

English Phonetics:

An e-course offered at Kasetsart University

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E-learning: What is it?

"pedagogy empowered by digital technology"
Nichols (2008)

E-learning

Modality-independent

- is educational-modal independent

With technology

- can be either offline or online education or a mix of both only that it utilizes digital technology as tools to achieve the educational goals.

On/off classroom

- can be any type in the spectrum of education with digital technology from classroom instruction with digital aids to a pure online course

E-learning paradigm (Lui and Hwang 2009)

"conventional
e-learning"

- networked
computers
- internet

"m-learning"

- internet
- wireless
- mobile devices

"u-learning"

- wireless
- mobile
devices
- Radio
Frequency
Identification
Devices (RFID)

In this perspective, the English Phonetics course offered at KU is

- a mixed-mode and blended course with both offline and online contents and practicums that utilize both offline and online technologies.
- The course is supported by the M@xLearn Program-- an LMS.

Educational philosophy

to provide a basic pronunciation/spoken English course with phonetic contents

- standard internationally
- enhanced by instructional methods that are up-to-date technologically
- student-centered pedagogically that will enhance self-access learning leading to life-long learning for self-development

The course is designed
-to be in accordance with the current
Higher Education Development Plan
(the Commission of Higher Education
2008) (<http://www.mua.go.th>).

Commission of Higher Education, in the 15-year long term plan (2008)

addresses the issues of:

- inadequacies of classroom-based education and monologue teaching
- the need for improvement of the quality of education

and advocates for

- innovation in teaching
- Liberal Arts education to prepare graduates for competitiveness in the post-modern world
- communication skills in multi-lingual and multi-cultural society
- IT for mobile and mass learning as well as lifelong learning
- quality of education

The course is also designed

to be in accordance with K U
policies of

- internationalization
- academic excellence
- student-centered andragogy
(as opposed to instructor-centered
which is mono-directional).

and in agreement with Government's Policies:

3. Policy on Social and Quality of Life

3.1 Education Policy

3.1.1 Reform the entire education system by reforming its structure and management, amending laws in accordance with the Constitution, pooling resources for the improvement of education management from the primary to the tertiary levels, developing teachers, improving the university entrance examination system, developing curricula, adjusting curricula of primary subjects including history, improving instructional media, developing thinking and analytical skills, adjusting the role of non-formal learning into an office for lifelong learning, establishing a lifelong learning centre for appropriate learning in each area, as well as promoting decentralization so that all sectors of society can participate in education management to help realize the objective of quality education and learning that emphasizes virtue-led knowledge.

In this regard, the English Phonetics course is in agreement with:

Government Policies (on social and quality of life) on Human development (www.thaigov.go.th/)

Commission of Higher Education policies on Human development (www.mua.go.th)

Kasetsart University policies on Human development (www.ku.ac.th/eng2008/sarn_PR.html)

Linguistic Motivation

L2 Learning: learning English sound and speech production as a second/foreign language in a formal setting at tertiary education level can be most effective through a carefully designed curriculum which incorporates both theoretical and practical articulatory as well as acoustic phonetics, beginning from single sound production of consonants and vowels to prosody in connected speech.

Moreover, digital technologies are recognized as the best tools in facilitating individual students in language production practices through both offline and online interactive learning.

-Textbook:

Ladefoged (2006), *A Course in Phonetics*,
(available in Thai version)

-Website (for interactive learning):

UCLA.

-Supplementary reading and interactive lessons:

Academic websites around the world, e.g.,
U. of Arizona, USA, Macquarie U., Australia,
Otago U., New Zealand, Stuttgart U., Germany,
etc.

-Lectures:

on-campus, in classroom environments via desktop/laptop computer on projected screen and/or via controlled intra-lab network on individual computer screen.

-Teaching materials:

are integrated with live demonstrations of sound/speech production and acoustic correlation using IPA-Help program and speech analysis tools, (free download from <http://www.sil.org>)

-Access to e-course:

is restricted to students registered for the course. No pre-requisite. It welcomes all. Alumni of the course are given permission to access the course.

-LMS: KU M@xLearn platform

course materials, homework, classwork, linkages, news, course calendar, etc. are posted. The e-course provides a platform for instructor-students and students-students interaction.

Course outline

The weekly lecture topics and activities outlined for the 15-week English Phonetics course offered at KU. (Course syllabus and details of the Performing exercises are available at

http://pirun.ku.ac.th/~fhumalt/372101/p_372101.htm

Week (3 hrs./week)	Lecture Topics (classroom with digital tools)	Interactive Learning (online)
1	Physiology of Speech production	Pre-course sound recording
2	English Consonants: Place of Articulation	Performing exercise 1
3	English Consonants: Manner of Articulation	Performing exercise 2
4	English Vowels: Monophthongs	Performing exercise 3
5	English Vowels: Diphthongs	Performing exercise 3+
6	IPA Transcriptions of English Consonants and Vowels	Performing exercise 4
7	English vs. Thai Consonants and Vowels and Phonetic Based Transliteration	Performing exercise 5
8	American vs. British English	Performing exercise 6
9	English Allophonic Rules for Consonants	Performing exercise 7
10	English Allophonic Rules for Vowels	Performing exercise 7+
11	English Syllable and Word Stress	Performing exercise 8
12	English Sentence Stress	Performing exercise 9
13	English Intonation	Performing exercise 10
14	Varieties of English	Performing exercise 11
15	Oral Presentation	Performing exercise 12

-Each student is required to do a digital sound recording of one's own English pronunciation on a list of test-items at the beginning of the course. This is to establish where one is in his/her English pronunciation.

-Along the 15-week course, the recording is to be used for comparison to evaluate each student's progress.

