

Influence Of Thai Culture On The English Language Learning Of Students In Phetchabun, Thailand: An Etic Perspective

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Abstract

Although English serves as a crucial global *lingua franca*, effective instruction requires integrating learners' cultural backgrounds to enhance engagement and reduce anxiety. Despite multiple educational reforms, Thailand's English proficiency remains low, as evidenced by a decline in the 2023 EF English Proficiency Index. This study investigated the influence of Thai culture on English language learning in Phetchabun, Thailand, as perceived by foreign English teachers. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from 37 foreign English teachers of various nationalities—predominantly Filipino, alongside American, Bhutanese, Canadian, and Irish respondents—most of whom were college graduates with over five years of teaching experience in Thailand. The findings revealed that Thai culture exerts a high impact on English language learning, specifically influencing language instruction, classroom management, language interference, and linguistic competence. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between the perceived extent of this cultural influence and the teachers' profile variables. Based on these insights, the study proposes an action plan designed to help educators craft culturally attuned, interactive, and effective instructional strategies, ultimately improving Thai students' language learning experiences and bridging the gap between local cultural norms and global linguistic demands.

Keywords: English proficiency, Thai culture, foreign teachers, cultural influence, language instruction.

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that in this contemporary place and time, the English language is one of the most widely spoken globally. It has become ubiquitous that it is used in every aspect of an individual's daily and professional life. In business, trade, politics, tourism, sports, and especially in education, the English language serves as a bridge to connect one person to the rest of the world despite having differing mother tongues or native languages. The English language enables people to spread their knowledge internationally and gain some ideas and information in return.

However, language acquisition does not occur in a social vacuum; a learner's cultural background heavily influences their learning process and may diverge from their teacher's pedagogical methods (Suparto, 2021). As a member of ASEAN, Thailand has

utilized English for regional communication since its introduction in the early 19th century (Darasawang, 2007). Yet, despite extensive historical integration and multiple educational reforms, the country's English proficiency remains critically low. According to the 2023 EF English Proficiency Index, Thailand ranks 101st out of 113 countries globally and 21st out of 23 in Asia, marking a severe decade-long decline from its 42nd-place ranking in 2011.

Prior research attributes this low proficiency primarily to linguistic divergence and rigid assessment tools. Structural differences between the two languages create profound interference, as English features complex verb tenses, pluralization, and adjective-noun syntax (e.g., "beautiful girl") that do not exist in Thai grammar (Thep-Ackrapong, n.d.). Furthermore, standardized evaluation tools often prioritize native-speaker norms over practical communicative competence (Taladngoen, 2018). While existing literature thoroughly analyzes these phonological, syntactic, and semantic barriers, few studies look beyond the classroom to examine the foundational culture driving these issues (Young, 2021).

To address this gap, this study investigates Thai cultural practices affecting English education, exploring how foreign teachers perceive the depth of this cultural influence on student progress.

METHODS

Research design

In this particular study, the researcher utilized a quantitative research design to gather, analyze, and describe the data to be collected. Van der Merwe (1996) defined quantitative research as an approach to study that aims to prove hypotheses, establish facts, demonstrate relationships between variables, and forecast results.

The researcher employed this particular research design as knowledge generation and understanding of the social world is one of its primary goals. It was specifically chosen and as it was generally used for observing events or phenomena that have an impact on people (Allen, M., 2017). In this study, the researcher adopted the quantitative research design as it assisted in the identification and understanding of the Thai culture that influences the English language learning of the students from the perspective of foreign teachers. The researcher hoped to obtain a thorough understanding of Thai cultures that impact English language instruction and learning from an etic perspective by using a survey.

Specifically, the researcher utilized a survey type of quantitative research. This research design was appropriate for this study because collected data from a large sample, allowing the researcher to gather data from a diverse and representative sample of foreign teachers in the province of Phetchabun.

Participants and Sampling

The considered population of the study was forty-one (41) foreign teachers teaching foreign/second language in the province of Phetchabun, Thailand. The respondents were foreign teachers teaching in Government Secondary Schools both at the Junior and Senior

levels under the regular program, Mini English Program, Intensive English Program, or Bilingual or Trilingual Program. Slovin's formula was used to get a sample size of the total population which resulted in a total sample population of thirty-seven (37) foreign teachers.

Instrument

In this study, the researcher employed a survey and questionnaire to gather the desired data. The questionnaire is one of the most popular methods for gathering data in research, particularly social science research. The primary goal of a research questionnaire is to collect pertinent data most validly and credibly as possible (Taherdoost, 2016). The researcher utilized a questionnaire based on previous studies that were similar to the study that was conducted. The survey questionnaire for this study consisted of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire items used assessed the level of significance of the variables using a Likert rating scale ranging from "not influenced" to "very highly influenced".

