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Examining English Test Practicality among Different Stakeholders in Thailand

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This study investigated perceptions of university students from various areas in Thailand regarding aspects of English test practicality including affordability, convenience, resources, contents, and delivery modes. 210 students filled out a questionnaire consisting of three sections: demographic data, perceptions of test practicality, and views on content and delivery. The data was further analyzed to see whether any differences in the perceptions of test practicality existed between students from universities in Bangkok and those from other regional universities. An additional analysis was conducted to examine relationship between their perceptions and other variables, such as socio-economic status (SES) and gender. The results revealed that Thai university students viewed the test of English for international communication as important for their future careers despite their unfamiliarity with it. Several aspects of practicality can be enhanced by taking extra steps, such as organizing orientations for high-school students or college freshmen, offering scholarships and fee waivers, and creating a level-based test. Stakeholders from middle-income families and those outside the metropolis had acquaintance with and an encouraging attitude toward the test and the opportunity to achieve a higher score. Regarding gender's effects on test practicality, while male students embraced computer and the Internet as the new delivery mode, female students, on the other hand, seemed reluctant to do so.

Keywords: Testing, TOEIC, Thailand, practicality

Introduction

Among many existing English standardized tests, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is commonly recognized and accepted for assessing English language skills used in the workplace. This test measures the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers who prepare to enter the workplace, and more than five million of them take the test every year (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2013). Although ETS claimed that this test does not require specialized knowledge or vocabulary, the TOEIC turns out to be quite challenging for many test takers. For example, in the year 2016, the average score of test takers in Thailand was 496, and that of those in Indonesia was 397 from a possible score of 990 (ETS, 2017). This would indicate that an attainment of a satisfactory TOEIC score for potential employment is rather strenuous for a large number of non-native English speakers. Given the fact that the test can be challenging, a great number of tutoring materials and services have been published and provided for aspirants. A plethora of books and media kits have been written and

created, and they are extensively available for the TOEIC studies. Many language schools and tutoring programs also open to devising courses and strategies to help their clients to achieve the highest possible score. For those who can afford to take the test and are skilled enough to obtain high scores, it is favorable and advantageous in their careers and lives. However, for students and persons who lack such opportunities, it is unfortunate and quite upsetting. There is still a large number of people who may never get their hands on the actual test or even a test handbook. About 15 years ago, ETS reported that there had been approximately 57,000 TOEIC test takers in Thailand (ETS, 2005). Currently, while the Thai population has risen to more than 65 million, the number of TOEIC test takers is still rather small. However, businesses, industries, and the government expects Thai job applicants to hold a minimum TOEIC score as a search on jobsdb.com found that more than 800 jobs required TOEIC score (<https://th.jobsdb.com>, 2018). In addition, research has found that most teachers have low self-reported language proficiency and have no prior training on the new approach (Tongpoon-Pattanasorn, 2011); therefore, the Ministry of Education has required new cohorts of teachers to achieve a TOEIC score of 400 or a similar equivalent before they start teaching services in their hometown areas (Audjarint, 2017).

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)

The Test of English for International Communication is administered by the Educational Testing Service. There are three main formats: TOEIC Listening & Reading Test, TOEIC Speaking & Writing, TOEIC Speaking Test, and TOEIC Bridge Test. TOEIC Listening & Reading Test is the most popular version in Thailand. As its name implies, it consists of two major sections, namely, Listening and Reading. Test takers have two and a half hours to finish it. The Listening Section takes 45 minutes, and the Reading Section needs 75 minutes. In the beginning, test takers are required to answer biographical questions so that ETS can have data for its annual report. There are 100 items in the Listening Section and another 100 in the Reading Section. The total score is 990. In Thailand, it is managed by Center for Professional Assessment Thailand or CPA which has offices both in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. According to its website (<http://www.cpathailand.co.th/home>), the company administers the test from Monday to Saturday, two sessions each day. In addition, it offers special administration in the evening as needed. On Wednesday, it has a special session for foreign test takers starting at 9 a.m. Besides, organizations, such as universities, schools, and business corporations can request in-house testing services. This means that CPA Thailand can arrange the test at the requester's locations provided that they have the letter of understanding. The cost of taking a personal test is 1,500 baht. However, fees for university students or clients of a language school may be lower depending on their agreement. Test takers who do not work in a company that has a letter of understanding with CPA (Thailand) and those living outside Bangkok and Chiang Mai must follow the news announcements from local educational institutions in order to learn about the test date, time, and place. Some universities or schools may be able to administer the test more frequently if there are more demands in the area. However, if there are insufficient numbers of candidates, the satellite centers may not be able to administer the test. Test takers might then have to travel to Bangkok where the TOEIC is arranged on a daily basis. People from the regional areas might, thus, have fewer chances of taking the test which can lead to a minimized test exposure and a lack of their career improvement.

