



The Language Barrier of Thai Students at Rangsit University International College: Communication Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

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Abstract

This study delves into the language barriers encountered by Thai students enrolled at Rangsit University International College and explores communication strategies employed to overcome these challenges. The research investigates the impact of language barriers on the academic and social experiences of 10 Thai students within the international college setting. It also examines the effectiveness of various communication strategies utilized by these students to navigate linguistic challenges and engage effectively in academic and social interactions. The study analyzes the communication strategies employed by students, including language acquisition techniques and cultural adaptation approaches. The findings highlight the significance of communication strategies in mitigating the effects of language barriers and enhancing students' academic performance and social integration. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of language barriers faced by Thai students in an international college context and provides practical recommendations to support students in overcoming these challenges. This study has several limitations. The small sample size of 10 students may not be representative of the entire population of Thai students at Rangsit University International College. Incorporating a mixed-methodology approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, would strengthen the findings and provide a more robust understanding of the issues. By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative measures, future research could capture a more comprehensive picture of the language barriers and communication strategies, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of the results.

Keywords: *Language Barrier, Communication Strategies, Thai Students, Rangsit University International College*

1. Introduction

Rangsit University in Thailand is increasingly becoming a popular destination for international students worldwide. Data from 2020-2021 shows a steady increase in student enrollment, with 14,752 students in 2020 and 15,889 in 2021 (Library RSU, 2023). A 2018 survey revealed that the largest group of international students at Rangsit University were from Myanmar (51.8%), followed by Bhutan (19.9%), China (13.5%), and smaller percentages from Japan, Taiwan, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Sweden, Cameroon, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia (Yumei, Sriphaew, & Tsang, 2018).

Rangsit University, a private higher education institution, focuses on developing students into well-rounded individuals capable of meeting national development needs. The university emphasizes science, technology, design, and management, aiming to equip students with skills necessary for professional and personal growth within societal, economic, environmental, and cultural contexts (Rangsit University Bulletin 2022-2023, 2022).

The international curriculum at Rangsit University is designed to meet global standards, providing students with opportunities to enhance their English language proficiency and other essential skills needed for higher education or careers in international organizations (Dreamstudy, 2024). This curriculum prioritizes communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and preparation for various organizational roles. Additionally, it includes student exchange programs that foster cultural experiences and diverse learning perspectives (Rangsit University International College, 2018). As of the academic year 2023, 2,200 students were enrolled in these international programs

Language proficiency is critical for academic success and social integration in a new country. It involves not just speaking a language but also comprehending, reading, and understanding cultural nuances, which are vital for effective communication and critical thinking (Langster, 2024). Studies have shown a strong correlation between language proficiency, as measured by TOEFL scores, and academic performance (GPA), indicating that higher language proficiency often leads to better academic outcomes (Dragojevic, Gasiorek & Giles, 2015). Furthermore, language proficiency is essential for social and cultural integration,

facilitating meaningful interactions, building relationships, and understanding social norms and values (Tahmina Zamal, 2020; Dabrinze, 2022).

Despite the importance of language proficiency, many Thai students at Rangsit University International College face significant language barriers. Informal interviews and questionnaires revealed that these students struggle with understanding accents, pronouncing English words, and feeling confident in using English, which hampers their classroom participation and social interactions. These challenges lead to misunderstandings, mistakes in group work, and feelings of isolation, as students tend to form social circles with peers from the same linguistic background (Bukhari, 2011).

The stress and anxiety resulting from these language barriers highlight the need for strategies to support Thai students at Rangsit University International College. Addressing these issues aligns with the university's mission to provide high-quality education and to ensure that students develop the necessary academic and professional skills (Dreamstudy, 2024). Understanding and overcoming these language barriers will enhance inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and effective communication, ultimately benefiting future generations of students and promoting their academic and social success.

2. Objectives

In this study, there are two strong and clear objectives that can contribute to a better understanding of The Language Barrier of Thai Students at Rangsit University International College: Communication Strategies for Overcoming Challenges.

- 1) To identify the language barriers of Thai students at Rangsit University International College.
- 2) To identify the communication strategies employed to overcome challenges.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs qualitative research methods to explore the language barriers faced by Thai students at Rangsit University International College and the communication strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The sample consists of 10 Thai students from various years (1st to 4th year) enrolled in international programs at the university. These participants were selected based on their experiences with language barriers and their suitability and reliability for providing insightful data.

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews conducted in Thai via online platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, though the exact duration varied depending on the depth of the participant's experiences and information shared. During the interviews, audio recordings were made with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and translated into English for subsequent analysis.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed qualitatively. This process involved interpreting the data to draw conclusions about the language barriers faced by Thai students and the communication strategies they employ. The analysis aimed to identify common themes and patterns that could inform effective interventions.