Data collection

After approval of this proposal, the researcher approached the foreign English language department of the schools with foreign teachers. Following safety procedures, an informed consent form was given to participants during the study's data collection process. Moreover, all information and documents gathered were protected from accidental, illegal, or unauthorized access, disclosure, or theft to maintain confidentiality. After the data was no longer used, it was properly disposed of to prevent any problems arising from it. The researcher implemented an online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire indicated in a Google form was sent through Messenger or Line due to the distant location of the respondents.

Data analysis

The data collected was recorded, analyzed, and interpreted. The data gathered was also subjected to a statistical treatment to answer the questions proposed in the study.

For problem number 1. **Weighted Mean and Percentages** were used in determining the demographic profile of the foreign English teachers including their age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, position, school program handled, nationality, average family monthly income, number of years of teaching in Thailand, and number of relevant seminars and training attended.

For problem number 2. **Average Weighted Mean, Frequency Count, and Percentages** were used to identify the rate of observed impacts of the Thai culture on the English language learning of the students.

For problem number 3. **Spearman's Rank Correlation Test and Eta Test Analyses** were used to examine the significance of the relationship between the profile of Foreign English teachers and their perceived impact of Thai culture on the English language learning of Thai students.

RESULTS

Table 1. Profile of participants

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	17	45.9
	Female	20	54.1
Age	25 years old and below	2	5.4
	26-30 years old	17	45.9
	31-35 years old	9	24.3
	36-40 years old	3	8.1
	41 years old and above	6	16.2
Civil Status	Single	28	75.7
	Married	9	24.3
Nationality	Filipino	30	81.1
	American	3	8.1
	Bhutanese	2	5.4
	Canadian	1	2.7
	Irish	1	2.7
Average Monthly Family Income	20,000 and below	4	10.8
	21,000-30,000	15	40.5
	31,000-40,000	12	32.4
	41,000-50,000	3	8.1
	51,000 and above	3	8.1
Highest Educational Attainment	College Graduate	25	67.6
	College Graduate with Master's Units	10	27.0
	Master's Graduate	2	5.4
Position	English teacher	35	94.6
	Assistant Eng teacher	2	5.4
School Program Handled	Regular Program	19	51.4
	Mini English Program	5	13.5
	Intensive English Program	5	13.5
	Bilingual/Trilingual Program	8	21.6
Number of years of teaching in Thailand	less than a year	5	13.5
	1 to 2 years	7	18.9
	3 to 4 years	12	32.4
	more than 5 years	13	35.1
Number of relevant seminars and trainings attended	0	11	29.7
	1-3	12	32.4
	4-6	6	16.2
	more than 7	8	21.6

The respondents consisted of **37 English teachers** working in Thailand. The majority were **female (54.1%)**, **26–30 years old (45.9%)**, and **single (75.7%)**. Most were **Filipino (81.1%)** and had an average monthly family income of **₱21,000–₱30,000 (40.5%)**.

In terms of educational background, **67.6% were college graduates**, while **27.0% had earned master's units**. Nearly all respondents were **English teachers (94.6%)**, with most assigned to the **Regular Program (51.4%)**.

Regarding teaching experience, the largest group had been teaching in Thailand for **more than five years (35.1%)**, followed by those with **3–4 years of experience (32.4%)**. In terms of professional development, the majority had attended **1–3 relevant seminars and trainings (32.4%)**, although **29.7% had not attended any**.

Overall, the respondents were predominantly **young, single, Filipino English teachers** with **college degrees, considerable teaching experience in Thailand**, and **some participation in professional development activities**.

Table 2. Summary of the Extent of Influence of Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun, Thailand along with **Language Instruction Classroom Management**

Sub Areas	Weighted Mean	Description
A. Thai Hierarchy	3.77	Highly Influenced
B. The concept of “Face”	3.71	Highly Influenced
C. Collectivism against Individualism	3.63	Highly Influenced
D. Plagiarism	3.60	Highly Influenced
E. The learning environment	3.69	Highly Influenced
Grand Mean	3.68	Highly Influenced

The findings indicate that the respondents were highly influenced by Thai culture in all identified sub-areas, with an overall grand mean of 3.68, described as Highly Influenced. Among the dimensions, Thai Hierarchy obtained the highest mean (3.77), followed by the Concept of “Face” (3.71) and the Learning Environment (3.69). Collectivism against Individualism (3.63) and Plagiarism (3.60) also received ratings corresponding to Highly Influenced. Overall, the results suggest that Thai cultural values and educational practices have a strong influence on the respondents' English language teaching and learning experiences.

