

## **A Case Study of Communication Strategies Used by Thai Business Students in an English Online Job Interview Test**

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### **Abstract**

Developing speaking skills for foreign language learners is challenging. Whenever they speak foreign languages, they often encounter communication problems because of their limited grammatical and discourse competence. To overcome the problems, language learners need to employ communication strategies. Previous studies stated that these strategies were valuable for learners in speaking a target language; however, they mainly examined the students' use of communication strategies in general speaking situations. Thus, the present study aims to explore types and levels of communication strategies used by Thai business students majoring in accounting and to investigate their communication problems during an English online job interview test. The participants were 35 Thai undergraduates. The 35-item self-report communication strategy questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to collect the data. The data was analyzed through the IBM SPSS statistical analysis software and the content analysis. The findings indicated that the participants were strategic users. The overall mean of the participants' communication strategy use was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ). The most frequently used communication strategies were strategies for understanding interlocutor's messages (UIM) which was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.84$ ). The participants selected to use nonverbal language the most such as body language ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ). The main problems which they experienced during the English online job interview test were unknown vocabulary and listening problems. Furthermore, most participants preferred attending an online interview test to an onsite interview test.

**Keywords:** Communication strategies, Communication problems, Business students, Job interview, Online interview

### **Introduction**

Foreign language learners often encounter many communication problems when their second language is limited. In order to convey their messages successfully and remain in a

conversation until their communicative goals are achieved, language learners need to apply communication strategies while having conversations with the interlocutors.

Communication strategies (CSs) have been defined by several scholars. Tarone (1983, p. 419) defined communication strategies as “a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared.” Applying language learners’ these strategies reflects their attempts in making people they are talking to understand their messages. This process is called the interaction between the speakers. In addition, Faerch and Kasper (1983) stated that communication strategies were potentially conscious plans for solving communication’s problems, and these strategies could make language learners reach their particular communicative goals. Canale (1983) stated that communication strategies consisted of both verbal and non-verbal strategies which language learners used to compensate their communication difficulties in order to enhance their understanding through the conversations. Using these strategies shows that language learners have limited knowledge in the target language. Consequently, communication strategies are helpful and effective tools for language learners to use consciously when they confront communication concerns. With these strategies, they can overcome their difficulties in communication and make meaningful and purposeful conversations.

Communication strategies can be categorized into two approaches: the interactional and the psycholinguistic approaches. First, the interactional approach was influenced by Tarone’s (1980) work. It highlights the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors, so communication strategies are considered as devices that language learners use to enhance their negotiation of meaning and to convey their messages while interacting with each other in the target language. The interlocutors play an important role in an oral communication. Second, the psycholinguistic approach was influenced by the work of Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Bialystok (1990). It regards communication strategies as the internal and the individual mental plans that language learners intentionally use to solve their oral communication problems. The strategies are based on the cognitive models of speech production. For instance, if language learners do not know the word, they compensate by using filler words or substituting a different topic for the original topic, which requires the use of unknown words.

Many scholars (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Dornyei, 1995; Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Nakatani, 2006) proposed and classified communication strategies. Their classifications overlapped and shared some similarities. Most communication strategies are comprised of two main strategies: 1) reduction or avoidance strategies, and 2) achievement strategies or compensatory strategies. Firstly, reduction or avoidance strategies are identified as topic avoidance (or message reduction), message abandonment, and message replacement. Language learners use these strategies to reduce the content of the intended message from the interlocutor and help them continue to communicate with the interlocutor without difficulty. Secondly, achievement or compensatory strategies include word coinage, language switch, paraphrase or circumlocution, and paralinguistic devices or appeal for help. Language learners intend to use these strategies to handle their communication problems and to make the interlocutor understand their messages. Oxford (2013) states that these strategies are learning strategies

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which should be taught explicitly in language classes because they enable learners to maintain the conversations, to be more confident, autonomous, and proficient language users. Likewise, Littlewood (1996) explains that a good communicator is an autonomous learner who can apply communication strategies independently and appropriately to each situation and can express their thoughts and opinions correctly and confidently.

