

**CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WORKPLACE
EVIDENCE FROM A THAI HIGH SCHOOL**



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EVIDENCE FROM A THAI HIGH SCHOOL**

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.....
Mr. Kritsanapong Piyayodilokchai
Candidate

.....
Dr.Astrid Kainzbauer
Ph.D.
Advisor

.....
Assoc. Prof.Gerard Tocquer,
Ph.D.
Chairperson

.....
Assoc. Prof. Annop Tanlamai,
Ph.D.
Dean
College of Management
Mahidol University

.....
Asst. Prof.Parisa Rungruang,
Ph.D.
Committee member

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Kritsanapong Piyayodilokchai

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KRITSANAPONG PIYAYODILOKCHAI 5549124

M.M. (ENTREPRENEURSHIP MANAGEMENT)

THEMATIC PAPER ADVISORY COMMITTEE: DR. ASTRID KAINZBAUER, Ph.D., ASSOC. PROF. GERARD TOCQUER, Ph.D., ASST. PROF. PARISA RUNGRUANG, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss about aspects of Thai culture where foreign teachers felt a need to adapt their existing strategies to teach more effectively. This research focuses on one bilingual high school in Bangkok. Data were gathered through in-depth interviewing approach based on the cultural intelligence frame work. The qualitative information obtained was analyzed through content analysis. Six main aspects were identified in the findings which are: passivity (choēi), laziness (kīetkhrān), taking the easy way out (ruksabuy), fun (sanuk), kindness (jai dee) with strict rules, and communication in Thai-English (Tinglish). By being aware of the identified cultural aspects, foreign teachers can adjust their teaching style more effectively.

KEY WORDS: Cultural intelligence / High school / Thai classroom / Culturally responsive teaching

23 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalized world where people are closely interconnected. Globalization drives economic change through foreign investment. Our society and economy no longer reflect a single cultural identity: we live in a multi-cultural world. Our exposure to different cultures has a huge effect on our daily life from childhood to adulthood. Studying the English language with a foreign teacher, working with a boss from overseas, developing relationships with foreign customers, or even working in a multicultural team, these have become the new reality. As globalization shapes our economic position, the education system is also affected by this economic shift. The Thai education system has evolved to reflect this rapid change. Proficiency in a second language offers a huge boost to future job prospects. As a result, parents who want their children to have a better future are looking for schools that employ native English speakers to teach the language.

As demand grows for qualified English teachers from abroad, schools need to hire more foreign teachers. It is worth noting that some foreign teachers do not succeed in improving English skills in their students even if they have been teaching for a long time. However, other foreign teachers achieve a high standard of teaching and their students are successful in learning English. The major problem for unsuccessful teachers is the failure to adjust their teaching practices to a different cultural context.

To be successful in handling different cultures, what guarantees your success is neither IQ nor EQ (emotional intelligence), neither a good resume nor proven expertise. It is the ability to work or interact effectively in culturally diverse situations, what is known as CQ (or cultural intelligence) (Thomas, 2006). The concept of CQ enables us to explain why some people take only a few months to get used to a new culture while others can take up to several years. It is therefore

important to know what aspects of Thai culture are most important for foreign teachers to adopt as part of their teaching strategies.

The research question for this study

How do foreign teachers adjust their teaching style in Thai classrooms to create an effective learning environment?

Research Scope

This research focuses only on foreign teachers working in School E. School E is located in Bangkok. It is a public school that conducts a fully bilingual program in Thai and English from Kindergarten 1 (3 year-olds) to Matayom 6 (17 year-olds). The school has more than 200 Thai teachers and just over 100 foreign teachers. Of the foreign teachers, 50% are from BANA countries (Britain, Australia/New Zealand and North America), about 30% are from the Philippines and the rest are from other European and African nations. This research focuses on the high school education level (Matayom 4 to 6) and on English language teachers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As we live in a globalized world where distance is no obstacle, there is more job flexibility between countries and across continents. This gives people who are proficient in English great job opportunities. Many Thai parents understand the importance of English for their children's future and want their children to study in a school where they will be taught by native English teachers at any early age. Schools have been eager to take on this opportunity. A new curriculum called the English Program (EP) has been created and many foreigners hired to teach English. The classroom, therefore, is the place where the two different cultures meet. For those teachers who fail to know or understand cultural differences, it will be difficult to live in Thailand and teach Thai students. To succeed in teaching in a different culture we need to understand the concept of cultural intelligence or CQ and to understand Thai culture.

