Perceptions towards Engagement: The Case of Thai English Majors in an International Higher Education Environment

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Abstract

This study examines Thai English majors' perceptions towards engagement. The aim of this study is to be better informed of the English language learning experience of students in an international environment where English is used as a foreign language. A mixed methods approach was employed. A modified version of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was used to collect quantitative data, while qualitative data was collected through a focus group interview. Correlation scores and one-way ANOVA were calculated to examine the survey data. Results indicated that almost all the categories of engagement were significantly correlated, except for the correlation between supportive learning environment and faculty interaction. The one-way ANOVA test, on the other hand, revealed that students' year of study had a significant effect on at least three components of engagement. The quantitative results were further informed by data collected from a focus group interview. From the interview, students were able to describe the classroom atmosphere, teachers' pedagogical strategies, as well as challenges they faced in their studies. From the findings, it was evident that the Thai students were open to different pedagogical approaches, and that they were not culturally constrained. This may be the hallmark of international education, wherein students take on a contextualized approach to learning, aside from being in a context where a foreign language is used.

Keywords: Engagement, English Language Majors, English as a Lingua Franca, Higher Education

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Thailand has seen an increase in the number of international programs offered by higher education institutions. These international programs offered university degrees based on foreign curricula which are typically delivered by international faculty members. The increase aspired to position the nation as capable of addressing and meeting regional economic and industrial needs (Schiller, 2006; Schiller & Liefner, 2007). By 2011, both public and private higher education institutions in Thailand offered 981 international programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2011, as cited by Lavankura, 2013). This phenomenon was an opportunity for the nation to pursue economic development, as well as to provide middle- and upper-class Thais with the opportunity to study international programs (Lavankura, 2013). It is then becoming common for Thai students to study with higher educational institutions that will provide them with sufficient English exposure, whether it be from courses taught in English or through the university environment (Rhein, 2016).

Several studies have attempted to examine the success of the internationalization of higher education in Thailand. Factors considered included faculty members' teaching capabilities, research output, and university links with the industry (Schiller, 2006; Schiller & Liefner, 2007). In studies elsewhere, the quality of higher education has been evaluated by examining students' perceptions towards their learning environment. Some typical surveys include student ratings of teachers (e.g., Penny, 2003), evaluation of teaching effectiveness (e.g., Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002), and perception towards the quality of university services and facilities (e.g., Tan & Kek, 2004). With regard to English language learning and teaching, studies in the Thai university setting have examined various constructs, such as strategy use (e.g., Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011), attitude and motivation (e.g., Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2012), or communication anxiety (e.g., Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017). These studies, nonetheless, as with other studies on engagement elsewhere (see Svalberg, 2009; Philp & Duchesne, 2016) focus mainly on individual constructs found in the students or the classroom environment. For a more holistic approach, studies have suggested the examination of student engagement (e.g., Kuh, 2003; Coates, 2005). Engagement deals with elements from within and beyond the classroom walls, such as the cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral dimensions. Our study, hence, will use engagement as a framework to see how Thai university students navigate English language learning within and beyond the classroom. Specifically, our study seeks to examine the perceptions toward engagement of Thai university students majoring in English in an international higher education environment.

From this study, we hope to address the deficiency in research on engagement in the Asian context, as pointed out by Reschly and Christenson (2012), since most studies on higher education student engagement have been done in western contexts. Another contextual justification is the preconceived notions of the type of students Asians are, especially those studying the English language (e.g., Cheng, 2000; Littlewood, 2000; Kember, 2000). Furthermore, as student engagement has been established as a vital component for curriculum measurement and planning (see Coates, 2005), results from this study will help stakeholders of the study site evaluate the learning context provided to its students.

