) have been discovered by a variety of scholars or researchers. The challenges include speaking problems, discipline problems, motivation, differentiation, weight, class size, grammar (Copland et al., 2014), lack of vocabulary mastery, limited mastery of teaching methods, inadequate resources and facilities (Songbatumis, 2017), and lack of sufficient number of qualified teachers (Strakova, 2014).

In Thailand alone, English language teaching has been a challenging task (Ulla, 2018). Many students in Thailand are lack of motivation and interest in learning English (Ulla, 2018) as well as they do not have enough practice in English on their own (Noom-ura, 2013). Following those statements, Thai students especially young learners are mostly still unfamiliar with English.

Other challenges such as textbooks and learning facilities are also included. Most teachers agree that using a textbook or coursebook in English language classroom has a number of advantages, but it still needs to be combined with several supplementary materials and techniques (Puskas, 2016).

In addition, with cultural differences in Indonesia, teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in Southern Thailand becomes much more challenging. In a cross-cultural context, the first and foremost problem is both teachers and learners face some limitations in dealing with language (Sultana, 2011). Most Indonesian people do not understand Thai, and Thai young learners also barely understand English which lead to a language barrier where they have difficulty in communicating with each other.

Some solutions of those challenges involves improving resources and facilities, applying various

teaching methods and techniques, providing motivational feedback (Songbatumis, 2017), and three to five days of training, seminar or conference (Noom-ura, 2013). The existence of teaching aids is indeed required to help the teaching process and the students' understandings. EYL teachers need to find out the best teaching methods and techniques that are suitable for the students' condition. In any case, whatever the problems are, they have to be able to manage them well.

### 28 Methodology

This present study was a qualitative research which used case study (4) the approach. Yin in Taherdoost (2016) said that case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within real-life context. The case that was researched should be specific, complex, and (4) nctional (Merriam in Songbatumis, 2017) and could be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal; a program; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy; and so on

(Cohen et al., 2017). The approach was considered suitable since the researcher would like to present (11) challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers in teaching English to young learners and how they overcame the challenges based on their experience of teaching practice in Southern Thailand.

The participants of this study were 10 Indonesian pre-service teachers who had been experiencing teaching practice in Southern Thailand for five months. Eight of whom experienced their teaching practice on November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019, while the other (20) were on November 17, 2019 - March 24, 2020. Purposive sampling was applied in selecting the subject of the study. The participants were chosen as the representatives since the schools where they had teaching practice at were located in several cities of Southern Thailand and coded as P1 to P10 for anonymity to keep the participants' privacy.

**Table 1: An overview of the research participants**

Participant	Date of Teaching Practice	Place of Teaching Practice	Gender
P1	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Female
P2	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Krabi	Female
P3	November 17, 2019 - March 24, 2020	Phuket	Female
P4	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Krabi	Female
P5	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Female
P6	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Songkhla	Female
P7	November 17, 2019 - March 24, 2020	Krabi	Female
P8	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Female
P9	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Female
P10	November 6, 2018 - March 27, 2019	Hat Yai	Female

In collecting the data, the researcher used questionnaire and interview whose questions were adapted from Copland et al. (2014), Songbatumis (2017), and other kinds of scientific paper that were read by the researcher. The questionnaires which were an online type by using Microsoft Forms which were divided into four sections, three of which were about challenges in TEYL and in the shape of likert scale questions while the other one was ranking scale question which was factor that would improve TEYL. The data of (27) questionnaires were tested by using SPSS 22 to check the validity and reliability of the data. The numbers of questions that were invalid and unreliable were omitted. While interview was used to get further and detailed data which was conducted via WhatsApp voice note as the purpose to minimize the time. Avoiding misunderstandings, bahasa Indonesia was applied for the interview so that both the researcher and the participants could understand the case comprehensively. The results of the interview were transcribed and translated into English.

