



Queer Learner Identity and English Language Learning in a Thai Context

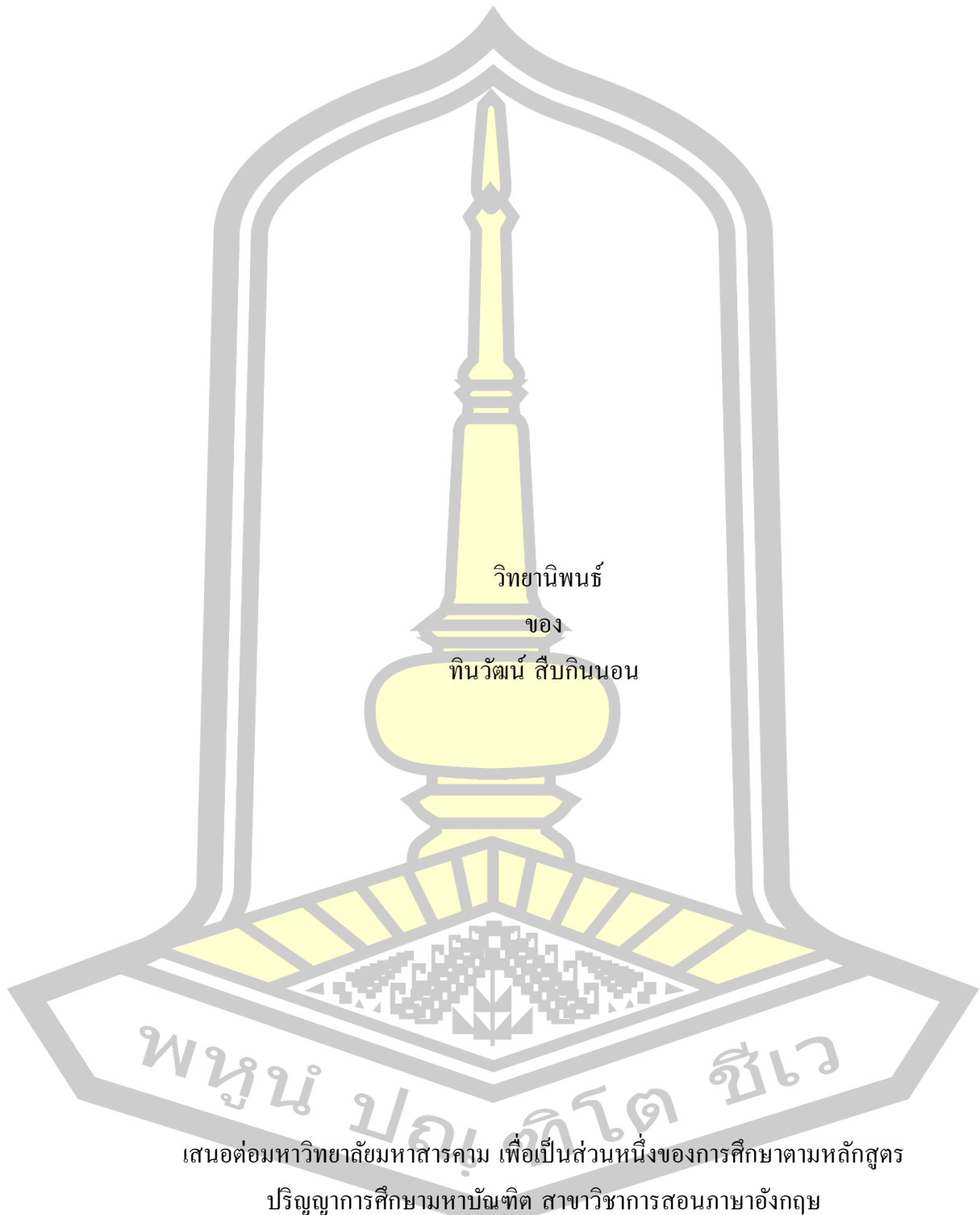
Tinnawat Suebkinnon

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
degree of Master of Education in English Language Teaching

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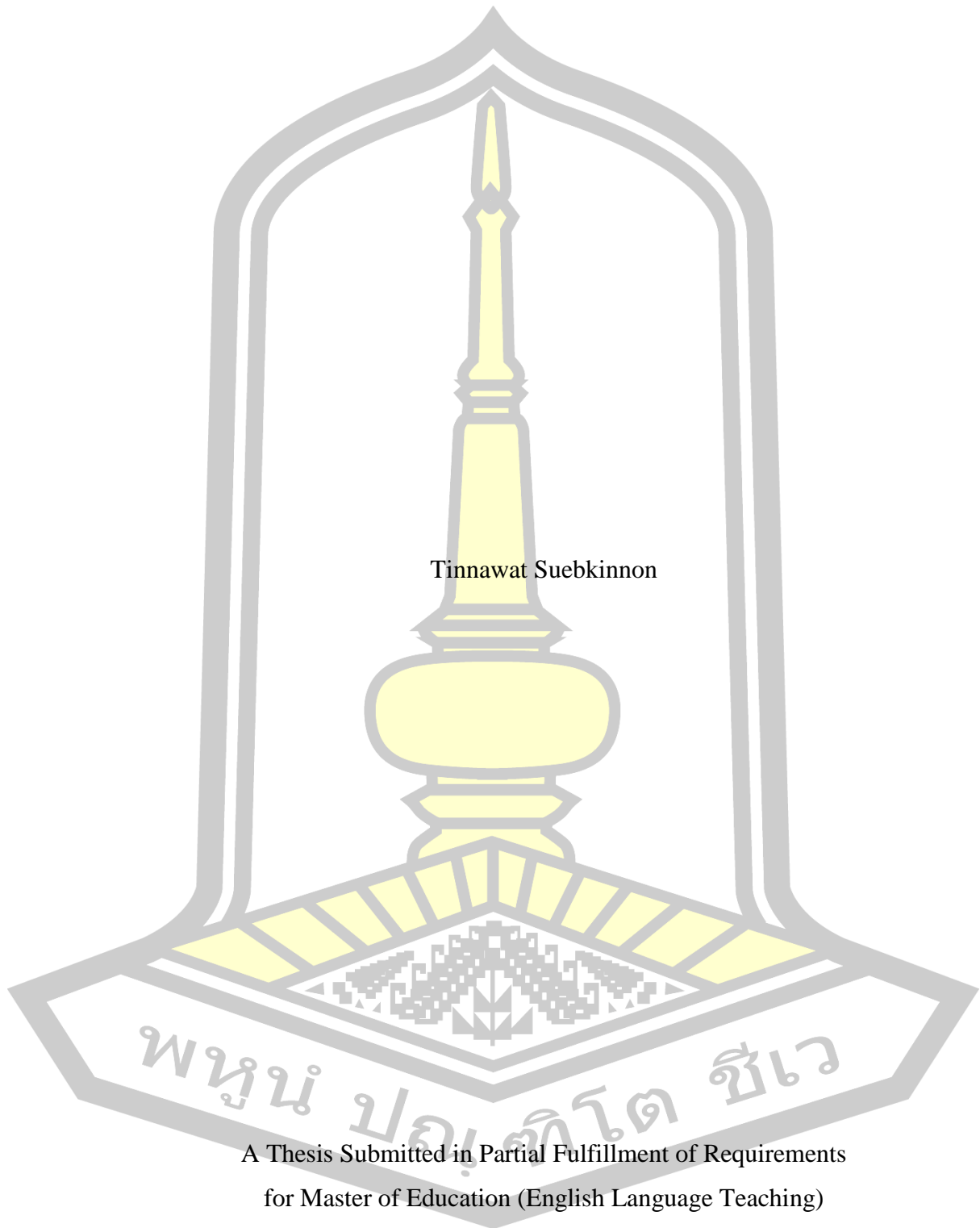
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### ABSTRACT

Despite studies on queer learners in language education received attention from numerous researchers, queer learner identity and English language learning have been understudied, especially in a Thai EFL context. This study therefore aimed to examine the identity construction of queer learners in English language learning and its influences in English language learning. The four participants who were male queer and studied in English majors and English language teaching in a Thai university were selected for the study using convenience sampling. Two of the participants were known by the researcher, whereas the others were not. Semi-structured interviews, field notes, and a digital sound recorder were employed for data collection. Qualitative content analysis was utilized for data analysis. The findings revealed that queer characteristics and marginalized and unequal positions based on gender identity and sexual orientation were two main factors constituting queer learner identity of English. The majority of the participants illustrated that their queer characteristics were conducive to their speaking skills. Additionally, the findings found that the heteronormativity in a Thai context was a part of the participants' passions for pursuing English language proficiency which was advantageous for their future success and help them gain parental and societal acceptance. Also, it is the impetus for most participants to acquire English to migrate to an English-speaking country in which they believed it was a welcoming place for queer people. Besides, the study revealed that some participants who desire a Western partner viewed English as beneficial to them for finding the Western man, whom they thought the Western men would be more open to gender diversity than Thai men. The findings implied a better understanding of the identity construction of queer learners and its influences in English language learning.

Keyword : Queer learner identity, positioning theory, English language learning

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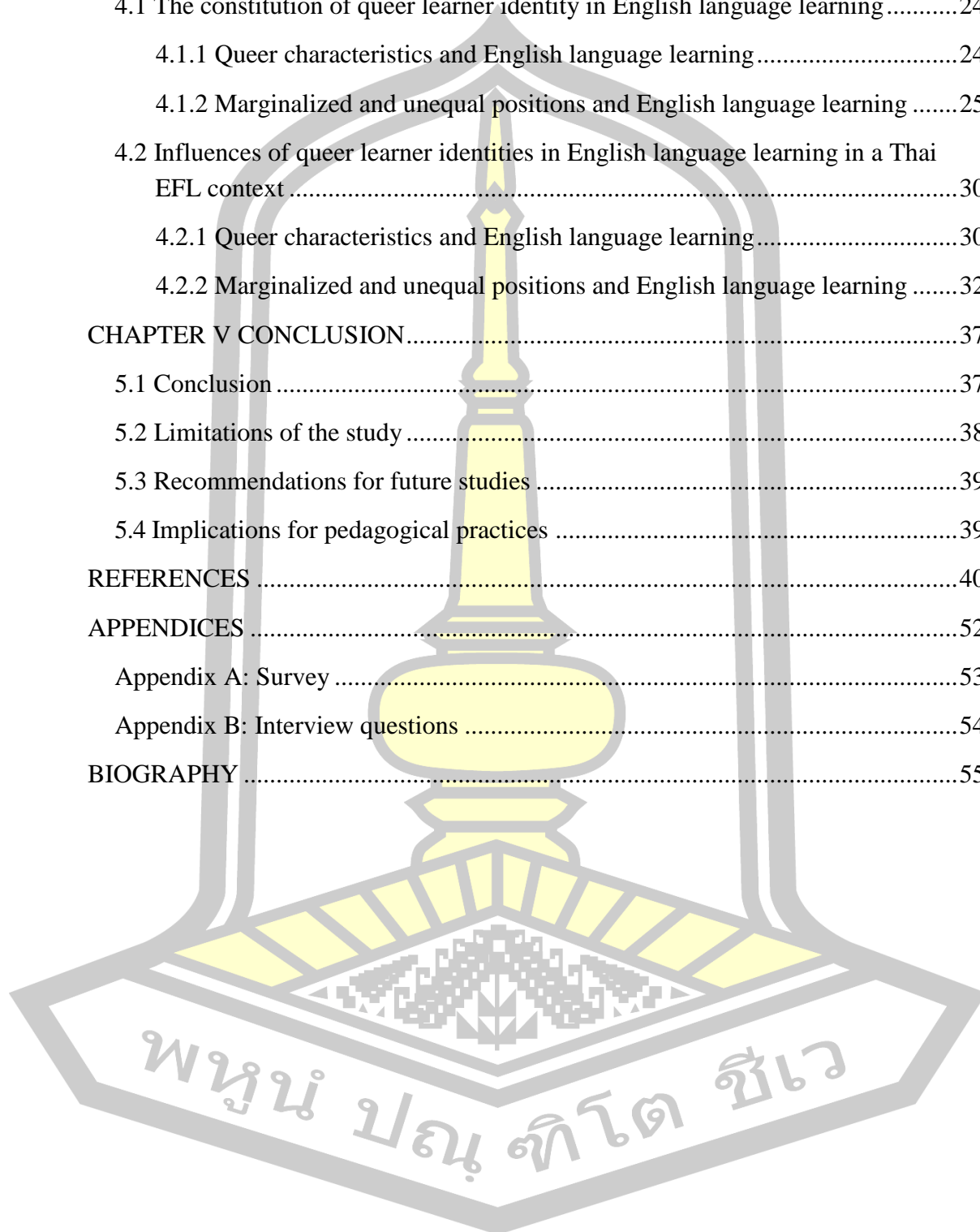
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Learner identity plays a significant role in language learning and has received much attention in foreign language learning research over the past decades. Every learner has a unique identity that influences their behaviors and the processes of language acquisition. Understanding learner identity can explain why some learners are outstanding and successful in language learning, while others are unlikely to develop their language proficiency even at a beginner's level.

