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ACADEMIC SUPPORT NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF PROSPECTIVE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE CREDIT BANK SYSTEM OF BUSINESS ENGLISH PROGRAM, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, SUAN SUNANDHA RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the academic support needs and preferences of 15 prospective Myanmar undergraduate students enrolled in the Credit Bank Business English Program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire covering demographic information, perceived academic challenges, awareness and use of support services, preferred support formats, priority support areas, and reasons for choosing to pursue a bachelor's degree in Thailand. Overall, respondents reported moderate levels of difficulty with course content, language barriers, study skills, time management, academic writing, and classroom participation, indicating a broad need for integrated academic support rather than a single, isolated area of concern. The most frequently selected priority support areas were English language improvement, study skills and time management, subject content understanding, and preparation for English proficiency tests such as EnglishScore, TOEIC, and SSRU-TEP. Learners showed strong preferences for one-on-one tutoring, small group workshops, online self-paced resources, and peer study groups as preferred support formats, highlighting the value of flexible, multi-modal support. Open-ended responses underscored time management, balancing coursework with self-study, and access to learning resources (e.g., library) as key ongoing challenges. Regarding study destination and institutional choice, safety and stability, career opportunities in Thailand, proximity to Myanmar, cost compared to Western countries, language and cultural learning, internships or industry links, and scholarships/financial support were commonly cited motivations for choosing to study in Thailand and at SSRU. The findings suggest that a targeted support framework combining language development, study skills training, content-focused assistance, and clear pathways to careers and financial support would be responsive to the specific needs and aspirations of this student group.

Keywords: 1 Academic support needs 2 Business English 3 Learning preferences

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to identify the specific academic support needs, learning preferences, and key motivations of prospective Myanmar undergraduate students enrolled in the Credit Bank System of the Business English Program at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, in order to inform the development of targeted support mechanisms that enhance their academic readiness

and integration.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing enrollment of Myanmar students in Thai higher education institutions reflects both the geopolitical realities of Southeast Asia and the expanding appeal of Thailand as an accessible study destination for neighboring countries. At Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU), the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has welcomed a cohort of prospective Myanmar undergraduate students into its Credit Bank System under the Business English Program. However, despite their presence and enrollment intentions, we have limited understanding of their prior academic backgrounds, specific learning needs, motivations for pursuing a degree in Thailand, and preferred modes of academic support. This knowledge gap presents a significant challenge for designing responsive interventions that can facilitate their academic success and integration into the Thai university system.

Understanding student needs is not merely a matter of logistical planning; it is fundamentally tied to learner well-being and academic outcomes. Affective factors, including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging, play a critical role in shaping how students engage with learning, particularly in cross-cultural and linguistically demanding contexts. For prospective international students, these affective dimensions may be compounded by uncertainties about course expectations, language proficiency challenges, cultural adjustment, and financial concerns. Left unaddressed, such factors can negatively impact academic performance, persistence, and overall student experience.

Recent research highlights the importance of the academic-support environment as a key intervention in mitigating negative affective factors and fostering positive learning outcomes. Voisin, Phillips, and Afonso (2023) found that the quality and accessibility of academic support services significantly influence learner affect in higher education, with students reporting improved confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater academic engagement when support structures are well-aligned with their needs. Their findings underscore that academic support is not a supplementary service but a foundational element of the learning environment, particularly for students navigating new educational systems or facing linguistic and cultural transitions.

