

# Affinity-seeking Measures Employed by High School Teachers in Thailand

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8124194>

Published Date: 07-July-2023

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**Abstract:** Affinity-seeking measures employed by high school teachers in Thailand were measured using the Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors Instrument (Richmond et al., 1987) and the Verbal Immediacy Behaviors Instrument (Gorham, 1988). In all, 437 first-year university students rated a teacher of their choice from high school. Results, for the most part, replicated studies conducted at various educational levels ranging from high school to university and on-line with locations worldwide, primarily the Mid-west in the US, with the exception of two factors: a negative relationship was found between the use of names and affinity-seeking success, whereas the use of touch reflected a positive attribute. Thai-cultural norms, both within and outside of an education environment help to explain these two anomalies to a certain extent in terms of the special relationships between juniors and seniors, students and teachers and the desire not to lose face and to remain calm at all times, both central to the social fabric in Thailand.

**Keyword:** affinity-seeking measures, high school, teachers, Thai culture, Thailand.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Affinity-seeking measures are verbal or nonverbal behaviors used to create a sense of physical or psychological closeness between a teacher and their students. Verbal immediacy behaviors include behaviors such as the use of 'we' and 'us', recalling names, previewing and reviewing to keep students focused along with rewarding and encouraging participation whereas non-verbal include the use of eye contact and smiling (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988). Research has highlighted the positive relationship between teacher immediacy behaviors and classroom variables such as student motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 1995) and student engagement – a strong predictor of student learning. Used to create a sense of physical or psychological closeness between teacher and students, behaviors include the use of 'we' and 'us', recalling names, previewing and reviewing to keep students focused along with rewarding and encouraging participation.

As teachers tend to use these various immediacy behaviors more frequently, Richmond (1990) found that students whose teachers were more immediate in the way they teach, had, in turn, students willing to pay more attention to what they were studying with increased concentration and enhanced content retention. When examining education across cultures, what factors are important? If it is accepted verbal and non-verbal affinity seeking measures have positive correlations to cognitive and affective learning, what do students from different cultures expect of educators from their culture and from other cultures?

The goal of this current study was two-fold. First, to determine if the questionnaire, primarily employed in a post-secondary environment, would prove effective in determining teacher immediacy and its impact on affective learning in a high school setting. Second, to determine to what extent Thai high school teachers varied in employing affinity-seeking measures from other studies and to what extent these findings relate to studies completed in the US and other locations

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom-based, verbal (Gorham, 1988), and non-verbal immediacy behaviors (Gorham et al., 1987) have been studied extensively in the US undergraduate environment (Aydin et al., 2013; Furlich, 2016), and increasingly in other cultures at the high school level although more often undergraduate level (Huu & Hoang, 2018; Gholamrezaee & Ghanizadeh, 2018;

Rugen, 2018) international student milieu in the US (Britto, 2018), on-line (Hughes, 2014) and at the elementary (Sözer, 2019) and high school levels (Chang, 2016; D'souza, 2018; Kalat et al., 2018); albeit not as extensively as with university undergraduate samples.

Based on Bloom's (1965) taxonomy of educational objectives, affective learning is defined as an increasing inclination to feel positive towards course content or subject matter, it is traditionally accepted as an important motivational factor leading to student willingness to learn, employ and generalize content and skills learned in class to situations in the outside world. (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Dolin, 1995; Witt et al., 2004) examined what affinity seeking behaviors would be best suited for a short questionnaire and tested this short list. The resulting survey asked students to estimate, on a five-point Likert scale, never to very often, how often a professor used the following seven affinity seeking behaviors: 1) Facilitate Enjoyment, 2) Assume Equality, 3) Altruism, 4) Dynamism, 5) Sensitivity, 6) Comfortable Self and 7) Trustworthiness.

The research into cross-cultural studies, particularly to do with the individualism-collectivism dimension, although not clear what variables need to be accounted for, is beginning to show how people from a culture will react to a given situation (Singelis & Brown, 1995). Thailand's cultural collectivism, giving priority to in-group goals over the individual (Singelis & Brown, 1995) and Thailand's historical background as one of two Asian countries never colonized by the West, creates a culture and behavioral norms some non-local lecturers may not understand possibly leading to unintentional cultural faux pas, for example, touching adults on the head or pointing with the feet, to a more fundamental problem in not being able to work effectively with and instruct Thai students.