In language education, "identity" is widely understood as learner identity as a second or foreign language learner (García-Pastor, 2018b) and has been defined in many ways. Identity refers to "a sense of self that is socially or culturally constructed and 'dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing across time and place'" (Norton, 2006, p. 502). In addition, Wenger (2000) states that "an identity is not an abstract idea or a label, such as a title, an ethnic category, or a personality trait. It is a lived experience of belonging (or not belonging). A strong identity involves deep connections with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection, and mutual commitments" (p. 239). Others have argued that a learner's identity is as "a diverse, dynamic, often contradictory, multiple rather than unitary concept" (García-Pastor, 2017, p. 39).

Owing to the vital roles of learner identity on language learning, much research exists on learner identity and foreign language learning. For instance, Teng (2018) recently examined the roles of identities in language learning and found that learner identity is historically and socially constructed and can affect EFL learning. This study shows that learners who build a positive identity in language learning are more likely to invest in their language learning to achieve a target language. In contrast, those who form their identity as a poor English learner are likely to be discouraged in EFL learning. Learner identity can shape one's investment in learning English. In addition, gender identity influences the levels of motivation in language learning (Kissau, 2006). In general, women are more motivated to learn a new language and have more positive attitudes when compared with men (Michońska-Stadnik, 2004). Specifically,

women tend to be integratively motivated to learn a new language because they are interested in the culture associated with that language. On the other hand, men tend to be instrumentally motivated to learn a language due to a practical reason; getting good grades (Kissau, 2006).

Recently, there has been a growing body of research on learner identity in language education that sexual identities have been emphasized in language classroom (Beebe, 2002; Courtney, 2007; Nelson, 2000, 2009, 2010, 2012; Dalley & Campbell, 2006; King, 2008; Nguyen & Yang, 2015; Paiz, 2015). A number of studies found that social discourse in the classroom, including the language classroom, were mainly heteronormative (Courtney 2007; Dalley & Campbell 2006; Kappra & Vandrick 2006; Liddicoat 2009; Nelson 1993, 1999, 2009, 2010; O'Mochain, Mitchell, & Nelson 2003; O'Mochain 2006) and queer learners are taunted in classroom (Anderson et al., 1997; Moita-Lopes, 2006; Saint Pierre, 1994). For example, Paiz (2015) investigated 45 ESL reading textbooks that most of the samples promoted heteronormative worldviews that tended to avoid the issues related to queers. The role of textbooks may have a negative impact on queer learner voices and restrict queer learner identity in the classroom. Also, Dalley and Campbell (2006) found that although school promoted sexual diversity, social interactions in the classrooms and school were mainly heteronormative. When learners come out as gay or are called gay by others in the classroom, they face with a negative reaction from their classmates. Moreover, the teachers are not sure how to deal with it and often keep silent (Moita-Lopes, 2006; Nelson, 2009).

Another main focus of current research investigated the relationship between queer learners and English language learning (King, 2008; Nelson, 2010; Rondón, 2012; Nguyen & Yang, 2015; Moore, 2013, 2016). For example, Rondón (2012) stated that queer learners were uncomfortable revealing their sexual identity in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom that directly affected students' participation in classroom activities and the development of language proficiency. Norton (2000) suggested that some queer language learners may refrain from the classroom in which was a heteronormative environment or instructors or friends' stereotypes about their sexual orientation. Queer learners' freedom and rights in the classroom may be

discouraged. However, the heteronormativity influences learners' impetus and investment for acquiring English language proficiency because the English language is a sort of gay lingua franca that helps them gain access to more welcoming and wider queer communities (Beebe, 2002; King, 2008; Nelson, 2010; Moore, 2013, 2016).

In a Thai EFL context, to the best of my knowledge, there was only one study by Shih-Wei (2013) that explored the intersection between English language learning and sexuality. This study investigated the discursive construction of language desire of Asian gay men in Bangkok. It showed that participants invested in learning English in order to gain access to the target language speakers and symbolic and material resources. As English is the lingua franca of Asian gay men who desired and were desired by Western men, some of the participants identified that his identity as a Thai gay man gave him the legitimacy to flirt with Western men on Grindr, which was the social networking and an online dating application app for queer people. Also, dating a white man will provide him opportunities to live in the West.

Although a growing body of research on queer issues in ELT has received increased scholarly attention, e.g. investigating what is at risk in classes promotes heteronormative worldviews. The studies examining queer learner identity and English language learning have been overlooked (King, 2008; Nguyen & Yang, 2015). According to the inequities and marginalized experiences of queer learners playing significant roles in language acquisition, understanding a queer learner identity in language acquisition is crucial. Thus, this study examined how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influences English language learning.

### **1.2 Purposes of the study**

To date, the inequalities experienced by marginalized groups of language learners (e.g., queer learners) in language learning have not received adequate attention in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Thus, this study aimed to shed light on how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influence English language learning. The following research questions will be addressed in the current study:

1. How do queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning?
2. How does queer learner identity influence English language learning?

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

According to the marginalization and inequality of queer learners in a Thai context, the current study aimed to understand how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influence English language learning. This study focused on four Thai male EFL learners who are queer and suffered discrimination and marginalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity from Thai society. The participants studied English majors and English language teaching at a government university in northeastern Thailand. In order to counter biases in collecting data, the participants were divided into equal groups of two: known and unknown. For the known participants, the researcher has known them for many years. The participants and researcher used to participate in activities together and hung out together many times. As such, the researcher believed that this friendship could be an advantage of data collection as the trust can encourage the participants to talk openly regarding various and sensitive topics. The researcher had only the information regarding their educational background and their inequalities in a Thai setting for the unknown participants. Two-hour semi-structured interviews were used to obtain in-depth information. A follow-up question was used in case the researcher needed more information. Field notes and a digital sound recorder were used for collecting the data in the interview.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The current study provided a better understanding of queer learner identity in English language learning in a Thai EFL context and its influence on language acquisition. In addition, the findings of this study revealed more about the roles of gender identity in language education. Teachers would be more aware of the marginalization of queer learners and its effects on language learning. This study provided a desirable learning atmosphere and quality education for different types of learners, such as queer learners who were stigmatized. All the different types of learners felt more welcome and safer within the classroom. The classroom, then, would be an equal environment in which everyone feels accepted and respected.

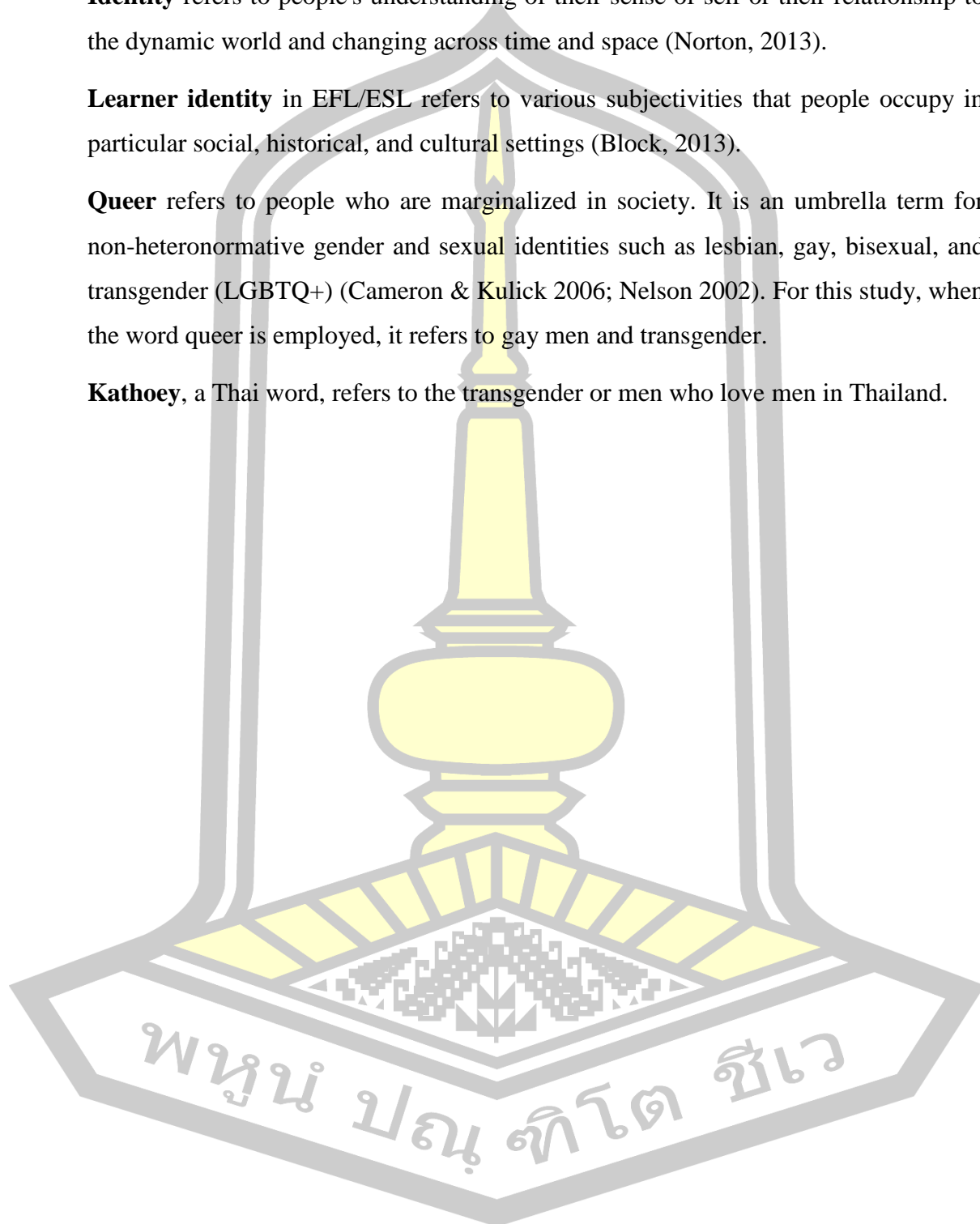
### 1.5 Definition of key terms

**Identity** refers to people's understanding of their sense of self or their relationship to the dynamic world and changing across time and space (Norton, 2013).

**Learner identity** in EFL/ESL refers to various subjectivities that people occupy in particular social, historical, and cultural settings (Block, 2013).

**Queer** refers to people who are marginalized in society. It is an umbrella term for non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) (Cameron & Kulick 2006; Nelson 2002). For this study, when the word queer is employed, it refers to gay men and transgender.

**Kathoey**, a Thai word, refers to the transgender or men who love men in Thailand.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the current literature on queer learner identity and English language learning as a foreign language in Thai universities. The chapter also outlines three main identity construction areas in second language acquisition: social and gender and positioning theory.

#### 2.1 Definition of learner identity

In the field of language education, the term "identity" is generally understood as a learner's identity as a second or foreign language learner (García-Pastor, 2018). A learner's identity in language learning refers to "the different subjectivities and subject positions they inhabit or have ascribed to them within particular social, historical, and cultural contexts" (Block, 2013, p. 18). The construction of learner identity was described as "a diverse, dynamic, often contradictory, multiple rather than unitary concept" (García-Pastor, 2017, p. 39). In addition, identity theory indicated identity as a sense of self that is socially situated and constrained and 'dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing across time and place' (Norton, 2006, p. 502). Identities were imposed by the contexts in which people were born and the person's life experiences. Moreover, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004b) argued that people could not freely or easily select who they wanted to be. Yet, people had to negotiate their identity through the broader economic, historical and social context in which they lived. Indeed, identity was signified as 'the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship was structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' (Norton, 2013, p. 45). Identity was flexible and fluid and had distinct roles that could be adopted in different contexts (Teng, 2018).

English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have different aspects of identities that play significant and distinct roles in foreign or second language learning. For instance, Murray & Kojima (2007) investigated how a Japanese female student learned a foreign language outside the class and how her language learning experiences influenced her identity development. It was found that the student had high



motivation in language learning, and her personality fulfillment affects language acquisition.

Before discussing the research on learner identity and language learning, the word queer will be described first. Queer is generally understood as an umbrella term for non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) (Gray, 2016). Therefore, a sexual identity of male participants, who desire and are desired by men, in the current study will be under the umbrella term of “queer.” Queer gender identity is viewed as marginalized and unequal; queer people are thus denied ‘the cultural rewards afforded those whose public performances of self are contained within that narrow band of behaviors considered proper to a heterosexual identity (Cameron & Kulick 2006). In queer community, queer learners have a cultural capital including queer beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and linguistic repertoire that is employed in the queer communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). There are discursive practices in conversations between queer people that often include certain lexical items, speech patterns, grammatical forms, and conversational styles (e.g. Abe 2006; Barrett 1997; Coates & Jordan 1997; Podesva, Roberts, & Campbell-Kibler 2006).

## **2.2 Learner identity and language learning**

### **2.2.1 Roles of gender in language learning**

Sex is assigned at birth and is determined as a biological fact. By contrast, gender identity is “a person’s own feelings about their gender – whether they are male, female, both or neither” (Paechter, 2001, p. 47). In addition, Paechter (2001) states: “Gender identity is a private matter; we demonstrate our gender identity, by and large, by the playing out of gender roles, and these roles are learned – usually unconsciously, and usually in early childhood and in adolescence” (p.49).