Cultural Intelligence

The definition of general intelligence given by Schmidt and Hunter (2000, p. 3) is "the ability to grasp and reason correctly with the abstractions and solve problems". In past research, the concept of intelligence has often been limited to an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) that tends to be used for measuring the ability to solve academic problems. Later studies have identified other types of intelligence; for example, Sternberg and Detterman (1986) differentiate between academic intelligence and practical intelligence. This research has been extended to the field of cultural intelligence (CQ).

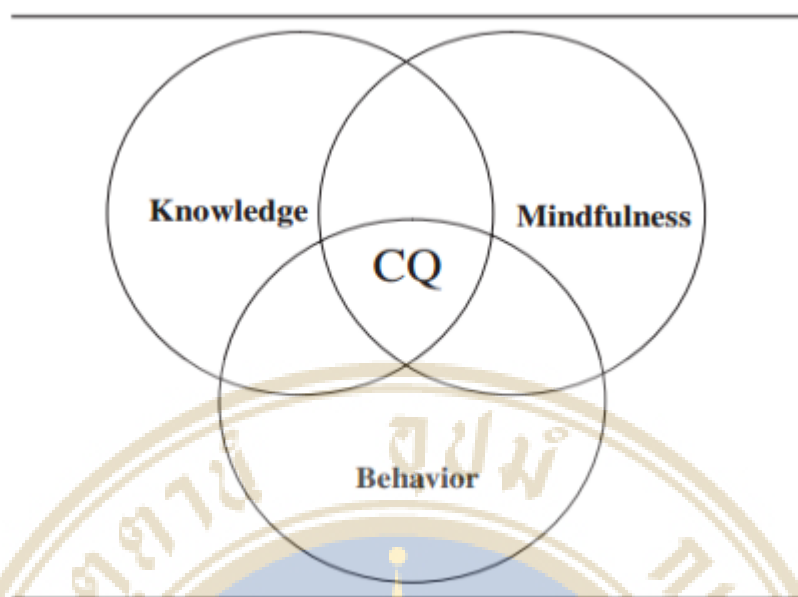


Figure 2.1 Components of cultural intelligence¹

Many studies have attempted to define CQ and their definitions are similar. All authors say that CQ is about “ability” and “different cultural context”. Ang et al. (2007) define it as the ability to function effectively in a “culturally diverse setting”. I pick Thomas’s (2006) definition. He defines as “the capability to deal effectively with people from different backgrounds”. He also says that CQ includes three overlapped domains: knowledge, mindfulness, and behavior; this is very similar to the arguments made by Earley and Mosakowski (2004). They define three core features of QC as head (thinking), heart (energizing), and body (action). Their concepts of head and body are similar to Thomas’s concepts of knowledge and behavior but for Thomas mindfulness is the key, linking knowledge and action while for Earley and Mosakowski the emphasis is on energizing to build personal confidence.

For teachers working in a foreign context, CQ is a key indicator for success in teaching practice. With a high level of CQ, teachers can understand cultural differences and adapt to the foreign context quickly. Such teachers are more valuable to the school and can easily be accepted in society. To achieve a high CQ, teachers

¹Source: Thomas importance of mindfulness(p.81)

must have good knowledge, be mindful and act appropriately. Good knowledge in this context means that teachers are required to have a general knowledge about foreign culture and to understand the differences between the foreign culture and their own home culture. Teachers also need to pay attention to the people around them. Learning another culture can be achieved through observation that is observing how students behave and what they do and say. Teachers need to be mindful in order to act appropriately. Lastly, with knowledge and mindfulness set, teachers must show appropriate behavior (verbal and non-verbal) in the new setting based on their knowledge and mindfulness. For instance, displaying emotional aggression is frowned on in the Thai context: foreign teachers should at all times appear calm and content.

According to Thomas's definition of CQ, knowledge is the first component and it describes the knowledge of cultural differences. This study aims to discover the aspects of Thai culture that are most needed by foreign teachers working in Thailand. We therefore extend the scope of this literature review to include research on Thai culture in general and on Thai culture in the school context.

Thai Culture

Thailand's cultural dimensions are confirmed by various researchers as having a high degree of femininity (Komin, 1991, Thomas 2006, Schmidt, 1998) and which also highly values authority (Kainzbauer and Hunt 2014). This can be interpreted to mean that Thai people value harmony, interpersonal skills, and fun, and at the same time they pay respect to seniority. For example, children respect parents, students respect teachers; subordinates respect their bosses, and so on.

