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Understanding English Achievement Differences Among Undergraduate Students: Influencing Factors and Comparative Insights

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Abstract: This study examines the factors influencing English language achievement among non-English major undergraduate students in Thailand, with a specific focus on the differences between high-achieving and low-achieving learners. Conducted at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. Three primary influencing factors were identified: student-related factors (e.g., motivation and self-regulated learning), teacher-related factors (e.g., pedagogical practices and teacher-student interactions), and environmental factors (e.g., availability of learning resources). Student motivation and self-regulation emerged as the strongest predictors of success, while teacher-related factors unexpectedly showed a negative influence, suggesting a misalignment between teaching strategies and student needs. Environmental factors, though positively perceived, had a less direct impact on outcomes. Practical implications include enhancing intrinsic motivation, adopting tailored teaching strategies to meet diverse learner needs, and strengthening teacher-student relationships to support low-achieving students. Policymakers are encouraged to address resource disparities and develop targeted interventions to enhance English language proficiency among students.

Keywords: *English language proficiency, factors, learning achievement, undergraduate students.*

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Introduction

Background and Rationale of the Study

In an increasingly globalized world, English proficiency has evolved from being a desirable skill to an essential one for success across various domains, including academia, business, and international communication. As the world's dominant lingua franca, English facilitates cross-cultural exchange, enables global knowledge sharing, and significantly enhances career prospects (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Recognizing this importance, Thailand has prioritized English language education at the national level, integrating it into the curriculum from primary school through higher education. This strategic focus aims to equip students with the skills necessary to compete in a globalized workforce (Baker, 2015).

However, non-English major students often face unique challenges in achieving proficiency, particularly due to a disconnect between classroom instruction and practical language use. The heavy emphasis on grammar, reading, and writing in English instruction creates a gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application in conversation and workplace communication (Baker, 2012; Foley, 2005). Furthermore, teacher-centered approaches, focusing on rote memorization, limit opportunities for students to actively practice speaking and listening skills. For students in rural areas, these challenges are intensified due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom, reinforcing the perception of it as an academic subject rather than a practical communication tool (Noom-ura, 2013).

Despite the national emphasis on improving English education, many non-English major students fail to achieve the proficiency levels required for career advancement and global competitiveness. Inadequate teaching methods, low student engagement, and limited opportunities for real-world practice are significant barriers. Previous studies on English achievement in Thailand have largely focused on English majors or urban students, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges faced by non-English major students, particularly those in rural or semi-rural areas.

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Significance of the Study and Research Gap

Understanding the factors influencing English language achievement among non-English major students is critical for improving educational outcomes in Thailand. Non-English majors represent a significant portion of the undergraduate population, and their proficiency in English has wide-ranging implications for both the education system and the national labor market. Industries like tourism, international business, and technology increasingly demand strong English language skills (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Addressing the gap in English proficiency is therefore an educational and economic necessity.

Existing research has predominantly explored factors like motivation, teacher quality, and access to resources but often overlooks the unique challenges of non-English major students, particularly in under-resourced rural areas. Additionally, there is limited research examining how these factors differ between high- and low-achieving students. Moreover, few studies employ qualitative methods to capture students' personal experiences and perceptions, leaving a gap in understanding the nuanced challenges these students face.

This study seeks to address these gaps by analyzing the learner, teacher, and environmental factors that influence English achievement among non-English major students at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna. By comparing high- and low-achieving students, this research aims to identify specific factors that contribute to success or hinder progress in English learning. The findings will provide actionable insights for developing targeted strategies to support students across varying proficiency levels.

Research Aims and Questions

The primary aim of this study is to identify and analyze the key factors influencing English language achievement among non-English major students at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Thailand. Specifically, the study seeks to compare the experiences of high-achieving and low-achieving students to understand the distinct challenges each group faces in their English learning journey. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the key factors influencing English language learning among non-English major students in Thailand?
- How do these factors differ between high-achieving and low-achieving students?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the development of more effective educational strategies to improve English language learning outcomes for non-English major students. The findings will be valuable for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers working to enhance English proficiency in Thailand.

Literature Review*English Language Achievement*

In the field of English language education, understanding the factors that enhance students' English language achievement has been a primary focus of research for decades. Scholars have examined a wide range of influences, from individual learner characteristics to broader sociocultural and institutional variables, to explain how students acquire and effectively use English. Theoretical models such as Gardner's (2007) Socio-Educational Model underline the role of motivation, distinguishing between intrinsic and instrumental types, while Dörnyei's (2009) work emphasizes self-regulation and the motivational self-system in second language acquisition. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory underscores the importance of interaction and scaffolding in collaborative learning environments. This body of work provides a framework for understanding how learners' proficiency is influenced by cognitive, motivational, and social factors.

Theoretical Backgrounds of English Language Achievement

As abovementioned, different theoretical perspectives on English language achievement provide essential insights into the mechanisms underlying successful language acquisition. These perspectives encompass both foundational theories and contemporary views, each contributing uniquely to our understanding of what drives learners toward proficiency in English.

Among the foundational theories, Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of providing learners with comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level, allowing them to gradually acquire new linguistic structures. This theory underscores the need for environments where learners are consistently exposed to language that challenges them, raising continuous improvement. Similarly, Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model emphasizes the role of motivation in language learning, distinguishing between instrumental motivation (focused on practical rewards, like job opportunities) and integrative motivation (driven by the desire to connect with the target language culture). Gardner's model suggests that the more motivated learners are, the more effort they put into acquiring the language, directly affecting their achievement levels. Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory focuses on social interaction and scaffolding, emphasizing that collaborative learning environments, where learners engage with peers and receive guidance, are key to achieving language proficiency. Finally, Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory

explains how a learner's belief in their capacity to succeed affects their engagement and persistence, with higher self-efficacy linked to greater effort and resilience in learning tasks. These theoretical backgrounds not only identify key drivers of English language achievement but also help frame our understanding of why some students excel while others struggle. They provide a basis for identifying the internal and external factors that support or inhibit effective language learning, offering insights into learner variability.

