Enhancing the Thai Film Industry through Virtual Learning: A Sustainable Approach to Language Skill Development and Soft Power Expansion

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Abstract

In an era of globalization, countries and people are progressively interconnected with soft power playing a crucial role in expanding influence through collaboration and cultural exchange. The Thai film industry, despite its global recognition, encounters challenge due to limited English language proficiency among its professionals, which hampers its potential for international engagement and actions. This study intends a virtual learning model designed to enhance language skills and support the growth of soft power within the Thai film industry. Employing technologies such as the Metaverse, the model integrates learning across all stages of film production—pre-production, production, and post-production. Lining up with SDG 4 and national policies, the study adopts an action research approach to gauge the impact of this model on industry professionals. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a sustainable framework for developing language skills and flourishing Thailand's soft power, driving the future growth of the Thai film industry on the macro stage.

Keywords: *Metaverse, Soft-Power, SDG4, Film Production, Management.*

Introduction

The world has undergone a remarkable transformation, largely driven by advancements in information technology. This shift has not only reshaped the global economy and political dynamics but has also connected nations like never before. As a result, we now live in a borderless world society, often described as a global village, where countries are increasingly interdependent and interconnected.

In this interconnected world, actions in one country reverberate across borders, creating a shared fate among nations. Events occurring in any part of the globe can be perceived as immediate due to the sophisticated network of global interdependencies (Green and Ruhleder, 1995). Consequently, leading nations have shifted their focus towards expanding influence through soft power, characterized by persuasion and cooperation, in stark contrast to the coercive nature of hard power (Chatin and Gallarotti, 2019). This soft power, rooted in economic strength, particularly relies on cultural, values, and foreign policies (Henne, 2022).

Taking South Korea as a case study, its remarkable global influence is exemplified through its cultural exports, such as food, beauty standards, and the entertainment industry (drama, K-pop series). This intentional global presence is not incidental but stems from strategic planning, promotion, and budget allocations by the South Korean government since the late 1990s (Oxford Analytica, 2019).

Simultaneously, research on the structure of the Thai film production industry, aligned with the Phase 3 strategy (2017-2022) for promoting the film and video industry, underscores the strength of Thai production personnel. These individuals possess expertise in production skills, modern program utilization,

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and an understanding of international market and consumer needs (Thoongsuwan et al., 2017; Praditsilp, 2022).

However, challenges persist, particularly in the limited English language skills of industry personnel, hindering effective communication and collaboration in fields demanding proficient English. Addressing this, it becomes imperative to enhance the teaching and learning system, aligning it with global standards and preparing human resources in the film industry for future challenges (New S-Curve).

This study, in response to these needs, aims to develop a modern learning model to enhance the English skills of personnel in the Thai film industry (Mansoor, 2021). By utilizing a virtual space, the proposed platform seeks to comprehensively cover all aspects of the production process, from pre-production ideation to post-production processes. Integration of modern technology, including Metaverse, is considered paramount for achieving consistency and enhancing educational quality, utilizing cultural capital as a valuable learning resource.

Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Thailand's education policies, the goal of this study is to enhance soft power and economic growth by addressing communication barriers.

This study is crucial for preparing the future workforce in Thailand, aligning with human capital development policies. Despite the thriving film and digital media industry, there's a significant language barrier among Thai professionals. This gap hampers collaboration with foreign productions, leading to communication challenges, work pressures, and wage issues.

To address the challenges hindering the progress of the Thai film industry and propel it to international acclaim, the study sets forth three distinct objectives. Firstly, it aims to develop the English skills of personnel within the Thai film industry through innovative methods within a virtual space. Secondly, the study seeks to establish a dedicated platform on the Metaverse virtual space, aimed at enhancing English language proficiency among industry professionals. Lastly, the study endeavors to propose comprehensive guidelines for driving the development of English language skills among personnel in the Thai film industry within a virtual space. These guidelines are intended to not only address existing language skill gaps but also to position the Thai film industry on a global scale, fostering international recognition and collaboration opportunities.

