

# Analysis for Achang Students' English Learning and Their Teachers' Humanistic Concerns—A Case Study in Rural School of Western Yunnan

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**Abstract:** *The study will closely combine teaching practices with the teaching exploration for Achang ethnic students in Western Yunnan. It focuses on their learning environment under the multicultural background, and investigates the attitude, motivation, strategies, anxiety and the countermeasures of their English learning. The research puts forward some assumptions: Achang students are greatly affected by the traditional concepts, external environment and their learning attitudes, motivations, strategies and anxiety. Under this assumption, their learning efficiency and further development will be naturally affected. As a result, the students can hardly obtain better results and reach a balance among the various subjects. Therefore, the educators should take practical measures and strategies to help them learning English happily and efficiently.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnic minorities, Achang students, EFL learning, Humanistic concerns*

## 1. Introduction

Multiculture is a theory focusing on coexisting multiple cultures in a certain society[1]. Multicultural societies, in which there is a mixture of different ethnic groups. As we all know, many different nationalities live in Yunnan and their culture is different and brilliant. Yunnan province is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural diversity and ecological environment, culture and the close relationship between the ecological environment. The cultural diversity makes different ethnic group be influenced deeply by the neighboring ethnic groups[2]. Gradually, they become quite similar in every aspect and just like brothers and sisters in a family. People keep frequent contacts with each other on politics, economy and culture. Most of them can not only speak their mother tongue but also can speak Chinese even other ethnic languages. For instance, under the Han influence, Achang people generally improve themselves by learning from Hans. During the identifying process, Achang people continue to absorb new blood of development. And one important festival for Achang people named the Lu Luo Waterloo Festival. Whichever minority, they enjoy their own festival so much, meanwhile, even other nations nearby them also celebrate different festivals with their neighbors, all the reason for explaining this is the coexisting multi-national culture.

The Achang is an ethnic minority in Yunnan province, it's also the only one among the provinces of China. It has a long history and it's special traditional civilization and splendid national culture, the population is over 30,000(2000, The fifth census of China)[3]. They mainly Spread in Longchuan, Lianghe, Luxi, Yingjiang, Ruili, Wanding of Dehong, Tengchong and Longling of Baoshan, and Yunlong of Dali. They have their own language, but they don't have their standard characters. Since they had no written language in the past, their history and culture were taught orally and handed down from generation to generation[4]. Most of them live with Han and other minorities together. Their culture has been deeply influenced by neighboring Han and Dai. In the past, some Achang families are too poor to afford their school. As a result, they had to stay at home to get money to keep their families. Another reason was that many parents think it useless for girls to study and they would not like them to go to school. In fact, all the Achang girls should have the chance to receive education anyway.

Humanism is originally a psychological term. It emphasizes the development of the whole person rather than focusing solely upon the development and employment of cognitive skills[5]. There are five basic principles of humanistic education:

(1) Students should be able to choose what they want to learn. Humanistic teachers believe that students will be motivated to learn a subject if it's something they need want to know.

(2) The goal of education should be to foster students' desire to learn and teach them how to learn. Students should be self-motivated in their studies and desire to learn on their own.

(3) Humanistic educators insist that schools need to provide students with an unthreatening environment so that they will feel secure to learn. Once students feel secure, learning becomes easier and more meaningful.

Most of our Achang students are from the remote and poor villages where the nine-year compulsory education has not been fulfilled yet. The economic development in those areas is quite slow and it becomes a big obstacle to the development of education[6]. Therefore, it is possible that both teachers and students need time to gain mutual understanding and thus, to build a harmonious relationship in learning. This shows that how important the humanistic care is to these special learners from the ethnic areas.

Due to my curiosities, my concern for multi ethnic culture and my consideration for Achang students' English learning initiated my exploration into the present research. I was determined to listen to the Achang students' own voice on what they are thinking and why they do things in the way they are doing them.

