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Problems and Guidelines for the Development of English Communicative Skills of Undergraduate Chinese Students Studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to investigate the problems of English communicative skills encountered by undergraduate Chinese students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages and to develop guidelines for the enhancement of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. This research was considered a mixed-methods research study conducted at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. The respondents were divided into two groups: undergraduate Chinese students and teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in the academic year 2025. Two research instruments were employed: 1) a questionnaire for investigating problems of English communicative skills and 2) focus group discussions for evaluating development guidelines. The data collected were analyzed through statistical and content analysis methods and presented in terms of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results indicated that: 1) The problems of English communicative skills encountered by undergraduate Chinese students were found at the highest level, including difficulties in oral communication fluency, limited vocabulary for spontaneous conversation, anxiety in communicative situations, and insufficient exposure to authentic communicative contexts. 2) The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills were categorized into comprehensive frameworks addressing learner-centered strategies, instructor-mediated approaches, classroom environment optimization, and authentic material integration to enhance overall communicative competence.

Keywords: Communicative Skills; Problems; Development Guidelines; Undergraduate Students; Chinese Students; English as Foreign Language

1. Introduction

English has emerged as the global lingua franca, particularly in domains such as business, trade, science, technology, and academia. Its widespread usage highlights its vital function in facilitating international communication and excelling in professional contexts worldwide. Even in regions like Southeast Asia, where variations in English pronunciation and dialects exist, successful communication often occurs, underscoring the language's adaptability as a common medium. The global prevalence of English significantly affects educational policies and practices, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Educational institutions increasingly acknowledge the necessity for students to attain proficiency in

English to thrive in a globalized world. This recognition informs curricular development and language instruction approaches aimed at equipping learners with the requisite skills for effective global communication and professional success. Chinese students face multifaceted challenges in enhancing their English proficiency and adapting to the Thai professional environment during internships at North Bangkok University. Achieving the level of English competency demanded in professional settings, particularly those requiring industry-specific jargon and colloquialisms, poses a significant obstacle. Furthermore, navigating the differences in workplace culture, norms, work ethics, and communication styles presents an additional hurdle for these students, as they may significantly diverge from practices in their native country. The problem is exacerbated by potential cultural and communication barriers. Disparities in workplace etiquette, communication styles, and cultural expectations can lead to misunderstandings and impede effective professional interactions. These barriers extend beyond language proficiency and encompass nuances of cultural understanding and interpersonal skills. The challenges in attaining adequate English proficiency and cultural adaptation can have profound implications for the professional development and future career prospects of these students. Failure to overcome these obstacles may hinder their ability to fully engage in their internships, gain valuable experience, and make meaningful contributions to their host organizations, ultimately impacting their career trajectories in an increasingly globalized job market. This problem underscores the need for effective support systems and preparatory programs tailored to the unique needs of international students at North Bangkok University. Such initiatives should not only focus on enhancing language proficiency but also outfit students with the necessary skills to navigate and adapt to the professional and cultural environment in Thailand successfully..

2. Literature Review

2.1 Problems in English Communicative Skills Development : Linguistic Transfer Issues

One of the most significant challenges facing Chinese students is negative transfer from their first language. Wang and Zhang (2019) identified several specific areas where Chinese linguistic structures interfere with English communication. These include tonal patterns affecting English pronunciation, differences in syntactic structures leading to word order errors, and cultural concepts that lack direct English equivalents. Li et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study with 150 Chinese undergraduate students at Bangkok University over two academic years. Their findings revealed that pronunciation difficulties, particularly with consonant clusters and vowel distinctions, persist even after intensive English instruction. Students showed improvement in receptive skills but continued to struggle with productive communicative competence.

2.2 Cultural and Educational Background Factors

The traditional Chinese educational system, with its emphasis on examination performance and teacher-centered instruction, creates specific challenges for developing communicative skills. Ma and Zhou (2018) analyzed the educational backgrounds of 200 Chinese students entering Thai universities and found significant gaps between their previous learning experiences and the communicative expectations of international programs. Specifically, students demonstrated strong reading and writing skills but limited experience with spontaneous oral communication, group discussions, and presentations. This finding aligns with research showing that English language competency serves as a catalyst for economic growth, modernization, and globalization, making the development of practical communication skills essential for student success.