The earlier literature claims that girls outperformed verbal skills in second language acquisition because of their biology. However, this assumption is rejected by grounded research on neurology, which shows no biological differences between males and females (Sunderland, 2000). Although biology does not affect language learning, many studies reveal gender differences in language acquisition due to social factors (Sunderland, 2000). Women and men are aware of the appropriate behaviors

and attitudes dictated by social norms and their families. As such, non-physical gender differences are constructed by socialization (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). The communication styles between women and men can vary due to differences in the purposes of conversations. Research in psychology suggests that, in general, the male type of communication is competitive, whereas the female manner is cooperative. The female conversation is more tentative, expressive, and polite, whereas the male conversation is more confident and power-hungry (Basow & Rubenfield, 2003). In addition, women are more sociable and tend to interact with others; men, on the other hand, are likely to be more independent (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1977; Eagly, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). Women also generally use their interactions to gain input, but men use interaction strategies for the output (Viriya & Sapsirin, 2014). Also, men tend to cope with problems and offer solutions in order to avoid further conflicts or unimportant issues (Basow & Rubenfield, 2003). Mahmud (2008) finds different characteristics in language use between men and women in Bugis, Indonesia. Women are more likely to use polite words to share their opinions emotionally or show their own success and others' negative sides. Women have also been shown to value communication to construct relationships and develop social connections, while men use language to gain power (Leaper, 1991; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001).

Over the last several decades, educational research has revealed that gender differences play a significant role in students' academic interests, needs, and achievements (Halpern, 1986; Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2000). In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), women are superior to men in the second language learning process (Burstall, 1975; Boyle, 1987; Ehrlich, 2001). Women display greater language abilities and effort, and they are also more successful learners (Michońska-Stadnik, 2004). In addition, women seem to be more inspired and open to corrections and feedback than men. According to Ellis (2012), women may acquire a language better than men because they are more open to learning the new language structures and tend to use the correct forms of the target language. Regarding differences in performances between females and males in second language tests in schools, the available studies indicate that women generally have higher scores than men. Females outperform men in verbal fluency, accuracy,



and memory. This may be due to traditional gender roles imposed on women in society, enabling them to practice and interact with a language. However, it has been argued that this is not a reliable finding (Saha, 2016). A language classroom also represents a specific socio-educational environment where students have to speak or produce outputs to interact with their peers or teachers. This environment has been described as a “girls’ domain” (Sunderland, 1998). Thus, it is believed that studying language is traditionally considered a female activity, which may have psychological and social implications for both women and men. This may explain why language acquisition is faster for women than men (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

Gender differences also exist in the motivation to learn a second language. In general, women have a higher level of motivation to learn the target language and display a more positive attitude (Michońska-Stadnik, 2004). Women are likely to have integrative motivation, while men tend to have instrumental motivation (Kissau, 2006). For example, Spanish female university students in the US have more instrumental motivation than male students (Bacon & Finnemann, 1992). French female students in Canada have more aspirations than male students and have more positive perspectives on native speakers (Block, 2002).

Currently, the importance of sexual identities in the classroom has been recognized in language education (Nelson, 2012). Many studies show that social discourse in language programs and classrooms are predominantly heteronormative (e.g. Courtney 2007; Dalley & Campbell 2006; Kappra & Vandrick 2006; Liddicoat 2009; Moita-Lopes 2006; Nelson 1993, 1999, 2009, 2010; O’Mochain, Mitchell, & Nelson 2003; O’Mochain 2006). When disconnection between the content of the classroom and learners’ identities appear, the learners may struggle in their learning (McKay & Wong, 1996), resist teaching (Talmy, 2009) or ignore classroom participation (Norton 2000). Moore (2016) indicates that some queer language learners report that the classroom content does not fit their personal information. This marginalization may also create an undesirable learning space for queer language learners. There may be numerous inequalities or issues that queer learners face in the classroom and may not find a preferred identity in a language classroom. The heteronormative environment may impact queer learners’ motivation and investment.

Besides, numerous scholars have started to examine the negotiation of learners' sexual identity both inside and outside the classroom and how these affect their language learning (King, 2008; Nelson, 2004b, 2005, 2010; Rondón, 2012; Nguyen & Yang, 2015; Moore, 2013, 2016). For example, Rondón (2012) finds that queer learners feel uncomfortable in an EFL classroom because they are concerned about revealing their sexuality. This directly affects queer learners' participation in activities and their development of language proficiency. Also, King's (2008) study shows that marginalized sexual identities motivate learners to study English in the USA in order to gain access to a global queer community where they can gain legitimacy and acceptance. Moreover, Moore (2013) suggests that queer gender identity is intertwined with motivation and investment in learning English. Some queer learners learn English to enter the LGBTQ+ community because of experiencing a sexual conflict in their L1 setting (Japan).

These findings show that the roles of gender identity play major roles in language acquisition, especially in queer learners who may feel stigmatized by social interaction and educational space. Dangerous behaviors may emerge, such as bullying, when people allow heteronormative forms to flourish and do not address homophobia. This atmosphere and behavior can have disastrous consequences for queer people, including suicide and homelessness. Indeed, suicide is the second leading cause of death in queer youth (CDC, 2017), and almost 40% of homeless youth in the United States are queer (Durso & Gates, 2012). Although the research in this area has been growing, the research on queer learners' gender identity and language learning has not been adequately investigated and solved (King, 2008). As such, the current study will examine the impact of queer learners' identity construction and language learning.

### **2.2.2 Social influences and language learning**

Social identity is defined as "the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts" (Norton, 1997, p. 420). Learner identities are complex and change over time. The process of identity formation occurs when learners experience a particular social environment, such as persons, activities, and the world

(Wenger, 1998). The social and historical context can impact constructing an identity or the identity options, which a language learner cannot freely choose (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004b). In addition, poststructuralists suggest that identity is a site of struggle, and there may be a conflict with others when one takes up different positions (Norton, 1995; 2000). Learner identities can therefore change from one context or environment to another. While identity can be the product of a social context, one can also identify his or her own identity (Ellis, 2008). According to Andersson (1999), learners have their own agency and attempt to shape the social context in which they inhabit. Teenagers from a minority group often try to become independent from their family and refrain from using a minority language (Andersson & Andersson, 1999).

Social context can affect the improvement of learners' linguistic identities. Robinson and Clardy (2011) find that when learners encounter anxiety in a language learning environment, they may not achieve outstanding academic performance and lose their identity. An EFL learning community may, therefore, also impact the construction of learner identity. When one has a positive identity, they are likely to put more effort into EFL learning. Sagsayan (2011) argued that knowledge of a foreign language was intertwined with identity formation. She realized that she felt more at ease employing the English language than the Armenian language. Using English as a foreign language, she was comfortable that she could have a logical and affective discourse. While in her native language, she found her discourse to be quite incoherent and emotional, leading to confusion between the speakers.

Anwaruddin (2012) showed that home environment and parental involvement were crucial factors to learners' identity formation and their English learning achievements. One of the participants wrote that she could not interact in English fluently when she was in high school. After she came to the US, she began to speak English, which provided her with a new identity as an 'English speaker'. In addition, the participants stated that geographical locations significantly affected their identity formation and language acquisition. They believed that their family's ability to send them to a good school helped them learn English and, thus, influenced their identity. Another participant stated that living in the capital city gave him a higher social status. His friends in the rural area treated him with respect, and he felt superior to his peers. This

encouraged him to have high self-esteem and inspired him to study hard in school. He firmly believed that his English proficiency could be attributed to a geographical location.

In summary, social conditions impact identity construction in language learning and can also promote or limit language learners' opportunities to develop their language proficiency.

### **2.3 Positioning theory and the analysis of identity in discourse**

The positioning Theory of Davies and Harré (1990) is a sound theoretical framework and a method to analyze identity construction and language learning experience inside and outside the classroom (Kayi-Aydar 2013; Menard-Warwick 2008; Wortham 2004). Positioning Theory used in many educational fields for several decades was taken up in the 1990s by Harré and Van Langenhove, who remain influential authors to its progress up to date (Davies & Harré 1990; van Langenhove & Harré 1999). Positioning is related to the ways that individuals construct themselves and others through discursive practices: speech, oral and written discourse, language use, and other acts (Davies & Harré 1990). In addition, Rex and Schiller (2009) indicated that the positioning of people is involved in how they are located or assigned certain rights and duties in a conversation. Langenhove and Harré (1999) revealed the impact of positioning in a conversation that “one can position oneself or be positioned as, e.g., powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definitive or tentative, authorized or unauthorized” (p. 17). However, people may accept or reject certain rights or duties that they are assigned.

Positioning theory can be divided into two modes: reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself, and interactive positioning in which what one position others and be positioned by others (Davies & Harré, 1990). The notion related to this study is that reflexive positioning may be deliberate (individuals choose to express their personal identity) or forced (individuals are asked to position themselves by others). Also, the relevant distinction for analysis is that among first-order positioning and second-order positioning. First-order positioning refers to the way individuals locate themselves and others in discourse. In contrast, second-order positioning occurs when the first-

order positioning is questioned and challenged or is not taken for granted by others involved in the discourse (Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Positioning is an important role that can impact students' access to learning opportunities and L2 learning practices. Possessing these rights depends on how students positioned themselves, how they positioned other students, and how their instructors positioned them (Kayi-Aydar, 2012). For example, if instructors or mainstream students position some language learners as problematic, those learners would have a sense of powerless and invisible (Yoon, 2008). As Howie's (1999) statement, positioning a student as inferior may affect students' interaction negatively. Eventually, they may avoid participating or separate themselves from classroom activities. However, if the instructors position students as capable of learning, this may be a better consequence for students. The interaction between teachers and students in a classroom is essential for students to shape their identity for themselves and others (Kayi-Aydar, 2012).

Positioning plays a significant role in constructing one's identity. This theory helps to show how positioning creates one's identity and behavior. It is useful to identify how students shape and show literacy identities and how instructors can support learners' identities (Vetter, 2010).

Thus, the researcher considers that Positioning Theory can provide the current study with a useful framework to analyze queer learner identity construction and language learning experience inside and outside the classroom.

#### **2.4 Related studies on learner identity and language learning**

A number of studies have examined the relationship between learner identities and language learning. Norton (2013) produced a case study on Fadhel's narrative in learning French. In this study, Fadhel was a participant who was a migrant and stayed in the port of Calais in France. He identified as a refugee and felt 'out of place'. Language can be important to a learners' identity, as it can dictate one's ability to access social networks. As such, language was not simply categorized as a tool to communicate but was also a key to get access to society. In order to have a new life in France, Fadhel believed that he could receive asylum and be accepted in France by learning the French language. That is, the French language could construct an identity



for Fadhel. Similarly, Murray and Kojima (2007) examined the language learning history of a young Japanese woman. They investigated the student learned to speak English as a foreign language out-of-class and how her language learning experiences influenced her identity development. It was found that the student had a positive experience and identity in language learning. This helped her to pursue language learning. Also, Anwaruddin (2012) studied learner identity in second language education. The study was conducted in Bangladesh, and the participants were males and females aged 18 to 21. The study aimed to identify factors affecting Bangladesh's ELT situation and how and why teachers adapted certain curricular and educational practices. The participants were asked to write a brief autobiography, post their writings on Facebook, and respond to an open-ended questionnaire. This study revealed three main factors that motivated students to have higher self-esteem and study hard in school. First, most students perceived their identity as “users of English”. Second, they believed that they were “privileged” to have a chance to learn English when compared to their peers who lived in the rural area. Finally, the geographical location was significant for them to constitute identity and success in learning English.

Additionally, many scholars have conducted the relationship between gender and motivation. For example, Mori and Gobel (2006) examined 453 participants who were second-year students from Japan. Two motivational models in the study: Expectancy-value theory and Gardner's Socio-educational model. The findings showed a gender difference in integrativeness, with females scoring higher than males. Female students also had a greater interest in the cultures and people of the target language. In addition, female students tended to interact with people around them and be more interested in studying and travelling overseas than male students. Similarly, Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) investigated 228 secondary school students' motivation in years 7, 8, and 9 in the South-west of England to learn French as a foreign language. A questionnaire was formed on the basis of a model from the motivation literature to examine students' responses on 16 constructs related to motivation. They found that females showed a greater integrative orientation, and learning French was viewed as feminine, which meant that the men practiced less and seemed bored learning French.

Other researchers have examined how gender identities can cause issues in language acquisition. Teutsch-Dwyer (2002) examined a case study related to an issue of language and gender in SLA. The study focused on Karol, a 38-year-old Polish immigrant in California. After 14 months of data collection (observation and interviews with Karol and his coworkers and girlfriend), the study found that Karol's English language proficiency had been impaired because of his inability to set a good gendered identity with other people in the U.S.

Recently, the importance of sexual identities in the classroom has been recognized in language education (Nelson, 2012). Many studies found that discourse in language programs and classrooms were predominantly heteronormative (e.g. Courtney 2007; Dalley & Campbell 2006; Kappra & Vandrick 2006; Liddicoat 2009; Moita-Lopes 2006; Nelson 1993, 1999, 2009, 2010; O'Mochain, Mitchell, & Nelson 2003; O'Mochain 2006). For example, Paiz (2015) investigated 45 ESL reading textbooks that most textbooks were dominantly heteronormative. The samples tended to avoid queer issues in the classroom. Thus, the roles of textbooks may impact queer learner voices and restrict queer learner identity in the classroom. Similarly, Dalley and Campbell's (2006) study investigated peer discourses among youth at a bilingual high school in Canada. The researchers used data from a 4-year ethnographic study of student interactions for analysis. The findings found that although school promoted sexual diversity, social interactions in the classrooms and school were dominantly heteronormativity.

