

FOREIGN EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO RURAL THAI UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT Despite national initiatives to enhance English levels, current testing consistently shows that Thai students, particularly rural students, still experience low English proficiency. This study aimed to reveal foreign EFL teachers in rural Thai Secondary schools with particular emphasis on challenges and strategies within the English classroom. Based on a qualitative case study research design, data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews of EFL teachers at Assa-adah School in Southern Thailand. Findings revealed a set of interlocking challenge categories, including psychological (students with demotivation and anxiety), cognitive (students with low English proficiency), pedagogic (curriculum and practice gap, and limited access to media), and social challenges (students' parental environment, students' preference for translanguaging and teachers partnerless). The pedagogic strategies to overcome the challenges involve using responsive teaching and a fun learning method. The present study contributes to the ongoing debate on EFL instruction in Southeast Asia by way of illustrating the complex interdependence among sociocultural context, pedagogy, and governmental support. The implications of these findings are sought for the Thai policy maker to arrange continuous training among teachers and provide sufficient resources even in rural areas, as well as for English teachers in Thailand to anticipate the challenges encountered before classroom interaction.

Keywords: challenges, EFL, English for Thai students, foreign teachers, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Thailand remains a great challenge for the teachers, particularly for teachers in rural areas. Despite national initiatives toward better English proficiency, national and international tests still show Thai students' underperformance (Hendrajaya, 2023; Phisutthangkoon, 2024; Pongsin et.al., 2023; Suwannatrat et al, 2022). Moreover, students with low English proficiency are those who have limited or no practice in using English. Research indicates that poor English proficiency and limited exposure to native speakers of the language beyond class hours are contributing factors to this problem (Rahatlou et al., 2018). Students who have problems with the English lesson tend to struggle with class participation, which hinders their learning pace in English. Students' disbelief due to inadequate exposure to native English speakers and areas of competency continues to impede learners' ability (Phisutthangkoon, 2024).

One of the key shortcomings discovered in previous literature is that psychological factors influencing students' motivation are ignored (Loo et al., 2019; Ulla, 2019). A 2023 investigation of Thai university students yielded only moderate motivation toward English learning, with limited instrumental motivations in addition to compulsory academic needs (Hendrajaya, 2023). Additionally, studies in secondary school show that students exhibited moderate motivation, and it was impacted to a large extent by social-contextual factors such as family, peers, and teacher support (Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023). For instance, fear of making mistakes and potential criticism from fellow students (Putri, 2020). A Filipino-Thai comparative studies, however, suggest that motivation and negative attitudes significantly inhibit EFL learning (Khamkhien, 2012).

Foreign English teachers in Thailand's environment are a common phenomenon and usually bring in new ideas and teaching styles. This state certainly brings other challenges for both teachers and students in an EFL teaching context. However, teachers in Thailand have several issues. A large university-level research study found that teachers are experiencing

difficulties in delivering content effectively due to low levels of student proficiency, the absence of classroom management support, and poor professional development (Suwannatrat et al., 2022). Most of the teachers express that they do not have the proper preparation to instruct English well, citing a lack of good training programs as a key hindrance (Ulla, 2019). Another issues include time constraints, insufficient funding, and poor institutional backing (Hossain & Boonmoh, 2025). Teaching challenges are also obvious where most of the EFL teachers in Thailand view themselves as being insufficiently equipped, citing irregular professional development and regional discrepancies in training implementation (Ulla, 2019). For instance, the use of technology in learning and the application of collaborative learning strategies as a means of addressing such challenges infuses innovative thinking in EFL instruction (Putri, 2020). Those issues are still rising in this digital era.

