



Motivation and Attitudes towards English Language Learning by Hmong EFL Learners

แรงจูงใจและทัศนคติที่มีต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนชาวม้ง

Natcha Charoenthongmankhong¹

ณัชชา เจริญทองมั่งคอง²

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes and level of motivation towards learning English of 70 Hmong students from the first year to the fourth year at Naresuan University in 2021. The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire, using a four-point Likert scale, which was adopted from (Imsa-ard, 2020). The findings revealed that the attitudes in learning English of Hmong students at Naresuan University were positive, and they were highly motivated in learning English. They also insisted that English was crucial and was a key to communicate with foreigners. Based on the research's findings, some relevant and beneficial motivational learning implications are recommended for improving and enhancing students' attitudes and motivation such as emphasizing the importance of speaking English than focusing on grammar, which was in accordance with their responses to the open-ended question. However, English grammar should not be ignored because it was a significant part in many exams such as TOEIC, TOEFL, CEPT, or even exam in class. Furthermore, lecturers should prepare suitable teaching that does not exert too much pressure on the students. This would make them feel at ease to learn English.

Keywords: Attitudes, Motivation, English language learning, EFL students

Introduction

English is considered an international or global language, it is extensively utilized as a key to open the door to communication and mutual understanding between people from different countries. English also serves as the official language, the medium of teaching, a compulsory topic, and a lingua franca in Thailand (Prasongporn, n.d.). Even though English is regarded as a foreign language in Thailand, it has played a significant role in Thai education from primary schools to the universities for over a century (Darasawang, 2007). However, Thai students' English scores are not very impressive. To be specific, EF English Proficiency Index ranking (2020) reported that Thailand was ranked 89th out of 100 countries and 20th out of 24 Asian countries in terms of English proficiency. Furthermore, this revealed that Thailand was very low in English proficiency based on the EF EPI score of 419 (EF English Proficiency Index, 2020).

Various factors play a role in learning English as a foreign language, and one of those factors is motivation (Gardner, 1985) and (Dörnyei, 1998). Duckworth et al. (2011) and Eccles & Wigfield (2002) stated that individuals with less talent but higher motivation to achieve their goals are more likely to succeed than those with talent but no ability to set goals and stay focused on reaching them. The question is: What was level of motivation of university students? Hence, the researchers aimed to investigate the level of motivation from university students in a public university.

¹ Undergraduate student, Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University

² นิสิตระดับปริญญาตรี สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

Research question

What are the attitudes and level of motivation of Hmong students at Naresuan University towards learning English?

Research objective

To investigate the attitudes and level of motivation towards learning English of Hmong students at Naresuan University.

Significance of the study

The study of motivation can be beneficial to not only English lecturers in the Faculty of Humanities but also English teachers at school to design interesting and appropriate teaching for their students. Whenever teachers set up appropriate challenges for students to boost their self-confidence to work through the tasks, their level of motivation goes up. In terms of students, this study could raise their awareness on motivation. Whenever students become motivated, they tend to think longer and harder and enjoy the class. In turn, they will ask deeper, more thought-provoking questions.

Literature Review

This section is divided into two major sections. It begins with a theoretical framework. The final section covers previous research studies.

Theoretical framework

Motivation can influence success and failure in English learners. Spolsky (1990) stated that motivated students are likely to learn more quickly than students who are less motivated. That is, less motivated students are more likely to lose focus, misbehave, and generate discipline issues in a given learning situation. Highly motivated students, on the other hand, will participate actively and pay more attention to a certain learning assignment or activity. How things work can be seen in the following theoretical framework.