Table 2.1 Thai clusters according to importance

Clusters	Definition
Ego orientation	Concern to keep face. Face-saving, avoiding criticism, and <i>kreng jai</i>
Grateful relationship orientation	This Thai social value is expressed by <i>bunghun/katanyu</i> .
Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation	Thai people value harmony and compromise; <i>jai yen/mai pen rai</i> . A focus on easy social relations.
Flexibility and adjustment orientation	Nothing is so important that it cannot be changed. Not-principle oriented.
Religio-psychical orientation	Strongly influenced by Buddhism. Karma beliefs.
Education and competence orientation	Education seen as a means of improving social position.
Interdependence orientation	Thai people help each other.
Fun-pleasure orientation	Thais place great value on fun (<i>sanuk</i>); if it is not fun, it is not interesting.
Achievement-task orientation	Thais are motivated more by social achievement (maintaining good relationships) than task completion.

Source: Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns by Komin S.

Another study led by Komin (1991) identified Thai values (Ekalak Thai) in clusters based on instrumental values, as shown in Table 2.1. The study indicates that there are nine dominant values with a clear focus on interpersonal issues, “since Thai are a society of relationship” (p.7).

Kainzbauer and Hunt (2014) explored CQ in Thai universities, interviewing foreign teachers in graduate schools. Their research confirmed similar behavioral norms as in previous studies: namely fun (*sanuk*), hierarchy (*kreng jai*), authority with a kind heart (*jai dee*), and collectivism.

Being aware (or mindful) of the nine Thai value clusters (Komin,1991) should help foreign teachers make their teaching sessions more effective. The values of fun (*sanuk*), hierarchy (*kreng jai*) and collectivism are confirmed in two studies which imply that they are strong Thai values. The idea of authority with a kind heart suggests a benign relationship between the lower level (students, subordinate or *ruknonng*) and the one who is higher in the hierarchy (boss, teacher) (Kainzbauer, 2012). Kindness is also one of the values associated with an orientation towards smooth interpersonal relationships.

The concept of CQ becomes more important in diverse cultural contexts such as today's classroom. Foreign teachers represent a minority ethnic group. Accordingly, foreign teachers have a responsibility to be aware of and adapt to new cultural values in order to create a productive learning environment. One study into the effectiveness of teaching in ethnically diverse classrooms (Gay 2001) suggests that to enable effective teaching, culturally responsive teaching must use "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching more effectively" (p 106). Culturally responsive teaching consists of five essential elements, the development of a cultural diversity knowledge base including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring, building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the way lessons are taught. The study also suggests that the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught in a way that reflects their culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research question, I conducted in-depth interviews and non-participate observation for data collection because the factors that influence good cultural adjustment of foreign teachers teaching in Thai classrooms are unknown. The discovery of factors needs to be conducted using the qualitative approach. Each interview session will take about 30 minutes. During the interview, open-ended questions are used because the scope of the question is broad and the information gained from open-ended questions may come from different perspectives, different points of view and this will be useful for finding all possible factors to answer the research question. Moreover, open questions would develop an open conversation; finding out more detail, and finding out the person's opinion or issues.

I divide the questions into 3 sets, the lists of questions are provided below:

Set 1: Demographic & Biographic questions

1. Biographical information and warm-up questions (teaching experience, create friendly atmosphere)

Set 2: Specific questions

2. What are the differences of teaching Thai students compared to teaching in your country?
3. What are the difficulties you found in teaching Thai students?
4. How do you handle the difficulties and differences of teaching in Thai classrooms?
5. What changes in your prior teaching style have you made for teaching Thai students?

Set 3: Asking for suggestions

6. If there is a foreign teacher coming to teach Thai students, what advice and suggestions you are going to give?

During the interview, the probing technique is adopted to ensure the validity of the data. The probing is the technique that is used to get deeper information and make the answers stay within the focus of study. Probing can be done by asking deeper by using questions such as: what do you mean by...? or asking for more details in that topic, for example, “what exactly you mean by Thai students are passive”. Reflective note taking is also used to record observed data because sometime respondents might be uncomfortable with the questions and they express it on their face or gesture which cannot be determined by voice recording.