This study touches a small issue in the teaching process in the ethnic regions. However, its effect is far more than the issue itself on the EFL education of ethnic minority especially Achang minority[7]. There are two main aspects of the significance of this research. Theoretically, it will hopefully contribute to the English teaching of ethnic areas in Yunnan. The pragmatic aspect is that this research is expected to help to see some problems in current EFL teaching in the ethnic regions.

## **2. Research methodology**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

Reasonable research methodology is considered to be a crucial factor which makes a difference to the success of the study. The main purpose of this study is to present a description of the research methodology and procedures for data collection and processing in this study.

### ***2.2 The purpose of the of the investigation***

With the purpose of finding out the factors affecting Achang minority students' successful learning in the multi-ethnic culture , seeking a comparatively appropriate perspective in which teachers will reflect their English teaching with a new way of Humane care and students will reconsider their English learning, the author has undertaken the tests and the investigation. With the Multi- ethnic cultural communication more frequent and the English teaching innovation deepening, teachers and students are supposed to inevitably pay more attention to how to solve the new realistic problems in teaching and learning[8].

### ***2.3 Rationale for research***

#### ***2.3.1 Quantitative approach***

Quantitative approach will firstly be used in this study. It consists of close-ended written questionnaires which are highly structured. That means a specific set of questions handed out by the researcher are to be answered by the participants in a set order. In this case, the researcher has a complete control over the questioning, and the participants usually do not have opportunity to explain much on the answer.

Another approach is qualitative approach which was presented by a semi-structured oral interview. This approach was used in this study as the supplement for the former one. In the study, classroom observation to Achang students and several interviews to their parents was carried out. The advantage of the qualitative approach is more credible. And it will take a longer time to transcribe and deal with the collected data.

Since both approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages, a more proper way is the combination of them to make most of the advantages and blind the disadvantages. In this way, the collected results are most likely to be comprehensive, reliable and persuasive.

**2.4 Participants and procedures**

**2.4.1 The subjects**

**2.4.1.1 Achang students and some of their parents**

The subjects in the current study are 16 English teachers, 75 High School students and some of their parents, as shown in the Table1.

*Table 1: Students in No.x High school of Tengchong*

Total Ss:1412									
Han Ss (87.3%)		Minority Ss:180(12.7%)							
1232		Achang	Dai	Hui	Jingpo	Wa	Lisu	Bai	Yi
		75	64	12	10	7	5	5	2
Rate among total	87.3%	5.72%	4.88%	0.9%	0.76%	0.53%	0.38%	0.38%	0.15%
Rate among minority		41.67%	35.56%	6.67%	5.56%	3.89%	2.78%	2.78%	1.11%
Notes:Students =Ss									

As I mentioned before,the students are from different areas even the nearby ethnic regions like Dehong, so there are more than eight kinds of ethnic minorities students such as Achang,Dai, Hui,Wa, jingpo ,Lisu,Yi and Bai. In the multi-cultural background, all the minority students have to face another language---English. For Achang ethnic minority, their culture has been deeply influenced by neighboring Han and Dai.

I interviewed 16 English teachers from the school and some of the Achang students' parents from different areas including Tenchong, Longling and Dehong. The researcher always thinks that if the teachers know more about their students, better and proper teaching methods can be used to help students learn English better. Meanwhile, if the parents know more about their children, better and proper educating strategies can be used to help their children grow up better. Practice has proved that both teachers and parents are playing important roles for teaching young generation.

**2.4.2 Procedures**

**2.4.2.1 Classroom observation**

“Observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place”[9] .

“For our purposes in discussing language classroom research , we will define classroom observation as a family of related procedures for gathering data during actual language lessons or tutorial sessions, primarily by watching, listening, and recording (rather than by asking)”[10] .

In this study, the researcher observes Achang ethnic students' learning state in English classroom teaching in person and takes down the results of observation. This group of Achang ethnic students is not told that they are being observed so that the observing results and discovering questions would be more complete and accurate.

