

Resilience in Times of Disruptions: Perspectives from Thai Pre-service English Teachers

Jariya Sairattainain , Thiwaporn Thawarom , Daron Benjamin Loo 

Faculty of Education and Human Development, Sisaket Rajabhat
University, Thailand, Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and
Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Amidst disruptions in the education, resilience has emerged as a vital quality for educators. This study aimed to explore the nature of resilience as a dynamic construct from the perspectives of Thai pre-service English teachers (n=115), who were recruited through convenience sampling. Using thematic analysis of qualitative data, four key themes were identified: *maintaining a positive outlook and sense of control, developing flexibility, being in a supportive environment and inspiring growth in others*. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of resilience and how personal attributes, professional support, and institutional conditions shape it. This renders resilience as a dynamic and context-dependent construct rather than one that is fixed. Teacher education programs, especially in the ASEAN context, should recognize resilience as an important construct to be familiarized among pre-service teachers. This would ensure that these future teachers would be prepared to address challenges or opportunities that arise in their work environment.

Keywords: qualitative analysis; pre-service teachers; teacher resilience; teacher education

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Introduction

Over the last few years, the education sector has experienced public health crises, technological advancements like Artificial Intelligence (AI), and policy shifts (Gleason & Pan Algarra, 2022). Despite these disruptions, teachers and educational institutions have banded together to support students' learning continuity. In the ASEAN region, these disruptions have been handled through collective effort seen through mutual effort and instilling a sense of shared responsibility in navigating precarious times (Sofyan et al., 2023). At the teacher education stage, overcoming challenges collectively would help inspiring pre-service teachers in their future teaching settings (Waghid & van Wyk, 2024). This may be a distinct trait in the ASEAN region, as the teaching profession is often conceived as a communal rather than an individualistic effort (Fihris et al., 2024). A group that would require careful guidance in developing resilience is English teachers, especially those working in a setting where English is not the dominant language. Against this backdrop, the objective of this study is to explore how resilience is perceived and developed among Thai pre-service English teachers, especially on how socio-cultural and technological contexts can shape their experiences. Findings from this study would be helpful for teacher educators and officials in-charge of teacher education programs in focusing on resilience in Thailand, especially as the nation reckons with disruptions complicated by the lack of resources and access to various educational support (Pal et al., 2022). Beyond Thailand, the findings from this study would also be of value to ASEAN as the region considers reforms for their teacher education programs in anticipation of future disruptive events (Pascua-Valenzuela, 2025).

What makes Resilient Teachers?

Resilience is a notion that has been widely examined, mainly due to it being an integral element of teachers' professional identity. According to Hascher et al. (2021), the concept of teacher resilience may be defined as "the capacity to maintain their [teachers'] commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and recurring setbacks" (p. 20). Moreover, resilience is produced when teachers take a more positive attitude towards negative or precarious experiences and utilise them to develop skills, dispositions and endurance (Poole, 2020). Resilient teachers would normally have a strong sense of agency, a support network, and a recognition of one's own worth and ability (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Resilience is also shaped by trust between teachers and those around them – their colleagues, the administrators, the schools, the students, and their community. This will allow the teacher to develop a sense of agency, which would be valuable for teachers when managing challenging or stressful situations. This process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Factors Contributing to the Development of Resilience

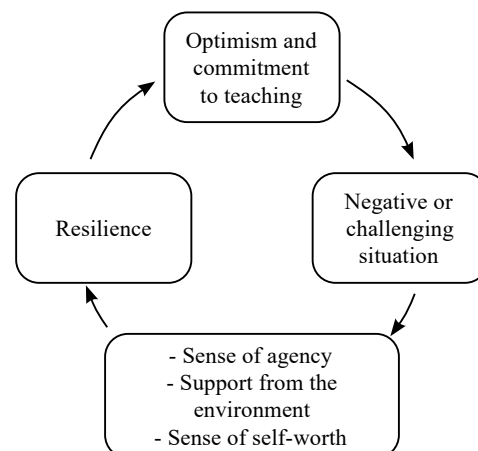
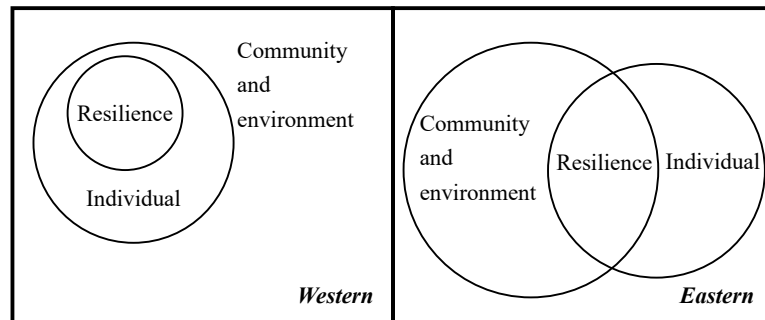