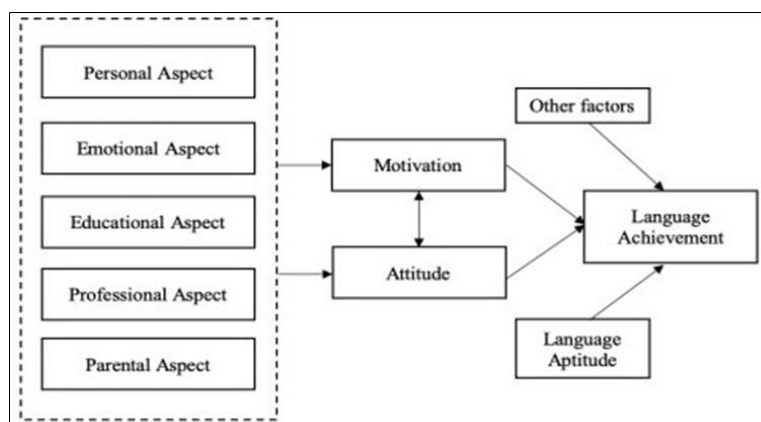


Figure 1 Research Framework of Motivation and Attitudes adopted from (Imsa-ard, 2020)

In Figure 1, the terms “attitudes” and “motivation” usually go together because they have close relationship. Although motivation and attitudes are thought to be different, there is a link between the two, and they influence one



another. Regarding personal aspect, students' perspectives on the role of English as a lingua franca are referred to as international posture (Kormos, Kiddle & Csizér, 2011). Students desire to improve themselves so that they can reach greater potential. Dörnyei (2005) also stated that the future self-image of students was the main motivator for language acquisition to become a competent second language speaker. Although highly motivated goals are aware and aid learners in focusing their attention on the learning task (Zimmerman, 2008), they also have an emotional arousal effect (Ford, 1992). Emotional arousal is defined in educational psychology as either the intrinsic pleasure obtained from learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000) or an attitude toward the learning object (Ajzen, 2005). Attitudes have been recognized as emotional precursors to the beginning of learning behavior in the study of L2 motivation. Concerning educational aspect, the instructional context, teachers, and friends may have a big influence on language learning attitudes, and their attitudes may be related to English being one of the school subjects (Kormos, Kiddle & Csizér, 2011). Particularly, they discovered that learning English was beneficial and interesting, so they were motivated to learn it. In addition, social and contextual factors have a great impact on motivation such as family support. Kormos, Kiddle & Csizér (2011) indicated that students who are encouraged and praised by their parents seem to be motivated to achieve something specific. It should be noted that parental supports derive from beliefs about the significance and necessity of language learning. Parents reveal their offspring's language learning support through expressing positive attitudes towards studying English or providing verbal comments to their children. Another aspect driving motivation in language learning is career commitment. Students are extremely motivated because they desire to do well in their jobs. They put a great deal of effort and energy into learning new skills or knowledge when they attend training sessions. Their investment is intended to improve their abilities to their jobs or ensure their job advancement (Cheng & Ho, 2001). As a result, attitudes and motivation in English language learning are influenced by a variety of elements, including personal, emotional, educational, parental, and career commitment concerns.

Previous studies

Most of the research studies on attitudes and motivation toward English learning have been conducted as motivation is one of the significant factors for language learning success. Therefore, it interests many researchers to carry out studies to investigate how important attitudes and motivation are.

Many previous studies have been conducted with various participants and in various locations such as China, Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand. It is discovered that many studies on language motivation to learn English applied questionnaires to examine the level of English. Furthermore, most EFL students have been inspired with instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. Regarding non-Thai researchers, Long, Ming & Chen (2013) examined motivation in learning English among 45 students at a Chinese middle school through a questionnaire. Many students had a strong instrumental motivation in their English learning, indicating that despite the numerous difficulties they faced, they had a strong desire and commitment to English learning. Nevertheless, due to the long-term exam-oriented education system, students' motivation was generally low. The role of instrumental motivation was also supported by Bobkina & Fernandez de (2012) who investigated 72 EFL industrial engineering students' motivation and attitudes towards learning the English language in Madrid administered by questionnaire. The findings demonstrated that the



instrumental motivation was the most common among Spanish engineering students, and most of them had a positive attitude toward English social values and educational status. Likewise, Al-Tamimi (2009) investigated petroleum engineering students' motivation and attitudes toward learning the English language in Yemen. The participants were a group of 191 males studying in the academic year 2006-2007 and were asked by questionnaire and interview. The results showed that instrumental motivation was the primary source of motivation for petroleum engineering students' English learning. However, in terms of integrative reasons, learning English to become a part of a people's culture had the smallest impact on students' English language motivation. This indicated that instrumental motivation was a major factor for these English learners. On the other hand, Yahya (2017) determined the type and level of English language learning of 50 undergraduate students from semester 3 of Faculty Management and Muamalah in Kolej University Islam Antarabangsa Selangor. The findings were the students were highly motivated both integrative and instrumental to learn English. Particularly, the students seemed more integratively motivated to learn English. It can be stated that these undergraduate students can achieve English learning because of their inner motivation or desire, not because of external factors.