The selection of interviewees was a critical component of this research. The methodology involved conducting online interviews in Thai to facilitate ease of communication and ensure the target number of participants could be achieved efficiently. This approach was chosen to accommodate the participants' comfort with the language, thereby ensuring more reliable and comprehensive data collection.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

The study on language barriers experienced by Thai students at Rangsit University International College and the communication strategies they employ to overcome these challenges yields significant findings and practical recommendations. This research compiles in-depth data from interviews with students, shedding light on the pervasive language obstacles they encounter and the strategies they adopt to navigate these challenges.

Objective 1: To identify language barriers of Thai students at Rangsit University International College from interviews about language barriers, abilities, challenges, feelings, cultural factors and environments in international colleges.

Language barriers among Thai students are particularly pronounced in their first year, affecting their proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These barriers hinder their ability to engage with the

international curriculum, participate in social interactions, and join extracurricular activities. The initial lack of confidence stemming from these language limitations impacts their overall university experience and their ability to learn from international peers. Addressing these challenges requires targeted support to enhance English language skills, foster a supportive environment, and encourage cross-cultural interactions.

Cultural factors further intensify these barriers, making it difficult for Thai students to adapt to different cultural contexts and communication styles. The respect and assertiveness ingrained in Thai culture often make students hesitant to seek help, leading to a tendency to cluster with other Thai students, exacerbating language barriers and affecting confidence.

Cultural sensitivity and adaptability in communication styles are essential for effective interactions with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This involves using simple language, active listening, appropriate gestures, and respecting cultural norms. Such strategies help bridge language gaps, foster good relationships, and prevent division within the international college community.

Objective 2: To identify communication strategies used to overcome challenges by interviewing strategies, language skills development support, personal success strategies, communication style adjustments, and cultural sensitivity.

To bridge the language and cultural gaps, Thai students often resort to various communication strategies. These include personal initiatives, such as being open to learning, striving for self-improvement, and setting specific goals to overcome communication challenges. Creating an environment that promotes the use of English and embraces language learning opportunities is crucial in developing these skills and building confidence. Effective communication strategies encompass detailed planning, utilizing verbal and non-verbal techniques, and adapting to different communication environments. Tools like active listening, translation aids, and peer interactions from diverse linguistic backgrounds are instrumental in this process.

The study's participants, ranging from first-year to fourth-year students, provide valuable insights into their experiences and the evolution of their communication strategies over time. First-year students typically face significant language barriers that affect their academic and social integration, while more advanced students have developed personal techniques to bridge these gaps. The second and third-year students emphasize the importance of adapting and using individual strategies to overcome academic and social challenges. Fourth-year students highlight the success of their communication strategies in navigating extracurricular and academic activities, demonstrating how they have managed to cope with cultural differences and language barriers effectively.

Analyzing the interview data reveals that language proficiency is crucial for academic performance and social interactions. Proficiency helps students understand academic content, communicate effectively with peers and instructors, and participate in group activities. Conversely, a lack of language skills can hinder understanding, reduce participation in classroom discussions, and limit social engagement, affecting the development of essential social and leadership skills. Thai students must often use translation tools and seek help from more proficient peers to navigate course content and communication challenges.

Effective communication strategies among Thai students include careful planning, clear verbal and non-verbal communication, and active listening. Utilizing language development support services provided by the international college significantly improves their language skills, confidence, and willingness to engage in the international community. Successful personal techniques involve embracing different language perspectives, continuous practice, and setting goals for improvement.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that Thai students face language barriers in academic communication, participation in activities, and cultural integration during their first year of study in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. This clearly points out the language obstacles they must deal with and the challenges they must overcome. This results in Thai students at international colleges having to adapt and understand the language barriers they face, which aligns with Lutfiana, Tono, & Mahmuda (2020) research indicating that limitations in English language communication lead to learning difficulties. Additionally, it impacts factors in social and cultural development due to differing backgrounds. Different backgrounds lead to difficulties in communication due to the use of accents, idioms, and specialized vocabulary that pose obstacles in English language communication (Sim, 2022).

Language barriers are a crucial factor affecting Thai students' confidence and communication skills in international colleges due to language differences. Thai students often feel unsure and lack confidence in expressing themselves, which aligns with Ali's (2020) study on facing language barriers, stating that

uncertainty and lack of confidence lead to problems in interacting and meeting new people. Students tend to group with those of the same nationality, resulting in English language skills not developing as they should.

Language differences are the main problem that leads to a decrease in Thai students' confidence and communication skills in international colleges. Students tend to choose to interact with peers of the same nationality, which results in their English language skills not developing. The study by Ali, Yoenanto & Nurdibyanandaru (2020) highlights the need to support and create an environment that helps students feel confident and brave in communicating in English. Collaborating with institutions to help students overcome language barriers and reduce language obstacles for students with different language backgrounds is essential (Ralarala, Pineteh, & Mchiza, 2023).

