

A STUDY AND COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT WITH SCHOOL TYPE: THE CASE OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE LOWER NORTHERN REGION OF THAILAND***Henry Yuh Anchunda**

Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand

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Abstract

There has always been a common perception that students' academic achievement differs with school type. Very few studies have been conducted in Thailand which focused on comparing students' English language achievement in relation to school type in order to give suggestions on how to improve students' English language competencies. This study aimed at 1) assessing and compare students' English language achievement with the school types and programs in the lower northern region of Thailand. A total of 1,242 selected using disproportionate stratified sampling technique formed the sample (917 and 325 students from general education and English programs respectively). An extract of the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (ONET) English language achievement test for twelfth grade, ninth grade and sixth grade whose validity and reliability had been determined by the Ministry of Education constituted the research instruments. Descriptive and inferential methods were used for data analysis and interpretation. The results revealed as follows: 1) Students' English language achievement by school type for general education at all levels excluding special programs (EP) revealed that private schools slightly outperformed public schools for general programs as follows: for sixth-grade students (\bar{X} =60.60, and \bar{X} =46.63 for private and public schools respectively). The results were similar for ninth grade (\bar{X} =52.32 and \bar{X} =46.84 for private and public schools respectively and for twelfth grade students (\bar{X} =52.00 and \bar{X} =44.93) for public and private schools respectively. A comparison of students' English language achievement in English programs for ninth and twelfth grade revealed no significant difference for grade nine (\bar{X} =69.18 and \bar{X} =69.60) and grade twelfth (\bar{X} =70.99 and \bar{X} =71.75) for private and public schools respectively. Discussions are made with respect to research finding and reasons for the differences in English achievement.

Keywords: School type, English language achievement, public schools, private school.

INTRODUCTION

English language is a foreign language that has enjoyed a prestigious position in many countries as it is being increasingly used by many nations (Karahan, 2007). The English language has become the most widely used language in the world today to an extent that knowing it and possessing the competence increases our chances in the labour market as it is considered a tool for lucrative jobs. It is the official language of 53 countries and spoken by around 400 million people across the globe. It enables us to connect and communicate with people all around the world in the aspects of education, business, etc. According to Anchunda and Wareerat (2021), English language is widely used by people all around to bridge the communication gap and as such it has been qualified as a "Global Language." in the area of education, technology, business, politics and livelihood. It equips us with the skills required for survival in the 21st and future centuries. To face the challenges of the present and future centuries, and in order to meet up with the world's standards, the Thai government has focused on developing Thai citizens with communicative English language competencies who are able to communicate both in written and oral forms, and also being able to use the language to get information through research and measuring up to international standards. English language teaching in Thailand focuses on developing the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

According to Laksanasut, (2019), the Thailand National Education Act of 1999 clearly indicates that the development of students' communicative English language competencies is of vital importance as it drives toward lifelong learning. Since English is considered important, various school types including private, denominational and public institutions implement varying policies related to language instruction in order to gain market monopoly and to offer alternative learning institutions to different families to make a choice for their children to learn. There is a clear relationship between language competencies and salary level, especially in Thailand as students with English language competencies get well paid and lucrative jobs. The Thai government had realized the importance of English language since 2005 as the Ministry of Education has been encouraging the offering of Intensive English Programs (IEP) and the establishment of bilingual departments in schools with the English language as the medium of instruction. Education in Thailand especially among private institutions is considered as business. As such, for each learning institution to withstand the competition in order to stay functioning in the market, they must focus on producing good results and performance in both nation and competitive examinations. This is the same with public learning institutions. The quality of fixed capital and human capital resources of every institution determines its productivity as well as its achievement. In this light, education in Thailand gives room for the operation of different school types including government, private, municipal, and denominational schools. According to Aransi, (2018),