Building on these foundational ideas, contemporary theories provide further insight into the dynamic and individualized aspects of language acquisition. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System introduces the concept of the ideal L2 self, suggesting that learners who can envision themselves as successful language users are more motivated to undertake the actions necessary to achieve that vision. This perspective adds a future-oriented dimension to understanding motivation, connecting personal goals and identity with language achievement. Additionally, Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) (Larsen-Freeman, 2015) portrays language learning as a non-linear, constantly evolving process influenced by numerous interacting variables. This view underlines the importance of adaptability, recognizing that factors like motivation, anxiety, and learning environment are not static but fluctuate over time, directly impacting a learner's trajectory towards English proficiency. Emotional intelligence (EI) also plays a crucial role in modern understandings of language achievement, where learners who effectively manage their emotions and reduce anxiety are found to perform better (Goleman, 1995). This aligns with Bandura's emphasis on emotional regulation as a factor influencing persistence and resilience.

Together, these theoretical perspectives, both foundational and contemporary, establish a broad framework for understanding the different elements that contribute to English language achievement. They underscore the interplay of cognitive, motivational, social, and emotional factors, demonstrating how successful language acquisition is a complex, multifaceted process. This theoretical background sets the stage for understanding why some learners are more successful than others. The following section will explore the specific characteristics of high and low-English language achievers, linking these theoretical insights with the observed behaviors and outcomes of different groups of learners.

Characteristics of High and Low-English Language Achievers

Building on the theoretical perspectives of language achievement, it is essential to understand the distinct characteristics that differentiate high and low achievers in English language learning. These characteristics can be analyzed through the lens of motivation, self-efficacy, social interaction, and emotional regulation, all of which play crucial roles in determining language learning outcomes.

High-English language achievers are typically characterized by a strong combination of intrinsic and instrumental motivation. As explained by Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), high achievers often value both the intrinsic joy of learning the language and its practical benefits for career and social integration. They also possess a clear ideal L2 self, as described by Dörnyei (2009), where they envision themselves as successful English speakers, which acts as a motivational force driving their persistence and consistent effort. Moreover, high achievers demonstrate high self-efficacy, a concept underscored by Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory. These learners believe in their capacity to succeed, which encourages them to take on challenges and remain resilient in the face of setbacks. They are also more likely to employ effective learning strategies such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and seeking opportunities for practice (Oxford, 2003). In addition, high achievers are active participants in social learning environments, taking full advantage of Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding by interacting with peers and mentors to expand their learning within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Another distinguishing characteristic of high achievers is their ability to manage language anxiety through EI, as noted by Goleman (1995). High achievers are better equipped to cope with the emotional demands of language learning, enabling them to participate more actively and confidently in communication-based activities. This emotional regulation reduces the impact of stress and fear of failure, which often hinders progress in low-achieving learners.

In contrast, low-English language achievers typically struggle with low motivation, often viewing English as irrelevant to their personal or professional lives, which aligns with the lack of integrative or instrumental motivation described by Gardner (1985). These learners may lack a vision of themselves as proficient language users, making it difficult for them to stay engaged over time (Dörnyei, 2009). Low achievers often exhibit low self-efficacy, which affects their willingness to persist when faced with challenges. According to Bandura (1997), this lack of belief in their capabilities leads to avoidance behaviors and less effort in tackling complex language tasks. Moreover, low achievers frequently experience high levels of language anxiety, which impedes their ability to participate in speaking activities and contributes to a reluctance to take risks—key behaviors necessary for language growth (Horwitz et al., 1986). Low achievers are also less likely to engage in self-regulated learning behaviors. They may rely more heavily on teacher direction rather than taking the initiative to seek out additional opportunities for practice, which limits their exposure to comprehensible input, as advocated by Krashen (1985). In addition, low achievers often miss out on the benefits of social interaction and scaffolding emphasized by Vygotsky (1978), as they may not actively participate in collaborative activities or seek support from peers and instructors. This limits their ability to expand their language skills within the ZPD and hampers overall progress.

Overall, the characteristics of high and low English language achievers underscore the importance of motivation, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and active participation in social learning contexts. High achievers leverage these attributes to navigate the complexities of language learning effectively, while low achievers often struggle due to a lack of motivation, low self-belief, and difficulties managing anxiety. Understanding these differences can help educators design targeted interventions that support low achievers, enhance motivational factors, and create supportive learning environments that enhance higher levels of language proficiency for all learners.

Types of Factors Influencing English Language Achievement

As discussed earlier, there are several factors influencing English language learning. Such factors can be categorized into three broad groups: student-related factors, teacher-related factors, and environmental factors. These categories encompass a wide range of elements that interact to shape students' language learning outcomes, especially for non-English major students.

Student-Related Factors

Student-related factors involve individual characteristics, preferences, and abilities that students bring to the language learning process. These factors are crucial for determining the success of second language acquisition (SLA). Among these factors, motivation stands out as one of the most critical determinants of success in language learning. Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (2007) emphasizes that motivated learners engage more deeply with language learning and persist through challenges. Moreover, motivation can be categorized into intrinsic motivation, which is driven by personal interest or enjoyment, and instrumental motivation, which is driven by practical goals such as career advancement (Dörnyei, 1998). Interestingly, learners who balance both intrinsic and instrumental motivations generally perform better in language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009). In addition, the role of self-regulation and goal-setting is significant for language success (Oxford, 2003). Learners who actively control their learning processes, set clear goals, and employ effective strategies tend to outperform those who rely solely on external motivation. Thus, self-regulated learners adjust their learning strategies to optimize their progress and seek opportunities to improve their skills. Consequently, enhancing intrinsic motivation and raising learner autonomy are crucial strategies for ensuring sustained engagement in language learning.

