

ปัญหาอุปสรรคทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีผลต่อการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสาร  
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**Cultural Impediments to Teaching English Communication:  
A Case Study at Christian University of Thailand**

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**บทคัดย่อ**

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์ในการระบุปัจจัยทางวัฒนธรรมที่เป็นอุปสรรคต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทย รวมทั้งเสนอแนะข้อควรปรับปรุงในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษกับนักศึกษาดังกล่าว กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีของมหาวิทยาลัยคริสเตียน จำนวน 200 คน และอาจารย์ในสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 10 คน โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างตอบแบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับกิจกรรมการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ การเก็บและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเป็นทั้งแบบเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ จากผลการวิจัยพบว่า ปัจจัยทางวัฒนธรรมที่เป็นอุปสรรคต่อการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษามีด้วยกัน 6 ปัจจัยหลักคือ ความเขินอาย การออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษ วิธีการสอน การอภิปราย

หรือปฏิสัมพันธ์ในชั้นเรียน การนำเสนองานรายบุคคล และการอ่านออกเสียง เนื่องด้วยงานวิจัยนี้เป็นกรณีศึกษากับกลุ่มตัวอย่างในมหาวิทยาลัยคริสเตียน ฉะนั้น ข้อเสนอแนะในการปรับปรุงรูปแบบการสอนภาษาอังกฤษจะอ้างอิงเฉพาะเพื่อสถาบันนี้เป็นหลักอันประกอบด้วย การนำเสนออุปกรณ์การสอนที่ให้ความบันเทิงมาปรับใช้กับกระบวนการเรียนการสอนให้น้ำหนักต่อการสอนทักษะการฟังและการพูดภาษาอังกฤษให้มากขึ้นกว่าเดิม มุ่งเป้าหมายต่อกลุ่มนักศึกษาที่มีความสนใจอยากเรียนภาษาอังกฤษก่อน รวมทั้งการผนวกหลักไวยากรณ์และทักษะอื่นๆ เข้าไปในการสอนด้วย

**Abstract**

This study aimed to identify the inhibiting cultural factors in Thai students learning English, and to recommend improvements to the system of teaching English to them. The participants in this study were two hundred undergraduate students of Christian University of Thailand, and ten teachers in the English Department. They were asked to

complete the questionnaires concerning English teaching and learning activities. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed to obtain the data. Findings on the cultural impediments to teaching English indicated that there were six major inhibiting cultural factors in Thai students learning English language, which were embarrassment,

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pronunciation, teaching methods, class discussion/interaction, individual presentations, and oral reading. Discussion on the cultural barriers was subsequently presented. As the case study applied to Christian University of Thailand, the initial recommendations referred specifically to that institution. These included the adoption of entertaining and interactive teaching aids; an extension of the focus on speaking and listening; targeting students who are specifically motivated to learn English; and the incorporation of grammar with other language learning skills.

### Introduction

When the researchers arrived in Thailand from Australia to teach English in September 2006, there was an assumption that the level of English already attained by university students would make the task quite a simple one. That assumption was very soon to be tested! Nothing could have prepared them for what they were to encounter at Christian University of Thailand, an institution that was typical of the level of university-standard English in this south-east Asian country. The assumption that this was to be a simple task was challenged by that very first class, when an attempt to engage in conversation with the students was met with muted, wide-eyed stares and giggles. Ever since that encounter, the researchers have been on a quest to understand

why the level of spoken English in Thailand is at a low level, compared to other Asian countries. As an English native-speaker with little spoken Thai, you soon begin to appreciate those Thai people who are actually able to communicate with you. It is an absolute pleasure to find Thais who have a desire to improve their English and in particular, their conversation skills. Therefore, the researcher was determined to investigate this issue to the point of making a difference. So then, the question had to be asked – Why are so many Thais reluctant to enter into conversation, and make this transition to converse and communicate with ‘farangs’ (foreigners)? What are the inhibiting factors that are preventing them from progressing to conversation stage?

Essentially, the objectives of the study are to identify the inhibiting cultural factors in Thai students learning English, and to recommend improvements to the system of teaching English to Thai students, through a mutual respect of culture and an understanding of the inhibitors that are automatically in place, in the learning process. So, the objectives embrace identification of the problem and recommended solutions to the situation.