Developing speaking skills for foreign language learners is challenging because they have very few opportunities to use the target language outside the classrooms. It is vital for teachers to organize various speaking activities and tasks for their students. Speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities which students can practice, develop real-life speaking, and gain more confidence in the safe zone (Harmer, 2010). Before graduating from university, students are required to prepare themselves for the future employment. In university, they can learn how to create a resume, write a cover letter, and do a job interview as job applicants, which is a part of a company recruitment process. Recruitment is a form of business competition. It is the process of finding people to work for a company which includes specifying, screening, shortlisting, and interviewing candidates for jobs. Interviewing is the most common method of selection (Dafoulas et al., 2002). Nowadays, with the advent of the internet technology and the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, many companies have conducted virtual or online interviews to recruit candidates for their vacant positions. Virtual or online interview occurs remotely by using different methods such as video calls, video conferencing via specific programs - Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet, and recorded video interviews. Video calls and video conferencing are face-to-face interviews which take place synchronously. Both interviewer and interviewee use smartphones, laptops, PC computers, tablets, webcams, and other devices to communicate at the same time (Keiling, 2021). Since the undergraduates have little or no experience of the business world, it is imperative for teachers to provide them some relevant information about job recruiting and selection process and train them to be familiar with the process and devices so that they will succeed in the future job interviews.

Levashina et al, (2014) explain that an employment interview is a personally interactive process consisting of an interviewer or a group of interviewers and an interviewee. To make an employment decision, interviewers ask questions orally to an interviewee and evaluate his responses to determine whether he is qualified for the job. Most job interviews are conducted in English. Candidates who are capable of speaking English could make a good impression on interviewers and have a higher chance to be selected to work in a company (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). However, whenever Thai undergraduates have to speak English, they are faced with some difficulties. Several studies have been investigating communication problems in Thai EFL undergraduate context. For example, Phattaraphakin et al., (2014) conducted a study on English skill problems of the fourth-year students in the faculty of education at Dhonburi Rajabhat University. They found that the students had the difficulties in all English skills. Listening was the highest ranked issue because the students felt unfamiliar with different English accents, and they did not have enough vocabulary to communicate in English which caused them to feel confused. Then Sunitisarn et al., (2017) examined the third-year students'

communication problems. Their results revealed that the students could not speak English correctly and fluently because they had limited vocabulary and expressions, could not understand the advanced grammatical structures, and felt unfamiliar with English speakers' accents. Jantasin and Pantawee (2020) studied problems in using English of the second-year business English students at Roi-et Rajabhat University. The students admitted that speaking was their biggest concern in English communication due to limited English practice time and lack of opportunities to use English outside the classrooms. More importantly, Jaemjedrio et al., (2015) investigated the English problems of pre-graduate senior students and employees in various companies during their job interview, and they reported that the participants could not understand the questions and could not give the suitable responses. They found that the participants used incorrect grammar, inappropriate vocabulary, mispronounced, and mixed Thai with English while they were attending the English interview. Besides, they indicated that lack of adequate preparation for job interview was another concern resulting in the participants' poor performance. They did not research the information about the jobs and the companies they had applied for and did not have much experience in English job interviews.