Examining Thai culture and how its members are expected to behave in an educational situation requires an understanding of the collective conscience. Bechstedt (2002) and Hofstede (1980) suggested this coherent worldview exists "as social systems can only exist because human behavior is not random, but to some extent predictable" (p. 14). However, in his study, Dubey-Villinger (2001) suggested that while cultural norms can often be observed, these same norms will not necessarily be observed to the same extent in all individuals.

The question then is, to what extent to Thai high-school students rate different behaviors employed by their teachers in and out of class in terms of their estimations as to affective learning. This is important as the expansion of Education in English, particularly in Asia, is growing rapidly with an increasing number of native English speakers lecturing at national and private universities throughout the region. Foreign universities are increasingly establishing permanent in-country programs throughout Asia in conjunction with local institutes or establishing their own campus either as a feeder program into a main campus or an entire program of study taught in-country.

### III. METHODS

The instrument employed in this study combined four instruments, Verbal Immediacy Behaviors, Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors, Affective Learning and Student Perceived Learning Loss Scale. Three of the four instruments have been extensively tested and employed in research over the past 30 to 40 years with initial research verifying high reliability in terms of Verbal Immediacy Behaviors and Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors and Affective Learning (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988) with continuing research still being conducted today (Park, 2016; Sözer, 2019). The full survey used in this study is included in the Appendix.

Cognitive Learning measures remain a controversial subject with many researchers doubting their efficacy (Smythe & Hess, 2005). Others have suggested student reports about learning may be affected by the 'halo effect' and are somewhat subjective and that the learning loss question format is, at best, a possible factor in affective learning. However, it remains the only method to gain student insights into the level of learning they experienced reflected in a one-time, look-back questionnaire (Richmond et al., 1987). As both Christophel (1990) and Christophel and Gorman (1995) determined, there is a positive relationship between perceived instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy and this in turn related positively to perceived cognitive learning.

The goal in this survey was to determine if non-verbal affinity seeking measures, for example, smiling to walking around the room, calling students by name to offering praise, travel across cultures and if so, to what extent do they impact affinity-seeking success. In most of the surveys published to date, reported personal data was limited to specifying where the survey was taking place and that students have been asked to review the instructor they had studied with immediately before the class in which they were completing the survey.

In the current research, a range of personal detail questions about both the student and the teacher selected by each student were included and dealt with age, ethnicity, and native language. In addition, they were questioned concerning the class they had attended with the instructor, class size, coed or non-coed, language of instruction, country in which they had studied, how long they had been in the country at the time they took the class and the time since they had studied with the chosen instructor.

When examining education across borders and cultures, what factors are important? If it is accepted that both verbal and non-verbal affinity seeking measures have a positive correlation with both cognitive and affective learning, then what do different cultures expect from educators from their culture and from other cultures? Is it the same, or is it different depending on the myriad of combinations and permutations of teachers and students?

The expectation was that it would be possible to determine if any or all these factors had a bearing on a teacher's choice, use of and effectiveness in employing affinity-seeking measures and perhaps answer if a Thai instructor needs to teach a non-Thai class differently than a class limited to Thais. Does a coed or non-coed class change the way a teacher, male or female, best employs affinity-seeking measures?

Unlike US based studies in which students are asked to review the instructor they had previous to the class in which the questionnaire was being completed, in this study, 437 first-year Intensive English Program students at one of Thailand's leading universities were asked to review the teacher they best remembered from high school. While we had to accept that recall of various behaviors might be vague, we believed in doing this we could reach a variety of insights reflecting Thai students rating Thai and non-Thai teachers and non-Thais rating Thai and non-Thai teachers.

The 31 items measuring affinity seeking were on a five-point scale, giving respondents the choices "Never" (1), "Rarely" (2), "Occasionally" (3), "Often" (4), and "Very Often" (5). The item measuring the perceived goodness of the teacher was on a seven-point scale in which the two endpoints were labeled "Bad" (1) and "Good" (7). The full survey is included in the Appendix. Only questionnaires completed in full were used for this study.