### Literature Review

A review of the related literature was undertaken through on-line

resources, the Christian University of Thailand's and Southern Cross University (Australia) Libraries. The bulk of related research was carried out by the researcher in undertaking three years of university instruction in Thailand, through observation and practical interaction with students and teachers.

### **History of English in Thailand**

As noted by Monthienvichienchai, Bhikulbhanuwat, Kasemuk, & Speece (2002), the economic boom during the first part of the 1990's gave a tremendous boost to the economic system in Thailand. During this period the first three international schools in the country opened their doors to those who could afford a specialized English education for their children. The boom in tourism to the country that occurred from this period, also contributed to the need for a greater percentage of the population to be able to communicate effectively in English.

### **Language and Culture**

Xiao (1997) cited in Wang, L. (u.d), noted that,

Language reflects the feature of nation. It contains not only the historical cultural background of this nation, but also the view of life, the way of life and the way of thought of this nation'.

It is therefore, within this context that we approach the subject of cultural barriers in communication of the English language into the Asian environment. The importance of language and vocabulary should never be under-estimated in

respecting the communication patterns of both the native and foreign tongue.

Kirkpatrick (2006), asserts that if English is used as the primary method of communication between non-native speakers, for example between a Vietnamese and an Indonesian, then the culture of the speaker becomes more important than a native speakers culture. English can act as the building block for Asians to learn about other Asians cultures through a neutral language. The researcher suggests that curriculum needs to change to reflect the culture of the region and to educate students on cultures of their near neighbors. The researcher concludes that the English language teacher should, ideally, be multilingual and multicultural and know the language of the students. But, also very importantly, know and understand the educational, social and cultural contexts in which they are working so that they are able to provide an appropriate and attainable model for their students.

### **Cultural barriers to learning**

The former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, stated that 'cultural barriers do not come down easily' (Straits Times, 18/3/09). He was identifying the differences between eastern and western culture, and as the senior diplomat and negotiator with the west, he should know. The main issue on the table in these discussions was the attraction of top talent from the west into

the east. The need for westerners to behave differently in Asia is a challenge to attracting talent, and the message was that the cultural barriers were not going to come down anytime soon to accommodate these people. Herein lies the problem for the average westerner, thrown into the Asian class-room and having to communicate across cultural barriers to students.

### **Cultural misunderstanding**

Xu (2008), relates that many English teachers recall many cases where students have been reluctant to answer questions even though they knew the answer. Some teachers have interpreted this as ignorance and insolence on the part of the student, but an understanding of the cultural barriers/inhibitors would have allowed the teacher to better relate to the student. In relation, the researcher also discusses the issue of the behavioral norms in collectivistic cultures as opposed to individualistic cultures can act as inhibitors to learning a foreign language. The researcher raises the importance of aggressive class participation in group activities in collectivistic cultures, as the trial and error process of speaking openly is the most effective method of perfecting English language.

### **Motivation in learning**

The role of motivation in improving cross-cultural communication was studied by McCargar (1993). The research

stressed that teachers should realize that student expectations may change slowly or very little. The researcher concluded that cultural differences in role expectations are central to many second-language teaching contexts, and that this understanding should provide educators with insights that will allow language teachers to help students more efficiently, and the importance of cross-cultural understanding in teaching English as a second language.

Ur (1996) stresses the importance of motivation in relation to student achievement. The researcher relates the relationship between success and motivation in learning a foreign language. This argument is further developed to discuss the teacher's role in motivating the students and therefore their success at learning. The question of the student's motivation was also studied by Tang (1999), who cites Gardner and Lambert's (1972) argument that second language may have an instrumental motivation, which means that the motivation is to acquire work or a place at university. The argument that arises from this type of motivation is that the learner is neither concerned with the culture from which the language emerged, nor interested in developing any feelings of affinity with native speakers of the language being learnt.

### **Bridging cultural barriers**

Xu (2008), put forward some recommendations to bridge cultural

barriers. In doing so he mentioned that cultural change takes time. He suggested that English teachers should take the initiative in a number of areas, including:

1. Use group work by adopting group-oriented teaching;

2. Hire more foreign teachers so that Asian teachers are actually getting more English-language exposure;

3. Facilitation of English-only areas where English is spoken, English music is played and students communicate in English; and

4. English teachers as cultural mediators so that Asian teachers can appreciate students who take the initiative and adopt some individualistic traits.