Table 3. Summary of the Extent of Influence of Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun along with **Language Interference**

Sub Areas	Weighted Mean	Description
A. PRONUNCIATION	4.30	Highly Influenced
B. WORDS AND TEXT	4.09	Highly Influenced
C. GRAMMAR	4.03	Highly Influenced
Grand Mean	4.14	Highly Influenced

The results indicate that the respondents were highly influenced by Thai culture in terms

of English language learning, with an overall grand mean of 4.14, interpreted as Highly Influenced. Among the three language components, Pronunciation obtained the highest weighted mean (4.30), followed by Words and Text (4.09) and Grammar (4.03), all described as Highly Influenced. These findings suggest that exposure to Thai culture has a strong influence on the respondents' pronunciation, vocabulary use, reading and writing practices, and grammatical competence in English.

Table 4. Summary of the Extent of Influence of Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun, Thailand along with **Linguistic Competence**

Sub Areas	Average Weighted Mean	Description
A. GRAMMAR	3.69	Highly Influenced
B. SPEAKING	3.87	Highly Influenced
C. READING AND COMPREHENSION	3.80	Highly Influenced
D. WRITING	3.74	Highly Influenced
E. LISTENING	3.76	Highly Influenced
Grand Mean	3.77	Highly Influenced

The findings reveal that the respondents' English language proficiency was highly influenced, with an overall grand mean of 3.77, interpreted as Highly Influenced. Among the five language skills, Speaking obtained the highest average weighted mean (3.87), followed by Reading and Comprehension (3.80), Listening (3.76), Writing (3.74), and Grammar (3.69). All sub-areas were rated as Highly Influenced, indicating that Thai culture has a substantial influence across the respondents' English language proficiency, particularly in speaking and communication skills.

Table 5. Overall Summary of the Extent of Influence of Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun, Thailand as Observed by Foreign English Teachers

Areas	AWM	Description
1. Language Instruction Classroom Management	3.68	Highly Influenced
2. Language Interference	4.14	Highly Influenced
3. Linguistic Competence	3.77	Highly Influenced
Overall Grand Mean	3.82	Highly Influenced

The results show that the respondents were highly influenced by Thai culture across all three major areas, with an overall grand mean of 3.82, interpreted as Highly Influenced. Among the areas, Language Interference recorded the highest average weighted mean (4.14), followed by Linguistic Competence (3.77) and Language Instruction and Classroom Management (3.68). These findings indicate that language interference was the aspect most affected by Thai culture, while all three areas demonstrated a consistently high level of cultural influence.

Table 6. Relationship Between Profile and Extent of Influence of Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun, Thailand

Profile	Correlation Coefficient	Language Instruction Classroom Management	Language Interference	Linguistics Competence	Overall Extent of Influence
Age	r Sig.	0.196 0.244	0.299 0.072	0.243 0.148	0.281 0.092
Average Monthly Family Income	r Sig.	.352* 0.032	0.141 0.405	0.028 0.871	0.216 0.199
Highest Educational Attainment	r Sig.	.423** 0.009	0.231 0.170	0.180 0.285	.346* 0.036
Number of years of teaching in Thailand	r Sig.	0.126 0.458	0.291 0.081	0.124 0.463	0.223 0.184
Number of relevant seminars and trainings attended	r Sig.	0.048 0.776	0.238 0.155	-0.050 0.768	0.080 0.637

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed that average monthly family income and highest educational attainment were the only profile variables significantly related to the extent of Thai culture's influence. Specifically, average monthly family income showed a significant positive relationship with Language Instruction and Classroom Management ($r = 0.352$, $p = 0.032$). Likewise, highest educational attainment exhibited a significant positive relationship with Language Instruction and Classroom Management ($r = 0.423$, $p = 0.009$) and with the Overall Extent of Influence ($r = 0.346$, $p = 0.036$).

On the other hand, age, years of teaching in Thailand, and the number of relevant seminars and trainings attended showed no significant relationships with any of the three dimensions or with the overall extent of influence ($p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that respondents' educational attainment and family income are associated with the perceived influence of Thai culture, whereas the other profile variables do not significantly affect the extent of influence.

