

Globalization of English Education: The Case of Eastern Asia University, Thailand

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Abstract

English proficiency is a crucial component in fostering and improving efficiency in the global marketplace. Presently, educational institutions in Thailand are striving to produce internationally competitive professionals. Although the establishment of English education programs is thriving and are in constant demand among learners who have a desire to compete in the global arena, there is still a lack of innovation and individuality among the tertiary level learners. The preparedness of educational institutions in Thailand in meeting the challenges of globalizing English education programs to compete in a global marketplace was explored in this paper. Data generated for this descriptive analysis was derived from respondents who comprised of university undergraduate learners of Eastern Asia University, a midsize private higher education institution in Thailand. A set of questionnaires was given to learners, which provided useful information for comprehending the preparedness of the learners to meet the challenges of the global marketplace. Drawing upon leading research sources, it was found that the passive teaching and learning model has impeded the promotion of autonomous learners. The data also revealed that the lack of globalization in English education programs has led to a deficiency in the creation of globally competitive graduates.

Keywords: English, international, globalization, higher education, Thailand

1. Rationale of the Study /Background of the Study

1.1 English Education in Thailand

The financial growth of economies of Asian countries is placing a priority on the demand for well-trained university graduates who are proficient in English to assure the financial realization of that particular nation. The current landscape of English language education in Thailand continues to show limited progress in concordance with the effort made in teaching and learning in order to bring English skills to an accepted international level. The challenges and obstacles associated with outdated pedagogy, education policy changes, and social norms are impeding and indeed disheartening the progress of English language education in Thailand. Therefore, the most significant demands for the future

success of Thailand is in incorporating principles, models, and competencies of innovative language teaching in the creation of an effective, engaging and motivating learning environment for the globalization of English education in Thailand.

The need for English education in Thailand was recognized early on during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) (Wyatt, 1994). Altback (2004) similarly pointed out that nations who encourage English learning and usage can take advantage of the increasingly frequent application of the language in technology. Graddol (2006) stated that the globalization of communications technology accelerated the use of English as a global language and with it, the expansion of English as a lingua franca. Globalization often relies on the development of universalized values. Ohmae (1996) argued that an amalgamation of cultures and societies is an inevitable consequence of globalization.

For the most part, according to Punthumasen (2007), education institutions in Thailand are often regarded as lacking in their ability to prepare graduates for competing in a globalizing world. As a result, educational improvements must be considered as crucial with regards to improving international competitiveness. Punthumasen (2007) continued that economic growth is created, and developing areas are improved through substantial investments in education. Patrawimolpon and Pongsaparn (2006) explored the fact that an overall unhealthy national economic performance accompanied by government inefficiency with unsatisfactory transparency and corruption lead to a deficiency in the areas of education, human resource development, and innovation. It is imperative that the preparation of an internationally competitive workforce could stimulate economic growth and ensure a sustainable future for Thailand. For that reason, it was felt that the challenges of the globalization of English education programs in Thailand should be explored.

Kanjananiyot (2002) stated that during the early to mid- 20th century Thailand began to recognize the challenges associated with globalization, and struggled to reform the higher education system to produce more internationally competitive graduates. Many factors encouraged the higher education system in Thailand to become more interactive and interconnected both regionally and internationally. These factors comprised economic globalization, less restrictive trade and investments, access to technological advancement, and the importance of English language proficiency.

Fry (2002) remarked that private education institutions were the first to begin offering international education programs and to contribute to the globalization of the higher education system of Thailand. These private educational institutions, according to Fry (2002), first offered undergraduate business degrees in English in the later part of the 1960s, and the first international college with English as a medium of instruction was established in the late 1980s. At present, many of the prestigious public and private higher education institutions have developed international programs focused on English as the medium of instruction to foster an appreciation and a higher level of proficiency for English.

