

Scrutinizing Problems and Needs of Non-Formal Education Students on English Communication Skills

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Received: June 3, 2022 Accepted: July 8, 2022 Published: July 18, 2022

doi:10.5296/jei.v8i2.19925 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v8i2.19925>

Abstract

To have necessary and ready skills for careers in the 21st century, students should be given awareness of the importance of English, not only in formal but also non-formal and informal education. However, students still lack English abilities, and their English communication skills are still in need of development. Thus, this study aims to analyse the non-formal education students' problems and needs for improving their English communication skills. The participants in this study are students from the Offices of Non-Formal and Informal Education in the eastern economic corridor (EEC), Thailand. To obtain the data, research instruments, including questionnaire and semi-structured interview were employed in the study. Then, the data were analyzed statistically by using the SPSS program to find percentage, mean and standard deviation, and the content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the instruments employed in this study. The findings from this study demonstrated that the students had moderate problems with English communication skills. The students required "conversation in daily life" activities to develop their listening and speaking skills the most and "letter or e-mail" activities to develop their reading and writing abilities the most. Additionally, the results from semi-structured interview, yielded the teachers' perceptions of the students' English communication skills in various aspects. As a result, this study would provide pathways for teachers to find effective teaching methods and activities to eliminate the students' problems and thoroughly fulfil their needs on English communication skills.

Keywords: Eastern economic corridor, English communication skills, Non-formal and informal education, Problem and need analysis

1. Introduction

English plays a crucial role as an international language for people around the globe in both spoken and written contexts. To simplify, English is used as the official language in 53 countries and for native speakers by around 400,000,000 people around the world (Ilyosovna, 2020). People use English for many purposes such as business, education, tourism and services. According to the Framework for 21st Century Learning, English is one of the core subjects and 21st century themes, and communication is one of the 21st century skills that are necessary for learning and innovation. Thus, English communication skills should be applied and promoted in Thai curricula in both formal and non-formal education. This is in line with the National Scheme of Education (2017-2036) of Thailand that emphasizes the potential development of people of all ages and the building of learning societies (Office of the Education Council, 2017). To have ready skills for employment, Thai students should center on English for communication to become future citizens with adequate knowledge and effective skills for working and living (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009).

However, Thai students still struggle with English communication problems, including listening, speaking, reading and writing (Rungswang & Kosashunhanan, 2021; Tantiwich & Sinwongsawat, 2021; Kampookaew, 2020; Suwannasit, 2019) which can affect their job opportunities in the future. In other words, English communication skills are required by most employers as they have been recognized as necessary skills for working that make successful business (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996). Thus, if students have English communication skills, it is highly possible that they will get jobs and be employed. Thus, Thai students should have raised awareness of the importance of English communication skills, in not only formal but also non-formal education. This is particularly with non-formal education students who have missed opportunities to study in the higher education institutions (Draper & Kantavong, 2017) and lacked access to the formal schooling system (Office of The Permanent Secretary, 2019), so learning through a wider range of courses and tools in relation to English communication skills would be limited. To help non-formal education students develop their English communication skills and go through learning difficulties effectively, instructors should understand causes of the problems and seek out the students' needs in order to design or find supplementary tools to enhance their skills appropriately.

Under these circumstances, this study aims to investigate the problems with and needs for English communication skills among the non-formal education students in three provinces in the eastern economic corridor of Thailand: Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao as these areas are considered as the main locations for ASEAN, China and India with potential for transport systems and free trade zones (Thailand Board of Investment, 2016) which can attract many foreigners to come to Thailand. Therefore, if instructors understand the non-formal education students' problems and needs for English communication skills, the instructors would be able to find productive ways to solve the problems and support the students' development of English communication skills. Then, the students would have ready knowledge and skills to welcome foreigners who visit Thailand, and the students would be able to use their knowledge and skills to support their business and work in the future. The students would not only have better quality of education but also better quality of life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Non-Formal and Informal Education in Thailand