Figure 2*Western and Eastern Notions of Resilience*

The notion of resilience is also shaped by culture; for instance, while an individual agency and the ability to respond independently may be integral components for teacher resilience in the western context, relationality and a sense of belonging are key features of resilience in the Asian setting (see Figure 2) (Kowitarttawatee & Limphaibool, 2022). This may be observed in the ASEAN region where societies value collectivism and interpersonal relationships may define resilience significantly. Teachers operating with this cultural perspective may strive to comply and work with changes brought about by the institution instead of responding against them. In cases where they are unable to cope with such changes, they would probably view this as a failure on their part (Wang et al., 2024). In Thailand, teacher resilience is particularly relevant given the increasing concerns about teacher burnout and the role of emotional intelligence in sustaining teachers' well-being. Paschal (2023) found that Thai primary school teachers who demonstrated higher emotional intelligence were better equipped to manage stress, which helped prevent burnout. In other Asian contexts, resilience was also reported to be closely linked with well-being. To illustrate, in the Philippines, resilience contributes to the

sustenance of teachers' psychological well-being, which was found to help mediate challenges at work (Orines et al., 2023). This reflects that resilience is a construct that can impact other aspects of teacher professionalism. Moreover, resilience may also affect others within the teaching and learning setting. This was illustrated by Parrott et al. (2024) in their study done in Sulawesi, Indonesia, where teachers' resilience had a positive ripple effect on their students. In particular, students who observed the resilience of their teachers were inspired to build resilience for themselves and their broader community. Furthermore, with the rapid emergence of AI technology, teachers may rely on these tools to perform routinized tasks in order to focus their time and energy on their students, as well as more meaningful aspects of teaching and their profession (Al-khresheh, 2024). Teachers may also engage in reflection with AI tools, by engaging with these as a nonjudgemental conversation partner (Hashem et al., 2023).

Given the dynamic nature of resilience in being affected by teachers' immediate work environment, it becomes imperative to understand how this concept may be shaped. This is especially important in today's context, where various

disruptions have affected teaching and learning practices. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore how resilience is perceived and developed among Thai pre-service English teachers, especially on how socio-cultural and technological contexts can shape their experiences.

The Study

This study was premised on constructivism, which values multiple perspectives of individuals towards a certain phenomenon or construct that are subjective and context dependent (Burns et al., 2022). In seeking to understand Thai pre-service English teachers' perspectives on resilience, a qualitative method was used to enable a bottom-up and an open approach to data collection and analysis, which was necessary to accommodate the variability of the participants' views. This methodological choice aligns not only with the study's constructivist foundation but also with the broader post-pandemic reform efforts in ASEAN, where there has been a focus on building teacher capacity from a bottom-up perspective. Particular attention has been given to ways teachers 'catch-up' and maintain optimal socio-emotional health when times are volatile and when faced with disruptions (Pascua-Valenzuela, 2025).

Study Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a teacher education university in northeastern Thailand that offers a range of four-year undergraduate programs in areas such as Primary Education, Mathematics, General Sciences, and Language Teaching (Thai, Chinese, and English). Pre-service teachers studied courses such as classroom management, teaching theories and practices, educational philosophy, and their chosen specialization.