### Findings

According to the pre-service teachers' perspectives, children's cognitive development should not be marked lightly in TEYL. Most students in Thailand were still unfamiliar with English so that their mastery in vocabulary was also low. Students' diversity (36) were also one of the problems since 70% of the pre-service teachers agreed that it was difficult to manage students' diversities in one class. Meanwhile, challenges also came from the pre-service teachers themselves. 6 out of 10 pre-service teachers assumed that they still had limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques. Even some of the pre-service teachers did not have any experiences in TEYL before having teaching practice in Southern Thailand which greatly impacted on their teaching performance, professional development, and how to deal with children in the class (21) teaching. In spite of the fact that the majority of the pre-service teachers reported the facilities of the school where they had

teaching practice at had already supported their teaching, there were schools that still had inadequate facilities including teaching aids/medias

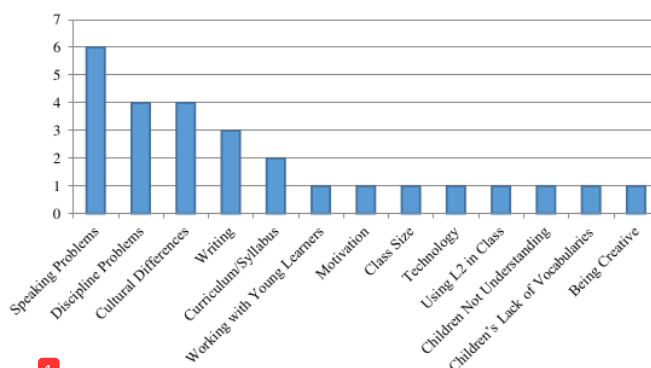
and textbook. The result of the questionnaires can be seen below.

**Table 2: Questionnaire results of likert scale questions**

Questionnaire	Challenges	Numbers of Participants	
		f	%
Students' Side	Cognitive Development	9	90
	Unfamiliarity to English	5	50
	Lack of Vocabulary Mastery	7	70
	Differentiation	7	70
Pre-service Teachers' Side	Lack of TEYL experiences	3	30
	Limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques	6	60
	Lack of professional development	3	30
	Deciding materials	3	30
	Feeling nervous while teaching	3	30
	Handling children	2	20
Others' Side	Facility Issue	2	20
	Textbook	1	10

More detailed information about pre-service teachers' perspectives of the challenges they face and the way of handling them was obtained from open questions. The first question asked "Which

pects did you think the most challenging in teaching English to young learners in Southern Thailand? Why did you think so?" (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Challenges identified by pre-service teachers in response to open question**

The results above revealed 6 out of 10 pre-service teachers (60%) claimed that *speaking problems* was the most challenging aspect in TEYL in Southern Thailand. *Discipline problems* and *cultural differences* (which also influenced speaking problems and discipline problems) were in the second most challenging aspect with

40%. *Writing* gained 30% and are in the third position, followed by *curriculum/syllabus* (20%). The others included *working with young learners*, *motivation*, *class size*, *technology*, *using L2 in class*, *children not understanding*, *children's lack of vocabularies*, and *being creative* attained 10% from each aspect.

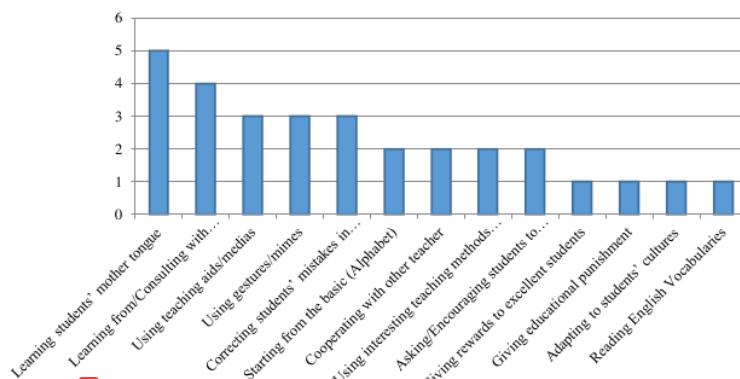


Figure 2: Challenges identified by pre-service teachers in response to open question

