

## Culture Shock Experiences of Foreign Teachers Working in A Selected Private School in Chonburi province, Thailand

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### Abstract

The overarching purposes of this study were to explore the core essence of culture shock experienced by foreign teachers who work in a selected private school in Thailand. Also, the researcher found out the meanings by the perception of the culture shock of foreign teachers. A selected private school was allowed to collect data in Chonburi province, Thailand. Then, there are selected 14 participants from the school with at least 1 year of work experience. A phenomenological research methodology was employed in this qualitative research. Data were considered from 14 foreign teachers through in-depth interviews. The Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data was utilized for analysis of the data collected analyze to identify meaning units and themes. The findings suggested that the core essence of culture shock was experienced by foreign teachers who work in a private school in Chonburi province, Thailand. It has been determined that include six themes: 1) hierarchy culture at school; 2) behaviors of people at school; 3) jealous caused gossip at the workplace; 4) school management differences; 5) language barriers; 6) school environment differences. The influences of cultural shocks have been determined that include three themes: 1) cultural shocks affect self-emotions; 2) culture shock affects attitudes; 3) overcome culture shock techniques. Also, the meanings by the perception of the culture shock of foreign teachers have been determined that include two parts: 1) a learning experiences; 2) an adaptation process.

**Keywords:** Culture, Culture Shock, Foreign Teacher

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## Introduction

With the increase of globalization in the world, our fragmented world is progressively being replaced by a new borderless environment with the support of global organizations, mass education, Information Technology (IT) and low-cost transportation. As a result, people are moving more easily and more frequently around the world for traveling, studying, working and so forth. When a person goes abroad and enters a new environment, no one can escape from culture shock easily.

The term Culture Shock refers to the feelings of distress and unease when being exposed to a foreign culture. Culture shock is the best and maybe even the only means to experience and understand foreign cultures (Wagner, 1996). They can have positive outcomes in the end, by serving as a hint that something is not right and therefore motivating thinking about how to adjust (Guirdham, 1999).

The impact of cultural shocks on school management is mainly reflected in the efficiency of the human resources department, such as language barriers. Every person reacts differently to the effects of Culture Shock. Most newly-arrived or other foreign teachers who work in Thai private school might be encountered culture shock. Culture shock can be a very serious condition. It affects foreigners' health, behavior, and attitude. Cultural shocks have changed the behavior and attitude of Thai students to foreign teachers. The researcher hopes that foreign teachers can adapt to Thai culture and find out what the core essence of culture shock is through the results of this study.

## Purposes of the study

This qualitative study, it was designed to explore the core essence of culture shock experienced and to find out the meanings by the perception of culture shock of foreign teachers by foreign teachers who work in a selected private school in Chonburi province, Thailand.

## Research Questions

This study was based on the following overarching research questions and related sub-question:

1. What is the core essence of culture shock experienced by foreign teachers who work in a private school in Chonburi province, Thailand?
  - What is the influence of culture shock experiences?
2. What are the meanings by the perception of the culture shock of foreign teachers?

## Research Methodology

### Research Paradigm, Design and Strategy

In a view of Guba & Lincoln (1994) provided most fundamental to differentiating the four paradigm positions on selected practical issues, but Creswell (2014) also supplied the major elements of each position, such as Constructivism: understanding; multiple participant meanings; social and historical construction; theory generation. It makes more understandable and simply about paradigm positions on selected practical issues.

The purpose of this study is understanding culture shock experiences, the researcher believes Constructivism or Social constructivists utilized for this present study appropriately. According to Creswell (2014), Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this study, the researcher wants to know the various forms of culture shock experiences how foreign teachers face that happened and what the possible culture shock experiences maybe when foreign teachers work in Thai private school. This is an open-ended question that will not provide results that will lend themselves to statistical analysis. Therefore, that is a reason where qualitative methods should be applied.

This study focuses on understanding the culture shock experience of foreign teachers working in a selected Thai private school. Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience (Valle, Kong, & Hauling, 1989). The research questions focused on identifying specific behaviors and attitudes influenced by culture shock that may serve to predict a way to deal with culture shock experiences. The researcher believes phenomenology as a research strategy will be appropriate to this study, which is motivated by the desire to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

## Data Collection

### Selection of Settings and Participants

This research was conducted at a selected private school in Chonburi province, Thailand. The researcher provides criteria to pick out this private school which from five private schools in Chonburi, Thailand for this study. To obtain data saturation and reliability, criterion sampling and snowball sampling are selected by the researcher, which depend on this phenomenological strategy. For phenomenology strategy, as mentioned by Creswell (1998) should conduct a long interview with up to 10 people. Also, Johnson and Christensen (2004) addressed that 10 to 15 people that should be interviewed as a primary data collection method. Based on those suggestions, the numbers of participants will be 14 foreign teachers who are recruited. Typically, this is enough to reach data saturation.

