

English Listening and Speaking Problems Among Shan Students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College Based On Linguistic Approach

Venvayama¹, Sakchai Posai², Narogchai Pintrymool² and Phardhammadavachirodom⁴

Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, Email: ¹vayama23@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article aimed to 1) identify English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach. 2) analyze English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach. 3) find ways to solve the problems for improving English listening and speaking among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach. The study used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research. The sample population consists of 37 fourth-year Shan students enrolled in the English program at Mahapajapati Buddhist College, located in Pak Thong Chai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD). Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis.

The findings showed that most respondents were between 22–24 years old (41.6%), followed by 19–21 years old (40%) and those 25 and above (18.4%). Regarding English learning experience, the largest group had studied for 2–5 years (42.3%), followed by those with 5–7 years (31.4%), and over 8 years (28.6%). As for English usage, 42.9% spoke English daily, 28.8% practiced three times per week, and 28.3% only once per week.

Keywords: Listening and Speaking; Problem; Linguistic Approach; Mahapajapati Buddhist College; Shan Students

Introduction

English has become a vital global language, widely used for international communication, education, trade, diplomacy, and technology. In today's interconnected world, proficiency in English is essential for academic and professional success. Among the four fundamental language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening and speaking are considered the most interactive and practical for real-life communication. However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially those in non-English-speaking environments, developing effective listening and speaking abilities remains a major challenge. This difficulty is particularly evident among Shan students studying at Mahapajapati Buddhist College in Thailand.

The Shan ethnic group, whose primary language is Shan, often learns English as a third language, after Shan and Thai. This linguistic background can lead to unique difficulties in acquiring English listening and speaking skills. These problems may stem from phonetic differences, lack of exposure, limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, or a fear of making mistakes. Moreover, many students have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, which results in minimal language reinforcement and real-time practice. Understanding these obstacles is essential to improving English instruction and helping students become more confident and competent in communication.

At Mahapajapati Buddhist College, English is part of the academic curriculum for Shan students, many of whom are Buddhist nuns and females with limited resources and time to engage in immersive language learning. Despite their interest in learning English, they often face issues related to pronunciation, comprehension of native and non-native accents, grammatical usage, and fluency in spoken interaction. These challenges highlight the need to investigate their language learning difficulties through a linguistic lens, which emphasizes the role of phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, and sociolinguistic competence.

A linguistic approach allows researchers and educators to analyze how sound systems, stress patterns, intonation, and grammatical structures affect listening and speaking skills. For instance, the inability to distinguish between voiced and voiceless consonants (e.g., /b/ vs. /p/) or to recognize reduced speech forms (e.g., “gonna” for “going to”) can severely hinder comprehension. Similarly, limited awareness of intonation and rhythm in spoken English may cause students to misinterpret meaning or fail to convey appropriate expressions in conversation.

Therefore, this research is designed to explore the listening and speaking problems faced by Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College, using a linguistic approach as the analytical framework. The study has three main objectives: (1) to identify specific listening and speaking problems experienced by the students, (2) to analyze these problems in terms of linguistic features, and (3) to propose practical solutions for improving students' proficiency in English communication.

The research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Surveys and structured interviews will be conducted with 4th-year Shan students to gather data on their language background, challenges in listening and speaking, and strategies they use for improvement. By incorporating both numerical data and personal insights, the study aims to paint a clearer picture of the students' linguistic struggles and offer actionable recommendations for teaching practices and self-learning techniques.

In summary, this study is crucial not only for the academic development of Shan students but also for the enhancement of EFL teaching methodologies in multicultural, multilingual settings. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how linguistic features impact English learning and help bridge the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical communication skills.



Objectives

1. To identify English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach.
2. To analyze English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach.
3. To find ways to solve the problems for improving English listening and speaking among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on linguistic approach.

Research methodology

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research designs. Data collection was primarily conducted through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Therefore, the focus of this study is to investigate English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College based on a linguistic approach.

