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The Use of English Communication Strategies by Thai EFL Interns

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Abstract. This study focused on exploring English communication strategies used by 196 fourth-year Thai English as a Foreign Language students, comparing the types of English communication strategies used by the students of several majors within the same internship program. The study employed a mixed methods design. The findings reveal that, overall, the students moderately used communication strategies. Non-verbal strategies were employed the most, followed by appeals for assistance, and time-gaining strategies. Students from three majors, including English, hospitality management, and tourism similarly rated the non-verbal strategies as the most frequently used. In their view, these non-verbal strategies could provide hints to the interlocutor and also help to express their mood. While the students majoring in English and tourism rated appeal for assistance strategies as the second most frequently used, the students majoring in hotel management rated time-gaining strategies as the second most frequently used. The students from three majors similarly rated avoidance strategies as the least frequently used. They did not view such strategies to help maintain a professional conversation. In addition, overall, there were no significant differences among the means of English communication strategies used by students of different majors within the internship program ($F(2,193) = .856, P = .425$). However, when focusing on sub-types of communication strategies, the results showed that the English majors used significantly more circumlocution, approximation, and requests for clarification while using less foreignizing on average than students from both the hotel management and tourism majors. This is possibly related to their different levels of English proficiency.

Keywords: communication strategies; internship program; Thai English as a Foreign Language students

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) graduates must be able to communicate effectively in English while possessing the requisite knowledge and competencies

required by the current job market (Idrus, 2016; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014). The demand for graduates with communicative competence in English tends to be intense due to the competitiveness of both regional and global industries. This is particularly true for Thai EFL graduates who need to compete with other graduates from countries in the ASEAN labor market (Chairat, 2017). Employees who are competent in English can add value and benefit to their company since they are able to convey thoughts and ideas in addition to being able to navigate between cultures effectively (Musa et al., 2023a; Sapungan et al., 2018). As a result, many companies desire to recruit large numbers of new employees with good communication skills (Suarta et al., 2017). It is therefore important for university students to possess these skills so they might enter their future careers ready to deal with workplace challenges (Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018; Musa et al., 2023a).

Meanwhile, internships benefit students as they provide opportunities to learn while gaining valuable, real work experience outside the classroom. They also help equip students with soft skills and technical skills needed in the job market (Musa et al., 2023; Musa et al., 2023b). Internships have been recognized for not only playing an important role in personal and professional development (Tran & Trang, 2020) but also in increasing interns' communication skills (Ahanchian et al., 2017; Tran & Trang, 2020).

A tertiary education is expected to prepare students with knowledge and skills, including oral communication skills needed in the workplace (Heang et al., 2019). Internships are therefore regarded as a valuable component of the curriculum at the tertiary level (Tran & Trang, 2020) that connects students with the real workplace (Heang et al., 2019). This is true in Thailand, where internships and cooperative education programs have been established within many curricula to enhance graduates' English communication and work skills by allowing them to have genuine workplace experience (Chairat, 2017).

Previous research (e.g., Ananta et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2023a) found that tertiary-level students have difficulty with English communication during internships. Heang et al. (2019), for example, revealed that student-reported problems during their internships included a lack of technical knowledge and poor English communication skills. Their lack of knowledge regarding grammar rules and vocabulary are prohibitive when it comes to their ability to communicate ideas (Panggabean & Wardhono, 2017). However, by introducing students to communication strategies, they can begin to cope with their communication difficulties (Chairat, 2017). This, in turn, promotes more successful communication which leads to positive communicative outcomes (Panggabean & Wardhono, 2017). Therefore, focusing on communication strategies is vital in order to help students overcome their oral communicative challenges and convey their ideas more effectively.

However, there are few studies in the Thai EFL context focusing on investigating communication strategies used by undergraduate students during their internships. This is especially true for the study of communication strategies used

among students from different majors (Bootprom, 2017). Teachers' limited awareness of how students use communication strategies during their internship impacts the students' challenges in real-life communication. The students themselves are unable to accomplish their communicative goals due to their lack of knowledge about effective communication strategies.

Therefore, this study explored the communication strategies used by Thai EFL interns to address the gap in the literature on how Thai EFL undergraduates from different majors use communication strategies, particularly in the internship context. It explored whether there were statistically significant differences in the types of strategies employed by students from different majors. This study provides useful data for teachers who emphasize teaching communication strategies in the classroom to suit students from different majors. This equips students with the tools they need to deal with communication challenges in their future workplaces and daily life. Moreover, educators can use the data to redesign their curricula to meet workplace demands.

2. Research Questions

1. What are the English communication strategies used by the fourth-year Thai undergraduate students in their internship program?
2. What are the types of English communication strategies used by the fourth-year Thai undergraduate students of different majors in their internship programs?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences between the English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students of different majors during their internship programs?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Communicative competence and English communication strategies

Due to both global and regional economic competition, English has become an important communication medium. In the era of the ASEAN economic community, students emerging from their respective EFL learning contexts will be competing with graduates from other countries. Internships and cooperative education serve to prepare Thai students with employment and communicative skills. Moreover, they provide opportunities to gain valuable real work experience and thus are part of the academic curricula at many universities in Thailand (Chairat, 2017). Meanwhile, it is worth noting that a lack of communicative competence can disadvantage students, including decreasing their confidence and motivation to engage in longer conversations. In addition, it contributes to difficulties in personal expression and understanding others (Xiong & Zhou, 2018). Therefore, communicative competence is an important focus in the quest to improve EFL students' communicative skills during their internships and into their future careers (Panggabean & Wardhono, 2017).