Hence, it is obvious that many factors contribute to the success while taking the TOEIC. For example, some test takers might be better prepared because their schools or universities have integrated TOEIC lessons into a curriculum (Anthony, 2003; Kawano, 2004; Takahashi, 2012). However, others might not be able to get satisfactory test scores because it was difficult for them to gain access to test preparation materials due to high costs (Kocken, 2014). In some universities, professors have investigated the nature of English language skills used in a business context which usually requires TOEIC score in order to find a method to promote and increase students' achievement in the standardized English tests. For example, a collaborative research was carried out with employers in Thailand's private sectors (Panyawong-Ngam, Tangthong, & Anunvrapong, 2015). These researchers requested the entrepreneurs to identify the English

skills necessary for functioning in business and industry. While the potential employers indicated that listening skills were the most needed, the preliminary assessment of engineering students in this research found their skills to be vastly inadequate. Even after Panyawong-Ngam, Tangthong, and Anunvrapong (2015) developed a model of English instruction for engineering students by combining the communicative approach and content-based teaching methodologies, the scores were still far below the expected range. It might be because students lack sufficient vocabulary because Chujo and Oghigian (2009) were able to determine that in order to gain 95 percent coverage on TOEIC, a reader would need a minimum vocabulary size of 4,000 words, or 3,000 word families. Therefore, it might be more practical to first develop a multilevel test that may serve to build up learners' skills and self-confidence before they can take on the TOEIC. Another effort to meet the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners is evident in the adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference of Language Learning (CEFR) by Thailand's Ministry of Education. According to ETS, a test taker who obtains a score between 945 and 990 has a proficiency level equivalent to C1 in the CEFR. The so-called FRELE-TH consists of 10 levels, which is four more than the original six-level CEFR (Hiranburana, Subphadoongchone, Tangkiengsirisin, Phoochaoensil, Gainey, Thongsongri, Sumonsriworakun, Somphong, Sappapan, & Taylor, 2018). This indicates that certain criteria or standards in one context may not be practical in another; some adjustments are indeed necessary to consider various situational factors.

Objectives of the Research

This study set out to examine whether Thai university students, whom would be expected to submit an English proficiency test score along with their job application form, perceive the TOEIC test as practical or not. It was expected that, through test takers' perception, language testers could gain a better insight on how a standardized English proficiency test impacts the society in general and how testing environment and conditions could probably be made fair for all test takers. The subjects were Thai university students from various backgrounds. The issues investigated in this research dealt mainly with different aspects of test practicality including recognition of a test's importance, location, convenience, expenses, availability and affordability of tutoring services and materials, registration processes, equality of access, test content, test length, time allowed, contexts of reading and listening materials, and delivery modes. The subjects' perceptions were also compared to analyze differences between viewpoints of those who were from particular locations (Bangkok vs. Provincial Cities), with dissimilar household income levels and differences in viewpoints between gender. In this research however, reliability and validity are not the focus because the survey aimed to investigate opinions of potential test takers related to practicality in order that test deliveries and administrations could perhaps be better managed.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it aimed to identify means for decreasing social complications; particularly ones that arose from utilizing a language test. As McNamara and Roever (2006) stated, "any assessment can have far-reaching and unanticipated social consequences" (p. 2). This means that a test can be used to select or place a person into a proper position or program, but at the same time it could keep others from having such an opportunity. For that reason, this study has important implications for all stakeholders including teachers, test writers, test management agencies, and test takers. It seeks to gather empirical data contributing to effective, impartial, and facilitative test arrangements, which could help a test to elevate social status of a large number of Thai students because English proficiency test scores have played a gatekeeper role to better professions. Especially for the TOEIC, many major organizations such as embassies, airlines, banks, manufacturers, hospitals, and government units use the TOEIC score to make their hiring decisions. Thus, in a country like Thailand where income inequality is ranked number three in the world (Fernquest, 2016), and some of the highest paying jobs require a high TOEIC score, English education seems to be one of the plausible instruments to reduce this widening income gap.