Another important factor is learning styles, which refer to individual preferences for how students engage with and process information. According to Felder and Silverman (1988), learners can be classified into visual, auditory, and kinesthetic types. Visual learners benefit from diagrams, reading materials, and images, while auditory learners excel through listening and discussion. On the other hand, kinesthetic learners prefer hands-on activities and learn best by doing. Research has shown that aligning instructional techniques with students' preferred learning styles can enhance their engagement and comprehension (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Oxford, 2003). However, it is crucial for learners to develop flexibility in using different modalities, as real-world language use often requires a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic skills. Furthermore, traditional teaching methods that focus heavily on grammar-based and rote memorization techniques often do not address diverse learning styles effectively, thereby limiting opportunities for interactive and communicative language use. As a result, this mismatch between teaching methods and learning preferences can lead to disengagement and reduced proficiency, especially for students who thrive in more interactive, communicative environments.

In addition to motivation and learning styles, cognitive abilities also play a significant role in determining how effectively learners acquire new language skills. Robinson (2002) suggests that learners with strong working memory capacity perform better on language tasks involving vocabulary acquisition and grammar processing. This is primarily because effective working memory allows learners to handle complex linguistic information, contributing to better grammar understanding and vocabulary retention. Moreover, students with higher cognitive capacities are generally better equipped to manage language learning demands, leading to faster progress. Conversely, those with limited working memory may struggle with the real-time processing required in language learning, such as managing new vocabulary while constructing sentences. To address this issue, differentiated instruction and scaffolded learning tasks can help bridge these cognitive gaps, offering additional support for learners with varying abilities.

Furthermore, learners' attitudes toward the target language, its associated culture, and their beliefs about their own abilities (self-efficacy) are also critical to language learning success. Gardner (1985) argued that positive attitudes enhance motivation, resulting in better learning outcomes. For instance, students who view the language as valuable or enriching are more likely to engage deeply, while those with negative perceptions are likely to disengage. Within this context, self-efficacy, or a learner's belief in their ability to succeed, is also a crucial component of effective language acquisition (Bandura, 1997). Research indicates that high self-efficacy correlates with greater resilience and persistence, as learners are more inclined to engage in active strategies, seek feedback, and overcome challenges. Therefore, positive reinforcement and achievable goals can help enhance self-efficacy and encourage more proactive engagement with learning tasks. In conclusion, motivation, learning styles, cognitive abilities, and attitudes all significantly influence the language learning process. Consequently, tailoring instruction to accommodate these diverse factors, encouraging self-regulation, and building a positive learning environment can help create more successful language learners.

Teacher-Related Factors

Teacher-related factors are pivotal in shaping the language learning experience, as teachers act as the primary facilitators. The effectiveness of language acquisition is influenced by teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and teachers' proficiency and pedagogical skills. Firstly, the choice of teaching methods plays a crucial role in language learning outcomes. Student-centered approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL), have been shown to promote engagement and fluency more effectively than traditional grammar-focused methods (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). In particular, CLT emphasizes real-world communication, encouraging learners to practice English in meaningful settings, thereby boosting their confidence and retention of language skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

On the other hand, traditional teacher-centered methods, such as lecture-based instruction and rote learning, often lead to disengagement, especially when students fail to see the immediate practical value of learning English. Consequently, interactive, communicative methods that allow learners to use language in authentic contexts tend to raise motivation and enhance long-term retention (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Moreover, the quality of the teacher-student relationship is another significant factor in language learning. A supportive teacher-student rapport is linked to increased motivation, greater engagement, and improved proficiency (Hattie, 2008; Pianta et al., 2015). This suggests that when teachers encourage active participation and offer emotional support, they create a conducive learning environment that can alleviate anxiety and enhance communication skills. Conversely, an authoritarian or distant approach can discourage student participation and limit opportunities for language practice. Therefore, personalized instruction and raising autonomy in students can lead to increased engagement and better academic outcomes.

Additionally, teachers' proficiency in the target language and their pedagogical knowledge are critical to effective language teaching. Shulman (1987) emphasized the importance of pedagogical content knowledge—teachers must not only know the subject but also understand how to teach it effectively. For instance, teachers who are proficient in English and knowledgeable about language acquisition techniques are better equipped to address the diverse needs of learners. Furthermore, teacher training and professional development are essential for improving teaching quality. Continuous professional development can help teachers enhance both their language skills and their ability to apply modern, student-centered methods that actively engage learners (Guskey, 2002).

In summary, the interplay of teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and teachers' proficiency significantly influences language learning outcomes. By adopting effective strategies, enhancing positive relationships, and investing in professional development, teachers can create a more effective and enriching language learning environment for their students.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors, such as socio-economic status (SES), access to resources, and exposure to English, play a crucial role in determining the success of language learners. Firstly, socio-economic status is a key determinant of educational success, including language acquisition. Higher SES often correlates with better access to private tutoring, quality materials, and language learning technologies, leading to more effective learning (Milton, 2009). In contrast, students from lower SES backgrounds may face significant challenges due to limited access to these resources (Farooq et al., 2011).

Moreover, access to language learning resources significantly impacts acquisition. Resources such as textbooks, online platforms, and extracurricular activities provide learners with opportunities to practice and reinforce their skills. For instance, AI-driven tools and language apps like Duolingo or Babbel offer flexible and personalized learning options, enabling continuous practice beyond the classroom (Liang et al., 2024). However, discrepancies in access to such resources can create gaps in language proficiency, further complicating the learning process for some students.

Additionally, exposure to English in real-world contexts, such as through media, travel, or social interactions, reinforces classroom learning. Learners who engage with English through TV shows, movies, music, or online content typically show improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Encouraging learners to seek out opportunities to use English outside formal instruction can enhance their overall language proficiency and help them apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings.