While the second question was about the way the pre-service teachers handle the challenges with question: "How did you overcome the challenges that you faced?" (see Figure 2). In overcoming the challenges, the most dominant answers were *learning students' mother tongue* and *learning from/consulting with teacher advisors* with 50% (half of participants) and 40% in sequence. *Using teaching aids/medias*, *using gestures/mimes*, and *correcting students' mistakes in speaking* were the third favorite solutions by securing 30% responses of the pre-service teachers. The other solutions which were *starting from the basic*, *cooperating with other teacher*, *using interesting teaching methods and techniques*, and *asking/encouraging students to speak English* obtained 20% while 10% were obtained from each *giving rewards to excellent students*, *giving educational punishment*, *adapting to students' cultures*, *reading English vocabularies*, *using bilingual*, and *asking A-grade students*.

### Discussions

A variety of challenges in teaching English to young learners in Southern Thailand are found and come from several factors. The researcher classifies the challenges into three sides: challenges from students' side, challenges from pre-service teachers' side, and challenges from others' side.

#### Challenges from Students' Side

Students' lack of English competences becomes the major challenges for pre-service teachers in TEYL in Southern Thailand. The competences include cognitive development, motivation, discipline problems, speaking problems, and writing.

**Cognitive Development.** The two major theorists in development psychology, Piaget and Vygotsky, claim that children's cognitive abilities develop in a

sequence and particular abilities develop at certain stages. A child's thinking develops as gradual growth of knowledge and intellectual skills towards a final stage of formal, logical thinking which can be affected by their social environment. Nunan (2011) stated that since young learners go through significant developmental changes from infancy to adulthood, teachers of young learners need to consider the stages of development and learners' psychological and social characteristics when designing learning activities and creating tasks and materials for learners at different stages. For this reason, children need to be given different tasks according to their level and condition.

Some pre-service teachers admitted that deciding what materials should be given to students is not an easy task. One class can consist of several students with different characteristics and capabilities. Some of them are fast learners, get motivated easily, disciplined, obedient, and some not. In spite of that, teachers are required to be able to control and manage the class to run well as it is planned.

Nunan suggests that the earliest stages of learning, children can follow single-step instructions followed by two-step and then three-step instructions. Children can understand symbolic concepts like numbers and letters in advance of beginning reading, then word-play activities like rearranging scrambled letters to make words, and followed by the ability to grasp abstract concepts.

**Lack of Motivation.** The motivation of the students in Southern Thailand is still very low in which learning English seems to be an unnecessary thing for them. "When I was teaching them English in the class, some of the students fell asleep or did not pay attention to my lessons but did other lessons instead" said P4. Ulla (2018) stated that Thai people may lack motivation and interest in learning

English as Thailand is the only country in the ASEAN region which was not colonized by West. It may be the case in areas where learners have little contact with foreigners and therefore little perceived need to learn to communicate in English (Ho in Copland et al., 2014).

P4 stated that she applied various strategies to maintain interest and motivation among students. For example, she used to make teaching aids/medias to be applied in her class. She also awarded incentives for excellent students in motivating them to compete to be the best. In addition, she told stories to inspire the students to learn English.

**Discipline Problems.** The differences between the students' and the pre-service teachers' mother tongue has become a problem of students' discipline in learning English. "Since they are children, everybody must have problems in disciplining children to study inside the class. Moreover with different languages, it was difficult to discipline them," said P2. Reinforcing P2's statement, P10 argued "...they were very hardly controlled because we are Indonesians and they knew that we could not speak Thai. When we taught English in full English, it seemed like they were ignorant or busy alone". While P1 claimed that discipline problems came from a large class with many different students which were hardly controlled. According to Copland et al. (2014), discipline problems are related to students' age and sex, differentiation, parental attitudes, inexperience, not sharing their first language, and keep them motivated.