The sample is convenient as interviewees are 4 foreign teachers from School E, in Bangkok, who have relevant experience and are willing to participate in the study. The selection of interviewees are based on these criteria

Table 3.1 Respondents’ selection criteria

Teaching experience outside Thailand
Teaching experience \geq 3 years in Thailand
Foreign Nationality
Gain positive feedback from school management

Firstly, in three years of teaching in Thai environment, foreigners are able to learn, get familiar, and adapt to the diverse culture context. And having teaching experience in their home country can make the respondents have better understanding and able to compare the culture differences.

Secondly, the interviewees must not be Thai as the scope of this study is the culture intelligence of foreign teachers that come to teach in Thai classroom.

Lastly, I ask the school management for the teachers that gain positive feedback from students. However, there is no formal instructor evaluation in this school, so I have to ask for informal feedback from the management.

Table 3.2 Respondents' Information

Respondent	Nationality	Years of teaching in Thailand
Respondent A	British	5
Respondent C	American	3
Respondent M	American	4
Respondent W	Hungarian	7

After collecting data from interviewees, I synthesize the data using a content analysis approach to analyze qualitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This method attempts to find similarities and patterns among the data which are then grouped together called "category". In order to synthesize the data, we have to transcribe what each interviewee is saying. We can then highlight and identify the key factors, and group statements that have similar meaning together. And later, I compare this research's result to the similar research conducted by Komin (1991), Kainzbauer and Hunt (2014) The analysis will tell us how foreigner teachers attempt to adapt their teaching style to match Thai student culture and increase the academic performance of their students.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Using data from the four teachers interviewed in the study, the core aspects of Thai culture that teachers feel to be necessary for inclusion in their existing teaching strategies can be grouped into six main areas: passivity (*choēi*), laziness (*kētchrān*), taking the easy way out (*ruksabuy*), fun (*sanuk*), kindness (*jai dee*) with strict rules, and communication in Thai-English (Tinglish).

During the interviews, the four respondents were asked about the adaptations they had made to their existing teaching style to develop more effective teaching and learning environments. The answers of all respondents were based on their individual experiences over the time they have been teaching in Thailand.

Passivity (choēi)

All the respondents agreed that Thai students are very passive. This means that students do not like to participate actively in the classroom, especially when teachers ask questions during the lesson to check a student understands. Even when a teacher calls a student by name, that student remains passive and will not answer the question. The reasons behind this behavior are described below from the Thai perspective. Firstly, the students can answer the question but do not want to be the focus of attention in the classroom (*aowna*). Secondly, they are not sure whether the question or answer is correct or appropriate and they do not want to lose face (*siana*) by making a mistake. And lastly they are shy to speak in English.

Respondent A commented: *“My students are very passive. Whenever I ask, they don’t react. This is different from my country. When I do asking checking, I don’t get any answer. This makes [it] a little hard to teach them”*.

Respondents C and M responded in a similar way agreeing that Thai students do not answer questions in class. This creates a problem as teachers cannot then find out how well their students are following the lessons. Even when teachers

ask students to raise their hands, it is still impossible to get everyone to participate. The respondents felt this was one-way-communication. To create a more effective learning environment, both parties must communicate with each other.

Respondent A gave an example of how he had enabled students to participate more. *“Instead of waiting for a student to ask a question, I go up to them and say gently in Thai “khow jai mai” (do you understand?) “thamdaina” (you can ask me)”*. This encourages students to ask questions and to give answers in the classroom.

Another approach was suggested by Respondent M. He motivates his students to participate in class by giving free snacks, small prizes or high scores to the students who contribute in the classroom. *“This pretty much helps my classes to participate”* commented Respondent M.

Laziness (kīetkhrān)

Thai people usually say *Khikiet Tum* (lazy to do) whenever they are assigned a task. Based on the interview data, three out of four respondents agreed that Thai students are lazy. Lazy in this context means that they come to class late, don't pay attention in the classroom and even refuse to do their assignments. Listed below are examples from each respondent.

Respondent A commented: *“My students are lazy; they are not independent and they are not eager to learn new things.”* Respondent A argued that laziness in Thai students comes from the way they are taught at home. The respondent states that in the United States, children are taught to eat on their own by the age of three: even if they make a mess, they will learn from the process. Thai children, on the other hand, are fed by their parents until the age of 8. This helps to make Thai students so dependent that they always seek help from others and in the end refuse to learn anything new by themselves.