Literature Review
Engagement in Higher Education
In education, student engagement is considered a multifaceted construct which includes psycho-social processes, institutional and personal parameters, the wider context of the community, and the sociocultural and behavioral traits of an individual (Kahu, 2013). It is what maintains and promotes students' attention to their learning. Engagement is associated with the concept of self-efficacy, and can manifest itself through observable behaviors (behavioral engagement), approaches or strategies to manage learning (cognitive engagement), and personal interest, such as attitudes and value placed on one's learning journey (motivational and emotional engagement) (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Being engaged is also a basis for social and collaborative learning activity. Hence, one who is engaged values perceptive interaction with other learning and teaching elements, such as other students and teachers, the curriculum and content, the pedagogical approaches, plus various learning opportunities, beliefs, and strategies (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007; Krause & Coates, 2008). Finally, those who are engaged will invest time and effort in discovering other learning opportunities, such as that discussed by Zhao and Kuh (2004) in their study on learning communities among university students.

The Study of Engagement
There are at least two approaches to analyze student engagement. One way is to look at student engagement as involving different procedural phenomena. This is a conservative manner of looking at engagement. It conceptualizes engagement based on observable behaviors and abstract attributes which are applicable in all settings, irrespective of contextual differences. This view also elevates the teacher, and other stakeholders with institutional power, as possessing the full responsibility over students' learning and progress. What this entails, then, is a high value placed on academic achievement. The second way of looking at student engagement involves focusing on student strengths. This involves not only academic achievement, but also achievement elsewhere, such as community involvement. As such, context is an influential determinant for student engagement, as it provides the grounds for experiences of the intellect, art, and society to be enhanced (McMahon & Portelli, 2004).

A common tool employed to study student engagement is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), developed by Peter Ewell for the American Association for Higher Education (Kuh, 2009). The NSSE had been widely used as it provides a comprehensive outlook on engagement in higher education and it is a sensitive tool that can reveal potentials to expand on, and challenges to address (see McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013). Extensive findings on the examination of engagement through the use of NSSE and other related surveys have also directed action proposals to enhance engagement, which can be adapted by higher education institutions (see Zepke & Leach, 2010). The NSSE consolidated engagement into five major categories, which are level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Definitions and examples of these categories are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. NSSE Categories and their definitions with examples

Category	Definition	Example
Level of academic challenge	Challenging, intellectual and creative university work	Class preparation; number and type of assignments; thinking skills expected in assignments; application of knowledge learned
Active and collaborative learning	Provision of a different approach to learning (as opposed to individual learning)	Ask questions in class; contribute to class discussions; work with students outside of class time; work with the community; discuss materials with others external to the university setting
Student-faculty interaction	Interaction with faculty members inside and outside the classroom	Discussed feedback/results with a faculty member; consulted faculty members about study issues or future plans; worked with faculty members on other non-academic matters (e.g., community work)
Enriching educational experiences	Activities that complement and augment classroom learning	Participating in extra-curriculum activities; community or volunteer work; experiences abroad; culminating senior courses (e.g., senior projects, practicum; seminars); interacting with international students with different worldviews
Supportive learning environment	Conducive and positive environment in the university setting	Help given to achieve academic success; help given to achieve success in life; quality relationships with other students and faculty members

When there is a clear understanding of student engagement, higher education institutions will be able to cater better to students' learning needs (Kahu, 2013). Student engagement can also be the basis to measure student interest (Ainley, 2012), student motivation (Martin, 2012), and emotion regulation (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). Student engagement is not only a catalyst for various positive learning outcomes, but it is also a byproduct of students having a positive disposition towards learning (Kaur, 2006). Moreover, in the context of tertiary education, student engagement is considered a valuable construct that can inform and measure the quality of the educational environment (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Coates, 2005; Kuh, 2001, 2009).

