
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating English Communication Barriers for Foreign Teachers in the English for International Communication Program

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to examine the barriers and English communication skills in interactions between foreign English teachers and 1st to 3rd-year students majoring in English for International Communication at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. The study involved 45 undergraduate students from this major during the first semester of the academic year 2021. The research instruments used were a questionnaire and an interview form. Quantitative data collected were analyzed for frequency, percentage, mean (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (S.D.) using the SPSS program. The results indicated that the overall level of English communication barriers among 1st to 3rd-year students was high. The primary issues, in descending order, included: lack of confidence in communicating in English with foreign teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.93$; S.D. = 0.80). Fear and difficulty in recalling necessary vocabulary when conversing in English with foreign teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.94$; S.D. = 0.84 and S.D. = 0.76). Limited opportunities for students to communicate with foreign teachers in English due to large class sizes ($\bar{x} = 4.00$). The analysis summarized the current interactions between students and foreign teachers, highlighting that most students have limited opportunities to interact with foreign lecturers. This limitation is exacerbated by the aggressive behavior and insufficient number of foreign teachers at the university, which hinders students' ability to practice English in daily life.

KEYWORDS

Barriers, English Communication Major, Communication Skills

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1. Introduction

Language is essential for everyday communication as it conveys ideas, feelings, needs, and various emotions. Presently, English is the most widely used foreign language globally, serving as a common medium for communication worldwide. It is also a crucial tool for accessing scientific sources and discovering new knowledge. Therefore, it is imperative to encourage Thai people to learn English effectively so they can use it as a tool for knowledge acquisition and career development. Additionally, proficiency in English is essential for negotiating and engaging in economic and social activities on the international stage (Duang Waen Hangchai, 1990). The English language now plays a significant role in various fields, such as business and tourism, particularly as Thailand has entered the ASEAN Community.

According to a study conducted by the Education First International English Language Institute (EF), a survey of English language skills among students in 44 countries revealed that Thai students ranked 42nd, placing them in a group with significantly below-standard skills. Neighboring countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam also fell into this group, though they performed better than Thailand. In contrast, Malaysia advanced to 9th place with advanced English language skills. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, South Korea, and Japan ranked 12th to 14th, respectively, and were classified in the medium skill group. The Office of the Education Council Secretary (ONEC) has attributed Thailand's poor performance to a lack of a clear educational

system and strategy. ONEC has set a goal that within the next 20 years, Thai students will need to be proficient in three languages, Thai, English, and Chinese, to prepare Thai workers to compete in the global market (Tiansawat Srichai-ngam, 2012).

1.1 Research Questions

1 What barriers do students majoring in English for International Communication face when communicating with foreign English teachers at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak?

2 How proficient are students majoring in English for International Communication in communicating with foreign English teachers at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Communication Concepts and Skills

2.1.1 Definition of speech

Tuanchai Chalermkij (2002: 57) indicated that speaking is a challenging skill to teach because learners must possess a solid understanding of language elements to articulate their thoughts effectively. These elements include vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structure, and language topics. Similarly, Pornsawan Sipo (2007: 163) emphasized that speaking involves interaction between individuals within a society, representing verbal communication between two or more people. To avoid confusing the listener, it is crucial to ensure correct pronunciation and appropriate word choice. Additionally, speech must be tailored to fit societal and cultural norms.

Speaking is a crucial skill as it encompasses listening, understanding, and facilitating easier reading and writing. However, developing speaking skills is complex and requires prolonged practice rather than mere comprehension (Sumitra Angwattanakul, 1997:167; Scott, 1981:70). Each participant must interpret what they hear, which involves spontaneous processing of form, language, and meaning, and interact with language in a meaningful and reflective manner.

Pinthip Toycharoen (2001:2) elaborates on the uniqueness of human speech, highlighting that humans have a specialized ability to produce vocal sounds, distinguishing them from other animals. This capability is attributed to specific language areas in the brain, generally located in the left hemisphere. These areas are divided into two parts: one controls the movement of the vocal organs (e.g., mouth, tongue), and the other, located beneath the first, recognizes and interprets speech when heard.