In the case of prospective Myanmar students at SSRU, the absence of baseline data on their academic preparedness, support preferences, and motivational drivers means that current support offerings may not be adequately tailored to their realities. Without evidence-based insights, there is a risk that well-intentioned interventions may miss the mark, failing to address the actual challenges students face or delivering support in formats that do not align with their learning preferences. This study therefore seeks to fill this knowledge gap by systematically investigating the academic support needs, learning preferences, and key motivations of these prospective students, with the ultimate goal of informing targeted, evidence-based support mechanisms that can enhance their academic readiness, mitigate negative affective factors, and promote successful integration into the university community

LITERATURE & THEORY

Migration Patterns and Educational Motivations

Misclassified and Unprotected: Phyu, H. P. (2025) states that survival migration from Myanmar and the Limits of Thailand's Pink Card System. Migration from Myanmar to Thailand has evolved from primarily low-skilled labor movements into a more complex pattern involving "survival migration" and educational pursuit. Recent studies indicate that while economic necessity remains a core driver, there is a growing trend of "educational migration" where young people from Myanmar view higher education in Thailand as a strategic pathway to social mobility and security. This shift is characterized by students actively seeking international programs that offer recognized qualifications, which are increasingly seen as superior to the disrupted and under-resourced educational options currently available within Myanmar. The pattern of migration is often step-wise, where initial movement to border areas or learning centers transitions into formal enrollment in Thai universities for those with sufficient resources.

Push and Pull Factors Influencing Myanmar Migration

The decision to migrate is heavily influenced by a distinct set of push and pull factors.

Push Factors: The primary push factors driving students out of Myanmar include political instability, lack of personal safety, and limited economic and educational opportunities following recent political upheavals. Research highlights that the breakdown of the domestic education system in Myanmar has created a "forced" demand for foreign education, where students leave not just for better quality, but because local alternatives are inaccessible or unsafe.

Pull Factors: Thailand exerts strong pull factors due to its geographic proximity, cultural similarity, and relative safety. Specific to education, Thai universities are attractive because of their "value proposition"—offering international standard curriculums at a cost significantly lower than Western institutions, while still providing a recognized degree that facilitates global mobility. Additionally, the presence of established Myanmar communities in Thailand provides a social safety net that encourages parents to send their children across the border.

Challenges Faced by Myanmar Migrant Students

Despite the opportunities, Myanmar students in Thailand encounter multifaceted challenges that impact their academic and social integration.

Access to Information and Resources: A critical barrier is the lack of centralized, accessible information regarding admission pathways and support services. Many prospective students rely on informal social networks rather than official channels, leading to misinformation and unpreparedness for academic requirements. Furthermore, once enrolled, students often struggle to access institutional resources such as libraries or digital tools due to language barriers or lack of familiarity with Thai administrative systems.

Competition with Local Graduates: Upon graduation, Myanmar students face intense competition in the Thai labor market. Zar, T. H. H. (2025) indicates that while Myanmar graduates possess high human capital, they often encounter systemic barriers such as visa restrictions and employer preference for Thai nationals, which limits their ability to convert their Thai degrees into equitable employment opportunities.

Common Academic and Social Challenges: Inside the classroom, language proficiency, both in English and Thai, remains a significant hurdle. Although students may study in English programs, the broader campus environment and daily life often require Thai language skills, creating a "double language barrier" that affects social integration and confidence. Additionally, financial stress is a prevalent issue, as many students come from families whose economic stability has been compromised by the situation in Myanmar, making the cost of living in Bangkok a constant pressure.

Institutional Context and Pedagogical Challenges

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU) has increasingly prioritized the integration of international learners through strategic initiatives aimed at streamlining academic procedures and adapting curricula for diverse student cohorts (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 2025; Amatyakul et al., 2025). Central to this adaptation is the university's pedagogical readiness; for instance, Yalangkan et al. (2023) demonstrated that SSRU academic staff are highly capable of delivering flexible instruction, reporting strong satisfaction and cognitive engagement with Blended Learning Process Workshops. This suggests the university possesses a validated framework for hybrid teaching. However, a significant gap remains between staff capability and student experience. While instructors are prepared for blended delivery, Chutrtong and Boonman (2022) found that student satisfaction with online learning environments at similar institutions was notably low, despite moderate levels of academic success. Their research highlighted that while students possess high digital familiarity, they are frequently hindered by infrastructural barriers such as unstable internet access and a lack of responsive institutional support. This contrast underscores that implementing effective flexible learning for international students requires more than just skilled faculty; it demands a robust support ecosystem to bridge the divide between pedagogical potential and the actual technological and emotional realities of learners.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative survey design using a structured questionnaire to investigate the academic support needs, learning preferences, and study motivations of prospective Myanmar undergraduate students in the Credit Bank Business English Program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

