

## การเปรียบเทียบผลสัมฤทธิ์ภาษาไทยมาตรฐานของนักเรียนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์กะเหรี่ยงชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่หนึ่งในห้องเรียนที่ใช้ภาษาไทยล้วน กึ่งทวิภาษาไทย-กะเหรี่ยง และพหุภาษา

## A Comparison of Standard Thai Achievement of Ethnic Karen First Grade Students in Monolingual Thai, Informal Bilingual Thai-Karen, and Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Classrooms

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### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ ๑) เปรียบเทียบผลสัมฤทธิ์ภาษาไทยมาตรฐานของนักเรียนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์กะเหรี่ยงชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่หนึ่งในห้องเรียน ๓ แบบ ได้แก่ ห้องเรียนที่ใช้ภาษาไทยล้วน ห้องเรียนกึ่งทวิภาษาไทย-กะเหรี่ยงและห้องเรียนพหุภาษา ๒) ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความสามารถด้านการอ่านการเขียนกับความถูกต้องในการพูดภาษาไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักเรียนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์กะเหรี่ยง ๗๖ คนจาก ๓ โรงเรียนของสำนักงานเขตพื้นที่การศึกษาประถมศึกษาเชียงใหม่เขต ๕ เครื่องมือสำหรับเก็บข้อมูลคือ แบบทดสอบการอ่านออกเสียง การเขียน และการพูด สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิจัยได้แก่ ค่าเฉลี่ย ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน การวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนทางเดียว การวิเคราะห์รายคู่ และการหาค่าสหสัมพันธ์แบบเพียร์สัน ผลการวิจัยพบว่านักเรียนจากห้องเรียนกึ่งทวิภาษามีคะแนนผลสัมฤทธิ์ภาษาไทยสูงกว่าคะแนนของนักเรียนจากห้องเรียนที่ใช้ภาษาไทยล้วน โดยมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ส่วนนักเรียนจากห้องเรียนพหุภาษามีค่าสหสัมพันธ์ของคะแนนระหว่างการอ่านการเขียนกับความถูกต้องในการพูดสูงกว่านักเรียนจากห้องเรียนกึ่งทวิภาษา และห้องเรียนที่ใช้ภาษาไทยล้วนตามลำดับ สรุปได้ว่านักเรียนในห้องเรียนที่ไม่ใช้ภาษาแม่เป็นสื่อจะเสียเปรียบในการพัฒนาภาษาไทย

**คำสำคัญ:** ห้องเรียนกึ่งทวิภาษาไทย-กะเหรี่ยง/ห้องเรียนพหุภาษา

## Abstract

The purposes of this study were firstly to compare the achievement of ethnic Karen first grade students in 3 types of classrooms: monolingual Thai, informal bilingual Thai-Karen, and mother tongue-based multilingual education or MTB-MLE, and secondly, to study the correlation between students' literacy and speaking accuracy. The subjects were 76 ethnic Karen students from 3 different schools in Educational Service Area Office 5, in Chiang Mai Province. The instruments consisted of a reading aloud test, a writing test, and a speaking test. The statistical methods used in this study were mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA, Scheffe post hoc comparisons, and the Pearson Product Moment correlation. The results showed that students from the informal bilingual classroom achieved a mean score which was significantly higher than that achieved by students from the monolingual Thai classroom. Furthermore, students in the MTB-MLE classroom showed a significant correlation between literacy achievement and speaking accuracy in Thai. This correlation was higher than those from the informal bilingual and the monolingual Thai classrooms respectively. Therefore, it appears that the classroom environment where the students' mother tongue was not used was disadvantageous for students' acquisition of standard Thai.

**KEYWORDS:** INFORMAL BILINGUAL THAI-KAREN CLASSROOM/MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

## Introduction

Not many people in Thailand know that there are many languages spoken in the country. Lewis (2009) pointed out that there are around 70 living languages in Thailand. Some of these languages are spoken by small groups of indigenous people while others are still widely used to communicate within their ethnic groups. In the provinces along the western border of Thailand and Myanmar, there are communities that speak Karen, one of these ethnic languages. Karen languages are split into Pwo Karen and Sgaw Karen and grouped in Tibeto-Burman, a subgroup of the Sino-Tibetan language family (Manson, 2011). Although Karen people speak their own languages, they send their children to schools under the Thai education system. The national language Standard Thai is used formally as the medium of instruction in schools all over the country, no matter where the schools are located in Thailand.