The process of speech involves air flowing from the lungs, coordinated with the movements of speech organs, producing sound waves that reach the listener's ear. These sound waves travel from the outer ear to the middle and inner ear, eventually sending signals to the language area of the brain responsible for interpretation. Upon receiving the message, the listener comprehends the content and prepares a response, which follows a similar neural pathway to produce speech. This cyclical process continues regardless of the language spoken, including English.

Thus, effective speaking involves not only the mechanical aspects of producing sound but also the cognitive processes of interpreting and generating meaningful communication within a cultural and social context.

2.2 Barriers to English Communication

1 Meaning of obstacles

2 English Communication Barriers

- 1) Messenger
- 2) Recipient
- 3) Substances
- 4) Media

2.3 Related Research

Nattanaree Ritthirat and Dr. Thanapa Shiramanee (2014) studied the problems and obstacles in developing English speaking skills and methods to improve self-speaking skills among university students in fields affected by the opening of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. The sample consisted of third-year students in Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Engineering, and Accounting at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus. The tools used in this study included questionnaires, English speaking proficiency scores, and interviews. The results indicated that problems and obstacles affecting the development of English speaking skills included students' anxiety and fear when speaking English, vocabulary issues, and a lack of training for students, teachers, and other stakeholders. Additionally, students tended to think in Thai while speaking English, which hindered their improvement in speaking skills.

Pensri Tubtim (1998) studied the conditions and communication problems related to executive tasks using a sample of 137 individuals. Data collection tools included checklists and 33 teachers and staff opinions, classified by variables such as position

status, qualifications, and work experience. The study found that communication was primarily conducted in a written format, such as circulars, and verbal communication often took place through individual meetings or orders, regulations, and guidelines. The nature of the messages received by personnel was generally clear and understandable. However, communication problems were found to be moderate overall. Specifically, problems were identified in message transmission, while other aspects of communication faced moderate issues.

Shumin (1997) mentioned that young learners are more likely to become proficient in speaking a second language than adults because they are less concerned about making mistakes. However, in terms of grammatical competence, adults may achieve proficiency faster and more effectively than young learners (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Galusha (2001) pointed out that distance education is an excellent way to reach adult learners, as they require a high level of flexibility. The structure of distance learning allows adults to control their time, location, and pace of study. However, distance education is not without challenges. The loss of student motivation due to a lack of face-to-face communication, prohibitive startup costs, and insufficient support from faculty are significant obstacles that hinder the success of remote learning.

3. Research Instrument

The instruments used in this research included a structured interview form developed by the researcher based on a review of books, journals, documents, and related research on English communication. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to identify expected obstacles for students in the field of English for International Communication.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 1st to 3rd-year students majoring in English for International Communication at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. A total of 45 students were selected through random probability sampling, with 15 students per year. The interview form was used as the primary research tool to gather data from these participants.

4. Results and Discussion

Part 1: Analysis of Respondents' General Data

In the English for International Communication program, there were 45 respondents from the 1st to 3rd years. The respondents provided information regarding their gender and year of study, as detailed below:

Table 1 presents the total number of respondents and their percentages categorized by gender and year.

	List	Amount)N=30(Percent
Gender	Male	13	28.9
	Female	32	71.1
	Total	45	100
Year	1 Year	15	33.3
	2 Year	15	33.3
	3 Year	15	33.3
	Total	45	100

Table 1 shows that 71.1 percent of the respondents were female, and 28.9 percent were male. All 45 respondents were evenly distributed across the 1st to 3rd years, each year representing 33.3 percent of the total.

Part 2: Analysis of Barriers in English Communication with Foreign Teachers

The analysis focused on identifying barriers in English communication experienced by 1st to 3rd-year students majoring in English for International Communication at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. The results are presented with the mean (M) and standard deviation (S.D.).

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of barriers in English communication with foreign teachers for students in the English for International Communication major, 1st to 3rd year, at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, both overall and in terms of content.

Barriers	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1 .Barriers Affecting Communication	3.81	0.84	high
2 .Barriers related to speaker	3.78	0.83	high
3 .Barriers related to language characteristics	3.81	0.92	high
Total	3.80	0.86	high

From Table 2 and Figure 2, it was found that the barriers to communication in English with foreign teachers for 1st to 3rd-year students majoring in English for International Communication at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak were very high in all aspects. This includes barriers affecting communication, barriers related to speakers, and barriers related to language characteristics. The overall average value was 3.80, with barriers affecting communication and language characteristics having the highest average (= 3.81).