Canale and Swain (1980) stated that communicative competence consists of four aspects: (1) grammatical competence, which involves being competent with grammar rules, vocabulary and pronunciation; (2) sociolinguistic competence, which deals with the suitability of communication depending on the situation,

mastering comments, and using both verbal and non-verbal responses appropriately; (3) discourse competence, which relates to cohesion, the coherence of utterances, and turn-taking in conversations (Shumin, 2002); and (4) strategic competence, which includes verbal and non-verbal communication strategies for conveying effective communication and dealing with communication breakdowns (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Among all the aspects of communicative competence, strategic competence is one of, if not the most, important aspect (Shumin, 2002). Tarone (1980) defined strategic competence as an ability to use strategies to achieve a communicative goal. Speakers should have strategic competence, which is an individual's knowledge of how to use the language to get their intended message across (Tarone, 1983). Furthermore, Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Shumin (2002) stated that communication strategies are essentially a speaker's plan to cope with difficulties in communication and keep the conversation going. This implies that communication strategies are important tools for promoting speakers' strategic competence.

As a consequence, English teachers should encourage students to employ communication strategies when facing problems in communication (Tarone, 1983). Such strategies are very important tools for EFL learners who hope to achieve successful communication (Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018). Lewandowska (2019) suggested that teachers should introduce various types of communication strategies for students because they will be useful for communication in their real-life working experience.

Previously, other scholars have presented their own types of communication strategies as tools for English communication. Many scholars (e.g., Faerch & Kasper, 1980; Tarone, 1980) proposed their own classification systems for communication strategies. Firstly, Tarone (1980) proposed a classification system for communication strategies based on Tarone (1977), which comprises the following three categories: (1) paraphrase, (2) transfer or borrowing (Tarone, 1983), and (3) avoidance. Paraphrase first consists of approximation, which is the use of the incorrect target vocabulary. An approximation can provide sufficient meaning for the interlocutor to understand. The next paraphrase aspect is word-coinage, which occurs when a speaker creates a new word to get their message across. The last is circumlocution, which happens when the speaker does not use the appropriate word but tries to explain the characteristics of objects or actions. The second component of this classification system is transfer. Transfer comprises literal translation, which involves a speaker translating words from their native language to their second language (L2) word for word. Next under transfer is language switch, which occurs when a speaker simply uses their first language (L1) to replace an L2 term. Appeal for assistance is another, which can happen when a speaker asks their interlocutor for the correct term. The final aspect of transfer is mime, which involves non-verbal strategies. The last of Tarone's three-part classification system is avoidance. Avoidance is self-explicit as it consists of simply avoiding a topic. This happens when a speaker tries to avoid talking about a topic due to their lack of requisite vocabulary or meaning structures. Another

aspect of avoidance is message abandonment. This happens when a speaker cannot talk any further about a concept and stops in the middle of their speech.

Dörnyei and Scott (1997) classified types of communication strategies in a way that is similar to other authors, namely Tarone (1980). Their classification system of communication strategies comprises direct, interactional, and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include message abandonment, message reduction, message replacement, circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, word-coinage, restructuring, literal translation foreignizing, code-switching, and mime. In other words, these types of strategies relate to situations where a speaker has insufficient knowledge (of elements including vocabulary and language structures) but an attempt is made to achieve the communicative goal. The second type is interactional strategies. These include appeals for help, asking for repetition, asking for clarification, asking for confirmation, guessing, and interpretive summary. It is implied that these types of strategies relate to interaction with an interlocutor. Mutual understanding occurs through a two-way communicative exchange. The third type is indirect strategies. These involve the use of fillers and repetitions. These types of strategies, however, do not directly relate to the meaning of the language used, but create a circumstance for promoting mutual understanding. As mentioned above, it is implied that Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) classification system is similar to that of Tarone (1980) in many aspects. However, the former proposes interactional strategies which emphasize interaction between the speakers and the listeners in order to convey the message. Meanwhile, Dörnyei (1995) distinguished the existing communication strategy classification systems created by different scholars (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1977; Varadi, 1973) into three main types: (1) avoidance or reduction strategies, which consist of message abandonment and topic avoidance; (2) achievement or compensatory strategies, which involve circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, word-coinage, use of nonlinguistic strategies such as mime, gesture and facial expressions, literal translation, foreignizing, code-switching and appeals for help; and (3) stalling or time-gaining strategies, which contain the use of fillers and hesitation devices to create time for considering one's words. Dörnyei's (1995) strategies share similarities with Dörnyei and Scott's (1970) strategies; however, he added time-gaining strategies which grant speakers extra time to think before delivering their speech.

The communication strategies used in this study are based on the types of communication strategies proposed by Tarone (1977), Dörnyei (1995), and Dörnyei and Scott (1997). This is because many of their strategies share common elements and their frameworks cover different strategies that were shown to be employed by Thai EFL students in previous studies (Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018; Kongsom, 2016; Tachaiyaphum & Saengsri, 2018).

3.2 Research on students' communication strategies

Currently, more studies have focused on investigating the problems of interns in the workplace and their use of communication strategies to cope with communicative problems. This is done in order to improve curricula and prepare students for internships. Musa Othman et al.'s (2023a) study revealed that the

challenges that Malaysian accounting interns faced during work involved their lack of technical vocabulary in English, deficient technical knowledge, lack of exposure to business slang, lack of exposure to local English dialects, difficulties in understanding various English accents, and limited oral English communication skills. Furthermore, Zulkurnain and Kaur's (2014) study revealed that Malaysian students' challenges during their internships included their insufficient linguistic knowledge (including vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation), the inability to process language on time, using incorrect vocabulary, being unfamiliar with idioms or utterances, misunderstanding their interlocutor's intended message, and having difficulty understanding various English accents. The study also showed that the strategies students preferred to use the most to cope with their difficulties were negotiation for meaning and fluency maintenance. From this previous research, it is implied that students have encountered problems in communication during their internships and that communication strategies could be a tool for them to handle such problems. However, these previous studies focused on interns in the English as a second language context.

On the other hand, while more studies have focused on students' communication strategies in EFL contexts, these were conducted mainly in classroom settings (e.g., Bootprom, 2017; Panggabean & Wardhono, 2017; Rahman & Isroyana, 2021). First, Bootprom (2017) studied the use of communication strategies by undergraduate students majoring in tourism. The findings revealed that the majority of the participants used time-gaining strategies the most, followed by borrowing strategies, paraphrase strategies, and avoidance strategies. The students with high English proficiency preferred using time-gaining strategies the most, while the students with intermediate proficiency favored using borrowing strategies. Students with low level English proficiency employed avoidance strategies the most.