Applying communication strategies while speaking a foreign language is necessary for language learners since they are effective tools enabling them to continue conversations more smoothly. There have been numerous studies exploring the use of communication strategies by Asian EFL undergraduates. For instance, Mei and Nathalang (2009) conducted a study with the first-year Chinese undergraduates and aimed to investigate the factors affecting the use of communication strategies such as English proficiency level, academic fields of study, and gender. The findings found that the students' most frequently used strategies were comprehension check and clarification request whereas their least frequently used strategies were message abandonment, word coinage, and language switch. Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) conducted a study with Thai undergraduates majoring in English, and they found that the students used different strategies to handle their communication problems because they had limited linguistic knowledge and confronted with unknown words such as using non-verbal expressions to convey a message to the interlocutor; switching some unknown words or phrases into Thai; making a phone call to another person for assistance; and appealing for assistance from the interlocutor. Later et al. (2013) examined communication strategies used by Tourism Chinese undergraduates at different universities. The results revealed that gender and students' language ability had minor relationship with students' overall use of communication strategy. The low proficient students employed strategies for understanding interlocutor's messages more frequently than the high proficient students. Female students used greater and more frequent communication strategies than male students did. Saengpakdeejit (2016) explored communication strategy usage among Thai science and non-science students. She found that the students used strategies for achieving communication more frequently than strategies for avoiding difficulties in communication such as using simple words, simple expressions, and non-verbal expressions. Phonhan (2019) investigated Thai engineering students' communication strategy use in English oral communication. The findings indicated that the

engineering students used the nonverbal strategies the most, whereas the accuracy-oriented strategies were used the least.

From the above mentioned, communication problems Thai undergraduates often experience while conversing English are a lack of necessary and relevant vocabulary and having listening difficulties, so communication strategies are important and useful strategies assisting them to remain and survive in English conversations successfully. However, previous studies were mainly examined the students' use of communication strategies in general speaking situations. There are very few studies investigating the students' use of communication strategies in an online context. Consequently, this study was aimed to explore types and levels of communication strategies used by Thai business students majoring in accounting and to investigate their communication problems during an English online job interview test. Due to gaining better job opportunities, job candidates need to be fluent in English because English is a common business language. Most companies use an English interview as a part of their recruiting and selection process (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). Getting students' viewpoints in using communication strategies during the English online job interview test will provide valuable information for language teachers to better understand and become aware of the students' English competency, their communication strategy use, and their problems as the interviewees. The findings will be beneficial for language teachers to find the possible solutions to resolve students' communication problems; to provide them with the relevant information about doing an online interview; and to train them to be well-prepared and feel more confident in giving an English interview before they graduate and enter into the job markets in the future.

### **Research questions**

- 1) What types and levels of communication strategies did Thai business students majoring in accounting employ in an English online job interview test?
- 2) What communication problems did they experience during the English online job interview test?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The participants were selected by using the purposive sampling method on the basis of convenience and availability. There were 35 Thai undergraduates comprising of 12 males and 23 females whose age range between 19-21-years-old and were majoring in accounting at the faculty of Business Administration at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI). They were sophomores who passed two compulsory English subjects and enrolled in *ENL-211: English for Work* in the first semester in 2020 during June 15 - October 2, 2020.

### Research instruments

The 35-item self-report communication strategy questionnaire and three interview questions were employed to collect the data. The self-report communication strategy questionnaire (CSQ) was developed by Zhao and Intaraprasert (2013), which is considered as the most recent established speaking strategy questionnaire, and it was adapted the typologies of communication strategies proposed by Dornyei and Scott (1997), Mariani (2010), Nakatani, (2006), Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011). In this study, it was translated into Thai to avoid misunderstanding which was scrutinized and proofread by two Thai experts in the area of English language teaching and it had high reliability ( $\alpha$ ) at .86.

The communication strategy questionnaire (CSQ) was used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, that is, 1 = never use, 2 = rarely use, 3 = sometimes use, 4 = usually use, and 5 = always use, and it is categorized into three main categories as follows:

1) *Strategies for coping with communication problems (CCP)*; for example, “I will use synonyms or antonyms.”, “I will speak Thai when a speaker doesn’t know how to say it in English.”, and “I will spell out or write down the intended words, phrases, or sentences.” There were 20 items (Item 1-20).