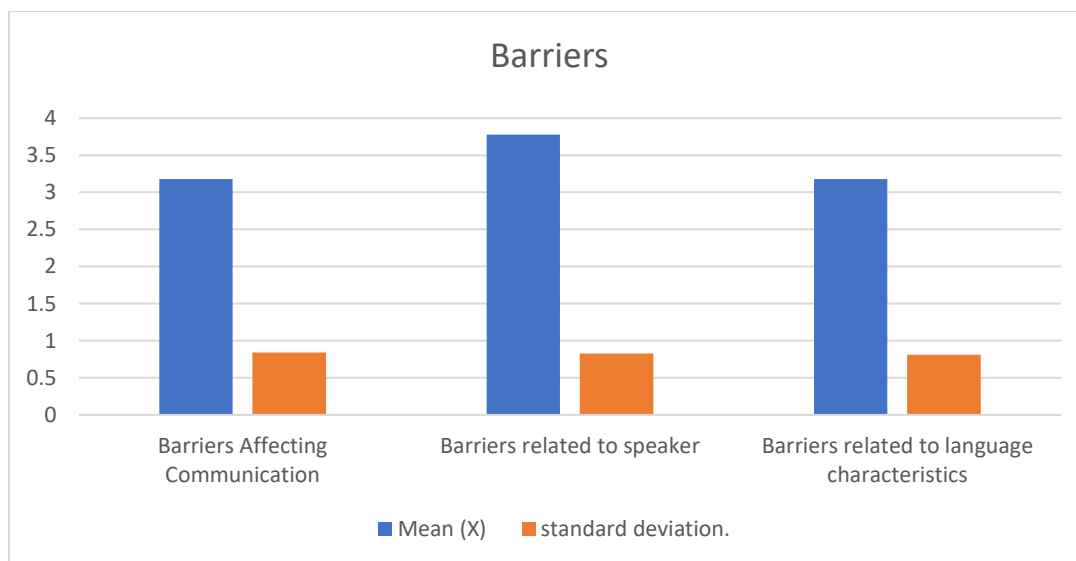


Figure 2 Mean and Standard Deviation overall and in terms of content

When each item was considered separately, the following results were obtained: barriers to English communication with foreign teachers for students majoring in English for International Communication (1st to 3rd year) at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, in the elements connected to the speaker, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Barriers in Communication in English with Foreign Teachers for Students in the English for International Communication Major, 1st to 3rd Year, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, on Barriers Affecting Communication.

1 .Barriers Affecting Communication	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1.1 Concerned about communicating with foreign teachers in English	3.84	0.77	high
1.2 Lack of confidence in speaking with foreign teachers in English	3.93	0.80	high
1.3 Lack of interest in practicing English with foreign teachers due to a lack of stimulation and promotion	3.68	0.86	high
1.4 Lack of desire to converse in English with foreign teachers	3.71	0.81	high
1.5 There are little opportunities to communicate with foreign teachers.	3.90	0.96	high
Total	3.81	0.84	high

From Table 3 and Figure 3, it was found that the factors impeding communication in English with foreign teachers among the 1st to 3rd-year students majoring in English for International Communication at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak

were at a high level overall. When considering each item, it was found that 3 items were at a high level, and 2 items were at a moderate level. The top 3 items with the highest mean were: lack of confidence in communicating in English with foreign teachers (= 3.93), limited opportunities to communicate with foreign teachers (= 3.90), and concern about communicating with foreign teachers in English (= 3.84).