Moreover, Inkeaw and Thumawongsa (2018) investigated the use of communication strategies by English majors enrolled in Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education programs. The findings revealed that no significant difference was found in the use of communication strategies among students from the two different programs. On the other hand, significant differences were apparent regarding the communication strategies used by students with different English proficiency levels. Students with an advanced proficiency level employed circumlocution and clarification requests, whereas the students with beginner-level proficiency preferred using topic avoidance and body language strategies. In addition, Phonhan (2018) revealed that there was no significant difference in the communication strategies used by students from different engineering fields. Overall, the engineering students used non-verbal strategies the most. This implies that the participants were accustomed to using gestures and facial expressions to help convey messages or compensate for linguistic inadequacies. As mentioned earlier, only a few studies in the EFL context have focused on the use of communication strategies in real-life situations.

Tachaiyaphum and Saengsri (2018) conducted a study on the communication strategies used by five Thai university students liaising with international students. Video recordings showed that fillers, self-repetition, and mime were the most frequently used communication strategies by the participants. They employed the use of fillers because they likely provided more time for the participants to think of words or utterances before speaking. This also enabled them to speak more smoothly and naturally. Self-repetition was likely used due to limited vocabulary knowledge along with their use of self-correction. Mime was employed alongside verbal expressions to describe objects due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge. The communication strategies participants used that enabled them to cope with communication difficulties successfully included message replacement, circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, literal translation, use of fillers and self-repetition, and interpretive summary. In addition, Chairat (2017) investigated the communication strategies used by Thai English majors during their internships through a questionnaire. The results showed that the most used strategies during their speaking tasks were non-verbal strategies, followed by message reduction strategies and negotiation for meaning strategies.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 The population

The population of the study comprised 196 fourth-year university students from the following majors: English (99), hospitality management (38), and tourism (59). All participants came from one faculty at a university located in the southern part of Thailand. The students participated in workplace internships where English was used for communication alongside Thai. This faculty provides a curriculum that allows students to attend internship programs to promote real work experiences and to improve job skills. In this study, it was possible to collect the data from the entire population of 196 fourth-year undergraduate students.

4.2 Research Instrument

The study adopted a mixed methods design to investigate Thai EFL undergraduate students' use of communication strategies during their internship programs. The communication strategies used by the students from three different majors were compared, and this study explored whether there was a statistically significant difference between the communication strategies used by these groups. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire whereas the in-depth qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire in this study was adapted from Bootprom (2017) and Inkeaw and Tumawongsa (2018), and it applied the types of communication strategies suggested by Tarone (1977), Dörnyei (1995), and Dörnyei and Scott (1997). The questionnaire consisted of 17 items asking about the participants' level of frequency in using the six main types of communication strategies: (1) avoidance strategies, (2) achievement strategies, (3) borrowing strategies, (4) non-verbal strategies, (5) appeal for assistance strategies, and (6) time-gaining strategies. The communication strategies questionnaire was verified by three experts for content validity with a Cronbach coefficient of 0.83. The interview questions were also verified for content validity by the experts. All 196 student

participants were required to complete the questionnaire and five participants from each major were voluntarily interviewed through semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth information. The quantitative data were analyzed by using mean scores, standard deviation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

5. Findings

5.1 What are the English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students in their internship program?

Table 1: English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students during their internship programs

Communication Strategy	\bar{x}	S.D.	Frequency Level	Rank Order
Avoidance				
1.Message abandonment	2.70	0.95		
2. Topic avoidance	2.40	1.12		
Total	2.55	0.87	Seldom	6
Achievement				
3.Circumlocution	3.69	1.02		
4. Approximation	3.80	0.99		
5.Use of all-purpose words	3.40	1.02		
Total	3.40	0.75	Sometimes	4
Borrowing				
6.Word-coinage	2.74	1.84		
7.Literal translation	3.20	1.01		
8.Foreignizing	2.69	1.13		
9.Code-switching	3.15	1.03		
Total	3.01	0.78	Sometimes	5
Non-verbal				
10.Body language	4.14	0.91		
11.Facial expressions	3.84	0.99		
Total	3.99	0.83	Always	1
Appeal for assistance				
12.Appeals for help	3.61	1.00		
13.Comprehension check	3.55	1.01		
14.Asking for repetition	3.98	0.91		
15.Asking for clarification	3.65	0.96		
16.Asking for confirmation	3.63	1.01		
Total	3.69	0.76	Usually	2
Time-gaining				
17. Use of fillers/ hesitation device	3.60	1.07		
Total	3.60	1.07	Usually	3
Overall	3.40	0.54	Sometimes	

In general, as shown in Table 1, the results show that the participants sometimes used communication strategies while working as interns, signified by the overall mean score of 3.40 (S.D. = 0.54). When considering the types of communication strategies used by the participants, it was found that non-verbal strategies were used the most ($\bar{x} = 3.99$, S.D. = 0.83), followed by the appeal for assistance strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.69$, S.D. = 0.76), and time-gaining strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.60$, S.D. = 1.07) respectively. Notably, the results in this study revealed that avoidance strategies were the least used by the participants during the internship program ($\bar{x} = 2.55$, S.D. = 0.87).

5.2 What are the types of English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students of different majors within their internship programs?