#### IV. RESULTS

In total, 437 complete questionnaires were collected. The mean score, standard deviation, and confidence intervals of each Likert scale item are reported in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics of Affinity Seeking Behaviors**

Item	Behavior	M	SD	95% CI
1	Sat behind desk while teaching	2.419	1.056	[2.319, 2.518]
2	Gestured while talking to the class	3.922	0.964	[3.832, 4.013]
3	Used monotone/dull voice when talking to the class	2.295	1.182	[2.184, 2.406]
4	Looked at the class while talking	4.574	0.709	[4.508, 4.641]
5	Smiled at the class while talking	3.707	0.980	[3.615, 3.799]
6	Had a very tense body position while talking to the class	2.910	1.164	[2.804, 3.022]
7	Touched students in the class	2.375	1.067	[2.275, 2.476]
8	Moved around the classroom while teaching	3.606	1.007	[3.512, 3.701]
9	Sat on a desk or in a chair while teaching	2.384	1.139	[2.277, 2.492]
10	Looked at boards or notes while talking to the class	2.499	1.017	[2.403, 2.595]
11	Stood behind podium or desk while teaching	2.325	1.139	[2.218, 2.432]
12	Had a very relaxed body position while talking to the class	3.945	0.947	[3.856, 4.034]
13	Smiled at individual students in the class	3.098	1.148	[2.990, 3.206]
14	Used a variety of vocal expressions when talking to the class	3.689	0.936	[3.601, 3.777]
15	Used personal examples or talked about experiences she/he had outside class	3.741	1.036	[3.644, 3.839]
16	Asked questions or encouraged students to talk	3.970	0.920	[3.884, 4.057]
17	Got into discussions based on something a student brought up even when this did not seem to be part of the lecture plan	3.211	0.899	[3.126, 3.295]
18	Used humor in class	3.481	1.006	[3.386, 3.575]
19	Addressed students by name	4.151	0.934	[4.063, 4.239]
20	Addressed me by name	4.050	1.087	[3.948, 4.153]
21	Got into conversations with individual students before or after class	3.293	0.944	[3.204, 3.382]
22	Initiated conversations with me before, after, or outside of class	3.046	0.994	[2.952, 3.139]

23	Referred to class as “our” class or what “we” are doing	3.657	0.987	[3.564, 3.750]
24	Provided feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc.	3.481	1.087	[3.378, 3.583]
25	Called on students to answer questions even if they had not indicated they wanted to talk	3.661	0.972	[3.570, 3.753]
26	Asked how students felt about assignment, due date, or discussion topic	2.929	1.152	[2.821, 3.037]
27	Invited students to telephone or meet with them outside of class if they had questions or wanted to discuss something	2.501	1.252	[2.383, 2.619]
28	Asked question that solicited viewpoints or opinions	3.119	0.950	[3.030, 3.208]
29	Praised students’ work, actions, or comments	3.455	0.939	[3.367, 3.544]
30	Had discussions about things unrelated to class with students or with the class as a whole	3.128	0.961	[3.038, 3.219]
31	Was addressed by their first name by the students	3.270	1.251	[3.152, 3.388]

Table 2 presents the five least frequent and five most frequent affinity seeking behaviors among all teachers. The least frequent behaviors were between “Rarely” and “Occasionally” on the Likert scale items; the most frequent behaviors were between “Often” and “Very Often.”

**TABLE 2: Three Least Frequent and Three Most Frequent Affinity Seeking Behaviors**

Behavior	M	SD	95% CI
Used monotone/dull voice when talking to the class	2.295	1.182	[2.184, 2.406]
Stood behind podium or desk while teaching	2.325	1.139	[2.218, 2.432]
Touched students in the class	2.375	1.067	[2.275, 2.476]
Addressed me by name	4.050	1.087	[3.948, 4.153]
Addressed students by name	4.151	0.934	[4.063, 4.239]
Looked at the class while talking	4.574	0.709	[4.508, 4.641]
Used monotone/dull voice when talking to the class	2.295	1.182	[2.184, 2.406]
Stood behind podium or desk while teaching	2.325	1.139	[2.218, 2.432]
Touched students in the class	2.375	1.067	[2.275, 2.476]

Multiple regression was conducted to investigate the relationship between the perceived goodness of a teacher (operationalized by the “This teacher was...” seven-point Likert scale item) and the 31 affinity-seeking behaviors, each of which was measured via a single five-point Likert scale item. The multiple regression with the 31 predictors had an  $R^2 = .336$ ,  $F(31, 405) = 6.621$ , and  $p < .000$ . This  $R^2$  result can be interpreted as having a moderate effect size in social science data (Ferguson 2009). The results of the multiple regression are reported in Table 3.