1. Participants

The target population comprised prospective Myanmar undergraduate students enrolled in the Credit Bank System pathway of the Business English Program. A total of 15 respondents completed the questionnaire, all of whom held Myanmar nationality and were preparing to transition into undergraduate study rather than being fully enrolled degree students at the time

of data collection. Participants varied in gender, age, prior educational background (e.g., high school, high school equivalency), and sources of financial support (self-funded, family-supported, scholarships).

2. Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled “Academic Support Needs and Preferences Questionnaire,” which was administered in an online format. The instrument consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended items and was organized into the following sections:

2.1 Demographic Information

This section collected data on gender, year of birth (age), prior educational attainment, financial support status, and nationality, in order to describe the sample and examine potential relationships between background variables and support needs.

2.2 Academic Challenges

Participants rated the extent of their academic difficulties on multiple items using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated “Strongly Disagree” and 5 indicated “Strongly Agree.” Items addressed course content difficulty, language barriers (English and Thai), study skills, time management, academic writing, class participation, and adjustment to the Thai university system.

2.3 Priority Support Areas

Respondents selected and ranked key areas in which they most needed academic support, such as English language improvement, study skills and time management, subject content understanding, preparation for English proficiency tests, and other domain-specific needs.

2.4 Preferred Support Formats

This section asked participants to indicate and rank their preferred modes of academic support, including one-on-one tutoring, small group workshops, online self-paced resources, peer study groups, and related options.

2.5 Use and Awareness of Support Services

Items in this section captured whether students were aware of, and had used, various support services (e.g., tutoring, writing support, language assistance, academic advising). Response options included yes/no and simple frequency categories.

2.6 Motivations for Studying in Thailand and at SSRU

Participants selected reasons for choosing to pursue a bachelor's degree in Thailand and in this specific program, including safety and stability, cost, proximity to Myanmar, career opportunities, language and cultural learning, scholarship or financial support, internships and industry links, and curriculum-related factors.

2.7 Open-Ended Questions

Three open-ended items invited participants to describe their most important current academic challenges, the types of support they considered most helpful, and any additional comments or suggestions about academic support at SSRU.

3. Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using an online survey platform. A link to the survey was shared with all eligible students in the Credit Bank Business English cohort via email and program communication channels. Participation was voluntary, and an information statement at the beginning of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the study, assured anonymity, and indicated that responses would be used solely for research and academic support development. Students indicated their consent by proceeding to complete the questionnaire.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from closed-ended items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and response distributions were calculated for demographic variables, academic challenges, priority support areas, preferred support formats, and motivations for study. These statistics were used to identify dominant patterns of need and preference within the small cohort. Responses to the open-ended questions were examined using basic content analysis, in which recurring themes related to academic challenges and support expectations were identified and summarized to complement and interpret the quantitative findings.

