



Problems and Strategies for the Enhancement of Communicative English Usage in Multilingual Societies: A Case Study of Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in Guangxi, China

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were: to enhance problems of Guangxi University of Foreign Languages as an example to explore the issue of English communication skills among Chinese university students and develop corresponding improvement strategies. The purpose is to 1) identify specific issues regarding the English communication skills of students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, and 2) develop effective improvement strategies based on these issues. This is a survey-based study. The survey subjects are students from Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, and 386 students and 263 teachers were selected through appropriate sampling methods. Two main research tools were used: 1) a questionnaire aimed at investigating students' self-perception issues in English communication, including vocabulary comprehension, accent adaptation, and listening concentration; 2) An English communication test that objectively evaluates students' communication skills and identifies specific error patterns in content understanding, detail mastery, and reasoning. The collected data, including questionnaire responses and test results, are analyzed using content analysis and statistical methods such as frequency count and percentage calculation. The research results indicate that: 1) the problems with students' English communication skills are mainly reflected in multiple aspects. The difficulty of understanding vocabulary in context, adapting to different English accents (including British, American, and other accents in dialogue materials), and maintaining long-term focus during communication is relatively high. In addition, there are also issues with skills such as inferring implicit meanings and mastering key details. 2) The Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students is composed of 5 chapters ; namely, chapter 1: About Learners , chapter 2: About Instructors, Chapter 3: About teaching materials , chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities, and chapter 5 About teaching-learning evaluation: All the 5 chapters were approved by the three specialists in terms of correctness and suitability. All the 5 chapters were evaluated and approved by the three specialists; therefore, the constructed Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students could be used as guidelines for the enhancement of English communicative skill of Chinese university students in China.

Keywords: Strategies, the Enhancement of Communicative English Usage, Multilingual Societies, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

1. Introduction

The advent of globalization has rendered English an instrumental medium of international communication. China initiated the prioritization of English education in the 1980s, leading to the present scenario where over 400 million individuals in China are engaged in English language acquisition, thereby giving rise to a substantial ancillary industry. However, this phenomenon is concomitant with challenges in regions where multiple languages coexist, such as Guangxi, China, which is home to 12 ethnic groups, including Zhuang, Han, and Yao, and where individuals engage in daily interactions using three languages: Zhuang a dialect, and Mandarin. Local educational institutions face the dual challenge of safeguarding the national language while concurrently promoting Mandarin and English, a model referred to as "learning three languages together," which places considerable strain on students. A particularly salient example is Guangxi Foreign Language College, which is located at the forefront of China's interaction with Southeast Asian countries. The institution focuses on training foreign language talents, with more than 40 percent of its students majoring in English. However, the students' backgrounds are complex: nearly two-thirds of them come from local Guangxi, and nearly 40 percent of them are ethnic minorities. These students have been exposed to multiple languages since childhood, including both Zhuang and Mandarin, as well as various dialects. Consequently, when these students begin to learn English, their original language habits often "fight" with the new language. For instance, the simple sentence structure of Zhuang hinders their ability to comprehend the complexity of long sentences in English. Additionally, the dialectal pronunciation of words influences the correct pronunciation of English words, and the euphemistic expressions characteristic of the national culture result in a lack of directness in English communication. Research indicates that these students frequently alternate between languages at a rate of more than two times per minute on average, which can lead to confusion. A particularly salient issue is the experience of many ethnic minority students who, in an effort to master "standard English," discreetly conceal their linguistic characteristics in the classroom. However, in their personal lives, these students must rely on their mother tongue for communication, resulting in a sense of disconnection and a concomitant confusion regarding their cultural identity. The challenges encountered in the classroom extend beyond the confines of the classroom, as the English language education curriculum in schools is found to be deficient in its incorporation of authentic, real-life scenarios from Southeast Asian countries. The pedagogical approach predominantly relies on monolingual teaching methods, and the assessment paradigm is predominantly focused on grammar and scores rather than on fostering communicative competencies. These shortcomings contribute to a lack of English fluency in workplace contexts, even for those who have successfully passed the requisite exams.

2. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the English communication skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China
2. To develop strategies to enhance the English communication skills of Chinese foreign language majors studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

3. Literature Review Chapter

Concepts of Communicative English as a Foreign Language

Before delving into specific principles, it is essential to understand the theoretical framework that underpins effective EFL teaching. The field has evolved significantly from traditional grammar-translation methods to more communicative approaches (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). This evolution reflects a deeper understanding of language acquisition

processes and the recognition that language learning is inherently social and contextual (Widdowson, 1978; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In other words, the theoretical framework underpinning effective EFL teaching represents a sophisticated synthesis of multiple theoretical perspectives that have evolved over time (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Moving beyond early behaviorist approaches, contemporary EFL theory integrates cognitive, sociocultural, and constructivist understandings of language acquisition. This framework draws substantially from Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizing comprehensible input (Widdowson, 1978), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlighting the social nature of learning (Singh & Richards, 2006), and constructivist approaches emphasizing learners' active role in knowledge construction (Nunan, 1991). It incorporates Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, which delineates four essential components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Critical Applied Linguistics perspectives (Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 2009) contribute crucial insights about power relations and social contexts in language teaching, while cognitive and metacognitive theories (Anderson, 1999) illuminate the role of information processing and learning strategies. This theoretical foundation emphasizes the importance of authentic materials, meaningful interaction, supportive learning environments, and balanced assessment practices that consider both process and product. The framework acknowledges the complexity and dynamicity of language learning, recognizing the influence of technology, globalization, learner autonomy, and Mahmoud Abdallah – 24 October 2024 identity in the language learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This multi-faceted theoretical understanding guides educators in creating effective learning environments that balance linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural factors while addressing the diverse needs of EFL learners in increasingly globalized contexts (McKay, 2002; Kachru & Smith, 2008). The framework's practical implications emphasize the need for authentic materials, meaningful interaction, scaffolded instruction, and assessment practices that reflect the complex nature of language acquisition while maintaining sensitivity to cultural and contextual factors that influence learning outcomes.

4. Research Conceptual Framework

The research topic of this study is "Issues and Strategies for Strengthening English Communication Use in a Multilingual Society: A Case Study of Guangxi Foreign Studies University". The purpose of this study is to investigate the English communication skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China. Develop strategies to enhance the English communication skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China.

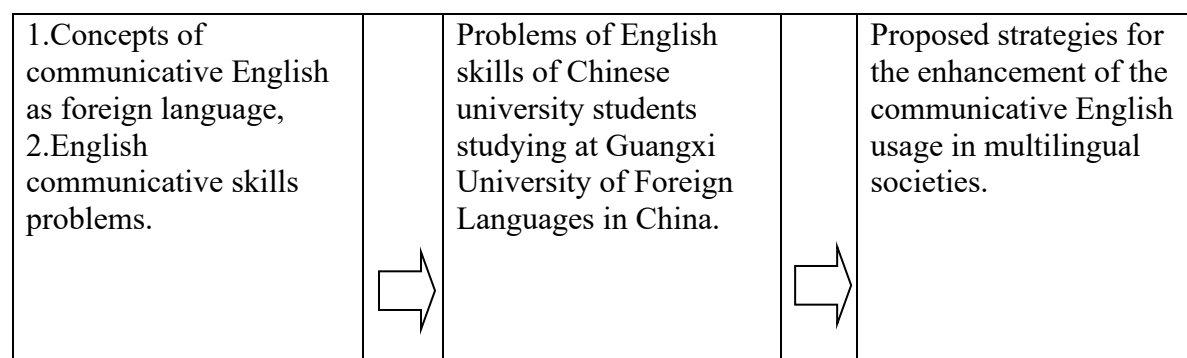


Figure: Research Conceptual Framework

5. Research Methodology

Population/Samples

This research was conducted in Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in Guangxi, China as a case study. The population in this research project were divided into 2 groups, namely, 1) 11000 students and 2) 764 teachers and administrators at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in Guangxi, China.