In summary, learner, teacher, and environmental factors interact in complex ways to influence English language achievement. Motivation, cognitive skills, teacher proficiency, supportive relationships, teaching methods, socio-economic conditions, and exposure to the language are all crucial elements that shape learning outcomes. Therefore, addressing these factors comprehensively is essential to create supportive learning environments and improve proficiency for diverse groups of learners, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. A Summary of Factors Influencing English Learning Achievement

Category	Factors	Explanations and examples
Learner-related factors	Motivation	Intrinsic (personal interest) and instrumental (career goals) motivation drive engagement and success (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner, 2007).
	Learning styles	Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences influence learning; matching methods enhance engagement (Felder & Silverman, 1988).
	Cognitive abilities	Working memory, attention span, and processing speed determine language learning effectiveness (Robinson, 2002).
	Attitudes & beliefs	Positive attitudes and high self-efficacy improve motivation and persistence in learning (Bandura, 1997; Gardner, 1985).
Teacher-related factors	Teaching methods	Student-centered methods like CLT and TBL improve engagement and fluency compared to traditional methods (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).
	Teacher-student relationship	Supportive relationships increase motivation, reduce anxiety, and engagement (Hattie, 2008; Pianta et al., 2015).
	Teacher proficiency & expertise	Teachers' language skills and pedagogical content knowledge significantly influence student outcomes (Guskey, 2002; Shulman, 1987).
Environmental factors	Socio-Economic Status (SES)	Higher SES enables access to tutoring and resources, while lower SES limits opportunities (Farooq et al., 2011; Milton, 2009).
	Access to Learning Resources	Availability of textbooks, online tools, and extracurricular activities enhances practice and proficiency (Liang et al., 2024)
	Exposure to English Outside	Engaging with English through media and social interaction reinforces learning and improves fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Previous Studies Related to Factors Influencing English Language Achievement

English language achievement is a crucial benchmark for educational success in Thailand. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, proficiency in English has become critical for individuals to participate effectively in the global economy and engage in international knowledge exchange (Graddol, 2006). Recognizing this, Thailand has integrated English into the national curriculum from primary through higher education levels to prepare students for the challenges of globalization (Ministry of Education, 2019). English proficiency is linked directly to better employment opportunities, as many employers in Thailand, particularly in the sectors of tourism, international business, and technology, prefer candidates with strong English skills (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Consequently, English proficiency serves as an important determinant of socio-economic mobility, and students with higher proficiency levels often have better chances of securing desirable jobs and advancing in their careers (Baker, 2015).

Despite this emphasis, the overall level of English achievement among Thai students remains unsatisfactory, particularly in speaking and listening skills (Foley, 2005). The traditional focus on grammar and reading, driven largely by the examination-oriented system, has led to a situation where students acquire theoretical knowledge without developing the practical skills needed for real-world communication (Phothongsunan, 2019). This issue is further exacerbated by the limited opportunities for authentic language practice outside the classroom, especially in rural areas where exposure to English is minimal (Noom-ura, 2013). Therefore, while English is a required subject and considered essential, there is a significant gap between the curriculum's intended goals and the actual outcomes.

The characteristics that distinguish high achievers from low achievers in English learning are critical to understanding different student outcomes and designing effective educational interventions. High achievers often exhibit a combination of intrinsic and instrumental motivation. Intrinsic motivation includes enjoying the process of learning the language or finding it intellectually stimulating (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, instrumental motivation involves practical benefits such as career advancement or academic success (Dörnyei, 2009). High achievers tend to be self-regulated learners, engaging in behaviors such as goal setting, time management, and employing varied learning strategies to enhance their learning (Oxford, 2003). They are proactive in seeking opportunities to practice English, whether through engaging with English media or using technology to support their learning (Milton, 2009). Additionally, high achievers possess high self-efficacy, or the belief in their ability to succeed, which has been shown to correlate strongly with language achievement (Bandura, 1997). This sense of confidence helps them persevere through challenges, viewing difficulties as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles (Gardner, 1985).

In contrast, low achievers often struggle with both low intrinsic motivation and poor self-efficacy. They may see English as irrelevant to their personal goals or future careers, which results in minimal engagement with the subject (Noom-ura, 2013). These students typically lack autonomy in their learning processes and are more dependent on teachers for direction (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2020). Without personal goals or intrinsic interest, low achievers fail to employ

effective learning strategies, such as goal-setting or self-monitoring (Zimmerman, 2000). Moreover, low achievers frequently experience language anxiety, which negatively affects their ability to learn and use English effectively (Horwitz et al., 1986). This anxiety often results from negative past experiences, fear of making mistakes, or a lack of positive reinforcement, thereby reducing their willingness to actively participate in learning activities (Choomthong, 2014). Furthermore, these students struggle to adapt to traditional, teacher-centered methods that do not align with their learning preferences (Noom-ura, 2013).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design to comprehensively explore the factors influencing English language achievement among non-English major students. Mixed methods were chosen to integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, enabling a more detailed analysis of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative data, collected via questionnaires, provided a broad understanding of the relationships between key variables, while the qualitative data, gathered through semi-structured interviews, offered in-depth insights into students' personal experiences and perceptions. This integration ensured a holistic view, combining statistical trends with rich, contextual narratives, a recommended approach for complex educational research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Lampang, Thailand, targeting fourth-year students from three faculties: the Faculty of Business Administration and Liberal Arts, the Faculty of Science and Agricultural Technology, and the Faculty of Engineering. Given that these students had completed multiple English courses during their academic programs, they were well-suited to provide informed responses on the factors influencing their English language achievement.