Respondent W found something similar: *“A high percentage of Thai students are lazy and under-performing.”* Respondent W gave an example of how to overcome this, by forcing students to study: *“I ask questions of students who are not paying attention in class to make them pay more attention. The good students*

appreciate when I pay them attention but the bad students do not appreciate it because they don't want to learn. But I know what's best for my students."

In contrast to Respondent W, Respondent C just gave up on some students and focused on the good students: *"When bad students don't come to class, the whole class becomes better"*.

Taking the easy way out (ruksabuy)

Ruksabuy is another significant attribute of the Thai student mentioned by most of the respondents. *Ruksabuy* has no exact equivalent in English. Its meaning is taking the easy way out - doing everything that is easy even it is bad. In the classroom context *ruksabuy* can also mean cheating. Cheating violates an accepted standard in order to achieve specific goals. In the classroom context, cheating might mean disobeying the rules to complete an assignment or to get good a grade during an examination. Cheating is viewed as negative behavior causing many issues around the world; in many cases cheating in the wider world can lead to wide-scale corruption.

Respondent A said that his students often say *"Getting things done the right way is hard, copying is easier"*. This copying can refer to books, DVDs, homework or exam papers, and so on. He continued, *"I think it is a part of the culture, it is ok to copy."*

Respondent W identified problems with students cheating in exams as follows: *"Written exams are always a problem. They have some magic way to copy. I don't know. I try everything to check it. I know it was not possible. I don't know how they do it. I think students are cleverer than teachers."*

Respondents C and M found cheating very common in Thai classrooms. Students usually copy each other's assignments. Respondent C called this *"roum gun pun"* (helping each other copying). Respondent M mentioned that *"In the US, some students also copy but it is done in a sneaky way"*. Thai students, on the other hand, are not afraid of being caught; they do it in an obvious way.

The respondents tried several ways to prevent students from cheating. Respondent W, for example, introduced oral exams and reflective essays instead of simply giving the class a written exam. Respondent C does not give homework but

asks students to do the work in class. Respondent M makes multiple sets of exam papers.

Fun (sanuk)

Another aspect of Thai culture that foreign teachers need to be aware of is fun. Thais place a high value on fun (sanuk); in everything they do, they always seek for enjoyment. If it's not fun, it's not worth doing. This is reflected in the way that Thai people often use the word *len* (play) for many of their activities. Other examples include "*lenhoon*" and *lengaanmeuang* or "*play*" stock market or "*play*" politics. The meaning of this "*play*" is for the fun sake.

Respondent C commented: "*I try to make my lessons more fun. Usually in the fun lessons, most of my classes participate and we can learn things. Usually I attempt to make the lesson more fun as Thai culture is full of...enjoy this, enjoy that. So we sing a song, play games and make jokes - like making a sentence that is funny and then they enjoy learning.*"

In a similar way, Respondent M confirmed that it made a big difference to student participation and engagement when he made lessons more fun. Students now like his classes; they prepare for them and pay more attention in the classroom without his telling them to. In his first year teaching in Thailand, he noticed that the students did not like his class because no-one paid attention. Once he realized that his teaching style was the problem he adjusted his teaching to be more interactive by including more games and competitions in class to make it more fun.

Kindness (jai dee) with strict rules

Respondent M pointed out that Thai students like their teachers to be kind-hearted (*jai dee*) and not emotionally aggressive (*Du*). From the Thai perspective, a smooth interpersonal relationship is a crucial factor. A definition of a good teacher from the Thai student perspective is a person who is calm, polite, friendly, kind, helpful and caring of students.

Although students may love kind teachers, love does not mean that they learn. "I am kind but I am very strict" said respondent A. He sets very strict rules at the first class and follows the rules strictly. In a situation where some students disobey

the rules, he will not get angry at them but will use a soft word and say it gently. For example, when one of his students is late for class, he allows that student to sit down but marks him as being absent in the register: *“You are marked as absent but you may sit in class”*.

Communication in Thai-English (Tinglish)

In Thailand, people communicate in Thai and we rarely see or use English in our daily life. Most texts are translated in Thai for our convenience, for example, cartoons and instructions; even movies are dubbed into Thai. Since English is not necessary in daily life, not many Thais are able to understand it. Even when Thai people understand and are able to communicate in basic English, they still think in Thai and translate those thoughts into English word by word, resulting in incorrect sentence structure and incorrect meanings. Native Thais have defined this imperfect English as Tinglish.