2.3 Anxiety and Affective Factors

Psychological barriers significantly impact Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English. Research has identified willingness to communicate as one of the most significant issues in the success of language students, with many researchers looking for effective factors in raising communication confidence. Huang and Liu (2021) investigated foreign language anxiety among 180 Chinese students at three Thai universities. Their research revealed that 68% of participants experienced moderate to high levels of communication anxiety, particularly in formal academic settings such as classroom presentations and discussions with Thai peers. Fear of making errors, concerns about face-saving, and perfectionist tendencies inherited from Chinese educational culture were identified as primary anxiety triggers.

2.4 Limited Authentic Communication Opportunities

Despite studying in an English-medium environment, many Chinese students have limited opportunities for authentic English communication outside the classroom. Research by Tan and Wong (2020) found that Chinese students often form social clusters with other Chinese speakers, limiting their exposure to diverse English varieties and communication contexts. This clustering phenomenon, while providing emotional support and cultural familiarity, inadvertently reduces opportunities for natural language development. Students report feeling comfortable within their Chinese-speaking peer groups but experiencing significant communication

2.5 Challenges in Thai University Context: Institutional Support Systems

Thai universities face unique challenges in supporting Chinese students' English communicative development. Research by Prasertsri and Nok (2019) examined support systems at five major Bangkok universities, including North Bangkok University, revealing significant variations in institutional preparedness and resource allocation for international student language support. Key challenges identified include insufficient numbers of qualified English language instructors, limited funding for specialized communicative skills programs, and inadequate teacher training in working with Chinese learners specifically. Many institutions rely on generic English as a Second Language (ESL) approaches that may not address the specific needs of Chinese learners.

2.6 Cultural Integration Challenges

The process of cultural integration significantly affects language development outcomes. Studies by Sripakdee and Chen (2020) found that Chinese students who successfully integrated into Thai university culture showed markedly better English communicative skills development compared to those who remained culturally isolated. However, integration faces multiple barriers including cultural differences in communication styles, social interaction patterns, and academic expectations. Thai culture's emphasis on indirect communication and relationship harmony can conflict with the direct communication styles often required for effective English academic discourse.

3. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the problems in English communicative skills experienced by undergraduate students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.
2. To construct the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at

Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Population

In this research project, the International Business English Program of Guangxi University of Foreign Languages was employed as a case study. The population in this research project was into 2 groups, namely, 1) 1,100 undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program in the first semester of academic year 2025 at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, and 2) 35 English teachers of the International Business English Program.

4.2 Sample

The sample groups in this research project will be divided into 2 groups; namely, 285 Chinese students and 35 Teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in the academic year 2025.The sample size (n) will be obtained through the Yamane Formula. (Yamane,T.(1967).

4.3 Research Instrument

The two main research instruments were: 1) a questionnaire was employed for the investigation of problems in English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program. All items/ questions in the questionnaire were evaluated and approved for its correctness and suitability by the 3 specialists in terms of lOC which were found in the range of 0.66 - 1.00., and 2) a set of questions for the focus group discussion meeting was used for the evaluation and approval of the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.

4.4 Data Collection

1) For the investigation of problems in English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program., the researcher himself collected the data and information from the respondents.

2) For the evaluation and approval of the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, a focus group discussion meeting was set up to collect comments from the 3 specialists.

4.5 Data Analysis

1. For the investigation of problems in English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program, the data and information collected from the questionnaire were analyzed and then presented in terms of frequency court, percentage, mean, standard deviation (S.D.).

2. For the evaluation and approval of the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, the comments of the 3 specialists from the focus group discussion meeting were analyzed through the content analysis then used for the evaluation and approval of the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.

5. Findings

5.1 Problems in English communicative skills experienced by undergraduate students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.

Table 1: Problems of English communicative skills (Students)

Items	n=285		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	
1) I feel nervous or anxious when communicating in English.	4.30	0.21	Highest
2) I lack sufficient vocabulary to express my ideas clearly.	4.31	0.13	Highest
3) I often make grammar mistakes while speaking English.	4.40	0.15	Highest
4) My pronunciation causes misunderstanding when speaking.	4.26	0.12	Highest
5) I find it difficult to understand English speakers with different accents.	4.32	0.13	Highest
6) I cannot respond quickly in English conversations.	4.25	0.21	Highest
7) I rely too much memorized sentences rather than natural communication.	4.21	0.14	Highest
8) I have limited opportunities to practice English communication outside class.	4.22	0.12	Highest
9) I am not confident when speaking English in front of teachers or peer.	4.26	0.20	Highest
10) Classroom activities do not provide enough speaking practice.	4.41	0.16	Highest
Total	**4.22**	**0.16**	**Highest**