University students, especially those who live in the local areas, may benefit significantly from the research outcomes and implications because they are the targeted group. This survey research method would bring about numerous advantages by not only supplying practical ideas to the field of language testing but also providing useful implications for the administration of high-stakes English proficiency tests so that more underprivileged groups gain better access and exposure to this test.

Literature Review

Test Practicality

Many scholars defined test practicality from the perspective of test creation, implementation, and administration. For example, Bachman and Palmer (1996) stated that the practicality of a language test involves consideration of resources available and required for the design, development, and application of the test. Recourses may comprise human resources, material resources, and time. Brown (2004) stated that an effective test is practical when it is not excessively costly to develop, takes the appropriate time for test takers to finish, is not too complicated to implement, and is convenient to score and interpret. In the *Dictionary of Language Testing* (Davies, Brown, Elder, Hill, Lumley, & McNamara, 1999), “practicality” is defined as “covering range of issues, such as the cost of development and maintenance, test length, ease of marking, time required to administer the test (individual or group administration), ease of administration (including availability of suitable interviewers and raters, availability of appropriate room or rooms) and equipment required (computers, language laboratory, etc.)” (p. 148). While these definitions are worthwhile for teachers or language test writers and administrators to consider, it is not directly expedient for test takers. Test takers are similar to clients. Oftentimes, many test administrators fail to devote efforts to contemplate practicality on their side. There are many potential test-takers who wish to gain experiences of taking the actual test, but many obstacles do not allow them to do so. For example, if a test center is too far away from their domicile, they may have to pay for transportation, food, and likely accommodations in addition to the test registration fees because it usually takes them more than a day to make it to the test center. To make matters worse, the test content is not divided into levels, discouraging test takers from trying more attempts as it might be too difficult for them. In that vein, this research looks into the perceptions of practicality from the test-takers’ perspectives instead of a test creator’s standpoint.

Perceptions of Test Practicality

Of the many research studies conducted on various stakeholders’ perceptions of test practicality, a few stand out. For example, Apichatrojanakul (2011) conducted interviews with teachers who taught TOEIC preparation courses and with the students who took them to explore the feedback of the TOEIC in Thailand. For example, teachers changed teaching styles from a student-centered approach in which various activities could be employed to practice communication skills to a test-centered one which focused on test questions and test-taking strategies. This shows that the test could influence how syllabi were written and how courses were delivered. The students, who were vocational-level business majors, expressed mixed feelings. Although some students preferred the test-oriented courses, some of them favored the student-centered method permitting them to interact more with peers. Nevertheless, both students and teachers agreed that by using the test tutorial style, students invested more in test materials and seemed to perform better, resulting in having a more satisfactory score. In another study, Brown (2006) scrutinized perception of Japanese students who were enrolled in a class designed to prepare them for the TOEIC test. He used some reading lessons, which were not test-directed preparation materials, but rather a graded-reading novel. The study had two objectives: to investigate the effectiveness of or the application of skill from graded reading to the reading tasks completed in the test and to learn students’

perceptions of whether the graded reading materials were supportive of the test achievement. The results in the first survey showed that students perceived the graded reading materials as having no or very little connection to the test. Students would just want to study the TOEIC test materials. However, after six months of using the graded materials to improve students' reading speed, meaning, and confidence, they expressed a more positive attitude toward the graded materials. This study clearly showed that learners could attain high scores on a standardized English proficiency test through general skill-building class resources, and that they do not have to rely on test preparation material alone.