During the early stages of our respondents' teaching in Thailand, they all found it is difficult to communicate to Thai students in English because the students didn't know what they meant. The form of the English language that Thai students use is very different from the English used in an English-speaking country or by native speakers. Respondent A pointed out that *“It takes some time to understand how Thai people speak English. If you have good observation you will quickly be able to understand the vocabulary and grammar that Thai students use.”*

Respondent W revealed that it took him about four months to understand how students used English. During the first four months, he carefully observed the students in his class, looking at the way they talked. After he understood what they were saying, he tried to correct their use of English but he found it a very hard job.

To overcome this situation, all respondents agreed that studying the Thai language is a must. Respondent W said *“I chose to learn Thai myself and that helps a lot in communication”*. He also pointed out that foreign teachers should speak in a way that Thai students can understand easily using Thai accents and grammar structure.

These interviews of foreign high school teachers in Thailand indicate that there are six main areas where teachers should adapt their teaching style to match the needs of Thai learners. By comparing this with the research literature, we can see that two of these aspects are also mentioned in the Kainzbauer and Hunt study (2014). These are the aspects of fun and kindness with strict rules (*jai dee*).

Table 4.1 Matching high school culture to Thai value clusters

Thai student culture	Thai value
Passivity	Ego-orientation
Kindness (<i>jai dee</i>)	Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation
Laziness & taking the easy way out (ruksabuy)	Flexibility and adjustment orientation
Fun	Fun-pleasure orientation
Tinglish	-

Table 4.1 indicates the match between Thai high school culture and Thai values based on Komin's research (1991). Five of the six values are matched. The final aspect that does not match and is not mentioned in graduate student culture is using imperfect English (Tinglish) to communicate.

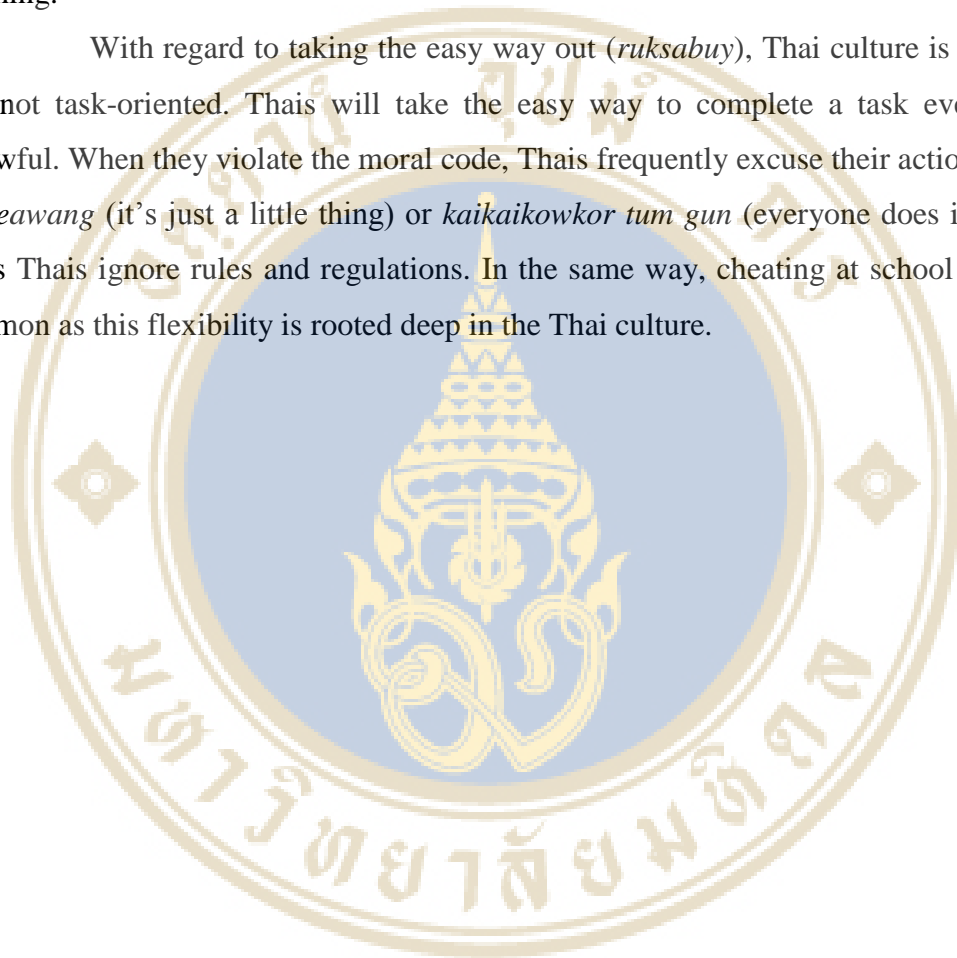
The results from the teacher interviews can be supported with evidence from research into Thai values (Komin 1991) as outlined below.