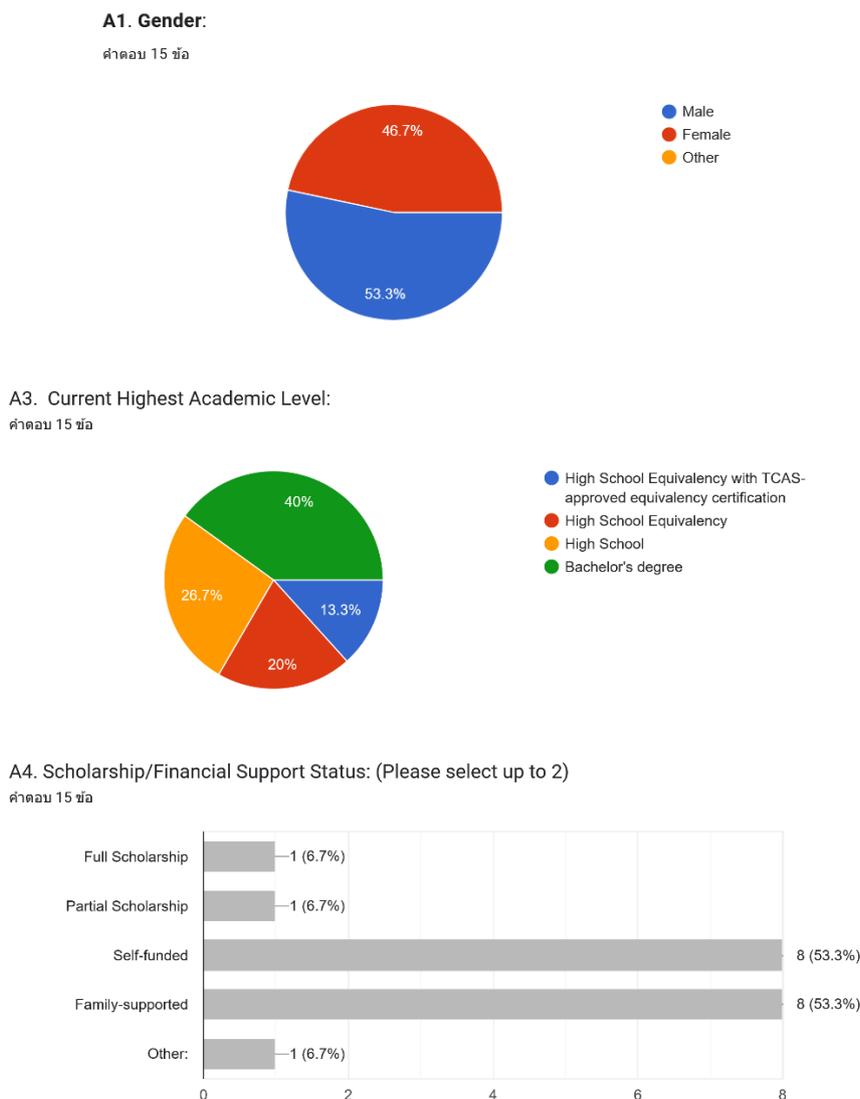
RESULTS

This section presents the main findings from 15 completed questionnaires. Results are organized into demographics, academic challenges, priority support areas, preferred support formats, and motivations for study in Thailand and at SSRU.

Demographic Profile

Most respondents were young adults, all from Myanmar with higher educational backgrounds and self-funded. The minority of respondents are with upper secondary educational background and family financial support.

Figure 1 Demographic Summary of Respondents



Academic Challenges

Respondents reported moderate challenges across several academic areas, especially time management, language, and content understanding.

Table 1 Perceived Academic Challenges (Likert responses)

Challenge item (summary)	Pattern of responses (qualitative summary)
Course content difficulty	Mostly “1-3”: moderate easy
Language barriers (English/Thai)	Many “3-4”: noticeable impact on performance

Challenge item (summary)	Pattern of responses (qualitative summary)
Study skills and learning strategies	Several “3-4”: need for better methods
Time management and balancing coursework	Often “3”: frequently mentioned as moderate challenge
Academic writing in English	Often “3”: frequently mentioned as moderate challenge
Class discussions and presentations	Mixed “3-4”: expressed the need of improvement of public speaking and presentation skills
Adjusting to Thai university system and culture	Some “3-4”: adaptation issues present but varied

Open-ended responses repeatedly highlighted public speaking and presentation skills, time management, balancing coursework and self-study, and access to learning resources (e.g., library) as key challenges.