There is evidence that shows disadvantages to school children whose mother tongue is not the same as the language used at school. For example, a study by the World Bank in 2005 showed that half of the school children who dropped out of school spoke a different mother tongue (Kosonen, Young & Malone, 2006). In 2007, the Ministry of Education also found that 25-35% of grade 2 students from schools in the far reaches and border areas of Thailand where Standard

Thai is not their first language were basically illiterate (Person, 2009). Furthermore, it was found that a number of schools in which the majority of their students were from ethnic communities were likely to get lower scores in National Test results. For example, the educational evaluation report of Educational Service Area Office 5, which controls all schools in Doitao, Hod, and Omkoi Districts in Chiang Mai Province showed that on the Thai subject section of the Grade 3 National Test (2010), students from schools in these areas averaged only 38.87%. This average was lower than the mean score of 50.97% for the country (Educational Service Area Office 5, 2010). This suggests that students are likely to face difficulties when the language used in the classroom differs from their mother tongue.

The United Nations stresses the importance of literacy for ethnic minority people. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People 2007, Article 14, indigenous people have the right to “establish and control their educational systems” (Office of Ethnic Affairs, 2010). It also emphasizes that individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. With an increasing awareness of the language problems in Thailand, the Ministry of Education and non-government organizations agreed to have bilingual teachers

in schools where the majority of students are from ethnic communities. Bilingual teachers are competent in using the target ethnic language and the language of instruction. Kosonen (2005) claimed that the bilingual approach is an approach that can improve literacy rates among ethnic minority students.

The Educational Service Area Office 5, in cooperation with non-government organizations, for example SIL International, Foundation of Applied Linguistics, etc. trained local Karen speaking people to be bilingual teachers. As a result, there are now schools where Standard Thai and Karen are used as the medium of instruction. This idea can be seen as controversial among mainstream teachers since classroom procedures are different from what was done in the past. At present, there are three types of classrooms found in schools under the Educational Service Area Office 5, where the majority of students are ethnic Karen. These are as follows.

1) Monolingual Thai classroom (MNL) is the type of classroom which is commonly found in other regions of the country. The teachers who carry out the process of teaching and learning use only Standard Thai as the medium of instruction even though the students speak a different mother tongue.

2) Informal bilingual Thai-Karen classroom (IBL) is the type of classroom where Standard Thai is mainly used as the medium of instruction. Karen which is the

students' mother tongue is also used to check students' understanding of the lessons and to cope with communication problems in the classroom. This differs from other bilingual education programs in which two languages are formally used for teaching the content of school subjects.

3) The Mother tongue based multilingual education approach (MTB-MLE) has recently been adopted in the formal school system in Thailand. The MTB-MLE approach has a structured teaching and learning system. Schooling begins completely in the students' mother tongue and then gradually goes through a transition to the mastery of national or official languages in later years. Ball (2010) indicated that fluency and literacy in the mother tongue lays down a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages. If the mastery of their first language develops sufficiently, learning a second language will be easier for these students. Likewise, it reveals that primary education programs that begin in students' mother tongue help them gain literacy and numeracy skills more quickly (SIL International, n.d.). Although it has been claimed that MTB-MLE not only promotes effective language learning, but also facilitates learning other subject matters for ethnic minority children, there have not been any comparative studies reporting the outcomes among Karen first grade students.

## Objectives

Because students' proficiency in Standard Thai affects learning and understanding of other subjects, an investigation on the effect of each type of classroom on the achievement in various aspects of Standard Thai among Karen first grade students was carried out. The research was conducted according to the following purposes.

1. To compare what effect and to what extent each type of classroom i.e. monolingual Thai, informal bilingual Thai-Karen, and mother tongue-based multilingual education, has on Standard Thai achievement among Karen first grade students

2. To find out whether there is any correlation between students' Standard Thai literacy and their speaking performance in terms of word recognition, intelligibility, and phonological accuracy according to the three types of classrooms.

## Scope of the study

According to demographic information (Phillips, 2009), 80% of the population of Omkoi District are ethnic Karen. Therefore, two schools in Omkoi were chosen to participate in this study: Banyangkrok School representing the MNL classroom and Banluang School (at Banyangtai extension) representing the IBL classroom. The third

school, Banphui School in Hod District, represents the MTB-MLE classroom. The three selected groups contained 100% ethnic Karen students.