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2018, Thailand, after remaining in the very-low proficiency range for the past decade, has been recently upgraded to the low proficiency range, just

slightly ahead of neighboring ASEAN nations of Cambodia and Laos. EF English (2018) reported that although ASEAN is becoming more economically integrated as a region, nations with historical ties to English speaking countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or Australia, often display higher levels of English proficiency than their fellow member countries. Seeing as much, it is fitting that Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines all rank in the upper 25% of the 2018 EF English Proficiency Index, while Cambodia and Laos rank in the lowest 10%. For that reason, the inadequacy of English education programs in Thailand is therefore apparent when compared to neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Vietnam.

The ASEAN Secretariat (2017) revealed that in 2015, Thailand had the highest number of tourist arrivals in ASEAN with approximately 30 million visitors. This information showed that there was a significant influx of tourists compared to Cambodia with nearly 4.8 million and Laos with nearly 4.7 million, which is less than 16% of the volume of tourist arrivals as Thailand. Even with the massive influx of English speaking tourists, the English proficiency level within Thailand is third from the bottom in ASEAN, just slightly above Cambodia and Laos. Accordingly, a higher English proficiency through the globalization of English education programs in Thailand will become necessary to keep Thailand's economy healthy.

Graduates from international programs where English is the sole medium of instruction are more likely to find employment in an increasingly demanding international marketplace. This fact has somewhat accelerated the expansion of English university programs in Thailand. Hence, the acquisition of additional linguistic and cultural skills in English had become the principal objective of many learners in higher education Marginson (2004) stated.

English language curriculum, according to Bremer and Van der Wende (1995), must be targeted at preparing learners both professionally and socially to function within an international and modern global context. Although these programs are recognized regarding both economic and social competitive advantages, the quality of these programs is often questioned.

Graddol (2006) stated that governments realized the economic competitiveness of higher English language proficiency of its citizens; as a result, English is now regarded as the compulsory language for internationalizing higher education in Southeast Asia. Since Thailand, being ranked as number 1 among economically advanced among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) community, it can be the central provider of educational assistance to its less developed neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines (Perrodin, 2018).

However, even if the government of Thailand was keenly dedicated to global competitiveness in financial, industrialization and technology, but not on human resource development, there was a reasonable rising of conflict between the financial goals and cultural tolerance of the nation. Phongpaichit and Baker (2004) later stated that critics expressed a measure of apprehension against

cultural change through globalization. The opposition of the critics prompted a reexamination of Thai social foundations and Thai social objectives to thwart a possible domestic disaster.

According to Hofstede (1991), language and culture are reasonably integral elements of global development. Recognizing both generalities and specifics of essential world cultures is advantageous for intercultural comprehension, and this understating will allow better planning of English education program approaches.

In reality, teaching and learning in an international context would better prepare graduates in Thailand to measure up to international standards and to become autonomous lifelong learners who can take ownership of their learning. Kanjananiyot (2002) said that the government of Thailand had placed a high priority on regionalization and globalization policies. The government, along with public and private higher education intuitions, has solicited international cooperation in education as an effective means of enhancing the quality of higher education graduates through the sharing of global knowledge and experiences.

1.2 Globalization of English Education

Globalization, as defined by Robertson (1992), is the pressure of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world to come together in economic and political interconnections that flow together to make most of the presently active national and cultural boundaries and limits. Waters (1995) stressed that globalization does not signify that the world would become Westernized or acculturated by the West but instead each culture would establish its position in the global marketplace. Globalization creates more significant opportunities for economic development due to economic, political and cultural variations of each nation. Battersby (2003) affirmed that international connectedness, or globalization, should not be threatening to traditional cultures, instead, should be viewed as dynamic rather than static, so adopting ideas and preferences from other cultures should not be an indication of emerging cultural homogeneity.

The demand of an international business environment for higher English proficiency level requirements should lead to learners viewing knowledge of and proficiency in English as an investment for their future in a globally competitive society. Altbach (2004) anticipated that financial growth of economies in Asia would place a priority on the demand for well-trained university graduates and general workforce to assure the financial realization of that nation.

