

## Teaching Thai Language in Refugee Camps along Thai-Myanmar Border การสอนภาษาไทยในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราว บริเวณชายแดนไทย - เมียนมา

♦ Pimjai Mestsuksai

Lecturer, Master of Education Program in Educational Administration

Siam Technology College, E-mail: pimjai2544@hotmail.com

พิมพีใจ เมษฐ์สุขใส

อาจารย์หลักสูตรศึกษาศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาบริหารการศึกษา

วิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีสยาม กรุงเทพมหานคร

---

### Abstract

This paper aims to find out usefulness and effectiveness of teaching Thai language in Myanmar refugee camps along Thai-Myanmar border as perceived by the trainees and the refugees. Enable to get a positive perception of the trainees that learning Thai language is useful for them, an effective teaching method must be constructed. To meet the objectives, an assessment on teaching Thai language was made in the 8 refugee camps. The sample size was 240. There were two parts in the questionnaire. The first part dealt with the demographic variables and the second part dealt with the perceptions of the respondents on usefulness and effectiveness of the literacy training that they were attending.

Simple statistics, for demographic variables such as gender, aged groups, length of stay, skills in reading and writing and levels, mean, and percentage, was used to find out the perception of the respondents in different levels. A pair sample test and one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to compare the responses of the respondents in different levels on usefulness and effectiveness of the training.

It was found out that main reason for higher drop-out rate, which is considered to be an indicator of ineffectiveness of teaching, was due to the trainees interested in resettlement in a third countries. This problem was also happened in in the camp formal schools. If we consider the effectiveness and usefulness of Thai language training accordingly with the performance of the trainees, it was found out that skills of the trainees of all levels in reading and writing skills was in average. It means that teaching process of this project could not significantly improve the skills of trainees after attending a certain level.

For further study, researchers should focus on the ways of life of the refugees who could not attend the basic education in their country and lack of enthusiasm in learning literacy. It means that teaching and learning process should be changed accordingly with their concepts.

**KeyWords:** Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education, UNHCR, Thai Literacy and Numeracy, Skills in reading and Writing,

### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาไทยในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราวบริเวณชายแดนไทย - เมียนมา โดยมีกลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 240 คน ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล ซึ่งแบบสอบถามดังกล่าวแบ่งเป็น 2 ตอน ตอนแรกเป็นข้อมูลพื้นฐาน ตอนที่สอง เป็นการสอบถามความคิดเห็นของกลุ่มตัวอย่างเกี่ยวกับประสิทธิภาพของการรู้หนังสือที่ผู้เรียนได้เข้ารับบริการ

สำหรับสถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้สถิติพื้นฐานเพื่อวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับเพศ อายุ ระยะเวลาการเข้ามาอยู่อาศัยในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราว ทักษะและระดับการอ่าน เขียน ส่วนการทดสอบ สมมติฐานนั้นผู้วิจัยใช้การวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนทางเดียว(ANOVA) ผลจากการศึกษาครั้งนี้พบว่าอัตราการออกกลางคันอยู่ในระดับสูงทั้งนี้เพราะประสิทธิภาพการสอน ผู้เรียนมีความมุ่งมั่นที่จะเดินทางไปอยู่ประเทศที่สามจึงเป็นเหตุให้ผู้เรียนไม่สนใจเรียนภาษาไทย ทักษะการอ่าน เขียนของผู้เรียนอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง สำหรับการศึกษาครั้งต่อไปควรศึกษาเกี่ยวกับวิถีชีวิตของผู้อาศัยอยู่ในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราว

**คำสำคัญ :** การอ่าน เขียน และการคิดเลขเป็น ทักษะการอ่านและการเขียน

### Introduction

Millions of refugees were seeking refuge in different parts of the world. The reasons of leaving their countries are due to the civil war, political oppression, ethnical cleansing and economic crisis. On humanitarian points of view some countries host them by providing foods and shelters. United Nations agencies and non-government organizations shared the burden of these people for their survival. In addition, everybody believe that education is a basic right for the refugee children who have no formal basic education system in their camps. Instead of wasting their time in the camps and while they are waiting for their uncertain future, host governments, United Nations agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF and international and national non-government organizations such as World Education, ZOA, FRC etc. are helping these refugee children to study basic education and literacy and numeracy.