Table 2: Types of English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students of different majors within their internship programs

Communication Strategy	English		Hospitality Management		Tourism	
	\bar{x}	S.D.	\bar{x}	S.D.	\bar{x}	S.D.
Avoidance						
1. Message abandonment	2.64	0.96	2.61	0.92	2.88	0.95
2. Topic avoidance	2.22	1.06	2.45	1.16	2.66	1.15
Total	2.43	0.85	2.53	0.85	2.77	0.88
Achievement						
3. Circumlocution	3.91	1.00	3.47	1.08	3.44	0.95
4. Approximation	4.05	0.93	3.50	1.01	3.56	0.97
5. Use of all-purpose words	3.55	1.04	3.11	1.06	3.34	0.90
Total	3.56	0.75	3.18	0.79	3.29	0.68
Borrowing						
6. Word-coinage	2.73	1.31	2.66	1.00	2.81	1.09
7. Literal translation	3.13	1.14	3.29	0.73	3.27	0.94
8. Foreignizing	2.38	1.18	3.27	0.94	3.05	1.07
9. Code-switching	3.01	1.12	3.24	0.79	3.34	0.99
Total	2.84	0.85	3.16	0.49	3.22	0.74
Non-verbal						
10. Body language	4.25	0.86	3.92	1.08	4.08	0.86
11. Facial expressions	3.89	0.97	3.89	0.95	3.73	1.05
Total	4.07	0.79	3.91	0.86	3.91	0.86
Appeal for assistance						
12. Appeals for help	3.69	1.08	3.45	0.92	3.58	0.89
13. Comprehension check	3.58	1.10	3.34	0.88	3.64	0.92
14. Asking for repetition	4.17	0.92	3.82	0.90	3.78	0.87
15. Asking for clarification	3.85	0.98	3.37	1.02	3.49	0.82
16. Asking for confirmation	3.78	1.08	3.45	1.01	3.51	0.86
Total	3.81	0.79	3.48	0.73	3.60	0.69
Time-gaining						
17. Use of fillers/ hesitation device	3.63	1.17	3.66	0.99	3.53	0.94
Total	3.63	1.17	3.66	0.99	3.53	0.94
Overall	3.44	0.56	3.30	0.46	3.40	0.56

As shown in Table 2, students majoring in English used non-verbal strategies the most ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, S.D. = 0.79) followed by the appeal for assistance strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.81$, S.D. = 0.79), and time-gaining strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.63$, S.D. = 1.17). In regard to the sub-types of the appeal for assistance strategies, the findings revealed that asking for repetition ($\bar{x} = 4.17$, S.D. = 0.92) was the most employed strategy by the participants majoring in English, followed by asking for clarification ($\bar{x} = 3.85$, S.D. = 0.98) and asking for confirmation ($\bar{x} = 3.78$, S.D. = 1.08). For the student participants majoring in hotel management, the type of communication strategies that they used the most were also non-verbal strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.91$, S.D. = 0.86), followed by time-gaining strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.66$, S.D. = 0.99), and appeal for assistance strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.48$, S.D. = 0.73). However, for the sub-types of appeal for assistance strategies, it was found that asking for repetition ($\bar{x} = 3.82$, S.D. = 0.90) was used the most, followed by appeal for help ($\bar{x} = 3.45$, S.D. = 0.92), and asking for clarification ($\bar{x} = 3.37$, S.D. = 1.02). Similar to the students majoring in English, the findings showed that the majority of the participants majoring in tourism mostly used non-verbal strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.91$, S.D. = 0.86), followed by the appeal for assistance strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.60$, S.D. = 0.69), and time-gaining strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.53$, S.D. = 0.94). For the sub-types of appeal for assistance strategies, the tourism students mostly employed asking for repetition ($\bar{x} = 3.78$, S.D. = 0.87), followed by comprehension check ($\bar{x} = 3.64$, S.D. = 0.92) and appeal for help ($\bar{x} = 3.58$, S.D. = 0.89). Interestingly, the data showed that the students from the three different majors similarly rated avoidance strategies as the least used communication strategy during their internship ($\bar{x} = 2.77$, S.D. = 0.88, $\bar{x} = 2.53$, S.D. = 0.85, $\bar{x} = 2.43$, S.D. = 0.85 respectively).

The quantitative data was aligned with the qualitative data from the interview. The majority of the participants from the three majors reported that they always used gestures when talking to others. For example, student A4 (English major) stated "I think using gestures made them understand me better. ... Although I did not know the vocabulary, I could use my gestures and it helped me communicate better." Similarly, Student B1 (hotel management major) reported "I think gestures could help me when I could not speak or could not figure out what word to say. We could use our body language. For example, I could use my hands to show the directions to the toilet when our customer asked where the toilet was. It was faster." Student C4 (tourism major) stated, "I always used body language because sometimes the tourist did not understand what I said. It might be because of my accent." Some of the students also mentioned their use of facial expressions during conversation. For example, Student C5 (tourism major) added that when she furrowed her eyebrows, the customers knew that she could not understand their message leading them to repeat what they said.

Similar to the quantitative data, participants from the three majors reported that they used appeal for assistance strategies during their internships. They reported that asking for repetition was often employed during their conversations. They similarly stated that they used asking for repetition because they could not understand the message due to the interlocutors' accents, fast pace of speech, and their own lack of vocabulary knowledge. For example, Student A1 (English major)

stated "I often asked the guests to speak again because their accents were difficult to understand. When they repeated their questions, it made me more familiar with their accent. So, when I met other guests using the same accents, I could be able to understand their accents more." Another student, A5 (English major), stated "I could not catch the word.... I were not sure if I got it right. So, I asked them to repeat the question." Apart from this, Student C5 (tourism major) explained that she asked the tourists to repeat their messages slowly, so she could understand what they just said. It made her realize that sometimes it is not the vocabulary that is difficult, but rather the pace of the speech and accent that made their interlocutor difficult to understand.

The data from the interviews also showed that the students majoring in English used asking for confirmation during their internships. For example, Student A5 stated "Sometimes, I was not sure if I understood what they said, so I asked the guest, for example, 'Do you need meat right? ... to confirm my understanding ... Sometimes, the guests were from many countries, so asking for confirmation could make it clear." Further, the data also showed that hotel management students used asking for clarification. For example, one of them stated that when the guest called to use a buggy "I asked them 'I'm sorry what do you mean?'"