Engagement in Language Learning and its Pedagogy
Similar to the educational perspective of engagement, engagement in language learning also consists of different dimensions (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg, 2009, 2012). These dimensions are cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral, and are interdependent. They are exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions of language learning engagement and their examples

Dimension	Cognitive	Affective	Social	Behavioral
Examples in language learning	Noticing language features, including the planning and use of different strategies	Willingness to engage with different learning situations, including the connectedness of students with other entities or objects related to their learning	Interactive means for language learning	Time and effort invested in the completion of a language task

The study of engagement in language learning is crucial, as it provides us with "ways of explaining why some linguistic or language-related behaviors and attitudes seem to facilitate language learning and learning about language(s) more than others" (Svalberg, 2009, p. 243). Furthermore, engagement in language learning is a more encompassing construct compared to other notions such as attitude, involvement, commitment, or motivation (Svalberg, 2009, 2012). To link the categories of engagement proposed by the NSSE (Table 1) with the dimensions of language engagement (Table 2), we propose the following comparisons (Table 3). This will inform the data collection and analytical processes of the current study.

Table 3. Categories of engagement with dimensions of language learning engagement

Category	Dimension
Level of academic challenge	cognitive; behavioral
Active and collaborative learning	cognitive; behavioral; social; affective
Student-faculty interaction	social; affective; behavioral
Enriching educational experiences	social; affective; behavioral
Supportive learning environment	cognitive; behavioral; social; affective

To nurture and sustain student engagement, various pedagogical approaches have been proposed. These approaches are typically those that involve a form of interaction between teacher and students. One approach that is commonly suggested to enhance student engagement is scaffolding. Teaching practices which reflect scaffolding include modelling, bridging, contextualization, building schema, re-presenting text, and developing metacognition. It is believed that scaffolding encourages the development of students as it provides "rigorous, deep, challenging, and responsible education" (Walqui, 2006, p. 177), which will help heighten students' language awareness. Bridging students' familiarity with new knowledge not only ensures that students remain motivated and challenged, but it also draws teachers to the level of their students for the purpose of social interaction. Another recent approach that aims to engage students and support students' active learning is the flipped classroom approach. The flipped classroom approach employs different pre-class teaching/learning aids to ready students to be actively involved in learning during class. Hence, the aim of a flipped strategy is to free up class time from teacher-talk in order to maximize students' active participation. It is also through the flipped approach where students may be engaged with their learning materials outside of class time and the classroom setting (Hung, 2015). Aside from providing support to guide learning and allocating outside-

of-class time for preparation, language classrooms are also implementing task-based activities to enhance student engagement (Svalberg, 2009, 2012; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). These tasks, which involve interaction, require students to work with different social entities and objects in their learning environment. It also requires students' use of personal resources, such as their experiences, knowledge, and even language skills to achieve a specified outcome, which may be linguistic or non-linguistic (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

Studies about Student Engagement in the Local Setting

As mentioned earlier, there have not been any known studies conducted on the construct of engagement in the current setting, Thailand; nonetheless, there have been studies that examined related notions, such as Thai students' attitude and motivation towards English language learning. The notion of attitude and motivation are examined in light of particular pedagogical approaches or learning materials. For instance, in a study by Lai and Aksornjarung (2018) on a content-based instruction English course, Thai students' attitudes towards the learning of English were found to be more positive compared to their motivation to learn English. While the students valued the development of their language skills, their motivation may have been less positive due to other academic commitments (the sample of this study was medical and nursing students). Similar results were also observed in Chairat's (2015) study, where university students majoring in public health were found to hold a positive attitude towards learning English, coupled with motivation that is instrumental in nature, that is, the position of English as a tool that is beneficial for future socioeconomic and professional development. Another study by Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai (2012) also reported English majors having a positive affinity towards the learning of English for instrumental purposes. These reports about Thai university students' view towards English as an instrumental tool for personal development concur with that of Hayes' (2016) study. There are also studies that look at particular language skills. For instance, in a different setting involving Thai upper secondary school students, it was found there was a lower motivation for reading. The researcher reported that this may be due to the students' instrumental motivation to read, that is to receive positive feedback or better grades, or good evaluation by teachers, and not necessarily to build competence in the English language (Pluemsamran & Vibulphol, 2015).