A total of 125 students participated, distributed as follows: 64 from the Faculty of Business Administration and Liberal Arts, 43 from the Faculty of Science and Agricultural Technology, and 18 from the Faculty of Engineering. These participants were selected using purposive sampling due to their extensive exposure to English courses, which made them more capable of reflecting on the factors impacting their language learning outcomes (Palinkas et al., 2015).

After the initial quantitative phase, a sub-sample of 18 students was selected for qualitative interviews, based on their academic performance in English courses. To ensure balanced representation, nine high-achieving and nine low-achieving students were chosen, with stratified random sampling employed to maintain equal representation across achievement levels (Etikan et al., 2016). A unique identifier system was applied to each participant to enhance clarity in the analysis (e.g., HEng1 refers to the first high-achieving engineering student, while LEng1 refers to the first low-achieving engineering student).

Table 2. Participant Demographics, Faculty, GPA, and Achievement Level for Qualitative Interviews

Participant ID	Major	Faculty	GPA	Achievement
HEng1	Electrical		3.75	
HEng2	Electrical	Engineering	3.93	
HEng3	Electrical		3.76	
HBBA1	Accounting	Business	3.88	High
HBBA2	Marketing	Administration and	3.57	
HBBA3	Management	Liberal Arts	3.85	
HSci1	Plant science	Science and	3.50	
HSci2	Food science	Agricultural	3.75	
HSci3	Animal science	Technology	3.65	
LEng1	Industrial		2.34	
LEng2	Electrical	Engineering	2.41	
LEng3	Electrical		2.42	
LBBA1	Marketing	Business	2.46	Low
LBBA2	Accounting	Administration and	2.44	
LBBA3	Accounting	Liberal Arts	2.46	
LSci1	Plant science	Science and	2.50	
LSci2	Food science	Agricultural	2.45	
LSci3	Food science	Technology	2.13	

Research Instruments

Questionnaires

The main tool for collecting quantitative data was a structured questionnaire designed to measure the key factors affecting English language achievement. The questionnaire was developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature and previous studies on learner-related, teacher-related, and environmental factors. To address potential biases in self-reported data, several strategies were implemented. Participants were assured of anonymity to reduce social desirability bias and encourage honest responses. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of similar participants to identify and revise ambiguous or leading questions. Triangulation with qualitative data from interviews also provided a cross-validation mechanism to ensure the reliability of the findings.

The questionnaire comprised four sections. The first section gathered demographic information such as age, gender, year of study, and academic background, enabling the contextualization of results and analysis of individual differences. The second section focused on learner-related factors, including motivation, learning styles, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward English learning. Questions in this section assessed intrinsic and instrumental motivation, based on Gardner's (1985) model, and students' beliefs in their ability to succeed, drawing on Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997). The third section measured teacher-related factors such as teaching methods, teacher proficiency, and the quality of teacher-student relationships, informed by theories like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL). The final section explored environmental factors, including access to learning resources, socio-economic status (SES), and opportunities to practice English outside the classroom.

Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale allowed for the quantification of students' perceptions and experiences, facilitating statistical analysis. The structured nature of the questionnaire enabled the collection of data from a large sample, providing an overview of the key factors influencing English language achievement.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To supplement the quantitative data and gain deeper insights into the personal experiences of students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 participants from the main sample. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency in questioning while providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, qualitative data exploring learners' perspectives on factors that either facilitated or hindered their English language learning.

The interview guide was organized around the same themes as the questionnaire—learner-related, teacher-related, and environmental factors—but allowed for open-ended responses. This flexibility enabled students to share their thoughts freely, providing detailed insights into their motivations, challenges, and learning experiences. Key areas explored included participants' personal motivations, confidence in their language abilities, and strategies for overcoming challenges. The interviews also delved into students' perceptions of teacher support, instructional methods, and external influences such as access to resources and opportunities for practicing English outside the classroom.

To ensure the validity of the qualitative findings, the study implemented triangulation and member checking. Triangulation involved independent coding of the interview transcripts by multiple researchers to identify recurring themes and discrepancies, which were then resolved through discussion to enhance reliability. Member checking was conducted by sharing initial findings with participants, who confirmed the accuracy of interpretations and provided clarifications where necessary. These strategies enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study comprised both quantitative and qualitative approaches, enabling a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing English language achievement. The quantitative data, collected through questionnaires, were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to identify key trends in learner-, teacher-, and environmental-related factors (Pallant, 2020). English proficiency was measured using participants' cumulative English course grades, which reflected their academic performance in English across their program. This grading system was selected as a reliable proxy for language proficiency, consistent with prior research employing academic performance as an indicator of English language achievement (e.g., Vibulphol, 2016).

To examine how these factors influenced proficiency, multiple regression analysis was conducted. This method identified the relative contributions of learner-related, teacher-related, and environmental factors. The regression analysis adhered to key assumptions, including normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Tests such as the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality and residual plots for homoscedasticity were conducted to validate the dataset. These diagnostics ensured the robustness and reliability of the statistical results.

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), following Schreier (2012). The interview transcripts were carefully reviewed and systematically coded into predefined categories: learner-related, teacher-related, and environmental factors. This coding enabled the identification of recurring themes and differences between high-achieving and low-achieving students. The study employed two key strategies to enhance the reliability of the qualitative analysis. First, researcher triangulation was applied, with multiple researchers independently coding the interview transcripts. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved to achieve consensus. Second, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants, allowing them to validate the interpretations and confirm the accuracy of the analysis. These steps ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative findings.

This study provided a holistic perspective on the factors influencing English language achievement by integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses. This mixed-methods approach offered valuable insights for developing targeted strategies to improve English instruction for non-English major students.