In resolving the issue, learning several Thai vocabularies that are commonly used in class is indicated as the key to make them easier controlling the students. Besides, the three of them also confessed that the intervention of other teachers of the school is necessarily needed such as being assisted by the homeroom teacher (P2) and learning from/consulting with English teachers of the school, usually as the teacher advisors of the pre-service teachers, how to teach and control the students over there (P1 & P10). Even so, when there is a case of disagreement with how the teacher advisor or the English teacher disciplines the students, P1 stated that she made her own rule which was giving educational punishment to be applied in her class.

**Speaking Problems.** According to the participants, speaking problems were indicated as the most challenging aspect in TEYL in Southern Thailand. Language diversity, unfamiliarity to English, lack of vocabulary mastery, grammar, and pronunciation are the reasons that lead to speaking

problems. P1 argued that language diversity which was explained affecting students' discipline problems earlier, becomes a hindrance in speaking. Another statement was revealed by P5 that many students in Southern Thailand are still unfamiliar with English in which they do not really understand it. From the research findings, the researcher found that students in Southern Thailand are unfamiliar with English due to their lack of vocabulary mastery. According to Chung (2016), EFL students are limited by their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of the target language and have to struggle to comprehend the content which also stated by P4 and P9. "...children in Southern Thailand were still lacking in speaking skills, especially in terms of pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and grammar" said P4 and "...it was difficult for them (the students) to speak English since they did not know a lot of English vocabularies" P9 argued. For grammar, P4 stated that when the students and her were talking to each other, the students still made mistakes in their sentences. Furthermore, P2 and P9 explained that due to the nonexistence of L and V letters in Thai alphabet, the majority of the students had difficulties in pronouncing the letters.

P1 revealed that she needed to use Thai, for example in giving instructions, to manage the problems. Giving feedback by correcting the students' mistakes while speaking is also indicated as a way to minimize speaking problems. While other participants stated that gestures or mimes help them in communicating with the students better. Puskas (2016) expressed that teacher can establish a common gesture for a certain concept and better explains an action with mime.

Writri et al. (2020) stated that writing in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) has an important role to help students in strengthening their language skills, content, culture, and literacy in which many students mostly find it difficult in learning writing (Byrd, 2016). Thai people has their own alphabet which is different with the most widely used alphabet in the world, Latin alphabet. The students in Southern Thailand are unfamiliar with Latin so that most of them are still weak in writing. P5 claimed that let alone writing a text, a sentence, or a word, it is even difficult for them only to differentiate one letter to another such as which one is A and which one is B.

Indonesian pre-service teachers justified that teaching alphabet which is the basic in writing is the first step should be done as the students need to be introduced with Latin alphabet. P2 and P6 stated that when they asked the students to write, they used to spell the letters of the word first to minimize the students' misunderstandings.

### Challenges from Pre-service Teachers' Side

The challenges which come from pre-service teachers' side include limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques and lack of professional development.

**Limited Mastery of TEYL Methods and Techniques.** The majority of the pre-service teachers admitted that they still had limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques. P10 revealed that finding interesting teaching methods or techniques as interesting as possible had become a challenge for herself. Attiloro (2015) proclaimed that teachers should use a variety of methods for teaching English. Applying various techniques in language teaching will enable teachers to create suitable condition for students in learning English as well as help them to deal with their learning challenges (Holenšinská in Songbatumis, 2017). Meanwhile, it is not an easy thing since the teachers need to not only think of how to transfer four language skills but also how to remain students' motivation and enthusiasm in learning English (Ansari, 2012).

According to Garton et al. (2011), young learner teachers apply various activities in their classes including listening to a tape-recorded/CD, reading aloud, playing game, or singing popular songs. P10 explained that she often used music or games like Bingo and hunting games to attract the students' attention and motivate them to learn English as well. Lewis and Bedson in Klimova (2015) claim that for young language learners, games increase their motivation as well as represent the primary and most important way of learning.

**Lack of Professional Development.** Several pre-service teachers think that they are still lack of professional development. As a tool for teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in teaching, professional development can be gained by means of orientation, training, and support which contribute to the quality of the learning and teaching process improvement (Lessing & De Wit in Adnyani, 2015). Pop (2015) asserted that to achieve professional development requires a lifelong learning experience which aspiring teachers need to acknowledge in the moment they consider embracing this career.