Additionally, the focus of current research on queer learners investigated how queer learners negotiate their sexual identity both inside and outside the class and how these affect their English language learning (King, 2008; Nelson, 2010; Rondón, 2012; Nguyen & Yang, 2015; Moore, 2013, 2016). For example, Rondón (2012) examined how EFL LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) students navigate their gender in the classroom using FPDA (Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis). This study consisted of six short-range narratives that showed unstable discourses of LGBT individuals to challenge or resist heteronormative classroom discourse. There were 21 participants (two lesbians, two bisexuals, 17 gays) at different universities in Bogotá. The participants responded to a survey via e-mail,

and six participants provided short narratives in a subsequent semi-structured interview. The participants ranged between 18 and 32 years old. The findings showed that queer learners felt uncomfortable in an EFL classroom because they were always concerned about revealing their sexuality. Rondón argued that this directly affected queer learners' participation in activities and their development of language proficiency. This marginalization may also damage the desirable learning space for queer language learners. In addition, King (2008) examined the language learning experiences of three Korean gay men whose sexual identities were stigmatized. The participants were asked to write about a negative experience they faced while speaking a second language and were also interviewed. The findings showed that marginalized sexual identities motivated learners to choose to study English in a liberal city in the USA in order to enter a broader queer community where they can more easily find legitimacy. Similarly, Moore (2013) investigated the relationship between the sexual identity of five Japanese gay male English and second language acquisition learners. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were used for data collection. The findings found that the Japanese gay men had a conflict between sexual identity and the options available to them in a Japanese context. Thus, participants stated that their motivation to learn English was to carry out a gay identity and look for a welcoming place. In Nelson's (2010) study, she focused on gay immigrants that have been invisible from the literature of language education. The interview was used for the data collection in this case study. The participant was a gay man who was from Mexico and studied English in the United States. This case study showed that gay topics were unspeakable in the language classroom. Also, the findings illustrated that Pablo perceived that his gay identity was important in his social discourses in an English-speaking country, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, it was the motivation to improve his English language proficiency and move to an English-speaking country. The English language was regarded as a gay lingua franca that helped Pablo gain access to a global gay community. Besides, the study of Nguyen and Yang (2015) investigated the English classroom participation of a Korean queer learner who identified herself as a transgender woman. This study focused on how the participant constructed gender identity in her discourse and her learner identity positioning inside and outside the classroom. Data were collected in field notes,



interviews, classroom recordings, postings on a social media network and a video recording of the participant's interactions with friends outside the classroom. This finding showed that the participant's investment was to gain access to queer communities rather than the classroom community. Besides, the participant mentioned that learning English was essential to her transitioning since it could allow her to live in a wider LGBTQ+ community.

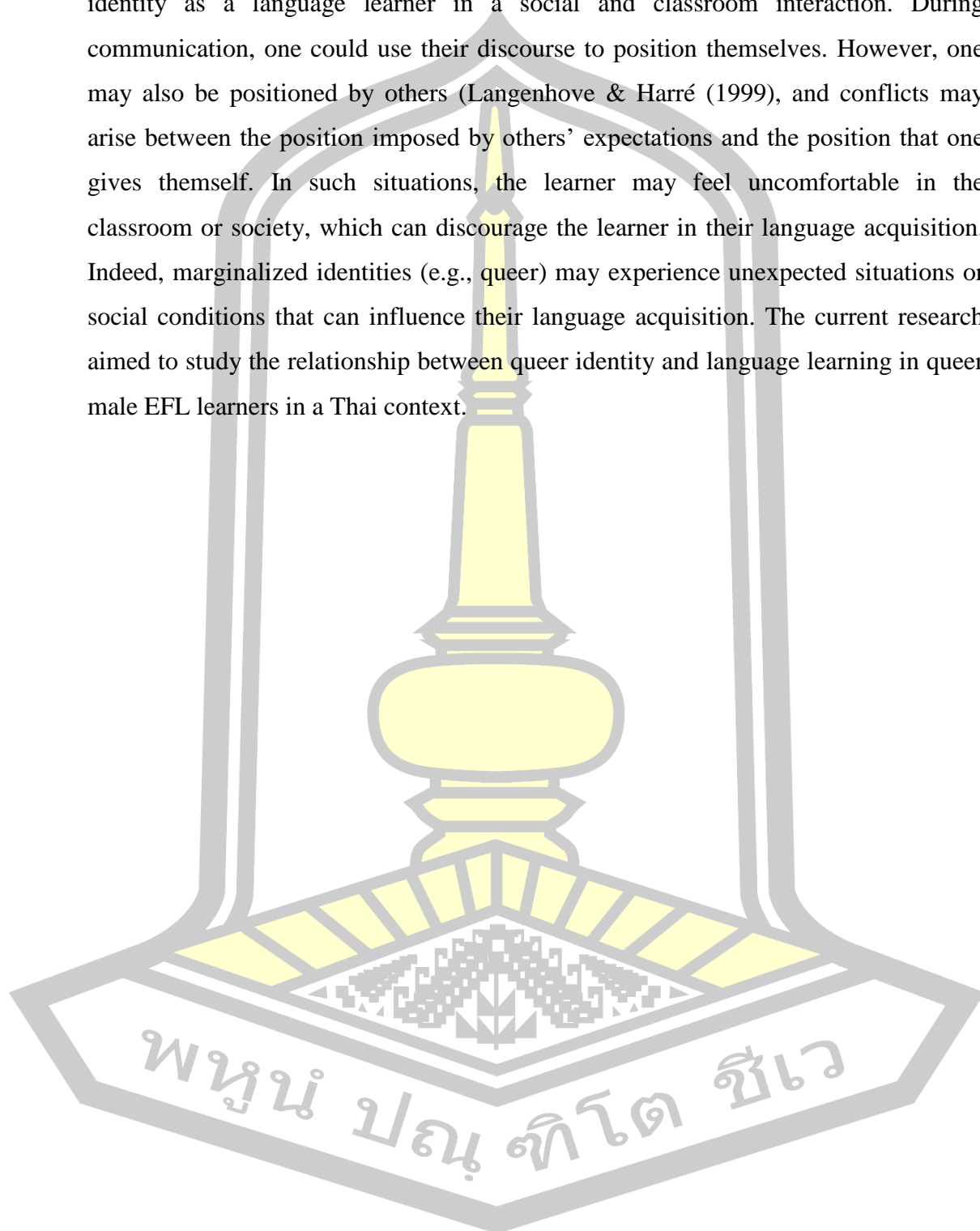
Additionally, the study exploring the relationship between sexuality and English language learning in a Thai EFL context, Shih-Wei (2013) study examined the language desire of Asian gay men in Bangkok. It found that the participants learned English to gain symbolic and material resources. As English functions as a lingua franca for Asian gay men who desired and were desired by Western men, some participants illustrated that their gay identity gave them the legitimacy to flirt with Western men on Grindr, a social networking and an online dating application app for queer people. Also, dating a white man could provide them opportunities for migrating to the West.

### **2.5 Summary of the conceptual framework of the study**

This study aimed to investigate how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influenced English language learning. Many factors were identified that formed or constrained learner identity and language learning, such as social background, gender identity, and positioning.

Females and males differ in their language use and performance in language learning. These gender differences in language learning are likely due to social factors (Sunderland, 2000) and differences in motivation (Kissau, 2006). Queer learners have also often faced marginal and unequal experiences, and this affects their language learning. Some queer language learners may resist the classroom's heteronormativity or classmates or teachers' stereotypes about their gender, and they may ultimately terminate their classroom participation (Norton 2000). On the other hand, some may be highly motivated to acquire a new language in order to improve their social class or gain legitimacy in a new social environment.

Finally, positioning theory could be used to analyze the construction of queer learner identity as a language learner in a social and classroom interaction. During communication, one could use their discourse to position themselves. However, one may also be positioned by others (Langenhove & Harré (1999), and conflicts may arise between the position imposed by others' expectations and the position that one gives oneself. In such situations, the learner may feel uncomfortable in the classroom or society, which can discourage the learner in their language acquisition. Indeed, marginalized identities (e.g., queer) may experience unexpected situations or social conditions that can influence their language acquisition. The current research aimed to study the relationship between queer identity and language learning in queer male EFL learners in a Thai context.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This chapter is regarding the discussion of research design and methodology used in the study, which aimed to investigate the identity of the marginalized group of EFL learners (e.g., queer learners) in language learning that has been neglected its significance in SLA research. To achieve this study's aim, I used a qualitative case study and Positioning theory to analyze the collected data. This chapter was composed of the research design, participants and setting, research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, and the explanation of the research trustworthiness of my data.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Case Study Approach**

A case study is the most appropriate approach to gain in-depth information from a person, group or community through various qualitative data collection such as interviews. Thus, this current study used a qualitative case study because it aimed to examine the connection between the identity of queer learners and English language learning. Also, it could help explain the positioning of queer learners in a Thai EFL context.

#### **3.2 Participants and setting**

Participants in this current study were mainly opted by a unique gender (queer). To counter biases in collecting the data, four male participants were separated into equal groups of two: known and unknown. The participants were queer language learners, who desired and were desired by other men, and experienced marginalization and inequality, both inside and outside the classroom in a Thai context. As in a Thai context, non-normative gender identity is subject to social pressure from heteronormative practices.

Another criterion for selecting the participants was their educational background that the researcher needed the English language learners to complete the aims of the study. Thus, the researcher chose the queer participants who studied in an English major and English language teaching at a government university in northeastern Thailand. Here are the participants' profiles.

**Karn** identified herself as transgender and studied as an English major at a government university in northeastern Thailand. She experienced a societal and parental rejection of her sexual orientation and gender identity: she faced many adverse treatments from society, such as bullying, stereotyping, denying, and other barriers to gender equality because of her sexuality. Her family was initially not open about her sexual orientation and gender identity, especially her father, who reacted negatively. Originally, she had a poor relationship with her father and would try to avoid talking to him. Karn's freedom of gender expression was restricted by her parents, that she had to conform to traditional gender norms despite revealing her sexuality already.

**Yoya**, who described herself as transgender, studied English language teaching at a government university in northeastern Thailand. She had negative experiences with other people because of her sexuality. In the beginning, her family did not entirely accept her sexual orientation and queer gender identity. Especially Yoya's father, he initially had negative views toward queer gender identity that he would harshly rebuke if Yoya expressed queer gender identity.

**Tommy** identified himself as gay and studied as an English major at a government university in northeastern Thailand. Tommy stated that he did not officially reveal his gender identity to his parents. However, his parents might perceive but avoided mentioning it. It was one of the challenges that he needed to overcome. In addition, Tommy stated that Thai society did not generally accept who he was. Thus, he frequently faced negative experiences due to his sexual orientation and gender identities, such as teasing, bullying, and discrimination.

**Mike** identified himself as gay and was an English major at a government university in northeastern Thailand. He expressed that Thai society and Thais, in general, had opposing views and were not open to his gender identity. Mike expressed that it was challenging for him to come out to his parents, that he had not yet revealed his gender identity to them. However, his family was likely to know his gender identity and never reacted negatively.

Before conducting the interview, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the types of data required. Also, the researcher ensured participants that the anonymity of their responses in the interview was protected. Then, the researcher provided a consent form to them. The interviewing was conducted at the café, which would be a comfortable environment for the participants in the northeastern region of Thailand.

### **3.3 Research instruments**

To understand the identity construction of queer learners in English language learning and the roles of queer learner identities in English language learning in a Thai context, a semi-structured interview was employed (see Appendix B). The researcher interviewed one-on-one with each participant three times to be more familiar with the participants and gain in-depth information. The interview session for one participant was approximately two hours. The researcher conducted interviews at a café in the northeastern region of Thailand, in which the participants would be more relaxed. The semi-structured interview was employed since it could provide the information that was likely to meet the researcher's interest or any other unexpected factor that might impact the construction of queer learner identity in English language learning. To sufficiently collect the data, follow-up questions were employed if the researcher needed more information. For recording the interview, a digital sound recorder and field note was also used.

### **3.4 Data collection procedure**

Before collecting data, the researcher informed the objectives of the study to the participants that this study aimed to understand queer learner identity and English language learning. The interviews were conducted in Thai to elicit information from the participants. Before the interview, the researcher provided them with a copy of the interview questions. Therefore, the participants could give better and more focused answers. In addition, the researcher informed the participants that they could skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering. The researcher conducted interviews with each participant over three sessions (2 hours in total) in the interview. The reason for conducting the interviews over three sessions was described by Seidman (1991). The first interview was an ice-breaking session for the unknown participants that helped

establish a relationship between the interviewer and interviewees. Also, this session was functioned to allow both known and unknown participants to recount their specific details about the research questions. For the second interview, the researcher stimulated and asked pertinent interview questions to the participants to gain in-depth information and more detail regarding the research questions. In the third interview, the researcher asked any questions and clarified any doubts to complete the research questions.