The majority of previous studies have concentrated on teachers' challenges in English language teaching toward primary and university students in Thailand, involving foreign English teachers from Indonesia and the Philippines (Haryadi, 2024; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwan, 2024; Suwannatrat et al, 2022; Putri, 2025; Takong & Wichaidit, 2024; Ulla, 2019). Additionally, existing literature has not yet investigated the foreign English teachers' challenges in rural areas for upper secondary school students, which have different characteristics from those in primary and university. This research addresses this gap by examining the challenges encountered by foreign English teachers from different cultural backgrounds when they are teaching English in Assa-ada Secondary School, located in a rural area of Southern Thailand. Therefore, this study aimed to reveal foreign English teachers in rural Thai Secondary schools with particular emphasis on challenges and pedagogical strategies within the EFL classroom. Particularly, this study seeks to address the foreign English teachers' challenges in teaching secondary students in rural Thailand and what coping strategies the teachers use to deal with the challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thailand

Despite years of progress in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thailand, students' English proficiency remains low. This indicates that there are still unresolved issues with the teaching of Thai English instruction. Thai EFL teachers have identified several key challenges, such as students' limited English abilities, classroom management issues, overuse of the native language (L1), difficulties in planning engaging activities, lack of student motivation, challenges in lesson planning, assessing student performance, and selecting appropriate teaching resources (Suwannatrat et. al., 2022). Another recent review has outlined a range of factors impacting English language teaching and learning in Thailand, including insufficient educational resources, the diversity of student demographics and proficiency levels, and the growing need to enhance learners' intercultural competence (Phetsangkhad, 2023). Both studies suggested that ELT in Thailand still struggles with various unresolved issues faced by teachers, particularly the issue of students with low level of English skill which may lead to several condition including students' low engagement, L1 interference, motivational issue, and more boarder the limited resources, and the need to strengthen intercultural understanding. One of the keys to the students' English improvement is the English teacher in Thailand, which vary from one school to another particular school.

Foreign English Teachers in Thailand

Following the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, schools throughout Thailand have made urgent efforts to enhance their English programs and to recruit foreign English teachers. To date, there remain foreign English teachers from Native English-speaking teachers as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and non-native English-speaking teachers from countries like Kenya, Cameroon, the

Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Putri, 2025). In the ASEAN context, Filipino and Indonesian English teachers in Thailand were investigated earlier. While Filipino English teachers in Thailand tend to view their roles as EFL educators positively, they also face a range of professional and personal challenges, including a perceived lack of access to professional development programs, cultural and linguistic differences (Ulla et al., 2019). Indonesian English teachers in Thailand are highlighting several classroom challenges, such as limited student motivation, linguistic deficiencies, and occurrences of academic dishonesty. Moreover, they found that their pedagogical practices were enhanced by adopting more creative and innovative approaches, thereby fostering a more engaging and enjoyable environment for English language learning in Thai primary school (Putri, 2025). In summary, Thai schools have expanded English programs by employing both native and non-native English teachers from a range of countries. Filipino and Indonesian teachers face challenges but have adapted by enhancing their teaching methods, creating more engaging English classrooms.

Most prior research has focused on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in Thailand to elementary level (Haryadi, 2024; Putri, 2025; Ulla, 2019), lower secondary school (Takong & Wichaidit, 2024), and university students (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwan, 2024; Suwannatrat et al., 2022). Moreover, the study involved foreign English teachers from Indonesia (Haryadi, 2024; Putri, 2025), the Philippines (Ulla, 2019), and several others, including Myanmar, the UK, the US, Iran, and India (Methanonppakhun & Deocampo, 2016). The abovementioned prior research has yet to explore the challenges faced by foreign English teachers working in rural secondary schools, which differ significantly from those at the primary and university levels. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the difficulties experienced by foreign English teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds while teaching at Assa-ada Secondary School, situated in a rural region of Southern Thailand.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Participant

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the challenges of Thai English teachers because it allows the researcher to obtain a better knowledge of events that occur in real-world teaching settings. As the qualitative technique is suitable to investigate the intricacies of people's perceptions and experiences in EFL instruction, the data were obtained from individuals' perceptions, experiences, and behaviors. This study was done to explore the challenges faced by foreign EFL teachers and strategies to overcome these challenges at Assa-adah School in Southern Thailand. The subjects were three foreign English teachers working at Assa-Adah School in Southern Thailand who were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which allowed the researcher to select participants who had experience related to English language teaching. The criteria are having more than 2 years of teaching English experience and being willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations.