In other studies done in the Thai tertiary setting, there have been efforts to employ pedagogical measures grounded in communicative principles as a way to nurture and encourage student engagement (e,g, Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, & Radić-Bojanić, 2015; McDonough, 2004; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Saengboon, 2004; Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2002). For example, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol's (2007) implementation of task-based pedagogy to allow students to have control over their learning, and subsequently develop independent language learning strategies. The task-based approach allowed teachers to focus both on content and form, ensuring that the learning experience was meaningful and engaging to the students. Other pedagogical approaches which may engage students at the tertiary level are interactive learning (McDonough, 2004); working with peers of the same language proficiency (Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, & Radić-Bojanić, 2015); and being open to various teaching practices and materials (Saengboon, 2004).

Nonetheless, these efforts in Thailand have been mixed or lackluster, such as that reported by Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick (2016) because of tensions between cultural customs and beliefs with educational reforms that are deemed progressive, political instability, and a lack of understanding by different stakeholders about the function and value of language education. A wider issue is the inaccurate assumption that engagement will be realized with the presence of an engaging teacher or pedagogical approach. Various reports

have shown this phenomenon, for example, the study of Bryson and Hand (2007), Yang and Chen (2007), and Hyland (2003). These studies reported that while there were novel approaches that were supposed to promote engagement, students were found to either view English language learning for the purpose of reaping academic gains and not necessarily to develop language skills.

The Present Study
Research Setting
This study was conducted in a private international University in Thailand, where most of the researchers are currently teaching. Aside from reasons of convenience, the setting was selected because it reflected the changing landscape of higher education in Thailand. The institution offers full-time degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It also offers distance and part-time programs at the graduate level, which are popular among full-time working professionals in the Southeast Asian region (see also Rhein, 2016). Aside from having an international outlook, international institutions are appealing because the education environment is predominantly English speaking. The research site not only offered programs in English taught by international faculty, but most of its extra-curricular activities were conducted in English. Most of the students enrolled at the research site were boarding students; hence, their exposure to English occurred on a daily basis. Moreover, English was truly used as a lingua franca (ELF) for socialization, as the student body came from 30 different countries (the understanding of ELF is guided by Jenkins, 2015; Cogo, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2011). Another reason for the site selection is to expand on Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai's (2012) study, which was also conducted on Thai English majors in the same university.

Research Participants
The study sample consisted of Thai-born English majors from all year levels (first year to fourth year). While the sample studied in a Thai program, all their major courses were conducted in English. The curriculum objectives of the courses emphasized theories of language and communication, and application this knowledge. At the time of the research, there were 234 Thai English majors enrolled in the program. They were enrolled in two different English emphases, which are English for Communication and English for Business. What sets these students apart are the core courses, which consist of approximately 36 to 40 credits of professional courses related to their emphases. The Thai English majors initially take courses together (in their first two years), regardless of their emphases. These courses are skill-based (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Though there are separate courses for separate language skills, all of the courses take on an integrated-skills approach, but with a heavier weightage for a particular skill. It is only in the third and fourth year when the courses of these students become content-based, with a mix of theoretical and practical courses. Convenience sampling was used in the selection of participants, limiting the results to private international universities in Thailand.

Collection of Data
With the objective of studying student engagement among university-level English language students in an international setting, this study sought to address the following research questions:
1. What is the perception of Thai English majors towards engagement?
2. Is there a difference in engagement as perceived by Thai English majors?

To address these two research questions, this study employed a mixed-methods approach for data collection and analysis, as suggested by Philp and Duchesne (2016). This approach was chosen to ensure that assumptions can be drawn, yet at the same time provide emic insights. The quantitative approach involved the collection of data with a modified version of the NSSE. Furthermore, the NSSE is considered useful as it provides emic insights into the construct of engagement within a particular study setting (McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013). With regard to the current study setting and the broader notion of higher education, it may provide useful information regarding the function of language within an educational domain consisting of speakers from multiple cultural and language backgrounds.