The Centers of Non-Formal and Informal Education in Thailand have given importance to the provision of basic education to people who have missed opportunities to pursue their higher education in the formal system (Draper & Kantavong, 2017). By way of explanation, Non-Formal and Informal Education has important missions to provide the students with quality of education, strengthen learning skills as well as create lifelong learning environments. To elevate education level, all groups of non-formal education students should be supported to have quality of education equally as there is a great diversity among the groups of non-formal education students in the Centers of Non-Formal and Informal Education, such as elderly, farmers, general public, immigrants, Thai-Muslims and workforce (Office of the Education Council, 2017). Therefore, the 21st century skills (The Office of Permanent Secretary, 2019) should also be applied in Non-Formal and Informal Education as these skills are necessary for learning, living and working as described below.

2.2 The 21st Century Skills

According to the Framework for the 21st Century Skills, it is a combination of content knowledge, specialized skills, expertise and literacies that the students should experience to become successful in life and work (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). There are 11 competences which can be categorized into the three significant components, namely learning and innovation, information, media and technology and life and careers as illustrated in the rainbow of P21 below.

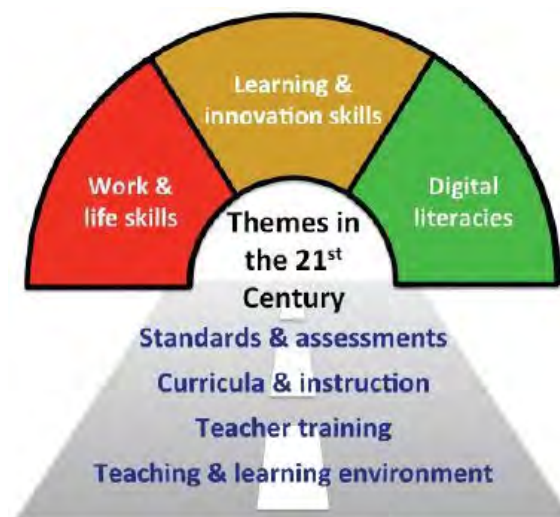


Figure 1. The rainbow of P21 for the 21st Century Framework (Wah Chu et al., 2017)

Regarding learning and innovation set, it consists of both core subjects and communication and collaboration (Wah Chu et al., 2017). To clarify, English is one of the core subjects, and

communication is concerned with the way in which the students could convey their thoughts and ideas by using communication skills to produce messages in various forms and contexts efficiently. Also, the students shall have abilities to work with others collaboratively (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Koçak and Göksu (2020) mentioned that communication was interrelated with the message transfer and interaction processes between interlocutors. However, successful communication occurs when interlocutors have communicative abilities to use language effectively. This involves the use of English communication skills as explained below.

2.3 English Communication Skills

English communication skills refer to listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills were interconnected with one another to make successful communication which is comprised of both linguistic comprehension and production (Nan, 2018). However, many studies revealed that Thai students have problems with English communication skills. Rungswang and Kosashunhanan (2021) revealed that students' difficulties in reading derived from lack of using reading strategies, varying speed rates and guessing meanings of unknown words. Tantiwich and Sinwongsuwat (2021) also found a lot of conversational problems in phone call role plays of EFL students in relation to pronunciation, sounds, stress, prosodic breaks and formation of grammatical turns in question-answer sequences. The study led by Kampookaew (2020) reported that the students had 10 types of grammatical errors in essay writing, and the most problematic types consisted of nouns, articles, verbs, word classes and prepositions. As for reading, Suwannasit (2019) presented three main causes of listening problems among Thai students, including the learner factor, the input factor and the teaching and learning factor. In other words, the learner factor was about linguistic knowledge, working memory, motivation and attention. The input factor referred to listening texts. Lastly, the teaching and learning factor was in line with the access to additional courses and authentic activities in English. For these reasons, it is urgent for Thai students to develop their skills to be ready for uses in their daily life and professional development.