Data Collection and Instruments

This study employs two instruments to gather extensive and detailed information about English teachers' challenges and strategies to overcome the challenges. The instruments utilized include in-depth interviews, where each teacher participated in in-depth interviews to discuss their challenges and strategies during their teaching of English in Thai. These interviews allow the researcher to obtain the best understanding of the participants' particular perspectives. Moreover, classroom observations of the teaching process in the classroom are conducted to better understand the dynamics of interactions between teachers and students. This observation gives a real-world perspective on how teachers address challenges and strategies in EFL instruction. To assure the validity of the data, this study used the triangulation technique, with the findings of interviews and classroom observations compared. This

approach helps to strengthen the reliability of the findings by providing evidence from different sources.

Data Analysis Technique

Data obtained from the interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involves identifying major themes from the interviews and observation notes and then reclassifying those themes of challenges and strategy to allow for deeper interpretation. The validity of the analysis findings is strengthened by the use of triangulation techniques, by comparing the results of interviews and class observations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Foreign English Teacher Challenges

The result of this study was obtained from in-depth interviews and data analysis compiled by English language teachers from the Assa-adah school in southern Thailand. The seven major findings are divided into four categories that can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Foreign EFL Teacher Challenges at Assa-adah School

Challenges Category	Description
Psychological Challenges	1) Demotivated students in learning English 2) Students with English language Anxiety
Cognitive Challenges	3) Students with low English Proficiency (speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well as vocabulary, and grammar)
Pedagogical Challenges	4) A gap between the English Curriculum and Practice in Thai Secondary Schools 5) Insufficient resources – limited access to learning media
Social Challenges	6) Students' Environment – Lack of parental support 7) Students' Preference for Using L1 over English

Psychological Challenges

Most English teachers identified demotivated students as a major obstacle in English language instruction. A significant number of learners demonstrate limited interest in acquiring English proficiency. They do not see value or relevance in learning English. The teachers noted that during English language learning in Assa-adah schools, students tend to have limited attention and minimal interest in classroom activities, which can significantly hinder language acquisition and overall academic achievement. This can be seen from the interview excerpt described in Table 2.

Table 2. The Interview Excerpt for Demotivated Students

"Many of my students seem unmotivated to learn English. They often ask why they need to study it, especially if they don't see a clear connection to their daily lives. Some of them show no interest in the English lesson".

"It's quite difficult to teach when students lack motivation. Some of them don't seem to care about completing assignments. I think their lack of interest comes from not seeing immediate benefits in learning English".

Another psychological challenge is anxiety. In learning English, students demonstrated their anxiety by showing indicators of fear or worry of making mistakes, feeling ashamed in terms of Speaking English, especially worrying about correct pronunciation or grammar. Students were also observed to be nervous when doing oral communication in English. Such an anxious situation is mainly caused by afraid of being judged by their peers as depicted in the excerpt Table 3.

Table 3. The Interview Excerpt for students' anxiety

"I've observed that some students hesitate to answer questions because they worry about making errors.

Some students told me they feel ashamed when they have to speak English in front of the class. They worry

that their pronunciation or grammar isn't good enough, and they're afraid their classmates will laugh at them. This kind of anxiety makes it hard for them to build confidence in speaking English".

"One of the main issues I notice is that many students feel very anxious when they have to speak English in front of others. They're afraid of being judged or laughed at if they make a mistake. Even when they know the answer, they often stay quiet. I think this fear really holds them back from improving their English skills".

Cognitive Challenges

In addition to psychological challenges, students' cognitive condition has also become a challenge. Most students have limited English skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as vocabulary and grammar). Observation findings suggest that students' lack of understanding of lesson content presents a considerable challenge. A significant number of students struggle to comprehend instructions and grasp new concepts delivered in English, which frequently impedes their academic progress. Teachers reported that students often ask questions that reflect confusion about the material, highlighting a general deficiency in English language proficiency, as shown in the interview except Table 4. This limitation extends beyond speaking skills and includes difficulties in listening, reading, writing, as well as in vocabulary acquisition and grammar usage. These challenges collectively hinder effective English language instruction in the school context.

Table 4. The Interview Excerpt for limited English skills

"Another challenge many students are unable to understand, as well as cannot develop basic speaking skills. Most of them do not understand English lessons. Every time I invite them to speak English, they don't understand, so I also have to repeat English sentences into Malay or Thai."