2) *Strategies for understanding interlocutor’s messages (UIM)*; for example, “I will ask the interlocutor to slow down.”, “I will ask the interlocutor to simplify the language.”, and “I will ask the interlocutor to write down the key words.” There were 10 items (Item 21-30).

3) *Strategies for carrying on the conversation as intended (CCI)*; for example, “I will try to enjoy the conversation.”, “I feel comfortable for taking risks while speaking English.”, and “I try to respond to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the messages.” There were 5 items (Item 31-35).

Three interview questions were as follows: 1) Do you have any communication problems during an English online job interview test? What are they? 2) How do you feel when being online interviewed? Is it different from an onsite interview? 3) In your opinion, which method can help you improve your English-speaking skill?

### Data collection procedure

The 35-item self-report communication strategy questionnaire was distributed to the participants after they finished a face-to-face English online interview test via Google Meet. The English online job interview test took 7-15 minutes per person, and they were interviewed by both Thai and British teachers. The interview questions were similar to the traditional employment interview questions such as what kind of person are you? What are your strength and weaknesses? Why do want to work at this company? Can you work under pressure and deal with deadlines? and why should we hire you? Before answering the questionnaire, the participants were informed the purposes of the study and their confidentiality had been the researcher’s priority concern. So, their responses hadn’t affected their grade results in *ENL-211: English for Work*. They were requested to answer all items with truthfulness and should spend 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was organized by Google Form and was delivered through Google Meet’s Chat Room. Then the participants were

attended in focus group interviews. There were five participants in each group and the interview lasted 20 - 30 minutes. During the interview, the researcher observed and recorded the participants' responses. Then the researcher categorized, highlighted the interesting responses, and interpreted their responses.

### Data analysis

The IBM SPSS statistical analysis software 28.0 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviations (SD) were carried out to examine the types and levels of participants' communication strategy usage. Furthermore, three interview questions were explored through content analysis by conducting the semi-structured interview.

### Results

- 1) *What types and levels of communication strategies did Thai business students majoring in accounting employ in an English online job interview test?*

Based on the results of the data analysis, the overall mean of the participants' communication strategy use was high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ). The most frequently used communication strategies were strategies for understanding interlocutor's messages (UIM) which was high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.84$ ), followed by strategies for coping with communication problems (CCP) which was high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.53$ ) and finally strategies for carrying on the conversation as intended (CCI) which was moderate level ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ) as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics Result on the Types and Levels of Communication Strategy Use among Thai Business Students Majoring in Accounting at TNI (N = 35)

Rank Order	3 Types of Communication Strategies	$\bar{x}$	SD	Frequency of Strategy Use	Level of Strategy Use
1	UIM	3.84	0.54	Usually Use	High
2	CCP	3.53	0.41	Usually Use	High
3	CCI	3.31	0.81	Sometimes Use	Moderate
<b>Overall Communication Strategy Use on Average</b>		<b>3.59</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>Usually Use</b>	<b>High</b>

The three most frequently used strategies were item 6, "I will use nonverbal language such as body language." ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ), followed by item 26, "I will try to catch the interlocutor's main points." ( $\bar{x} = 4.34$ ), and item 16, "I will refer to mobile phone dictionary or another type of document that makes me understand." ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ). These three strategies were considered as

high level. The least frequently used strategy was item 3, “I can correct the other speakers’ pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes.” ( $\bar{x} = 2.37$ ), which was considered as low level.

Moreover, the three highest level of strategies for understanding interlocutor’s messages (UIM) were item 26, “I will try to catch the interlocutor’s main points.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.34$ ); followed by item 28, “I will guess the meanings of what the interlocutor has said.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ); then item 22, “I will ask the interlocutor for a repetition.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ). Lastly, it was item 30, “I will notice the interlocutor’s gestures and facial expressions.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ). Twelve participants (34.28%) admitted that they tried to use their facial expressions to show that they confused and they asked the interviewers to repeat the questions one or two times. These four items were considered as a high level of strategy use.