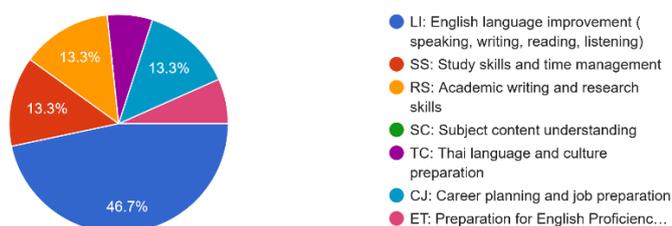
Priority Academic Support Areas

Students were asked to select priority areas where they most needed support.

Figure 2 Top Priority Support Areas

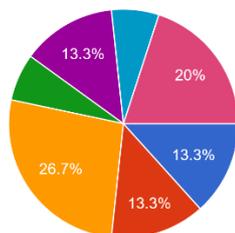
The first priority area I selected is.....

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The second priority area I selected is.....

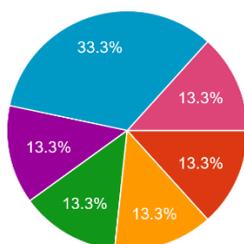
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- LI: English language improvement (speaking, writing, reading, listening)
- SS: Study skills and time management
- RS: Academic writing and research skills
- SC: Subject content understanding
- TC: Thai language and culture preparation
- CJ: Career planning and job preparation
- ET: Preparation for English Proficiency

The third priority area I selected is.....

คำตอบ 15 ข้อ



- LI: English language improvement (speaking, writing, reading, listening)
- SS: Study skills and time management
- RS: Academic writing and research skills
- SC: Subject content understanding
- TC: Thai language and culture preparation
- CJ: Career planning and job preparation
- ET: Preparation for English Proficiency

These patterns indicate that learners need integrated support that combines language, study skills, and

academic writing and research skills, with an additional emphasis on test preparation for progression and employability.

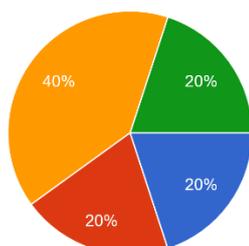
Preferred Support Formats

Respondents indicated clear preferences for a mix of interactive and flexible support formats.

Figure 3 Preferred Support Formats (Top Choices)

My top choice for support format is...

คำตอบ 15 ข้อ



- E1: One-on-one tutoring with an instructor or tutor
- E2: Group workshops or seminars (4-8 students)
- E3: Online resources and self-paced learning modules
- E4: Peer study groups (meeting with classmates)
- E5: Drop-in/office hours with instructors

Overall, students prefer online resources and self-paced learning modules, with equal preference for the other support format: one-on-one tutoring with an instructor or tutor, group

workshops or seminars (4-8 students), peer study groups (meeting with classmates), but no office hours with instructors.

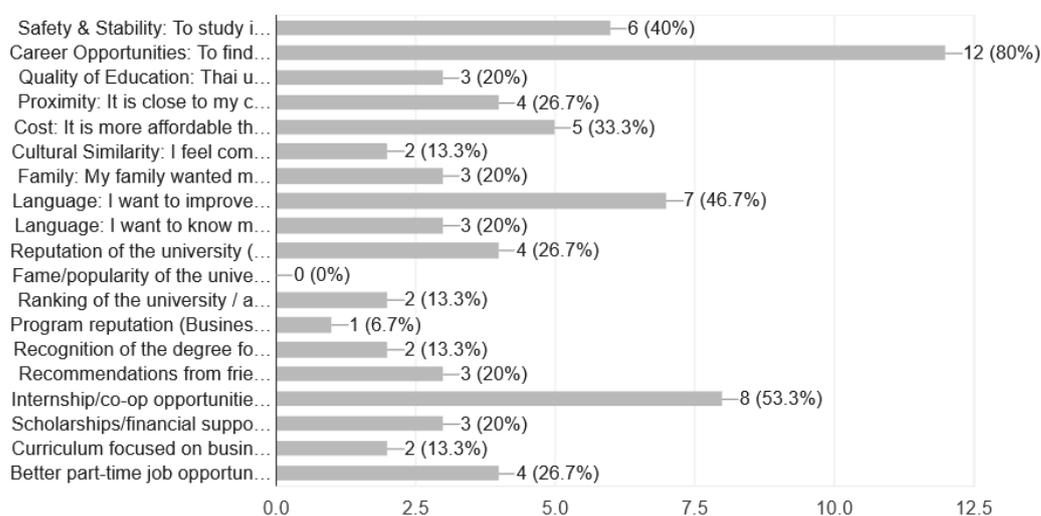
Motivations for Studying in Thailand and at SSRU