**2.4.2.2 Data collection and analysis**

With the help of some old classmates, colleagues and students, seventy-five pieces of questionnaires for students were delivered to all the subjects. The same quantity of valid questionnaires was regained in February, 2022. Meanwhile, interviewed sixteen English teachers and some of the Achang students' parents in November, 2022.

After the questionnaires were returned, the author presented these questionnaires with the statistics of frequency. Some statistical tables of the tests and questionnaires were adopted in this study. After the statistical procedures, the relevant discussion based on the research questions is presented in the research.

**2.5 Limitations of the research methodology**

(1) The great weakness of tests are lack of quality and modern equipment. And the data from the tests are not accurate enough. It can be find out error.

(2) The great weakness of questionnaire and interview design is lacking of theory in the sense that there are no scientific principles that guarantee an optimal or ideal experience.

(3) Due to the poor interviewing skills of the researcher may greatly reduce the validity and reliability of the interview data.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Data analysis of the investigation, tests and questionnaires

This part will describe and discuss the data obtained from the investigation, English tests, interviews, classroom observations (including investigate 180 ethnic minority students especially 75 Achang ethnic minority students) from No.X High School of Tengchong, as is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The distribution of each variable for the subjects

Variable	Category	Number	Percent (%)
Gender	boy	42	56
	girl	33	44
	total	75	100
Junior & Senior	junior	55	73.3
	senior	20	26.7
	total	75	100
Grade	Junior one	21	28
	Junior two	18	24
	Junior three	16	21.3
	Senior one	8	10.67
	Senior two	7	9.3
	Senior three	5	6.7
	Average scores for English	Junior one	
	Junior two		75.1
	Junior three		67.9
Junior Average (120 points)			72.7
	Senior one		63.1
	Senior two		49.7
	Senior three		74.4
Senior Average (150 points)			62.4
Place of origin	Tengchong	51	68
	Longling	13	17.3
	Dehong	11	14.7
	total	75	100
Permanent Residence	city	3	4
	rural	72	96
	total	75	100
Family income (for a year)	5000-10000	50	66.7
	10000-20000	20	26.7
	Over 20000	5	6.7
	total	75	100

The table shows that most of the Achang students in the school are from the rural areas such as Tengchong, Longling and Dehong, and most of their family conditions are not so superior. As for them, it's not so easy to insist on staying at school especially for senior students. One reason is just a few of them can pass the senior entrance examination. That's why junior students are more than senior students in my school now. Another reason is their families cannot afford to send them to get education because of their low family income, even some of the Achang students' brothers and sisters have already dropped out before they went into high schools. What's worse, few of parents pay more attention to sons than daughters for education. In addition, we can see clearly from the table above is both junior

and senior Achang students' average scores in English test are not so Satisfied. In order to change the states of them, lots of researches are waiting to be done, as is shown in Table 3.

*Table 3: The investigation to 180 ethnic students ' nationality of my school*

Nationality	Number	Percent (%)
Achang	75	41.67
Dai	64	35.56
Hui	12	6.67
Jingpo	10	5.56
Wa	7	3.89
Lisu	5	2.78
Bai	5	2.78
Yi	2	1.11
Boy	105	58.33
Girl	75	41.67

The table shows that there are eight kinds of ethnic minority students (180 in all) my school, and about 41.67% are Achang minority students (75 in all), as is shown in Table 4.

*Table 4: Different Areas' ethnic minority students*

Address	Number	Percent (%)
Puchuan, Tengchong	80	44.44
Xinghua, Tengchong	40	22.22
Hetou, Longling	28	15.56
Lianghe, Dehong	22	12.22
Longchuan, Dehong	10	5.56

The table shows that The ethnic minority students in the school come from different places nearby Tengchong, but most of them are from the local. They live together and influence each other, as is shown in Table 5.