As mentioned above, the non-formal education students required English communication skills to not only support their study but also create opportunities for them in business, careers and work in the future. Notwithstanding, a few researchers conducted the study to explore the non-formal education students' problems with and needs for English communication skills. For these reasons, this study focused on discovering their problems and needs for English communication skills and the teachers' perceptions towards the students' skills in various aspects. If teachers understand the factors that have effects on the students' problems and needs, the teachers would find effective ways to solve their problems with English communication skills. Moreover, this study would yield positive outcomes for the teachers as well as the Offices of Non-Formal and Informal Education to design and create productive teaching methods, tools and activities to meet their needs and support the development of their skills efficiently.

3. Research Questions

The objective of this present study is to investigate the non-formal education students'

problems with and needs for English communication skills, so the research questions can be determined as follows:

- (1) What are the problems with English communication skills of the non-formal education students?
- (2) What are the needs for English communication skills of the non-formal education students?
- (3) What are the teachers' perceptions towards the non-formal education students' English communication skills?

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study used the mixed-method approach between qualitative and quantitative data for the research design. By way of explanation, the data from the questionnaire was collected quantitatively, whereas the semi-structured interview was used to present data qualitatively.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The population in this study are the non-formal education students and teachers from the offices of non-formal and informal education in the eastern economic corridor (EEC), Thailand. They were selected by simple random sampling by using the lottery method. The inclusion criteria were based on age, gender and the offices of non-formal and informal education in EEC areas. The sample group can be divided into two groups. The first sample group comprised of 135 students who were up to 18 years old, and they are studying at three offices of non-formal and informal education in Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao. The students completed the questionnaire on the problems and needs of English communication skills. On the contrary, the second sample group consisted of 3 teachers who are under the offices of non-formal and informal education in Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao as well. They were also selected randomly by the lottery method. The teachers were interviewed for in-depth information about the students' English communication skills.

4.3 Instruments

The research instruments in this study were comprised of the questionnaire and semi-structured interview for quantitative and qualitative data. Before both instruments were utilized, they were evaluated through the IOC process for the content validity by three experts from English departments in Thailand. The details of questionnaire and semi-structured interview are described below.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was employed in this study to investigate the problems with and needs for English communication skills of the non-formal education students. The questionnaire was divided into four main parts including the students' general information (6 items), the students' problems with English communication skills (24 items), the students' needs for

learning English communication skills (24 items) and two open-ended questions for the students' opinions on other problems and needs that were not listed in the questionnaire. The students are requested to complete the questionnaire within 30 minutes per person.

4.3.2 Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was designed to obtain in-depth information from the teachers in three offices of non-formal and informal education in the eastern economic corridor. The contents in the interview form were in relation to significant aspects related to the students' English communication skills. By this instrument, it's flexible for the interviewer to ask questions with the interviewees openly but limited to the main questions listed in the form (Ruslin et al., 2022). There are five questions in the interview form, and the teachers were interviewed for 15 minutes per person.

4.4 Data Collection

The data in this study were collected from the questionnaire and the form of semi-structured interviews. To gather the data about the non-formal education students' attitudes toward the problems and needs on English communication skills, the questionnaire was distributed to 135 students first. After that, the teachers from the offices of non-formal and informal education in Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao were interviewed, and the data were taken from notes according to their responses to understand their perception towards the students' English communication skills.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed by the SPSS program for descriptive statistics. Then, it was summarized and displayed with percentages, mean and standard deviation. The students' attitudes toward the problems and needs with English communication skills then were interpreted according to the 5-point Likert scale. The degrees of agreement are ranged from strongly agree, agree, moderate, disagree and strongly disagree consecutively (Yaacob et al., 2019). For the open-ended questions, the data from the participants were translated from Thai into English for accuracy. Also, the data were grouped into similar wording clusters, and the content analysis was used to analyze the data to describe results explicitly. Similarly, the data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed by the content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). In other words, the data were transcribed, and then it was categorized according to the coding method for the interpretation of the results.

5. Results

This study demonstrated the results of the non-formal education students' problems with and needs for English communication skills as well as the teachers' perceptions towards the students' English communication skills. The three questions were answered thoroughly below.