Table 7. Relationship Between Profile and Extent of Influence Thai Culture on the English Language Learning of Students in Phetchabun, Thailand

Profile	Language Instruction Classroom Management		Language Interference		Linguistics Competence		Overall Extent of Influence	
	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Strength</i>
	(η)		(η)		(η)		(η)	
Civil status	0.149	S	0.10	S	0.08	N	0.13	S

			0.26		0.36		0.42	
Sex	0.395	M	7	S	8	M	3	M
			0.17		0.35		0.28	
nationality	0.267	S	8	S	6	M	7	S
			0.00		0.20		0.19	
Position	0.219	S	5	N	2	S	1	S
School								
Program			0.36		0.36		0.45	
Handled	0.447	M	9	M	4	M	9	M

Legend: Negligible (N) 0.00-.09 Small (S) = 0.10-.30 Medium (M) = 0.31-0.50
 Large (L) = 0.51-1.00

The eta analysis showed varying strengths of association between the respondents' categorical profile variables and the extent of Thai culture's influence. Among the profile variables, School Program Handled demonstrated the strongest association, showing medium relationships across all dimensions, including the Overall Extent of Influence ($\eta = 0.459$). Sex also exhibited medium associations with Language Instruction and Classroom Management ($\eta = 0.395$), Linguistic Competence ($\eta = 0.368$), and the Overall Extent of Influence ($\eta = 0.423$).

Meanwhile, Nationality showed a medium association with Linguistic Competence ($\eta = 0.356$) and small associations with the other dimensions. Civil Status and Position generally demonstrated small associations, with Civil Status having a negligible association with Linguistic Competence ($\eta = 0.087$), while Position showed a negligible association with Language Interference ($\eta = 0.005$). Overall, the findings suggest that School Program Handled and Sex have the strongest associations with the influence of Thai culture on English language teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION

The present study revealed that Thai culture has a **high level of influence** on English language learning as perceived by foreign English teachers in Phetchabun, Thailand. Across the three major dimensions—Language Instruction and Classroom Management, Language Interference, and Linguistic Competence—the overall grand mean (3.82) indicates that cultural factors remain a significant determinant of English language acquisition. These findings strongly support the argument of **Young (2021)** that many of the challenges experienced by Thai learners originate not only from classroom instruction but from the cultural environment itself. While earlier studies primarily emphasized linguistic deficiencies and curriculum-related concerns, the present study demonstrates that Thai cultural practices continue to shape classroom behavior, communication, and language use.

The findings on **Language Instruction and Classroom Management** further reinforce the studies of **Kumagai (1994)**, **Ulla (2018)**, and **Imsa-ard (2020)**, all of whom emphasized that respect for authority, teacher-centered instruction, and hierarchical relationships remain dominant characteristics of Thai classrooms. Similar to these studies, Thai hierarchy obtained the highest rating among the cultural dimensions in the present study, suggesting that cultural norms continue to influence classroom participation and instructional practices. However, unlike the previous studies that relied primarily on theoretical discussions or observations of Thai learners, the present research provides empirical evidence from foreign English teachers, thereby confirming that these cultural practices are directly experienced by international educators working in Thailand.

The results on **Language Interference** are likewise consistent with the findings of **Tipa Thep-Ackrapong**, **Young (2021)**, **Kumagai (1994)**, and **Bentahila and Davies**

(1989), who argued that structural differences between Thai and English create persistent difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Pronunciation received the highest weighted mean among all language interference variables, indicating that phonological differences remain the greatest challenge for Thai learners. This supports Tipa Thep-Ackrapong's observation that the two languages differ considerably in sound systems, sentence structures, and grammatical rules. Similarly, Bentahila and Davies emphasized that language learning cannot be separated from culture because cultural and linguistic systems jointly influence language production. While previous studies largely focused on learners' linguistic errors, the present study broadens this perspective by demonstrating that foreign teachers consistently perceive these interferences as manifestations of both linguistic and cultural influences.

Similarly, the findings regarding **Linguistic Competence** corroborate the works of **Phuket and Othman (2017)**, **Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013)**, **Tananuraksakul (2016)**, and **Wiriyachitra (2002)**. Speaking emerged as the language skill most affected by Thai culture, followed by reading, listening, writing, and grammar. Previous studies attributed these difficulties to indirect communication styles, rhetorical differences, phonological interference, and limited opportunities for authentic English interaction. The present study agrees with these conclusions but extends them by demonstrating that these linguistic challenges are not isolated classroom problems but are embedded within broader cultural norms that shape communication behaviors and learning practices.