Because the application of IBL classroom and MTB-MLE approach provided for Karen students in the north of Thailand has just recently started in the formal education system, there were constraints on time and the number of students involved in this study. In addition, the teaching materials used in the classroom were different. Two classrooms, the MNL and IBL, used the same kind of textbooks recommended for all schools under the Educational Service Area Office 5. For the MTB-MLE classroom, original materials were created because the classroom has different learning steps. The students learn school subjects in Pwo Karen first before moving on to Standard Thai. Therefore, the MTB-MLE classroom needs specific teaching and learning materials for its students.

To improve the language development of bilingual children, second language proficiency must include both formal structure and communicative application (Bialystok, 2001). Therefore, to investigate Karen students' achievement in Standard Thai, formal productive skills: writing and reading aloud are focused on since these literacy skills are directly taught in class. In addition

to literacy skills, speaking performance in a given context is examined to see whether students are competent in this area. Accuracy is examined to evaluate students' productive skills. For example, the segmental level that includes initial consonant sounds, vowel sounds, and final consonant sounds is mainly investigated. For prosodic or suprasegmental features, only varieties of tone are examined because these things mainly affect listeners' comprehension when listening to Standard Thai. According to Baker (1993), there are five basic competencies of linguistic areas; these are pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, meaning, and style. Therefore, the tests for measuring Karen students' Standard Thai were designed to cover these points.

### **Basic Assumptions**

It was assumed that the three groups of Karen students who were subjects in this study were equal in terms of ability in their mother tongue (Pwo Karen), their readiness to learn, their IQ, their motivation and attitudes at the start of the project. All of them came from similar low-income rural families. When these Karen students started their schooling, they were exposed to Standard Thai differently in each type of classroom. The teachers involved in this research were equal in terms of their level of education and teaching skills. Even though Karen teachers were local people, they had been trained in the pre-service teachers'

training program organized by Educational Service Area Office 5 in cooperation with non governmental organizations. Lastly, the three schools had similar geographical backgrounds of rural and mountainous terrains. Even though the students live in remote areas and speak Pwo Karen in their own communities, they are able to get access to Standard Thai by listening to the local radio programs and watching television.

## **Methodology**

### **1. Research participants:**

The subjects in this study were 76 ethnic Karen students who were in the first grade at three different schools: 27 from the MNL classroom, 19 from the IBL classroom, and 30 from the MTB-MLE classroom. The average age of the participants was seven years old. These students had already spent two years in kindergarten where different types of classrooms were continuously managed.

### **2. Instruments:**

Standard Thai tests are comprised of a reading aloud test, a writing test, and a speaking test. The tests were taken at the end of the first grade year.

2.1 A reading aloud test evaluates students' recognition of the Standard Thai alphabet including vowels and tones which are required in reading. There are set criteria included for scoring students' reading.

2.2 A writing test aims to measure students' competence in Standard Thai sentence structure through writing. Scores are given to sentences arranged in the S V O pattern (subject-verb-object). In addition, correct spelling and complete thoughts are focused on when marking.

2.3 A speaking test requires students' output that reflects their ability to produce language ranging from words and phrases to complete sentences. Their language is expected to be meaningful and grammatically correct. A series of four pictures is given to each student to study. The students then have to tell a story about the pictures. There are no specific right or wrong answers as long as students are able to imagine or create a situation that relates to the pictures. A recorder is used one by one to

record each student's speaking test. These are transcribed and analyzed to assess the quality of their speech in terms of word recognition, intelligibility, and phonological accuracy.

## Results

Table 1 presents the mean scores that Karen students achieved from the three types of classrooms that participated in the tests.

The average scores out of a total score of 85 (40 in literacy and 45 in speaking accuracy) were analyzed by the Analysis of Variance (the one-way ANOVA). The result is presented in Table 2.