### Data Collection Process

First, fifteen informants were recruited as participants in this study, and they have worked for more than one year in a selected private school in Thailand. As mentioned in earlier, individuals are willing to provide information about culture shock experiences. Second, foreign teachers are willing to participate in the study received, reviewed, and completed the following documents: a consent form and letter to participants explaining the study. Third, criterion sampling and snowball sampling are selected by the researcher, Creswell (2014) stated that criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher provides criteria to pick out participants for this research. Fourth, an effective interview guide was designed and used to collect data from each participant. Fifth, each interview was audiotaped and transcribed, and also took field notes. Sound recording can help the researcher to review conversation contents. Taking field notes also helps the researcher catch some information about the non-verbal expression that cannot be caught on audiotape. Sixth, to visualize and analyze unexpected problems, the researcher would take place during the fieldwork and developed an effective plan to deal with these problems. Finally, each interviewee's information would be numbered, organized and safely saved in a computer through creating a file.

### Data collection instruments

An interview guide is an instrument for the researcher to ensure that none of the important issues to be discussed is left out of the conversation. Additionally, non-

participant observation is used to supplement and clarify data derived from participant interviews (Polkinghorne, 2005).

### Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from significant statements of interviewees, all interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist, and the data was uploaded to ATLAS.ti for data analysis. The Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized for analysis of the data collected analyze to identify meaning units and themes.

### Findings of the Study

#### Research question one

*What is core essence of culture shock experienced by foreign teachers who work in a private school in Chonburi province, Thailand?*

To explain the first main question and its sub-question, the researcher used the main themes to consider to create a message of phenomena or core essence derived from culture shock experiences of foreign teachers. The researcher has compiled sub-themes, main themes, and core essence by presenting in Table 1.

Table 1 Summaries of the thematic of the core essence

Core Essence	Main Theme	Sub-theme
Cross over through hard time to deal with culture shock experiences	Theme 1 Hierarchy culture at school	Sub-theme: Superiority between colleagues and foreign teachers Sub-theme: Authority between foreign teachers and students
	Theme 2 Behaviors of people at school	Sub-theme: Students' behaviors Sub-theme: Colleagues' behaviors
	Theme 3 Jealous caused gossip at the workplace	
	Theme 4 School management differences	Sub-theme: No trust in school policy Sub-theme: Visa issue Sub-theme: No pre-employment training Sub-theme: Unfair in school policy

Table 1 (Continued)

Core Essence	Main Theme	Sub-theme
	Theme 5 Language barriers	Sub-theme: Language barriers with Thai teachers Sub-theme: Language barriers with students Sub-theme: Language barriers with HR
	Theme 6 School environment differences	Sub-theme: Workplace surroundings Sub-theme: School settings
	Theme 7 Cultural shocks affect self-emotions	Sub-theme: Feelings of frustrated Sub-theme: Feelings of confused Sub-theme: Feelings of unhappy Sub-theme: Feelings of anxiety
	Theme 8 Attitudes to people at school	Sub-theme: Attitude to colleagues Sub-theme: Attitude to students
	Theme 9 Overcome culture shock techniques	Sub-theme: Self-management Sub-theme: Assistance from other foreign teachers Sub-theme: Language barrier

The above is a summary of the thematic of the core essence table constructed from the data. These nine themes, presenting what core essence of culture shock experienced is, was gained from the interviews with the 14 teachers.

In responding to the first research question, it has been found that the core essence of culture shock experienced by foreign teachers who work in a private school in Thailand, involves: Theme 1 Hierarchy culture at school, which includes: (1) superiority between colleagues and foreign teachers, and (2) seniority between foreign teachers and students. Theme 2 behaviors of people at school, includes (1) students' behaviors and (2) colleagues' behaviors. Theme 3 Jealous caused by gossip at the workplace. Theme 4 School management differences include: (1) No trust in school policy, (2) No pre-employment training, (3) unfair in school policy, and (4) Visa issue. Theme 5 language barriers include (1) language barriers with Thai teachers, (2) language barriers with students, and (3) language barriers with HR. Theme 6 School environment differences include (1) workplace surroundings and (2) school settings.

### In response to the sub-question of the first research question

*What is the influence of culture shock experiences?*

It was identified the influence of culture shock experiences to foreign teachers, contains: Theme 7 Cultural shocks affect self-emotions, includes: (1) feelings of frustration; (2) feelings of confusion; (3) feelings of unhappiness; and (4) feelings of anxiety. Theme 8 Attitudes to people at school involve (1) attitude to colleagues and (2) attitude to students. Theme 9 Overcome culture shock techniques include: (1) self-management; (2) assistance from other foreign teachers; and (3) language barriers.