To achieve these objectives, qualitative research is specifically directed towards students, government officials, and operational-level film personnel. The data collection process involves workshops and Focus Group Interviews, supplemented by pre- and post-class learning assessments. This multifaceted approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the proposed language skill development strategies through enhanced language proficiency within a virtual space.

The overarching objective of this study encompasses language proficiency development, platform establishment, and guideline formulation for language skill development, all aimed at elevating the Thai film industry to international acclaim. Employing an Action Research framework, this study unfolds through a Qualitative and Participatory approach, extending into the realms of Research and Development (R&D).

In today's changing Thai film industry, influenced by globalization, bridging the language gap among industry workers is crucial. To address this, our study relies on Kurt Lewin's Action Research model for guidance. Kurt Lewin's Action Research model emphasizes researchers working closely with practitioners to drive positive change within organizations. This aligns perfectly with our study's goal of improving English skills in the Thai film industry through targeted interventions and collaboration, promoting real-world impact and transformative change.

By actively involving stakeholders, including students, government officials, and industry professionals, in the research process, our study seeks to foster a cooperative environment conducive to identifying and implementing effective strategies for language skill development. Furthermore, the model underscores the

importance of democratic leadership and participatory decision-making, principles that resonate with the inclusive approach adopted in our research methodology.

Literature Review

Thai Film Industry Navigates Global Challenges as A Soft Power Tool

Globalization, a multifaceted force encompassing societal, economic, political, and technological dimensions, fosters interconnectivity among nations (Rodrik, 1998). This connectivity creates a borderless society termed the Global Village (Pieterse, 2021). Economically, globalization fuels trade, investment, and capital flows globally, fostering global supply chains (Garrett and Mitchell, 2001). Furthermore, globalization drives technological innovation, facilitating the rapid dissemination of ideas (Garrett and Mitchell, 2001). Politically, globalization prompts a reevaluation of traditional power dynamics, emphasizing soft power as a means of international influence (Baylis, 2020).

Soft power leverages cultural diplomacy, education, and aid to shape perceptions positively (Ivey and Cleggett, 2018; Wilson, 2017). Leading nations strategically employ soft power initiatives like the Fulbright Program and UNESCO's cultural diversity promotion to enhance global influence (Pyykkönen, 2012). In this interconnected world, soft power emerges as a vital tool for nations to shape perceptions and build relationships (Rothman, 2011; Nye, 2017).

Cultural diplomacy, a subset of public diplomacy, refers to the deliberate use of cultural resources and activities to foster mutual understanding, build relationships, and promote national interests on the global stage (Nye, 2017). It operates on the premise that shared cultural experiences and expressions can transcend linguistic, ideological, and political barriers, fostering goodwill and empathy among nations (Stasevska and Malanchuk, 2021). Cultural diplomacy is distinct from traditional diplomacy, which primarily focuses on state-to-state interactions, as it targets non-state actors and seeks to engage with foreign publics directly (Kim, 2017). Cultural exports, including films, music, literature, art, and cuisine, serve as potent tools for cultural diplomacy, offering a window into the social, political, and cultural fabric of a nation (Nye, 2017).

Movies play a crucial role in cultural diplomacy by stirring emotions, sharing stories, and sparking ideas among diverse viewers (Lee, 2022). They allow countries to exhibit their distinct culture, history, and modern achievements worldwide. For example, showcasing landmarks, traditions, and customs in films helps audiences worldwide appreciate a nation's cultural diversity and richness.

Success stories like South Korea's "Korean Wave" illustrate the power of cultural diplomacy through film, with blockbusters like "Parasite" and "Train to Busan" garnering international acclaim and boosting the country's cultural influence. Additionally, film festivals and cultural exchanges serve as platforms for promoting cultural diplomacy and fostering closer connections between nations.