Wang, L. (u.d.) points out reading difficulties can be eliminated by improving English proficiency and reading skills; establishing and strengthening the cultural sense; and questioning and discussion. The writer also states that the 'global village' in which we live does not necessarily break down cross-cultural differences. On the contrary, the researcher notes that there may be an increase in misunderstanding due to an increase in cross-cultural communication.

## **Methodology**

### Participants

Over 200 students undertaking English I, II, III, IV, and V were surveyed.

These were carried out randomly. Also, ten teachers involved in the English Department were interviewed and completed questionnaires.

### Research Instruments

This study makes use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, but is primarily rooted in the interpretive social sciences paradigm, sometimes referred to as a constructivist paradigm. An interpretive researcher steps back from searching for a prescriptive answer and instead approaches the issue with the aim of better understanding the nature of the Thai student experiences in the English language classroom. To better enable this understanding, the researcher has applied a grounded research model. Unlike a traditional research method whereby a researcher chooses a theoretical framework or model, and then applies this model to the studied phenomena, grounded theory reverses this process and first collects data through a variety of methods:

1. Identifying a problem from observation;

2. Compiling research instruments (survey, interviews, observation) to gather data;

3. Gathering data from other sources, including academic and anecdotal information available from the case study site

### Data Collection and Analysis

A Mixed methods approach was used to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. The steps for collection were as follows:

1. Teachers were approached to administer the survey to their classes;
2. The data was collected over a period of 5 weeks from 1st March – 8th April, 2009 from these students, utilizing the survey method;
3. The researcher also assisted in the process by interviewing students from selected classes, during this period;
4. A Teacher's Workshop was held at the end of the period to gain qualitative insight into attitudes about English teaching. The Teacher's workshop was held within the English Department and each teacher involved was given a survey form to complete.

5. The information from students and teachers was gathered and compiled for analysis. The steps in Data Analysis were as follows:

1. The survey sheets were compiled;
2. An Excel Spreadsheet was established to record the actual responses from each student to each question;
3. The Spreadsheet was analyzed by question to ascertain the differing responses by each student;
4. A result sheet was compiled that provided a breakdown by student

number and percentage response to each question;

5. The result sheet also recorded the qualitative responses to the appropriate questions;

6. The preceding steps were repeated for the Teachers Workshop.

### **Results and Analyses**

#### Data Analyses from the Students

##### Survey Questionnaire

Question 1: Do you like studying English?  
Total responses 206 – Yes 53.9%; No 8.7%;  
Sometimes 37.4%

ANALYSIS: The first point that should be made about English is that it's not just another subject, it's a foreign language. The principles of teaching a foreign language are different to those applying to a 'subject' or 'unit'. There is a strong degree of motivation required to learn a foreign language, different in respect that its communication skills cannot be learnt from memory or rote learning.

Accordingly, only just over half the students (53.88%) surveyed actually LIKE studying English, and just over a third of the students, (37.38%), like studying English, sometimes. Nearly 9% of students don't like studying English at all. This indicates that nearly half of the students in the classroom at any one time are not enjoying their English learning experience.

Question 2: If you answered No (or Sometimes) what don't you like about studying English?

Total responses 148 – Grammar 40.5%; Listening/Speaking 13.5%; Reading 10.1%; Writing 35.1%; Other 0.1%

ANALYSIS: Those students that responded 'Sometimes' to Question 1 felt strongly enough to provide a response and reasons what they don't like about English in this question. Over 40% of the students who do not like English, do not like GRAMMAR. Only slightly less, (35.14%) do not like WRITING. The researcher believes that these responses are linked. The English writing process requires significant grammar skills and students are regularly confounded in the use of verbs, adjectives, nouns and tenses. LISTENING & SPEAKING did not feature strongly in the students responses, indicates that most students enjoy this activity if they can gain some proficiency.

Question 3: Are you studying English, because?

Total responses 246 – You Want To 30.1%; You Have To 52.4%; Suggested To You 14.6%; Other 2.8%

ANALYSIS: The researcher has concluded that this question could have been worded better. It appears that most students struggled with the difference between 'want to' and 'have to'. In many surveys, unsure students recorded multiple responses to a question that required

just one response. However, by recording ALL responses we have eliminated bias in the results and the researcher believes we have a sound conclusion. Over half of the students (52.44%) indicated that they 'have to' study English. This indicated that they may not be doing it voluntarily but because they need to undertake it for reasons of study, family pressure and/or job future. Only 30.08% of students indicated that they were studying English because they wanted to. This quite closely correlates to Question 1 and the level of (dis) satisfaction in studying English.