### Research Question Two

*What are the meanings by perception of culture shock of foreign teachers?*

In order to answer this second research question, it is essential to find out the meanings by the perception of the culture shock of foreign teachers. The following two sub-themes, supported by direct quotations, were made by foreign teachers, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Meaning of culture shock

Theme 1 Meanings of culture shock	Sub-theme 1.1: A learning experiences Sub-theme 1.2: An adaptation process
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In answering the last research question about the meanings by the perception of the culture shock of foreign teachers, it was found that meanings of culture shock, includes: 1) a learning experiences and 2) an adaptation processes.

### Period of culture shock experiences model

Through analyzing and generalizing the results of this study, the researcher has found a model that a cultural shock experience should be a consequence of a change in personality and identity towards a new consciousness. This cultural shock experience model is described by the researcher with a three-period model of development, as shown in Figure 1.

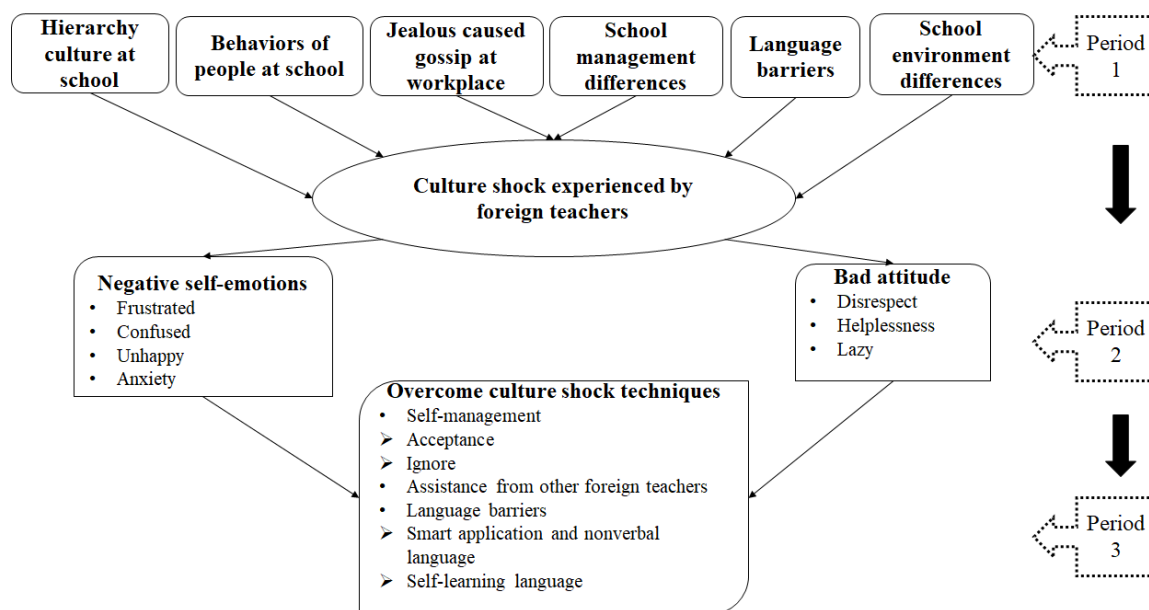


Figure 1 Period of culture shock experiences model

Each period are described as follows:

Period 1, it identified six aspects that led to foreign teachers to encounter cultural shock experiences. It includes: hierarchy culture at school; behaviors of people at school; jealous caused gossip at the workplace; school management differences; language barriers; and school environment differences.

Period 2, the foreign teachers are immersed in negative self-emotions problems: frustrated; confused; unhappy; and anxiety. They are also suffered bad attitudes: impolite; disrespect; helplessness; and lazy.

Period 3, overcoming cultural shocks techniques help foreign teachers to reduce or adapt to the negative effects of cultural shocks.

## Discussion

### Discussing the findings of the first research question

The first theme represented in the study was hierarchy culture at school which centered on superiority between colleagues and foreign teachers. As Sonsri (2006, p.7) observed: “almost everything in the perception of Thai people is situated in a hierarchical system; also, manifested in authority between foreign teachers and students”. As



Sriussadaporn and Jablin (1999, p.382) provided this view on the symbolism of social respect in Thailand: “younger people are taught to respect their elders”.