The sample groups were divided into 2 groups, namely, 1) 386 students and 2) 263 teachers and administrators at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in Guangxi, China. The sample size was obtained through Yamane Formula (Yamane, 1976). The respondents were obtained through the Stratified Random Sampling Technique.

Research Instrument

The main research instrument was: 1) a questionnaire, and 2) a set of questions for a focus group discussion meeting for the approval of strategies for the enhancement of the communicative English usage in multilingual societies. The preparation and implementation of the questionnaire mainly will go through the following five stages: First, the dimensions of the questionnaire were designed and discussed with the researcher's advisor to determine the purpose and direction of the questionnaire. Second, the questionnaires were prepared and revised based on the situation of the respondents and the opinions of the researcher's advisor. Third, the questionnaire was evaluated for the Index of Congruence Scores (IOC scores) 0.66-1.00 by the three specialists to examine the effectiveness of the questions. After modifying the unreasonable places in the questionnaire, it was formally distributed to the respondents. Last, the collection of the questionnaires and analysis of the questionnaire survey results. In addition, the Likert's Five Scale Method was the main concept of the formation of the questionnaire, and each option is respectively "Highest", "High", "Moderate", "Low" and "Lowest", five options respectively with 1-5 value to indicate problems of communicative English usage in multilingual societies. In this research project, a questionnaire was employed for the data collection. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections; namely, 1) general information, 2) problems of communicative English usage in multilingual societies. The questionnaire was evaluated for the Index of Congruence Scores (IOC scores) by the three specialists. In the part of finding out strategies for the enhancement of the communicative English usage in multilingual societies, a set of questions were employed for the focus group discussion. The 5 specialists were invited to participate in the focus group discussion meetings. The 5 specialists gave comments and suggestions as well as the approval of the proposed strategies for the enhancement of the communicative English usage in multilingual societies.

Data Collection

For this research project, the researcher himself collected the data and information from the sample groups. The sample groups were informed the purposes of the data collection, then made an appointment with the researcher. The researcher submitted a letter of permission signed by the researcher's advisor to the university in advance to ask for a permission to collect the data.

In addition, the comments towards the correctness and suitability of the proposed strategies for the enhancement of the communicative English usage in multilingual societies were collected from the focus group discussion meeting by the researcher himself.

Data Analysis

The data and information collected were analyzed and then interpreted and presented in

terms of frequency count, percentage, mean ($\bar{X}$), standard deviation (S.D.). The criteria and define at the range of the mean scores as follows:

- 4.21-5.00 = the highest level of problems and level of agreement of strategies
- 3.41-4.20= the high level of problems and level of agreement of strategies
- 2.61-3.40= the moderate level of problems and level of agreement of strategies
- 1.81-2.60= the low level of problems and level of agreement of strategies
- 1.00-1.80= the lowest level of problems and level of agreement of strategies

Moreover, the comments towards the correctness and suitability of the proposed strategies for the enhancement of the communicative English usage in multilingual societies collected from the focus group discussion meeting by the researcher himself were analyzed through the Content Analysis Method.

5. Research Results

Objective 1: To investigate problems of English communicative skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

Table 1: Problems of English communicative skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China (Students)

Items	n=386		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	SD	
1) The severity of the consequences of the incidents of communicative failure due to cultural differences that you have experienced is mostly:	4.92	0.15	Highest
2) you Have encountered communication barriers when communicating across languages.	4.76	0.23	Highest
3) When communicating in English, your perceived clarity of expression of cultural identity in your native language is:	4.59	0.19	Highest
4) The extent to which dialectal pronunciation affects the accuracy of your English speech:	4.48	0.15	Highest
5) Your sensitivity and ability to cope with English cultural taboos (e.g., private topics/meaning of gestures):	4.46	0.22	Highest
6) To what extent do you think native thinking interferes with English expression:	4.39	0.15	Highest
7) you have a sense of the differences in cultural expressions when you are communicating across cultures.	4.28	0.16	Highest
8) you Have encountered communication barriers when communicating across languages.	4.16	0.17	Highest
9) you proactively adjust to flexibility in	4.16	0.17	Highest

a mixed language environment, such as a dialect/multilingual community.