government learning institutions or schools are funded and ran by the government of the country with a low fee structure or without fees which can be at national, state, and local levels. Whereas, private schools are funded by private organizations, individuals, or Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and with high fee structures designed to meet necessary conditions in terms of teaching and learning facilities. As stated by Brewer and Hentschke (2009), a growing interest in improving school quality and student outcomes, a quest for greater school choice for parents and students in the schools have challenged the notion of the government's primacy in education as they see that apart from the government in providing educational services, private bodies and individuals can also provide and manage educational services even better than the government. With this, it is clearly indicated that private institutions are profit-making and strictly created for business and profit maximization while government or public educational institutions are created to satisfy the basic educational needs of any given society without maximizing profit. These schools whether public or government and private have their pros and cons. Different studies have found varied results concerning school type and students' performance ranging from academic, ethical and personal. The growth of different educational institutions has led to school choice of school based on their socioeconomic backgrounds, bringing about unequal educational opportunities and outcomes, leading to arguments in society as to whether school type affects students' academic performance or not. Proponents of private schools assert that private involvement in school management leads to more efficiency and responsiveness to parents' and students' needs, as well as producing better results than public institutions. Privately managed schools may have the authority to hire and compensate teachers and staff, and thus can select better-prepared teachers, introduce incentives for better performance. In addition, private schools have greater incentives to reduce costs and may be subject to more flexible regulations.

On the other hand, advocates of public schools contend that private schools seem to threaten justness or equity and social inclusiveness, thus, leading to discrimination during admissions procedures. Comparisons have been made that certain schools have more resources or a better learning environment, and students who attend these schools are more likely to perform better. Conversely, those students who attend schools with fewer resources and disruptive environments tend to perform poorly, which could ultimately limit their prospects in life. It is worth noting that learning environments and peers play important roles not only in students' academic performance but also in their socialization in a broader sense, school systems that are highly stratified along socio-economic lines could inadvertently undermine social cohesion. Socio-economic stratification, as well as how students' educational experiences differ depending on their school type. Proof of students' academic achievement in public and private schools is assorted as some studies report little, negative, or insignificant effects, and the results often depend on methodological choices. With this difference of opinion and unclearness in stated aspects, the intention of the researcher is to investigate whether students' academic performance differs with school type in English language achievement in the lower northern region of Thailand taking into consideration private and public primary and secondary schools. This study therefore aims to assess and compare students' English language in the lower northern region of Thailand, study reasons for the differences in English performance as well as

advance recommendations to close the gap in students' language achievement with school type.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Glewe (2002), an understanding of school type, characteristics, policies, and effects is of great importance. Supporters of private educational institutions and public schools believe that students' academic achievements differ with school type. Private schools are funded by the private sector or individuals using both standard core curricula designed by the government and alternative or special program curricula under the supervision of the Private Education Commission of the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, public learning institutions or schools are funded and managed by the government through the Ministry of Education, which follows core subjects and a standard curriculum. Geller, Sjoquist and Walker (2006) reveal that studies based on the data of United states of America concluded that school choice and enrollment is not directly related to academic performance. Esposito (2010) believes that students' academic achievement is related to school type because some schools perform better than others and as such, they are able to produce students with better results than others. Different schools have different policies which have an influence on the process of instruction and students' academic performance. Glewe, (2002) cited in Okon and Achibong (2015), states that different school policies will provide different results through the influence in has on the school characteristics and functioning. Lubienski, Lubienski and Crane (2008) Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) as cited in Endeley (2017) found that mathematics achievement in public schools was slightly higher than that in demographically similar private schools after using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data. Sexton (2001) conducted different studies on public and private schooling giving suggestions that reform efforts and financial investments in the educational system should promote public schools' implementation of policies and management ability. The selection of educational institutions by parents for their children is based on cost and the ability of the school to drive the students to better academic performance and competency enhancement. Evidence from studies have revealed mixed results on the effect of school type on students' academic achievement. The establishment of any educational institution or school has an objective to develop and or enhance learners' knowledge, competencies, etc. through effective instruction. For the school to fully achieve the purpose of school creation, both the teachers and students must be comfortable (Alimi, 2004).