The modified version of NSSE had a reduced number of questions. Some questions were omitted if they were found to be irrelevant to the research site and sample, while others were combined when they were found to be very similar. The modified version was then assessed by inter-raters to determine their construct validity (Cohen's Kappa). The level of agreement was 0.82, which is a good indicator for inter-rater agreement. The modified version of the NSSE has 6 demographic questions, plus 47 items which are an array of questions that fall under the five primary categories of student engagement outlined by the original NSSE version (see modified questionnaire in the Appendix). At the end of the questionnaire, students could indicate their willingness to participate in an anonymous post-survey interview. Interview questions were formed based on the quantitative results from the completed surveys.

Data Analysis
The survey data were analyzed in different modes. First, the demographic data were presented through descriptive statistics. Second, to examine the perception of Thai students towards engagement, correlations between the five categories of engagement were calculated. Finally, to address the second research question, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted. Students who had agreed to the interview took part in a focus groups interview. Data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, as the researchers were interested only in meanings found in the content of the students' responses. The qualitative approach sought to address the limitation of the quantitative approach in studying engagement, for which Kahu (2013) warned that confining engagement to certain variables may result in a narrow perspective of engagement. Qualitative findings will also provide us with a deeper and culturally-nuanced understanding of student engagement, and guiding the development of meaningful and contextualized language pedagogy.

Findings and Discussion
Though the surveys were distributed to all of the Thai English majors, only about 70% (n=172) of them were completed and returned. Demographic information of the sample is presented below. Results from the survey indicated that there were representations from all levels of education, with a majority of the respondents coming being second year students (n=57) (Table 4).

Table 4. **Participants' level of education**

Year of Study	First	Second	Third	Fourth
n	40	57	36	39

The respondents were predominantly female (n=121; Table 5). This is expected, as indicated by the World Bank, wherein the year 2015 saw 60% of university enrollment in Thailand made up of female students and 57% in the following year (World Bank).

Table 5. Participants' gender

Gender	Male	Female
n	51	121

A majority of the respondents come from low-income families, as seen in Table 6. Most of these students are able to afford a university education because of government loans made available to them (see Savatsomboon, 2006).

Table 6. Participants' family income

Family Income (Thai Baht per month)	<10	10K - 20K	20K - 30K	30K - 40K	40K - 50K	50K - 60K	>60K	Not sure
n	21	89	38	7	4	3	3	7

In terms of academic achievement, most of the respondents were in the 'pass' range or above ($\geq$2.00 CGPA), according to the research site's academic policy (Table 7). With regard to course load, most of the respondents had regular loads (4 credits, n=75; 5 credits, n=73), which is considered the norm per semester at the research site (Table 8).

Table 7. **Participants' cumulative academic achievement**

CGPA	<2.00	2.01-2.25	2.26-3.00	3.01-3.25	>3.26	Not sure
n	4	10	56	31	49	22

Table 8. Students' course load

Course Load	3 (9 credits)	4 (12 credits)	5 (15 credits)	6 (18 credits)	7 (21 credits)	Not sure
n	16	75	73	2	2	4

To answer the first research question, correlation between variables were analyzed, and it was found that almost all the categories of engagement were significantly correlated with each other, except for the correlation between supportive learning environment and student faculty interactions (p=0.02) (Table 9).

Table 9. Correlation between components of engagement

	LAC	ACL	SFI	EEE	SLE
LAC	1.00				
ACL	*0.44	1.00			
SFI	*0.25	*0.29	1.00		
EEE	*0.58	*0.57	*0.21	1.00	
SLE	*0.41	*0.34	0.02	*0.53	1.00

*significant at 0.05

LAC – Level of academic challenge; ACL – Active and collaborative learning; SFI – Student faculty interactions; EEE – Enriching educational experiences; SLE – Supportive learning environment

The correlation results may be indicative of the sample's awareness of their language learning approaches and experiences that goes beyond the classroom realm. This extends our understanding of Asian learners. As illustrated by Wong (2004), Asian learners in international settings (e.g., those studying abroad), are not restricted by their cultural norms when in their learning approaches. It was shown that these students are able to adapt to new learning approaches when appropriate support is given, as well as ample adjustment time. This was also observed in the studies on Thai university students in McDonough (2004), and McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007). Hence, in line with Wong's (2004) study, we could assume that the sample's perception towards engagement, and ultimately how they function in a learning setting that is internationalized, is contextually driven, and not culturally shaped. These results may challenge the generalized notion that Asian learners have learning habits which others perceive as not engaging. This assumption may be further expounded through the post-survey interview, which five students agreed to participate (each student is labelled as ST1, ST2, and so forth).