Concerning Thai researchers, they have the findings in common that the majority of EFL students had been more instrumentally motivated than integratively motivated. Suwanpakdee & Rungruang (2020) investigated the motivation level of 68 third-year English major students at Naresuan University through a questionnaire and interview. The findings revealed that the third-year English major students at Naresuan University had high instrumental and integrative motivation to learn English. Their instrumental and integrative motivation levels were found to be fairly close. Besides, the integrative motivation should not be ignored though their instrumental motivation was slightly higher. Oranpattanachai (2013) also evaluated the use of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, and English language requirement to predict their English language requirements. The participants were 420 first-year engineering students from a university in Thailand, and they were asked by questionnaire. The results showed that despite the fact that students took English for both instrumental and integrative reasons, the majority of students stated that instrumental motivation was higher and more important than integrative motivation for studying English. Similarly, Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai (2012) investigated the type of motivation (integrative or instrumental) of 137 Thai students majoring in English at Asia-Pacific International University through a questionnaire. The findings were they had high integrative and instrumental motivation to learn English while their instrumental motivation was slightly higher than their integrative motivation. It is obvious that these learners have been instrumentally motivated than the other one. Furthermore, Imsaard (2020) examined 640 Thai EFL secondary school students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English through a questionnaire. The results revealed that EFL students in Thailand were highly motivated and eager to learn and improve their English. However, the majority of them claimed that classroom English language learning did not meet their needs, and it prevented them from improving English skills that were useful in real-life situations.

In summary, the previous studies demonstrate that both motivations are crucial elements to succeed in their English learning. The majority of EFL students have been both instrumentally motivated and integratively motivated, particularly instrumental motivation. That the EFL learners seem to fail or succeed depends on their attitudes and level



of motivation. As a result, this viewpoint interests the researcher to examine the motivation and attitudes towards English learning of Hmong students at Naresuan University.

Research Methodology

There are four sections in this part: participants, instruments, data collection process, and data analysis. The details are demonstrated below:

Participants

The participants of the study were 70 Hmong students from the first year to the fourth year. They had been studying English for at least ten years. During the academic year 2021, they were also students in various majors at Naresuan University.

Instruments

The data was collected in the form of a questionnaire, adopted from (Imsa-ard, 2020) with 34 questions to answer the research question “*What are the attitudes and level of motivation of Hmong Students at Naresuan University?*”. The questionnaire consisted of five main components: personal, emotional, educational, professional, and parental. The participants were required to complete five aspects of motivational items with four-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). In addition to Likert scale items, an optional, open-ended question was at the end of the questionnaire to inquiry what they thought about learning English based on their own experiences and perspectives. For their convenience, the questionnaire was manipulated via Google Form. 70 participants completed the questionnaire but only 20 participants answered the open-ended question.

Data analysis

The data from the questionnaire was calculated through the use of a computer program. The researcher applied the interpreting procedure devised by Imsa-ard (2020) to interpret the mean score for participants' attitudes and motivational level as shown in Table 1. Likewise, content analysis was utilized to code the answers to an open-ended question into a meaningful set of categories

Table 1 Interpreting of mean scores

Scale	Range	Interpretation
4	3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.51-3.25	Agree
2	1.76-2.50	Disagree
1	1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree

Findings

The findings have two parts. One is a quantitative data from the questionnaire. The other is a qualitative data from an open-ended question.