Moreover, during the interviews, the students majoring in tourism reported the use of comprehension check and appeal for help. Student C1 stated "I used comprehension check every day because I was afraid that the tourists did not understand my accent. So, I asked them if they understood what I said." In addition, one of the tourism students reported "I wanted to know how they call [I-tim] (popsicle) in the United States, so I asked them how to call this in your country in order to use it later." This showed that they used these strategies to overcome difficulties.

The participants from the three majors also shared their experiences of using the time-gaining strategies during the interviews. Student A5 (English major) stated that she employed the use of fillers such as "umm" or "err" to gain more time to think of what to say. Likewise, Student B2 (hotel management major) said "I used 'umm' to think of the basic words that I knew. Sometimes, I needed to inform the hotel room information to the guests but I could not speak spontaneously." One of the tourism students said it worked when he used "umm" because the tourists themselves continued their speech. Furthermore, one of the students majoring in hotel management (B5) said that he used to use "umm" or "err" before his speech when he first started his internship. However, his manager at the hotel said this strategy was frustrating as the guests were in a hurry and using time-gaining strategies too often did not give off a reliable impression. This shows that while time-gaining strategies can help them overcome difficulties, using them inappropriately or too frequently does not always look professional.

Interestingly, the majority of participants from the three majors similarly reported that they rarely or never used the avoidance strategies. For them, to stop talking in the middle of the conversation, particularly when working in the hospitality industry, was impolite. For example, Student A2 (English major) stated "I think it

was rude to abandon the conversation in the middle. ... Whether we understood or not we should try our best to continue talking." Student A3 (English major) added "If we stopped talking, it was like we did not provide them a good service." Likewise, Student B2 added, "I never used the message abandonment strategy because I did not want them to make a complaint." In addition, Student C4 (tourism major) also stated that although she was an intern, she had to provide quality service to the customers. This included maintaining the conversation with them.

Notably, most participants stated that they never changed topics immediately when they encountered difficulties. Student A3 (English major) added that changing a topic immediately was inappropriate. The customers came to talk to her to ask for information. Therefore, she had to help them as much as possible to get that information. Student C2 (tourism major) stated that he thought that the topic avoidance strategy was ineffective because it did not help maintain a conversation or gain mutual understanding. Moreover, during the interviews, some participants stated that they had never heard of some of these strategies, such as all-purpose words, before. If they had known such a strategy, they would have used it during their internship to deal with language barriers.

5.3 Are there any statistically significant differences between the English communication strategies used by fourth-year Thai undergraduate students with different majors during the internship program?

Table 3: One-way ANOVA results of the use of the communication strategy scores by students' major

Types of Communication Strategy	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Avoidance	Between groups	4.350	2	2.175	2.953	.055
	Within groups	142.140	193	.736		
	Total	146.490	195			
Achievement	Between groups	5.055	2	2.528	4.621	.011*
	Within groups	105.574	193	.547		
	Total	110.629	195			
Borrowing	Between groups	6.234	2	3.117	5.407	.005*
	Within groups	111.265	193	.577		
	Total	117.499	195			
Non-verbal	Between groups	1.310	2	.655	.960	.385
	Within groups	131.670	193	.682		
	Total	132.980	195			
Appeal for assistance	Between groups	3.609	2	1.805	3.228	.042*

	Within groups	107.911	193	.559		
	Total	111.520	195			
Time-gaining	Between groups	.523	2	.261	.227	.797
	Within groups	222.436	193	1.153		
	Total	222.959	195			
Total	Between groups	.508	2	.254	.856	.426
	Within groups	57.253	193	.297		
	Total	57.761	195			

According to Table 3, the results reveal that, overall, there were no statistically significant differences in the students' use of English communication strategies by major (English, hotel management, and tourism) during their internship program $F(2,193) = .856, P = .426$. However, when focusing on each type of communication strategy, there were significant differences in the students' use of achievement, borrowing, and the appeal for assistance by major, at the level of 0.05.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA results of the use of achievement strategies scores by students' major

Achievement	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Circumlocution	Between groups	10.646	2	5.323	5.313	.006*
	Within groups	193.370	193	1.002		
	Total	204.015	195			
Approximation	Between groups	13.047	2	6.523	7.122	.001*
	Within groups	176.790	193	.916		
	Total	189.837	195			
Use of all-purpose words	Between groups	5.614	2	2.807	2.774	0.65
	Within groups	195.345	193	1.012		
	Total	200.959	195			
Word-coinage	Between groups	.591	2	.296	.209	.812
	Within groups	273.138	193	1.415		
	Total	273.730	195			

As shown in Table 4, there were statistically significant differences in the students' use of circumlocution and approximation by major at the level of 0.05.

Table 5: Comparison of the use of the circumlocution strategies by students' major: Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test

Major		English	Hotel management	Tourism
	\bar{x}	3.92	3.47	3.44
English	3.92		.44551*	.47851*
Hotel management	3.47			.03301
Tourism	3.44			

As shown in Table 5, an LSD post hoc test indicated that the students majoring in English ($\bar{x} = 3.92$, $SD = 1.00$) used significantly more circumlocution on average than both of the students majoring in hotel management ($\bar{x} = 3.47$, $S.D = 1.08$) and tourism ($\bar{x} = 3.44$, $S.D = 0.95$) during the internship program. The students majoring in hotel management and tourism were not significantly different from each other. During the interview, two of the hotel management students reported that they did not use circumlocution because they were unable to explain the objects. This shows that the students with limited English proficiency avoided using circumlocution. On the other hand, one of the students majoring in English stated that when she did not know the exact vocabulary, she exerted more effort to explain it. Interestingly, this study revealed that the students majoring in English made more effort to explain the vocabulary than those from the other two majors.