"I also think that the challenges during my teaching here for almost 4 years are the students' lack of ability to understand English, especially speaking skills, vocabulary, grammar, etc. Also, most of them do not understand English, so there is no response at all every time I teach English material that I have prepared."

Pedagogical Challenges

Additionally, pedagogical issues are one of the most notable challenges encountered. The interview data reveal a significant gap between the goals outlined in the national English curriculum and the actual teaching practices observed in Thai Secondary schools. Although the curriculum emphasizes communicative competence and student-centered learning, teachers report facing numerous constraints that prevent full implementation. One teacher highlighted, as depicted in Table 5, that large class sizes, students' limited foundational skills, and the need for comprehension often force teachers to rely on traditional methods such as translation and rote memorization. Another teacher noted that the high-stakes nature of national examinations, which focus predominantly on grammar and reading comprehension, limits opportunities for practicing speaking and listening skills, as seen in Table 5. Consequently, instructional practices are often exam-oriented rather than communicative, contradicting the curriculum's intended outcomes.

Table 5. The Interview Excerpt for English Curriculum and Practice Gap

"The curriculum says we should focus on communication skills and use more student-centered activities, but in reality, it's hard to do that. Our class sizes are large, sometimes over 40 students, and many of them don't have enough basic vocabulary or grammar. So, I often have to go back to using translation and drilling just to make sure they understand. I want to follow the curriculum, but the conditions don't always allow it."

"We are encouraged to use communicative methods, but in practice, most of the time is spent preparing students for exams. The tests don't really assess speaking or listening, so we end up focusing on grammar and reading comprehension. Even though the curriculum promotes real-life language use, we're forced to teach in ways that help students pass the exam, not necessarily to communicate in English."

In a pedagogic context, student-centered learning seems to be another prominent challenge. The curriculum requirement of student-centered activity is far beyond reality. The teacher admitted that student passivity and lack of engagement in the classroom are also significant concerns in applying student-centered learning. The teachers have observed that

many learners were reluctant to take part in classroom activities or collaborative tasks. Classroom observations further highlighted that both teachers perceived students as favoring a passive role, choosing to remain silent and listen rather than participate actively in the learning process. The teachers noted that this lack of effort in studying posed additional challenges for them in their roles as English teachers at the school. Data from interviews in Table 5 reveal that the teachers expressed a degree of frustration due to the minimal student engagement.

One of the most persistent challenges in English education across Thai Secondary schools, especially in rural areas like Assa-adah School, is the lack of sufficient resources. This problem affects both teachers' ability to deliver effective lessons and students' ability to engage meaningfully with the language. More specifically, limited access to supportive learning media has been a problem, as seen in the Table 6 interview excerpt. The interview excerpt highlights the severe limitations in media access faced by Assa-adah schools in Thailand. One teacher describes the challenges of teaching without basic media tools like projectors, televisions, or reliable internet. Without access to digital news, documentaries, or current events, lessons become abstract and disconnected from the real world.

Table 6. The Interview Excerpt for limited access to learning media

"In English lessons, the Media is a powerful tool for teaching. But here, we don't have access to enough media resources. There's no TV in the classroom, no projector, and no access to online news or educational videos. The students rarely see documentaries or visual content, and it makes learning abstract and disconnected from real life. We can't give them to fully understand or engage with the world outside the classroom."

Social Challenges

The last challenge the teachers encountered was from social challenges, where students prefer to use more Thai than English in the English classroom. The teacher observed, as revealed in the interview section seen in Table 7, that many students prefer to use Thai rather than English during English class activities. Students feel more confident and comfortable expressing their thoughts in Thai, as it is their first language. Even when they understand English, they often avoid using it because they fear making mistakes or being judged.

Table 7. The Interview Excerpt for preference using the first language

"Many of my students prefer to use Thai or Malay when speaking, even during English lessons, especially when talking to their friends or asking questions. Some of them feel shy or nervous using English because they're afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at."

"Even though we encourage English use in the classroom, students often revert to Thai or Malay. It seems that using their English is a nightmare for them."