Question 4: What is the greatest difficulty you encounter in learning English?

Total responses 369 – Pronunciation 7.3%; Listening 17.3%; Speaking 16.0%; Reading 7.6%; Writing 20.1%; Grammar 25.2%; Thai teacher 1.6%; English native teacher 3.5%; Other 1.4%

ANALYSIS: This question also attracted multiple responses as students listed the different skills that they have difficulty with. The most difficult area is GRAMMAR with over 25% of respondents listing it as the most difficult component of English study. Next, they listed WRITING, at just over 20% of all responses. This very closely correlates to Question 2 and supports the responses of the students who don't like studying English. Either way, there is a great dissatisfaction with Grammar and related Writing

activity. Interestingly, to a lesser degree, students have difficulty with Listening (17.34%) and Speaking (15.99%). However, added together this forms a third of all students. The researcher believes that 'Listening' is the weakest of the English skills for Thai students. Speaking is difficult unless the Listening skills are improved. These two skills are intrinsically linked and will discuss these skills further into the study.

Question 5: Would you prefer to be taught English by?

Total responses 206 – Thai teacher 31.6%; English native speaker 21.4%; Team teaching (both) 47.1%

ANALYSIS: Nearly half the students surveyed (47.09%) responded by stating that they preferred the 'Team Teaching' system of both Thai and English teachers together. It is important to note from the comments received, that the students understand this to mean both teachers together in the classroom, at the same time. They see the benefit of Thai translation of English words and vocabulary as very important in the learning process of English. They also see the importance of English pronunciation and the benefit of a team as being a 'fun' learning environment.

Question 6: What are the cultural barriers you perceive when being taught by a native speaker?

Total responses 278 – Pronunciation 30.2%; Teaching methods 20.1%; Class discussion/interaction 23.4%; Individual presentations 10.8%; Reading 11.9%; Punctuality 1.1%; Discipline 2.2%; Other 0.4%

ANALYSIS: This question was designed to make the students think about the differences between taught by a Thai teacher and being taught by an English native speaker. Interestingly, they listed 'Pronunciation' as the prime cultural difference. Nearly a third of all students surveyed (30.22%) believe this is the biggest cultural hurdle they face in the classroom. This correlates with the need for Team or Thai teachers to translate and explain the words, phrases and sentences they hear from a native speaker. The next most difficult cultural challenge for the students is 'Class discussion/interaction', with nearly a quarter (23.38%) of all students indicating this is their most difficult cultural challenge.

Question 7: Do you think English will help you in your future career?

Total responses 206 – Yes 95.2%; No 2.4%; Don't Know 2.4%

ANALYSIS: Only a very small percentage of students, 4.85%, said 'No' or 'Don't Know' if they thought English would help them in their future careers. Thankfully, over 95% of recipients believe English will be helpful for them in the future.

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Question 8: If you had a choice to study English or study something else, what would you do?

Total responses 204 – Keep studying English 76.5%; Drop English for another subject 23.5%

ANALYSIS: Despite the fact that over 95% of students stated that they believed English would be helpful in their future life, nearly a quarter (23.53%) of all respondents stated that they would drop English for another subject given the choice. What does this tell us? This figure is indirectly correlated to the students who don't like studying English or only enjoy it, sometimes.

Question 9: What do you do outside of English classes to improve your English?

Total responses 394 – Talk to your friends 10.7%; Watch English TV 16.5%; Watch English movies 23.1%; Listen to English songs 33.3%; Read English books/magazines 15.2%; Other 1.3%

ANALYSIS: This was a question to gain an understanding of what students do outside of class to improve their English skills, and also to appreciate what English activities the students are interested in. One third (33.25%) of all respondents indicated that they 'Listen to English songs'. This was not a surprising number considering the students' interests in Popular Music and Karaoke in Eastern society. Obviously, much western music appeals to them and they are keen to learn the words so that they

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can sing the song. This information is supported later in the survey. Many respondents also indicated that they like to watch 'English Movies' (23.10%) and 'English TV' (16.50%), a combined total of nearly 40%. This indicates that the students are also interested in 'celebrity' culture and would like to understand what is being communicated in a medium that they are interested in. English TV also presents many entertainment programs that they find appealing.

Question 10: Do you worry about being embarrassed or 'losing face' when you practice your English in public or in front of the class?