Table 6: Comparison of the use of the approximation strategy by students' major: LSD post hoc test

Major		English	Hotel management	Tourism
	\bar{x}	4.05	3.50	3.56
English	4.05		.55051*	.49118*
Hotel management	3.50			.05932
Tourism	3.56			

According to Table 6, an LSD post hoc test indicated that the students majoring in English ($\bar{x} = 4.05$, $S.D = 0.92$) used significantly more approximation on average than both students majoring in tourism ($\bar{x} = 3.56$, $S.D = 0.97$) and hotel management ($\bar{x} = 3.50$, $S.D = 1.01$) during the internship program. There was no statistically significant difference in the use of approximation between the students majoring in hotel management and tourism. Student A1 (English major) reported that she often used words that had roughly similar meanings because she did not know the exact word and she wanted to maintain the flow of her speech. Moreover, Student A5 stated that when she once forgot the word 'honey' at a particular moment and used the word 'sugar' instead to inform the customer about the ingredient that was on top of their bread. This implies that English major students tend to use approximation to compensate for their breakdowns and to propel their speaking.

Table 7: One-way ANOVA results of the use of the borrowing strategies scores by students' major

Borrowing	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Literal translation	Between groups	1.067	2	.533	.518	.597
	Within groups	198.770	193	1.030		
	Total	199.837	195			
Foreignizing	Between groups	19.476	2	9.738	8.166	<.001*
	Within groups	230.156	193	1.193		
	Total	249.633	195			
Code-switching	Between groups	4.330	2	2.165	2.057	.131
	Within groups	203.079	193	1.052		
	Total	207.408	195			

As shown in Table 7, there were statistically significant differences in the students' use of the foreignizing strategy by major at a level of 0.05.

Table 8: Comparison of the use of the foreignizing strategy by students' major: LSD post hoc test

Major		English	Hotel management	Tourism
	\bar{x}	2.38	2.95	3.05
English	2.38		.56353*	.66701*
Hotel management	2.95			.10348
Tourism	3.05			

According to Table 8, an LSD post hoc test indicated that the students majoring in English ($\bar{x} = 2.38$, S.D = 1.18) used significantly less of the foreignizing strategy on average than students majoring in tourism ($\bar{x} = 3.05$, S.D = 1.07) and hotel management ($\bar{x} = 2.95$, S.D = 0.87) during their internship programs. There was no statistically significant difference in the use of foreignizing between the students majoring in hotel management and tourism. The findings from the interviews revealed that two of the English major students stated that they did not use foreignizing because it was strange and it would not help others understand them better. On the other hand, two tourism students used foreignizing. Student C2 stated, "I used a Thai word with English pronunciation because I think that Thai word might sound the similar to the one in English." Moreover, Student C4 reported that he used it at the beginning of his internship because of his limited vocabulary knowledge. Hence, students with insufficient vocabulary knowledge would likely resort to foreignizing to maintain the conversation.

Table 9: One-way ANOVA results of the use of the appeal for assistance strategy scores by students' major

Appeal for Assistance	Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Appeal for help	Between groups	1.820	2	.910	.911	.404
	Within groups	192.711	193	.999		
	Total	194.531	195			
Comprehension check	Between groups	2.230	2	1.115	1.085	.340
	Within groups	198.260	193	1.027		
	Total	200.490	195			
Asking for repetition	Between groups	7.027	2	3.514	4.349	0.14
	Within groups	155.927	193	.808		
	Total	162.954	195			
Asking for clarification	Between groups	8.394	2	4.197	4.701	0.10
	Within groups	172.315	193	.893		
	Total	180.709	195			
Asking for confirmation	Between groups	4.299	2	2.150	2.125	.122
	Within groups	195.252	193	1.012		
	Total	199.551	195			

As shown in Table 9, there were statistically significant differences in the students' use of the asking for clarification strategies by major at a level of 0.05.

Table 10: Comparison of the use of the asking for clarification strategy by students' major: LSD post hoc test

Major		English	Hotel management	Tourism
	\bar{x}	3.85	3.37	3.49
English	3.85		.48006*	.35696*
hotel management	3.37			.12310
tourism	3.49			

According to Table 10, an LSD post hoc test indicated that the students majoring in English ($\bar{x} = 3.85$, S.D = 0.98) used significantly more of the asking for clarification strategy on average than students majoring in tourism ($\bar{x} = 3.49$, S.D = 0.82) and hotel management ($\bar{x} = 3.37$, S.D = 1.02) during their internship programs. There was no statistically significant difference in the use of asking for clarification between the students majoring in hotel management and tourism, which was supported by the data from the interviews. One of the English majors

reported that she also asked a passenger to explain what she said again when she did not understand their speech.

6. Discussion

The findings show that the Thai EFL student participants moderately used communication strategies during their internships. Communication strategies are considered important tools to help students deal with difficulties in communication and achieve their communication goals (Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018) particularly when they are interns who need to use English communication in real-life situations (Musa et al., 2023). Lewandowska (2019) suggested that teachers introduce various types of communication strategies for students that they can use in their real-life working experience.

The findings reveal that the majority of participants used non-verbal strategies the most, which aligns with previous studies (e.g., Phonhan, 2018; Tachaiyaphum & Saengsri, 2018). The participants reported that by using gestures, they could convey their message faster and provide clearer messages to their interlocutors. In addition, their facial expressions helped convey their mood and promote more effective communication.

Apart from this, the results showed that appeal for assistance strategies were the second most frequently used among participants. This type of strategy requires interaction from both interlocutors to create mutual understanding (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). The results of the study are consistent with that of Chairat (2017), who found that their participants used negotiation for meaning strategies. During the interviews, most participants stated that they used asking for repetition because they could not understand the message due to their interlocutors' accents, fast pace of speech, and their own lack of vocabulary knowledge. This is in line with the findings of Musa et al. (2023a) and Zulkurnain and Kaur (2014).

