

Challenges in English Communication Skills of University-Level EFL Learners

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This study aims to investigate the problems and needs related to English communication skills among EFL students and examine teacher perceptions of these skills. The participants in this study were 48 students and five English teachers in one university in Thailand. Data were collected using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was first distributed to the students, followed by interviews with the teachers individually. The jamovi program was employed to analyze the data for mean and standard deviation, while content analysis was used for qualitative data. The findings from the questionnaire revealed that the students experienced the most difficulty with listening, followed by writing, speaking and reading skills, respectively. Regarding student needs, they preferred presentations the most for developing their speaking and listening skills. Moreover, findings from the semi-structured interviews with teachers indicated that students had problems with three skills: speaking, writing, and listening. Therefore, this study offers valuable insights to help teachers better understand the issues that the students currently face and to identify effective teaching strategies that will help students become more proficient in English communication skills. This study implies using technology, such as online platforms to enhance students' communication abilities and promote their learning experiences.

Keywords: English communication skills, EFL students, needs analysis, higher education

English communication skills encompass listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are essential for EFL students in the 21st century, especially in Thailand, where increased mobility and business interactions provide more opportunities to interact with foreigners. As Rido (2020) highlights, English communication skills are crucial for work and are in demand by both domestic and international employers. For example, officers may use listening and speaking skills when they communicate with clients on the phone or in meetings. They may also use their writing skills when contacting foreign clients via email and their reading skills when reading business contracts. Therefore, EFL students must prioritize developing these skills to effectively communicate with international clients, colleagues, or employers. Proficient communication skills can also lead to better employment opportunities, supporting students in their professional lives (Thuratham, 2022a).

To use English communication skills effectively in the workplace, however, students must also possess a solid foundation in English grammar and vocabulary. These components are critical for crafting accurate and meaningful messages, which are integral to communicative competence (Thuratham, 2022b). However, university students have still struggled with communication problems, which can hinder their development. Regarding linguistic factors, teachers faced challenges when teaching oral communication

skills, such as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and poor pronunciation (Maji et al., 2022; Raqib et al., 2023). Moreover, psychological factors like lack of confidence and low motivation are the primary barriers for effective communication (Purwati et al., 2023; Suwartono et al., 2020). The external factors, such as insufficient supporting tools, limited opportunities for oral practice, and class sizes also affected students' communicative development (Ha & Duc, 2024; Ibna Seraj et al., 2021). Additionally, it was found that students experienced more difficulties with online learning compared to face-to-face learning in the context of communication (Ishtiaq et al., 2024), so these learning modes shall also be evaluated to enhance their proficiency more effectively.

Addressing these challenges requires close attention to both the problems and the specific needs of students in developing English communication skills. Previous research in Thailand has examined the needs and challenges related to English communication skills among organizational staff (Kaewkunha, 2021; Namtapi, 2022; Utaiwan, 2019). However, few studies have focused on EFL students in tertiary education. To maximize support for students' communication skills, it is essential to explore teachers' perspectives; however, research on this aspect remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the needs and problems faced by EFL students at a public university in Thailand, as well as to examine teacher perceptions of these skills. By understanding these issues, the study seeks to identify effective teaching activities and methods to prepare students for and equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in international professional environments.

Research Questions

The objectives of this study are to investigate the problems and needs related to English communication skills among EFL university students and examine teacher perceptions of these skills. Accordingly, three research questions are outlined below.

1. What are the problems associated with English communication skills of EFL students?
2. What are the needs related to English communication skills among EFL students?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of EFL students' English communication skills?

Literature Review

English is widely recognized as a key medium for communication in diverse contexts, including business and education (Pratumchat, 2020). It enables individuals to interact with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, often serving as a working language to achieve various professional and educational goals. For example, professionals in international companies rely on English to communicate with clients and colleagues, both verbally and in writing. However, successful communication requires not only linguistic competence but also the ability to engage meaningfully in interpersonal interactions (Thuratham, 2022a). Proficient English communication skills, therefore, involve mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing to facilitate the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and collaboration in diverse settings, such as international conferences and workshops (Dunakhir & Osman, 2023). These skills are often considered essential soft skills highly valued by employers. Consequently, graduates with strong English communication skills are more likely to secure employment and command higher salaries in competitive job markets.