*Table 5: The special festivals among different groups nearby the school*

Nationality	Special festival	Special meaning
Han	Tomb-sweeping Festival	memorize the ancestors
Achang	Water Festival; The a Lu Luo Waterloo Festival	bless happy life; sacrifice to the god of Heaven and Earth(also bless happy life)
Dai	Water Festival	bless happy life
Hui	Muslim Eid	give thanks to Allah
Jingpo	MuNaoZongGe Festival; Water Festival	long for future life bless happy life
Wa	Water Festival	bless happy life
Lisu	Torch Festival; The Sword Pole Festival (also called the Sword -ladder Climbing Festival )	Harvest; memorize an ancient Han hero who offered great favor to Lisus
Yi	Water Festival; Torch Festival	bless happy life; harvest
Bai	Ethnic Bai March Street Festival; Water Festival; Torch Festival	exchange of goods and recreational activities; bless happy life; harvest

The table shows that multi-ethnic culture is just around of us, and the ethnic culture is very rich and coexistence with each other nearby the school. And from the table we also know that different kinds of ethnic cultures, different festivals and meanings. But the truth is they sometimes share their festival together, and gradually their cultures will combine and even one day their specials will disappear from our sight. In order to prevent this, the specialists advised taking all kinds of effective measures to protect them, as is shown in Table 6.

The table shows that Achang students' pronunciation and spelling ability are a little poor. The

students didn't learn English in primary school is 100%. Most of them are interfered by Chinese. They can be confused by Chinese when they read alphabet and English pronunciation. And just a few of them think English pronunciation and mother language pronunciation can combine together.

*Table 6: The interference by Chinese for Achang students*

Interviews	Number	Percent (%)
The students didn't learn English in primary school.	75	100
The students are interfered by Chinese.	70	93.3
The students' alphabet and Chinese pronunciation can combine together.	40	53.3
The students' English pronunciation and Chinese pronunciation can combine together.	20	26.7
The students' English pronunciation and mother language pronunciation can combine together.	5	6.7

### 3.2 Data analysis from the tests

In order to know the study state of these Achang students and the teaching strategies of humane care from their teachers, to obtain more about Achang Students' difficulties and problems in English learning, I chose two groups students from Junior two at the same level. One is non-experimental group (18 Han students), the other is experimental group (18 Achang students). I had two tests about their ability to use English for my Achang students early or later so as to compare their performances. We can see clearly from the table, the gap is just 9 for total scores, the mean gap is just 0.5, Indeed, the two groups are at the same level, as is shown in Table 7.

*Table 7: Scores of learning results in pre-experiment test*

Item	Total score	Mean
Group A	1368	76
Group B	1359	75.5
Gap	9	0.5

### 3.3 Teaching-experiment phase

According to observation, face-to-face interview, questionnaire and pre-experiment test, the researcher finds that there is high anxiety among Achang ethnic English beginners. They are afraid of learning English and their learning results are really low. The pre-experiment test reveals that the situation is serious. These students need lowering anxiety urgently [11]. Moreover, most of these students hope their teacher to help them overcome anxiety barrier and improve their English. Therefore, it is quite necessary and urgent for English teachers to create a relaxing environment of mutual support in English class.

### 3.4 Post-experiment phase

The second test was tested on December 20, 2022, after three months' experiment. The same group of students took part in the test. Then in March, 2023, as is shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Scores of learning results in post-experiment test*

Item	Total score	Mean
Group A	1458	81
Group B	1530	85
Gap	72	4

Although the test results are not detailed and perfect, the findings can still provide some evidence for further analysis and discussion. From the table we can easily see, the gap between Group A and Group B are much bigger than before (72), and the mean bigger than the Pre-experiment Test. It can prove the strategies of humane concerns from teachers help the students a lot, it's useful and meaningful.