Another category, the three highest levels of strategies for coping with communication problems (CCP) were item 6, “I will use nonverbal language such as body language.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ); followed by item 16, “I will refer to mobile phone dictionary or another type of document that makes me understand.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ). Six participants (17.14%) admitted that they glanced at their notes or their mobile phones when they could not remember the words or the prepared answers. Next item was item 2, “I will use familiar words, phrases or sentences.” ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ). Five participants (14.28%) explained they tried to use familiar words they learnt in their responses. Then item 19, “I will make use of the expressions found in some sources of media (e.g., movies, series, or songs).” ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ). Nine participants (25.71%) said they liked to watch foreign series, movies, and listen to English songs; and they usually picked up some sentences and expressions from the media to communicate. These four items were considered as a high level of strategy use.

The last category, the three highest level of strategies for carrying on the conversation as intended (CCI) were item 32, “I will send the continuation signals to show that I understand.” ( $\bar{x} = 3.91$ ); followed by item 35, “I try to respond to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the messages.” ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ); and item 31, “I will try to enjoy the conversation.” ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ). Three participants (8.57%) reported that they often nodded to signal their interlocutors that they understood. These three items were considered as a high level of strategy use the same as the former strategies as shown in Table 2.



**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics Result on Top Three Highest Items in Each Communication Strategy Category (N = 35)

Top Three Highest Items in Each Communication Strategy Category	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level of Strategy Use
<b>1. Strategies for understanding interlocutor's messages (UIM)</b>			
a) I will try to catch the interlocutor's main points.	4.34	0.68	High
b) I will guess the meanings of what the interlocutor has said.	4.17	0.74	High
c) I will ask the interlocutor for a repetition.	4.00	0.80	High
d) I will notice the interlocutor's gestures and facial expressions.	4.00	0.84	High
<b>2. Strategies for coping with communication problems (CCP)</b>			
a) I will use nonverbal language such as body language.	4.45	0.81	High
b) I will refer to mobile phone dictionary or another type of document that makes me understand.	4.22	1.03	High
c) I will use familiar words, phrases or sentences.	4.14	0.69	High
d) I will make use of the expressions found in some sources of media (e.g., movies or songs).	4.14	0.73	High
<b>3. Strategies for carrying on the conversation as intended (CCI)</b>			
a) I will send the continuation signals to show that I understand.	3.91	1.03	High
b) I try to respond to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the messages.	3.62	1.13	High
c) I will try to enjoy the conversation.	3.54	1.09	High

2) *What communication problems did they experience during the English online job interview test?*

The communication problems that the participants experienced during their English online job interview test can be categorized into four topics as illustrated in Table 3. Firstly, most participants (33 students: 94.28%) reported that they faced the unknown vocabulary, could not translate the words in Thai and identify their meanings, and had limited vocabulary which led them to be reluctant to speak, stammer and keep silent. Sixteen participants (45.71%) said that even though they understood the interview questions, they could not find or think of suitable English words and sentences to answer. In their minds, they tried to answer in Thai. Besides, eleven participants (31.42%) accepted that they did not understand what the interviewers were asking because they met the unknown words and could not guess the words' meanings in the contexts, whereas six participants (17.14%) said that while being interviewed, they instantly forgot the words and the prepared answers and they felt worried and too excited to speak English. Secondly, nearly half of the participants (15 students: 42.85%) reported that they were confronted with listening problems. Eleven participants (31.42%) explained that they did not understand the interviewed questions because they heard unfamiliar words and could not differentiate the sounds, stresses, and intonations of the words and the sentences. Four participants (11.42%) admitted that they could not catch the main messages because they faced with unfamiliar English accents. Thirdly, ten participants (28.57%) accepted that they were not confident with their English grammatical structures. They often misplaced the words

in sentences and used incorrect English grammar. Lastly, six participants (17.14%) said that they were scared to speak English due to errors they might make. They were afraid to be seen as unintelligent if they chose incorrect words or said irrelevant information causing confusion among the interviewers.