In South Korea, standardized English tests such as the TOEIC are also ubiquitous and research conducted on this test is bountiful (Sewell, 2005). For example, Thomson (2012) studied the effects of deliberate attention to the TOEIC of South Korean university students. The researcher surveyed opinions of university students who underwent a TOEIC training course, which was a part of the university requirement. The survey was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition, the researcher observed the class comprising two sections—one was taught by a native speaker, and a South Korean teacher instructed the other. The survey questions sought to discover the effects of studying for the TOEIC on South Korean university students' motivation to learn English and the TOEIC influence on language teaching in preparatory courses at South Korean universities, both positive and negative. The results show that students were overly concerned with scores, and this could raise their anxiety to perform well on a given test as the majority of students recounted that they felt nervous to do well on the TOEIC. The tension occurring among TOEIC test-takers in South Korea can cause test reliability problems since the test-takers might not be demonstrating skills as they would in a less nerve-wracking situation. Furthermore, students indicated that they studied because of the university requirement and job prospects, and that the students' motivation was just extrinsic. Another research related to test takers' perceptions was conducted by Pathumthong and Jaturapitakkul (2012), in which they surveyed the attitude of test takers towards the Test of English for Thai Engineers and Technologists (TETET). This test claimed to be a pioneering computer-based testing (CBT) in the country. Participants were 250 fourth-year undergraduate students at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) who took the TETET. Researchers studied many aspects, such as clarity of instructions, size and type of text fonts, suitability of items and time, variety of item types, page design, usefulness, validity, reliability, and administration of the TETET based on the test takers' (N = 250) opinions on these issues. Pathumthong and Jaturapitakkul found that the test takers had very constructive perceptions concerning most aspects of the TETET which was directly related to their imminent occupation. Scrymgeour (2011) conducted a survey to examine test preparation strategies and performance on the Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP), a standardized English proficiency test for Thai university students. She used a questionnaire which contained both close-ended and open-ended questions soliciting the data from 16 university students from the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. The result revealed that only half of the participants prepared for the test. "Not one student admitted preparing gradually over time by doing some extra study every evening when they did their homework. Out of the nine students who prepared, seven did so just before the exam, while the other two did it a week before" (Scrymgeour, 2011, p. 18). Students' preparation techniques included doing old exams and reviewing grammar, vocabulary, etc. The study also found that students in the education majors, especially the master's degree ones perceived the CU-TEP as important for career but difficult to ace.

Hsieh (2017) used online surveys and phone interviews with 1,527 Taiwanese students from 123 higher education institutions to investigate their perceptions of using the TOEIC test scores to meet an English-language graduation requirement. Hsieh also conducted interviews with 26 students. Results indicate that about 80 percent of the respondents had constructive views about the use of the TOEIC test scores as a form of exit exam. They were also confident that preparing to take the test had a promising impact on their language adeptness and future work prospects. In addition, the participants view this test as having high levels of reliability and validity and they also observe the TOEIC test scores favorably. Lertcharoenwanich, Limsiriruengrai, Watcharenwong, and Yenphech (2018) assessed pre-service teachers' needs regarding the TOEIC. The samples were 32 designated individuals who were recruited by

the government to teach in school in their hometown districts once they graduated. These prospective teachers indicated that they needed the instructional materials the most, followed by the requests for experience trainers and test strategy training. Finally, they hoped the TOEIC is offered more regularly in the local areas. Wallace (2018) examined perception of test takers in Taiwan regarding fairness and judgment of a test. The data which was collected from 83 L2 university students by using online questionnaire suggested that participants made justice judgments of their language programs based on how fairly the procedures used to administer a single test were carried out and how respectfully the instructor administering the test treated them. This shows that perception of test takers is important and can be useful in developing a test which is impartial and beneficial to different testees.

In summary, “as the industry leader, the TOEIC program has set the standard for assessing English-language skills needed in the workplace for over 35 years. With about 7 million tests administered every year, the TOEIC tests are the most widely used around the world. More than 14,000 organizations across more than 160 countries trust TOEIC scores to make decisions (ETS, 2018, para 1).” Given the extensive use and high-stakes decisions associated with many standardized English proficiency tests, it is timely and important to investigate the potential test takers’ perceptions of the practicality of existing standardized English proficiency tests.

Research Methods

This survey research utilized a questionnaire to collect data from students enrolled in eight Thai public universities. It was conducted in the beginning of the first semester of the Academic Year 2017. There were four universities from Bangkok and another four universities from regional areas. In Bangkok, the researcher approached respondents on university campuses and requested them to complete the questionnaire. On the other hand, for the data from students in four local universities, the researcher requested teachers from those places to distribute the questionnaires and collect them back. Since it is impossible to survey all Thai undergraduates, only 210 undergraduate students participated in this study. Among them, 105 were studying in four different regions—the North, the South, the Northeast, and the East. The other 105 belonged to four major universities in Bangkok and the perimeter areas. The questionnaires show that 143 respondents were females while 72 were males. The respondents were chosen regardless of their years of study, majors, and background in English. In this report, they are referred to interchangeably as stakeholders, respondents, Thai college students, and Thai university students.