The Thai film industry operates within a complex ecosystem influenced by governmental policies and industry-driven initiatives aimed at promoting growth and competitiveness. Government interventions, such as the Phase 3 strategy (2017-2022), emphasize human capital development and international collaboration to enhance the industry's visibility (Vallejo, 2020; Sumpradit, 2021). Meanwhile, industry organizations like FNFAT and TFDA contribute to talent development through capacity-building programs and strategic partnerships with international entities (Lewis, 2003; Zemaityte et al., 2024). These combined efforts underscore the industry's potential as a driver of economic growth and cultural diplomacy, emphasizing language skill development and global positioning.

However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in language education and global positioning. To succeed on the world stage, Thailand's film industry must address limitations such as the need for continuous evaluation, investment in tailored language education programs, and collaboration among government, industry, and education sectors. Flexibility, innovation, and lifelong learning are essential for the industry to excel globally and enhance Thailand's reputation as a hub for film production and cultural diplomacy.

English Language Skills Learning Gap in Thai Film Industry

The Thai film industry grapples with a significant hurdle caused by the insufficient English proficiency of its workforce, hindering effective communication and collaboration (Klemm, 2019). This language skills gap spans the entire film production process, from pre-production planning to post-production tasks. During pre-production, where ideas are conceptualized and plans are made, personnel struggle to articulate concepts and develop scripts due to language barriers (Toohey et al., 2012). Effective communication is crucial for coordinating efforts among team members, but the language barrier often leads to misunderstandings and delays. In the production phase, directing talent and liaising with external stakeholders become challenging without fluent English skills (Rae and Irving, 2015). Communication breakdowns can result in inefficiencies and compromised production quality.

Similarly, in post-production, conveying feedback and collaborating with international partners pose challenges due to the language skills gap (Case, 2013). Industry stakeholders lament missed opportunities for international collaborations and distribution deals due to language barriers (Fang, 2021).

Recognizing the severity of this issue, educational institutions and government agencies are acknowledging the importance of addressing language skills within the industry. Tailored language training programs covering technical vocabulary and industry-specific terms are essential to enhance competitiveness, attract foreign investment, and position Thailand as a filmmaking hub.

Leveraging technology, such as virtual reality (VR) classrooms and Metaverse platforms, offers promising solutions to bridge the language skills gap, providing immersive and engaging learning experiences for industry professionals. VR simulations allow for active engagement in scenarios relevant to professional roles, such as script readings and post-production discussions (Lee and Park, 2020). Metaverse platforms facilitate peer-to-peer communication and collaborative projects, fostering language proficiency through authentic interactions (Alam and Mohanty, 2022).

Success stories from technology-driven language education programs, such as Duolingo and Rosetta Stone, demonstrate the effectiveness of gamification and multimedia content in personalized learning (AlGerafi et al., 2023). However, challenges like adapting content to industry-specific needs and addressing digital literacy and infrastructure limitations must be overcome. Nonetheless, the integration of immersive technologies into language education presents promising opportunities to complement traditional instruction and cater to diverse learning preferences (Yu et al., 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The literature review explores the interconnectedness of globalization, soft power, and cultural diplomacy, emphasizing the pivotal role of language skills in fostering international collaborations and promoting the global standing of industries such as film. It also highlights the significance of leveraging innovative technologies, such as virtual reality and Metaverse platforms, in enhancing language education and addressing skill gaps within various sectors (see figure 1).
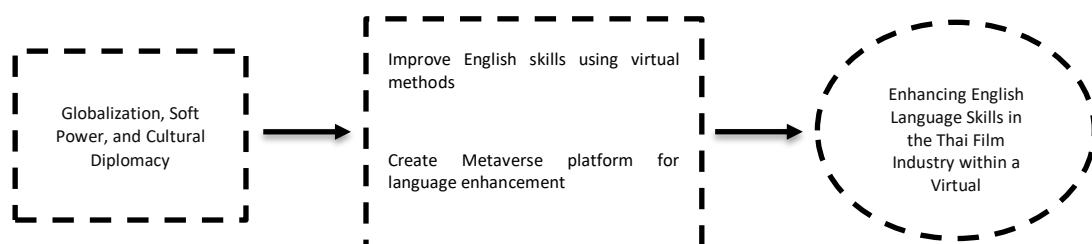