In Thailand, after many years, the first government organization directly intervene in refugee affairs. It was in 2006, when the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, in collaboration with UNHCR provided Thai language in 8 refugee camp along Thai- Myanmar border. Curricula and syllabi were designed by the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education and by coordination of the camp committee, Thai language class, level one, two and three were taught in the first academic year. The drop-out rate within and between the semesters was higher than it was anticipated, or in the other words, the success of teaching Thai language was not satisfied by the donor, UNHCR. It asked the project coordinator and programme officer to find out the causes of the higher drop-out rate and usefulness and effectiveness of the project.

This paper is the outcomes of the case study about usefulness and effectiveness of teaching Thai language, and it is considered as a survey or a minor research for a particular study in a particular group of people, in this case Myanmar refugees.

## Objectives

The objectives are;

- 1) To find out the usefulness of teaching Thai language in Myanmar refugee camps along Thai-Myanmar border as perceived by the trainees and the residents.
- 2) To find out the effectiveness of teaching Thai language in Myanmar refugee camps along Thai - Myanmar border as perceived by the trainees.

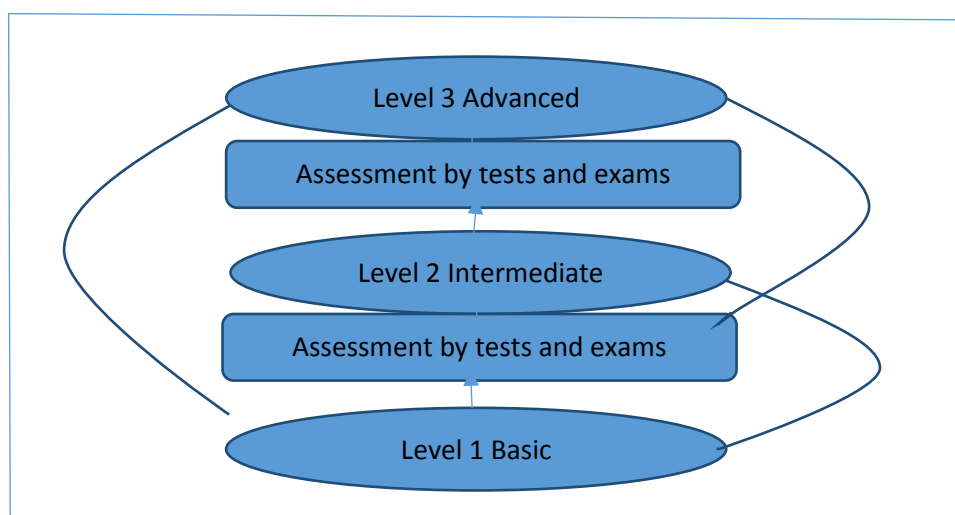
## Scope of Research

In this research, trainees were chosen randomly among the refugees regardless their age, gender, education background and the race. In teaching literacy of a language, there is a question of to what level should the trainee be taught to becoming a literate. According to UNESCO and in many countries, if a trainee has successfully learnt up to the primary school or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the person is considered as a literate. In this project, curriculum was designed in three levels, which is equivalent to grade 4 of the public school. Hence the person can communicate with the local Thai people.

## Conceptual Frame Work

In-put values of this model was the feedbacks of the trainees of this project and non-trainees who have lived in the camps for a long time. Trainees were divided into 3 levels-

basic, intermediate and advanced levels. We find out their improvement (by their own judgements) when they moved from one level to a higher level. Theoretically, a trainee should improve his skills in reading and writing after each level of literacy and numeracy courses. These feedback were analyzed by statistical methods, central tendency and made a comparison between and within the group.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework of measuring effectiveness of teaching Thai language in refugee camps.

## Literature Review

Since this paper is just a case study and has limited scope on teaching Thai language in refugee camps, very few related literatures such as education management, literacy and numeracy for refugees and evaluation in education are described in this section.