> [1] The teacher calls all students to say hello (he encourages students to engage in small talk), we all have relationship and know each other, so we can make a friend. So we can help each other. If we don't know each other, we scared. We stay quiet - so boring. If students know each other and have fun, study will improve. The teacher also looks at the student and has fun, and understands what students want to do [ST1]

> [2] We start by coming together and the teacher puts a sentence or word to the students and we talk to each other, and change with other people. We get around each other and talk to each other [ST1]

Excerpt 1 illustrates the type of participative and inclusive atmosphere that is created in the classroom with the students, the purpose being for relationships to be formed to encourage communication between teacher and students, as well as student to student [2]. These instances reflect different dimensions of engagement, namely social, emotional, and cognitive, and the dependency of these dimensions on each other. As mentioned by Svalberg (2009), dimensions are bound to overlap when there is an optimal level of engagement. As such, the lack of one or more dimensions may hinder opportunities for effective learning.

[3] Last semester, teacher helped students, students don't know how to use a word, call them to her office and help them understand. Any teacher can help you, but some students don't want to study with teacher. The teacher is in their office, right? But some students don't know how to do. Any teacher if I have problem I can go and talk to them. But for me, I think any teacher not the same [ST2].

There were also mentions about teachers engaging with students beyond the class time. ST2 in [3] makes an interesting point as well, with regard to students not knowing what to do when encountering a problem. This resonates with other studies (e.g. Cheng, 2000; Wong, 2004; Campbell & Li, 2008), wherein students' inability to perform or participate could be because they are unaware of the type of help available to them. Or perhaps they have not been socialized into the learning norms of the university setting. What may be observed here are primarily cognitive and behavioral dimensions, as well as social. Engagement, in its broad educational sense, also takes into account learning opportunities beyond the classroom walls. In language learning, engagement beyond class time is crucial as it is indicative of the level of noticing that students have, the willingness of one to use the learned language as a tool for communication, and the purposefulness of the learned language (Phip & Duchesne, 2016).

[4] When teacher teach, I write short notes. In evening, I listen every day. When teacher teach, I can talk with teacher. When I don't know, I call teacher speak with me but I'm shy. I write short note [ST3]

Perhaps when learning strategies are intentionally taught to the students, they would be able to employ learning tactics such as that seen in [4], mentioned by ST3. ST3 is also aware of help available through foreign students studying together in an international setting. What [4] and [5] illustrate is the types of strategies (social and metacognitive) that are used to aid in improving English language proficiency, as well as improving learning. These are illustrative of the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of language learning engagement, wherein the realization of particular language learning strategies which are proactively carried out through actions may support students' language learning processes.

[5] In class I don't know the word, but my foreign friends know it. But these friends don't know the word in Thai, I will help them. I teach Thai, international friends teach English. When I don't understand English, they help me. When they want to learn Thai, I teach them [ST3]

Despite what was mentioned in the interviews, the results showed that there was no significant correlation between supportive learning environment and student faculty interaction. Nonetheless, as seen in the results from the one-way ANOVA test, we find that there is actually a distinction in significance between first- and second-year students and senior students with regard to the interactivity with faculty members. This is discussed in the next section.

To answer the second research question, a one-way ANOVA was used to determine the effects of the variables. Results indicated that there was a significant effect of year of study on at least three components of engagement (See Table 10).