Multiple-response items captured reasons for choosing to pursue a bachelor's degree in Thailand and specifically at SSRU.

Table 2 Main Motivations for Studying in Thailand

Motivation factor	Times selected
Safety and stability (safer than home context)	High
Career opportunities in Thailand	Highest
Proximity to Myanmar (easy travel and visiting home)	High
Cost more affordable than Western countries	Moderate-High
Family influence or relatives in Bangkok/Thailand	Moderate
Desire to improve English and Thai language and understand culture	High
Scholarships / financial support opportunities	Some
Internship or industry links	Very high

Figure 4 Main Motivations for Studying in Thailand



These results show that students' decisions are shaped by both push factors (safety and instability at home) and pull factors (career prospects, affordability, and language/cultural learning opportunities) in Thailand.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings indicate that all 15 respondents are Myanmar nationals, predominantly recent high school graduates who rely mainly on family financial support for their studies. Academically, they report moderate to high levels of difficulty in several areas, particularly time management, language proficiency, academic writing, and academic writing and research skills, suggesting that their transition into Thai higher education involves multiple, overlapping challenges. In terms of support needs, they place the greatest priority on English language improvement, enhanced study skills and time management, deeper subject content understanding, and preparation for English proficiency tests such as EnglishScore, TOEIC, and SSRU-TEP. Their preferred support formats combine individualized and collaborative approaches, with strong preferences for one-on-one tutoring, small group workshops, online self-paced materials, and peer study groups, reflecting a desire for both personal guidance and flexible learning options. Regarding their motivations, students' decisions to study in Thailand and at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University are shaped by a mix of safety and stability concerns, perceived career opportunities in Thailand, geographic proximity to Myanmar, relatively affordable costs compared with Western countries, and the opportunity to improve both English and Thai while learning about Thai culture.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study provides critical baseline data on the academic support needs and motivations of prospective Myanmar undergraduate students in Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University's Credit Bank Business English Program, revealing moderate challenges in language proficiency, time management, academic writing, and content understanding, alongside clear preferences for personalized tutoring, small group workshops, and online resources. The findings confirm that students are primarily drawn to Thailand for safety, career prospects, proximity, and affordability, underscoring the importance of integrated support systems that address both academic skills and employability pathways. By documenting these needs through direct student input, the research establishes an evidence-based foundation for program administrators to develop targeted interventions, such as enhanced English test preparation, study skills workshops, and career orientation services, that can improve academic readiness and retention for this growing cohort.

Future work should expand this pilot study by tracking these students longitudinally as they progress into full undergraduate status, allowing researchers to assess whether current support preferences align with actual challenges encountered in degree programs. Additional research could also involve qualitative interviews with a larger sample to explore the nuances of ethnic diversity within the Myanmar student population and their differential support needs, as well as comparative analysis with other international cohorts at SSRU to identify program-specific best practices. Finally, collaboration with Thai labor market stakeholders could investigate how academic support translates into employability outcomes, addressing the documented gap

between Myanmar graduates' qualifications and their integration into the Thai workforce.

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