Before the study was conducted, ethical approval was obtained. The participants were then informed of the nature of the research, and that their responses would be kept anonymous and confidential. The participants were also assured that there was no immediate risk from taking part in the study, and that their participation would not have any implications on their courses. Once ethical approval was granted, the principal researcher recruited her students via convenience sampling. This was considered suitable for this study as there was already a professional rapport established between the researcher and the participants, which would encourage them to be open in their responses (Brewis, 2014). There were 115 pre-service teachers who took part in this study. They were in their second or third year of their pre-service education program, and as such, would have formed some perceptions towards the teaching and learning of English.

Data Collection and Analysis

An online open-ended survey was created to determine how pre-service English teachers perceived resilience. This method was deemed appropriate as its openness would cater to the participants' distinct and diverse experiences and perspectives. The open-ended survey questionnaire was presented in Thai and English to ensure the participants' understanding of the questions was accurate. They were also allowed to respond in either or both languages. The survey comprised five questions, which were:

1. What does resilience mean in teaching?
2. Given the challenges experienced today*, what are the characteristics of a resilient teacher?

3. Why do teachers today* need to be resilient?
4. What roles do others (e.g., students, colleagues, schools, administrators, policies) play in teachers' development of resilience?
5. How should resilience be understood in today's teaching environment?

**Today refers to post-pandemic times and the age of technological advancements*

A thematic analysis was carried out on the qualitative responses provided by the participants. As per the study of Bayaga et al. (2021), the thematic analysis began with the iterative reading and familiarization with the participants' responses. This included the identification of similarities across reactions, as well as those that were distinct. After reading through the data and understanding it, codes were drawn out and then consolidated into themes. The themes were consolidated based on the resonance of meanings between codes and with published literature.

This ensured a consensus between the data points, existing literature, and the researchers' subjectivities. The operationalization of each theme was done based on the initial codes generated.

Findings

All 115 pre-service teachers responded to the five open-ended questions, bringing the total of responses to 575. All participants responded in English, even though they could have responded in Thai. The thematic analysis of these responses yielded four themes: *maintaining a positive outlook and a sense of control; developing flexibility; being in a supportive environment; and inspiring growth in others*. Sample responses, the categories, themes, and explanations are presented in Table 1. Excerpts of participants' responses are provided verbatim, with no corrections made to ensure credibility by maintaining the natural state of the data (Nassaji, 2020). The responses were labelled with the acronym PST which referred to 'pre-service teacher', followed by a number that reflected the order in which the response was submitted.

Table 1

Responses, Categories, Themes and Explanation

Sample verbatim responses	Categories	Themes	Description of Themes
PST34	Emotional regulation;	Maintaining a positive outlook and	A teacher's ability to manage cognitive and
Teacher should have patience and self-control.	self-efficacy;	outlook and	emotional
solve problems according to the situation Whether	problem-	a sense of	pressures
it's using the Internet network, screen sharing	solving; sense	control	through an
problems while teaching, or it's controlling emotions	of purpose		ongoing and
if the learner is not interested in the teacher.			dynamic process.

PST5

We can explain that: teacher resilience is the capacity, process and teaching resilience is a capacity because it allows to react and recover with positive energy and towards personal and professional. And teacher resilience is a process because it requires recovery and accommodation skills with a positive disposition in the face of any problem.

PST97

Teachers can modify teaching styles at any time to ensure continuity of learning. Resilience in content or even resilience in terms of time. Teachers therefore need to modify the format according to the situation for students to be able to learn and understand the content taught by the teacher.

Adaptability; innovative thinking; openness to change; handling uncertainty

Developing flexibility

A teacher is able to work within a dynamic situation where appropriate adjustments are made to the teaching and learning processes, as well as in the teacher's perspectives.

PST21

Everything plays an important role in teachers' development of resilience because teachers need to adapt to the context that arises whether it is from the students, colleagues, schools, administrators, policies, parents, communities.

PST11

1. Students must have an appetite for learning and have positive qualities such as compassion, optimism.
2. Universities should create a safe learning environment and focus on developing a feeling of people like a second home.

Support; sharing ideas; feel encouraged

Being in a supportive environment

Resilient teachers find themselves in an environment that is supportive

PST78

They can be like a big team. Friends support each other by sharing ideas, advice, and experiences. They can talk and listen to each

other when things are challenging and celebrate successes together. Having good colleagues helps friends feel encouraged and supported.