Another social challenge is the absence of parental involvement. The teacher observes that many students fail to complete homework assignments because they receive little to no academic support at home. In some cases, parents are preoccupied with demanding work schedules, while in others, there is a general lack of engagement in the child's educational progress. This phenomenon is reflected in the interview excerpt below:

Table 8. The Interview Excerpt for no parental support

"Some students come to school without having done their homework because no one at home is helping or even checking in on them. Some parents don't seem involved in their child's education at all."

"Some of my students told me that their parents do not care about their school progress. It's like school and home are two separate worlds for them."

Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

Aside from finding the foreign English teachers' challenges in teaching English for upper secondary school in rural southern Thailand, the strategies the teachers applied to overcome the challenges were also investigated. The strategies can be seen in the table below:

Table 9. Strategies implemented to overcome the challenges

Strategies	Overcome Challenges
a) Translanguaging	Social – 7. Preference for using L1 Psychological – 2. Language Anxiety
b) Technology Integration – using songs or music	Psychological – 1. Demotivation Psychological – 2. Language Anxiety Cognitive – 4. Low English skills Pedagogic – 5. Insufficient Resources
c) Collaborative learning - Pair conversation & game-based learning	Psychological – 1. Demotivation Cognitive – 4. Low English skills

Translanguaging

The first strategy to address the challenges of preference using L1, where students often prefer to use their native language, is using translanguaging as the practice of using learners' first language (L1) alongside English to aid understanding and communication, and validates the use of L1 while gradually encouraging English use. Also, using a translanguaging strategy by switching between L1 and English reduces pressure and anxiety, and helps learners build confidence, as stated in the excerpt below.

Table 10. The interview excerpt for the translanguaging strategy

"Absolutely. One approach that's worked really well for me is using the Thai or Malay language. Many of my students feel more comfortable starting with their first language. So I let them use it during brainstorming to clarify instructions. I hope this can reduce their anxiety and help them to be more motivated in learning."

Technology Integration – Using Songs or Music

Incorporating English songs and musical activities into English lessons is another selected strategy for overcoming the above learning challenges. As shown in Table 11, the teacher expects that this strategy will be able to increase students' motivation by making lessons more enjoyable, thereby helping students feel more interested in the material. It is also expected to help reduce language anxiety, as music creates a relaxed and supportive classroom environment where students feel less pressure to perform. From a cognitive perspective, songs are expected to improve students' English skills by reinforcing vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence patterns in a memorable way. Additionally, this strategy is a way to tackle insufficient resources as pedagogic challenges, since many educational songs are freely available online and easy to integrate into various teaching contexts. Overall, using songs in the classroom is expected to be a powerful tool in learning English.

Table 11. The interview excerpt for the song as a technology integration strategy

"I also use songs and music in English lessons. For example, I use simple English songs to teach vocabulary and grammar. It's engaging and helps to increase motivation and improve English skills. Music creates a relaxed atmosphere and makes it easier for students to remember phrases and pronunciation. Plus, it doesn't require a lot of resources, which is great when materials are limited."

Collaborative Learning – Pair Conversation & Game-Based Learning

The last strategy applied by the teacher in an attempt to cope with the challenges is collaborative learning. The interview results, as seen in Table 12, show how collaborative learning, like pair work and games, helps students feel more comfortable and motivated to use English. The teacher explains that working in pairs or small groups reduces pressure, so students are more willing to participate. Playing vocabulary games also makes learning fun and helps improve their English skills. The teacher has noticed that even quiet students become more active and engaged over time. This strategy is useful for students who lack confidence or have low English skills, making the classroom more supportive and interactive.

Table 12. The interview excerpt for the collaborative learning strategy

"I rely a lot on collaborative learning, especially pair work. When students work in pairs or small groups, they feel less pressure, and it really boosts their motivation. They're more willing to work with English".

"For example, we play vocabulary games where they can support each other. This strategy surely improves their English skill as well as helps with more engagement. I've noticed even the quieter students become more engaged over time".

These strategies are thoughtfully tailored to specific challenges faced by Thai EFL students. By combining translanguaging, technology, and collaborative learning, English teachers can address not only language proficiency but also motivation, anxiety, and resource limitations.