Results

Types of Factors Influencing English Language Learning Among Non-English Major Students

Quantitative Results from Questionnaires

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Factors Influencing English Language Learning

Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Student Factor	3.6467	0.42705	125
Teacher Factor	3.7910	0.50183	125
Environmental Factor	3.9607	0.51832	125

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of factors influencing English language learning, encompassing student, teacher, and environmental factors. Student factors had a mean score of 3.6467 ($SD = 0.42705$), indicating that students generally viewed their own motivation and learning strategies positively. Teacher factors received a higher mean score of 3.7910 ($SD = 0.50183$), suggesting students had a favorable perception of their instructors. The highest mean was recorded for environmental factors at 3.9607 ($SD = 0.51832$), reflecting high satisfaction with learning conditions, such as access to resources and the learning environment.

These results indicate that students perceive all three factors—student, teacher, and environmental—as positive contributors to their English language learning. Environmental factors were rated the most favorably, while student and teacher factors were also considered significant influences.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing English Language Learning

Factor	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	Significance (p-value)
Student Factors	0.467	< .001
Teacher Factors	-0.541	< .001
Environment Factors	0.151	.192

In addition to the descriptive statistic results, the regression analysis presented in Table 4 quantifies the relationship between each factor—student, teacher, and environmental—and English language learning. The student factor had a positive Beta coefficient (0.467) and a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating a strong positive influence on English achievement. This underscores the importance of student-related factors, such as motivation and self-regulated learning, in determining success in English learning.

Interestingly, the teacher factor had a negative Beta coefficient (-0.541), which was also statistically significant ($p < .001$). Despite the positive perceptions revealed in the descriptive statistics, this result suggests a misalignment between teaching methods and student expectations. While students generally appreciate their teachers, the effectiveness of instructional strategies may not align with student learning preferences, pointing to an area where instructional improvements could be beneficial.

The environmental factor had a positive Beta (0.151), but the result was not statistically significant ($p = .192$). Although students rated the learning environment highly, the regression analysis indicates that its direct impact on academic achievement is less pronounced compared to student and teacher factors.

In summary, the quantitative results stress that while all three factors—student, teacher, and environmental—are viewed positively by students, the student factor has the strongest positive effect on achievement. The teacher factor

showed a significant negative relationship, suggesting room for improving alignment between teaching methods and student needs, whereas environmental factors, although appreciated, had a less direct influence on achievement.

Qualitative Results from Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews provided further insights into the factors influencing English language learning among non-English major students. These factors were examined across student-related, teacher-related, and environmental themes.

For student-related factors, which were positively correlated with learning outcomes, interviews revealed strong personal motivation and agency among high-achieving students. For example, HEng1 emphasized the importance of English proficiency in professional contexts, particularly in engineering, where English is necessary for technical communication. Similarly, HBBA3 stressed the value of English in enhancing career opportunities, especially in global business environments. These responses reflect the practical significance of English skills in students' career ambitions, aligning with the quantitative findings that student motivation plays a critical role in language achievement.

Excerpt 1 (HEng1):

“Uses it in the workplace to communicate with supervisors, because in engineering, most of the information is in English, so it is important to have knowledge and skills.

Excerpt 2 (HBBA3):

“English language proficiency enables better communication with foreigners, including opportunities for employment in large organizations.

In contrast, teacher-related factors, which showed a significant negative influence on achievement, revealed challenges in teaching methods. For instance, HEng3 described initial difficulties in understanding lessons due to the teaching approach, despite ultimately mastering the material. LEng2 expressed frustration with lessons conducted entirely in English, suggesting that explanations in Thai would improve comprehension. These insights suggest a gap between teaching methods and student needs, reinforcing the need for more adaptable, student-centered instructional approaches.

Excerpt 3 (HEng3):

“After receiving knowledge from the teacher, I can understand the lessons taught, express, and explain, and give examples.”

Excerpt 4 (LEng2):

“I hardly understand anything when lessons are conducted entirely in English. It would help if some explanations were given in Thai as well.”

Regarding environmental factors, the interviews revealed mixed responses. While LEng1 downplayed the importance of the physical learning environment, emphasizing personal adaptability, LBBA1 stressed the value of a supportive classroom atmosphere, particularly in enhancing motivation and participation. These differing perspectives suggest that while environmental factors may not have a strong direct influence on achievement, they still contribute to creating a conducive learning experience for some students.

Excerpt 5 (LEng1):

“The learning environment doesn't really affect my learning; I believe I can learn in any setting.”

Excerpt 6 (LBBA1):

“The classroom atmosphere is important for learning and motivating students to attend class. Creating an environment conducive to learning, such as providing interesting activities, raising good relationships between students and teachers, and giving opportunities for expressing opinions, can make students feel enthusiastic and more interested in attending classes.”

Overall, the qualitative findings aligned with the quantitative results. Student factors emerged as crucial drivers of success, with personal motivation and practical applications of English in professional contexts playing a key role. Teacher factors, while appreciated by students, revealed challenges in meeting student needs, indicating a need for more adaptive teaching strategies. Environmental factors, though valued, appeared less critical to academic outcomes but contributed to student engagement for some learners.

*Factors Influencing English Language Learning Among High- and Low-Achieving Students**Quantitative Results from Questionnaires**Table 5. Independent Sample t-Test Results Comparing High- and Low-Achieving Students*

Factor	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Student Factor	High Achievers	3.80	0.40	3.21	.002
	Low Achievers	3.33	0.50		
Teacher Factor	High Achievers	4.14	0.35	2.98	.004
	Low Achievers	3.73	0.45		
Environmental Factor	High Achievers	4.24	0.31	1.58	.117
	Low Achievers	4.11	0.29		

The analysis aimed to compare the key factors influencing English language learning among high-achieving and low-achieving students. Table 5 presents the results of independent sample t-tests comparing group means for student, teacher, and environmental factors.

For the student factor, high-achieving students reported a significantly higher mean score (3.80) compared to low-achieving students (3.33), with a p -value of .002, indicating that differences were statistically significant. This finding emphasizes that high achievers tend to exhibit stronger self-regulation, motivation, and engagement in their learning strategies. On the other hand, low-achieving students may struggle with the consistent application of effective learning behaviors.