Despite its importance, English proficiency among Thai students remains a significant challenge. Particularly, they face considerable difficulties with English communication skills, especially listening and speaking (Bamroongkit & Aowsakorn, 2022; Cherdchoopong, 2020). When listening, students find it difficult to understand English due to lack of vocabulary knowledge and the speed of the speakers which had significant effects on students' listening comprehension (Bamroongkit & Aowsakorn, 2022). Important challenges in speaking include a lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, anxiety (Cherdchoopong, 2020; Suwartono et al., 2020) and low motivation in learning to speak English (Purwati et al., 2023). In writing, students struggled to use vocabulary, grammar, and structure. She also had difficulties in idea development and organization in paragraph writing (Pitukwong & Saraiwang, 2024; Prapobratanakul, 2024). Moreover, it was found that Thai students had problems with reading in deficiency vocabulary and

linguistic understanding (Thongsook, 2023) as well as text difficulty and time constraints (Boonmoh & Tuaynak, 2023), which affected their reading comprehension.

Considering these challenges, it is essential to address the needs of university students on English communication skills to bridge the gap between their current abilities and workplace requirements. Previous studies have mostly concentrated on the needs and challenges related to English communication skills among staff in the workplace (Kaewkunha, 2021; Namtapi, 2022; Utaiwan, 2019). A study led by Kaewkunha (2021) found that Thai employees, particularly in service industries, require proficiency in all communication skills but often struggle the most with speaking and writing. Similarly, staff working directly in international relations have identified listening and writing as the most challenging skills, and they needed to improve their listening skills the most (Utaiwan, 2019). For tourism personnel, they expressed difficulties in listening and speaking and were required to improve these skills (Namtapi, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the problems and needs associated with English communication skills among EFL university students. If educators gain a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges faced by students, they will be better equipped to identify suitable teaching methods and tools that effectively support students in English language learning and further enhance their communication skills.

Method

Research Design

This study used a survey research design to analyze the problems and needs related to English communication skills among university students at a public university in Thailand. This method focuses on collecting quantitative data by administering surveys to a sample or the entire population, with the aim of examining and describing their attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics (Khotimah, 2019, as cited in Vinte et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers' perceptions of the students' English communication skills were explored.

Participants

The participants in this study were classified into two groups based on the research instruments. The first group consisted of 48 university students majoring in English for International Communication at a public university in eastern Thailand. These participants were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) aged 18 years or older for undergraduates, (2) majoring in English for International Communication, and (3) having completed a questionnaire. The second group consisted of five English teachers from the same department. They were asked to provide their attitudes regarding English communication skills through a semi-structure interview. The teachers who willingly volunteered were selected to participate in the interview. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Subjects of Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Thailand on 28th June 2023 (COA No. 023, RMUTTO REC No. 025/2023). The participants signed the consent form before participating in the research study, and their data were kept confidential.

Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study aimed to identify the problems with and needs regarding English communication skills among students majoring in English for International Communication. This questionnaire was adapted from Thuratham (2022a). It was the e-questionnaire which was chosen due to its numerous advantages, such as enhanced accessibility to participants and their perspectives, increased efficiency in data collection, and reduced expenses (Pitura, 2023). It consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions and was divided into four crucial parts. The closed-ended questions include: (1) general information, (2) problems with English communication skills, and (3) needs for learning English communication skills. The open-ended questions addressed three issues related to students' opinions on English communication skills, including: (1) the practical methods they usually use to practice their English communication skills, and (2) the topics they are interested in learning English to improve their English communication skills. Students were requested to complete the questionnaire within 15 minutes.

Semi-structured interview

In this study, a semi-structured interview was selected to examine English teachers' perceptions of students' English communication skills. This type of interview is particularly effective for qualitative research as it allows researchers to obtain in-depth data from interviewees and is flexible and adaptable for researchers to ask follow-up questions (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interviews were conducted after the students' questionnaire data had been collected. The teachers were interviewed individually. The interview consisted of four open-ended questions covering: (1) students' current English proficiency, (2) students' most problematic skill, (3) teaching activities/tools used by teachers, (4) the best way to improve students' skills. Each interview with the English teachers lasted approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Thai and English to ensure clarity of the data collected. The responses were then collected, analyzed, and summarized.