Discussion

Foreign English Teacher Challenges

Based on the findings, four major challenge categories were found, including psychological challenges affecting students with demotivation in learning English lessons, and students' English language anxiety, which has proven to be a significant barrier to English language learning. This is consistent with prior research, which found that students' motivation as an intrinsic drive considerably determines their achievement in learning English (Bancha, 2021; Putri, 2020), so that motivational deficits significantly hinder learning (Hendrajaya, 2023; Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023) that leads to disengagement and passive classroom behavior. In line with Akaraphattanawong et al. (2024), students with anxiety, which often present as feelings of fear, nervousness, or worry (Pipuš, 2021), particularly in speaking and performance-related situations, is a common affective factor that negatively influences students' ability to learn and use a foreign language (Liu & Wu, 2021). Both motivational and anxiety issues are part of affective factors as proposed by Khrasen's hypothesis, which can lead to reduced classroom participation, avoidance of communication, and lower academic performance. Understanding the sources of demotivation and anxiety is essential for teachers to develop more effective strategies to re-engage learners and support their language learning.

Another finding on cognitive challenges is students' low English Proficiency, which becomes an extensive challenge in teaching Thai students, as found earlier by Adekayanti, W. (2018) and Suwannatrat et al. (2022). As a result, many students struggle to understand instructions and new concepts in English, which may be frustrating for both students and teachers. Thai students have limited opportunities to use English outside of school (Chuanpongpanich, 2024). Consequently, a lack of exposure to English outside of the classroom, as well as interaction with native speakers, contributes to this challenge (Loo et al., 2019). Additionally, Kwantip (2014) noted that Thai students tend to prioritize their grades over the actual knowledge they gain or the feedback provided by their teachers. This suggests the need for a more flexible and responsive teaching strategy to fit students' demands, such as the use of visual and multimedia tools to improve their understanding.

The pedagogical challenge was the next challenge revealed, which is in accordance with Sriwongsa and Sukying (2024), who found a significant gap between curriculum policy and actual classroom practice in Thai Secondary schools in terms of implementing communicative language Teaching (CLT). Another pedagogic challenge for foreign English teachers in Thailand is student-centered learning orientation that is consistent with Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006), who found that teachers inconsistently attempted student-centered methods for their lack of theoretical grounding. In the ELT classroom activity, students' reluctance to actively participate leads them to be passive learners. Passive learners take longer to develop their receptive and productive skills, specifically speaking and listening (Sukying, 2023). Active learning modes, such as group work, have been found to reverse passivity (Chaisiri, 2023). This suggests the importance of interactive, student-centered pedagogy in reversing diminished

engagement. To solve this issue, teachers must use a variety of innovative teaching tools, including technology and collaborative learning methods. The usage of interactive software and educational games has been shown to increase student interest and engagement.

One more pedagogical challenge faced by foreign English teachers in teaching secondary school students in rural areas is insufficient resources, especially limited access to resources, which is in agreement with several research studies highlighting biased resource allocation (Hossain & Boonmoh, 2025; Suwannatrat et al., 2022; Wangkamhan et al., 2024). The issue of learning resource inequality in Thailand has been revealed to significantly affect students' academic outcomes, resulting mostly in lower performance (Buathong et al., 2020; Potipipittanakorn et al., 2023). This issue implied the need for authorities, either at the local, regional, or national to implement systematic tracking of resource needs and allocation, as well as student achievement, to guide data-driven reforms.

A significant social challenge faced by students that affects ELT in rural Thailand is the lack of parental support in their education. This finding is in accordance with Sivabalan et al. (2024), who found that low parental involvement in home education led to lower students' achievement. More specifically, in the EFL context, this result is similar to Srimalee & Worraarpakorn (2024), who discovered that many parents with insufficient English skills resulted in fewer students' opportunities to enhance their English skills. This negative effect of lower students' academic performance also places additional pressure on teachers, who often become the primary source of students' support and encouragement. This challenge underscores how family environment and parental involvement play a crucial role in shaping a student's educational experience.

Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

To address the four categorized challenges abovementioned, the teachers used several teaching strategies. One of the strategies implemented by foreign English teachers to cope with the challenges is applying translanguaging. This applied strategy is consistent with Ambele (2022) who finds that Thai teachers increasingly acknowledge using both Thai (L1) and English (L2) strategically as useful for comprehension and engagement, which allows them to scaffold learning, reduce students' anxiety, and make the classroom more inclusive in terms of valuing students' linguistic identity. It suggests an increasing recognition within Thai EFL instruction that flexibility of language use can enhance learning results, compelling strict language policies that could inadvertently cut off student progress.

Another learning strategy implemented by the teachers is technology integration. The use of technology is expected to be able not only to enhance students' English achievement but also ensure emotional comfort with enhanced motivation and engagement (Fadli et al., 2023; Nasution, 2023), as motivation and engagement mediate the relationship between technology integration and academic achievement in English (Nasution, 2023). Technology has been shown to effectively reduce language anxiety (Kim et al., 2024) and enhance student engagement by aligning instructional content with students' specific needs and characteristics (Surani et al., 2025). Learning English through songs boosts cognitive factors in language learning, particularly students' academic achievement (Chen et al., 2024). Therefore, learning English through songs or music has been proven to be an effective way of integrating technology integration to English language teaching.

Furthermore, another strategy utilized is collaborative learning practices in the form of pair conversation practice, which is a peer-learning approach that has been able to improve students' motivational orientation and reflect favorable effects on students' English performance (Averina & Kanasya, 2023). Similarly, game-based learning as part of collaborative learning has been shown to effectively increase student motivation, improve vocabulary outcomes, engage in collaboration in EFL classrooms (Susaniari & Santosa, 2024), lower anxiety (Ahmed et al., 2022), and English Language performance, especially vocabulary

and grammar (Rajendran et al., 2025). In other words, game-based learning is evidenced to be one of the effective ways to enhance students' English performance, reduce anxiety, and improve students' motivation.

Nevertheless, not all the discovered challenges have been solved by the only implemented strategies. Pedagogical issues in the form of educational policies and social challenges involving the lack of parental support have not been solved. Therefore, further research is needed to explore alternative teaching methods that can be used to understand how external factors, such as parental support and educational policies, influence learning outcomes.

Overall, this study emphasizes the challenges that foreign English teachers encountered in teaching secondary school students in rural southern Thailand, as well as the strategies implemented to cope with the challenges. These findings can help English teachers and policymakers devise more effective initiatives to improve the quality of English language teaching in Thailand. Understanding these dynamics allows us to take efforts to help teachers face the challenges and improve students' overall learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth study of the challenges of foreign English teachers teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to upper secondary school students in rural southern Thailand and the strategies to cope with the challenges. Four major challenges category were found, including a) psychological challenges including 1) students with demotivation in learning English lessons, and 2) students' with English language anxiety, b) cognitive challenges covering 3) students with low English Proficiency (speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well as vocabulary, and grammar), c) pedagogical challenges including 4) a gap between the English curriculum and practice in Thai secondary schools, and 5) insufficient resources particularly limited access to learning media, and social challenges encompassing 6) students' environment specifically lack of parental support and 7) students' preference for using L1 over English. To cope with or reduce these challenges, teachers have implemented three teaching strategies; 1) translanguaging, 2) technology integration using songs or music, and 3) collaborative learning in the form of pair conversation and game-based learning to overcome motivation, anxiety, limited English skill, insufficient resource, and preference using L1 over English.

However, two challenges have not been overcome by the teachers are the lack of parental support, and a gap between curriculum and practice like applying CLT and student-center activities as a limitation of this study findings, thus, upcoming study may to examine any alternative teaching methods to cope with the two challenges which proved to significantly affect students learning achievement. Another limitation is the geographical area, which is specific to Assa-adah School in rural Southern Thailand and may restrict generalizability to other areas. Future research needs to cover a greater geographical area, rural and urban, to enhance representativeness, and needed to explore alternative teaching methods that can be applied in local contexts. This research implied not only to the existing theories of EFL teachers' challenges but also guides teachers and stakeholders in their efforts to improve the quality of Thai ELT.

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