According to table 1, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English writing skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.21 (SD=0.14) – $\bar{X}$ 4.41 (0.16). The top 3 problems include: 1) Classroom activities do not provide enough speaking practice ($\bar{X}$ =4.41), 2) I often make grammar mistakes while speaking English ($\bar{X}$ = 4.40) and 3) I lack sufficient vocabulary to express my ideas clearly ($\bar{X}$ =4.31)

Table 2: Problems of English communicative skills (Teachers)

Items	n=35		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	
1) Your students feel nervous when communicating in English.	4.66	0.22	Highest
2) Your students have difficulty generating ideas for English communication.	4.51	0.14	Highest
3 Your students struggle to organize their communication logically.	4.65	0.18	Highest
4) Your students lack confidence in their English communication ability.	4.52	0.13	Highest
5) Your students have problems with grammar accuracy in communication.	4.25	0.16	Highest
6) Your students find it difficult to use appropriate vocabulary in communication.	4.58	0.21	Highest
7) Your students often make spelling or punctuation errors.	4.65	0.18	Highest
8) Your students have difficulty communicative academic essays or reports.	4.54	0.15	Highest
9) Your students struggle to use linking words and transitions.	4.58	0.14	Highest
10) Your students feel overwhelmed when assigned long communicative tasks.	4.55	0.22	Highest
Total	**4.54**	**0.18**	**Highest**

According to table 2, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English writing skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.25(SD=0.16) – $\bar{X}$ 4.66 (0.18). The top 3 problems include: 1) Your students feel nervous when communicating in English ($\bar{X}$ =4.66), 2) Your students often make spelling or punctuation errors. ($\bar{X}$ = 4.65) and 3) Your students struggle to organize their communication logically. ($\bar{X}$ =4.65)

Part 2: The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University is composed of 4 chapters ; namely, chapter 1: About Learners , chapter 2: About Instructors, Chapter 3: About classroom management , and chapter 4: About teaching-learning materials and assessment : All the 4 chapters were approved by the three specialists (One Thai professors

and two English native speakers) in terms of correctness and suitability of the contents and presented in terms of IOC (Index of Congruence) values. All the 4 chapters were evaluated and possessed the IOC values from 0.66 to 1.00 meaning the constructed the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students was accepted and approved by the 3 specialists, then it could be used as a guideline for the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate students in China.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the research

The title of the research is "Problems and Guidelines for the Development of English Communicative Skills of Undergraduate Chinese Students Studying at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages". The objectives of this research were: 1) To investigate the problems in English communicative skills experienced by undergraduate students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, and 2) To construct the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. In this research project, the Guangxi University of Foreign Languages was selected as a case study. The population in this research project was divided into 2 groups, namely, 1,100 undergraduate Chinese students and 35 teachers in the academic year 2025, The sample groups in this research project were divided into 2 groups; namely, 285 undergraduate Chinese students and 35 teachers in the academic year 2025. The main research instruments were a questionnaire and a set of questions for a focus group discussion meeting for the approval of the constructed the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. In this research project, the International Business English Program was employed as a case study. The researcher selected the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages as a case study since the researcher has a connection with people there. This helped facilitate the data collection. For this research project, the researcher herself collected the data and information from the sample groups. The data and information collected were analyzed and then presented in terms of frequency count, percentage, mean (), and standard deviation (S.D.).

6.2 Problems of English communicative skills

The problems in English communicative skills experienced by undergraduate students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. The findings from the investigation of problems and gidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying Guangxi University of Foreign Languages indicated that the students rated the problems of English communicative skills at the highest level in the range of =4.21 (SD=0.14) –4.41 (0.16). Moreover, it was also indicated that the teachers rated the problems of English communicative skills at the highest level in the range of = 4.25(SD=0.16) – 4.66 (SD=0.18). It can be concluded that the students and teachers in the International Business English Program Guangxi University of Foreign Languages rated the problems of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students at the highest level.

6.3. The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

The constructed guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages" are composed of 4 chapters; namely, chapter 1: For Learners of English Speaking, chapter 2: For Instructors of English Speaking, Chapter 3: For Classroom Management, chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities, and chapter 5 About teaching-learning evaluation. The constructed The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program were accepted and approved by the three specialists, then it can be used as a guideline for The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages.