Teachers should have deep and broad understanding of the subject in order to be successful in teaching. Eventhough the pre-service teachers have already given EYL (English for Young Learner) lesson in their university, 3 of them revealed that they have never taught English to young learners before having teaching practice in Southern Thailand. Consequently, the same

participants also stated that they did not know how to handle children well and still felt nervous when teaching them. Stelma & Onat-Stelma in Zein (2019) argued that teachers who does not have any experiences in TEYL become more effective after a year working in primary schools.

### Challenges from Others' Side

Apart from students and pre-service teachers, other aspects such as curriculum/syllabus, school's facilities, class size, and cultural differences are also considered challenging in TEYL in Southern Thailand.

**Curriculum/Syllabus.** According to the findings of Ulla (2018), one of the problems in English language teaching in Thailand is unclear and unsuitable English language curriculum. The similar case was also experienced by two participants of this study. P8 stated that during the teaching practice days, she was not given a clear curriculum or syllabus and since the curriculum in Thailand and Indonesia was different, it was difficult for her to adapt to it. Besides, P6 said that due to the differences of the curriculum, the expectations of the teaching aids/medias that had been prepared before did not rule out the possibility that it would change instantly while delivering the lesson or while having a meeting with the teacher advisor.

Consulting with the teacher advisors is the way the participants handle the matter. P8 said "I asked a lot about the material, how to teach the students there, or what must be achieved in that semester". She added that even without a clear curriculum and syllabus, she still had a guidance which meant there was a learning target of the lesson.

**School's Facilities.** Two participants revealed that the facilities of the school did not support their teaching. The facilities in question refer to technology and learning resources. P1 explained that the school where she had teaching practice at still uses traditional teaching method, using books and whiteboard, which is less attractive than learning using technology. In other side, according to P4, the textbook that was used in her school is not suitable for the students of that school which was too difficult for the students' abilities. This finding is in accordance with Copland et al. (2014) who maintained that in many countries appropriate books are either not available or are not used in the classroom.

Regarding to the matters, P1 stated that since there is no LCD projector, she makes various teaching aids/medias by her own to make the students interested in her class. P9 opined that pictures are the best teaching aids/medias for her since they are



easily understood. Puskas (2016) insisted that visual support is greatly important for young learners.

**Class Size.** A class with more than 38 students can be considered as large classes, which burden and concern the teachers about lack of resources, classroom management issues and difficulties in improving teacher-student rapport (Araos, 2015). Copland et al. (2014) claimed that large classes are a common challenge faced by many teachers worldwide and resulting problems of control and discipline. P1 revealed that in her school, one class might consist of 40-45 students, an extremely large class, so that some students were difficult to be controlled and did not pay attention during her class.

Responding to the matter, P1 confessed that she can not do anything about it since it is the school policy. On the other side, Araos (2015) disclosed that many studies identify group work as a useful strategy for teaching EFL in large classes because it helps to deal with challenges for monitoring learning. Brown (2015) explains group work as a concept involving various activities in which three to six students are assigned a task that implicates collaboration and cooperation.

**Cultural Differences.** The cultural differences discussed in this study are related to language diversity which is previously discussed as one of the causes of speaking problems. Curtain & Dahlberg (2010) emphasized that the relationship between language and culture is so close in which it is difficult to separate them in teaching. Some participants clarified that due to the differences between their mother tongue and the

students', they can not communicate with each other well which become a hindrance during teaching-learning process since the students barely understand English. Additionally, P3 stated that language diversity also influences students' disciplines and motivations in learning English. She informed that her students are more obedient to those who are able to speak their mother tongue.

Learning Thai language as the students' mother tongue is still the best solution according to the pre-service teachers since it is exceedingly difficult to teach English to children whom do not understand English by using English as the language of instruction. P3 and P8 claimed that it would be clearer for both them and the students to use Thai in delivering simple instructions. Moreover, P7 stated that she gets a help from her teacher advisor while teaching the students. During her class, the teacher advisor will translate the materials she explains to the students in Thai language so that they can understand the lesson easily. On the other hand, P5 argued that she needs to blend with the students and adapt to their culture in order that they can understand her better. As stated Moon in Araos (2015), English young learners teachers need the flexibility to be able to adjust their knowledge of English to the children's level and a rich knowledge of the culture so as to get children interested.