### 3.5 Data analysis from the questionnaires

The following part is the statistical tables resulting from the questionnaires referring to the factors affecting Achang Minority High School students' successful factors. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study, in which 16 English teachers were interviewed, and 75 Achang students (42 male, and 33 female) from Techong, Longling and Dehong were surveyed for

questionnaires. All the 75 questionnaires were collected and analyzed with SPSS, as is shown in Table 9.

*Table 9: Gender differences in foreign language learning*

Variable		Statistical value	Learning attitude	Learning motivation	Learning strategy	Learning anxiety
gender	schoolboy		87.50±13.26	43.67±7.66	153.17±13.46	88.83±15.13
	schoolgirl		96.73±17.21	45.36±8.76	150.61±12.66	80.61±14.51
		t	0.126	0.220	0.773	0.822

Table shows that there is no statistical difference between the male and female Achang students in their learning attitude, motivation, strategy and anxiety.

There is no significant differences for Achang students' listening, speaking, reading and writing in the process of English learning, as is shown in Table 10.

*Table 10: Each variable in statistics for Achang students' English learning*

Variable		attitude	motivation	strategies	anxiety
problems	Lack of language environment	99.20±11.96	43.49±8.58	154.83±12.40	78.22±13.02
	Lack of interest in learning	85.87±14.96	46.38±7.54	148.97±12.49	91.19±15.53
	The material is too old	85.20±21.94	42.60±10.31	150.80±21.75	90.00±13.45
	The level of teachers Limited	76.75±14.52	39.50±2.52	153.00±10.10	94.00±11.63
	Significant	0.000	0.268	0.344	0.002

Table shows that the significant of motivation and strategies are obvious for Achang Ss in the process of English learning.

### **3.6 Findings and discussions**

#### **3.6.1 Findings**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study, in which 16 English teachers were interviewed, and 75 Achang students (42 male, and 33 female) from Techong, Longling and Dehong were surveyed for questionnaires. All the 75 questionnaires were collected and analyzed with SPSS.

(1) The study shows that there is no statistical difference between the male and female Achang students in their learning attitude, motivation, strategy and anxiety.

(2) The data show that there are statistically marked differences in parents' support to Achang students' learning attitudes, motivation, strategy and anxiety.

(3) Analysis shows that there is no difference in Achang students' learning attitude and anxiety concerning the length of their English learning, while there are obvious differences in their motivation, method and strategy.

(4) There is no statistical difference in Achang students' learning attitude, motivation, strategy and anxiety in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

(5) The teachers can effectively help Achang students in their English achievements with various humanistic concerns.

#### **3.6.2 Discussions**

The reasons of poor performances in English learning for Achang students:

- (1) With backward concepts, the parents pay little attention to their children's education;
- (2) The teachers are not qualified enough to carry out effective teaching methods to meet the requirements of students;
- (3) The students are lack of learning motivation and they usually learn English with inappropriate

methods;

(4) Without a proper language environment, the students are only focused on the text materials.

To improve the effects of foreign teaching, the language teachers can try out the following humane care policies.

(1) Create a relaxed and harmonious classroom environment. Try to reduce the students' learning anxiety and make the learning easier and more pleasant.

(2) Grasp the students' mental activities with the psychological perspective, understand their individual differences and respect them to establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship.

(3) Develop some practical targets for the students through multivariate evaluation. Make sure "Not all to score high, but all to make progress."

#### 4. Conclusion

The study closely combines teaching practices with the teaching exploration for Achang ethnic students in Western Yunnan. It focuses on their learning environment under the multicultural background, and investigates the attitude, motivation, strategies, anxiety and the countermeasures of their English learning. The thesis only serves as a preliminary and tentative study in this field. As a special group, there is also some particular characters for Achang ethnic English learners in EFL learning. It's impossible to solve all the problems through one or two investigations. But one thing we can be sure that affective factors play a very important role whatever learning for students or teaching for teachers, both our English teachers and Achang students should take more effective measures and strategies for our teaching and learning. Although the road is still very long, we will go on as in the past.

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