The consequences of school type on a learner's academic performance have resulted in a deep interest in educational research (Choi and Calero, 2012). According to studies conducted by Coleman *et al.* (1982); Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993), students' academic achievement varies with school type. A study conducted by Dan Goldhaber, (1996) revealed that learners' academic performance does not vary with school type in terms of economic status. Different studies on school type and students' academic performance have revealed different results with different conclusions (Nelson *et al.*, 2005). American Federation of Teachers report indicated that traditional public schools in the United States of America perform better than privately managed public schools. On the other hand, Hoxby (2004) revealed that learners in privately managed public

schools had a positive effect on academic achievement, with students in these schools scoring higher in Math and Reading proficiency than those in traditional public schools. However, Gutiérrez (2009) in a study carried out in Catalonia revealed that private schools are not always superior to public schools. According to Okon and Archibong, (2014), students in private secondary schools performed better in Social Studies than those in public schools. On the other hand, David and Beegle, (2005) found that students who attended public junior secondary schools have higher test scores than those who attended private schools. School performance is determined by human and fixed capital resources, learners' attitude towards learning as well as other factors. Private schools pose high-quality capital and human resources (textbooks, qualified teachers, classrooms, etc.) though not in every aspect or indicator. The creation and functioning of private schools is seen as a lucrative business and as such in order to gain popularity and attract many "customers", they have to ensure that all resources are in place and also that better results are produced. Every subject is taught by a trained and qualified teacher in the public school and any teacher may teach any subject which is within the same nomenclature. In Public schools, teachers generally operate other businesses, or sometimes go teach in some private schools or even open tutor centers. According to Galady and Thomas, (2009), the teacher-student ratio in public schools is higher than the ratio in private institutions. Observations found that private learning institutions pay higher fees than public institutions yet, students still scramble for admissions. Public school students can also perform better in terms of academics if all resources are available and better managed.

The issue of academic performance and well-being has been a turning point in making decisions on school choice. As cited in Madrid and Barrios, (2017), Choi and Calero (2012) examined and analyzed the main factors behind the gap in results between state and private schools. In their study, private schools held a clear advantage over state schools. According to them, an elimination of economics and sociocultural factors results in no significant difference in students' academic performance for private and public-school learners. Madrid and Hughes (2011) provide data on the differences between state and subsidized schools with students who study in CLIL bilingual programs and others who study in Spanish and study English as a foreign language. In this study, Villoria, Hughes, and Madrid (2011) studied the differences between second language use (English) between CLIL and EFL students from state and subsidized schools in both primary and secondary education and found significant differences in primary schools between CLIL students from state schools.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of school types on students' academic achievement in English language in the lower northern region of Thailand with a specific objective to compare students' English language achievement with the school type (General education and English programs) in the lower northern region of Thailand.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: Students' English language achievement in the lower northern region of Thailand is not determined by school type or program of study.

METHODOLOGY

This research was a comparative survey that involved the use of multi-purposely disproportionate stratified selected samples of 1242 students drawn from both general education and English programs in private and public schools from 4 provinces in the lower Northern region of Thailand. An extract of the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (ONET) English language achievement test for twelfth-grade, ninth grade and sixth-grade students whose validity and reliability had been determined by the Ministry of Education were all administered to their respective levels to assess learners' English language achievements in the selected sample schools. The tests were administered at the beginning of the first semester of the 2021 academic year to determine students' English language achievement levels. Before the administration of the various tests, permission was obtained from the school administrators. Teachers from sample schools were employed as research assistants to organize, invigilate and observe students during the test to ensure transparency. After the test, marking was done by the researcher using a marking guide prepared by the Ministry of Education for all grade levels.

Participants

A total of 1,242 students from private and public schools obtained through a disproportionate stratified sampling technique consisting of 603 twelfth-grade students, 391 ninth-grade students and 248 sixth-grade students. From this sample of 1242, a total of 917 was drawn from general education programs while 325 was drawn from English programs.

Research instruments

The research instruments consisted of:

1. An extract of the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) English language achievement test for twelfth-grade students consisting of 80 multiple choice questions with five choices with a total score of 100 points. The time allocation for the test was 120 minutes.
2. An extract of the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) English language achievement test for ninth-grade students consisting of 50 multiple choice questions with four choices with a total score of 100 points. The time allocated for the test was 90 minutes.
3. An extract of the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) English language achievement test for sixth-grade students consisting of 40 multiple choice questions with 4 choices and required participants to answer based on given instructions. The total test score was 100 points. The test required students to answer in 60 minutes.

The benchmark for consideration as pass grades was 50% for all grade levels.