-The topics covered are on par with the (English) Phonetics courses offered in the universities elsewhere around the world with extra topics on Phonetic Based English-to-Thai Transliterations.

	Physiology of speech Production	Consonants	Vowels	IPA Transcriptions	Transliteration/writing system	Language Varieties	Phonetic Variants	Prosody	Acoustics/synthesis/Forensics	Perception/recognition	Language Acquisition/Disorders	Teaching Pronunciation/self-analysis
KU, Thailand	1	2, 3	4, 5	6	7	8, 14	9,10	11,12,13	Y	-	-	Y
M.I.T., USA	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
Harvard, USA	-	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
Stanford, USA	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
Cambridge, UK	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
UC, Los Angeles, USA	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-
U of Toronto, Canada	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
UT, Austin, USA	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Table 2: Comparison of topics in the English Phonetics course offered at KU with the undergraduate (English) phonetics course(s) offered at top universities in world ranking. (The numbers 1-14 are the topics shown in table 1 above and Y = Yes). It is noted that the topics not being covered in the (English) phonetics courses are covered elsewhere in other courses in all institutions surveyed.

A comparison of the topics covered in the English Phonetics course offered at KU with undergraduate phonetics course(s) offered at world top ranking universities shows that the topics covered in the course offered at KU is comparable to the course(s) offered elsewhere in top universities. (names of the courses may differ).

One main difference between a pure Phonetics course and a course that aims at teaching pronunciation/speech production in a second/foreign language, e.g., English, is that the later is applied phonetics.

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The English Phonetics course at KU therefore does not cover topics such as language disorders, acquisition and perception/recognition. Self-assessment and correction as well as Acoustics are integrated in lectures and practicums throughout the course. Speech analysis tools are used for self-correction.

- Students do have a glimpse of how phonetic/phonological rule-based synthesizers work and are given the challenge to outperform the computers!
- Students are also given opportunities to self-monitor their own production with digital aids throughout the course.
- The extra topic on phonetic based transliteration offered at KU is a practical topic that is useful in everyday life for a Thai in the globalized post-modern world, and is therefore, added to the curriculum.

One crucial point is that the courses offered at all universities surveyed and cited/linked in the performing exercises (cf. table 1) and additional assignments in the M@xLearn platform include instrumental studies. In this regard, the state-of-the-art of phonetics studies is inclusively e-learning.

Feedback from students is provided by an online evaluation program implemented by the university. Students answer a standard questionnaire for each course taken in the current semester on a voluntary basis. The evaluation on the course offered for the past few years has been very satisfactory. On a scale of 1-5, from the least-to-most satisfactory, the scores have been as follows:

Feedback from students

Academic Year	1 st semester (June –Sept.)	2 nd semester (Nov.-Feb.)
2004	3.80	4.01
2005	4.57	4.27
2006	4.56	the course is not offered
2007	4.58	4.47
2008	4.61	the course is not offered

Table 3: KU Students' online evaluation of the English Phonetics course on a scale of 1-5, from the least-to-most satisfactory.

Students' satisfaction and grades do not imply excellent proficiency in English pronunciation and speech, however.

How much improvement one has had throughout the course depends on several factors; where one started out at the beginning of the course, how much effort one has put into learning and practicing and other individual factors, etc.

But what is ensured is that students who have taken the course have a good foundation for English pronunciation and speech production.

They have resources for self-access learning for the improvement of their own spoken English. Their English proficiency increases with time as they continue their practice and use of the language. They are given the tools for lifelong learning.

What is guaranteed is that the students have finished the course better off in their own English production and are equipped with knowledge of what spoken English is, how it is produced, why it sounds as it is, where the variants occur, who speaks what varieties.

These will bring them into an awareness of their own speech as well as of the same but different languages of English as they engage in a conversation with either a native speaker or one who speaks English as a second/foreign language.

It prepares them to engage in English as an international language in the post-modern world.

How can the course be accessible for a wider audience?

The English Phonetics e-course at KU is not possible without the excellent facilities supported by the university; the Learning Management System (LMS), evaluation system, webmail system, high speed internet and wireless access, computer lab with intra-lab mini-LMS, classrooms that are well equipped with digital technologies, etc.

At present, the course is restricted to
KU students.

However, with MOU between
institutions, it is not impossible for
students from other universities to
register for the course.

This is an open issue that has to be
dealt with between university
administrations.

How can similar courses be developed for Thai students and teachers of English language/linguistics nationwide?

Similar courses are possible to be implemented at individual universities or network universities provided that there is a good support system, or at least a good (high speed) internet access. This is also an open issue that has to be decided upon at higher level administrations.

A Proposal for Collaboration

The 15-year Higher Education Development Plan (2008-2022) aims at **higher quality** of higher education system

producing:

“graduates of quality, capable of life long work and adjustment” filled with “knowledge and innovation” prepared for “the country’s global competitiveness and sustainable development”.

(Comission of Higher Education 2008:9).

For graduates of quality, prepared
for a globalized world community,
English language proficiency is
inarguably necessary.

One of the CHE 's strategic plans to achieve higher quality of education is to have Universities as catalysts for informatization of Thailand through ICT.

One of the tasks for universities in this role is to implement e-Education, to establish life-long learning education which is learners-centered with quality (Comission of Higher Education 2008:22).

To adhere to the King's "Sufficiency Economy", optimization of resources; personel, equipment, monetary fund, etc. must be kept underlying any decision-making in the higher educational system to achieve the educational goals in this long term plan.

It is therefore, proposed that:

- A collaboration be made between higher educational institutions that visualize the implementation of such English language/linguistics courses
- The availability of the state-of-the-art technologies, most importantly ICT, be cooperatively and maximally utilized in Higher Education for human development.

Thank you.



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