Field notes and a digital sound recorder were used for collecting the data in the interview. For the interview process, the researcher provided the interviews as active interviews. The interviewer talked to the participants as active participants and followed the research interest to activate and stimulate the participants about their English language learning identity. After each interview, I promptly checked the audio recording to ensure that it could work and be ready for transcription. Then, the record was transcribed, and the transcription was translated from Thai to English. However, if there were some points in case the researcher needed more information, the follow-up interview was employed.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

To analyze how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influence English language learning, the researcher used content analysis and Positioning Theory (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999). The researcher transcribed the interviews. Then the researcher read and used a thematic analysis, which included theme and coding in conducting the interview transcript as this can serve the aims of this study to identify queer learner identity in English language learning. Before setting the themes, the researcher used member checking that other master's students in the ELT program were asked to help verify themes.

The analysis focused on the following questions:

1. How do queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning?
2. How does queer learner identity influence English language learning?



### **3.6 Data Trustworthiness**

To obtain rich data, trustworthiness was very significant for conducting this research. Thus, the study established trust and rapport with the research participants. For the known research participants, the researcher has known them for many years. We used to participate in campus activities together and hung out together many times. As such, the researcher believes that this friendship can be an advantage of data collection as the trust can encourage the participants to talk openly regarding various topics. For the unknown participants, before conducting the interview, the researcher invited the participants to hang out at café and restaurant to build friendships. The researcher started with small talk about light topics, injected humor into the conversation to break the ice, and avoided asking direct questions at this moment. The researcher was always open-minded, flexible, sincere, respectful, and empathetic. The researcher believed that this could help build rapport with participants that benefited the study.

To increase reliability and check the research instrument's suitability, the researcher conducted a pilot test before collecting data. Moreover, to collect accurate data, interviews were audiotaped and transcribed immediately after finishing each interview. To confirm transcripts' accuracy, the transcripts were reviewed repeatedly by the researcher and provided to each participant to check their accuracy. Also, the researcher used member checking to promote my results' trustworthiness, that the researcher asked other master's students in the ELT program to help verify my findings and give me feedback or criticism.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter discussed the research procedures, participants and setting, research instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis. In the beginning, it started with a description of the methodology. Then, the research procedures have shown in detail, including the participants and setting, the semi-structured interview, and thematic analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the current study in relation to the research questions. The purpose of this study was to examine how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how this identity influences their English language learning. Specifically, two research questions guided this study:

1. How do queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning?
2. How does queer learner identity influence English language learning?

#### **4.1 The constitution of queer learner identity in English language learning**

##### **4.1.1 Queer characteristics and English language learning**

The four participants stated in the same way that queer learners were naturally outgoing more than typical straight persons. Indeed, most of the queer participants shared similar English language learning characteristics based on their queer gender identity; they produced exaggerated speech styles and used many gestures that animated their body language while speaking English. Thus, the finding implied that characteristics: exaggerating conversational styles and using numerous gestures contributed to the participants' queer learner identity in English language learning. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

[1] I think confidence is a universal queer characteristic... We make things more fun with our queer characteristics. Instead of saying something in a flat or bland tone like... “girl” (say in a flat tone), we say girllllll (high pitched and exciting tone). [Karn]

[2] We have confidence to make things more exaggerating than usual, including speaking English...When speaking English, I use dramatic expressions and gestures. It just comes naturally.... Sometimes I just speak English out of nowhere...It is a part of queer identity. [Tommy]

[3] As a queer, I can exaggerate as I want...There is no need to care about lady-like manners or gentlemanly manners. I can just mix everything up and be confident. We are not so tensed when speaking. Just let everything go with the flow. My queer characteristics actually help me to be more confident to speak English. [Yoya]

[4] Queers are more exaggerating and overreacting, so when they practice speaking skill, they do it in such a dramatic way, so exaggerating (laugh). [Mike]



#### 4.1.2 Marginalized and unequal positions and English language learning

The qualitative data analysis revealed that queer people were considered unfavorable in a Thai context, in which prejudices, stereotypes, sexual harassment, and bullying were supported by a hostile social environment. Indeed, people, including their family, generally had negative stereotypes and attitudes toward queer people: they labeled homosexuals as abnormal and offensive. Thus, the participants were positioned as marginalized and unequal because of sexual orientation and gender identity. These are illustrated in the following excerpts:

[5] Although people say that they are open-minded about LGBTQ+, it is not comfortable enough for queers. Transgender people are labeled as clowns or people who serve to be funny characters to other people in a school or a workplace. [Karn]

[6] I think Thai people do not really accept LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ is only accepted in some groups... Being queers or LGBTQ+ has made me really frustrated to reveal my identity... I need to hide my identity when I meet my relatives... Many times, when I explained things to them, I was bullied and looked down. Since then, I gave up talking and explaining things to them. [Tommy]

[7] I was bullied and called E-kathoey and E-Tum (Thai swear words and insults) by people in *her neighborhood*... People also criticized my beauty and appearance and said how I could be transgender because of my appearance and body shape. [Yoya]

[8] People bullied me just because of my gender identity... So, when I looked good, people liked to make fun of me... People might think that it was just kidding, and they did it again and again. For me, I think bullying is not funny. [Mike]

Additionally, the findings showed that all the participants, who did not conform to the heterosexual norm, encountered several difficulties and feared coming out to their parents since queer gender identity was considered unfavorable and conservative in a Thai sociocultural context. The two participants, Tommy and Mike, stated that they have not yet come out to their parents. Although parents probably perceived their gender identity, the parents avoided the topic of sexual orientation and still raised them as boys. However, the participants' parents never reacted negatively. Still, it was challenging for Tommy and Mike to officially come out to the parents. The two participants were fearful of coming out and concealed their gender identity from the parents because they were afraid of parental rejection and other unfavorable outcomes, as illustrated in the following extracts:

[13] My parents do not talk about this topic... But I think they have already known my gender identity. My parents raised me as a boy... One time, my boyfriend drove me home. My parents asked nothing but just peeped at us. Sometimes I was depressed, and I knew that I wanted to get over that hard situation. [Mike]

[14] I have not come out yet. Actually, I am trying to make my life better...To prove to my family that they can depend on me...When I can do these things... I will come out. I am not sure that my parents know my gender identity. Anyway, I assume that they may know about my gender. I think they are waiting for me to tell them first. [Tommy]

The other two participants, Karn and Yoya, whose sexual orientation and gender identity was known to their parents, also encountered many difficulties. After coming out to their parents, Karn and Yoya initially had to conform to gender norms since their parents did not immediately and completely accept who they were as transgender people. Specifically, both fathers reacted negatively and showed denial, anger, blame, and other adverse reactions after learning their sons' gender identity. In fact, the relationship between the two participants and their fathers were terrible: Karn and Yoya were unlikely to talk with and avoided showing their gender expressions toward their fathers. The statements below support these claims:

[15]In the past, I could not express my gender identity... My father was so furious and harshly scolded me. [Yoya]

[16] When I came out, I had a difficult relationship with my father. I could not be with my father. It was so quiet and weird. I felt frustrated. I knew that my father did not feel well at all...So, I decided not to talk with him and avoided facing him as much as possible. [Karn]

Also, the findings showed that schools were places that predominantly reinforced heteronormativity: all participants often faced oppression, bullying, homophobia, invisibility, and inequality because of their gender identity position. The participants revealed that they were often embarrassed and made fun of by the teachers and peers within the school context, extremely suffering from being treated differently from men and women and frequently experiencing disgusting physical, verbal and sexual harassment. These illustrated in the excerpt below:

[9] Even though we, queers, helped and volunteered many school's works, we were ignored by other people...Queer students were given school duties that were likely to be heavier than those given to non-queer students. The school provided more support to non-queer students...The teacher then called me E-Yen (a slave woman name in Thai drama)...That

teacher explained that this name suited me well because I did everything that others assigned to me. [Karn]

[10] I was sexually harassed by a male friend. He peeked at me when I took a shower, and he then told everyone about my body... That was too much for me. At that time, I felt there had had inequality in gender diversity... I was sexually bullied many times by both words and manners when I was young. [Tommy]

[11] At that time, I had acne and was late for the science class. Then, the male teacher embarrassed me by saying that my face was like an HIV-positive person. [Yoya]

[12] Some male friends squeezed my butt, chest, and even my private parts because they thought that they could do this to every gay people. They always made fun of me...I did the gardening like other boys. Then, my teacher made fun of me that I did a boy's job. And then, every peer laughed at me. [Mike]

In example 9, Karn indicated that she attempted to dedicate herself to helping teachers and being involved in school activities to be valued and accepted. However, she remained undervalued, and her efforts were never recognized. Also, queer students were given school duties that were likely to be heavier than those given to non-queer students and the school provided more support to non-queer students. Karn even reported being treated as a servant, and her teacher named her E-yen (a slave woman name in Thai movies). Karn revealed that she felt cursed and undervalued from being excluded and treated unequally because of her queer gender position in Thai society. In example 10, Tommy faced sexual harassment by male peers when he stayed at the dormitory. The male peer peeped at him while taking a shower and publicly embarrassed him about his appearance to other people. Also, Yoya (see in example 11 above) suffered homophobia from the male teacher who verbally bullied her that she looked similar to an HIV-positive person because of having acne. As a result, Yoya had to gauge how open the teachers were to queer people before expressing her gender identity. In addition, example 12 showed that Mike faced sexual harassment from his male student peers; they often squeezed his chest, butt, and even his private parts. Mike suffered because of his gender position, was treated differently from men and women, and experienced disgusting physical, verbal and sexual harassment.

Moreover, the current findings revealed that the participants were judged incompetent because Thai people and even the teachers held prejudices and negative stereotypes of queers' potentials and values. In addition, others often used negative words and questioned the participants' competency.

[17] The teacher believed that LGBT people could not be teachers and had no qualifications because LGBT people would teach others' kids being LGBT. They were likely to overlook my competencies and values. [Karn]

[18] Other people often considered queer people incompetent who always hung out with men or only focused on the dressing. [Mike]

[19] I was looked down on that being Kathoey was incompetent or could not do something like others. [Tommy]

The current study found that bullying queer people was a norm in a Thai context that people, in general, were unlikely to intervene to stop bullying. Safeguarding queer people from bullying and sexual harassment might endanger others' safety or put them at high risk. Thus, the participants were likely to handle these bullying problems on their own. Most participants were also unlikely to fight or talk back to the bullies and often kept quiet and pretended to be okay when being abused so that the situation would not worsen. Moreover, the participants frequently kept their pains or suffered hidden from others since others tended to ignore their feelings. The study suggested that most participants were powerless to protect themselves from adverse treatments due to their positions in society. Karn (see example 20, below) indicated that she was unlikely to fight back because others would consider her "wrong" and an "aggressive queer". Karn expressed that only a few close peers protected her from bullying and teasing. Some female peers, who had empathy for her, could only soothe her because they were afraid of being attacked.

However, male peers never helped her due to fears that they would also be stereotyped as queer. Even her parents told her to keep quiet and avoid conflicts; they believed bullying would eventually end. Thus, Karn had to keep calm and endure the abuse. She could only suffer and cry in silence. In example 21 below, Mike stated that he could not counter physical and verbal harassment when being bullied. Moreover,

other people were unlikely to help him; he could only be angry, feel slighted, and cry alone. Often, he handled these bullying problems by ignoring them or pretending to laugh hoping that the bullies would stop bullying. Mike was deeply moved and felt intensely bitter about marginalization and inequality. Besides, Yoya (see example 22, below) revealed that when teachers or superiors made fun of her queer gender identity, she could not protect herself against sexual challenges. Also, other people were unlikely to protect her because of the seniority system in Thai society. In other words, they dare not help her for fear of also being marginalized or might be used to seeing queer being bullied. Yoya thus frequently suffered homophobia and had to conceal her suffering by pretending to be okay or smiling at the bullies.

[20] People also think that it is normal when transgender people are attacked...If I fought back, they assumed that I was aggressive, Kathoey. They blamed what I did because I was transgender... I believed that other people feared to help me. It was because they were afraid that other people would blame and bully them too. Also, they would not help me because I was Kathoey and different from others. [Karn]

[21] Of course, I kept silent and did nothing. It was because I thought that no one would protect me. People usually considered bullying gay people as kidding, and nobody helped me. Even female friends did not help me that much; the worst was when they laugh. So, I decided to stay silent and did nothing.

[22] Was there anyone who protected and helped you?

No. Everyone said nothing...because there is seniority in our society; people do not dare to argue with senior people, especially teachers. People just do not understand how we queer feel. So, they just ignore it. [Yoya]

The findings of the current study supported the majority of the researchers that the interaction in the classroom was prominently heteronormative (e.g. Courtney 2007; Dalley and Campbell 2006; Kappra and Vandrick 2006; Liddicoat 2009; Moita-Lopes 2006; Nelson 1993, 1999, 2009, 2010; O'Mochain, Mitchell, and Nelson 2003; O'Mochain 2006). Also, the findings of the study confirmed some previous studies on queer that indicated schools are the insecure contexts and queer learners are at a high risk of social exclusion that they suffered discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Meyer, 2010). Similarly, in Moita-Lopes (2006) and Nelson's (2009) studies, they showed that it was usual that queer learners received negative reactions from their classmates. Also, Anderson et al. (1997), Moita-Lopes

(2006) and Saint Pierre's (1994) research illustrated that queer students are taunted in the classroom.