Additionally, the questionnaire and interview were also evaluated through the IOC process to assess the content validity and appropriateness of the two instruments used in the research study. During this process, the instruments were reviewed and commented on by three experts from the English departments of three different universities to ensure reliability. Based on their feedback, the instruments were then revised accordingly.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using two research instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms to 48 students majoring in English for International Communication at a public university in eastern Thailand. The students were given 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which aimed to assess their attitudes toward the problems and needs related to learning English communication skills. Subsequently, five teachers from the same English department as the students were interviewed to gain their perspectives and obtain more detailed information about the students' English communication skills and other related aspects. Each teacher interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. During the interviews, the researcher asked questions and took notes while also recording the responses using a mobile phone to ensure no key points were missed. The data collected through notes and recordings were compiled and transcribed. For data originally collected in Thai, translations into English were conducted to ensure consistency in the analysis. The data were then grouped according to content and analyzed to generate comprehensive results.

Data Analysis

In this study, the jamovi computer program (version 2.3) was utilized to analyze the data from the questionnaire for descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation (The jamovi project, 2022). For closed-ended questions, students' degrees of agreement on their needs and problems regarding English communication skills were interpreted using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 6 to 1: strongly agree (6), agree (5), slightly agree (4), slightly disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Scores were interpreted as very positive(5.17-6), positive(4.33-5.16), slightly positive(3.49-4.32), slightly negative(2.67-3.50), negative(1.83-2.66), and very negative(1.00-1.82), respectively(Vate-U-Lan & Masouras, 2018). Meanwhile, the data from open-ended questions were qualitatively analyzed using structural coding analysis. The coded data were kept in Microsoft excel which facilitated the extraction of meaningful insights from the raw information. This involved coding and organizing similar data into groups based on common themes (Yuvayapan, 2019). Regarding the semi-structured interview, qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. This method involved transcribing the data and coding it into themes (Thongsongsee, 2022; Thuratham, 2022a). After that, the data were summarized and presented descriptively to reflect the teachers' perceptions of students' English communication skills.

Results and Discussion

Problems in English Communication Skills

The present study employed a 6-point Likert scale to explore student attitudes toward their problems in English communication skills. The results were categorized into four skills, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The student attitudes towards their problems in English communication skills

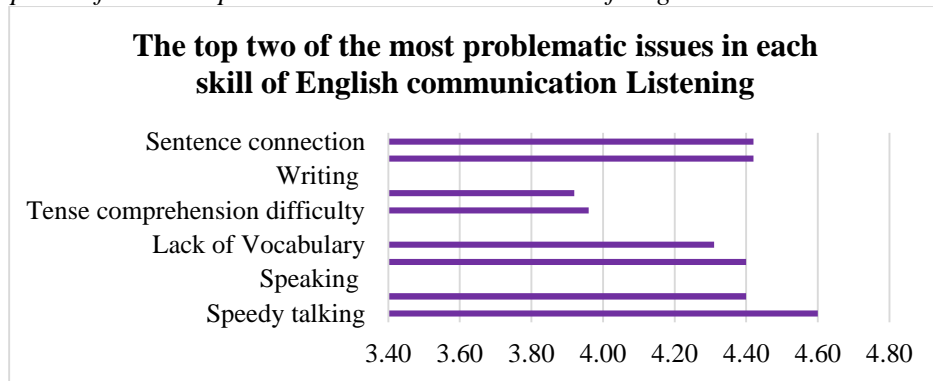
No.	Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
Listening				
1	It's challenging for me to comprehend communication because I lack a wide vocabulary.	4.17	1.26	Slightly Agree
2	Understanding communication is difficult due to my limited knowledge of English grammatical structures.	4.13	1.12	Slightly Agree
3	I struggle to grasp communication due to its length.	4.40	1.09	Agree
4	Understanding communication is hindered by speakers' English accents.	4.29	1.35	Slightly Agree
5	The pace of speakers' speech makes it difficult for me to understand communication.	4.60	1.20	Agree
6	Unclear pronunciation by speakers makes it difficult for me to understand communication.	4.38	1.20	Agree
Speaking				
1	Expressing myself in English is challenging due to my limited vocabulary.	4.31	1.26	Slightly Agree
2	Constructing grammatically correct English sentences poses a challenge for me.	4.40	1.27	Agree
3	Speaking English accurately is difficult because I struggle with pronunciation.	3.96	1.30	Slightly Agree
4	Fear of making mistakes hinders my ability to speak English confidently.	4.29	1.52	Slightly Agree
5	I lack confidence in speaking English due to my strong Thai accent.	4.00	1.43	Slightly Agree
6	Insufficient practice speaking English hinders my fluency.	4.25	1.33	Slightly Agree
Reading				
1	Understanding texts is challenging because of my limited vocabulary.	3.92	1.33	Slightly Agree
2	Properly comprehending texts is difficult due to my lack of grammatical knowledge regarding English tenses.	3.96	1.27	Slightly Agree
3	Pronunciation difficulties make it challenging for me to read texts accurately.	3.63	1.39	Slightly Agree
4	Fear of making mistakes hinders my ability to read English texts.	3.54	1.41	Slightly Agree
5	Lack of knowledge on stress placement in sentences makes it difficult for me to read English confidently.	3.63	1.31	Slightly Agree
6	Insufficient practice in reading English texts hinders my fluency.	3.83	1.36	Slightly Agree
Writing				
1	Writing English sentences correctly is difficult because I am unsure of word spelling.	4.08	1.29	Slightly Agree
2	Meaningful sentence construction in English is challenging due to my limited vocabulary.	4.21	1.24	Slightly Agree
3	Accuracy in writing English sentences is hindered by my lack of grammatical knowledge in sentence structures.	4.40	1.12	Agree
4	Correct use of English tenses poses difficulties for me in writing sentences.	4.42	1.13	Agree
5	Connecting sentences cohesively is challenging for me.	4.42	1.11	Agree
6	Lack of confidence in using punctuation correctly	4.35	1.16	Agree