In addition, time-gaining strategies were the third most frequently used among most participants, which corresponds with the results of Bootprom (2017). L2 students are likely to require more time to process the target language (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). While some of the participants reported that stalling for time granted them more time to think of what to say, one of the participants reported in the interview that his manager preferred him not to use this strategy because it did not look professional when working in the hospitality industry. This implies that while time-gaining strategies help the students deal with their oral communication shortcomings, using such strategies frequently might not be opportune. Unlike the findings of Tachaiyaphum and Saengsri (2018), the students preferred using time-gaining strategies to smoothen their casual conversations in daily life. The results of this study could raise awareness for teachers to focus on using suitable communication strategies for professional roles.

The least frequently used strategies among most participants were the avoidance strategies. Mostly, the participants noted that it was not an effective tool for achieving communicative goals. Moreover, many of them worked in the

hospitality industry where they needed to provide useful information and quality service to tourists and customers. Therefore, they rarely used strategies such as these, which they viewed as impolite because they involved stopping the conversation or changing topics immediately. While avoidance strategies could have been used when the speakers encountered breakdowns in communication (Dörnyei, 1995), the participants in the study tended not to use them because their job responsibilities require them to maintain conversations and assist their interlocutors. The findings were dissimilar from the results of previous studies (e.g., Bootprom, 2017; Inkeaw & Thumanwongsa, 2018), which focused on the classroom contexts where students, particularly those with low English proficiency, preferred the avoidance strategies.

Another interesting matter was found when comparing the use of communication strategies among students from different majors. It was discovered that all the participants from across the three majors similarly employed non-verbal strategies the most. While appeal for assistance strategies were the second most frequently used strategies among the students majoring in English and tourism, they were the third most frequently used strategies among the students majoring in hotel management. Another important aspect was that the participants from all three majors reported that asking for repetition was used the most, alongside other types of appeal for assistance strategies, due to the students' lack of vocabulary, inability to understand various accents, and the fast pace of their interlocutors' speech. Linguistic deficiencies in English can interfere with the ability to understand another's speech. Moreover, some interlocutors may use language that is so complicated, that listeners such as our student interns cannot possibly understand it (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014). In real-life situations, interns might encounter tourists from many countries. Learning English in the EFL classroom might not allow them to be exposed to the target language sufficiently, particularly when it comes to the varied English accents. Therefore, the experience of using English during an internship for the first time might be a huge challenge for EFL students. This is congruent with the findings of Chairat (2017), who found that EFL university students still faced difficulty in English communication during internships.

When focusing on sub-types of the appeal for assistance strategies, the findings revealed that apart from asking for repetition, asking for clarification was the second most frequently used strategy among students majoring in English. This was supported by the findings of Chairat (2017), who revealed that their English major students used asking for clarification strategies during their internships. Similarly, Inkeaw and Thumawongsa's (2018) study showed that English major students with an advanced level of proficiency employed the clarification request. On the other hand, the results showed that the tourism students also employed comprehension check. One of the participants reported that she needed to check if people understood her message to maintain their safety when they were on a trip. This suggests that communication strategies are important for L2 speakers who need to achieve communicative goals (Faerch & Kasper, 1980; Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018). Moreover, one of the participants was afraid that his accent might not be understandable, so he used comprehension check. This is consistent

with Zulkurnain and Kaur's (2014) study, which revealed that one of their interns' difficulties during their internship was poor pronunciation. However, this implies that the nature of a tourism major also appears to influence students in ensuring that their interlocutors understand them, as clear communication is essential for maintaining safety during times of travel. Furthermore, the results showed that tourism students employed time-gaining strategies as the third most frequently used strategy, which was similar to the findings of Bootprom (2017).

Moreover, it was found that the appeal for assistance strategies were the most frequently used among the students majoring in hotel management. In addition, hotel management major students also often used the appeal for help strategy, which required their interlocutor to help them get their message across. This was supported by Zulkurnain and Kaur (2014), whose hotel management students were likely to negotiate meanings with the interlocutors when speaking English. In this study, the results revealed that there were no significant differences in the students' use of English communication strategies when looking at students from three majors within the same faculty during their internships. This was supported by the results of Inkeaw and Thumawongsa (2018) and Phonhan (2018). This is possibly because these students had lived in the same Thai EFL context where they were not sufficiently exposed to English and had limited opportunities for using English in daily life. Therefore, when they faced English communication problems during the internship, the strategies that they used in general did not differ greatly.

However, when focusing on the sub-types of the communication strategies, the results showed that the students majoring in English used significantly more circumlocution, approximation, and asking for clarification on average than students majoring in hotel management and tourism. During the interviews, two of the hotel management students reported that they did not use circumlocution because they were not able to explain the objects. On the other hand, one of the students majoring in English stated that when she did not know the exact vocabulary, she tried to explain it. Another English major student reported that she used approximation to maintain the flow of her speech. This was possibly due to the English majors having better English proficiency than students from other majors. The students majoring in English had taken several English courses focusing on English communication. This implies that they were possibly more exposed to the target language and had more opportunities to practice English for communication than other students from different majors. Having sufficient linguistic knowledge enabled them to construct sentences to explain objects when they did not know the exact word for them. Moreover, the students with greater vocabulary knowledge might be able to find an alternative word to express their message. They may also have greater confidence which is needed for clarification when they do not understand the message clearly. This is in line with Inkeaw and Thumawongsa's (2018) research, which stated that students with an advanced proficiency level employed circumlocution and clarification requests. Interestingly, the findings of this study show the influence of their major on students' use of communication strategies.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that students majoring in English used significantly less foreignizing on average than students majoring in tourism and hotel management. Some of the students majoring in English stated that it was rather strange to do so and that the interlocutors might not understand them. On the other hand, the tourism students used foreignizing due to their lack of vocabulary. This suggests that students who have sufficient linguistic knowledge might not favor the use of foreignizing to deal with problems in communication. Foreignizing is one of the direct strategies to use in situations where a speaker has insufficient linguistic knowledge but makes an attempt to achieve the communicative goal (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). This signifies that a student's field of specialization may be a factor in their manner of coping with their communication problems.