On the other hand, the correlation analysis presents findings that both support and diverge from previous research. The significant relationship between **highest educational attainment** and the perceived influence of Thai culture aligns with the studies of **Smith and Johnson (2020)**, which suggested that teachers with higher academic preparation are generally better equipped to recognize and respond to intercultural challenges. However, the absence of significant relationships for years of teaching experience and seminars attended differs from the findings of **Lee and Park (2018)**, who reported that teaching experience contributes substantially to instructional effectiveness in multicultural classrooms. One possible explanation is that cultural adaptation depends not only on years of service but also on the quality of intercultural experiences, institutional support, and opportunities for cultural immersion, variables that were not examined in the present study.

Additionally, the eta analysis further revealed that **School Program Handled** exhibited the strongest association with the extent of Thai cultural influence. This finding is consistent with **Rodriguez and Garcia (2018)**, who concluded that structured language programs significantly influence instructional practices and classroom management. Teachers assigned to bilingual or intensive English programs are likely to encounter different instructional expectations and learner behaviors than those teaching in regular programs. Nevertheless, unlike previous studies that focused mainly on instructional outcomes, the present study demonstrates that school programs also shape teachers' perceptions of cultural influence, highlighting the importance of institutional context in intercultural language education.

Overall, the present study confirms the conclusions of earlier international research that language learning is inseparable from culture. However, it contributes new empirical evidence by examining Thai culture from the perspective of **foreign English teachers**, an area that remains relatively underexplored in previous literature. While earlier investigations concentrated primarily on Thai students, curriculum reforms, or linguistic errors, this study illustrates how foreign educators themselves experience and interpret the influence of Thai cultural values on English language teaching and learning. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of intercultural language education in Thailand and supports

the growing recognition that successful English language instruction requires both linguistic competence and intercultural sensitivity.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the respondents were limited to **37 foreign English teachers from one province in Thailand**, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions and educational contexts. This limitation is consistent with the scope and delimitation established in the study. Second, the study relied exclusively on **self-reported questionnaire responses**, making the findings susceptible to response bias and limiting the ability to validate teachers' perceptions through classroom observations or interviews. Third, the research adopted a **cross-sectional descriptive-correlational design**, preventing the examination of changes in cultural adaptation over time.

Finally, several potentially influential variables, including Thai language proficiency, intercultural competence, institutional support, school type, and previous overseas teaching experience, were not included in the analysis. Future researchers may address these limitations by conducting mixed-methods or longitudinal studies involving larger and more diverse samples across different regions of Thailand, while incorporating multiple stakeholders such as Thai students, Thai teachers, school administrators, and parents. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between Thai culture and English language learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the majority of the foreign English teachers in Phetchabun, Thailand are Filipinos, with a smaller representation of other nationalities, including Americans, Bhutanese, Canadians, and Irish. This indicates that Filipino teachers comprise the dominant group of foreign English educators in the province. The study further concludes that Thai culture has a **high level of influence** on the English language learning of students as perceived by the foreign English teachers. Among the cultural dimensions examined, practices rooted in Thai values—particularly respect for elders, authority, and individuals with higher social status—were found to have the greatest influence on the teaching-learning process. These cultural characteristics significantly shape classroom interactions, communication styles, and students' learning behaviors.

Moreover, the study found that the extent of Thai culture's influence on English language learning is significantly associated with the respondents' **average monthly family income, highest educational attainment, school program handled, sex, and nationality**. In contrast, **age, position, civil status, years of teaching in Thailand, and the number of relevant seminars and trainings attended** exhibited only small and statistically non-significant relationships with the perceived extent of cultural influence, suggesting that these demographic and professional characteristics do not substantially affect teachers' perceptions of Thai cultural influence.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. The **Ministry of Education of Thailand** and educational institutions offering English language programs should provide advanced professional development opportunities tailored to teachers' varying levels of experience.

In addition to pedagogical training, schools should offer workshops on financial management and stress management, establish mentorship and peer-support programs, and recognize long-term service through incentives to enhance teacher motivation and retention.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and the Schools Area Office should implement cultural sensitivity training for foreign English teachers while providing foreign culture integration programs for Thai English teachers to strengthen intercultural understanding within schools. Educational institutions should also promote academic and

co-curricular activities that help minimize Thai language interference in English pronunciation, while encouraging teachers to create interactive learning environments that incorporate authentic and culturally familiar learning situations. Teachers should establish clear guidelines on academic integrity and learning ethics, regularly assess students' learning needs and achievements, and ensure that all macro skills of the English language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as grammar—receive balanced emphasis and sufficient classroom practice.

Finally, schools should continuously equip both foreign and Thai English teachers with specialized workshops and training programs focusing on the cultural factors that influence English language learning, thereby enhancing intercultural competence and improving the overall quality of English language education in Thailand.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest among the researchers.

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