PST6

The important thing in teaching is to help students understand what we teach. People don't always grasp everything easily, so teachers need to exercise a great deal of patience and effort. For example, teachers have to explain or provide examples to students repeatedly until they understand what they are studying and can explain it to others.

Mentorship;
encouraging
student
success; role
modeling;
commitment
to lifelong
learning

Inspiring
growth in
others

Resilient
teachers viewed
as a positive
role model to
others such
as colleagues
and students.

PST90

For a teacher, resilience means they keep trying to teach you, even if you're finding something difficult. They encourage you to keep learning and growing, even if you make mistakes. They help you believe in yourself and keep going. They believe in themselves and their students, and they keep working hard to help their students learn and grow.

Discussion

Maintaining a Positive Outlook and a Sense of Control

This theme highlights the resilience of a teacher through their management of cognitive or emotional pressures. In an English language classroom in the ASEAN context, this may not be surprising as teachers would need to reckon with students' disparate levels of proficiency and motivation. This situation has been reported in Thailand (Sukying, 2021), where teachers had to vary their teaching approaches to cater to distinct English language backgrounds and language learning strategies that their Thai students

had and used. According to the participants' responses in this study, to accommodate such a complex classroom, teachers would need to have patience, self-control, and an optimistic mindset (PST34) and identify strategic pedagogical practices (PST5). With a positive disposition, teachers could offer a more suitable pedagogical response and intervention. This would also encourage teachers to consider challenges they encounter in the English language classroom as opportunities for growth. In fact, in the context of ASEAN, it would be beneficial for teachers to take on a growth mindset to avoid boredom and burnout at work. This is also extended to teachers' employers, where ample support for novel and creative teaching approaches or classroom

management is promoted to deepen teachers' interest in teaching (Imsa-ard, 2024). Taking on a positive disposition would inadvertently empower teachers to give their best to their students, the school, and their community.

Developing Flexibility

For this theme, importance is placed upon being able to make changes in an inherently dynamic situation. The classroom is an environment that involves people with different needs and preferences, so changes are bound to happen. This is true in a context where English is used as a foreign language – teachers not only need to reckon with their students' different levels of language proficiency but also the emergence of various digital tools brought about by AI technology. In response to these circumstances, teachers must respond in meaningful and localized ways. In being flexible, the participants of this study identified several considerations, such as recognising and responding to opportunities for improvement in teaching and learning, as seen in PST97. Teachers in the ASEAN context should feel empowered to make necessary adjustments in their teaching practices and classrooms. This is because teachers work directly with the students and other teaching colleagues, and as such, they would have a grounded view of what may or may not work in their classrooms (Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021).

Flexibility also involves fostering open and supportive relationships with students and colleagues. As indicated in PST21, a teacher's resilience is shaped by an array of influences, which include students, colleagues, administrators, school policies, parents, and the wider community. For instance, in Thailand, teachers in rural and remote areas face unique challenges beyond lesson planning and

student engagement. In such settings, many teachers teach their students and provide them with emotional and well-being support – all of which may stretch the conventional boundaries of a teacher's professional role. This may also be observed in other ASEAN contexts, such as that reported by Anas Ahmadi (2021) in remote islands in Indonesia. In the study, the teachers reported visiting the students' homes to provide enrichment programs to enhance their academic knowledge and skills. This may be seen as a distinct experience of teaching in the Asian setting, where a teacher's responsibility extends beyond the classroom walls.

Being in a Supportive Environment

As discussed, resilience is not an individual trait; it is shaped by the interactions, relationships, and support systems within the teaching and learning environment. Students, who are key to the learning environment, play an essential role in shaping their teachers' development of resilience (Fortunado & Canoy, 2021). As seen in PST11, students should develop a positive outlook towards their learning to influence the classroom environment beneficially. Students also have an active role in adapting to technological advancements, which can also support teachers' professional growth. This may be inevitable, given the significant impact of AI tools in the language classroom (Sumakul et al., 2022). Students can alleviate some of the pressures placed on educators by recognizing their role as active participants in the evolving educational landscape. Such a collaborative initiative can contribute to better classroom management and instructional practices.