The instrument for data collection consisted of three sections. The first section solicited demographic data, such as gender, household income levels, areas of residence, and experience with the test. The second part contained statements that required respondents to express their perceptions on the TOEIC practicality. There were 10 statements which aimed to examine agreement or disagreement associated with current knowledge of the test, views on the importance of the test, awareness of the test location, convenience and affordability in traveling to the test location, amount of the test fee, availability of tutoring services in the area of residence, ability to pay for tutorials, frequency of tests, registration processes, and equal opportunity of the testing among university students who were supposed to take the test soon. The third section of the questionnaire sought respondents’ perceptions on test contents and delivery modes. There were six statements related to number of test items, time for test taking, contexts of reading passages, delivery of test in the modes of paper-based or computer based, and classifications of the test according to background levels. Perceptions of stakeholders in Part 2 and 3 were measured on a Likert scale of one to four. One meant strongly disagree, and four meant strongly agree. As for the data interpretation, mean scores between one and 1.50 indicated strong disagreement. Mean scores between 1.51 and 2.50 showed disagreements. Mean scores between 2.51 and 3.50 meant agreement, and 3.51 to 4.00 meant strong agreement.

There were five research questions to which the analyses of the data provided the answers. First, did Thai test takers find the TOEIC test practical? Second, did Thai test takers support the delivery of the test via computer and the Internet? Third, did test takers studying in Bangkok and its' perimeter areas and those studying in provincial areas have similar perceptions of test practicality? Fourth, did test takers with different household income levels have similar perceptions of test practicality? Finally, did test takers' gender affect the perceptions of the test practicality? The data analysis was conducted by using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics through SPSS Version 22. Mean scores were reported to address the first and second research questions. Research Questions 3 and 5 were answered by using *t*-tests and Question four was answered by using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Results

Demographic Data

Descriptive statistics show that from the total of 210 respondents, approximately 70% were female 30% were male. Their family income levels varied greatly, but the majority fell into the lower-income group, earning less than 50,000 baht per month (69%). The proportions of the respondents living in the Bangkok greater area and in provincial cities were equal, but their income levels were significantly different. Respondents who lived in the Bangkok area had significantly higher income than those who lived in the provinces. In terms of experiences with a communicative English test, most participants (81%) never took the test. Only a few had taken TOEIC or its equivalent before (19%).

Test Takers' Perceptions of Practicality of the Test

The mean scores of student opinion are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, respondents did not agree on eight aspects of test practicality ($M = 1.51$ - 2.50). These were knowledge of the test components, awareness of test location, logistical and financial convenience, test affordability, sufficiency of tutoring and preparation services, ability to pay for tutorials, ability to take the test multiple times, and ease of registration. However, respondents agreed with the statements on two issues: importance of the test score and equality of test opportunities. Their agreement levels on the importance of TOEIC and the equality of opportunities were 2.94 and 2.62, respectively.

TABLE 1
Thai University Student's Perceptions on Practicality of the Test

Test Practicality	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1. I recognize each part of the TOEIC very well.	2.06	.749	Disagreed
2. TOEIC is important for my future career.	2.94	.838	Agreed
3. I know where the TOEIC test center is.	1.95	.850	Disagreed
4. It is convenient for me to travel to the TOEIC test center.	2.13	.775	Disagreed
5. The test fee of 1,500 baht is not expensive for me.	2.43	.875	Disagreed
6. There are many tutoring services available in my areas.	2.44	.800	Disagreed
7. I can afford to pay for the tutorials and test preparations.	2.19	.779	Disagreed
8. I can take the TOEIC as many times as I want.	2.34	.871	Disagreed
9. Registering for the TOEIC is not complicated.	2.33	.759	Disagreed
10. All test takers in Thailand have equal opportunity and chance to take the TOEIC and get good score.	2.62	.908	Agreed

Test Takers' Perceptions of Test Content and Delivery Modes

Table 2 shown below demonstrates participants' perceptions of test content and delivery modes. Respondents agreed on four main points; the reading passages, accents in the audio materials, delivery of the test via computer and the Internet, and dividing the test into three different levels. However, they disagreed on the issue of time allowed for the test, which means that the two-hour period might be insufficient for 200 items, according to their perception.