7. Conclusion

The results revealed that the EFL students moderately employed communication strategies to solve difficulties in English conversation. However, it was found that they still had limited awareness of using various types of communication strategies that could help them become more successful in communication. The findings of this study showed that some of the students were unaware of the use of all-purpose words. Moreover, students should be aware of different types of communication strategies including time-gaining and avoidance strategies. Using these strategies inappropriately would likely not promote effective and professional communication. Therefore, providing a better understanding of how to use communication strategies properly can enhance the practices of EFL speakers. The study provides beneficial insights for improving EFL instruction, particularly regarding the enhancement of students' communicative competence. Teachers and educators can use the data from the study to adjust their lessons and curriculum in order to prepare students for the workplace. It is recommended that there should be a training course for teaching students how to use communication strategies effectively in daily life and professional settings. Teachers can also incorporate these into their English courses to raise the students' awareness of how to use communication strategies effectively and appropriately in various situations. Moreover, students from different majors should be trained to use effective communication strategies that suit their specific work to prepare them for professional roles. Communication strategies training can help learners overcome breakdowns and difficulties, which would benefit them (Dörnyei, 1995), particularly in their future workplaces.

Moreover, the study signifies that undergraduate students urgently need to enhance their linguistic knowledge, which includes vocabulary and grammar, to bolster their linguistic resources. Having sufficient linguistic knowledge will allow them to use various communication strategies to express their planned message more effectively (Chuanhaisit & Prapphal, 2009). It would be advisable to emphasize implementing the vocabulary and grammar for communication to prepare them to use their knowledge when necessary.

Importantly, to reduce breakdowns in English conversation, it would be beneficial to provide more opportunities for students to be exposed to the target language

in various accents and practice their pronunciation as much as possible. Exposing students to English can increase their vocabulary knowledge and enhance their accent and pronunciation (Triwittayayon & Sarobol, 2018). Teachers should be positive role models for English pronunciation. They should provide more opportunities for their students to practice and enhance their pronunciation. They can achieve this by practicing the target language using communication strategies that are beneficial for dealing with the difficulties faced. Thus, they will have more confidence to engage in longer conversations, especially during internships, and to meet the requirements of the workplace.

8. Recommendation for further studies

This study focused on exploring the use of communication strategies by EFL interns to provide useful data for improving English language teaching and learning, thereby enhancing communicative competence and meeting the requirements of the workplace. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies should focus on investigating the effectiveness of training programs that promote the use of communication strategies for EFL students who intend to use English in the workplace.

9. Limitations of the study

The population of this study was rather small; however, it did manage to include all the fourth-year students from three different majors in one faculty. The population was selected because all the students attended internship programs in workplaces where English was used for communication alongside Thai. Therefore, the study's population was able to provide rich data in response to the questions of the study. Apart from this, the study employed a mixed methods approach and data triangulation to validate the results.

10. Acknowledgement

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11. Ethics approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research at Sirindhorn College of Health, Yala (SCPHYLIRB-2567/214).

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Appendix I

Questionnaire about the use of English communication strategies by the Thai EFL Interns

Section 1 Please fill in your personal information

Section 2 Mark ✓ in the box to provide the level of frequency at which you used each type of communication strategy during your internship

Section 3 Describe more about the communication strategies that help you deal with the difficulties you faced.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section 1 Personal information

Gender

Female male

Your current academic year _____

Your current program/major

English for communication

Tourism

Hotel management

Learning experience in the classroom

less than 10 years

10-15 years

more than 15 years

Learning experience outside the classroom

less than 5 years

10-15 years

More than 15 years

The workplace that you attended during your internship program

Hotel

Tour agent

Airline/ airport

School/ college

State agency

Private company

Others

Section 2

Mark ✓ in the box to provide the level of frequency at which you used each type of communication strategy during your internship

Communication strategy	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Avoidance					
Message Abandonment When I could not continue my speech due to difficulties, I just stopped talking. For example: It is a big animal. Umm. It has four legs. It looks like umm... well. I don't know.					
Topic avoidance I changed the topic immediately when I faced the difficulties.					
Paraphrase					
Circumlocution I tried to explain the action or the object or gave an example when I did not know the exact word. For example: It is a thing that you can use to make coffee instead of using the word 'a coffee maker.'					
Approximation When I did not know the appropriate vocabulary, I used the word or structure that had roughly the similar meaning e.g., 'flower' instead of 'lotus'; 'boots' instead of 'shoes'					
Use of all-purpose words I used a general word when I did not know the specific word, e.g., thing or something. For example:					

Can I have that <u>thing</u> , please?					
Word-coinage I created a new word to convey the message when I did not know the exact word in English, e.g., 'cow meat' instead of 'beef'					
Borrowing					
Literal translation When I did not know the right words, phrases or structures in English, I translated word for word from Thai to English.					
Foreignizing I used a Thai word with English pronunciation when I did not know the right word in English.					
Code-switching I used both Thai and other languages to keep my conversation going when facing difficulties.					
Non-verbal					
Gestures I used gestures to explain or convey the meaning e.g., head nod, headshake, thumb up, shoulder shrugs, and finger pointing etc.					
Facial expressions I used facial expressions e.g., raised eyebrows, smile, widened eyes, and gaping mouth etc. to express my feeling, convey my message or respond to their message.					
Appeal for assistance					
Appeals for help					

I asked for help from my interlocutor when I faced communicative difficulties, e.g., 'How do you say this in English'; 'what is it called in English?'					
Comprehension check I asked the interlocutor whether they understood me e.g., 'Do you understand?'					
Asking for repetition I asked the interlocutor to repeat what he/she said when facing the difficulties, e.g., 'Could you say that again?'					
Asking for clarification I asked the interlocutor to explain what he/she said again when facing the difficulties e.g., "what do you mean?"					
Asking for confirmation I checked if I understood the interlocutor correctly, e.g., 'You mean...', 'You said...'					
Time-gaining					
Use of fillers/ hesitation device I used pauses/fillers e.g., 'umm...', 'er...', 'uh...' and 'let me see' to gain more time to think of what to say in English.					