The second theme developing from the research study’s data was behaviors of people at school. It was highlighted in students’ behaviors. As mentioned by Nicole (2016, p.3), you will not have a class of children all sitting quietly at their desks, looking up at the board, taking notes; also stressed on colleagues’ behaviors. As suggested by Segal (2018), cultural shock can arise from a person’s unfamiliarity with local customs language and acceptable behavior.

The third theme emanating from the data was jealous caused gossip at the workplace. This do gossip in the workplace and Western staff often find themselves watched intensely with your every move discussed by the local staff (Chris, 2001).

The fourth theme evolving from the data was school management differences and no trust in school policy. The finding seems to support by John (2017) that many Thai school administrators treat the contract as a document they can amend depending on their mood that day; visa issue. As proposed by Jarn (2019) that Thailand has a very complex visa system and sometimes it seems like it's forever changing; no pre-employment training. The research result suggests that there are five key factors affecting expatriate culture shock. These are mainly: 1) training of the expatriate, 2) demographic characteristics of the expatriate, 3) personality traits of the expatriate, 4) organizational support given to the expatriate, and 5) the technical competence of the expatriate (Sims and Schraeder, 2004); and unfair in school policy. The discriminatory policies in place at many schools make it seem like we are not really welcome. We work just as hard as Thai teachers but do not enjoy the same benefits (John, 2017).

The fifth theme obtained in the study was language barriers. The findings involved language barriers with Thai teachers, language barriers with students and language barriers with HR. Language is a very important issue in managing expatriates (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The findings seem to support by Smalley (1963) which focusing on the difficulties in communication, hence the term ‘language shock’.

The sixth theme developing from this study’s data was school environment differences and workplace surroundings. According to Graduateland (2016) that a bunch of new colleagues, surprising customs - enough to shock even veteran members of the workforce, not to mention those starting in their first real first job. School settings. As proposed by Safary

(2012) that participants had culture shock at this school because of the different school setting, factors that may be general to the Philippines, and personal factors of the participants.

The seventh theme emanating from the data was cultural shocks affect self-emotions. Feelings of frustrated. As Oberg (1960) described the symptoms of Culture Shock as follows: "fits of anger over delays and other minor frustrations.". Feelings of confused. The findings seem to support by Ward et al. (2001) the affective component is very close to Oberg's original definition of culture shock and the confusion, suspicion, and anxiety caused by being faced with the unfamiliar. Feelings of unhappiness. As mentioned by Liam (2014) that Sufferers of culture shock can become withdrawn, nervous around groups of people, prone to sudden mood swings or emotional outbursts and just generally very unhappy with their surroundings. Feelings of anxiety. According to Matthew (2016) that Culture shock can have a yo-yo pattern where the feelings of anxiety may lessen in time, but then most unexpectedly resurface.

The eighth theme summarized from the data was attitudes to people at school, and attitude to colleagues. This finding was in accordance with the study conducted by Frith (2018). The school of life recently found that nearly a quarter (23%) of employees think their colleagues are lazy. Regarding to attitude to students, a Thai teacher anonymously remarked that he thinks that the most common problem among Thai students was laziness (Eric & Robert, 2017).

The ninth theme found from the study was overcome culture shock techniques and self-management. As mentioned by Ken (2017) that ignoring problems at work temporarily remove the pain that people feel from the problems; assistance from other foreign teachers. The finding seems to support by Esl (2017) that the other foreign teachers will also be a long way from home so it's good to get together and have a laugh about some of the weird and wonderful things you encounter living in another country. Language barrier. Language translation devices have made it easier for people such as tourists to travel all around the world without fear of the language barrier (Sarah, 2017).

### **Discussing the findings of the second research question**

This theme developing from this study's data was meanings of culture shock. A learning experiences. Most of the early explanations were clinically oriented, while models in the 1980s saw culture shock in relation with sojourning, as a learning experience, which needed to be prepared through the acquisition of certain skills (Jindal-Snape, Todman, Topping, & Zhou,

2008). An adaptation processes. As Apfelthaler (1999) said that culture shock in all its diverse forms is completely normal and is part of a successful process of adaptation.

### Recommendation for future research

First, further research might a comparison of the generalized how different to students' behavior between Thai teachers' classroom and the foreign teachers' classroom.

Second, it is a period of culture shock experiences model. Questionnaires can obtain adequate reliability; future research may consider the development of reliable measures for examining such this model.

Third, from the results of this study, further replication of this study may be conducted with foreign teachers who work at different schools. The best way is to use quantitative research methods to measure and generalize the impact of cultural shock on foreign teachers.

Finally, this study highlights a concerning finding that hierarchy culture at school has caused on culture shock. Future studies could collect information on the amount, frequency, and the hierarchy relationship between foreign teachers and colleagues or students.

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