Research Design

This mixed quantitative and qualitative study aims to study “English Listening and Speaking Problems among Shan Students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College Based on Linguistic Approach.”

Quantitative data was used to provide the respondents’ opinions about the listening and speaking problems. The information obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed by mean and standard deviation (SD) and then interpreted.

Qualitative data was used to determine the improvement of respondents’ opinions on listening and speaking ability by providing them with topics to speak about, interviews, and discussions.

Percentages, average mean, and standard deviation were employed to provide the level and extent of studying English listening and speaking skills, problems, and solutions of fourth-year Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College.” Therefore, research design was the most important of data collection.

Respondents

The respondents of this study consist of 37 fourth-year Shan students from Shan State, Myanmar, who are enrolled in the English program at Mahapajapati Buddhist College during the 2023–2024 academic year.

Key informants

Three key English lecturers from Mahapajapati Buddhist College were selected as informants for in-depth interviews as part of the qualitative research component of this study.

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement. An instrument is considered reliable when it produces similar results under consistent conditions (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1999). In other words, if the same test is administered to the same subject multiple times, the results should remain relatively stable. This study aims to ensure high reliability, allowing the

data to be collected and interpreted with minimal measurement error and greater confidence in the findings.

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). For the results to be meaningful and applicable, the instrument must be valid. As Richards, Platt, and Platt (1999) note, a valid instrument ensures that the outcomes of the research reflect the true characteristics or constructs being examined. In essence, validity confirms the accuracy and truthfulness of the research. Researchers typically assess validity by asking key questions about the instrument's purpose and comparing results with findings from previous studies.

Primary data

Primary data was collected from the target group of the previous research study, consisting of 37 fourth-year Shan students, by answering the questionnaires. The researcher made up the questions, suggestions, and opinions about the problems of English listening and speaking, and the ways to improve the problems of English listening and speaking skills.

Secondary data

Secondary data were collected from documentary surveys, including academic books, theses, and journals, which were used to support the information in this study. The documentary survey is provided as guidelines to amplify the research.

Analysis of data from the questionnaires

1. To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, statistical.
2. The results from questionnaires of the students' background information, such as gender, age, and grade, will be calculated by frequency and percentage.
3. The students' opinions on the problems of English listening and speaking will be analyzed by using arithmetic means (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (SD).

Analysis of data from the in-depth interview

The In-depth interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview. All data obtained from the interviewees were noted from voice recorder and analyzed the data by using the three competencies, which were identified by Henderson (1995) as follows: organize disparate information into categories, analyze the key points that support decision-making, and detach self from the finding and report negative findings data for decision-making.

Results

The findings of this study on English Listening and Speaking Problems among Shan Students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College Based on a Linguistic Approach revealed that the overall problems in both listening and speaking skills were at a minor level.

For listening skills, students demonstrated some ability to infer meanings through phonetic cues, recognize stress and intonation, and understand speech from native English-speaking teachers due to their clear pronunciation. However, minor difficulties were found in



understanding idiomatic expressions, unfamiliar accents, and connected speech. The overall mean score for listening skill problems was $\bar{x} = 3.53$, indicating a minor level of difficulty.

Regarding speaking skills, the results showed that the overall problems related to grammatical proficiency were also at a minor level ($\bar{x} = 3.53$). Students showed moderate difficulty in pronouncing specific consonant sounds such as /s/ and /ʃ/, and in using correct verb tenses, while maintaining good performance in sentence structure and subject-verb agreement.

In terms of discourse proficiency, students could generally organize their speech coherently and use linking words appropriately, with an overall mean score of $\bar{x} = 3.64$ (minor level). They were able to construct meaningful sentences, use common expressions, and maintain fluency through fillers and discourse markers.

For sociolinguistic competence, the findings indicated that students were aware of cultural norms, used polite expressions, and demonstrated appropriate paralinguistic behaviors such as smiling and intonation during communication. However, some still faced minor issues with pronouncing final sounds, which occasionally caused misunderstandings. The overall mean score for sociolinguistic competence was $\bar{x} = 3.64$, also at a minor level.