The results revealed that the average scores of Standard Thai achievement levels were significantly different among the three

**Table 1** Summary of Mean Achievement Scores of 3 Types of Classrooms

Standard Thai Achievement	Type of Classroom		
	Monolingual	Informal Bilingual	MTB-MLE
	(n=27)	(n=19)	(n=30)
<b>Literacy (total 40)</b>	<b>14.56</b>	<b>25.32</b>	<b>21.17</b>
Reading aloud (15)	7.33	11.05	9.5
Writing (25)	7.22	14.26	11.63
<b>Speaking accuracy (total 45)</b>	<b>33.31</b>	<b>33.06</b>	<b>33.06</b>
Word recognition (15)	8.78	7.98	7.85
Intelligibility (15)	11.3	12.32	12.77
Phonological accuracy (15)	13.24	12.77	12.44



**Table 2** Standard Thai Achievement Results

Type of classroom	Mean	S.D.	F	P-value
Monolingual (MNL)	47.87	13.55	3.54	0.034*
Informal bilingual (IBL)	58.38	15.13		
MTB-MLE approach	54.23	12.55		

\*At a 0.05 level of significance.

**Table 3** Scheffe Post Hoc Comparisons of Standard Thai Achievement

Classroom	Classroom	Mean Difference	P-Value
MNL	IBL	-10.51	0.041*
MNL	MTB-MLE	-6.36	0.217
MTB-MLE	IBL	-4.15	0.584

\*At a 0.05 level of significance.

types of classrooms at a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the Scheffe post-hoc comparisons were used for testing significant differences between each pair, i.e. 1) MNL and IBL, 2) MNL and MTB-MLE, and 3) IBL and MTB-MLE. The results are shown in Table 3.

The results indicate that: 1) MNL's mean score was less than IBL's by 10.51,  $p = 0.041$ , this shows a significant difference; 2) MNL's mean score was less than MTB-MLE's by 6.36,  $p = 0.217$  which means that there is no significant difference; and 3) MTB-MLE's mean score was less than IBL's by 4.15,  $p = 0.584$ , which shows no significant difference. It can be concluded from this data that among the three types of class-

rooms, students from the IBL classroom received significantly higher mean scores than that of the MNL classroom.

To find out whether there was any relationship between students' achievement in Standard Thai literacy and their speaking accuracy, the Pearson Product Moment correlation was applied. The results are shown in Table 4.

The results indicate that there was a correlation between literacy and speaking accuracy at a 0.05 level of significance in the three types of classrooms. Analysis of the data shows a significant correlation between literacy and speaking accuracy at 0.59, 0.53, and 0.44 respectively among the MTB-MLE, the IBL, and the MNL classrooms.



**Table 4** Correlation of Literacy and Speaking Accuracy

Types of Classroom	Literacy	Speaking Accuracy	r	P-value
	Mean	Mean		
MNL	14.56	33.31	0.44	0.022*
IBL	25.32	33.06	0.53	0.02*
MTB-MLE	21.17	33.06	0.59	0.006*

\*At a 0.05 level of significance.

To sum up, the scores for literacy in the MTB-MLE classroom are most strongly related to the quality in speaking.

## Discussions

According to the results, using both languages, Karen and Standard Thai, formally or informally as the medium of instruction positively affects Karen students' Standard Thai literacy and some aspects of their speaking performance. The results from the test can be interpreted as follows.

### 1. Reading aloud ability

A reading aloud test aims to examine how well Karen students are able to read words that are arranged continuously into phrases and short sentences. They must know word boundaries at the first stage of their reading and the position of each Standard Thai character because not all of them are arranged in linear order. To read words correctly, they must recognize the Standard Thai alphabet, including symbols of simple

vowels, diphthongs, and varieties of tone marks. Importantly, they have to know the combination of these components and determine word boundaries which are not marked in the Standard Thai system.

The results showed that students from the three types of classrooms had no significant difference in their reading performance on the initial consonant sounds and tones. On the whole, students' ability to read initial consonant sounds correctly was higher than their ability to read the right tones of words. This suggests that their recognition of tones is not as good as their recognition of letters. Therefore, the practice of reading tones should be provided more so that they can read each tone more precisely to indicate the right word and the right meaning.