Thailand's first long-range higher education development plan, finalized in 2004, stated that the idea of globalization was also intended to facilitate international and regional cooperation among the ASEAN nations (Kanjananiyot, 2002). This plan was proposed to direct the necessary development of higher education in response to the anticipated needs of Thailand, and the other ASEAN nations. The proposal was also anticipated to determine appropriate economic and social positioning amid regional and global competition and to establish vibrant international collaboration. Finally, these strategies were expected to contribute to the growth of cultural and economic interdependence between Thailand and

its neighboring ASEAN nations, and the international community. The globalization of English education programs in Thailand is one way to upgrade the quality of knowledge and international skills of university graduates including increasing English competency and proficiency to produce employable candidates in the international marketplace. Therefore, adopting new approaches to managing globalization, in addition to producing an educated and experienced globally competitive workforce, is crucial for the economic future of Thailand.

Currently, social and cultural merging that is being perpetuated by the use of the Internet and is progressing at ridiculous speeds. This intermingling of cultures from exposure to the media-rich environment of the Internet reaches far beyond exposure to the English language and into changing the way one thinks, to their worldview, and to their mindset. The Internet allows individuals to effortlessly connect globally, therefore, eliminating physical location as a deciding factor in social, national and economic exchanges. Kirkpatrick (2012) stated that regardless of the expanding multilingualism of the Internet, English remains the lingua franca and the language of the global economy. Consequently, English language skills are in high demand around the world.

According to Fry (2002), the government established a policy that recognized the need to create a more globalized higher education system in Thailand that would be able to adapt to international challenges. The policy aimed at preparing a professionally trained workforce in a progressively internationally competitive time. These policy changes, in turn, would be expected to contribute to the national economy. Fry (2002) continued that the government's agenda to reform higher education encouraged the movement towards a more individualized learning culture with an added focus on improving English language proficiency skills, and furthering knowledge of the global market to strengthen international competitiveness with university graduates.

1.3 Pedagogical Approaches to English Teaching

Reformation must take place within the English language education system to improve and globalize the general English teaching situation in Thailand as debated by Noom-Ura (2013). Perrodin (2017) suggested that there may not be any right technique of teaching or learning for all situations. It is the educator's responsibility to employ various teaching methods to best suit the learner's learning styles and to promote a positive learning environment.

Thai learners were traditionally guided from a very young age to be obedient and to listen to their educators passively or rote learning and memorizing which are considered lower order thinking skills. (Klausner, 2000). This passive teaching and learning style is still considered to be the preferred choice by both academics and learners. Hence, university courses have been mainly developed according to general subject content, and are commonly assessed by content-based written multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer exams rather than promoting higher order thinking skills in the engagement of the content as an evaluation.

Perrodin (2017) furthermore asserted that English curriculum design is a crucial factor that affects the quality of teaching and learning. Educational institutions in Thailand are increasingly being advised by international education program marketing professionals to become more concerned with the needs of the international market and more innovative with their way of curriculum design and learner recruitment. The development of globalization has understandably changed professional expectations for university graduates in Thailand.

Passive teaching and learning models impede the promoting of deep learning or creative thinking and do not facilitate the current global skill requirements. This learning model does not prepare graduates for employment in international companies that require their staff to exhibit innovative and creative thinking, independent decision-making, and leadership qualities. It likewise lacks the necessary instruction needed to compete in an international marketplace such as creative thinking, and intellectual challenge and response. Furthermore, this passive teaching and learning style encourages memorization than the regurgitation of facts rather than absorbing knowledge. As a result, this model of passive teaching and learning has become a hindrance to university graduates in most educational institutions that wish to pursue international employment.

Fortunately, global expectations of English training are now determined by measures and perceptions of service criteria or quality. The desire for a working knowledge of English among learners became a lucrative pursuit for educational institutions. Therefore, educational institutions in Thailand are becoming increasingly aggressive with their recruitment of international learners. Nevertheless, thousands of Thai learners choose to participate in English language learning in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia each year, and this means a significant loss of revenue for Thailand.