#### 6 factors that will Improve Learning and Teaching English to Young Learners

The researcher adapted the questions of ranking scale questionnaire from Copland, Garton, & Burns (2014) and used Microsoft Forms to analyze the data results.

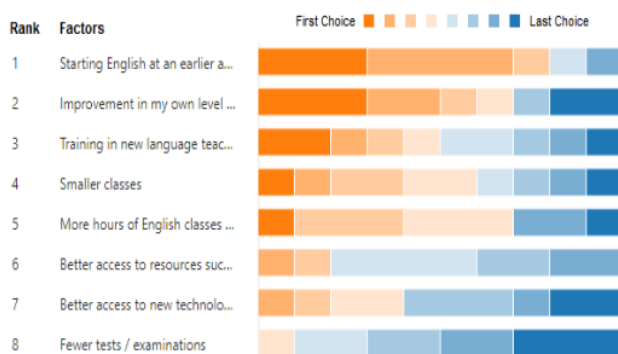


Figure 2. Result of Ranking Scale Questions

From Figure 2, where rank 1<sup>st</sup> is indicated as the most important and rank 8<sup>th</sup> is the least important, fewer tests and examinations is considered the least important factor in improving learning and teaching

English to young learners in Southern Thailand. Better access to new technologies such as DVDs or computers is considered the second least important overall, while better access to resources such as

textbooks and materials is the third least important. Smaller classes and more hours of English classes each week are still considered less important than other factors. While starting English at an earlier age and improvement in my own level of English attracted almost comparable number of responses and are ranked as the two most important by a fairly sizeable margin. At the same time, training in new language teaching methodologies is also considered important by pre-service teachers.

### 1 Conclusion

This research has highlighted a number of issues in teaching English to young learners faced by pre-service teachers during their five-month teaching practice in Southern Thailand. Based on the results, there is no significant differences between pre-service teachers who had their teaching practice on November 6, 2018 – March 27, 2019 and those on November 17, 2019 – March 24, 2020. Language diversity has become the main reason that leads to a number of problems.

Even if English has been introduced since primary school in Thailand (Noom-ura, 2013), some Thai students still have difficulty speaking and understanding the language. Mostly students in Southern Thailand have low English vocabulary mastery since they are still unfamiliar with English. Moreover, they have and use their own alphabet which is different with Latin alphabet as the most widely used alphabet in the world. The other challenges come from the students' side including cognitive development, lack of motivation, discipline problems, speaking problems, and writing.

Meanwhile, the pre-service teachers are challenged by their limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques and lack of professional development. Even though they have already had knowledge of TEYL through their days in university, some of them have never had any actual teaching experiences which can be different with what be expected. Besides, they admit that they need to improve their own level of English to be a better teacher.

Curriculum/syllabus, school's facilities, class size, and cultural differences also become a challenge for pre-service teachers in TEYL in Southern Thailand. Both pre-service teachers and the students do not understand each other's mother tongue that makes them hard to communicate without misunderstandings as well as has an impact on students' disciplines and motivation. The students are more obedient and easily controlled if the pre-service teachers are able to speak their mother tongue which is Thai language.

In overcoming the challenges, learning the students' mother tongue is the best solution proposed by the pre-service teachers. As stated by Moon in Araos (2015), young learner teachers need to adjust to the students' level and their culture. The pre-service teachers revealed that they need to start from alphabet since the students are not used to Latin alphabet and also learn several Thai vocabularies which are commonly used such as vocabularies to ask the students to do something. In addition, consulting with teacher advisors is also considered greatly effective in managing the problems during the teaching practice period. The other strategies implemented by the participants are using teaching aids/medias, using gestures/ mimes, motivating students, and applying interesting teaching methods and techniques.

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