### Teaching Thai Language to Refugees and Migrants Children

Initially, access to public education was prohibited for the children of migrant workers by law. In July 2005, access to public education to migrant children was permitted. Arphattananon, I (2012), and Su-Ann, O. (2010)

Since then there were more than 100 non-formal schools for the refugee children along Thai-Myanmar borders, mostly managed by the non-government organizations. Some learning centers taught only basic reading and writing Thai language to prepare migrant children to communicate in Thai. Some migrant children chose local Thai school to continue higher education. Premjai, V (2011-2013)

### **Education Management**

To get better results from the whole organization depends on performance management. It is important to understand managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goal, standards and competence requirements. In addition, cognitive style is also an important factors on performance of education management In education management, there are four aspects of each activity namely program establishment (as implementation in management), culture, capabilities of each stakeholders, and facilities, teaching and learning materials. Habib (2011).

### **Education for Refugees**

It is worthy to quote from part of speech of Myint Wai, deputy director of the Thai action committee for democracy in Myanmar. It said "Without education, they [Myanmar children] will have no chance to make a better life wherever they live, in Thailand or Burma," Because of the situations, many refugee children experience frequent disruption and limited access to education. Dryden. and Sarah (2015). This is not only the children who are living in the refugee camps but also some refugee children who are implicating in the post resettlement.

Many children who are refused to go to camp schools by their parents. The reason is the parents are illiterate and did not go to school when they were young. The second reason is the children have to help their parents when the parents go outside camp to find vegetable for their food. The last reason is refugee children often encounter language barrier in the schools. They may struggle to access instrumental content taught in a language other than their own.

Refugees are referred to as the people who are living in the middle of nowhere. They do not even have a dream for the future and they do not know when they will be sent back to the places where they come from and when they will have a chance to resettle in a third countries. In this situation, education for their children is their future. Tayler and Sidhu. (2009) discussed the educational challenge confronting refugee children. They concluded that educational institutions must play more active role for refugee youths through an inclusive approach. From the view point of United for Sight Organization (2017) ([www.unitedforsight.org/refugee](http://www.unitedforsight.org/refugee)) educating refugees has multiple benefits and immediate positive and widespread impact on society. Education teaches self-reliance helps creates the human

social capital needed for development, and play a fundamental role in providing both physical and psychosocial protection for the children.

In all refugee camps along Thai-Myanmar border, there are primary and secondary schools for refugees' children. However, the education standard of these schools are sub-standard of its host country education standard and failed to get accreditation from the ministry of education of Thailand. Lack of qualified teacher or well-trained teachers, school facilities, teaching and learning materials are the main factors for low standard of school education in the camps. In addition, there is no higher education institutions or higher education institutions are not allowed in the camps. In this regard, finishing secondary school, it is the end of education for the refugees' children.

According to Hasam. A. et. al (2004), In all four contexts of language barrier and choice of curriculum present hurdle to learning in the classrooms. Certification and accreditation for studies is not guaranteed and this can deter young people for continuing or reentering formal and non-formal education.

For young adults whose ages are over schooling age for primary education, in refugee camps, many educational organizations provide literacy and numeracy courses. For example, in Ban Mai Nai Soy and Ban Surin camps, Finnish Refugee Council provided literacy and numeracy courses for three year, from 2011 to 2014. Many Myanmar refugees were benefitted from this course.

### **Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Processes**

Evaluation is a part of management process. It goes cyclic with planning, implementation, monitoring. In fact, to find out the success (effectiveness and usefulness) and failure of a project is judges by evaluation. There are tremendous amount of literatures about evaluation. A few noteworthy literatures are briefly mentioned in this paper. Evaluation principal aims to determine a plan or system worked or not. To evaluate the improvement of student performance on norm or criterion Edison School used its own summative judgement by case and across cases. In this process, the school included wide audiences such as policy makers, district personnel, parents to judge the student achievement outcomes. Miron. and Applegate. (2000)

## Research Methodology

There are three steps in research method- Population and sampling method, data collection method and data analysis method.

### Population and Sampling

Considering the students, who had passed the level 1, 2 and 3, were still living in the camps. In other words all the students of this project were the population of this study. According to the statistic of the Office of Non-formal and Information Education, there were about 600 students had attended until the end of each level and these students were considered as the population of this study.