Table 10. One-way ANOVA between year of study on LAC, and SFI

Components of engagement	df		f	Sig.
	Between groups	Within groups		
Academic challenge	4	167	4.94	0.01
Rich educational experience	4	167	4.07	0.003
Interactivity with faculty members	4	167	4.37	0.002

First, there was a significant effect on academic challenge [F(4,167)=4.94, p = 0.01]. A subsequent Tukey Post Hoc test indicated that there was a difference between fourth year (m = 2.78) and second year (m = 2.57) with an effect size of 0.34. There was also a significant effect on rich educational experiences, [F(4,167)=4.07, p = 0.003]. A Tukey Post Hoc test indicated that there was a difference between fourth year (m = 2.80) and second year (m = 2.57) with an effect size of 0.60. The final component that was significantly affected by year of study was interactivity with faculty [F(4,167)=4.37, p = 0.002]. A Tukey Post Hoc test indicated that there was a difference between fourth year (m = 5.78) with an effect size of 0.82 and second year (m = 4.75) as well as between fourth year and first year (m = 4.45) which also had an effect size of 0.82.

In general, there is a difference in perception towards engagement between fourth-year students with their first- and second-year counterparts. One of the differences was in academic challenge and rich educational experiences. This is expected as fourth year courses are expected to be more challenging. One required course that fourth-year Thai English majors need to pass is an internship placement done during the summer term (May to July). During this period, students assume internship positions at various places, such as local primary or secondary schools, or international companies, airports or hotels. Moreover, fourth year courses typically have research components, where students have to expound on various concerns or issues found in the social sciences and humanities through theoretical frameworks learned in their courses. For example, the primary researcher taught an intercultural communications course which required students to conduct research based on any of the intercultural issues and theories discussed in the class. Some of the research topics were the meaning of school uniform in Thailand and the importance of urban development versus preservation and improvement of the natural environment in Thailand.

Another difference, which contrasts what was indicated in the correlation results, is the significant difference in perception towards interactivity with faculty members between fourth-year students and first- and second-year students. A potential reason for this could be the classroom sizes of the first- and second-year students. The language skills courses that the first- and second-year students experience are typically large, with classes of up to 30 students. These classes are also mostly instructional, or monologic (see Kettle, 2017), where students concentrate on improving their own language competencies. Another reason could be that first- and second-year students have different teachers for every language skills class they take, unlike their third- and fourth-year counterparts. In the Thai program, advanced courses are typically delivered by a core group of 4 or 5 faculty members. Perhaps having a core group of instructors helps with the development of familiarity and professional rapport, leading to better interaction between faculty members and students, and allowing more opportunities for dialogic teaching, where students are encouraged to contribute to the development of lessons and teaching materials (see Kettle, 2017). Another factor could be

that more senior students are acclimatized and have socialized well into the university setting, as seen in Wong's (2004) study. These results, we believe, are crucial, because unlike the previous studies mentioned earlier in the paper, our study gives a more expansive view of the English language learning experiences of Thai English majors, or Thai students that go beyond students' attitudes or the types of learning motivation by presenting different dimensions of how students are engaged.

Though the results seem to lean towards being positive, some negative experiences of the students did emerge from the post-survey interview. This supports the notion that negative affect may have detrimental results on students' engagement. Some excerpts which we felt stood out are as follows:

[6] I have personal problems. Maybe activities I don't want to participate. And I am shy. For instance, discussion I don't want to communicate with others [ST4]

[7] So many reasons. It's not about the class; it's about myself. My friends all study hard, except me [ST5]

[8] I have financial problems but I don't think the primary problem is from the teachers [ST1]

[9] When I read something there are a lot of new vocabularies and many sentences that I can't understand. This makes me stop reading. I feel very bored when I learn vocabulary. I can't learn reading [ST4]