Phongpaichit and Baker (2000) observed that the dominance of English drove globalization of higher education in Thailand as the language of international business. Consequently, the globalization of English education in Thailand may, in fact, generate a more culturally diverse environment for both educators and learners.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this data analysis were:

- 2.1 To critically assess the preparedness of undergraduate learners in Thailand to meet the challenges of contending in a global marketplace.
- 2.2 To evaluate the teaching styles and learning models in the promotion of autonomous learners in Thailand.
- 2.3 To make recommendations to improve the efficacy of English education programs in the establishment of globally competitive graduates.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Respondents

The total population for this descriptive quantitative study was 1,089 (N) university undergraduate learners enrolled in the general education English classes during the first semester of 2017 at a midsize private higher education institution in Thailand. Slovin's Formula was used to determine that minimum sample size (n) of two hundred and eighty-five (285) respondents were required to submit completed questionnaires for this descriptive analysis to achieve the required 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5%. The questionnaires were distributed at a time when the highest number of learners would be participating in the general education English classes. As a result, the total sample size (n) of four hundred and forty-three (443) respondents submitted completed questionnaires.

3.2 Materials

This descriptive analysis focused on utilizing acquired data in obtaining insight from undergraduate learner respondents into their faculty or program of study, current year of enrollment, desired English language skill most needed of improvement, overall English proficiency level, and preferred language teaching qualification. Also, a simplified description of language proficiency correlated with that of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels A1 to C1 were provided to the respondents to assist them in answering the item about their overall English proficiency level. The Beginner (A1) level language user demonstrates basic communication skills, and working knowledge of English, the Elementary (A2) level user demonstrates a good command, and good working knowledge of English, the Intermediate (B1) user demonstrates a very good command of English, and the Upper-Intermediate (B2) user demonstrates an excellent command of, and proficient in spoken and written English. Neither the Advanced Proficiency (C1) nor the Mastery Proficiency (C2) user levels were selected.

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire items that were utilized for this analysis were delivered in Thai for a more contextual understanding by the respondents. The respondents were instructed to carefully read every survey item at the time of the distribution of the questionnaire. The frequency (f) and percentage (%) were used to describe the data collected from the questionnaire items.

4. Results

Table 1 indicated that the respondents were associated with six faculties, which included the Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Management Science, Faculty of Aviation, Faculty of Business Administration, and the Faculty of Nursing. There were seven respondents (1.6%) of the total sample from the Faculty of Engineering, sixty-four respondents (14.4%) from Liberal Arts, seven (1.6%) from Management Science, three hundred and thirty-six (75.8%) from Aviation, twenty-five (5.6%) from Business Administration, and four of the respondents (1%) from the Faculty of Nursing of the total sample size (n) of four hundred and forty-three respondents.

Table 1
Current Faculty or School of Study

Item	Faculty or School	f	%
1	Engineering	7	1.6
2	Liberal Arts	64	14.4
3	Management Science	7	1.6
4	Aviation	336	75.8
5	Business Administration	25	5.6
6	Nursing	4	1
Total Sample (n)		443	100

There were two hundred and nine respondents (47.2%) in their first year of study, seventy-four or 16.7% in their second year, sixty-five (14.7%) in their third year, and ninety-five respondents (21.4%) of the total sample size in their fourth year of study. It is also interesting to mention that nearly half (47.2%) of respondents were in their first year of study.

Two hundred and thirty-four respondents (53.1%) stated that they would like to focus on improving their general English skills during their first year of study, sixty-seven (15.2%) stated they would like to focus during their second year of study, fifty-seven (12.0%) specified the third year of study, seven-three or 16.6% indicated the fourth year, and twelve (2.2%) identified that they would like to focus on improving their general English skills during every year of study.