**TABLE 3: Results of Multiple Regression**

Item	Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
1	Sat behind desk while teaching	0.038	0.067	0.568	0.570
2	Gestured while talking to the class	0.087	0.064	1.353	0.177
3	Used monotone/dull voice when talking to the class	-0.133	0.052	-2.552	0.011
4	Looked at the class while talking	0.184	0.088	2.079	0.038
5	Smiled at the class while talking	0.264	0.065	4.055	0.000
6	Had a very tense body position while talking to the class	-0.116	0.048	-2.444	0.015
7	Touched students in the class	0.114	0.055	2.066	0.039
8	Moved around the classroom while teaching	0.014	0.061	0.236	0.813
9	Sat on a desk or in a chair while teaching	-0.066	0.058	-1.141	0.254
10	Looked at boards or notes while talking to the class	-0.144	0.062	-2.312	0.021
11	Stood behind podium or desk while teaching	0.014	0.051	0.267	0.789
12	Had a very relaxed body position while talking to the class	-0.004	0.068	-0.065	0.949
13	Smiled at individual students in the class	0.070	0.055	1.271	0.204
14	Used a variety of vocal expressions when talking to the class	0.085	0.070	1.213	0.226
15	Used personal examples or talked about experiences she/he had outside class	0.072	0.063	1.144	0.253
16	Asked questions or encouraged students to talk	0.066	0.066	0.998	0.319

17	Got into discussions based on something a student brought up even when this did not seem to be part of the lecture plan	0.005	0.066	0.072	0.942
18	Used humor in class	-0.087	0.062	-1.395	0.164
19	Addressed students by name	-0.231	0.089	-2.590	0.010
20	Addressed me by name	0.075	0.077	0.982	0.327
21	Got into conversations with individual students before or after class	0.232	0.078	2.994	0.003
22	Initiated conversations with me before, after, or outside of class	-0.071	0.073	-0.969	0.333
23	Referred to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing	-0.097	0.063	-1.542	0.124
24	Provided feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc.	0.249	0.060	4.121	0.000
25	Called on students to answer questions even if they had not indicated they wanted to talk	-0.063	0.061	-1.040	0.299
26	Asked how students felt about assignment, due date, or discussion topic	0.047	0.055	0.865	0.388
27	Invited students to telephone or meet with them outside of class if they had questions or wanted to discuss something	-0.006	0.051	-0.125	0.900
28	Asked question that solicited viewpoints or opinions	0.046	0.069	0.660	0.509
29	Praised students' work, actions, or comments	0.025	0.068	0.376	0.707
30	Had discussions about things unrelated to class with students or with the class as a whole	-0.234	0.066	-3.540	0.000
31	Was addressed by their first name by the students	-0.019	0.045	-0.413	0.680

Of the 31 affinity-seeking behaviors, only ten were significant predictors of perceived teacher goodness. The significant predictors are included in Table 4. Six predictors were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, and four were significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level.

**TABLE 4: Significant Predictor Variables**

Variable	Coefficient	Pr(> t )
Sat behind desk while teaching	0.038	0.570
Gestured while talking to the class	0.087	0.177
Used monotone/dull voice when talking to the class	-0.133	0.011
Looked at the class while talking	0.184	0.038
Smiled at the class while talking	0.264	0.000
Had a very tense body position while talking to the class	-0.116	0.015
Touched students in the class	0.114	0.039
Moved around the classroom while teaching	0.014	0.813
Sat on a desk or in a chair while teaching	-0.066	0.254
Looked at boards or notes while talking to the class	-0.144	0.021
Stood behind podium or desk while teaching	0.014	0.789
Had a very relaxed body position while talking to the class	-0.004	0.949

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

In the following section, these results will be interpreted in the Thai cultural context.