These experiences reflect instances of students being disengaged from the learning environment. Studies have indicated that the more complex lives of students today may have a setback on engagement, wherein students will need to learn how to balance personal issues with other matters (e.g., [6] and [7]). For instance, Baron and Corbin (2012) reported that it is becoming more acceptable today for university students to work in order to afford basic necessities, and in some cases, to pay tuition fees. In some cases, when financial problems become overbearing, it may affect a student's engagement with his/her studies, as seen in [ST1]. Another factor which prohibits engagement is the desire to graduate quickly. This has brought about different delivery formats of courses, such as intensive courses or even courses delivered online. More than this, the educational institution itself may also negatively affect engagement. For example, Bryson and Hand (2007) state that even curriculum design and its implementation, or the irrelevance of learning outcomes and teaching practices may impede student engagement. The issue of disengagement may also stem from the lack of English language proficiency of the students, or being in a context that is overwhelmingly unfamiliar to them. This experience is common among students who find themselves in situations where they are unable to communicate effectively (e.g. Holmes, 2006). What this may lead to is a loss of interest in studying altogether, such as that seen in [9].

Pedagogical Implications

From this study, we suggest some implications for higher education pedagogy and curriculum development, especially for English language programs in ELF contexts. These implications are also informed by recommendations made by Saengboon (2004) and Zepke and Leach (2010).

(a) Faculty members, especially those from other cultural backgrounds, should not restrict their pedagogical approaches based on unfounded or general assumptions towards

students of the local setting. Relevant approaches that can be considered could be those that were mentioned earlier (e.g., task-based learning; communicative approaches). Nonetheless, as suggested by Zepke and Leach (2010), faculty members should not embark on curriculum planning on their own; instead; institutions should recognize and form communities that can provide support.

(b) Students need to be socialized with pedagogical approaches employed by international instructors. On the other hand, instructors should not assume that the learning norms they are used to would be similar to that of their (new) teaching context. This stems from the belief that learning approaches are contextually driven, albeit at times being culturally constrained (e.g. Wong, 2004). This has been proposed by other researchers as well (Cheng, 2000; Holmes, 2006) and discussed by Saengboon (2004) and its implementation in a university setting be observed in the study by McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007).

(c) Curriculum planning should deliberately aim to consolidate pedagogical approaches across different levels of education in different courses. This is to ensure students not only develop a sense of familiarity towards particular learning approaches, but it will also help them see how these approaches may be applicable in different settings. This may be accomplished through scaffolding or a flipped approach in teaching. This will help students developing cultural capital, wherein students, especially those considered a minority, are socialized into the different ways of operating within a higher education institution and their immediate communities (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study was able to add to our understanding of Thai students' perspective towards English language learning, there are at least two limitations that should be considered for future studies. First, as mentioned, our results may only be applicable to the context of private international higher education institutions in Thailand. The reason being that language landscape found in other universities in the region may be more hegemonic. Second, the results of this study are self-reports. To ensure validity, triangulation may be required. A longitudinal approach may also be needed to better comprehend the macro- and micro-language domains in a higher education setting in light of the dimensions of engagement.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the perceptions towards engagement of Thai English majors studying in an international environment that operates with English as a lingua franca. It also served as an expansion of the study and findings of Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai (2012). What was seen in our study is how the international environment gave them access to international faculty members whose pedagogical styles may be different, as well as international students with whom Thai students may socialize. The results indicated that there was a significant correlation between different dimensions of engagement. This indicates that the sample was not necessarily culturally constrained in terms of how they viewed language learning. Instead, the international setting where they find themselves may have been an influential factor in contextualizing how the sample viewed engagement. This further supports the significance to consider engagement within the context of the students, especially because engagement is a multidimensional construct, which sees the interrelationship between antecedents and actions, followed by achievements and outcomes. According to Kettle (2017), the antecedents are the individual, collective, and contextual conditions that shape, direct, and maintain the different aspects of engagement, which subsequently indexes the type of outcomes achieved. While students are important social entities that influence engagement, it is the teaching practices that is an essential mediator for

student engagement, as it furnishes "conditions of possibility within the institution for international students to participate in the practices of a course" which inducts students into expected and accepted dimensions for engagement (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, social, and affective) (Kettle, 2017, p. 170). This may be a useful consideration for higher education institutions interested in providing their students with an international experience and a contextually supportive environment that is helpful for the development as students and as English language users.

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