TABLE 2

Levels of Stakeholders Perceptions of Content and Modes of Delivery

Test Content and Delivery Modes	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1. The TOEIC, having 200 items, is not too long for me.	2.37	.762	Disagreed
2. The two-hour time for answering 200 items is appropriate.	2.05	.712	Disagreed
3. The reading should contain only passages from a native- speaker context.	2.54	.785	Agreed
4. The listening should feature only native-speaker's accent.	2.74	.747	Agreed
5. Test should be provided via computer and the Internet.	2.82	.718	Agreed
6. Test should be divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced.	2.99	.750	Agreed

The results from this analysis provide the answer to the research question whether computers and the Internet should be used to deliver the test. The data revealed that respondents agreed upon using computers and the Internet to administer the TOEIC with the mean score of 2.82. In addition, they also suggested that the TOEIC should be divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

Comparison of Perceptions by Areas of Residence

The comparison between the perceptions of those living in the Bangkok greater area and that of the respondents living in the provincial cities shows that they perceived differently on three issues. College students in the provincial cities, in some way, indicated that they knew more about the test than their counterparts living in Bangkok did. Furthermore, most of the students in provincial cities significantly agreed with the statement that Thai test takers had equal opportunities in access to the test. However, many respondents in Bangkok saw that there was unfairness in the opportunities. Another difference found in this survey was the view on the ability to pay for tutoring. Respondents who resided in Bangkok had a higher chance of being able to pay for tutorials than local residents did.

TABLE 3

Comparisons of the Perceptions among Students by Area of Residence

	Area of Residence						<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Bangkok Area			Provincial Area				
	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>n</i>		
Knowledge of test	1.95	.739	105	2.16	.748	105	2.042	.042
Ability to pay tutors	2.38	.794	103	2.00	.721	105	3.604	.000
Equality	2.45	.891	104	2.78	.862	105	2.658	.008

Comparison of Perceptions by Household Income Levels

When students' perceptions were compared on the basis of the five levels of household incomes, their views significantly differed on three issues: awareness of the location of the test center, availability of tutorial services, and equal opportunity in testing. As shown in Table 5, respondents with household income levels less than 30,000 baht per month knew the test center location significantly better than those with income between 30,001 and 50,000 baht and those with income between 70,001 and 100,000 baht. Additionally, participants with household income between 50,001 and 70,000 baht knew about the test center better than those with income of 70,001 to 100,000 baht. However, students with household

income level of more than 100,001 had a similar level of knowledge of the test components to that of students of all income levels.

TABLE 4

Comparisons of the Perceptions on Location of Test Center by Household Incomes

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	4	8.607	2.152	3.153	.015
Within group	194	132.408	.683		
Total	198	141.015			

TABLE 5

Post-hoc Analysis of Test Location Awareness by Household Income Levels

Income Levels	<i>M</i>	Less than 30,000	30,001-50,000	50,001-70,000	70,001-100,000	More than 100,001
Less than 30,000	2.09	-	.313*	.055	.620*	.388
30,001-50,000	1.78		-	.258	.307	.075
50,001-70,000	2.04			-	.565*	.333
70,001-100,000	1.47				-	.232
More than 100,001	1.71					-

TABLE 6

Comparisons of the Perceptions on Available Tutorials by Household Incomes

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	4	10.280	2.570	4.138	.003
Within group	195	121.115	.621		
Total	199	131.395			

TABLE 7

Post-hoc Analysis of Available Tutorials by Household Incomes

Income Levels	<i>M</i>	Less than 30,000	30,001-50,000	50,001-70,000	70,001-100,000	More than 100,001
Less than 30,000	2.42	-	.228	.115	.419*	.518*
30,001-50,000	2.20		-	.113	.647*	.746*
50,001-70,000	2.31			-	.534*	.633*
70,001-100,000	2.84				-	.099
More than 100,001	2.94					-

Table 6 shown above details the perceptions on tutorial services available. It was found that income levels affect perspectives on handiness of tutoring provisions. There was no difference between perceptions of students with household income less than 70,000 baht per month. Their mean scores for this matter were between 2.20 and 2.42. On the other hand, respondents with income higher than 70,001 baht significantly agreed with the statement that tutorial services were obtainable in their areas as can be seen in Table 7.

TABLE 8

Comparisons of Perceptions on Test Opportunity by Household Incomes

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	4	14.884	3.721	4.887	.001
Within group	195	148.471	.761		
Total	199	163.3555			

TABLE 9

Post-hoc Analysis of Perceptions on Test Opportunity among Household Incomes

Income Levels	<i>M</i>	Less than 30,000	30,001- 50,000	50,001- 70,000	70,001- 100,000	More than 100,001
Less than 30,000	2.86	-	.270	.663*	.382	.738*
30,001-50,000	2.59		-	.393	.112	.468
50,001-70,000	2.19			-	.281	.075
70,001-100,000	2.47				-	.356
More than 100,001	2.12					-

The comparison of opinions on equal opportunity in the TOEIC shows that participants with household income less than 30,000 baht per month had different perceptions from those with household income of 50,001-70,000 baht and more than 100,001 per month. This seemed to indicate that well-to-do persons view the chance to get the test as unfair while the less-affluent aspirants did not do so. The wealthiest group agreed the least to the statement that all test takers in Thailand had equal opportunity and chance to take the TOEIC and get good score ($M = 2.12$). However, their viewpoints were not significantly different from perceptions of students in the other income group, apart from the lowliest one, as shown by the post hoc analysis in Table 9.