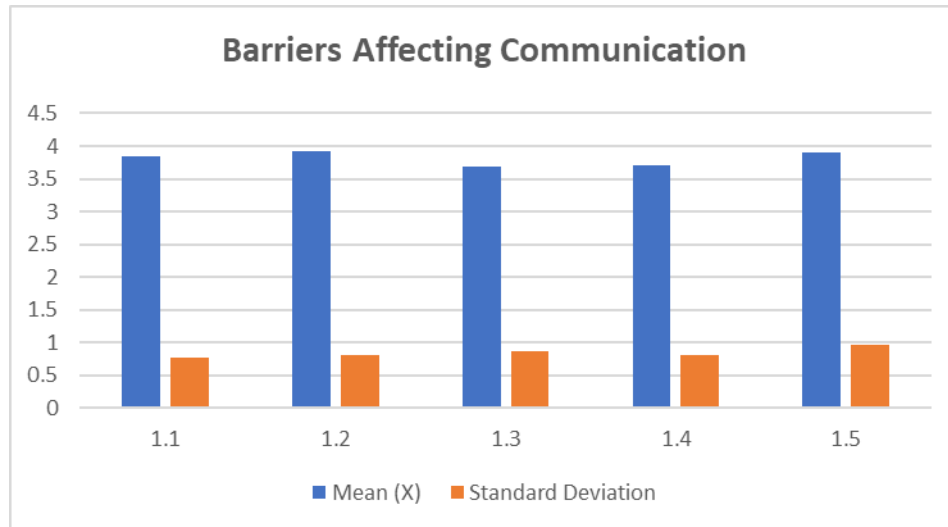


Figure 3 Mean and Standard Deviation on Barriers Affecting Communication

Barriers preventing students majoring in English for International Communication, 1st-3rd year, at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak from communicating in English with foreign teachers are summarized in Table 4. This table shows the results related to speaker-specific barriers.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Barriers in Communication in English with Foreign Teachers for Students in the English for International Communication Major, 1st-3rd year, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, on Speaker-related Barriers.

2. Barriers related to speaker	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
2.1 When speaking with foreign teachers, always avoid them.	3.69	0.90	high
2.2 Students are afraid to speak to foreign teachers in English.	3.78	0.75	high
2.3 When students converse in English with foreign teachers, they become frightened.	3.94	0.84	high
2.4 Students are having difficulty remembering vocabulary words that they need to utilize in conversation.	3.94	0.76	high
2.5 Students are unable to comprehend what foreign teachers are saying and, as a result, are unable to reply.	3.56	0.88	high
Total	3.78	0.83	high

From Table 4 and Figure 4, it was found that the barriers to communication in English with foreign teachers for 1st-3rd year students majoring in English for International Communication at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak are overall at a high level. When considering each item, 4 items were at a high level, and 2 items were at a moderate level. The top 3 items with the highest mean were: students become frightened when conversing in English with foreign teachers and have difficulty remembering vocabulary needed for conversation (=3.94); students are afraid to speak to foreign teachers in English (=3.78); and students always avoid speaking with foreign teachers (=3.69).

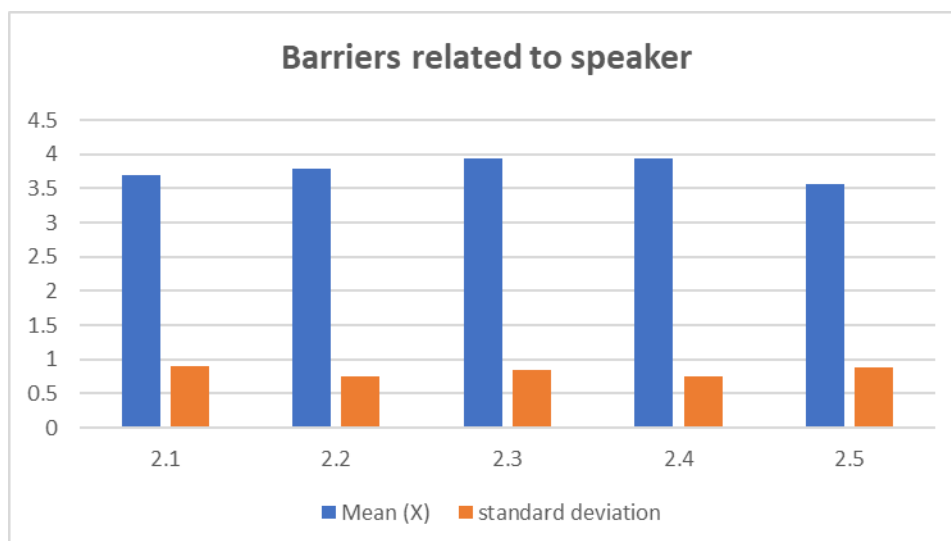


Figure 4 Mean and Standard Deviation on Barriers related to speaker

Barriers to communication in English with foreign teachers for 1st-3rd year students at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, related to language characteristics, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of barriers to communication in English with foreign teachers for students majoring in English for International Communication, 1st-3rd year, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, on barriers related to language characteristics.