In summary, the study concluded that Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College possess a basic command of English listening and speaking skills but continue to experience minor linguistic challenges, particularly in pronunciation, idiomatic comprehension, and accent variation. These difficulties are primarily phonological in nature and linked to the students' limited exposure to authentic English input. Despite these issues, their overall linguistic competence suggests steady progress in mastering English communication within an academic setting.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that English listening and speaking problems among Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College were overall at a minor level. This finding suggests that the students possess a basic level of communicative competence in English, particularly in academic contexts. The relatively low level of difficulty may be attributed to systematic exposure to English instruction and the presence of teachers with clear pronunciation, which supports learners' phonological perception and comprehension. This result is consistent with Brown (1990), who emphasizes that exposure to comprehensible input plays a crucial role in developing listening proficiency in second language learners.

In terms of listening skills, the students demonstrated the ability to infer meaning through phonetic cues, stress, and intonation, indicating a developing awareness of suprasegmental features. According to Cruttenden (2014) and Roach (2009), stress and intonation are essential components of intelligibility in spoken English, and learners who can recognize these features tend to experience fewer comprehension problems. However, minor difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions, unfamiliar accents, and connected speech were identified. These findings align with Bolinger (1986), who argues that natural spoken English often involves reduced forms

and intonational variation, which can pose challenges for learners with limited exposure to authentic input.

Regarding speaking skills, the study found that grammatical proficiency problems were at a minor level. Students generally maintained correct sentence structures and subject-verb agreement, suggesting a solid foundation in syntactic knowledge. This supports the view of Odden (2005), who notes that grammatical competence often develops earlier than phonological accuracy in second language acquisition. Nevertheless, moderate difficulties in pronouncing consonant sounds such as /s/ and /ʃ/ reflect persistent phonological interference, which may be influenced by the learners' first language sound system. Similar findings have been reported by Ladefoged and Johnson (2015), who explain that unfamiliar consonantal contrasts often remain problematic for learners from different linguistic backgrounds.

In terms of discourse proficiency, the students demonstrated the ability to organize speech coherently and use linking words appropriately, with overall problems remaining at a minor level. This indicates that learners are able to manage extended speech and maintain fluency through the use of discourse markers and fillers. According to Selkirk (1982), discourse organization and rhythmic patterns contribute to fluency and comprehensibility, even when minor pronunciation errors are present. The ability to construct meaningful utterances suggests that the students are progressing beyond word-level production toward functional communication.

With regard to sociolinguistic competence, the findings revealed that students were aware of cultural norms and used polite expressions and appropriate paralinguistic features during communication. This result supports Brown's (1990) assertion that sociolinguistic awareness is an integral component of communicative competence. However, minor problems with final sound pronunciation occasionally caused misunderstandings, which may affect pragmatic interpretation. This observation is consistent with Roach (2009), who highlights the importance of final consonants in conveying grammatical and pragmatic meaning in English.

Overall, the findings suggest that Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College are developing effective English listening and speaking skills, with only minor phonological and pragmatic challenges remaining. These difficulties appear to stem primarily from limited exposure to diverse English accents and authentic communicative contexts rather than from deficiencies in grammatical or discourse competence. The results imply that increased exposure to natural spoken English, including varied accents and idiomatic usage, may further enhance students' communicative proficiency and reduce remaining linguistic difficulties.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that English instruction for Shan students at Mahapajapati Buddhist College place greater emphasis on pronunciation practice, particularly final sounds, consonant contrasts, and connected speech. Teachers should incorporate more authentic listening materials, such as varied English accents and natural conversations, to enhance



students' exposure to real-life language use. In addition, communicative activities that integrate listening and speaking tasks should be regularly implemented to strengthen students' confidence and fluency. Future studies may expand the sample size or explore instructional interventions based on a linguistic approach to further improve learners' communicative competence.

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