Comparisons of the Perceptions according to Gender

The final analysis was done with *t*-tests to answer the fifth research question regarding whether gender had anything to do with perceptions. Overall, it was found that there was little difference in perception. The only three statements about practicality that female participants significantly disagreed with the male counterparts were related to the knowledge of the test component, location of the test center, and modes of delivery. Female respondents indicated that they had better knowledge of the test itself ($M = 2.18$), and more women knew the test center site ($M = 2.08$). For the content and delivery modes, female students showed significantly less agreement than their male counterparts did on using computers and the Internet. This meant that even though both women and men agreed upon using computers and the Internet to deliver the TOEIC, women might be more intimidated by technology ($M = 2.73$).

TABLE 10

Comparisons of the Perceptions by Gender

	Gender						
	Male			Female			<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>n</i>	
Knowledge of Test	1.82	.736	62	2.18	.728	143	3.324
Test Location Awareness	1.68	.785	62	2.08	.859	142	3.138
Modes of Delivery	3.02	.719	71	2.73	.704	143	2.669

Discussion

The survey certainly shed light on several major impediments of communicative English language testing in Thailand. It was evident from their viewpoints; TOEIC is important for Thai university students' future. This finding corresponded to that of Scrymgeour (2011) and Hsieh (2017). Students also agreed that all Thai test takers had equal opportunity to take the test and get a high score. However, these college students might not know each part of the TOEIC well. Most of them were unacquainted of the test center location, and it is not convenient for them to travel to the test center. Additionally, the test fee of 1,500 baht is considered relatively expensive and tutoring services are scarce. The respondents also felt that preparation materials were too costly. This supports the findings of Lertcharoenwanich et al. (2018)

in which pre-service teachers needed more instructional materials, compounding the issue of limited re-tests and complicated registration guidelines.

A large portion of college students in this case are found not to take the test. This may be due to the fact that the test is designed for occupation-related milieus. Many students might be in the early years of university; their knowledge of the test components displayed a large gap between what test takers knew and what was expected of them. They might start preparing for the test in the final year as per many establishments both in the public and private sectors have specified the test score as a requirement for job applications. Notably, respondents in this study agreed that a TOEIC score was vital for their future career, even though they appeared to be unfamiliar with the test. Postponement of preparation for the test until the last year of college can result in the failure to obtain a satisfactory score. The finding that Thai students did not prepare for essential English exams on a regular basis is in line with the finding of Scrymgeour (2011) in the case of the CU-TEP. The next concern was the financial expenses for taking a test. Since the majority of the stakeholders in this case ranked their household income as in the lower side of the bracket, their ability to pay for the test fee and tutorial services appeared inadequate. It was not uncommon to find that respondents in regional areas had less ability to pay for tutorial services, but their purchasing power was quite resilient because the mean score was close to agreeing with the statement that the test fee was inexpensive. For the registration process, it might need slight improvement because most stakeholders still did not agree that the procedure was uncomplicated. Thus, providing more stress-free methods could be a win-win strategy for both test managers and registrants.

In terms of test content and mode of delivery, a modification might perhaps be made regarding the time allotted for taking the test. Normally, test takers have two hours to answer the 200 items. Nevertheless, they are required to answer extensive biographical questions costing them a lot of energy before actually starting. It might be favorable for them to have the full two hours plus 30 minutes, which could be used to more successfully answer the test questions instead of the demographic ones. The final subject related to test material was whether the test should be divided into levels. They agreed on separation of the test into graded levels, which was rather thought-provoking since the current TOEIC test is not a multi-leveled test. Thai college students in this study might feel anxious. Especially, as they would have to pay a relatively expensive fee, it would be a waste of money if their results were lower than a stipulated point. If the test is too demanding, candidates may be too nervous as well. Offering a level-based test (i.e. step-by-step) to Thai students may make them less intimidated because they could be more self-assured and do not fear losing money; dividing the TOEIC into a series of assessment based on levels such as beginner, intermediate, and advanced could operate as a stepping-stone to their targeted accomplishment.