## V. DISCUSSION

Several questions could be raised concerning the questionnaire and the results. Further study will need to determine if, as assumed, students had the English ability to fully understand the questionnaire. Second, further investigation needs to be conducted to determine if Thai reluctance to criticize or to be seen as criticizing a senior affected the questionnaire results.

However, with most results matching, if not duplicating studies conducted in other countries or with varying groups of students, it is clear the questionnaire does elicit, for the most part, expected results in terms of affinity seeking behaviors employed by educators as found in studies conducted elsewhere. However, the most striking difference is dynamism where the loading and ranking differences are the greatest. Thai based students did not see teachers presenting themselves as dynamic, active, and enthusiastic as their counterparts in the US.

On looking at expected norms of teaching in Thailand, these results are, as a whole, surprising as they are not considered to be typical teaching style in Thailand. Chalapati (2007), in her doctoral thesis suggests that in a collectivist culture, such as Thailand's (Hofstede, 1991), instructors normally stand still at the front rarely moving about the room as they teach using overheads and tiny pointers on a projector in lieu of pointing or highlighting gestures.

This can be answered by the suspected awareness students have that a class in English, be it English or another subject, taught by a non-Thai or Thai will be different than a class taught in a Thai milieu. Another way to address this is that as Graham (2019) suggests, hierarchical relationships including those between teachers and students result in expectations being stereotypical leading to what Mulder (1996, p. 143) sites as a "self-fulfilling hypothesis", where people live up to their perceived image.

The use of appropriate touching as one method used by teachers to show caring, often seen between friends and family with young children, fits with findings by Moore and colleagues (1996) who found that as instructor immediacy behaviors increase, such as touching, they are seen in a more positive light, and added that in smaller classes would be seen as more immediate as the closer proxemics would allow more individual attention.

Although most factors reflected results found in other studies and that teachers reviewed were acting according to a perceived image of a teacher, two anomalies stand out. First, the use of touch by a teacher seen as a positive affinity-seeking measure, while, the use of student names seen as negatively affecting affinity-seeking measure.

The importance seen by students in the use of touching stands in stark contrast to a number of papers, primarily based in the US, that look upon this particular item as inappropriate and have often dropped it. Likewise, in most surveys, this time worldwide, the use of student names is cited as an affinity-seeking measure with a strong positive correlation to perceived affective learning.

These two anomalies can be explained by examining Thai culture and its impact on the classroom, even when taught by a non-Thai in a fashion different from what students either expected and/or had received in their past.

While Thai society is very conservative in showing affection in public, there is quite a bit of contact in playful encounters between juniors and seniors, parents, and children. With the power-distance quite high in Thailand, appropriate touching of students, pat on the back, slight touch on the arm, could be seen as one way to acknowledge a student in a manner that shows care and concern. Thais will generally avoid contact with people they do not know, as reflected in trains, buses and elevators considered crowded by Thais, but still half empty by Japanese or Western standards. Despite this, close contact and constant friendly touching is a norm among Thais, albeit in a completely non-sexual manner.

The use of touch and the closeness in Thai family relationships and that between teacher and student are one way in which teachers show they care. From a point of view originating in Western research (Dewey 1938), much has been written about the teacher's need to see students as individuals, and often find it difficult to know how to show this caring reflected respecting each student as an individual worthy of individual care (Thayer-Bacon et al., 1998). In the Thai world, children are taught the outside world is a tough place filled with troubles and tribulations in contrast to a smaller world of those who can be trusted. This smaller world including respected teachers, is one in which care for its members, regardless of status, is a two-way, back-and-forth effort to maintain harmony albeit within the varying confines of a specific senior-junior, junior-senior relationship (Mulder 2000).

The use of touch has multiple meanings but most importantly, in this context, it reflects a very close relationship or network ('sa-nit-mak' or 'puak-diew-kan' or 'kon-wong-nai') and that those in the relationship are one and the same with an unspoken promise to defend one another.