Regarding the teacher factor, high-achieving students also reported significantly higher scores (4.14) compared to low-achieving students (3.73), with a p -value of .004. These results suggest that high achievers are more likely to benefit from teacher engagement, effective instructional strategies, and positive teacher-student relationships, which are key to facilitating their academic success.

Finally, for the environmental factor, no statistically significant difference was observed between high-achieving and low-achieving students ($p = .117$). Both groups scored highly on this factor (4.24 for high achievers and 4.11 for low achievers), suggesting that while a positive learning environment is valued by all students, it does not significantly distinguish learning outcomes between the two groups.

In summary, the findings underscore the importance of both student- and teacher-related factors in influencing English language achievement. These results provide a nuanced understanding of how high- and low-achieving students differ in their perceptions of motivation, teaching methods, and their overall engagement with learning. However, environmental factors, while appreciated, appear to play a secondary role in determining outcomes.

*Qualitative Results from Semi-Structured Interviews**High-Achieving Students*

High-achieving students consistently exhibited an initiative-taking and purposeful attitude toward English learning, particularly concerning the student factor. For instance, HSci2 emphasized that English proficiency boosts confidence and creates opportunities for educational and career advancement. This reflects how high achievers view English as a key to personal and professional success.

Excerpt 7 (HSci2):

“English language skills boost confidence and contribute to a positive image. ... English language proficiency provides me with opportunities for educational advancement.”

In terms of the teacher factor, high-achieving students appreciated thorough content preparation. HSci1 highlighted how well-prepared lessons enhanced better understanding and engagement in class, which supports the quantitative finding that high achievers benefit from effective instructional methods.

Excerpt 8 (HSci1):

“The preparedness involves detailed preparation of the content ... After receiving instruction from the teacher, I have a moderate understanding.”

Although the environmental factor was not perceived as highly significant in the quantitative results, some high-achieving students acknowledged its value. HEng2 emphasized that a supportive environment and well-prepared teaching materials positively impacted the learning process.

Excerpt 9 (HEng2):

“The classroom environment is conducive to learning, and the teaching materials are good.”

Low-Achieving Students

Low-achieving students reported several challenges in their English learning journey, particularly related to motivation. LBBA2, for example, acknowledged the necessity of English but expressed a lack of curiosity and intrinsic motivation, which hindered engagement and progression beyond a basic level.

Excerpt 10 (LBBA2):

“Knowing English is very necessary nowadays, [but] ... I have a basic level because I am not very curious.”

For the teacher factor, low achievers highlighted issues with the lack of interactive teaching methods, which negatively impacted engagement. LSci3 noted that while lesson materials were well-prepared, there were limited opportunities for interaction, making it difficult to fully engage with the content.

Excerpt 11 (LSci3):

“The teacher prepares teaching materials and lesson plans quite well, making it easy to understand. ... [However], they do not provide opportunities for interaction; they only assign exercises and reading and pronunciation practices.”

In terms of the environmental factor, some low achievers expressed indifference, seeing it as “ordinary.” For instance, LEng2 remarked that while the physical learning environment was adequate, it did little to inspire motivation or deeper engagement.

Excerpt 12 (LEng2):

“The environment is ordinary, it’s the same everywhere you study.”

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative results reveal distinct differences between high- and low-achieving students. High achievers tend to be more initiative-taking, motivated by a strong sense of personal responsibility and professional goals, and they perceive teacher-related factors more favorably. Low achievers, on the other hand, face motivation challenges and are less engaged in the learning process, particularly in terms of student factors. Teacher factors, though important for both groups, revealed a gap in interactive teaching methods that could enhance engagement for low achievers. Finally, while environmental factors were appreciated, they did not significantly differentiate the learning outcomes between high- and low-achieving students.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore two central research questions: (1) What are the key factors influencing English language learning among non-English major students in Thailand? and (2) How do these factors differ between high-achieving and low-achieving students? The findings provided valuable insights into how learner-related, teacher-related, and environmental factors shape English language learning outcomes, with notable differences in how these factors affect high- and low-achieving students.

Learner-related factors showed significant differences between high-achieving and low-achieving students, with high-achieving students reporting stronger intrinsic motivation, better self-regulation, and more effective learning strategies. As shown in Table 5, t-test results revealed that the student factor had a statistically significant difference ($p = .007$), with high-achieving students reporting higher perceptions of self-regulated learning strategies. This aligns with Dörnyei’s (2009) findings on the role of motivation and self-regulation in determining language achievement. High-achieving students appeared to actively set goals, monitor their progress, and seek out additional opportunities for practice, such as through English media and language apps (Milton, 2009). In contrast, low-achieving students exhibited weaker self-regulation and were more likely to depend on teacher direction, which may explain their relatively lower proficiency levels (Zimmerman, 2000). These findings underscore the importance of cultivating learner autonomy, particularly among low-achievers who may lack the motivation or skills to manage their learning independently.

Teacher-related factors also demonstrated a significant difference between high-achieving and low-achieving students, with t-test results showing a p -value of .004. High-achieving students reported greater alignment with teacher methods, which suggests that they may be more adaptable to traditional teaching strategies or benefit more from teacher feedback and engagement. These findings are consistent with Lightbown and Spada’s (2013) emphasis on the need for adaptive, communicative teaching approaches that engage students at all proficiency levels. Conversely, low-achieving students reported a weaker alignment with teacher methods, which may stem from a reliance on teacher-centered approaches that fail to address their individual learning needs. This result highlights the importance of implementing more student-centered instructional techniques, such as task-based learning or cooperative activities, to improve engagement and

outcomes for low-achievers. (Foley, 2005; Lumby, 2015). Additionally, qualitative responses revealed that teacher-student relationships play a critical role in enhancing motivation and alleviating language anxiety. This finding aligns with Mercer's (2016) emphasis on promoting positive teacher-student interactions to enhance engagement and resilience, particularly for low-achieving students.