Comparison between perceptions of stakeholders in Bangkok and that of those in regional cities show that respondents who studied in the Bangkok area had less knowledge of the test than those in provincial cities. However, Bangkok stakeholders demonstrated more ability to pay for tutorials than those enrolled in regional universities. Respondents in the local areas also believed that everyone had equal chance of accessing and achieving the test. The analyses of perceptions of those from different economic status showed similar results. Stakeholders from different family income levels had divergent views on three issues: test location awareness, availabilities of tutorials, and test opportunity. Better-off stakeholders had less information of the test center than less-wealthy ones. After these issues were reexamined, it was found the rich were more likely to feel that Thai test takers had uneven chance to experience this test. This could imply that the higher the family's income, the more sympathetic test takers might have been. Well-to-do students might be worried that their less affluent counterparts were deprived of the prospect. In the meantime, participants from middle-income family might be keen and expectant. Even though they felt having less access to tutorials, they understood more about this test and felt everyone had comparable possibility of success.

The consideration between perceptions of male stakeholders and that of the females revealed a few differences. They had different views on three factors: knowledge of the test, test location awareness, and mode of delivery. Women seemed to be more attentive to the test than men were. It might be that females are more organized and detail oriented, so they might have spent time learning about the test and

becoming familiar with the test questions as well as the location. This preparation and attentiveness might land them a good career. Another reason was because the number of the female population is slightly higher than that of the male. Thus, it might be that women were enthusiastic to be prepared for competition in a challenging job market, especially jobs in the airline industry and multinational companies. This finding can guide test providers to direct their dissemination of information. Since men were less aware of the test components and test centers, more advertisement or training might be weighted more heavily towards men. In contrast, as women were more daunted by computers and the Internet, the test provider may need to suggest a drill for women to familiarize themselves and build a better attitude toward computer or Internet-based testing; otherwise, many female stakeholders may remain faithful to the paper-based version only.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From their perceptions on test practicality, test content, and mode of delivery, stakeholders suggested several changes that they felt needed to be addressed. Test providers and English educators in Thailand must take several actions if they want to see improvement in English proficiency and capacity of the future workforce. The first action is to increase stakeholders' awareness of the test. University students both in the Bangkok area and provincial cities have marginal knowledge of it; therefore, if they have to obtain the score as required by a large number of workplaces, they must gain information and become more familiar with it. Waiting until they graduate from university can possibly delay their chance of gaining a good score and usable English skills. The second action is to consider adjusting the test time and mode of delivery as well as dividing the test into progressive series. Although many test takers can obtain a very good score in the two-hour test, a huge number of others cannot since stakeholders in this research indicated that they did not agree with the current time frame. In addition, the test provider should consider delivering the test via computers and the Internet as the new generation of students agreed that it should be equipped and offered in that manner. Furthermore, if the test provider divides the test into three levels namely, beginner, intermediate, and advanced; then private companies or government organizations can change their requirement from a certain cut-off score to target levels of the test that applicants have achieved. For example, instead of specifying a score of 700 or more, an employer may instead specify the level of Intermediate or higher. This would encourage the test takers to try and achieve better marks. The data also showed that many students studying in universities in the Bangkok area had not learned about the TOEIC. This points toward the assumption that they had been studying for the admission test and had successfully gained a seat in a top university; however, they might not have paid attention to the test necessary for the entry to career. In order to tackle this issue, the test provider should organize an orientation to create more awareness of the test. Furthermore, it would be desirable for the test provider to offer tutorial services to people in the needed areas, especially in low-income provincial areas. It is recommended that the test maker organize free orientations for high-school students or freshmen in a university and offer some test takers scholarships and fee waivers. Finally, the implication extended from gender comparison is that the test provider may want to attract more male stakeholders to try out the test. On the contrary, note that if test providers decide to deliver by using a computer, they should ensure that female test takers are accustomed enough to operate on computers and the Internet.

Further studies should be conducted by using qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observations to look into the same matters such as knowledge about the test and delivery mode preference; this might yield more profound results. Additionally, the data pool may be extended to include experienced test takers because their veteran viewpoints can lead to better and deeper understanding of issues of test practicality. Essentially, more studies that bring about egalitarianism in communicative English testing and accomplishment of candidates will be highly admired.

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