Table 2 shows one hundred and two respondents (23%) stated that they would like to focus on improving their General English skills, one hundred and eighty (40.6%) stated they would like to focus on English Conversation, eighty (18.1%) indicated English Grammar, two (.5%) chose Academic English, nine (2%) selected Business Writing, and seventy (15.8%) stated they would like to focus on improving their English for Career skills.

Table 2
English Language Skill Most Needed of Improvement

Item	English Language Skill	f	%
1	General English	102	23
2	English Conversation	180	40.6
3	English Grammar	80	18.1
4	Academic English	2	0.5

5	Business Writing	9	2
6	English for Career	70	15.8
	Total Sample (n)	443	100

Table 3 showed the respondents CEFR levels. There were one hundred and four respondents (23.5%) that perceived that they were at the Beginner (A1) proficiency level, two hundred and twenty-five (50.8%) understood that they were at the Elementary (A2) level, one hundred and seven (24.2%) at the Intermediate (B1) level, and seven (1.5%) declared that they were at the Upper-Intermediate (B2) proficiency level.

Table 3

Overall English Proficiency Level

Item	Level	Description of Levels	f	%
1	Beginner (A1)	basic communication skills, and working knowledge of English	104	23.5
2	Elementary (A2)	good command, and good working knowledge of English	225	50.8
3	Intermediate (B1)	very good command of English	107	24.2
4	Upper-Intermediate (B2)	excellent command of, and proficient in spoken and written English	7	1.5
	Total Sample (n)		443	100

Table 4 showed the respondents' preference of type of English language educator(s) from Native Thai Speaker, Native English Speaker, Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker, or Both Native and Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker. There were one hundred and five (23.7%) of total sample that stated that they preferred a Native Thai Speaker to teach English, two hundred and eighty-five (64.3%) of the respondents stated that they preferred a Native English Speaker educator, forty-seven (10.6%) indicated they preferred a Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker, and six (1.4%) of the respondents stated that they preferred a team of Both Native and Non-Native or Near-Native Speakers.

Table 4

Preference of Type of English Language Educator(s)

Item	Type of English Educator	f	%
1	Native Thai Speaker	105	23.7
2	Native English Speaker	285	64.3
3	Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker	47	10.6
4	Both Native and Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker	6	1.4
Total Sample (n)		443	100

5. Discussions

The majority of respondents (75.8%), as shown in Table 1, were from the Faculty of Aviation. Aviation professionals such as Flight & Cabin Crews are in high demand across the globe. Battersby (2003) acknowledged that university graduates must be well equipped to compete in the global market. They continued that skills such as language proficiency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are essential. The highest priority of universities in Thailand, concurring with Fry (2002), must be to produce graduates who possess the general knowledge and characteristics that will assist them in contending in a global economy. These skills are useful in aiding graduates to position themselves in the global market as innovative, organizational, and functional.

It was also noted that a substantial percentage (98.5%), currently falls below the minimum English proficiency level required by most international airlines and companies. Graduates from the Faculty of Aviation must be thoroughly equipped to contend in a highly competitive global arena. In addition to having an Advanced Proficiency (C1) level in the national language of the airline, an Upper-Intermediate (B2) or even an Advanced Proficiency (C1) English proficiency level is required for all international airline companies. Perrodin and Somboon (2018) stated that a globally focused English language curriculum should likewise include pedagogical practices that support the demand for global economic changes. They continued that the goal of curriculum development should begin with reorganizing teaching practices along with educational program delivery methods that recognize social diversity. Additionally, the curriculum should ensure that that program material makes learners aware of global changes and the challenges of the changes associated with their chosen professional arena. Therefore, the educational institutions of Thailand should seek to cultivate an internationally competent workforce by promoting the establishment of global English education programs instructed by qualified English as a Second or Foreign language educators.