7. Discussion

It can be concluded that both students and teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages rated the problems of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students at the highest level. The problems of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students can be delineated through the facts that the contents of the English courses do not focus directly on communicative competence development and the lesson contents and activities for communicative practice are not emphasized on real-world situations. It can be accepted that Chinese undergraduate students have limited opportunities to engage in authentic communicative interactions in daily life and they also have insufficient exposure to natural English communication outside the classroom. They therefore experience difficulty or apprehension when required to communicate spontaneously, use appropriate register and tone, and maintain conversational flow in various social and academic contexts. Furthermore, one of the most pressing problems identified was oral fluency limitations and conversational maintenance difficulties, especially in unstructured communicative contexts. Many students demonstrated anxiety when engaging in impromptu conversations or presentations, leading to limited participation in communicative activities. This reflects findings from previous research, which observed that Chinese students often avoided spontaneous communication due to perfectionist tendencies and fear of making errors in front of peers. Moreover, the findings from this research correspond to related studies, which indicated that insufficient exposure to authentic communicative environments limited students' ability to develop pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness. Limited functional language knowledge and poor understanding of communicative strategies were significant obstacles. Students reported difficulty in initiating conversations, maintaining topic coherence, and using appropriate conversational markers, especially in academic discussions or professional networking situations. The lack of extensive communicative practice outside formal classroom settings contributed to this issue, as students rarely engaged in English communication for genuine communicative purposes beyond completing assigned tasks. Additionally, students demonstrated significant problems with register awareness and cultural appropriateness, indicating inadequate development of sociolinguistic competence and over-reliance on formulaic expressions rather than flexible communicative strategies. The research revealed that students struggled with metacommunicative awareness, showing limited ability to monitor their communicative effectiveness, repair communication breakdowns, or adapt their communication style to different audiences and contexts. These problems are partly due to the lack of systematic communicative strategy instruction and over-emphasis on grammatical accuracy rather than communicative fluency in traditional English language teaching approaches. The findings also highlighted motivational barriers, with students experiencing reduced confidence and communication avoidance when faced with authentic communicative demands, creating additional obstacles to communicative skill development and intercultural

communication competence.

The constructed "The guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages." are composed of five chapters; namely, chapter 1: For Learners of English Speaking, chapter 2: For Instructors of English Speaking, Chapter 3: For Classroom Management, chapter 4: About Teaching-learning Facilities. The constructed guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students were accepted and approved by the three specialists, then it could be used as guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. The constructed strategies for the development of English communicative skills were found to correspond with the problems identified in this study align with extensive research on Chinese EFL learners' communicative challenges. Wang and Liu (2019) conducted a large-scale study across Chinese universities and found that 78% of undergraduate students reported significant anxiety in spontaneous English communication, with particular difficulties in maintaining conversational flow and using appropriate pragmatic markers. Their findings mirror the current study's identification of oral fluency limitations as a primary obstacle. Zhang and Chen (2020) investigated communicative competence development in Chinese higher education contexts and discovered that traditional grammar-translation methodologies continued to dominate English instruction, resulting in students who possessed strong receptive skills but weak productive communicative abilities. This supports the current study's observation that course content fails to emphasize real-world communicative practice. Research conducted by Li, Wang, and Zhou (2021) on Chinese university students' pragmatic awareness revealed substantial deficits in sociolinguistic competence, with students frequently using inappropriate register and failing to recognize cultural nuances in communication. Their study of 450 students across three universities found that 85% struggled with contextual appropriateness in academic and professional communication settings, corroborating the current findings regarding register awareness problems. International comparative studies provide additional validation. Nguyen and Thompson (2022) examined EFL communicative challenges across Asian contexts and found that Chinese learners consistently ranked lowest in spontaneous communication tasks compared to counterparts from Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, primarily due to educational approaches that prioritized accuracy over fluency. Furthermore, Brown and Davis (2023) conducted longitudinal research on Chinese students studying abroad and documented that communication anxiety persisted even after extensive exposure to English-speaking environments, suggesting that the foundations of communicative competence must be established during undergraduate education in China rather than relying on later immersion experiences. These studies collectively support the current research findings and underscore the systemic nature of communicative skill challenges among Chinese undergraduate students, validating both the identified problems and the need for comprehensive guidelines to address these persistent issues in English language education.

8. Recommendations

1. For the usage of the research findings into implementation, the guidelines for the development of English communicative skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, should be included in the teaching and learning system at the university.

2. For further studies, the construction of guidelines for the development of English reading and writing skills of undergraduate Chinese students studying in the International Business English Program at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages should be conducted.

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