10) Have you encountered a lack of vocabulary when using English?	4.12	0.13	Highest
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Total	4.57	0.21	Highest
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According to table 4.3, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English communicative skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.31(SD=0.16) – $\bar{X}$ 4.66 (0.22).

Table 2: Problems of English communicative skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China (Teachers)

Items	n=263		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	SD	
1) Classroom listening practice time is insufficient to meet exam requirements.	4.95	0.22	Highest
2) Your students need more authentic listening resources (e.g., videos, podcasts) in real-life contexts.	4.49	0.22	Highest
3) The academic vocabulary in listening materials is too advanced, making it hard to identify key information.	4.47	0.14	Highest
4) The speed and difficulty of listening materials do not match my proficiency level.	4.47	0.16	Highest
5) Your students lack systematic listening strategies (e.g., prediction, note-taking), which affects my learning outcomes.	4.46	0.16	Highest
6) Your students lack interest in English listening learning and perceive it as less practical.	4.46	0.18	Highest
7) Teachers do not provide targeted guidance for common listening barriers faced by Chinese students.	4.41	0.17	Highest
8) Connected speech (e.g., linking, weak forms) is insufficient for comprehension.	4.36	0.16	Highest
9) Cultural differences hinder my understanding of implied meanings in materials.	4.35	0.21	Highest
10) Your students often struggle to understand English listening materials due to accent differences in English.	4.25	0.18	Highest
Total	4.51	0.18	Highest

According to table 4.4, it is indicated that the teachers rated the problems of English communicative skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.22 (SD=0.13) – $\bar{X}$ 4.51 (SD=0.17).

Objective 2. To develop strategies to enhance the English communication skills of Chinese foreign language majors studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

Table 3: Strategies to enhance the English communication skills of Chinese foreign language majors studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

Topics/Contents
Chapter 1: About Learners
1. How to get ready for English Communicative skill practice
2. How to practice English Communicative skill
Chapter 2: About Instructors
1. How to get ready for teaching English Communicative skill
2. How to teach English Communicative skill
Chapter 3: About teaching materials
1. How to select suitable teaching-learning materials for English communicative practice
2. How to apply teaching-learning materials for English communicative into practice
Chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities
1. How to create English Environment suitable for English communicative practice
2. How to apply facilitators for English communicative skill practice
Chapter 5: About teaching-learning evaluation
1. How to choose a suitable method of English Skill Practice Evaluation
2. How to conduct English Skill Practice Evaluation

According to table3, the Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students is composed of 5 chapters; namely, chapter 1: About Learners, chapter 2: About Instructors, Chapter 3: About teaching materials, chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities, and chapter 5 About teaching-learning evaluation: All the 5 chapters were approved by the three specialists in terms of correctness and suitability. All the 5 chapters were evaluated and approved by the three specialists; therefore, the constructed Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students could be used as guidelines for the enhancement of English communicative skill of Chinese university students in China.