No.	Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
	hinders my ability to write English sentences confidently.			

The results from Table 1 indicate that students expressed two levels of agreement regarding problems in English communication skills: 'agree' and 'slightly agree'. To give a clear overview of their problems, the top two of the most problematic issues in each skill were presented as follow.

Figure 1

The top two of the most problematic issues in each skill of English communication



According to the student attitudes towards their problems in English communication skills, it can be summarized that students encountered the most difficulties with listening, particularly with understanding fast speakers. This finding aligns with several studies that have identified the speaking speed of speakers as a significant factor influencing students' listening comprehension problems (Rungsinanont, 2023; Adi et al., 2022; Hardiyanto et al., 2021). Writing ranked second, as students indicated they struggled with grammatical knowledge in English tenses and connecting sentences. They lacked confidence in their writing, particularly in applying English tenses in appropriate contexts, due to a lack of practice and repetition (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020). Students also acknowledged difficulties in speaking, especially in using grammar correctly. Danti et al., (2023) found similar issues, attributing them to deficiencies in vocabulary, comprehension, writing-focused instruction, and practice. Additionally, students considered reading to be the least problematic skill. However, students still expressed difficulties due to their lack of grammatical knowledge, particularly with English tenses. Understanding tenses is crucial for comprehending texts and improving proficiency with functional language (Mustangin & Mulyah, 2023). Overall, since students struggled the most with listening due to the speed of spoken English, educators could implement task-based listening activities, such as note-taking and gap-filling, to enhance active listening skills. Regarding writing and speaking, it is evident that students faced difficulties with grammar.

Consequently, educators could employ strategies such as explicit grammar instruction and grammar-focused activities to support their learning. These activities should explicitly target grammatical issues, such as tenses, providing students with opportunities to review their own errors, identify patterns of difficulty, and address them effectively. Although reading was the least problematic skill, students still encountered challenges related to grammar. To address this, educators could teach grammar rules through authentic reading materials, allowing students to observe how English tenses are applied in context. Thus, an integrated teaching approach would be beneficial in reinforcing students' grammatical competence across all language domains while incorporating active, student-centered learning methods.

Needs in English Communication Skills

Students were provided with a questionnaire covering the four English communication skills to ascertain their needs in this domain. The students rated their agreement with all statements on the questionnaire, and these ratings were interpreted as displayed in Table 2 below.