Total responses 204 – Yes 78.9%; No 21.1%

ANALYSIS: This question was asked to test the cultural theory that 'losing face' stretches to speaking a foreign language. It was an investigation of the link between the Thais' reluctance to speak English in public to a cultural barrier. The researcher is not satisfied that the result is conclusive but is convinced that culture does play a part in the willingness, or otherwise, for Thais to communicate in English. Whether those reasons are shyness, embarrassment, or actual 'losing face' are uncertain. The end result, however, indicated that nearly 80% of students do worry about speaking English in public. Xu (2008) recommended some measures to bridge cultural barriers, but indicated that cultural change takes time. This researcher suggested English teachers should take the

initiative in a number of areas, including using group work to take pressure off the individual.

Question 11: Do you think learning English can be made more interesting? How?

Due to the qualitative nature of this question there were many varied and interesting responses.

ANALYSIS: The main thing that comes across in this final question is that students want the English lessons to be 'fun, exciting, interesting, and NOT boring'. Thus, we have a challenge for all English curriculum writers. How do we accomplish this? The students themselves have given some great examples of how they can see their lessons improved. The list is extensive but there are many examples of different activities that will assist the students to learn English in a fun, exciting and interesting atmosphere. The suggestions range from learning and singing songs to visiting foreign countries and interacting. The researcher believes that we have an opportunity to re-vamp English instruction so that all students will enjoy learning and participating in English lessons.

### Data Analyses from the Teachers Workshop

WORKSHOP INTERVIEWS – Note that this was a qualitative survey and workshop discussion/focus group to gain individual responses.

Question 1: Do you teach in English or in Thai?

RESULTS: English (cannot speak Thai); Both (2); English (2); English 60%, Thai 40%; Almost all in Thai; Thai for Thai students & English for Chinese students.

ANALYSIS: The researcher initially struggled with the concept of teaching English in Thai. However, the Thai teachers have a large proportion of their lessons in Thai for a very good reason

– to help the students understand.

The danger is that the students, if they have a Thai teacher, will resist English instruction completely and request that the whole lesson be delivered in Thai. Meanwhile, the English teachers struggle with a class of students who, at the very least, want some Thai translation. The answer, the researcher believes, is 'Team Teaching', whereby they get a balanced mix of English and Thai instruction, at the same time.

Question 2: If you teach in Thai, why?

RESULTS: Many students don't understand my English, so I have to teach in Thai; To explain to them; My students have little experience using English or are weak at English; I have to cover a lot in the lesson (Grammar), it will save time if I speak in Thai; Some students are very weak; Because students can understand grammar in Thai more than they can in English.

ANALYSIS: In line with the comments from Question 1, the Thai teachers teach in

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Thai because it is easier for the students to understand. Why should a Thai teacher struggle to teach students in English, if they can understand the concepts in Thai? This will be an ongoing dilemma for English educators. Whilst we are instructed to teach in English, the fact of the matter is that it is not going to happen, if the teacher is Thai. The danger, as indicated in Question 1 Analysis, is the production of lazy students who will not attempt to improve their English skills, if they know they have a Thai teacher who will communicate with them in their native language.

Question 3: What is the most difficult skill for you to teach?

RESULTS: Writing? Grammar? (I haven't taught reading); Public Speaking; Reading – students lack the vocabulary and the critical thinking skills; Listening/ Reading; Listening skill; Maybe speaking skill; Writing & Reading – their very limited vocabulary hinders the students comprehension and self-expression; Listening.

ANALYSIS: This question was aimed at the teacher to identify the skill they had the most difficulty in communicating to the student. We have to come to accept that on average the English proficiency of students at CTU is very poor. A summary of these responses indicates a range of all the skills with particular emphasis on skills that require an English vocabulary. The research is

convinced that the core of this problem lies in the student's inability to listen, comprehend and think about an appropriate response.

Question 4: What do the students enjoy most about learning English?

RESULTS: Group activities, fun activities, games; I don't know but they feel happy when they get a high score; Incorporate songs, games, and more interactive activities; activities; Reading & answering the questions; The challenging exercise, pictures; Inter-active teaching, methods such as teacher communicating with the students, or the students relating amongst themselves, etc.

ANALYSIS: It was pleasing to the researcher to get an independent response from the teachers that confirmed the student's survey opinions. It is obvious that the students want to bring fun into English teaching so that it can be exciting and interesting for them to learn. This may be the motivational 'hook' that we are seeking.

Question 5: What don't they like about it?