While participants in this survey may have come to accept teacher behaviors different than Thai-norms, at the same time realizing the care teachers were showing in doing so, would have accepted the use of appropriate touching as a means to show benevolence (hai kiad), as demonstrated when seniors (teachers) treat juniors (students) with respect (Mulder, 2000).

Benevolence (hai kiad) is offset by the showing of 'diffidence, deference and consideration merged with respect (krieng jai) (Klausner 2002, p 258) to one's superior, although in addition to a respect to one's seniors (teacher) there is also a need to show respect to one's juniors (students) as well. Finally, students also need to show gratitude to a teacher (Caiger et al., 1994). Much has been written about krieng jai and the central role it plays in how Thais are expected to behave in various situations ranging from education to business (Bird & Osland, 2001; Dubey-Villinger, 2001; Holmes et al., 1996; Klausner, 2002; Komin, 1990; Mulder, 1996; Mulder, 2000; Redmond, 1998).

Komin (1990) has suggested nine values play a role in the Thai cognitive system and began her analysis of the Thai ego through the lens of *kreng jai*, which she suggested included ‘face-saving,’ ‘criticism-avoidance,’ based on the core idea not to cause other people trouble or hurt their feelings. As the ‘*kreng jai*’ is central to the way Thais deal with their various social circles, they have developed ways to avoid unnecessary clashes with others and take special care to avoid any action that might cause embarrassment or conflict (Niratpattanasai, 2003). In this way, the calling of names could be seen as not showing the proper respect from a senior to a junior and to ensure neither lose face or become embarrassed.

This brings in another Thai norm, Thai students’ behavior of *choei* (impassive or uninvolved) reflected in their seldom asking questions and in fact, not expecting them from a teacher in return. In addition, most Thais place great emphasis on maintaining a ‘*jai yen*’ (*chai yen*), meaning a ‘cool heart’, as to avoid losing temper (Klausner, 2000; Mulder, 2000).

Students expect to be treated with a certain amount of respect and not have a teacher cause them to lose face or be embarrassed (*krieng jai*). Therefore the use of names, perhaps in an aggressive or punitive manner, as when students are not paying attention, creates an uncomfortable feeling as they are now in conflict as they must accept a teacher as their senior, but are not able to accept that a friend is being called upon in a manner that is, to them seemingly unfair or potentially embarrassing, compounded by their inability to defend their friend while trying to remain calm (*chai yen*) and not embarrass themselves or their teacher (*krieng jai*).

## VI. CONCLUSION

If further research could be conducted with students as to why the calling of names is seen as negative affinity-seeking factor, we would be able to determine if, in fact, the use of names was primarily seen as a scolding technique and whether the proper terms of respect, even from a senior to a junior were employed. In this study, students were commenting on teachers they had had in their senior year at high school, a time when they would have been, senior students and addressed as such. Therefore, encountering teachers who did not show them respect in the way they were addressed by others, too casually or too formally, might have caused an increased barrier rather than a decreased barrier between students and teachers.

We believe these two measures flipped in terms of their normal impact due to the nature of Thai society and the way juniors and seniors respect and treat each other as opposed to the deep affection and trust classmates from the same year place in each other, not only while in high school or university, but throughout their lives.

Finally, we believe the results reflect that those participating in the survey realized the teaching they had received might be different and although they had been able to deal with this, certain points, touching, normally inappropriate and name calling normally appropriate violated their expectations subtly albeit with a greater impact than expected. While we might forgive most mistakes a person from another culture makes in terms of our own, some may not be so easy to overlook (eating while walking in Japan) as reflected in our findings about the use of names while at the same time, people from outside the culture, may not realize what they cannot do in their own culture, (making lots of noise while eating in Japan) is fine in Thailand.

This would include determining if a contrast in results is dependent on whether the questionnaire is subjective. Finally, and most importantly dynamism and its forms and implications in the two cultures needs more examination. How might Thai based students react to a dynamic US style teaching? Is there a limit to teacher dynamism? Is dynamism viewed differently? Is it important for Thai students? These questions would provide interesting research and results in the future.

With the expansion of education in English throughout Asia, studies that enable guest professors to know how to present themselves to maximize results are both needed and useful. If research can determine which US based research instruments can be successfully duplicated in a non-US environment, an important route to expanding productive educational experiences will result.

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