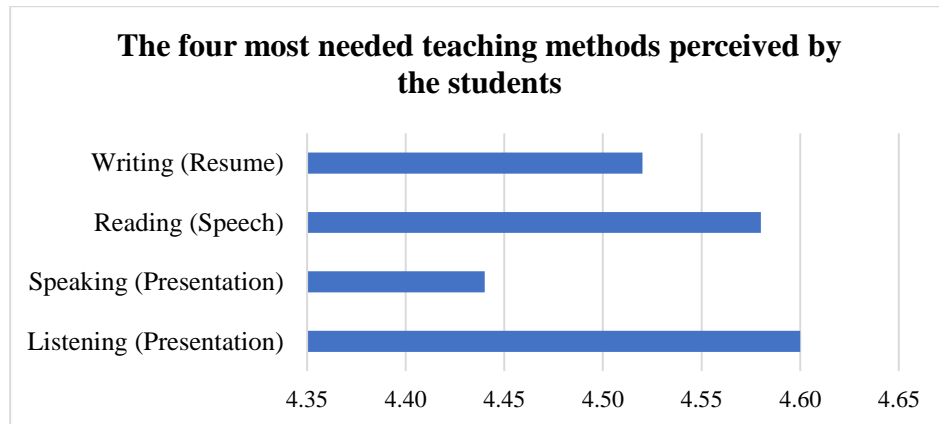
Table 2*The student attitudes towards their needs in English communication skills*

No.	Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
Listening				
1	Listening activities on 'talking about your job.'	4.50	1.01	Agree
2	Listening activities on 'exchanging contact details.'	4.38	1.14	Agree
3	Listening activities on 'describing products.'	4.42	1.07	Agree
4	Listening activities on 'describing a workplace.'	4.25	1.06	Slightly Agree
5	Listening activities on 'talking on the phone'.	4.46	1.03	Agree
6	Listening activities on 'giving a presentation.'	4.60	1.05	Agree
7	Listening activities on 'making appointments.'	4.46	0.99	Agree
8	Listening activities on 'giving advice and suggestions.'	4.42	1.07	Agree
Speaking				
1	Speaking activities on 'talking about your job.'	4.31	1.06	Slightly Agree
2	Speaking activities on 'exchanging contact details.'	4.23	1.06	Slightly Agree
3	Speaking activities on 'describing products.'	4.29	1.17	Slightly Agree
4	Speaking activities on 'describing a workplace.'	4.02	1.04	Slightly Agree
5	Speaking activities on 'talking on the phone'.	4.23	1.15	Slightly Agree
6	Speaking activities on 'giving a presentation.'	4.44	1.13	Agree
7	Speaking activities on 'making appointments.'	4.19	1.14	Slightly Agree
8	Speaking activities on 'giving advice and suggestions.'	4.23	1.15	Slightly Agree
Reading				
1	Reading activities on 'resume.'	4.44	1.09	Agree
2	Reading activities on 'emails.'	4.48	1.01	Agree
3	Reading activities on 'reports.'	4.44	1.03	Agree
4	Reading activities on 'business profile.'	4.31	1.15	Slightly Agree
5	Reading activities on 'cover letters.'	4.35	1.10	Agree
6	Reading activities on 'speech.'	4.58	1.05	Agree
7	Reading activities on 'agreements.'	4.44	1.03	Agree
8	Reading activities on 'advertisements.'	4.52	1.17	Agree
Writing				
1	Writing activities on 'resume.'	4.52	1.13	Agree
2	Writing activities on 'emails.'	4.38	1.10	Agree
3	Writing activities on 'reports.'	4.31	1.09	Slightly Agree
4	Writing activities on 'business profile.'	4.27	1.22	Slightly Agree
5	Writing activities on 'cover letters.'	4.25	1.18	Slightly Agree
6	Writing activities on 'speech.'	4.38	1.12	Agree
7	Writing activities on 'agreements.'	4.23	1.15	Slightly Agree
8	Writing activities on 'advertisements.'	4.31	1.09	Slightly Agree

The results from Table 2 demonstrate that the students 'agree' and 'slight agree' with statements regarding needs in English communication skills. For clearer insights into the results, the four most needed teaching materials perceived by the students can be illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

The four most needed teaching methods perceived by the students



Based on the findings, the students expressed a need to engage in various activities to enhance their English communication skills. Notably, the students showed a strong willingness to participate in ‘giving presentation’ activities for both speaking and listening practice. This aligns with Al-khresheh (2024), who found that EFL students improved their speaking skills after participating in presentation activities, demonstrated by better pronunciation, increased grammatical accuracy, improved fluency and enhanced self-confidence. Similarly, a study by Yuliani (2023) revealed that poster presentations significantly improved students’ listening abilities. Therefore, presentation-based activities could be effective teaching tools in EFL classrooms. Additionally, the students expressed interest in using speeches to practice reading. A study by Amin (2022) found that free text-to-speech applications facilitate oral repeated reading (RR) and listening while reading (LWR) activities, leading to improved reading fluency and comprehension. For writing, the students requested the use of resumes in classroom activities. Lina (2022) supported this approach, finding that using Google Docs to write job application letters and resumes helped students improve spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