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

With the aim of overcoming obstacles hindering the advancement of the Thai film industry and positioning it for global recognition, this study focuses on enhancing English language skills among industry professionals within a virtual environment. The study delineates three primary objectives: firstly, to develop English proficiency among Thai film industry personnel using innovative virtual methods; secondly, to establish a dedicated platform on the Metaverse for enhancing English language competency among industry professionals; and thirdly, to propose comprehensive guidelines for driving English language skill development within the industry, with the overarching goal of closing existing skill gaps and elevating the industry's global stature for enhanced collaboration opportunities.

To realize these objectives, the study suggests for the implementation of immersive and interactive English language training programs within a virtual setting. By leveraging virtual reality classrooms and specialized Metaverse platforms, industry professionals can actively participate in tailored language learning activities designed to enhance their skills. These forward-thinking approaches not only offer engaging learning experiences but also foster collaboration and skill enhancement among personnel, ultimately contributing to the industry's growth and competitiveness in the global arena.

Methodology

In implementing Kurt Lewin's Action Research Theory in our study, we adopted a proactive approach aimed at intervening in the research process to enhance English language skills within the Thai film industry. Embracing the collaborative ethos inherent in Action Research, our methodology emphasized active engagement with stakeholders to drive meaningful change (see figure 2).
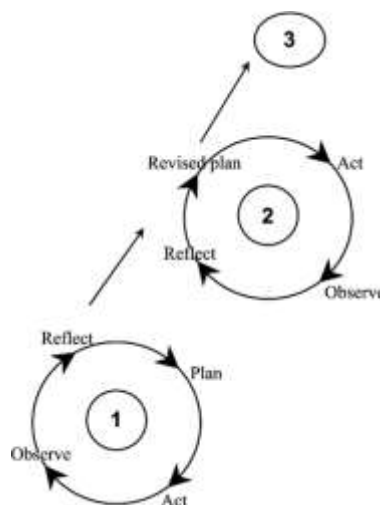
Figure 2. Spiral Action of Research Cycle (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001)

We incorporated elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR), enabling close collaboration with practitioners to identify key challenges and opportunities related to language proficiency. Through participatory workshops and focus group interviews, we actively solicited input and feedback from students, educational personnel, and industry professionals, totaling 26 individuals, to comprehensively understand the industry's landscape.

Furthermore, our intervention strategies were developed in consultation with stakeholders, including government officials intricately involved in the industry's regulatory frameworks. This collaborative effort, involving 20 government representatives, provided invaluable insights into the interplay between policies and industry dynamics. Central to our data collection toolkit were workshops and focus groups, serving as conduits for in-depth exploration of key themes and issues, guided by semi-structured interview guidelines.

Through the fusion of participatory action research techniques and workshop sessions, our data collection efforts transcended conventional boundaries, fostering an environment of shared learning and collective problem-solving. Each participant, driven by active engagement, contributed unique insights, enriching our understanding of the Thai film industry's intricacies.

Throughout the research process, our quest to achieve research objectives was guided by a thoroughly crafted Research Implementation Plan, focusing on curriculum development and comprehensive information gathering. Document research served as our compass, guiding us through academic literature and organizational reports to inform curriculum development. Simultaneously, we set guidelines to ensure curriculum resonance with industry intricacies, with practical workshops serving as arenas for collaborative brainstorming.

These workshops, eliciting vital feedback from stakeholders across the industry spectrum, emerged as crucibles of innovation. Our vision extended beyond traditional educational paradigms, with guidelines for crafting extracurricular courses aimed at fortifying English language proficiency among industry practitioners. Through these initiatives, we aspired to cultivate a holistic learning ecosystem, empowering individuals to thrive in the dynamic landscape of the Thai film industry.