Teachers' colleagues are also valuable in offering emotional and professional support. As noted by PST78, peer support among educators

creates an encouraging team. The availability of a support system becomes particularly crucial during periods of transition or crisis, such as the shift to online learning during the pandemic or the ongoing integration of AI into education. This is not a surprise, especially in the context of ASEAN, because communal effort is key to the teaching profession in this region (Waghid & van Wyk, 2024). A supportive environment encourages teachers to stay and become more motivated in their profession (Epanto, 2024). Thus, in the ASEAN setting, resilience should not be viewed as an individualistic construct; instead, it should be understood in terms of its surroundings. A positive surrounding would also encourage teachers to positively impact those they teach and meet. This would lead to a cycle of positive rapport, where all those within the educational setting influence each other in beneficial ways.

Inspiring Growth in Others

The fourth theme is about being an inspiration of growth for others. This theme is driven by the view that resilient teachers would be positive role models to whom others may look to. This is valuable not just to colleagues but to students as well. For teachers, there will be many opportunities to take on leadership roles. They could guide students' learning processes inside and outside a classroom setting. This is affirmed by the study of Parrott et al. (2024), where teachers deemed as resilient were found to be inspiring to the students and the broader community. This may not be surprising, especially in the ASEAN setting, where respect for teachers is readily accepted and rendered. Given this privilege afforded to teachers, they are responsible for initiating positive changes in the learning environment.

From another angle, resilience in teaching is not merely about enduring challenges; it is about maintaining a commitment to student learning and fostering an environment for growth. PST6 pointed out that patience and persistence are crucial in helping students grasp new concepts. This would require teachers to continually adapt their approaches to ensure that their students fully understand the lessons taught. Furthermore, PST90 stated that resilience is reflected in a teacher's ability to persistently motivate and encourage students, fostering both confidence and a growth mindset. The latter is essential in the context of ASEAN, where teachers need to recognize their important role in upholding and improving the standard of education for the younger generations. This may be significant for English teachers given that the dominant discourse regarding learning this language in the Asian setting has always been viewed from a deficient point of view. In other words, students in this context are viewed as unable to adequately or entirely master the English language. When English is taught from this perspective, attention will be placed on the accuracy of language use rather than meaningful communication.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine the conceptualization of resilience by Thai pre-service English teachers. From the qualitative data, four themes pertinent to resilience emerged, namely the need for teachers to be positive and in control, to be flexible, to be surrounded by positivity, and to be an inspiration of growth for others. Furthermore, as teachers who will be teaching English, resilience would entail acting promptly and accordingly when changes arise, especially in times when technology is rapidly evolving. Moreover, through the

findings, this study demonstrated a distinctive conceptualization of resilience in the ASEAN region. In particular, resilience was viewed as a communal and dynamic construct involving interaction among teachers, students, and colleagues. This is different from how resilience is discussed in the western world, where it is often viewed as a personal construct and is of concern only to the teachers themselves. As such, it is recommended that teacher education programs include guidance on how pre-service teachers may go about developing their resilience, as well as their sense of agency. This may include critical self-reflexivity exercises or the promotion of critical friendships between peers. In the ASEAN context, this should be implemented by addressing contextual nuances so as to avoid problematizing reflexivity through inconsequential cultural perceptions or perspectives.

While there are valuable findings from this study, there are also limitations that researchers should note. One notable limitation of this study is the use of self-reported data from the participants of the study. Furthermore, this data was not triangulated with other sources of data. Nonetheless, the findings of this study are still considered valuable due to the number of responses received. This provides a relatively comprehensive view of resilience among future teachers in Thailand. Nevertheless, future research should consider using multiple data sources or a mixed-methods approach to address these limitations to facilitate data triangulation. Moreover, as resilience is a dynamic construct, future research should embark on a longitudinal study to track resilience from pre-service to in-service teaching in order to capture and understand changes over time and in different work circumstances.

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Statements and Declarations

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The researchers have no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought at the university of the principal researcher, which is where the study was conducted. Participants of this study were also assured that their responses would be anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any point.

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