3 .Barriers related to language characteristics	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
3.1 Thai is frequently used in the classroom to teach subjects other than English.	3.72	0.92	high
3.2 If a communication sentence is overly long, causing students to be unable to comprehend the content of the sentence	3.88	0.87	high
3.3 Students may hear slang words in English during dialogues, causing them to misunderstand the meaning of the teacher's message.	3.60	1.01	high
3.4 When there are a large number of pupils in a class, students may not have the opportunity to communicate with foreign teachers in English.	4.00	0.95	high
3.5 There are too few activities to promote English speaking with foreign teachers at the university.	3.84	0.85	high
Total	3.81	0.92	high

From Table 5 and Figure 5, the barriers to communicating in English with foreign teachers for 1st-3rd year students in the English for International Communication major at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, related to language characteristics, were analyzed. It was found that three items were at a high level, and two items were at a moderate level. The top three items with the highest means were:

1. When there are a large number of pupils in a class, students may not have the opportunity to communicate with foreign teachers in English (= 4.00).
2. If a communication sentence is overly long, students will be unable to comprehend the content of the sentence (= 3.88).
3. There are too few activities to promote English speaking with foreign teachers at the university (= 3.84).

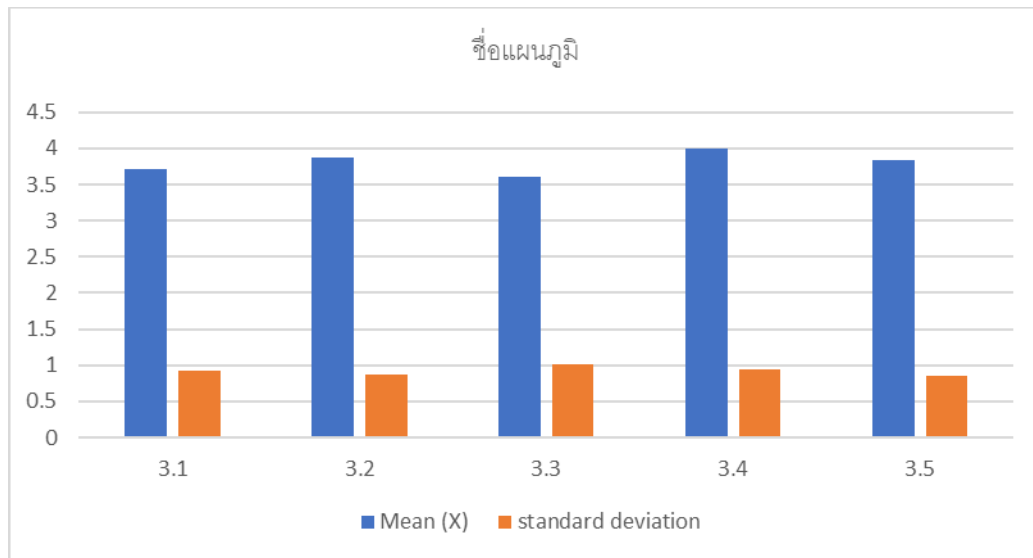


Figure 5 Mean and Standard Deviation on Barriers related to language characteristics

Part 3: Data Analysis of Barriers to English Communication with Foreign Teachers for Students in the English for International Communication Major, 1st-3rd Year, at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak.

The data was collected from students in the English for International Communication major, 1st-3rd year, at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. The analysis focuses on communication hurdles in various domains and methods for resolving problems in English communication with foreign teachers. This open-ended survey solicited thoughts and ideas on the following topics: barriers to communication, developing English communication skills with foreign teachers, and the impact of student interactions with current foreign teachers. Here are some examples of what was said in the interviews:

1. What are the barriers to communication?

Group A	Interview Answer
1 st person	"Sometimes the accent is hard to hear . There are words that do not understand. Lack of confidence to speak to the teacher Fear of mispronunciation causes anxiety in communication."
6 th person	"Don't dare to communicate with foreign teachers .embarrassed to communicate I'm afraid that the words I've said are not correct".
12 th person	" Sometimes when the teacher speaks, he cannot hear, cannot translate . speak too fast misunderstandings".
35 th person	" Sometimes when the teacher speaks, he cannot hear, cannot translate . speak too fast misunderstandings".
15 th person	"I don't know the meaning of words and I can't tell the accent .When the teacher speaks, it is difficult to listen .Lack of knowledge".
7 th person	"lack of confidence to communicate with foreigners".
14 th person	"Can't think of words in real conversation, bad accent, doesn't dare to speak"
23 th person	"Excitement The unfamiliarity of speaking words, fear of saying it wrong".
40 th person	"The listening experience and the chance of using it is low, sometimes I don't understand it".
28 th person	" There are not enough foreigners to communicate with on a daily basis, no confidence to speak .I'm afraid to say the wrong thing".
2 nd person	"Choosing the right words for the conversation because they are not their primary language, so they lack confidence whether they are using the right or wrong words".
32 rd person	" reluctance to speak because of fear that it will be wrong, understanding, and the opportunity to use English to speak with the teacher is not many".
19 th person	" The fact that Thai people pay attention to grammar makes our Thai people worry that we will speak grammatically wrong".
42 nd person	"can listen to English but most of them are not as fluent as they want".
31 st person	"Can't distinguish sound Trouble hearing words that sound similar".

Barriers to Communication: Most students are afraid to speak out, worried about making mistakes, and have very few opportunities to talk to foreign teachers. When there is a need to have a conversation, they often cannot think of the appropriate words to use. Shyness in communication creates significant barriers between international students and teachers.

Methods to Improve English Communication Skills with Foreign Teachers:

2. What methods do students have to improve their English communication skills with foreign teachers?

Group B	Interview Answer
36 th person	"Try to talk as much as you can .Listen to English often and understand the importance of the language".
28 th person	"There is more knowledge to train oneself to be able to listen and speak better .By listening to YouTube and using it in our daily life".
21 st person	" Practice speaking with a clear accent and using easy-to-understand words .Try to learn more English words .When you have to speak the truth, you will be able to speak".
5 th person	"You must dare to speak .Watch a video about English sometimes it's taken from what I've seen and applied .It makes it easier to communicate more than ever".
19 th person	"Watch movies in English often .Practicing the courage to speak up will make you develop better, more assertive".
30 th person	" Maybe trying to have a small conversation without being grammatically correct .But at least I got the courage to communicate more".
15 th person	"Listen to international music on a daily basis .Watch international movies with subtitles in English .Help us learn a lot of vocabulary .When we have a lot of words in our heads, we have the courage to speak".
26 th person	"Try to speak English every day, either with yourself or with friends".
9 th person	"Practice speaking with foreign teachers .You have to try to find new experiences for yourself.to develop in our own speech".
3 rd person	"Listen to YouTube and practice speaking in each situation .Choose to watch movies by reading English subtitles .I think they give me the courage to speak well".
44 th person	"Watch foreign movies learn words or sentences from movies you watch .Because maybe from what I have learned, it may not be enough to communicate in everyday life".
14 th person	"Practice speaking what you see This will allow you to practice vocabulary every day".
45 th person	"Use language learning apps to practice .Some activities in the app help me speak the language".
1 st person	"Listening to how a native speaker speaks and imitating accents, rhythms and tones"
11 th person	"The development of speech is that we have to understand what they are saying .We can talk.

Methods to Improve English Communication Skills with Foreign Teachers:

A list of barriers to consider when speaking with foreign teachers to improve English communication abilities includes making an effort to speak English in regular situations. Students build their skills by watching English conversation videos and learning to understand English independently. When conversing with foreign teachers, they should show courage and attempt to be confident.

Current Student Communication with Foreign Professors:

3. How effective is the current communication between students and foreign professors?

Group C	Interview Answer
9 th person	"I don't talk to foreign teachers much .Currently unable to communicate fluently .because they do not know the vocabulary in some words to communicate with It made a little impact".
13 th person	"Not at all, during this period of covid-19 in the university, there is no communication or meeting with foreign teachers .But we can practice speaking on our own by means of training in different applications".
38 th person	"Now studying online make communication less There is no opportunity to communicate with foreign teachers at all .I think it has an impact on communication".
6 th person	"It's getting better accordingly .There might be a slight impact if foreign professors speak too quickly".
2 nd person	" Currently, I can say some sentences .The consequence is that communication is not as fluid as it should be".
18 th person	"It's going well, no impact .If you don't dare to show. But we choose to be confident in speaking English .So we have no impact on communication".