Results and Discussion

In alignment with the predefined study objectives, the findings of this study are precisely organized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the development of English language skills within the Thai film industry.

The pursuit of the study objective necessitates a robust data collection strategy aimed at elucidating the underlying needs and concerns of key stakeholders. To this end, our research endeavored to engage with three distinct chores: students pursuing education in film-related disciplines, operational personnel actively involved in the day-to-day functioning of the film industry, and government officials alongside industry stakeholders entrusted with the formulation and implementation of policies shaping the industry's trajectory.

To gather rich and nuanced insights from these diverse constituencies, this study deployed a multifaceted approach encompassing workshop sessions, focus group interviews, and content analysis. These methodological tools served as vehicles for soliciting firsthand perspectives, uncovering latent challenges, and identifying emergent needs.

The ensuing findings cast a revealing light on the complex landscape of the Thai film industry, offering invaluable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of language proficiency development. From students grappling with the intricacies of film-related coursework to seasoned industry professionals navigating the demands of a rapidly evolving landscape, our research unearthed a spectrum of challenges and opportunities spanning the industry's ecosystem.

The Role of English Language in Shaping Thai Film Industry Stakeholders

The significance of the English language and the cultivation of stakeholders' values are paramount within the Thai film industry, as underscored by an in-depth examination of the industry's global standing and its interplay with various contextual factors. Through a series of stakeholder interviews and consultations, the perspectives and concerns of industry stakeholders have been meticulously documented, shedding light on the intricate web of influences shaping the industry's landscape.

Political factors emerge as pivotal determinants of stability and opportunity within the Thai film industry, with governmental policies exerting a profound impact on investment promotion, legislative frameworks, and the overall direction of industry development. Economic considerations, likewise, play a pivotal role, influencing funding opportunities, labor practices, and the broader economic viability of filmmaking endeavors.

Social dynamics further shape the industry's trajectory, with audience preferences, cultural trends, and societal norms exerting a discernible influence on content creation and consumption patterns. Technological advancements, in tandem, drive innovation and competition within the industry, necessitating agility and adaptability to remain relevant in an ever-evolving landscape.

Environmental factors, too, assume significance, with the rich tapestry of Thailand's landscapes serving as both a backdrop and a logistical consideration for filmmakers. Legal frameworks, albeit currently restrictive in certain domains, underscore the importance of contemporary and supportive regulations conducive to creative expression and industry growth.

Crucially, the cultivation of skills, particularly linguistic proficiency, emerges as a linchpin for professional advancement within the industry. Moreover, the collective adherence to shared values and industry standards fosters cohesion and collective action, underpinning a conducive environment for sustainable development.

In light of these findings, stakeholders have advocated for proactive engagement with international counterparts, advocating for global media processes such as international conferences and film festivals to facilitate cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange. Initiatives spearheaded by organizations such as Netflix Thailand, IMDA, and FDCP Philippines underscore the importance of forging strategic partnerships and leveraging global networks to propel the Thai film industry onto the international stage.

Challenges in Enhancing English Skills for Film Industry Personnel

In film industry-related courses, teaching and learning have evolved over time. In the past, the focus was on fundamental aspects of production like storyboard writing, scriptwriting, and location scouting. Students would practice these skills and then move on to shooting at designated locations during the production phase. Post-production activities mainly revolved around editing based on storyboard guidelines. However, in recent years, English language courses have been incorporated into the curriculum. These courses now include video assignments covering the entire production process, where students practice writing storyboards and scripts in English. Despite these changes, the curriculum still faces challenges in providing comprehensive coverage within limited class time, and teaching methods have not kept pace with evolving educational needs.