Sample size is calculated by Yamane's formula as following;

$$n = N / ( 1 + N e^2 )$$

Where “n” is sample size, N is population and  $e^2$  (.05x 005) is probability error. So the sample size is 240 for 8 camps. In each camp, sample size is 30.

### Data Collection

A questionnaire with demographic variables such as age, length of staying in the camp, successfully attended level, intention to resettle in a third country was prepared in Myanmar. For their perception on their skills in reading and writing, usefulness of the project etc. were prepared in 5 Likert scales. Questionnaire were sent to the facilitators of this project in each camp and were asked them to hand out and collect the questions personally.

### Data Analysis Method

A simple statistics, mean and percentage, is used to find out the frequency of all demographic variables. To test the hypothesis and to find out the difference in reading and writing skills of the respondents, comparisons were made among the group of three different levels. The results will give general idea of difference among the groups and a pair test was used two find out the different between two specific groups.

Comparison were made among the groups of three different levels to find out the differences of the skills in reading and writing. A pair sample test and analysis of variance are used in this study. It is assumed that mean value of reading and writing skills of all levels were the same. In the other words, effectiveness of this project, teaching Thai language in the refugee camps, significantly difference. Alternatively there was a different mean value at

least in two levels. It means that there was a significant improvement of the skills of trainees after they had finished a certain level.

## Findings

Gender Distribution. In term of gender, 42% of the respondent were females, 56% were males and 2% were failed to answer the question. It was slightly different from the gender ratio of the whole populations of the camps along Thai- Myanmar border. According to statistics of Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), 51% were female and 49% were male. It showed that females of camp residents were less interested in joining Thai literacy and numeracy courses than males. See table 1, below;

**Table 1** Gender distribution of the respondents

| Gender  | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|------------|
| Male    | 134    | 56         |
| Female  | 100    | 42         |
| Missing | 6      | 2          |
| Total   | 240    | 100        |

Distribution of Age of the Respondents. Respondents were grouped into three different groups - basic according to their age, less than 16 years old, 16 to 60 years old and above 60 years old. According to table 2, as shown below, majority of them or 84% of the respondents were in the category 2, 16 to 60 years old. It was followed by the first group, less than 16 years old, by 6% and group 3 by 1%. 9% of the respondents did not mention their ages.

**Table 2** Distribution of age of the respondents

| Age group       | number | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------|------------|
| younger than 16 | 14     | 6          |
| 16 to 60        | 202    | 84         |
| Older than 60   | 2      | 1          |
| missing         | 22     | 9          |
| Total           | 240    | 100        |

Length (Year) of Living in the Camps. Respondents were grouped, according to their length (year) of stay in the camps, into 5 categories- 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, 16 to 20 years and more than 20 years. As listed, below, in table 3, majority of them or

32% of the sampled respondents had lived in the camps for 6 to 10 years. It was followed by the group who had lived in the camp for 1 to 5 years. They were accounted for 31% of the total percentage. The next group, with 25% of the total, who were lived in the camp for 11 to 15 years. 6% of them had lived for 16 to 20 years and 3% of them had lived for more than 20 years. The rest 3% was considered as missing data.

**Table 3** Length (year) of living in the camp

| Year of living in the camp | Number | percentage |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 to 5 years               | 74     | 31         |
| 6 to 10 years              | 77     | 32         |
| 11 to 15 years             | 60     | 25         |
| 16 to 20 years             | 15     | 6          |
| more than 20 years         | 7      | 3          |
| Missing                    | 7      | 3          |
| Total                      | 240    | 100        |

Respondents in Each Level. ONIE has been teaching Thai language in 8 Myanmar refugee camps along Thai- Myanmar border since 2006. It started teaching for basic level at the beginning and in 2007, the following year, in phase one, March to June, in addition to basic level, an intermediate level was introduced and then in the second phase, advanced level, level 3 was started. In this regard, there were three levels of teaching Thai language in the camps. According to the table 4, as shown below, in this study, intermediate level or level two trainees were the majority, or 54%, of the respondent of this study. It was followed by level one, 29% and level three, 14%. 3% of the respondents did not answer this question. See table below.