Quantitative data

The personal aspect

Table 2 The results of the personal aspect

No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.	3.34	0.70	Strongly Agree
2	Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.	2.76	0.81	Agree
3	I wish I were fluent in English.	3.44	0.65	Strongly Agree
4	I wish I could have many native English-speaking friends.	3.19	0.71	Agree
5	I want to learn other cultures to understand the world better.	3.47	0.56	Strongly Agree
8	I want to get grade "A" in my English class all time.	3.14	0.79	Agree
9	If I can speak English, I will use it for travelling abroad.	3.34	0.68	Strongly Agree
10	Knowing English would help me to become a more knowledgeable person.	3.36	0.61	Strongly Agree
12	I learn English because English plays a role as an important language in the world.	3.24	0.69	Agree
13	I like to learn English because I like to watch films in English.	2.64	0.70	Agree
14	I like to learn English because I like to listen to songs in English.	2.90	0.71	Agree
24	Knowing English is not really an important goal in my life.	2.33	0.91	Disagree
27	Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	3.26	0.65	Strongly Agree
31	I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me.	3.27	0.64	Strongly Agree
	Total	3.12	0.70	Agree

The result from the questionnaire revealed that the overall mean score was 3.12, indicating that the informants had a high level of motivation in the personal theme. The highest mean score was 3.47, interpreted as "Strongly Agree" in statement number 5 (*I want to learn other cultures to understand the world better*). Moreover, the mean score 3.34 of statement number 1 (*Studying English is important because it will make me more educated*) was equal to the mean score of statement number 9 (*If I can speak English, I will use it for travelling abroad*). Astonishingly, 57.14% of the participants seemed to disagree that knowing English was not an important goal in their life. Obviously, most Hmong students thought that English was a useful tool to communicate with various people and to travel abroad.

The emotional aspect

Table 3 The results of the emotional aspect

No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
17	I get anxious when I have to speak in English to foreigners.	3.17	0.54	Agree
22	I get anxious when I have to speak in English in class.	3.17	0.64	Agree



No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
25	I hate English.	2.10	0.87	Disagree
29	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class.	2.81	0.73	Agree
32	It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.	2.76	0.84	Agree
34	I am sometimes anxious that the other students in class will laugh at me when I speak English.	2.81	0.79	Agree
	Total	2.80	0.73	Agree

As show in Table 3, the total mean score was 2.80, meaning that the participants had a high level of motivation in emotional aspect. The highest average mean score was 3.17, shared by the statement number 17 (*I get anxious when I have to speak in English to foreigners*) and statement number 22 (*I get anxious when I have to speak in English in class*). Surprisingly, two statements hold the same mean score of 2.81. One was statement number 29 (*It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class*). The other was statement number 34 (*I am sometimes anxious that the other students in class will laugh at me when I speak English*). The third mean score appeared to be 2.76 in statement number 32 (*It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do*). Moreover, most of the participants revealed that they disagreed the statement number 25 (*I hate English*). It could be summarized that Hmong students at Naresuan University seemed to lack confidence as they felt anxious while speaking in English with either foreigners or in the class, and they were also afraid that their friends would laugh at them while speaking English. Nevertheless, they still had a positive attitude towards the English language.

The educational aspect

Table 4 The results of the educational aspect

No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
11	I spend much effort in learning English.	3.10	0.49	Agree
16	I pay much attention to feedback I receive in my English class.	3.04	0.49	Agree
18	I look forward to going to English classes because my English teacher is so good.	3.00	0.66	Agree
19	Learning English is really great.	3.13	0.59	Agree
20	I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	2.96	0.65	Agree
21	My English class at school is really a waste of time.	2.21	0.95	Disagree
23	Studying English is not enjoyable.	2.26	0.94	Disagree
28	I think my English class at school is boring.	2.30	0.92	Disagree
30	My English teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style.	2.89	0.69	Agree
33	My English teachers are a great source of inspiration for me.	2.71	0.76	Agree
	Total	2.76	0.71	Agree