Data analysis

The results from assessing students' English language achievements were analyzed using mean and standard deviations and t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1. Comparison of 6th Grade students' English language achievement (General education program)

Overall	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private school	248	60.60	10.649	12.331**	0.00
Public Schools		46.63	7.107		

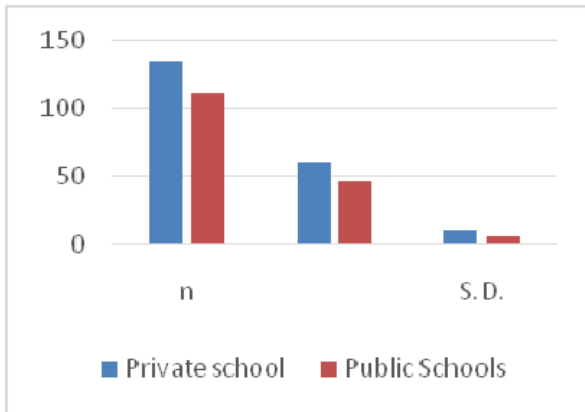


Table 1 and chart above shows the performance of sixth-grade students' English language achievement from the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) English language achievement test. A comparison of 6th grade students' English language achievement for private and public-school revealed that students' English language achievement in private schools (\bar{x} =60.60) is significantly higher than that of public-school students (\bar{x} =46.63) with a difference of 12.331

Table 2. Comparison of General Education Students' English Language achievement between private and public schools (grade 9)

General Education	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private school	234	52.32	7.438	5.537*	0.000
Public Schools		46.84	7.567		

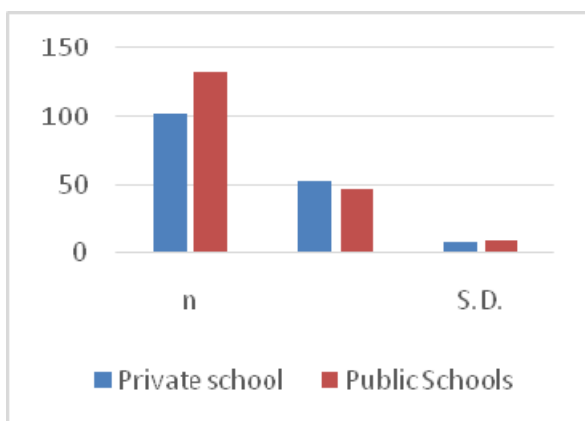
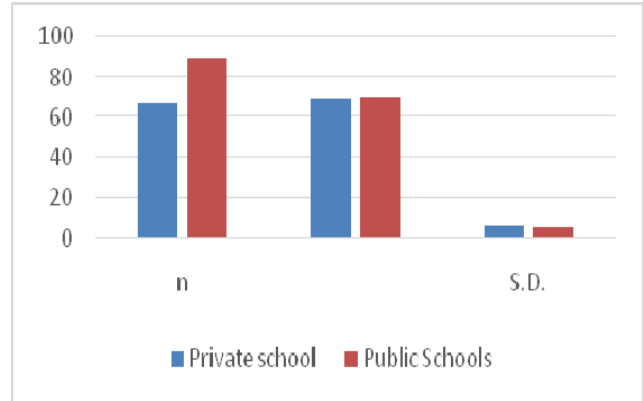


Table 2 and chart above displays the performance of the private and public school students' English language achievement from the administration of an ONET English language achievement test. From the table, it is clearly revealed that a comparison of 9th grade general education students' English language achievement revealed that students' English language achievement in public and private institutions had a statistically significant difference (\bar{x} =52.32, and \bar{x} =46.84,) with private schools performing better than public school students.

Table 3. A comparison of 9th grade students' English language achievement in English Programs between private and public Schools (English programs)

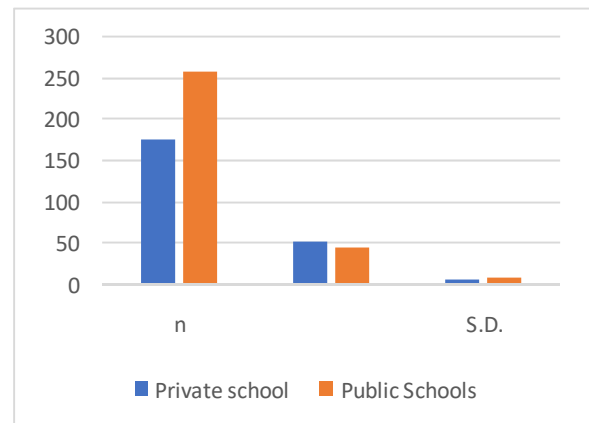
English Programs	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private school	157	69.18	6.112	-0.470	0.639
Public Schools		69.60	5.085		



From table 3 and chart above, a comparison of ninth-grade students' English language achievement in English Programs between private and public schools found no significant difference in English language achievements (\bar{X} =69.18 and \bar{X} =69.60) for private and public schools respectively.