**Table 4** Respondents in each level

| Level                   | Number | percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| basic- level one        | 70     | 29         |
| intermediate- level two | 130    | 54         |
| advanced= level three   | 34     | 14         |
| Missing                 | 6      | 3          |
| total                   | 240    | 100        |

Respondents' skills in Reading and Writing Thai Language. It was assumed that one of the causes which made high dropout rate of this project was most of the trainees went to a third country for resettlement. To confirm this assumption, respondents were asked their plan for resettlement programme. 29% said that they would go for a third country and 67% said that they did not wish to go for a third country.

All the respondents were asked about their skills in reading and writing of Thai language. Only 4% of them considered themselves very well in these two skills. 5% said they could read and write well. Majority, about 65% said they were in average and 20% could read and write a little or below average while 4% did not answer this question. Please see table 5.

**Table 5** Respondents' skills in reading and writing Thai language

| Skills in reading/writing | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------|--------|------------|
| very well                 | 10     | 4          |
| Well                      | 12     | 5          |
| Average                   | 156    | 65         |
| a little                  | 48     | 20         |
| Missing                   | 14     | 6          |
| Total                     | 240    | 100        |

Skills in Reading and Writing of Thai Language of Group 2. The same question was asked to the group 2 respondents who were in the intermediate level. There were 130 respondents to answer this question. Among them, 12% said that they could read and write Thai language well or very well, majority, 81% said they were in average and the rests, 7% said their skills were below average, could read and write a little. Please see table 6.

**Table 6** Skills in reading and writing of Thai language of group 2.

| Skill in reading/writing | number | Percentage |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|
| well or very well        | 16     | 12         |
| Average                  | 105    | 81         |
| a little                 | 9      | 7          |
| Missing                  | -      | -          |
| Total                    | 130    | 100        |

Skills of Reading and Writing of Thai Language of Group 3. The same question was asked to the group 3 respondents who were in the basic level. There were 37 respondents to answer this question. Among them, 12% said that they could read and write Thai language well or very well, majority, 72% said they were in average and the rests, 16% said their skills were below average, could read and write a little. Please see table 7.

**Table 7** Skills in reading and writing of Thai language of group 3.

| Skill in reading/writing | number | Percentage |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|
| well or very well        | 4      | 12         |
| Average                  | 24     | 71         |
| a little                 | 6      | 17         |
| Missing                  | -      | -          |
| Total                    | 34     | 100        |

Skills of Reading and Writing of Thai Language of Group 1. The same question was asked to the group 3 respondents who were in the advanced level. There were 70 respondents to answer this question. Among them, 11% said that they could read and write Thai language well or very well, majority, 72% said they were in average and the rests, 17% said their skills were below average, could read and write a little. Please see table 8.

**Table 8** Skills in reading and writing of Thai language of group 1.

| Skill in reading/writing | number | Percentage |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|
| well or very well        | 8      | 11         |
| Average                  | 50     | 72         |
| a little                 | 12     | 17         |
| Missing                  | -      | -          |
| Total                    | 70     | 100        |

Pair Tests and ANOVA Tests. Mean value of reading and writing skills of group 1 was 2.9153, group 2 was 2.9906 and group 3 was 3.0714 respectively. In this aspect, we can assume that all means were the same.  $U_1 = U_2 = U_3$ , which was one of the assumptions to make a comparison using pair sample test or one way ANOVA to find out that there was an effectiveness in teaching Thai language to refugees in the camp. It was assumed that a

trainee should improve his/her skills in reading and writing after attending a particular level of this project.

## Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, 80% of the respondents were in workable age, 16 to 60 years old and about 80% of them have been lived in the camps for 6 to 10 years. In term of their reading writing skills, which were the indicator of the success of this project, in the first group, basic level trainees, only 12% believed that they could read and write well or very well, but majority, about 71% felt that their skills in reading and writing was in average. Similarly, in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. groups, intermediate and advanced level trainees, about 10% believed that their skills were well and very well in reading and writing, but majority about, 70% thought that they were in average in reading and writing Thai language.