To gain deeper insights into English communication skills, the students were asked to answer the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The results were divided into two main points and summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Student attitudes towards their performance in English communication skills

No.	Aspects	Results
1	Practical methods that students usually use to practice their English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening to music, podcasts Talking with foreigners Reading articles, books, stories and lyrics Writing emails Watching encyclopedias, cartoons, movies and series Learning online via social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok Memorizing words Playing games
2	Topics that students are interested in learning English to improve their English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business English in everyday life Job application Presentation Personal life (family, friends, and love) Professional English Sentence structures Tenses Travelling

Table 3 shows that students used various methods to practice their English communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In other words, when students wanted to practice listening skills, they usually listened to music and podcasts. They added that they gained a lot of vocabulary they hadn’t heard before. In the case of speaking, they preferred talking with foreigners as often as they could. The students expressed that the foreigners also taught them how to pronounce English words correctly. As for reading, the students explained that they usually read articles, books, stories, and lyrics that they were interested in to practice their skills. Additionally, the students mentioned that they practiced their writing skills by using emails. They also watched encyclopedias, cartoons, movies, and series with English subtitles to practice their communication skills. They have learned English and practiced their skills through social media platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, as well as by playing games. With these methods, the students could increase their vocabulary and try to memorize new words.

Regarding student interests in learning English, the students expressed that they would like to learn English on various topics about business, English in everyday life, job applications, tenses, sentence structures, presentations, personal life, professional English, and travelling. The students particularly emphasized the importance of using English in the workplace to support their future careers.

Teacher Perceptions towards EFL Students’ English communication skills

Five teachers were interviewed to assess the students’ performance in English communication skills. The results from the semi-structured interviews were collected and summarized overall below.

Table 4
Teacher perceptions of EFL students’ English communication skills

No.	Aspects	Results
1	Current English proficiency of EFL students	Low to high levels
2	Most problematic skills in English communication	Speaking, writing, and listening
3	Methods to facilitate improvement in problematic skills	<p>Speaking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Group discussion▪ Role-plays▪ Pronunciation drills▪ Interactive activities▪ Supportive & encouraging classroom environment▪ Giving advice▪ Giving responses in English <p>Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Review of grammar basics and sentence construction▪ Practice writing skills▪ Feedback and comments from teachers <p>Listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Listening practice with audio scripts▪ Reflecting on students’ understanding
4	Best ways to improve EFL students’ English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Consistent practice▪ Exposure to the language in various contexts▪ Receiving personalized feedback▪ Encouraging students to engage in regular English conversations▪ Intensive skill practice▪ Using authentic materials▪ Changing students’ mindsets▪ Encouraging students to respond in English.

From above table, the results show that the English teachers observed a wide range of proficiency levels among EFL students, from low to high. While some students excelled in certain skills, such as speaking, others struggled with basics like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. This observation is

supported by the study of Jaya, Petrus and Pitaloka (2022), which revealed that the university students had speaking problems related to fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Moreover, the teachers identified speaking, writing, and listening as the most problematic skills. Many students lacked confidence in speaking due to a fear of making mistakes, similar to Yuh and Kaewurai's (2021) findings on Thai students. They struggled with pronunciation, fluency, and word choice, often feeling shy or hesitant. In writing, difficulties stemmed from issues with English tenses, grammar, and insufficient vocabulary. Listia and Febriyanti (2020) highlighted that English tenses affected both speaking and writing performance. Chuenchaichon (2022) further noted that students struggled with grammar and vocabulary in writing tasks. Listening comprehension also varied by proficiency level. Students struggled with fast speed, unfamiliar words, and different accents (Adi et al., 2022; Hardiyanto et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers encouraged students to practice logical thinking after listening. However, reliance on technology was seen as a barrier to developing critical thinking when students were asked to reflect on their comprehension.