Table 4. Results of comparing 12th grade students' English language achievement between private and public schools (General education)

General Education	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private school	435	52.00	5.910	11.008*	0.00
Public Schools		44.93	7.453		



A comparison of grade 12 general education students' English language achievement from table 4 and chart above revealed a statistically significant difference in students' achievements with students in private schools performing better than public school students (\bar{X} =52.00 and \bar{X} =44.93).

Table 5. Results of Comparing 12th grade English Program (EP) students' English language achievement between private schools and public schools

English Programs	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Private school	168	70.99	5.764	-0.832	0.406
Public Schools		71.75	6.079		

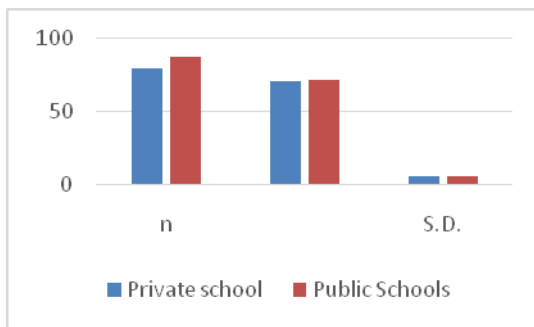


Table 5 and bar chart above displays the performance of therepresents the results of a comparison of 12th grade English Program (EP)students' English language achievement between private schools and public schools revealing that there is no significant different in English language achievement for English program students in both private ($\bar{X}=70.99$) and public ($\bar{X}=71.75$) institutions.

DISCUSSION

The results on and discussions on this research are presented according to the research objectives as follows:

The results of comparing students' English language achievement in general education with the school type in the lower northern region of Thailand.

A comparison of students' English language achievement in general education programs revealed that private school students at all levels perform better than public school students. For sixth grade students, private school students' English language achievement is higher ($\bar{X}=60.60$) than public schools ($\bar{X}=46.63$). A comparison of ninth grade students' English language achievement by school type also revealed $\bar{X}=52.32$ and $\bar{X}=46.84$ for private and public schools respectively (private school performing slightly better). Equally, a comparison of twelfth-grade students' language achievement revealed a score of $\bar{X}=52.00$ and $\bar{X}=44.93$ with private schools still performing better than public schools. It is an indication that students' English language achievement in the lower northern region of Thailand is determined by school type. The difference in students' English language achievement with school type in the lower northern region of Thailand is due to some critical factors. The better performance of private institutions stems from the fact that private schools organize smaller class size as compared to public school crowded classrooms. Also, private schools recruit qualified teachers, pay their teachers well, provide appropriate instructional materials, have a well-established school management team and control system, and have a sound enrollment system for students. This is not the case with public schools. The provision of these resources is fast and instant. Private learning institutions ensure a conducive learning environment, there is also a direct interaction and communication between the parents and private school teachers and administration. Moreover, private schools take it as business and as such they pay individual attention to students to ensure that they produce better results in terms of academic achievements whereas this is not the case with public schools as they must work according to the government rules and regulations with delays in handling some problems which may directly affect students' performance in order to gain a larger share of the market. Unlike in public schools, resources

for effective learning are out dated and sometimes, the provision of these resources may take a long time which affects students negatively. Also, in public schools, the learning environment is uncondusive, limited or complete absence of individualized learning and limited communication between parents and teachers and finally, public schools do not consider it as a business and as such no need for competition. The results were in accordance with Adeyemi (2014) who conducted a comparative study of Pupils' academic performance between private and public primary schools with a sample of 240 pupils were randomly selected from the private and public primary schools in Ilesa East and West Local Government Council Areas of Osun State, Nigeria. In this study a structured questionnaire and Pupils' Achievement Test was used in three subject areas consisting of English Language, Mathematics and Social Studies. Data were analyzed using frequency count, simple percentages and Z-test. Results revealed that pupils in the private primary schools performed better than their counterparts in the public schools. The findings were also in line with Okon and Archibong (2015) who found that students in private secondary schools performed better in Social Studies than those in public schools after examining the difference in academic achievement of students in both private and public secondary schools in AkwaIbom State. The results were also in accordance with Endeley (2017) who set out to assess the mathematic achievement of class six (final year) pupils in 18 English-speaking public, private and confessional primary schools in six divisions of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon and found that mathematics achievement is generally low and differs by school type.