This paper may not be a complete study about teaching Thai language in Myanmar refugee camps along Thai- Myanmar border. Further study, which forecast on intensive literacy courses with shorter period of studying time, needed to be implemented.

## Discussion

Based on the above findings, the researcher would discuss the followings; UNHCR and Ministry of Education were very cautious about willingness of Myanmar refugees in learning Thai language. In this regard, before starting this project, project coordinator, researcher of this paper, and programme officer visited to all 9 refugee camps along Thai- Myanmar border and explained about the objectives about this project to camp committee, refugees and prospective trainees. In Tham Hin Camp, because of resettlement program, most of the camp residents showed unwillingness to join this project. They thought that it would be a waste of time to learn Thai language when they are leaving for a third country. Refugees in the other camps showed that they would join the project as a good opportunity. However, in some camps, it was difficult to get enough trainees. The researcher and program officer explained them. Especially to those who were not interested in the resettlement program, the benefit of learning Thai language in terms of communicating with the local community and opportunity to pursue higher education if they were, in one day, allowed to go outside the camps.

There were high drop-out rate between and within the semesters. Among many reason, one reason, which was believed by the district office of non-formal and informal education,

was the resettlement program, for example in Tham Hin Camp. This study found out that, it was not the case because 67% of the respondents answered that they had no intention to go to a third country. Programme officer had noticed that it was not only in the Thai language project but also in the camp formal education. For example, In ban Dong Yan Camp, there were not more than 15 students in grade 10<sup>th</sup>. while there were hundreds of students in the lower classes. We need to find out the real root of this problem.

Mean value of all levels were almost the same- 2.9153, 2.9906 and 3.0714 respectively in level one, two and three. It shows that teaching process of this project could not significantly improve the skills of the trainees. To prove this finding, an assumption (hypothesis), reading and writing skills of the trainees of the different levels were the same. Was made and it was tested by a statistical method, the comparison test. In this case pair sample test and one way ANOVA were used at significant level of .05. The result showed that hypothesis was true. However, descriptive statistical analyses showed that reading and writing skills of level three, who had successfully finished the level two, were slightly better than the trainees of the lower levels.

## References

- Arphattananon, I. (2012), "Education that Lead to Nowhere: Thailand's Education Policy for Children of Migrants" International Journal of Multi-culture Education. Vol. 14, No. 1
- Su-Ann, O. (2010), "Education in Refugee Camps in THAILAND: Policy, Practice and Paucity" EFA Report, 2010 UNESCO
- Premjai. V. (2011-2013) "The Challenge of Education Policy for Migrant Children in Thailand from Security Standpoints" Center for Southeast Asia Studies, Kyoto University
- Sarah. D. P. (2015), "The Educational Experience of Refugee Children in Country of First Asylum" Migration Policy Institute. Washington D.C.
- Hasam. A, Et. Al (2014). "Ensuring Quality Education for Young Refugees from Syria (12-25 years old). Refugee center. Oxford Department of International Development. University of Oxford.
- Miron. G. and Applegate. B. (2000). "An Evaluation of Student Achievement in Edison Schools Opened in 1995 and 1996" The Evaluation Center. Western Michigan University.
- Taylor. S. and Sidhu R. K. (2009). "Supporting Refugee Students in Schools: What Constitutes Inclusive Education?"

Habib. M. (2011). "An Exploratory Analysis of Education Management for the University." Faculty of Business. American International University. Bangladesh.

Kagaari. J. et. al. (2010). "Performance management, Practice, Employee Attitudes and Management Performance." International Journal of Management. Vol. 24, no.6

Stark. B. P. and Freishtat. R. (2014). An Evaluation of Course Evaluations." University of California, Berkeley. USA

Appendix 6 of "Statistics; A Fresh Approach" by Donald H. Sanders. McGraw-Hill, 1990

Taro. Y. (1967). "Statistics: An Introductory Analysis. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition. New York. Harper and Row.

Report on "Effectiveness and usefulness of Thai Language Training in Myanmar Refugee Camps." Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education. (2007)



Dr.Pimjai Mestsuksai, Lecturer, Master of Education Program in Educational Administration, Siam Technology College.