6. Discussion

1. Problems of English communicative skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

It can be concluded that students and teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China have the highest evaluation of English communication skills among Chinese university students. The problem of English communication skills among Chinese college students can be described by the following facts: the content of English courses does not directly focus on dialogue skills practice, the course content and activities of communication skills practice do not emphasize specific situations, and various English accents used today. It is acceptable that Chinese students have little or no chance to hear all kinds of English accents in their daily life, and they also have little chance to communicate with foreigners. They; Therefore, you may feel confused about various English accents from different countries. They may not have enough communicative English vocabulary and basic English grammar to understand English listening. In addition, English communication problems may be caused by inadequate use of English in daily communication and course teaching in non-native English-speaking countries and regions, or by a low demand for English learning in that region and country. The research results are consistent with Songsiengchai, S.,

Baikum, S., & Juarez, E. M. (2020). Because English communication skills are a skill that needs to be used in daily life. In addition, students must use English communication skills to communicate with foreigners, and students need to prepare for English proficiency tests in order to learn at the level of higher education. Sen, C., Songsiengchai, S., Baikum, S., & Juarez, E. M. (2020). Explored how to promote educational approaches in these English-speaking environments in a creative and sustainable manner. The results showed that the average score of English exams for students at Guangxi Foreign Studies University was 49.07, with a standard deviation of 18.51. The research results also indicate that factors affecting students' listening skills include academic background knowledge, English language background knowledge, audience skills, and teaching methods.

Moreover, the results of this study correspond to Thammakhan, N. (2024). In 2025, the rapid development of technology in China and the demand for English listening and speaking skills have brought opportunities and challenges to Chinese university students. Thammakhan, N. (2024). Using analysis to influence the learning of English communication courses, mitigating through proficient translation practices, technological advancements, cultural sensitivity, and effective collaboration between teachers and learners. The data collected from 386 students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in Guangxi, China was randomly recruited to complete a questionnaire, and 10 of them were subjected to semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that mobile learning is considered more supported by students than being rejected. They found that mobile learning is easy to use, useful, resourceful, and easy to manage in self-learning, thus providing them with more opportunities to actively and independently learn these two English skills anytime, anywhere, rather than challenging their motivation to learn the language. These opportunities have to some extent achieved the goals of the "Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan" released by the Chinese government in 2018. The learning objectives also reflect their external and internal motivation, which is the driving force behind the opportunity to learn these two English skills.

2. Strategies to enhance the English communication skills of Chinese foreign language majors studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China

The "Strategies for Enhancing Communication and Learning Skills of Chinese College Students" constructed consists of five chapters; Chapter 1: Regarding Learners, Chapter 2: Regarding Teachers, Chapter 3: Regarding Textbooks, Chapter 4: Regarding Teaching Facilities, and Chapter 5: Regarding Teaching Evaluation. The "Strategies for Improving Communicative Skills of Chinese University Students" constructed have been recognized by three experts and can serve as a guiding principle for improving the English communication and learning skills of Chinese university students. The strategies for improving communicative skills developed are consistent with a research project conducted by Prommarak, C. & Rittikoop, W. (2021) on practical strategies for English communication skills.

New knowledge for research

The data and information on the English communication skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. 2. Strategies for improving the English communication skills of Chinese university students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

7. Conclusion

1. The survey results on the English communication skills of Chinese college students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China show that students have the highest scores on English communication skills, ranging from 4.31 (SD=0.16) to 4.66 (0.22). In addition,

research has shown that teachers have the highest ratings for English communication skills, ranging from 4.22 (SD=0.13) to 4.51 (SD=0.17). It can be said that students and teachers from Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China have the highest evaluation of the English communicative skills of Chinese university students.

2. The Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese university Students

The constructed “Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students” is composed of five chapters; namely, chapter 1: About Learners, chapter 2: About Instructors, Chapter 3: About teaching materials, chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities, and chapter 5 About teaching-learning evaluation. the constructed Enhancement Strategies of Communicative Skill of Chinese University Students was accepted and approved by the three specialists, then it could be used as a guideline for the enhancement of English communicative skill of Chinese Communicative students in China.

8. Suggestion

1. For the implementation of the research results into practice, it is suggested building skills for Chinese university students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in China.

2. For further study, it is suggested to provide scenario-based exercise skills training for Chinese university students at Guangxi Foreign Languages Institute in China.

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