The study of experiences related to language barriers found that Thai students in international colleges discover and adapt themselves to be prepared to cope with communication by using personal strategies to survive and readiness strategies, such as verbal and non-verbal strategies. Preparing by observing and analyzing situations before facing them. The strategies used by Thai students in international colleges are consistent with the literature of (Braga, 2014), which mentioned her experiences that readiness and attentive listening are crucial in receiving new information. If not understood, there must be courage to ask for explanations and continuously learn new vocabulary. She concluded by saying, "Don't let challenges disappoint you, and always keep a record of your small successes.

Facing language barriers in the context of education and a diverse linguistic and cultural environment in international colleges is a common experience for Thai students from their first to fourth year. Analyzing this issue using Communication Accommodation Theory, the Sociocultural Theory of Language, and the concepts of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism helps us understand and effectively address the problem. The Communication Accommodation Theory explains that Thai students' adaptation in communication reduces misunderstandings and fosters better comprehension. The Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that language is closely linked to culture and social context; accepting and exchanging cultures among students in international colleges helps mitigate language barriers and promotes collaboration. The concepts of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism encourage learning and using multiple languages in communication and work. This helps reduce language barriers and enhances creativity and problem-solving within the international college at Rangsit University.

In summary, the key aspects of studying language barriers for Thai students in international faculties regarding how to cope with these challenges are as follows: Language barriers impact feelings in English language communication, learning, interactions with people in the university, and participation in extracurricular activities, as well as cultural differences. This requires Thai students in international faculties to understand the situations and language barriers, leading them to explore personal tactics and strategies to navigate these challenges effectively.

5. Conclusion

Language barriers significantly influence Thai students' academic and social experiences at Rangsit University International College. These students often face difficulties in understanding lectures, participating in class discussions, and engaging in social activities due to limited proficiency in the English language. These challenges necessitate the development of survival strategies and effective communication tactics. Continuous language skill development, guided by Communication Accommodation Theory, is crucial. This theory emphasizes the importance of adapting one's speech to facilitate understanding, which can help Thai students adjust their communication styles to better interact with peers and instructors. The Sociocultural Theory of Language, which highlights the role of social interaction in learning, also plays a vital role. This theory suggests that through meaningful interactions with native speakers and other proficient peers, Thai students can improve their language skills, achieve academic success, and fully integrate into the university's international environment. Additionally, embracing Multilingualism and Plurilingualism, which recognize the value of multiple languages and the ability to switch between them, is essential. This approach encourages Thai students to use their native language alongside English, promoting a more inclusive environment where they can express themselves more comfortably. These strategies promote language learning and cross-cultural understanding, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students by fostering a more supportive and inclusive academic community.

6. Suggestions for future research

The language barrier faced by Thai students at Rangsit University International College should adopt both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups with students, faculty, and staff, can uncover personal experiences, perceptions, and the specific challenges faced in communication. These insights can inform the development of targeted strategies and interventions. Meanwhile, quantitative approaches, including surveys and statistical analysis, can quantify the prevalence and severity of language barriers, evaluate the effectiveness of different communication strategies, and identify any correlations between language proficiency and academic performance. Combining these methods will offer a holistic view, allowing researchers to develop evidence-based recommendations for improving language support services and enhancing the overall academic experience for Thai students.

6.1 Conduct longitudinal studies to track the progress of Thai students over multiple academic years. This will provide insights into how language proficiency and communication strategies evolve over time. By observing students from their first year through to graduation, researchers can identify critical periods of language acquisition and the effectiveness of various communication strategies. Such studies can also reveal the long-term impact of early interventions, the role of continuous language support, and the development of students' confidence and academic performance. Additionally, longitudinal research can highlight changes in students' social integration, participation in extracurricular activities, and their ability to navigate cultural differences (Srinon, 2011).

6.2 Study the experiences of Thai students in various cultural contexts, such as different countries or international programs, to understand how cultural differences influence language barriers and communication strategies. By comparing the challenges and adaptations of Thai students in diverse international settings, researchers can identify unique cultural factors that either mitigate or exacerbate language barriers. This approach allows for examining how host country cultures, educational systems, and social norms impact Thai students' language acquisition and confidence (Jhaiyanuntana, & Nomnian, 2020).

6.3 Study the psychological and emotional aspects of language barriers, such as anxiety, stress, and self-confidence, and how these factors affect language learning and communication. Investigating the emotional experiences of Thai students can reveal the extent to which language anxiety and stress impact their academic performance and social interactions. Understanding the sources of these emotional challenges, such as fear of making mistakes or negative past experiences, can help develop targeted emotional support programs (Mao, 2022).

6.4 Collect and analyze Thai students' personal narratives and case studies to gain a deeper understanding of their individual experiences and challenges with language barriers. This approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of how students navigate their linguistic and cultural environments. By delving into personal stories, researchers can uncover specific incidents that highlight the struggles and successes of students, providing rich, contextualized insights that quantitative data alone cannot offer (Tantiwich, & Sinwongsawat, 2021).

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