RESULTS: They don't want to attend the class if their scores are low; Speaking; Grammar; Listening to very fast audio; Listening to long lecture; They have a pre-set idea/belief that English is far too difficult for them to understand; Listening;

ANALYSIS: The issue of 'Listening' continues to come up. The results

confirm that we need to do something to make English more enjoyable for the students and engage them in activities that will interest them. Only when they are motivated to learn will their 'Listening' skills improve, which will lead to an improvement in their overall communication ability.

Question 6: What do you believe is the greatest difficulty for students in learning English?

RESULTS: Too afraid to ask if they don't understand; Having enough exposure to English & practice; Motivation to learn English; They are a little lazy (like all young people); Listening skill; Student's attitude; Student's behaviour; When they make no attempt and no practice after class; They don't have a native atmosphere; They don't often practice; Pronunciation & comprehension – there is a great difference between the language patterns of their native tongue and the English language; They don't have a wide vocabulary.

ANALYSIS: Motivation appears to be the key factor in nearly all these issues. It appears in many cases that the students don't have a desire to learn the language and this reflected in behaviour and attitude in the classroom. It is also reflected in the reluctance to practice outside of the classroom.

Question 7: Do you think they would prefer to be taught by? a) A Thai teacher

b) An English native speaker c) Team teaching together

RESULTS: Maybe they'd prefer both, Thai teacher to explain and native speaker to practice and model; Team teacher – to make sure they will understand their lessons; Team teaching; Team teaching – they want to practice their English while they need the Thai teacher when they have some problems; Team teaching – they can speak with English native speaker and can ask some confusing parts of the Thai teacher; It depends on their levels, if they're very weak they would like Thai teacher.

ANALYSIS: The researcher is very encouraged when he discovers that responses from students and teachers match on particular issues. The Thai teacher possesses a skill that the native speaker doesn't, and that is the ability to communicate to the student in their native language. This is extremely important when the student is struggling to understand concepts and issues that are presented by the native speaker. The teacher's responses support the need for 'Team teaching'.

Question 8: What do you think are the main cultural barriers for Thai students with an English native speaker?

RESULTS: They have little English to communicate with us; Embarrassment; Teaching/Learning styles; Thai students are shy; If they speak English patterns incorrectly, they won't speak with the

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native speaker: Punctuality – native speakers require students on time whereas Thai teachers are more relaxed about time, including exams: Thai students afraid of losing face when they talk with native speaker.

ANALYSIS: The main cultural barriers appear to revolve around the student's shyness, embarrassment and fear of losing face if they speak in English. Much of this could also come from 'peer pressure' from their colleagues who may ridicule or provoke them for wrong pronunciation. The researcher believes that their needs to be a Thai solution to this problem, whereby Thai teachers need to encourage their students to speak in public and practice.

Question 9: What should the students do outside of class to improve their English?

RESULTS: English songs, movies, radio, TV, magazines, etc. They know but don't choose to unless they are motivated or are major students: They have to change their everyday life atmosphere into English: Watch English movies, read other English material: Talk with the native speakers: To use English skills, listening, English songs, News, talking with foreigners: Internet, play games, songs, movies.

ANALYSIS: Many of the responses here are in line with the student's responses and correlate to the things that they would like to do during the lesson. It all comes down to motivation and desire to have

more English in their lives so they can start to attain that 'native atmosphere'.

Question 10: Do you think the Thai students suffer from embarrassment or 'losing face' when they have to speak English in public or in front of the class?

RESULTS: They are shy and they don't like to 'fail' or to appear embarrassed, they always like to be perfect: Yes, of course: No: Yes: At first, but when they know it OK, they will try: Yes, someone doesn't embarrass them, but she/he doesn't know vocabulary: I don't think so, they just need positive motivation and encouragement.

ANALYSIS: Some mixed reaction to this question. The assumption can be made, however, that students who are not confident in English speaking will suffer from embarrassment at speaking in public. The literature doesn't cover the issue of 'face', and therefore may be an area for additional research as a cultural impediment to learning English.

Question 11: How can English be made more interesting for the Thai students?

RESULTS: Songs, short movie clips, short games, chat online in English with friends, group activities, translation software to explain vocabulary: English songs & movies: Involve them in games, group activities, activities outside the classroom, incorporate songs, movies, contests: More language activities: Use English games, practice them to pronounce correctly and

make them more active.