When it comes to the English language skills of personnel in the film industry value chain, there are some notable observations. Many individuals demonstrate adequate listening skills, but they struggle with accurately interpreting complex discussions. Similarly, while most have moderate reading skills, they often struggle with translating technical vocabulary. In terms of speaking, many exhibit limited proficiency, especially in pronunciation, leading to communication breakdowns. Additionally, writing skills are lacking in many personnel, with difficulties in adhering to grammatical rules and spelling technical terms correctly. Overall, while there are strengths in reading, challenges remain in speaking, pronunciation, and effective communication.

Guidelines for Advancement

Film students have advocated for a stronger emphasis on teaching technical vocabulary in the English language, suggesting methods such as incorporating instructional materials and encouraging students to translate words independently. This is particularly crucial as many students lack proficiency in the language and require reinforcement of vocabulary knowledge, especially in the context of pre-production and production processes, as well as communication skills relevant to post-production activities. They propose integrating English language skills training into all subjects, with at least 40% of teaching materials per hour being audio-visual, unconventional, and engaging to deter rote learning. Content should prioritize industry-specific vocabulary, potentially incorporating conversational phrases applicable in real filming or work scenarios. Faculty and industry professionals agree that fostering English language skills among film students is vital for their prospects in the industry, whether as graduates entering the workforce or being

recruited to work on international film sets. They view this as an opportunity to further develop the content industry.

Table 1. Considerations for Designing Virtual Reality Classrooms

	Media Characteristics		Usage Characteristics
Realism and Engagement	Develop classrooms to be as realistic and engaging as possible to stimulate students' motivation to learn.	Communication Facilitation	Design user interfaces to facilitate effective communication with users.
User Experience	Enhance usability and accessibility to promote user engagement and interest.	Simplicity and Convenience	Develop UI for simplicity and convenience, possibly using symbols instead of text.
Interaction	Allow students to interact with various objects and environments, fostering practical learning experiences.	Engagement	Create visually appealing and modern UI to entice users to engage with the platform.
Gamification and Fun Learning Experiences	Gamification and Fun Learning Incorporate gaming elements to make learning enjoyable and engaging and include mini games to supplement traditional learning methods.	Team Interactions	Incorporate team interactions and decision-making opportunities to enhance learning.
Visual Appeal	Ensure interfaces are visually appealing, modern, and user-friendly.	Atmosphere	Utilize mood and tone to create a gaming atmosphere, increasing user interest and engagement.

The research findings and data analysis indicate that effective English language learning in virtual reality classrooms should embed technical vocabulary into lessons and incorporate interactive elements. Students seek challenging levels and specialized vocabulary, while classrooms should prioritize realism and user-friendly interfaces aligned with industry perspectives. Interactive communication, possibly through symbols or music, enhances user experience and engagement. Developing applications such as virtual film sets for practice can further promote interest and engagement, ensuring that classrooms remain dynamic and enjoyable learning environments.

Conclusion

Previous studies have proposed various development guidelines aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of the film industry, both domestically and internationally. These guidelines often focus on areas such as talent development, infrastructure enhancement, regulatory frameworks, and market access. While some studies advocate government intervention and policy support, others emphasize industry-driven initiatives and collaboration with educational institutions and international partners. One common thread among these guidelines is the recognition of the importance of language skills in fostering industry growth and global competitiveness. However, there is often a lack of specificity regarding the implementation of language education initiatives within the industry. Many existing proposals overlook the potential of innovative technologies, such as Metaverse platforms, in addressing language skill gaps and enhancing professional development within the film industry.

Recommendations

This study proposes concrete guidelines for the development of English language skills within the Thai film industry, informed by insights gathered through participatory research methods and collaboration with industry stakeholders. By leveraging Metaverse technology, we advocate for immersive and interactive

language education programs tailored to the needs of industry professionals. This approach represents a departure from traditional classroom -based learning methods, offering a more engaging and effective means of skill enhancement. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the proactive involvement of industry stakeholders in the development and implementation of language education initiatives. By fostering a collaborative environment and engaging closely with practitioners, government officials, and educational institutions, we aim to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of our proposed guidelines.

Acknowledgement

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