One of the dominant values common among Thai students is passivity. Passivity in this context means the idleness of Thai students in the classroom. They avoid being "spotlighted" in class (*aowna*) so they remain silent until the class ends but this silence does not mean they do not learn. Passivity is related to ego-orientation and is all about saving face. Thai students fear losing face (*siana*). They do not want to ask or answer a question in class because they do not want to be humiliated if they make a mistake.

Laziness and taking the easy way out (ruksabuy) are related to flexibility and adjustment orientation. As for laziness, Thai people are relaxed and do not always take things seriously. When they are asked to complete an assignment, they always

postpone it until the deadline is near. Thais call this behavior *pat-wan-bpra-gan-prung*. Moreover, Komin suggests that Thais see education as a tool to increase their social status; they do not care so much about content or knowledge. However, in the high school context, where students have no other option but to study (forced by law and their parents), some respondents said most Thai students feel that education is not important to them and often skip classes, come late and in the end they do not learn anything.

With regard to taking the easy way out (*ruksabuy*), Thai culture is relaxed and not task-oriented. Thais will take the easy way to complete a task even it is unlawful. When they violate the moral code, Thais frequently excuse their actions with *niddeawang* (it's just a little thing) or *kaiikowkor tum gun* (everyone does it). This helps Thais ignore rules and regulations. In the same way, cheating at school is very common as this flexibility is rooted deep in the Thai culture.



CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Thai high school has positioned itself as a bilingual school with an emphasis on the English Program (EP). Foreign teachers are a crucial resource. The school has to hire teachers with high qualifications and teaching experience in different countries. It is therefore important that teachers become aware of, understand, and adapt to the new culture in order to teach more effectively. Respondent A explained that some teachers adapt very fast (in one to three months) but some teachers take longer to understand Thai student culture, up to a year or more. To accelerate the process of learning a new culture, schools should provide assistance. This study recommends three areas in which school management could help their foreign teachers better prepare to teach students effectively.

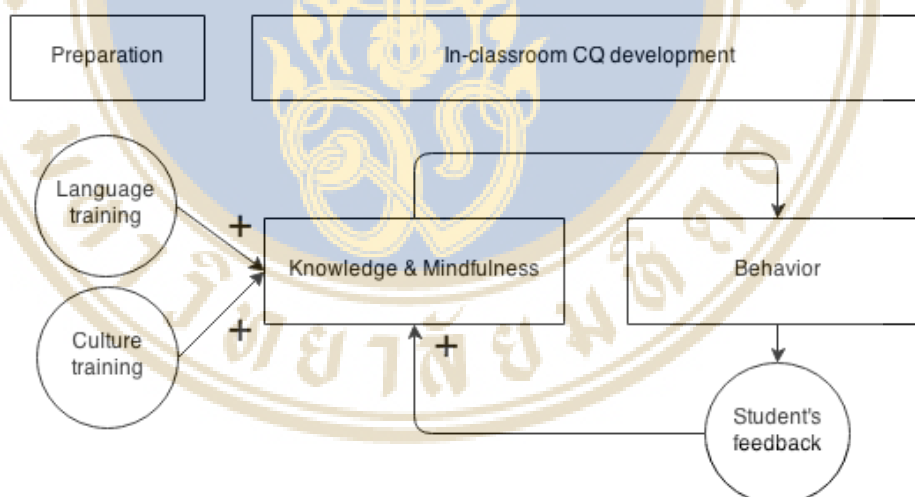


Figure 5.1 Foreign teacher's CQ development cycle

The recommendations are based on CQ components. During the preparation stage, language and culture training should be provided for new foreign teachers. Language and culture training will prepare teachers teaching in the Thai classroom where there are cultural differences. Mindfulness can be developed through cultural training. After teachers have developed two domains of CQ, they will practice

what they learnt in real classroom situations. Feedback (which will turn to knowledge) from students will help in the development of appropriate behavior.