As mentioned above, being positioned as marginalized and unequal due to sexual orientation and gender identity was an impetus for all four participants to be experts in English, which was crucial for their job opportunities and future achievement to resist a marginal position gain parental and societal acceptance. Additionally, the findings showed that most of the participants motivated to acquire English for migrating to an English-speaking country, a more welcoming place for queer people in their opinion. Moreover, finding a Western partner, which was a way of earning respect and acceptance from others in their views and was a consequence of being treated negatively by Thai men, was a passion for Karn and Yoya in English learning. Besides, most participants stated that their queer characteristics were positively intertwined with English speaking skills. Thus, the current study's findings implied that marginal and unequal positions were the major factors affecting the formation of learner identity as an English expert. The following sections would reveal the influences of queer learner identity on English language learning.

## **4.2 Influences of queer learner identities in English language learning in a Thai EFL context**

### **4.2.1 Queer characteristics and English language learning**

The findings of the current study revealed some of the characteristics of queer learners influenced English language learning. It was found that most participants, Karn, Tommy, and Yoya, were likely to use exaggerated discourses, expressions and gestures when speaking English. The participants also shared several characteristics, including self-confidence, extroversion, and high risk-taking. The following excerpts support these claims:

[23] I think being queer makes me more comfortable when speaking English. It helps with the accent and pronunciation... We make things more fun with our queer characteristics. Instead of saying something in a flat or bland tone like... "girl" (say in a flat tone), we say girllllll (high pitched and exciting tone)... Sometimes my queer characteristics do not only help with learning accent but also learning content... I use my creative queer words to help me remember the story... A fun word choice made a study more fun. [Karn]



[24] I do think my queer characteristics really help me improve my English-speaking skill. They really help with the accent and my word choices when I speak English... Other people may find it difficult to pronounce English words because they are shy... I think it is easier for LGBTQ to speak English smoothly and to sound like a native speaker... Sometimes I just speak English out of nowhere... It is more like a fun thing we do. We have the confidence to make things more exaggerating than usual, including speaking English. [Tommy]

[25] Queer characteristics were good because there is no need to care about lady-like manners or gentleman manners. I could just mix everything up and be a confident queer. When speaking English, I had more acting or gestures than other men and women... So, it was not difficult for me (speaking English) ... I can be as exaggerating as I want... My queer characteristics have helped me to be more confident and fluent to speak English... We are not so tensed when speaking. Just let everything go with the flow. [Yoya]

[26] We queers are more exaggerating, so when we practice our speaking skill, we do it in such a dramatic way, so exaggerating (laugh)... However, I think good pronunciation depends more on an individual... more about practicing, learning, and using the language to be more native-like. [Mike]

The majority of the participants revealed that queer characteristics help them have more confidence and fluency and less worried about speaking English and pronouncing English words. Examples 23 and 24 showed that Karn and Tommy produced various strange, exaggerated accents and created situations to engage in English conversation. Moreover, Karn and Tommy were outgoing and took risks when speaking English. For instance, these two participants used creative words when communicating in English. In example 25 illustrated that Yoya was an English language learner who had self-confidence and a high risk-taking character when speaking English because she did not conform to gender roles and stereotypes or what others considered appropriate as male or female. Also, Yoya did not act specifically masculine or feminine but rather embraced characteristics of both genders. These queer characteristics were conducive to the acquisition and development of English language proficiency, especially speaking skills.

The findings agree with many scholars (e.g. Abe 2006; Barrett 1997; Coates & Jordan 1997; Podesva, Roberts, & Campbell-Kibler 2006) that queer people have certain lexical items, speech patterns, and conversational styles in discourses. Similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) claims showed that queer learners have a cultural capital such as

linguistic repertoire used in social interactions. Also, the current study's findings supported Ely's (1986) research findings that risk-taking positively impacts second language proficiency because the learners attempt to practice vocabulary or expressions that they are not sure of. Similarly, Chastain (1975), Robinson et al., (1994), and Yamashiro & McLaughlin's (2001) studies showed that an outgoing personality (extroversion) and success in foreign language acquisition was positive. Unlike Beebe's (1983) research, it claims that successful second language learners are moderate risk-takers that they only use expressions or vocabulary they have acquired. Also, unlike Oxford & Ehrman's (1995) study, they illustrated no significant relationship between extroversion and introversion. In Tehrani et al., (2014) study, they showed that introvert learners did better on pronunciation when compared to extrovert learners.

#### **4.2.2 Marginalized and unequal positions and English language learning**

The current study found that queer participants were often viewed as weird mainly because they were queer. The participants were positioned as marginalized and unequal based on gender identity and sexual orientation. People, in general, including teachers, looked down on and had negative attitudes toward the participants. All participants revealed that they were considered incompetent. Others often overlooked their competencies. Moreover, all the participants feel powerless to protect themselves from unfair and harmful treatments.

[27] Even though we, queers, helped and volunteered many school's works, we were ignored by other people... Queer students were given school duties that were likely to be heavier than those given to non-queer students, and the school provided more support to non-queer students... [Karn]

[28] The teacher assigned boys to do gardening and girls to do the cleaning. At that time, I did gardening like other boys. Then, the teacher made fun of me that I did a boy's job. And then, every peer laughed at me. [Mike]

The findings of the study are consistent with Yoon's (2008) study that if teachers and peers position language learners in a negative way, the language learners will have a sense of powerless and invisible.



However, these negative stereotypes and prejudices were passions for the participants trying to resist the social ritual and the marginal positions that others bestowed upon them. As all four participants were interested in English, they thus enthusiastically studied English in order to negotiate their positions to gain legitimacy and parental and societal acceptance of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

[29] I tried to prove myself by studying English hard and taking part in competitions in school so that teachers, peers, and peers' parents accepted me. Then they would inform my parents about my potential...I was not incompetent because of my sexuality... I tried to prove that being Kathoey (a transgender) could be good at learning... [Karn]

[30] I was looked down on by others that I did not have the potential to do or achieve something like others...So, if I could do it, I would not be undervalued like other thought...It was a drive (being gay) that helped me improve my English proficiency in order to be a successful and gain acceptance from society. [Tommy]

[31] I suffered from being looked down on, but it motivated me to be better than men and women. So, I would be accepted. If I could not do it well, others would aggravate me... As my queer gender identity made my parents disappointed, it greatly inspired me to improve my English skills. [Yoya]

[30] People, in general, had stereotypes toward queer people that we were disabled and not interested in studying that always went out with men or wasted time in dressing...I attempted to prove myself to them by developing English and acquiring a good job. [Mike]

Also, the findings of the current study showed that the participants focused on their English language proficiency to acquire better employment opportunities and future success. Indeed, having a well-respected career could help the participants negotiate their positions and gain parental and societal acceptance and legitimacy. Thus, the participants were extremely motivated and dedicated to developing and improving their English proficiency as much as possible. The following excerpts illustrate these findings:

[32] Coming to my parents is my ultimate dream. It directly motivated me in learning. In order to come out, I must have a good job or be a successful person... Having high English proficiency can help achieve my dream...I do everything to improve my English proficiency that makes me watch English video, talk to native English speakers, and so on to make it happen and gain acceptance and come out to my parents. [Tommy]

[33] I wanted to improve my English proficiency in order to overcome those bullying... make my family accept me... I must be successful. It was an inspiration to acquire English...I try to prove myself to have good jobs or make more money. [Mike]

The excerpts above illustrate that queer participants attempted to negotiate their social positions through English language learning. Often viewed as incompetent or undervalued, queer participants made a great effort to develop their English language ability to be valued and widely respected as a community member by others, including teachers, classmates, and family members. The results of the study agreed with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977a) suggestion that in unequal situations of social interaction, language was "an instrument of power" (p. 648), and "some persons are not in a position to speak or must win their audience, whereas others effortlessly command attention." (p. 650). Also, Norton's (2016) study indicated that dreams and hopes for future achievement were learners' passion for acquiring English that their English language proficiency will finally be enhanced. However, Darvin and Norton (2015) indicated that students "may not be invested in the language practices of a given classroom if the practices are racist, sexist, or homophobic" (p. 37). Also, unlike Howie's (1999) findings, positioning a learner as inferior probably affect learners' interaction negatively.

Another motivation for most participants to learn English was to flee persecution in a Thai context and had freedom of gender expression. Indeed, the participants were seen as abnormal and offensive by others in society and often experienced negative treatments and other barriers to gender equality because of their gender position. Thus, Karn, Tommy, and Yoya needed to immigrate to an English-speaking country, in which they believed western cultures to be more liberal and welcoming for queer people.

[34] I felt that in the Western countries, being queer was not weird...So, I have much motivation to learn English in order to experience and live there [Karn]

[35] I needed to study and live in western countries because they may be more open about gender diversity than Thailand and Asia...It inspires me to struggle to learn English [Yoya]

[36] I wanted to live in western countries because I like technologies, quality of life... I want to live in an environment that was more welcoming for LGBTQ, and most people are more

open to LGBTQ people than Thais...They see LGBT people as usual and coming out was more freedom... which is highly different to Thailand. [Tommy]

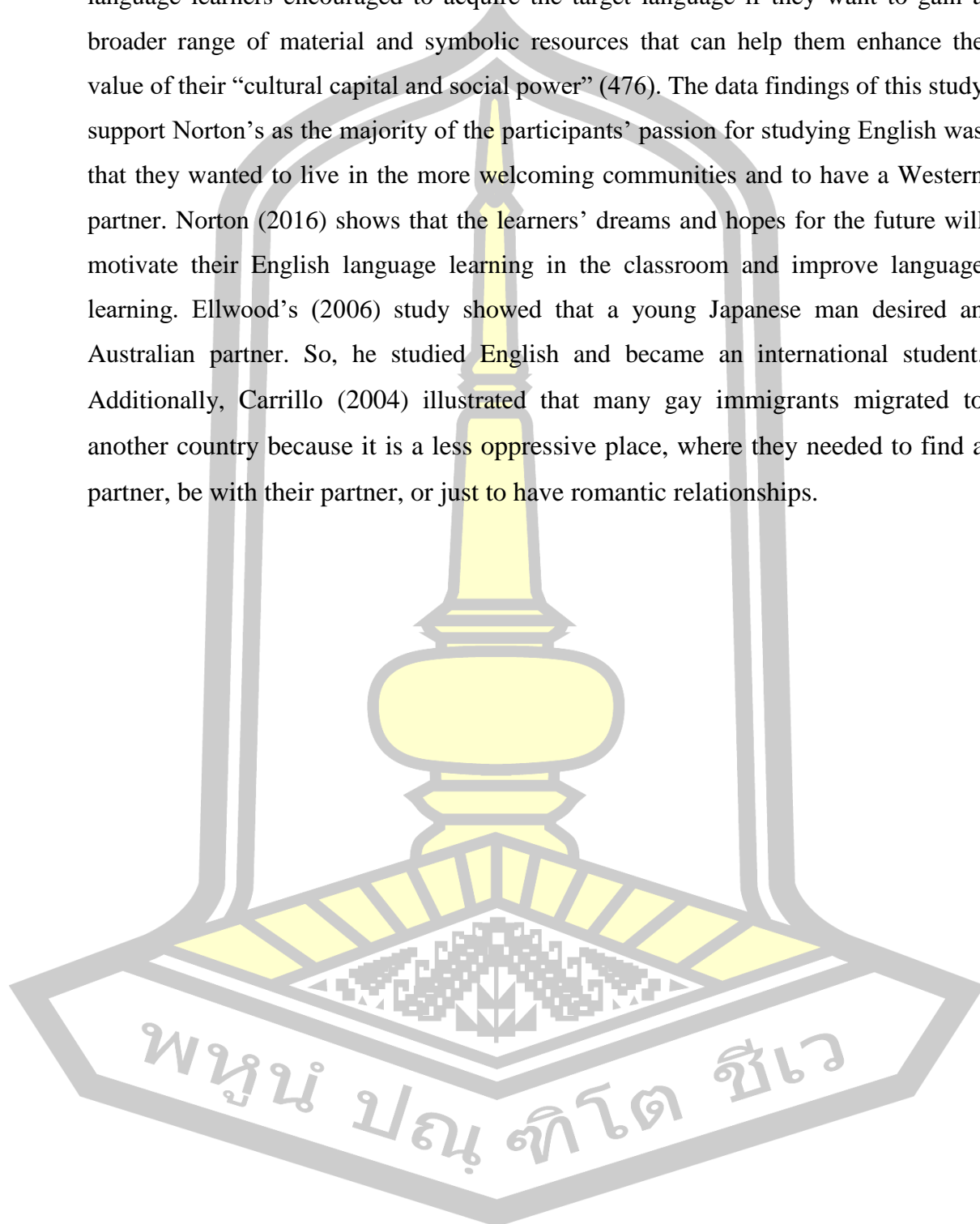
The results of the study were supported several researchers' findings. For example, Barnet (2006) mentions how "imagined communities can help students to invest more in the learning" (p. 4). Also, people are motivated to achieve things they hope for and avoid the things they fear. As experienced in the past and hope for the future impacted how people interpret and respond to stimuli differently, "possible selves can provide an effective bridge between motivation and cognition" (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The language learners can use the target language as a beneficial tool to help their future success. In addition, Kappra (2003) showed that students who were non-heteronormative and often victims of harassment were likely to leave their countries because of being afraid of their own safety. Moreover, some of the gay students that Nelson interviewed had the motivation to move countries (Nelson 2006, 206). Similarly, Carrillo (2004) indicated that several gay men migrated to the country related to a less oppressive environment about sexual identity.