**Table 3** Problems Thai Business Students Majoring in Accounting Experienced during the English online job interview test (N = 35)

No.	Problems Participants' Experience during the English Online Job Interview Test	Number of the Participants
1.	Unknown Vocabulary	33 (94.28%)
2.	Lacking Listening Ability	15 (42.85%)
3.	Incorrect English Grammar Usage	10 (28.57%)
4.	Fear of Making Mistakes	6 (17.14%)

Furthermore, most participants (32 students: 91.42%) agreed that taking an English online job interview test was not different from an onsite interview test at the institute, which they always felt anxious and excited whenever they took an English-speaking test. They were afraid that they might not give the correct responses and understand the questions well, and they were worried about the stability of their internet connection. Thirty-two students said they did not have any problems in the interview because they were familiar with the equipment and Google Meet program whereas two students did not have cameras and one student had lost the internet connection. Moreover, twenty-three participants (65.71%) added that they liked to take the online interview test because they could fully concentrate on the interviewers and their questions without any distractions, and they could hear the interviewers' voices clearly. They explained that taking the online interview was a convenient and cost-effective test method. They did not have to commute to take the test at the university. However, three participants (8.57%) mentioned that it was difficult to observe the interviewers' gestures and their facial expressions online because of the quality of the interviewers' cameras.

Finally, the solutions of the participants' communication problems during English online job interview test were revealed. Most participants (25 students: 71.42%) agreed that English-speaking practice was the best solution for them to improve speaking skills. Six participants (17.14%) stated that they should find more chances to practice English speaking by using the learnt vocabulary in classes or using some familiar words and sentences to communicate with their friends and English teachers while three participants (8.57%) chose to practice speaking with foreigners. Furthermore, eleven participants (31.42%) proposed that watching foreign films and series, listening to English music, playing games online, and reading English textbooks and novels could help them develop English speaking skills faster because they could practice English speaking skills with pleasure through their favorite hobbies and activities. Nonetheless, six participants (17.14%) reported that reciting useful daily life

vocabulary could help them understand the conversations well. Two participants (5.71%) admitted that finding a private English tutor could help them learn and speak English better because they could not learn by themselves. They did not know much vocabulary and could not arrange words in English sentences correctly. They thought studying alone could be more effective for them. Only one participant (2.85%) said he could hire an English interpreter to help him, so being unable to speak English was not his problem anymore.

## Discussions

The results revealed that Thai business students majoring in accounting at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI) were strategic users and good communicators who could use communication strategies independently and appropriately in the English online job interview test since the overall mean of the participants' communication strategy use was high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ). The strategic users can use both verbal and nonverbal communicative techniques to compensate for their communication breakdowns (Brown, 2014). Twelve participants (34.28%) attempted to use their facial expressions when they confused and to ask the interviewers to repeat the interview questions. Besides, the participants were autonomous learners because they managed to solve their communication problems with their preferred strategies. This is consistent with Littlewood's study in 1996. He explains that a good communicator is an autonomous learner who is willing to make choices independently and can express his/her thoughts and opinions through linguistic creativity and through the use of effective communication strategies freely (Littlewood, 1996). However, the participants were not the English proficient users yet.