Recommendations

Language. Understanding the language is the most important area that foreigners should understand in order to learn the culture. In order to live in Thailand, foreigners should learn about Thai culture, and to learn about Thai culture, it is important to know what Thais are saying. If foreign teachers are able to understand the basic day to day Thai language, it will help them adjust to Thai culture more quickly. The school should provide Thai language classes for those foreigners unable to understand basic Thai language. The school could conduct Thai language classes using their own resources, e.g. Thai teachers. The benefit of understanding the Thai language will not only quicken the process of cultural adaptation but will also help teaching in the Thai classroom since most high school students in Thailand are afraid of speaking English and even when they do, it is a Thai version of English (Tinglish). Where foreign teachers can understand what Thai students are saying this will create productive teaching environment.

Currently no Thai language courses are provided by the school. However, all the respondents learnt Thai and were able to communicate in Thai. As there was no opportunity to learn at the school, three of the respondents chose to study in Thai language institutes. One teacher taught himself. Respondent C mentioned that all the teachers he knows are studying Thai. From this it is clear that learning the local language is important to foreign teachers.

Culture. After language, the next step for the foreign teacher is to understand more about Thai culture, especially Thai student behavior. One of the respondents mentioned that a new foreign teacher should be better prepared for teaching Thai students. He said that “you have to forget everything you’ve learnt before and learn new things from students”. The Thai classroom is very different from other places. It is better to understand the classroom from the student perspective. Thai students are passive and therefore may not ask any questions in class. Without knowing this, teachers might think that everybody understands the lesson. New foreign teachers can learn Thai culture from both Thai teachers and foreign teachers

who have been teaching in Thailand for a number of years. The school should offer a cultural class to give insight into Thai student culture and should share knowledge about teaching styles. Knowledge sharing and Thai culture classes would enhance the CQ of the individual.

Some respondents revealed that they learnt Thai culture from asking other foreigners, from observing Thai students in the classroom or even from construction site workers who lived near their home and from the maid and security guard at the school. As the school lacks any formal cultural training, foreign teachers have to learn by themselves. This makes the process of learning a new culture slower. To speed up the process, the school should provide culture training and formal knowledge exchange.

Feedback. Even though foreign teachers have already acquired cultural knowledge and have already put it into action in the classroom, the process of learning and adapting to the new culture is a continuous one. Foreign teachers will continue to learn from students in the classroom as there is no absolutely correct approach to all students in every situation. For this reason, it is important for teachers to know what the students feel about their teaching style. Formal feedback is needed so that teachers can see which area or aspect needs to be improved.

Currently, all teachers (both Thai and foreign) have no opportunity to get formal feedback from students. Foreign teachers can only observe students in the school to see whether they enjoy learning in the classroom or if they are interested talk to the students outside the classroom. This informal feedback is not sufficient to give useful information on improving teaching practices. With formal feedback from students, teachers would know how students assess their classes and could then make adjustments to create better learning environments.

Limitations and Further Research

The research has some major limitations. The first limitation concerns the short timeframe which limits the scope of this research. The second limitation is that sampling is limited to four foreign teachers from one school. The research data comes from the interviewees' perspective only; it cannot be the representative of all foreign teachers in Thailand

For further research, it would be interesting to examine the CQ of the students in the classroom faced with teachers from diverse backgrounds. The learner's point of view would illustrate other ways of cultural adaptation, since CQ varies from person to person, and it would be interesting to know how students adjust their learning to improve their academic performance.

Conclusion

This research identified the major areas that foreign teachers felt it necessary to address in order to improve teaching effectiveness. The study is based on the perspective of well-respected foreign teachers who have tried to adapt to Thai culture and have been teaching in Thai classrooms for more than three years.

This study provides evidence that cultural differences make it hard for foreign teachers teaching Thai students. Teachers need time to adjust to the new culture. For some this takes only a few months but for others over a year may be needed. School management should also help foreign teachers prepare. Such support would help create excellent teachers as one of the critical resources of the school.

This research also makes recommendations for the school to help their foreign teachers adjust to cultural differences. The recommendations focus mainly on the development of CQ components, namely knowledge, mindfulness and behavior. The recommendations are to offer Thai language courses, cultural training and after-class evaluation. Adopting these recommendations would help foreign teachers become familiar with Thai culture, and adapt to it. From the perspective of the school, it would be successfully developing its most valuable resources and ensuring more productive classroom interaction.

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