However, the teachers used various teaching methods to help students improve their problematic skills. For speaking, they implemented activities such as group discussions, role-plays, pronunciation drills, and interactive exercises. These methods have been widely recommended for enhancing speaking skills (Hanh & Duc, 2022; Henisah et al., 2023). Teachers also created a supportive and encouraging classroom environment to boost students' confidence and provided advice to ensure they felt supported. Additionally, students were encouraged to respond to teachers in English. If mistakes were made, corrections were provided at the end of the class to aid understanding, as oral corrective feedback has been shown to effectively improve speaking skills (AbdAlgene, 2023; Gamlo, 2019). In writing, teachers focused on grammar basics and sentence construction. Students were given opportunities to practice, and feedback played a key role in their improvement, as supported by Hopper and Bowen (2023), who found that the teacher feedback positively influenced students' writing performance. For listening, teachers considered relevant topics and assigned listening practice with audio scripts, followed by reflections on understanding. With the constant development of technology, teaching tools such as audio files and podcasts have become valuable resources for practicing and developing listening comprehension (Abebe et al., 2022; Ayatfard, 2022).

In the teachers' opinions, the best way to improve EFL students' English communication skills varied. They emphasized the importance of consistent practice, exposure to the language in various contexts, and receiving personalized feedback. They also suggested encouraging students to engage in regular English conversations, both in and outside the classroom. This would greatly contribute to the development of fluency and confidence. Frequent practice of English communication skills was seen as crucial for helping students become more proficient and confident speakers, as supported by the study of Tipmontree and Tasanameelaep (2020). The use of authentic materials in teaching was considered the best way to enhance English proficiency. Using real objects to connect English words with meanings, contexts, and situations helps reinforce the students' skills continuously. This approach aligns with the findings of Treve (2023), which revealed that authentic materials could improve overall language proficiency, including vocabulary development, listening, reading comprehension, and writing abilities. Additionally, teachers believed students' mindset about "not having good English communication after years of study" should be changed. Instead, students should be encouraged to respond to teachers in English to improve their communication skills. For hesitant students, teachers could ask questions in English and provide Thai explanations for clarity. It is the duty of educators to employ various methods and approaches to motivate and involve students in language learning and development (Morales & Vaca-Cárdenas, 2023).

Limitations

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into students' difficulties and needs in English communication skills, as well as teachers' perspectives on students' proficiency. However, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by students' perceptions rather than objective assessments of their actual proficiency or learning needs. Second, the study relies solely on teachers' perceptions, which may introduce bias. While teachers offer valuable insights based on classroom observations and assessments, their perspectives may not fully capture students' actual experiences, challenges, or progress.

Conclusion

The present study examined the problems and needs related to English communication skills among EFL students and explored teachers' perceptions of their abilities. Comparing these skills, the results showed that students faced the most difficulties with listening, followed by writing, speaking, and reading. Specifically, students struggled to understand fast-speaking English speakers. During writing activities, students lacked confidence due to grammar weaknesses, especially with English tenses. This also made it harder for them to connect sentences cohesively. While some students exhibited good speaking abilities, many struggled with applying grammar correctly in speech, possibly due to a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. Grammar issues with tenses also affected their reading comprehension, though reading was the least problematic skill.

Regarding students' needs in English communication skills, the study found that students required various activities to strengthen their abilities, such as presentations for speaking and listening, speeches for reading, and resumes for writing. Using teaching materials that match students' interests should be considered to support their language learning effectively. This study also found that students became autonomous learners by practicing outside the classroom. For example, they listened to English songs, conversed with foreigners, read books, and wrote emails. These habits helped them improve their communication skills naturally. Social media also played a significant role in their learning as it provided easy access to useful information that benefited their language development.

According to teachers' perceptions of students' English communication skills, the study found that EFL students' English proficiency levels varied from low to high. However, teachers identified speaking as the most problematic skill, followed by writing and listening. Speaking problems were mostly attributed to lack of confidence, shyness, fear of making mistakes, incorrect pronunciation, and unfamiliar vocabulary. In writing, students still struggled with grammatical knowledge of tenses, making it difficult for them to construct meaningful sentences. For listening, students experienced comprehension issues, such as the speed of speakers, unfamiliar vocabulary, and various accents. These findings were consistent with students' opinions about listening problems. To address these issues, teachers emphasized the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment and using authentic materials for enhancing students' language learning and development. They recommended strategies such as regular conversation practice, personalized feedback, encouragement, and the integration of authentic materials into teaching. However, since the findings on needs, challenges, and other aspects of English communication skills were based on a survey of a limited group of students and teachers, further studies should explore additional teaching methods or interventions to address the identified problem areas, such as the use of technology to enhance English communication skills. Strengthening these skills is essential for students' future careers, as effective communication in English can expand their professional opportunities, improve workplace interactions, and increase their competitiveness in the global job market.

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