Next, it is significant to mention that over half (53.1%) of respondents stated that they would like to focus on improving their overall English skills during their first year of study at the university. Teng

and Sinwongsuwan (2015) stated that both public and private universities in Thailand had been encouraged by the government and international employers to produce graduates with more globally relevant English language skills. These universities have attempted to redefine their relevance to more sustainable, competitive and relevant in a global context with increased exposure to programs that will foster proficiency in the English language early in the graduates' education. This being the case, the creation of graduates with higher English proficiency levels is likely to be at the center of interest of international industries striving to maintain their position in the worldwide economy.

The majority (79.4%) of respondents stated that they would like to focus on improving their General English, English Conversation, and English for Career skills. It was also observed that a considerably smaller percentage (18.1%) of the respondents desired to focus on improving their English Grammar skills. Education institutions worldwide are becoming more conscious of the continuing changes in the international market. The findings showed that equipping of learners with knowledge and abilities in General English, English Conversation, and English for Career skills rather than focusing mostly on English Grammar to compete in a global marketplace is crucial. Consequently, English education programs in Thailand are currently undergoing extensive reform, without much success, in an attempt to meet the needs of the current global demand for highly-skill personnel with upper-intermediate English abilities (Thailand takes action, 2016).

Finally, it was noted that three hundred and thirty-eight (76.3%) respondents stated that they preferred Native, Non-Native, or Near-Native Speakers to teach English. Graddol (2006) affirmed that where educators were not adequately proficient in the English language, and where there is little or no use of English in the community the hopeful language learner will have a mediocre education. Particular attention must be given to the implementation of global teaching and the learning in education programs in Thailand by utilizing Native, Non-Native, or Near-Native Speakers to teach English.

6. Conclusion

As establish by the literature review for this analysis, worldwide intercultural knowledge and influences within the education system of Thailand are lacking. Perrodin (2017) suggested exposing learners to intercultural knowledge and influences within the realm of teaching and learning either through the use of foreign educators or the use of internships abroad would better prepare university graduates for global challenges. Therefore, understanding of recognized and proven methods for incorporating effective globalization of English education techniques, rather than strictly focusing on opposition or commercial gain, within the education systems of Thailand is essential.

Patrawimolpon and Pongsaparn (2006) insisted that higher education has a fundamental role in improving the global competitiveness of quality graduates. Hence, English proficiency has become a required criterion for university graduates in Thailand. Changes to pedagogy and learning practices in higher education in response to the challenges of the globalization of English education programs in Thailand should logically affect the culture of education in Thailand and induce cultural change both at

the individual and education institutional levels. Therefore, it must be further investigated, as corroborated by Noom-Ura (2013), as to how well-prepared are educational institutions in Thailand to meet the challenges of globalizing English education programs to compete in a global marketplace.

The globalization of English education programs would produce benefits for both learners and the education community of Thailand as a whole, such as greater awareness and an appreciation of other countries, cultures, languages, and societies. Likewise, cultural awareness should be incorporated into professional development programs for university graduates to prepare them for the global market better. Concurring with Punthumasen (2007), it is paramount for learners in Thailand to become more proficient in English to be able to communicate with and work in a globally competitive society.

Thus, affirming Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick (2016) who stated that the Ministry of Education of Thailand still strives to overcome difficulties in establishing globalized English education programs to create a more internationally competitive population. Unfortunately, according to Noom-Ura (2013), at present, the globalization of English education in Thailand is still yet another phase in the country's longstanding exercise of adopting ideas from abroad and ineptly adapting them to suit local circumstances.

7. Suggestions / Limitations

Based on the findings of this study, possible recommendations and/or limitations are as follows:

7.1 The cultural aspect of the preference of the respondents for Native English Speakers over the Non-Native or Near-Native Speaker, or Native Thai Speaker English teachers should be further explored.

7.2 Educators of English as a Second or Foreign Language should be encourage to integrate the use of English as the principal medium of instruction for English lessons.

7.3 Educators should be provided with specific professional development training in teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language for the enhancement of English language proficiency of the learners.

7.4 An Online Learning Support System for English as a Second or Foreign Language Education should be created to assist educators, and learners in gaining English proficiency to function in a globally competitive culture.

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