Tarone (1980) states that the interlocutors play an important role in an oral communication. Lightbrown and Spada (1999) mention that second language acquisition (SLA) takes place through conversational interaction. The most frequently used communication strategies were strategies for understanding interlocutor's messages (UIM;  $\bar{x} = 3.84$ ). The three highest levels of this strategy group were trying to catch the interlocutor's main points ( $\bar{x} = 4.34$ ); trying to guess the meanings of what the interlocutor has said ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ); asking the interlocutor for a repetition ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ); and observing the interlocutor's gestures and facial expressions ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ). The results are comparable to Mei and Nathalang's study in 2009. They found that the first-year Chinese students employed comprehension check and clarification request techniques to help them understand the conversations. Lightbrown and Spada (1999) explain that when foreign language learners do not understand the conversations, sometimes their interlocutors will check their understanding and repeat or paraphrase their messages; and sometimes learners themselves will ask their interlocutors for clarifying their messages to carry on the conversations. Having interactions with native speakers or the more fluent speakers can improve language learners' English competence. For that reason, language teachers should teach and employ the negotiation techniques such as comprehension checks, clarification requests, and self-repetition or paraphrase techniques in their classes to help learners survive in English conversations both inside and outside classrooms.

In addition, the results showed that the most frequently used strategy was using nonverbal language such as body language ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ). This is consistent with many communication strategy studies in Thai contexts (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Saengpakdeejit, 2016; and Phonhan, 2019). Their results confirm that Thai undergraduates preferred using nonverbal strategies such as using gestures and facial expressions to compensate words and sentences that they were unable to find or think of when they were talking. Using body language, gestures, and facial expressions are included in paralinguistic devices which are categorized in achievement or compensatory strategies.

The results also indicated that there were three main communication problems participants experienced during the English online job interview test. They were confronted with unknown vocabulary, felt unfamiliar with the speakers' English accents, mispronounced, and could not locate the speakers' main ideas. Moreover, they used incorrect English grammar and misplaced the words in the sentences. These problems are not different from the prior findings which are presented in previous communication problem studies in Thai EFL undergraduate context (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Phattaraphakin et al., 2014; Jaemjedrio et al., 2015; and Sunitisarn et al., 2017). Jaemjedrio et al., (2015) conducted a study about English problems that the fourth-year students and the company staff had experienced during their job interview. They point out that their participants faced comprehension problems during their job interview due to their insufficient grammar knowledge, limited job-related vocabulary and expressions, and mispronunciation. Their findings are similar to the participants' problems in this study. They did not understand the interview questions because they had limited vocabulary and had inappropriate grammar usage. Jaemjedrio et al., (2015) clarify that the participants' problems in their job interview caused by their English abilities and lack of adequate preparation for a job interview, therefore, searching for the relevant information about the companies, job positions and their requirements will be useful for job applicants. Also, job applicants or interviewees need to practice and learn how to answer job interview questions in English accurately and properly, as well as to learn the job interview etiquette. This can reduce their nervousness and increase their confidence and the chance of creating a favorable impression in the interview. As a result, the significant communication problems Thai undergraduates have encountered in face-to-face English conversations are facing unknown vocabulary, lacking listening ability or having comprehension problem, and using incorrect English grammatical structures. Using nonverbal strategy reflects the communication problems. By employing achievement or compensatory strategies, the participants could continue their talks with the interviewers even if they were not fluent in English.

Even though an online job interview is different from a traditional job interview, most participants (91.42%) reported that they did not face any difficulties while attending the online job interview. They were familiar with the equipment and Google Meet program, but the stability of the internet connection was their concern. So, before attending online job interviews, interviewees need to learn the guidance of conducting online job interviews. Keiling (2021) advises job applicants or interviewees on some tips for doing a successful virtual or online job interview. First, interviewees need to familiarize themselves with the

necessary equipment (a PC computer or a laptop, a smartphone, a microphone, speakers, and a webcam) and software programs (Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet). Before attending an interview, they should check all the equipment to ensure they work effectively and the internet connection is strong and reliable. Second, they should dress professionally by wearing a conservative or a business casual outfit the same as they will do in a face-to-face interview. Next, they should prepare the pre-answers for the common interview questions and rehearse them naturally in advance. For example, what do you know about our company? Why are you the right person for the job? And where do you see yourself in 10 years? Fourth, they should find a quiet place with no distractions and choose a clean and professional-looking background. Fifth, interviewees should be aware of their body language. They should sit up straight and ensure their cameras are placed and their faces are in the middle of the screens. They should make eye contact with the interviewer by staring directly at the cameras instead of at the interviewer's face or at their own faces. During the interview, they should smile and nod when the interviewer speaks. Maintaining eye contact and nodding will show the interviewer that they are involved and listening attentively. Finally, they should be calm, conscious and have a backup plan in case of unexpected incident such as the instability of the internet connection. Do not panic but try to contact the interviewer immediately by his phone or email to reschedule the interview. This is valuable guidance for interviewees and it should be passed on to the students for preparing themselves for a next virtual or online interview.