22 nd person	"Affected by the fact that the university has not yet opened a course, causing some parts of the study to not understand and to be afraid to ask questions because they may be embarrassed to not actually meet the teacher".
30 th person	"We haven't communicated much yet .There may be only questions and answers on the topic of study .Actually, I would like to have more conversations with the teacher here .I think this is the impact we get".
40 th person	" Didn't communicate with foreign teachers at all .have to practice speaking. You must seek knowledge on your own outside of school hours .It has a huge impact on communication".
26 th person	" It has an impact because if he goes back abroad and our time doesn't match, we don't talk much . We don't know who to communicate with .Because sometimes my friends don't even dare to communicate in English".
43 rd person	"There was an impact because he was not brave enough to talk to the teacher".
7 th person	"Can speak some sentences The effect is that the communication is not as fluid as it should be".
34 th person	"Personally, I think it's at a moderate level and is quite communicative because there are frequent conversations with foreign teachers".
12 th person	"There is an impact .Studying now is a question- and- answer conversation, unable to talk or ask questions, resulting in being unable to ask questions during class".
20 th person	"affected because it becomes more difficult when you cannot meet people."

Summary of Current Student Interactions with Foreign Teachers and Their Consequences:

Most students have limited opportunities to interact with foreign lecturers, resulting from a combination of aggressiveness and a shortage of foreign teachers at the university. This situation makes it difficult for students to converse in English in everyday life.

4.1 Discussion of the findings

The analysis of the questionnaire on barriers to English communication with foreign teachers revealed that most students lacked confidence in communicating in English with teachers. Additionally, there was a lack of stimulation, motivation, and encouragement for students to communicate in English with foreign teachers. Furthermore, large class sizes often prevent students from having the opportunity to engage in conversations with foreign teachers.

The analysis of the interview questionnaire on English communication skills with foreign teachers found that most students had concerns, shyness, and a lack of courage to communicate in English with foreign teachers. Communication opportunities were few. From the interviews, students suggested ways to improve English communication skills, such as practicing speaking regularly, trying to speak with classmates in English, and frequently listening to English conversations. These practices help students communicate more effectively in English. Due to the situations students encounter in their daily lives, they are driven to practice speaking more English.

5. Conclusion

For International Communication students, the research topic is the study of barriers to communication in English with foreign English teachers at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. The research results can be summarized as follows:

The first objective was to investigate the barriers to English communication with foreign teachers for students majoring in English for International Communication. The study found that barriers affecting communication, barriers related to language characteristics, and barriers related to speakers were all rated at a high level overall, with an average of 3.81.

- Barriers Affecting Communication:
- Lack of confidence in communicating in English with foreign teachers (Mean = 3.93)
- Limited opportunities to communicate with foreign teachers (Mean = 3.90)
- Concerns about communicating with foreign teachers in English (Mean = 3.84)
- Barriers Related to Speakers:
- Students become frightened when conversing in English with foreign teachers and have difficulty remembering vocabulary words (Mean = 3.94)
- Students are afraid to speak to foreign teachers in English (Mean = 3.78)

- Students tend to avoid speaking with foreign teachers (Mean = 3.69)
- Barriers Related to Language Characteristics:
 - Large class sizes prevent students from having the opportunity to communicate with foreign teachers in English (Mean = 4.00)
 - Overly long sentences cause students to be unable to comprehend the content (Mean = 3.88)
 - There are too few activities to promote English speaking with foreign teachers at the university (Mean = 3.84)

The second objective was to investigate the English communication abilities of students majoring in English for International Communication with foreign teachers at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak. The study observed that students often feel embarrassed and worried about speaking in English, sometimes unable to comprehend the teacher's message, which hinders their ability to converse in English. Low communication skills negatively impact students. Students can improve their English communication abilities by watching videos from various online learning tools, practicing daily dialogues and vocabulary, and choosing to communicate in English with their classmates every day.

5.1 Suggestions for Future Research

This study of barriers to communication in English with foreign English teachers for 1st-3rd year International Communication students at the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak offers valuable insights for current and future students. These findings can be used to improve English communication with foreign teachers and meet the needs of those most interested in learning. However, this study has a few limitations. Future research should address these gaps, such as increasing the sample size for more effective outcomes.

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