In terms of their ability to read words with simple vowels, words containing diphthongs, and words with final consonant sounds, IBL students read better and more correctly than MTB-MLE and MNL students

did respectively. Furthermore, Karen students from the three types of classrooms showed a lack of ability when reading words with final consonant sounds. This may be because final consonant phonemes do not appear in Karen words. This differs from the Standard Thai linguistic system which contains various syllable structures. Consequently, it was difficult for most Karen students to read Thai words which contained final consonant phonemes. This is a kind of interlanguage phenomenon. Archibald (2001) concluded that language features of a learner's first language are likely to have influences on those features of the second language, especially in a learner's speech. Even though Karen students knew the letter in the final position of the syllable including its consonant phoneme, they could not read it correctly. What they frequently did was to leave out the final consonant sounds. For example, the word “เด็ก /dek/” which means a child was pronounced /de/ without the final consonant sound /k/. Sometimes the final sounds were not deleted but mispronounced. For example, the final sound /n/ of the word “คน /khon/” which means people was shifted to the sound /m/, so the meaning was changed from “คน /khon/” which means people to “คม /khom/” which means being sharp. This has been a major problem for Karen students when learning Standard Thai; therefore, a longer period of time to practice reading words with final consonant sounds should be provided.

According to the vowel system (Phillips, 2009), differences between vowels of Pwo Karen and Standard Thai are not very distinct in terms of their articulated sounds. The mean scores showed that students' ability to read words with simple vowels correctly were relatively better compared to the ability to read words containing diphthongs. This was probably because it was easier for them to recognize simple vowels, which are written in only one single symbol. Again, IBL students were able to read Standard Thai better than MTB-MLE students who had just moved systematically from their mother tongue to Standard Thai and had a shorter period of learning to read Standard Thai. MNL students had been exposed to Standard Thai since the beginning but achieved the lowest scores. The results confirmed that the language of instruction which is not the students' mother tongue acts as a major barrier to education for children who do not get used to the language of instruction. Therefore, the learning process should begin with the first language which children learn and speak best (Pinnock, 2008).

## **2. Writing ability**

In addition to the students' ability in reading, their writing ability also demonstrated the success of the teaching and learning process. It was found that the results of the writing test in the three types of classrooms

were parallel to those of the reading aloud test. IBL students were able to write the best compared to the MTB-MLE and MNL students. Again, MNL students got the lowest mean scores. This may be because writing is a productive skill through which students can formally express their knowledge and skills. It reflected what the students understood and knew about Standard Thai sentence structure. Furthermore, it was found that around 50% of their writing was spelt incorrectly. According to the combination of word elements, students' errors in writing were usually related to tone marks and final letters which represented the final consonant sounds of the target words. Because the tone marks and the tone levels are not valid in Standard Thai, the same tone mark which governs different consonants generates different tone levels. In addition, the different tone marks may generate the same tone level. Therefore, Karen students were confused about consonants and vowels in Standard Thai, and this led to errors in their writing.

Apart from the confusion about tone marks which led to misspelling in students' writing, Karen students' problem in articulating final consonant sounds also caused errors when writing words. They wrote words the same way they pronounced them. Therefore, they wrote the words incorrectly because they pronounced them incorrectly. Rowe and Levine (2006) claimed that much of the

difficulty encountered in learning a second language is the result of L1 interference. Therefore, phonological accuracy should be practiced more in order to reduce errors in students' writing.

### **3. Speaking accuracy**

To develop young students' ability to read and write is one of the main goals of primary education. Speaking skills are not considered as important as literacy skills; these are learnt naturally in the classroom. To communicate effectively in their second language, accuracy is essential because it affects the listeners' comprehension. According to the speaking test, Karen students' conversational speech was examined in relation to word recognition, speaking intelligibility, and phonological accuracy.

#### **3.1 Word recognition**

Words are considered the most tangible element of a language when speaking. In order to speak comprehensibly, using any word to communicate requires knowledge of that language such as sounds, meanings, related words, and its use in sentences (Finegan, 2004). All linguistic information related to words has been stored in the students' brain. After three years of formal schooling, Karen students from different types of classrooms did not have different abilities in terms of word recognition when speaking Standard Thai. Only a few students in each classroom were able to think

beyond what they saw in the pictures. This resulted in a higher number of words selected from the word bank in their brain to communicate their thoughts. To conclude, different exposure levels to Standard Thai did not significantly affect students' ability in word recognition.