In addition, the results of the current study showed that finding a Western partner was the ultimate goal for Karn and Yoya in English language learning. These two participants preferred a Western partner because of their negative experiences with Thai men. Also, they stated that Thai men do not accept gender diversity. Moreover, they believed that it would be more socially acceptable to have a Western partner, and this would also gain the respect and praise from other people in their neighborhood:

[37] I think Thai men will not accept me... I feel that Western men are more open about diversity... It was my other ultimate inspiration in learning English...It motivated me to learn a lot in order to be more attractive and flirt with them ...Also, having a Western husband can help me gain acceptances from other people in my neighborhood...Acceptance is what I need.  
[Karn]

[38] It was my ultimate goal (having a Western partner) in learning English... I do not prefer Thai men because they have not been open to my gender...Also, my mom told me that it would be acceptable to have a Western boyfriend. She and other people in my hometown thought having a western husband was good...If I have a Western husband, others would adore me. [Yoya]

The findings of this study confirm Norton's conclusions. Norton (2016) believes that language learners encouraged to acquire the target language if they want to gain a broader range of material and symbolic resources that can help them enhance the value of their "cultural capital and social power" (476). The data findings of this study support Norton's as the majority of the participants' passion for studying English was that they wanted to live in the more welcoming communities and to have a Western partner. Norton (2016) shows that the learners' dreams and hopes for the future will motivate their English language learning in the classroom and improve language learning. Ellwood's (2006) study showed that a young Japanese man desired an Australian partner. So, he studied English and became an international student. Additionally, Carrillo (2004) illustrated that many gay immigrants migrated to another country because it is a less oppressive place, where they needed to find a partner, be with their partner, or just to have romantic relationships.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher provides the conclusion of the study in order of the research questions. The chapter also presented the limitations of the research and pedagogical implications. Recommendations based on the present findings for future studies are also provided.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated how queer learners constitute their identity in English language learning and how queer learner identity influences English language learning. For the first research question, the current study's findings showed two main factors, queer characteristics and marginal and unequal positions in a Thai context, constituting queer learner identity in English language learning in a Thai context. The current result analysis showed the participants had unique English language learning characteristics, inflated speech styles, and exaggerated expressions in speaking English for the first factor. Thus, most participants were likely to offer their attributes more exaggeratingly than typical male and female characteristics when speaking English. Moreover, most participants had similar English language learning characteristics in speaking English, such as self-confidence, extroversion, and high risk-taking. When most participants spoke English, they tended to be confident, outgoing, and less concerned. Besides, they produced exaggerated discourse styles, expressions, and many gestures when speaking English. The majority of the participants expressed that their queer characteristics helped them have more fluency and confidence in pronouncing and speaking in English. Therefore, the participants' queer characteristics of English language learning might be conducive to speaking English.

Also, queer gender identity positioning in a Thai context played an essential role in constructing queer learner identity in English language learning. The current study showed that the participants occupied marginal and unequal positions as queer gender identity was conservative and unfavorable in Thai society. Also, most participants occupied a vulnerable position that tended to be powerless to protect themselves from unfair and harmful treatments. Thus, the participants often faced adverse treatments, prejudices, and stereotypes: they were considered incompetent and worthless. Besides,

the participants encountered several struggles and feared coming out to their parents. These negative positions could partially account for queer language learner identities. As all four participants were interested in English and viewed English as a linguistic tool, the participants tried to constitute the identity construction of an English expert to resist the social ritual and a marginal position associated with others' first-order position. Having high English proficiency was advantageous for the participants in acquiring employment, gaining access to a more welcoming queer community, and having a Western partner that could help them negotiate their positions and gain parental and societal acceptance and legitimacy. Thus, the participants struggled to learn English as much as possible.

The current study's findings indicated that the participants' queer gender identity positioning, which occupied negative positions in a Thai context, encouraged them to greater ambitions and efforts to learn English to be recognized as legitimate community members and gain parental and societal acceptance. King (2008) stated that a learner's gay identity probably opens doors for fair participation and language learning opportunities in English-speaking communities. The following sections would provide limitations, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

The limitation of this study is a case-study design in that there are a few participants in this study. Another limitation of the research is that this study investigated queer language learners who experienced inequality and marginalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity in a Thai context. The researcher would speculate that the findings of queer language learners who live in another context or never face negative experiences because of their gender identity would be different. Also, one limitation is that this study is not a longitudinal study and short time for study. Thus, the findings of the study may not cover all aspects of queer language learner identity in English language learning. Therefore, it could not be claimed that what the researcher found would be applied to all situations. The following section would present the implications of the study.



### **5.3 Recommendations for future studies**

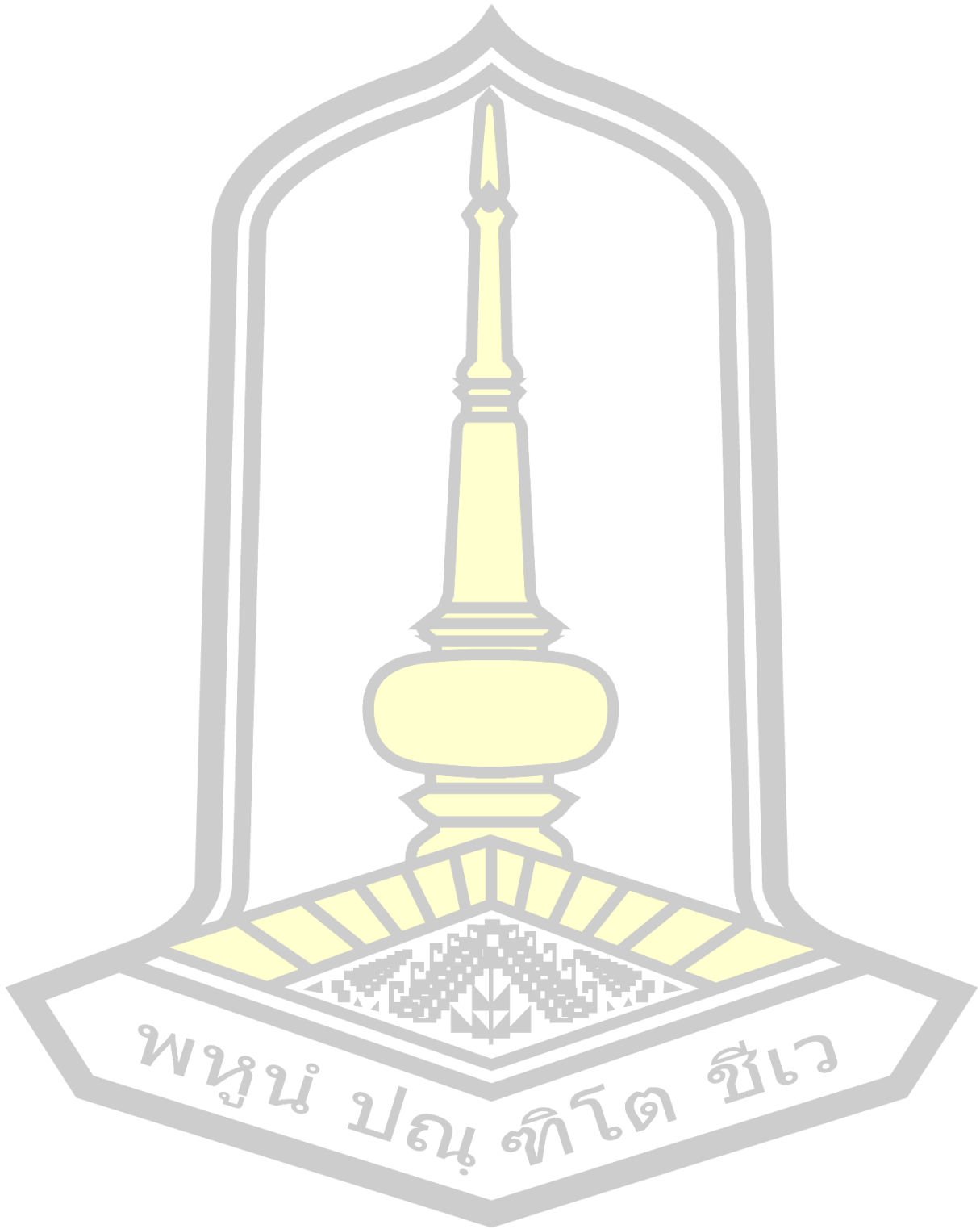
This study was conducted in a Thai EFL context, a government university in northeastern Thailand. A similar study can be undertaken in the Thai context or another context because studies of queer learner identity and language learning are still understudied in the field of SLA and particularly in the Thai context. Also, the future study should have more queer participants in order to obtain more insight into queer learner identity in English language learning. Additionally, studies related to queer learner identity and language learning are needed to investigate another language education aspect. Besides, more studies on female learners who identify as queer are still required, that the findings may show factors that affect language learning.

### **5.4 Implications for pedagogical practices**

The current study suggested that the queer participants often experienced prejudice, stereotypes, sexual harassment, and bullying supported by a hostile school environment. The participants indicated that the teachers and peers lacked awareness and an understanding of queer gender identity: they were likely to be bullied, embarrassed, and made fun of in public settings (Anderson et al., 1997; Moita-Lopes 2006; and Saint Pierre 1994). The school environment can be an undesirable place for queer students, promoting homophobia intentionally or unintentionally (Meyer, 2010). These negative treatments due to sexual orientation and gender identity caused embarrassment and bitterness toward the queer participants. Thus, these problems could discourage queer students from participating in school activities or their development of studying.

Therefore, the teachers and schools need to be more supportive and positive toward queer students and improve their awareness of queer gender identity. For example, queer issues should be taught and discussed in the classroom. The teachers were the influential people that can educate or lead students or other people to have positive views toward queer gender identity. The schools should be a desirable learning space for queer students.