ANALYSIS: The teacher's comments closely reflect those of the students in outlining activities that they should do to make English more interesting. The challenge for curriculum developers is to construct courses that will allow these opportunities for the students. The researcher believes that there needs to be a program that will keep the students enthusiastic through focusing on the things they are interested in. Further, in light of the research findings the researcher believes that the subject matter should change to reflect contemporary trends and student needs.

### Discussion

It is not an easy task to change a system, particularly one that is strongly linked to the culture of a country. The researcher strongly believes from the evidence of the research that there needs to be a cultural shift in the way that English is taught in Thailand. However, the problem is not at the University level. The problem goes back to the way English is being taught to children when they first begin school. There is a very discernible difference between the teaching of a foreign language and teaching a subject such as Mathematics or Science. A foreign language cannot be learnt through the process known as 'rote' learning which is quite common in the Asian educational system. The main reason for this is crucial elements of

listening and understanding the communicated language and speaking (or responding), in understandable terms. These crucial elements are missing in the way that English is being taught at a basic level. An indictment of this is the fact that the researcher was able to have more stimulating conversations with Bangkok taxi drivers, than with many Christian University students. Thailand is in danger of being left behind the rest of the world in education, commerce and trade unless it is able to dramatically improve the methods of teaching English.

In conclusion, the cultural inhibitors to learning English could be summarized as follows:

1. Pride in their language – inherently, there is nothing wrong with this, but there is a belief that it is not necessary to learn English, because the students do not think they will need to use it in the future.

2. Saving Face – an essential part of Asian culture is the 'saving of face'. Every action taken by Thai students is assessed on its exposure to 'losing' or 'saving' face. The learning of a foreign language where you are required to step out of your comfort zone and make mistakes to learn, does not fit comfortably with this cultural aspect. A further result of this cultural trait is to avoid problems and confrontation whenever and however possible.

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## Recommendation

Cultural impediments will need to be considered in undertaking any changes to the current system of teaching English. From the research gathered and from personal observation and experience, the researcher would recommend the following recommendations be considered in future English speaking programs. Bearing in mind that the case study applies to Christian University of Thailand, the initial recommendations refer specifically to that institution.

1. The students have indicated that they want English to be 'fun'. Whilst the researcher believes that teaching English in this fashion belongs in the pre-university forum, it should be an effective tool in motivating students to learn the language. The research indicates that the teachings aids could include a diverse range of activities including: games, stories, movies, songs, trips, television and interactive on-line English learning.

2. Christian University of Thailand should allocate the first full year (2/3 semesters) of English study focusing on Speaking and Listening. This would probably necessitate the employment of more foreigners (English native speakers).

3. English should not be a compulsory (core) subject. The research indicated that motivation is a key issue in learning English and only those students

who believe English will be important in their future careers should undertake the subject.

4. The researcher would recommend that Grammar be dropped as an exclusive unit to be incorporated in the other skills. A recommendation for curriculum change is as follows:

4.1 Team Teaching' incorporated wherever, and whenever possible. The researcher realizes that it is not always possible due to staff resources. A 'fall-back' position would be the segregation of 'motivated' and 'non-motivated' students to be taught by native speakers and Thai teachers, respectively.

4.2 A review of the nature of English teaching be carried out, so that more inter-active teaching be conducted to specifically meet the student's interests, needs and wants.

4.3 A draft example of a reviewed curriculum is listed below for your consideration. The researcher believes from the research completed that this would better prepare the students for the rigours of English study. As follows:

ENGLISH I - Should be composed primarily of Listening; it would also incorporate elements of Conversation/ Speaking, Grammar, Reading, & Writing.

ENGLISH II - Should be composed primarily of Conversation/Speaking; it would also incorporate elements of Listening, Grammar, Reading & Writing.



ENGLISH III – Should be composed primarily of Reading; it would also incorporate elements of Listening, Conversation/Speaking, Grammar, & Writing.

ENGLISH IV – Should be composed primarily of Writing; it would also incorporate elements of Listening, Conversation/Speaking, Grammar, & Reading.

ENGLISH V – Should combine all the skills in a career-based course; it would give equal attention and parity to every aspect of English communication. These five units should be strictly taken

in order from I – V and each should be a pre-requisite for the following unit.

### **Suggestion for Further Studies**

Due to the limitations of sample base and available data on the subject, further research needs to be undertaken. This research should focus on the methods currently undertaken to teach English at the most junior level of schooling. It is far easier to learn a foreign language when you are young and this is an opportunity that should be investigated through further research.

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