Comparing students' English language achievement with school type and program (English programs)

A comparison of students' English language achievement with school type and program found that students' achievement in English language in English language Programs is generally better than in general education programs. A comparison of students' English language achievement for English programs revealed no significant difference between students studying in English program for both school type. A comparison of students' English language achievement in English programs for ninth and twelfth grade revealed no significant difference for grade nine ($\bar{X}=69.18$ and $\bar{X}=69.60$) and grade twelfth ($\bar{X}=70.99$ and $\bar{X}=71.75$) for private and public schools respectively. The findings revealing no significant difference in students' English language achievement in English programs is due to some reasons. Generally, the language of instruction in English programs for both private and public schools is English language. All subjects are taught in English and mostly by native speakers of English. English programs in all schools provide available resources and there is also high competition between English language programs in both private and public schools. The results were in line with Latisha Harry (2016) who studied the effects of school type on academic performance-evidence from the secondary entrance assessment exams in Trinidad and the findings from data analysis found no meaningful difference in academic achievement between students in assisted schools versus students in government schools. The findings were also in line with Aransi (2018) who conducted a study with the objective to examine empirically the influence of school types, class classifications and gender on students' academic achievement in Economics among high school students in Irewole Local

Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. From data analysis, the empirical findings obtained with the aid of t-statistics indicated insignificant difference in the academic achievement of students in Economics on the basis of types of school and also in line with Alimi, Ehinola and Alabi (2011) who studied the influence of school types and facilities on students' academic performance in Ondo State. The study was designed to find out whether facilities and students' academic performance are related in private and public secondary schools respectively. The study revealed a significant difference in facilities available in public and private schools in Ondo State but no significant difference was revealed in academic performance of students in the two types of secondary schools.

Conclusion

This study had as objective to compare students' English language achievement with school type taking into consideration public and private primary and secondary schools. The results revealed a variation in students' English language achievement based on school type (general education) and also in significant difference in students' achievement in English language in relation to program (English program). Based on the fact that students' English language achievement in public schools the lower northern region is generally low, with private schools performing better than public school students, public schools need the revisit the instructional activities to ensure learners' effective participation through engagement as this will go a long way to help learners. For special programs (English program) there is no significant difference between private and public-school students at all levels. Private schools are run as business organization, with the aim of profit maximization. With this in mind, they put in place all required structures to maximize students' academic achievement. It is an indication that public schools need to reconsider as well as improve the instructional rules and regulations, provide appropriate resources for effective functioning, employ highly qualified Native English language teachers for English language instruction in particular, set an effective control system to as well as create a communication link between parents and teachers, reduce student-teacher ratio in other to boost students' academic achievement in the English language. English language instruction in Thailand should focus on the effective development of language competencies in practical ways. That is; students should be given the opportunity to practice in order to develop communicative language competencies. Above all, the government should focus on developing human resources such as teacher quality through professional enhancement programs on specific methods for English language instruction, letting teachers teach in their specific subject area as well as putting in place fixed capital resources such as appropriate libraries, classroom size and other facilities such as internet, etc. in order to improve students' academic achievement. Generally, private schools perform better than public schools in English language because of the student-teacher ratio, availability of and improvement of human and fixed capital resources, etc. Critically observed, though private schools perform better than public schools with overcrowded classrooms, some students in public schools still have a higher score than others in private schools. As such, if public schools take a duty to provide quality education and not just basic education, they can put in all the required resources, and modify all rules and regulations which will lead to

maximization of students' academic achievement, and then the gap in students' academic performance between private and public schools will be completely eradicated. It should be born in mind that providing quality education to all citizens is the duty of government.

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