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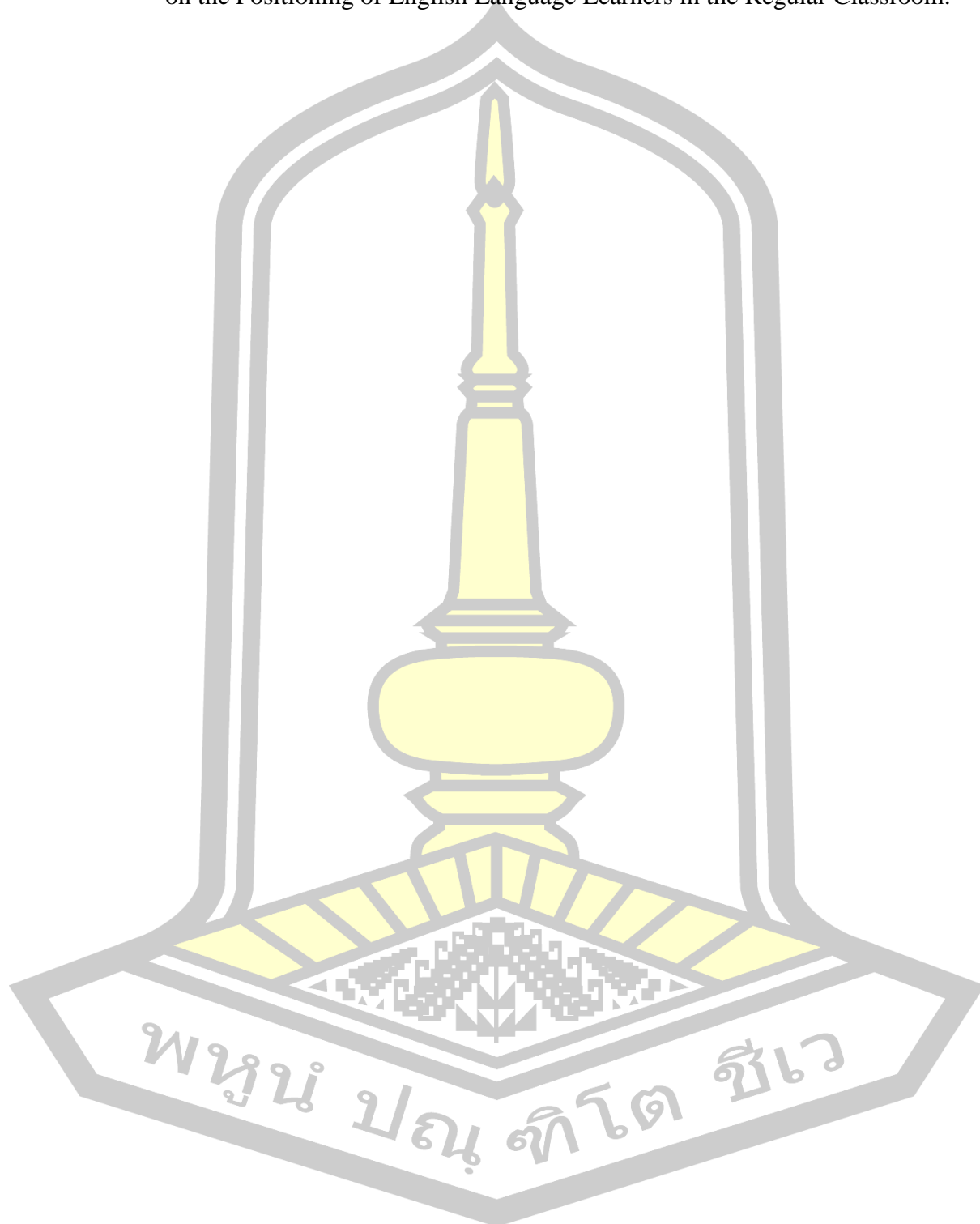
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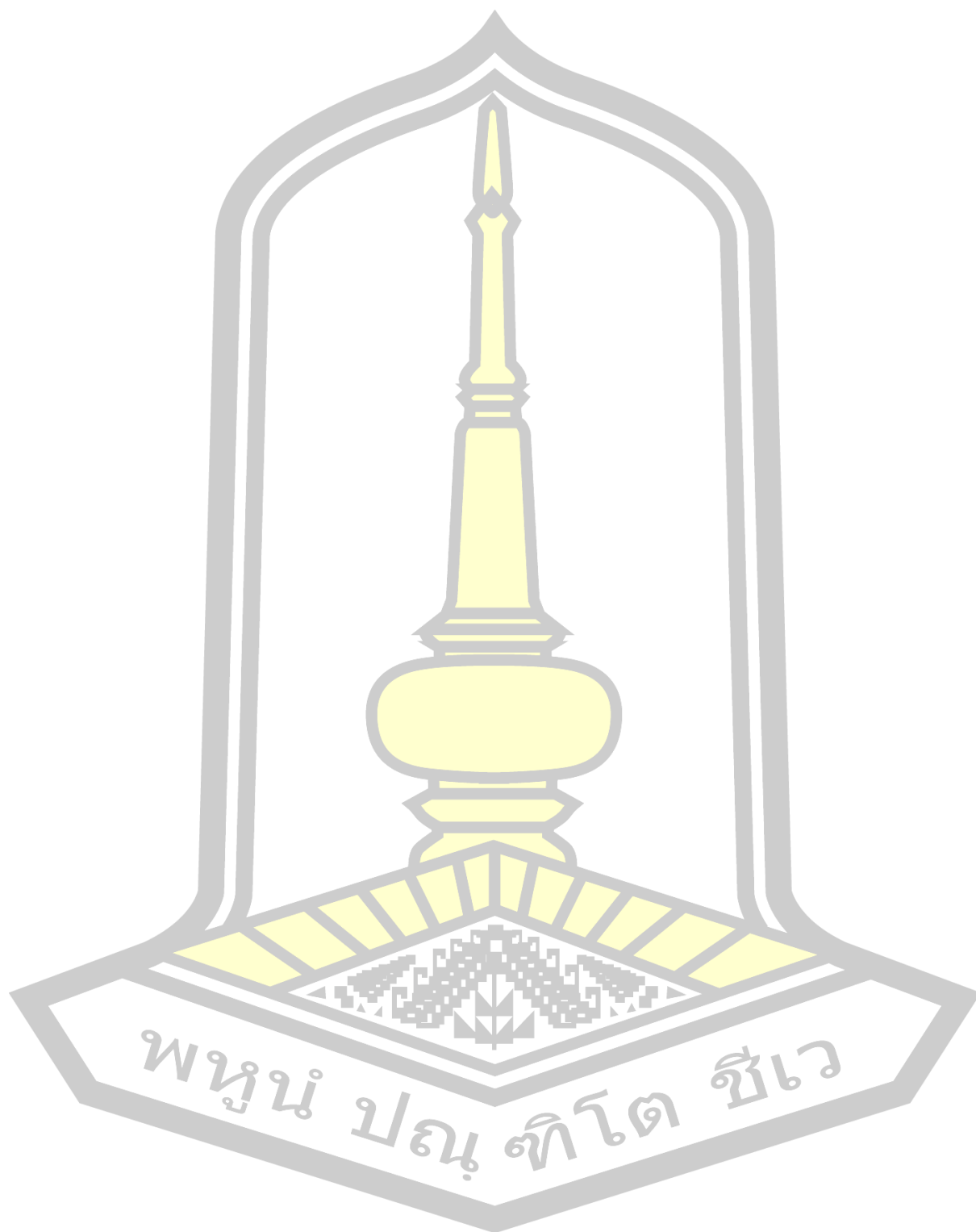
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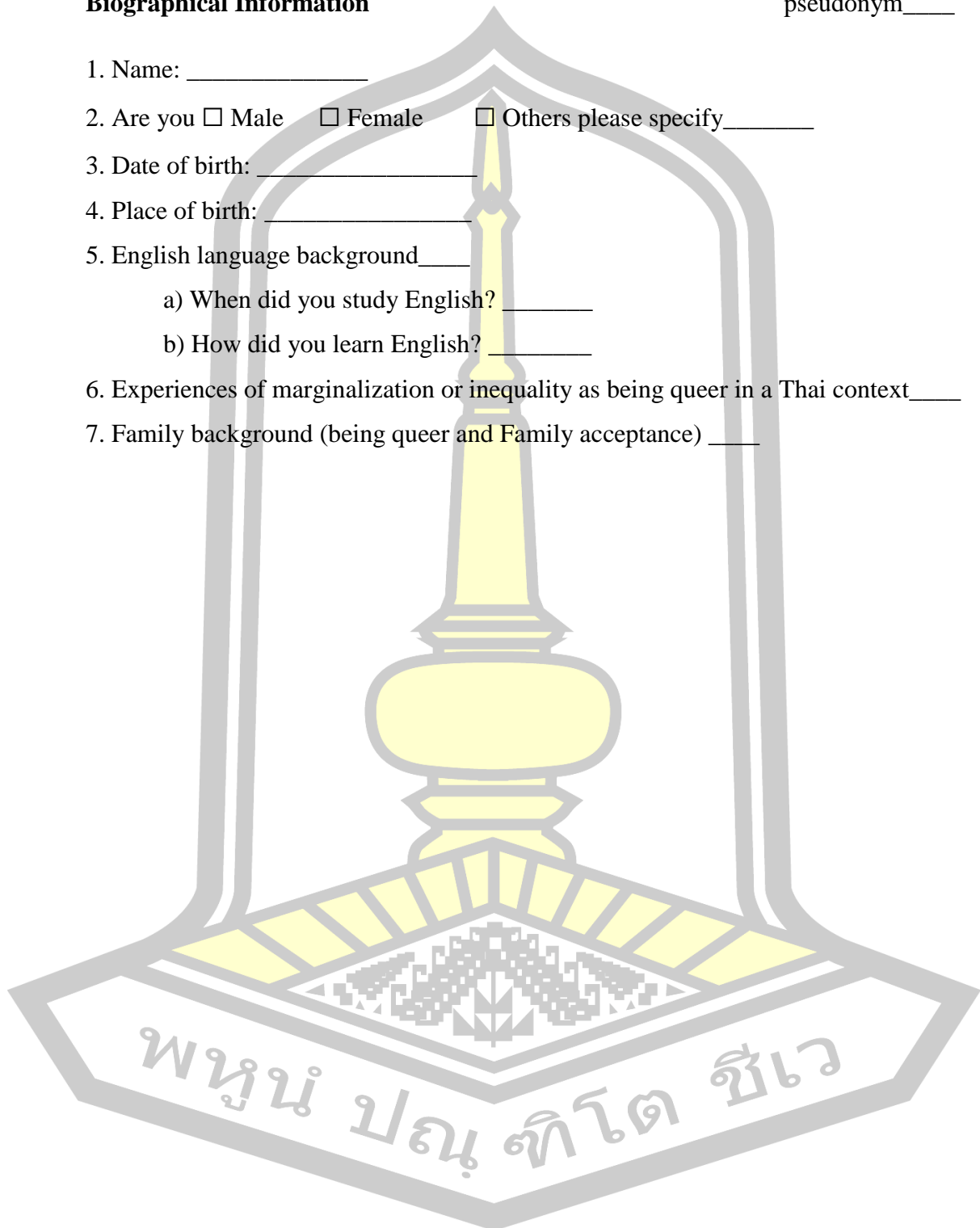
APPENDICES



**Appendix A: Survey****Biographical Information**

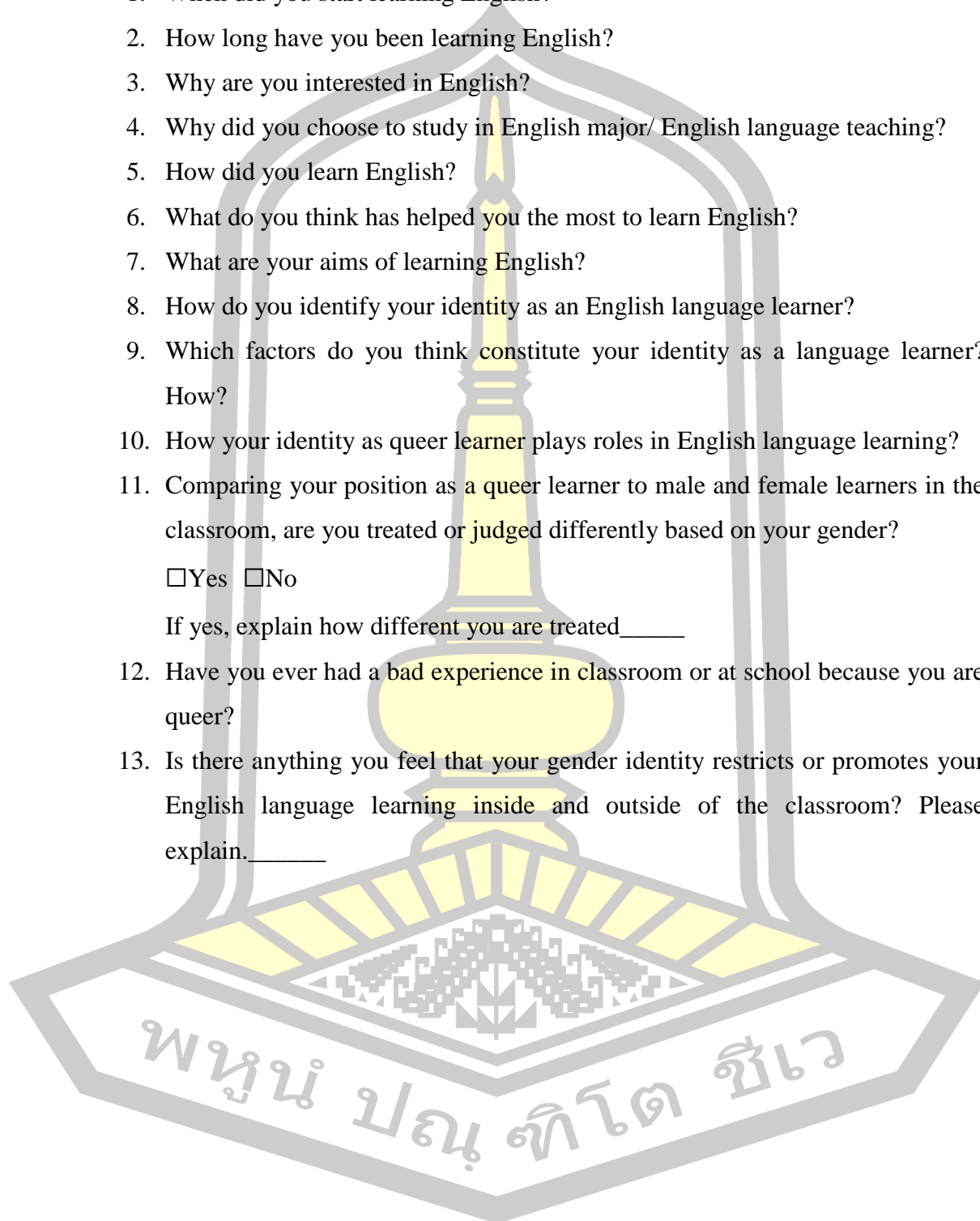
pseudonym\_\_\_\_\_

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are you  Male  Female  Others please specify \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
5. English language background \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) When did you study English? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) How did you learn English? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Experiences of marginalization or inequality as being queer in a Thai context \_\_\_\_\_
7. Family background (being queer and Family acceptance) \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix B: Interview questions

1. When did you start learning English?
2. How long have you been learning English?
3. Why are you interested in English?
4. Why did you choose to study in English major/ English language teaching?
5. How did you learn English?
6. What do you think has helped you the most to learn English?
7. What are your aims of learning English?
8. How do you identify your identity as an English language learner?
9. Which factors do you think constitute your identity as a language learner?  
How?
10. How your identity as queer learner plays roles in English language learning?
11. Comparing your position as a queer learner to male and female learners in the classroom, are you treated or judged differently based on your gender?  
Yes No  
If yes, explain how different you are treated\_\_\_\_\_
12. Have you ever had a bad experience in classroom or at school because you are queer?
13. Is there anything you feel that your gender identity restricts or promotes your English language learning inside and outside of the classroom? Please explain.\_\_\_\_\_



## BIOGRAPHY

<b>NAME</b>	Mr.Tinnawat Suebkinnon
<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	January 14, 1995
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>	Khon Kaen, Thailand
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<b>POSITION</b>	An English tutor
<b>PLACE OF WORK</b>	Maha Sarakham
<b>EDUCATION</b>	2008 Junior High School in Mahasarakham University Demonstrations (Secondary) 2011 Senior High School in Mahasarakham University Demonstrations (Secondary) 2014 Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in English, Mahasarakham University 2021 Master of Education in English Language Teaching (M.Ed), Mahasarakham University