Lastly, to resolve those communication problems, the participants (71.42%) agreed that English-speaking practice was an important and effective way to improve their speaking ability. Language teachers need to design and organize various types of speaking activities suiting real-world situations to enhance their students' speaking skills such as scripted and unscripted role-plays, simulations, problem-solving/decision-taking activities, discussions and debates, and group projects (Davies & Pearse, 2000). Harmer (2010) suggests that learners engaged in speaking activities can become very frustrated if they do not have enough words and essential grammar needed to express themselves. So, before asking them to participate in speaking activities, teachers need to check their knowledge, provide them key language and necessary information, and give them time to think and do things in the assigned tasks. Likewise, Nation and Newton (2009) propose the criteria of the successful fluency development which language teachers should employ in their classes. These criteria are as follows: 1) all input and output must be familiar to language learners, 2) teachers should focus on the students' roles in sending and receiving messages and give them some feedback, 3) teachers should motivate learners to work faster and provide them with lots of relevant input or output, and 4) teachers need to vary the learning activities and materials because they are important elements to stimulate learners to become engaged and enjoyable with the lessons and be willing to practice and improve their English-speaking skills.

Last but not least, English listening practice is also important for learners to develop their pronunciation since the findings showed that the participants (42.85%) encountered English listening problems. They did not understand the interview questions. Harmer (2010) explains that the more learners hear and understand spoken English, the more they absorb

appropriate pitch and intonation, stress and the sounds of both individual words and those which blends together in connected speech. Language teachers should use different genres such as news broadcasts, public announcements, phone conversations, and dramatic dialogues, and they should use authentic medium such as video clips from YouTube, online applications (Netflix, TED Talks, Learning English Podcasts by British Council, Duolingo, and BBC Learning English), interesting scenes from series, movies, and songs that reflect real-life language in their classes in order to help learners to become familiar with the varieties of English. Most importantly, language teachers need to recognize their learners' English competence and select the suitable learning materials, media, and activities matching their learners' level of English. These activities can motivate learners to pay more attention in the classes and be engaged in learning activities and tasks which will lead them to gradually develop their speaking skills and become the proficient English users in the near future.

### Conclusion

Communication strategies are a helpful and effective tool assisting language learners to conquer their communication difficulties, so language teachers need to teach these strategies explicitly. Oxford (2013) suggests that teachers should name the strategies, demonstrate how to use them, explain to students when these strategies are useful and their purposes, and ask students to use the strategies. Teachers should integrate the strategies into their lessons and activities so that students will recognize the importance of communication strategies and be willing to practice and eventually apply them in actual situations. Nevertheless, it is difficult to generalize from a case study of only 35 participants, which is considered as the limitation in this study. The participants could not be described as a representative of the Thai business student population. But the findings were consistent with prior studies (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Saengpakdeejit, 2016; and Phonhan, 2019). They verified that Thai undergraduates used nonverbal strategies such as using gestures and facial expressions to communicate when confronting speaking problems. Besides, the findings showed the similar communication problems that Thai undergraduates experienced while having English conversations such as facing unknown vocabulary, lacking listening skills, and using incorrect English grammar. Therefore, further studies should be examined the effects of communication strategy training in different learning activities and tasks to discover the essential set of strategies that language teachers should implement in classes to help students develop their English-speaking ability.

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