The results from the Table 4 showed that most participants had been highly motivated by education; the average mean score was 2.76. To be more specific, statement number 19 (*Learning English is really great*) had a highest mean score (3.13). Furthermore, the mean scores 3.10 and 3.04 were the second and third highest of statement number 11 (*I spend much effort in learning English*) and statement number 16 (*I pay much attention to feedback I receive in my English class*), respectively. Regarding statement numbers 21, 23, and 28, most informants disagreed that learning English at school was waste, unpleasant, and boring. As a result, most Hmong students at Naresuan University viewed that learning English was a great experience. Although English was quite difficult, they worked hard to get through it. Moreover, they believed that useless, unpleasant, tedious things did not exist in learning English

The professional aspect

Table 5 The results of the professional aspect

No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
6	Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.	3.41	0.58	Strongly Agree
7	Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.	3.41	0.60	Strongly Agree
	Total	3.41	0.59	Strongly Agree

The result from the questionnaire demonstrated that most participants had a high level of motivation in the professional aspect; the overall mean score was 3.41. The mean score of statement number 6 and number 7 was the same (3.41), and more than 90% of the participants believed that studying English was important because English was so important in their future careers and useful in getting a job. It could be said that most Hmong students at Naresuan University thought knowing the English language would be required and beneficial as it was one of the major requirements in finding a job.

The parental aspect

Table 6 The results of the parental aspect

No.	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
15	My parents try to help me to learn English.	2.83	0.74	Agree
26	My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.	3.17	0.56	Agree
	Total	3.00	0.65	Agree

The parental aspect had been classified as an extrinsic motivation in this study, which was thought to increase students' control over how they study. The result from the questionnaire showed that the total mean score was 3.00, implying that most participants had been highly motivated by parents. Statement number 15 (*My parents try to help me to learn English*) had a lower mean score than the statement number 26 (*My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English*). Overall, Hmong students said that most parents realized that the English language was crucial, and they encouraged their children to learn English for their own future.



Qualitative data

The participants were asked to answer an open-ended question: "*Could you please express your opinion and experiences toward learning English?*", to provide a qualitative data set. Although this study had seventy participants, only twenty participants completed this part. All the responses were grouped according to five major aspects, but only three aspects— personal, emotional, and educational—were found.

Concerning the significance of studying English having impacts on their personal components, some students stated the following:

"Learning English makes us able to communicate with foreigners." (Respondent A)

"It seems to me that English nowadays is crucial. If we have more English skills, we can communicate with people worldwide and go anywhere comfortably." (Respondent B)

"Meeting foreigners allows me to absorb and to have inspiration in studying English. I also receive various language cultures so that I have learned further different aspects of language as well." (Respondent C)

To conclude, Hmong students revealed that English was a vital tool to communicate with other people and make a journey around the world. In addition, meeting foreigners gave them a chance to learn other cultures to broaden their perspectives.

Concerning the significance of studying English on their emotions, some students stated the following:

"I do not like the way teachers ask students some questions randomly since I am not good at English, and I am nervous in front of my classmates." (Respondent D)

"I was blamed when I spoke English wrong by a teacher, so I do not want to study English." (Respondent E)

In short, Hmong students did not like the way teachers asked random questions. They felt uncomfortable and were afraid to be blamed for wrong answer. This would make them shy and would not like to study anymore.

Concerning their English learning, some students reported the following:

"A lack of vocabulary is a barrier to speak English because we do not know the meaning of it and what vocabulary we should use to speak." (Respondent F)

"In my opinion, it would be better to learn English with native speakers and focus on speaking more than studying grammar. Furthermore, students should not be under the pressure in the classroom so that they will feel comfortable to think and speak to each other." (Respondent G)

"Students will be better at studying English if they usually practice speaking together in the classroom by starting with easy words." (Respondent H)

"English heavily focuses on grammar" (Respondent I)

To sum up, some Hmong students said that there was a barrier to speak English if one lacked vocabulary. Additionally, they stated that studying with the native speakers would be better and provide more opportunities to speak English frequently without focusing too much on grammar.