### **3.2 Intelligibility**

Intelligibility is the underlying goal of all human speech communication. A message that is presented must be intelligible or easily understood by another human being (Flipsen, 2006). In regards to Karen students' speech intelligibility, there were sub-skills which were examined. The results from the data analysis showed that MTB-MLE students got the highest mean scores for two sub-skills: to speak continuously and to produce complete structured sentences, while IBL students got the highest scores for using the right words in relation to the context of conversational speech. Lastly, MNL students were not found dominant in any of the sub-skills. On the whole, MTB-MLE students performed the best in terms of speech intelligibility. This could be interpreted as MTB-MLE students having sufficient preparation for basic speaking skills because they started their schooling in the environment of their mother tongue. As their listening and speaking skills in their native tongue had become strengthened, they were ready to learn and develop their second language

used at school. This confirmed that as Karen students matured in their first language, they had obtained sufficient linguistic background for the transition from Pwo Karen to their second language Standard Thai. After their linguistic awareness was already built, it was not difficult for them to learn the other target languages used in their society.

### **3.3 Phonological accuracy**

As mentioned earlier, interlanguage transfer usually occurs when language features of a learner's first language have influences on those features of the second language. Especially in a learner's speech, differences of phonetic and phonological properties between the two languages are the main source of difficulty and this can lead to errors. When considering the phonetic and phonological properties of Pwo Karen and Standard Thai, the major difference is that words in Pwo Karen do not have final consonant sounds, but words in Standard Thai do. Therefore, it was difficult for Karen students to pronounce Standard Thai words containing final consonant sounds. These kind of pronunciation errors certainly caused listeners to misunderstand the speaker. Vowel sounds also cause problems to Karen students when speaking Standard Thai because diphthongs in Pwo Karen and Standard Thai are extremely different. Therefore, Thai diphthongs cause difficulties. For example, most Karen students pronounce

wrongly the words “เพี้ยว /thiiaw/” and “สว้ย /suuay/” that contain diphthongs: /iia/ and /uua/, so they usually pronounce them “เพ้าว /theew/”, and “โส้ย /sooy/” instead. When a word has a combination of both elements, a diphthong and a final consonant sound, Karen students were not able to pronounce the word correctly because they were not acquainted with these sounds. In relation to phonological accuracy, three main types of errors were frequently found: the deviation of final consonant sounds, the deletion of final consonant sounds, and the deviation of vowel sounds. Karen students will fail to communicate effectively if their utterances contain a lot of these errors.

It was found that the MNL students performed the best, having a higher mean score than those from the IBL and the MTB-MLE classrooms respectively. It could be concluded that in the traditional monolingual Thai classroom, students were exposed to Standard Thai only; as a result, they were familiar with the Thai teachers' pronunciation and accent all the time. This was beneficial for MNL students to naturally acquire phonological elements of Standard Thai. The MTB-MLE students got the lowest mean score for phonological accuracy. This result was expected because MTB-MLE students spent years in the kindergarten learning Pwo Karen before moving to Standard Thai. The amount of time that they were exposed

to Standard Thai was shorter; therefore, their phonological accuracy was lower.

All in all, even though each sub-skill which indicated accuracy in speaking was achieved differently by Karen students from different classrooms, their speaking performance on the whole was not significantly different.

## Recommendations

In conclusion, the classroom where the students' mother tongue was not used showed no advantage for students when developing Standard Thai. When ethnic minority students enter schools, their mother tongue should be used because they take advantage of their mother tongue to understand what they learn. The students' mother tongue acts as a strong foundation when learning new things at school. In Thailand, language diversity still exists in many provinces, particularly along the borders of neighboring countries. Bilingual and multilingual education is therefore necessary for students whose language background is different from the majority. In relation to the three schools which represented the three different types of classrooms in this research, some reflections on the strengths and weaknesses that affected Karen students' achievement in Standard Thai should be taken into account. This would be of benefit when reforming what has already been done and when

planning what should be done further. For example, the curriculum should be specifically designed for these students, and the National Test for ethnic students should be different from that taken by students in the mainstream. In addition, continuous support from the government to recruit bilingual teachers should be provided in order that students have a sufficient period to build academic proficiency both in their native tongue and their second language. Training Thai teachers

for teaching ethnic students should be promoted because it is important for Standard Thai speaking teachers to understand how to manage bilingual and multilingual classrooms. This would help avoid discrimination against ethnic minority students at school. As the new era of the ASEAN Economic Community begins, it is essential for Thailand to appropriately handle language diversity, as this is considered a major human rights issue.

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