Environmental factors, while rated positively by both high- and low-achieving students (mean scores of 4.2407 and 4.1091, respectively), showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p = .402$). This suggests that while students generally appreciate a supportive learning environment, it does not play a defining role in differentiating academic outcomes. However, qualitative findings highlighted that high-achieving students were more likely to leverage available resources, such as online learning tools and extracurricular opportunities, to enhance their language skills. In contrast, low-achieving students struggled to capitalize on these resources, often citing a lack of motivation or limited access. This aligns with research by Farooq et al. (2011) and Poonpon (2011), which emphasizes that differences in access to and utilization of resources can widen the achievement gap, particularly in under-resourced settings.

Interestingly, the findings diverge somewhat from previous studies, such as Khamkhien (2010), which stressed the significant role of environmental factors like socio-economic status (SES) and parental support in shaping achievement. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that motivated learners are often able to overcome environmental challenges through self-initiative, such as seeking external resources or adapting to less-than-ideal learning conditions. This is consistent with Dörnyei's (2009) assertion that highly motivated learners tend to proactively address barriers to their success. For low-achieving students, however, institutional support remains essential to help them overcome environmental disadvantages and ensure equitable access to resources.

Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of tailoring interventions to address the specific needs of high- and low-achieving students. For high achievers, reinforcing intrinsic motivation and providing opportunities for advanced, autonomous learning may sustain their progress. For low achievers, enhancing self-regulation, addressing mismatches in teaching strategies, and improving access to resources are critical steps to bridge the proficiency gap. This aligns with recent studies (e.g., Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Vibulphol, 2016) that stress the need for differentiated instructional practices and equitable resource allocation to support diverse learner profiles.

Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing English language learning among non-English major students, revealing that learner, teacher, and environmental factors significantly shape learning outcomes. Among these, learner-related factors, particularly intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and learning strategies, had the strongest positive influence, highlighting the importance of personal agency in achieving higher proficiency levels. High-achieving students demonstrated stronger intrinsic motivation and resourcefulness, while low-achieving students struggled with maintaining consistent engagement and self-regulation. Teacher-related factors, including instructional methods and teacher-student relationships, also played a critical role. However, the findings revealed a misalignment between traditional teaching approaches and student needs, particularly for low achievers. Environmental factors, while positively perceived, had less direct influence on achievement, emphasizing the importance of enhancing learner motivation and adapting teaching strategies to support students of all proficiency levels.

Future research should focus on developing targeted interventions for low-achieving students to address their unique challenges in self-regulation and engagement. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to explore how learner, teacher, and environmental factors interact and evolve over time, offering deeper insights into the dynamics of English language acquisition.

The broader implications of this study suggest the need for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach to English language education. By prioritizing student-centered teaching methods, equitable access to resources, and innovative strategies that cater to diverse learner profiles, educators and policymakers can raise more effective and sustainable language learning outcomes. This visionary approach holds the potential to bridge the proficiency gap and support all students in achieving their full potential in diverse educational contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance English language learning outcomes for non-English major students. Institutions should promote self-regulated learning by encouraging students to set personal goals, monitor their progress, and adopt self-reflection practices. Workshops and digital tools designed to enhance self-regulation, such as apps for tracking learning goals, can empower students to take greater responsibility for their learning. Teachers should integrate communicative and interactive teaching techniques, such as role-playing, debates, and group discussions, to enhance engagement and practical application of language skills. Additionally, classroom activities should include real-world tasks and scenarios to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical communication skills.

Universities should implement teacher development programs that focus on adaptive and student-centered teaching strategies while emphasizing the importance of building supportive teacher-student relationships to reduce anxiety and raise a growth mindset among learners. Policymakers and institutions must also address disparities in resource access by ensuring adequate learning materials, digital platforms, and extracurricular opportunities, particularly in underserved areas. This could include providing students in rural or low-income regions with access to free or subsidized language learning tools, such as mobile apps and online courses.

Finally, institutions should organize initiatives like guest lectures, internships, and partnerships with industries to demonstrate the practical value of English skills in professional contexts. Showcasing how English proficiency contributes to career advancement and global opportunities can inspire greater motivation, particularly for low-achieving students who may lack intrinsic drive. By implementing these strategies, educators, institutions, and policymakers can create a more equitable and effective learning environment, ensuring that all students, regardless of their initial proficiency, can achieve their language learning goals.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was geographically restricted to a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other educational or cultural contexts. Future research should include participants from diverse regions to ensure broader applicability. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as inaccurate self-assessment or social desirability bias. Although qualitative data helped mitigate these issues, incorporating objective measures, such as standardized tests and classroom observations, could strengthen future studies. Teacher-related factors were assessed primarily from student perspectives, which may not fully capture the effectiveness of teaching practices. Incorporating classroom observations and teacher interviews in future research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher impact. Additionally, environmental factors such as socio-economic status, digital literacy, and rural-urban divides were broadly addressed but require deeper exploration to uncover their nuanced effects on language learning. Finally, the cross-sectional design of this study limited the ability to observe changes over time. Longitudinal research is recommended to examine how factors influencing English language acquisition evolve and interact, providing a more dynamic understanding of language learning processes.

Ethics Statements

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at University of Phayao. The approval number is HREC-UP-HSS 2.2/007/67.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were informed of their right to withdraw from study at any time without any repercussions. Participants provided written consent to participate, ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

Generative AI Statement

As the authors of this work, we used the AI tool ChatGPT for the purpose of refining our English language. After using this AI tool, we reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the authors, take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Ngamsom: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Huttayavilaiphan: Editing/reviewing, supervision.

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