To summarize the overview of an open-ended question, all the responses indicated that their English language learning was stimulated only by three aspects: personal, emotional, and educational. To be more precise, learning English was a key to communicate with foreigners and to travel abroad pleasantly, and this was their personal need. Emotionally, success in language learning required having positive attitudes towards learning and towards teachers, it was necessary that teachers did not put too much pressure on students. Educationally, they stated that whereas vocabulary or grammar might be a barrier, they would rather speak English regardless of how badly they spoke because they considered that speaking was more essential than grammar.

Discussion, conclusion, and recommendation

This section covers four parts: discussion of the findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendation for further research studies

Discussion of the findings

The overall findings revealed that Hmong students from the first year to the fourth year at Naresuan University had positive attitudes and high motivation towards learning English. These findings answered the research question (*What are the attitudes and levels of motivation of Hmong Students at Naresuan University towards learning English?*). The findings correspond to several previous studies (Imsa-ard, 2020) and (Bobkina & Fernandez de, 2012) in that students' attitudes were positive, and they were highly motivated in learning English. Furthermore, from research findings, it could be concluded that professional, personal, and parental aspects were the three highest mean scores (3.41, 3.12, and 3.00, respectively).

In terms of the personal aspect, most of Hmong students realized that English was an essential tool since it would make them more educated and knowledgeable. Moreover, they stated that learning English would allow them to communicate with various people and allow them to travel abroad comfortably. This was similar to Long, Ming and Chen's (2013) research investigating student motivation in English Learning in Geiju, China. Their findings demonstrated that students were enthusiastic about learning English because they recognized the importance of learning English and believed that it would improve their personal quality of life.

Regarding the emotional aspect, most of Hmong students revealed that they did not dislike English, although they might get anxious when they had to speak in English in the class or to foreigners. In addition, some of Hmong students revealed that they felt uncomfortable when teachers asked them random questions due to fear of providing wrong answers. This might build negative attitudes and demotivate for their learning. Fear of negative evaluation was also recognized as a major source of student anxiety in active-learning courses that included social circumstances like group work or calling on students who did not volunteer (Downing, Cooper, Cala, Gin, & Brownell, 2020).

Concerning the educational aspect, most of Hmong students realized that learning English was great, and they spent much of their effort on learning English and heeding feedback received in the class. They also disagreed that learning English was boring and not enjoyable. Furthermore, they reported that it would be better to focus on speaking English rather than grammar since speaking could be used in real life situation. However, English grammar



should not be ignored because it was a significant part in many exams such as TOEIC, TOEFL, CEPT, or even exam in class.

Regarding the professional aspect, the majority of Hmong students reported that learning English was important since it was a crucial factor for them to get a good job. Moreover, not only could learning English improve social life, but it would also increase work opportunities in the future. Pandey & Pandey (2014) stated that it was necessary to have a strong command of the English language in order to advance in the professional world.

In terms of parental aspect, the findings indicated that most students were highly motivated and were encouraged by their parents in learning English. Since parents felt that English was important, they wanted their children to learn English. The importance of the familial environment in language development could not be neglected because parents could help their children become more motivated by aiding in their studies (Santikarn, 2015).

With these responses, Hmong students had positive attitudes and high motivation in learning English due to the influences from several elements, particularly their personal aspect because they believe English is a vital tool in education and occupation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the attitudes in learning English of Hmong students at Naresuan University were positive, and they were highly motivated to learn English. Based on the present findings, some relevant and beneficial motivational learning implications are recommended for improving and enhancing students' attitudes and motivation such as emphasizing the importance of speaking English than focusing on grammar, which was in accordance with their responses to the open-ended question. However, English grammar should not be ignored because it was a significant part in many exams such as TOEIC, TOEFL, CEPT, or even exam in class. Furthermore, lecturers should prepare suitable teaching and not exert too much pressure on the students. This would make them feel at ease to learn English.

Limitations of the study

The findings of this research were specific about Hmong students studying at Naresuan University, and the sample size of this study was too small. Thus, the findings of the study might not be applicable to other groups of Hmong students or even Thai students in other universities.

Recommendation for further research

The further research studies would be on attitudes and motivation towards learning English of Hmong students from other universities to compare the significantly different English learning results. Moreover, more research instruments should be utilized, such as interview and observation, to obtain information in different aspects.



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