5.1 What Are the Problems with English Communication Skills of the Non-formal Education Students?

According to the questionnaire, the results could answer two questions. First, it is the students' attitudes towards their problems with English communication skills. The findings were explained as follow.

Table 1. The students' attitudes towards their English communication problems

English Communication Skills	X	S.D.	Interpretation
Listening	2.97	1.14	Moderately Agree
Speaking	2.84	1.15	Moderately Agree
Reading	2.87	1.16	Moderately Agree
Writing	2.90	1.16	Moderately Agree

From Table 1, the results reveal that the students had moderate problems with English communication skills. The most problematic skill in their opinions is listening, as the highest mean score was 2.97, compared to other skills, followed by writing (2.90), reading (2.87) and speaking (2.84) respectively. Thus, it can be assumed that the non-formal education students were unsure about their problems with English communication skills, so they rated their agreements at the moderate level. To apprehend all aspects of their problems in English skills, the results of each problem were described by item distinctively below.

Table 2. The students' attitudes towards the problems on English communication skills

Item	Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
	Listening Skill			
1	I don't understand the meaning of English words.	3.18	1.21	Moderately Agree
2	I don't understand the meaning of English sentences in different structures.	3.21	1.23	Moderately Agree
3	I don't understand English because I am unable to distinguish sounds of similar words.	3.13	1.20	Moderately Agree
4	I don't understand English because of the speakers' fast talking.	3.21	1.22	Moderately Agree
5	I don't understand English because of the speakers' English accent.	3.16	1.20	Moderately Agree

	Speaking Skill			
1	I am unable to pronounce English words correctly	3.05	1.16	Moderately Agree
2	I am unable to speak English sentences grammatically and accurately.	3.15	1.16	Moderately Agree
3	I am unable to speak English properly due to nervousness, excitement or fear.	3.22	1.24	Moderately Agree
4	I am unable to choose English words that are appropriate for the context of communication in English.	3.26	1.25	Moderately Agree
5	I am unable to choose English words to match with the meaning of what I want to convey.	3.24	1.20	Moderately Agree
	Reading Skill			
1	I can't read because I don't understand the meaning of English words.	3.14	1.22	Moderately Agree
2	I can't read because I don't understand the meaning of English sentences in a variety of sentence structures.	3.10	1.20	Moderately Agree
3	I don't understand English because I can't interpret English words that have similar meanings to Thai.	3.07	1.25	Moderately Agree
4	I can't read it because I can't capture the main point of the content I read.	3.07	1.20	Moderately Agree
5	I can't read because of the author's English expressions.	3.09	1.19	Moderately Agree
	Writing Skill			
1	I am unable to spell English words correctly.	3.26	1.04	Moderately Agree
2	I am unable to choose English words that correspond to the meaning of what I want to convey in writing correctly.	3.17	1.14	Moderately Agree
3	I am unable to write English sentences grammatically and correctly.	3.17	1.21	Moderately Agree
4	I am unable to write and organize sentences in English correctly.	3.21	1.18	Moderately Agree
5	I am unable to use punctuation marks to write English sentences correctly.	3.20	1.18	Moderately Agree

From Table 2, the results show that the non-formal education students had moderate agreements with all statements of problems with English communication skills as the mean scores of their agreement were between 2.61 to 3.40. Regarding listening problems, the students rated their agreements on item 2 and 4 equally with the mean scores of 3.21. By way

of explanation, the students viewed that they had listening problems because of a variety of English sentence structures and the English speakers' fast talking. Thus, these two items ranked the highest among other three items (item 1, 5 and 3). The students acknowledged that they faced problems with English words and the speakers' English accent at the mean scores of 3.18 and 3.16 respectively. The students also felt that they were also unable to distinguish the sounds of similar words in item 3 which was the lowest mean score ($X = 3.13$).

In addition to speaking problems, the results demonstrate that the highest mean score was item 4, followed by item 5, 3, 2 and 1 consecutively. When speaking, the students moderately agreed that they couldn't choose English words that were appropriate for contexts of communication in item 4 ($X = 3.26$) but also the English words to match with what they meant in item 5 at the mean score of 3.24. Item 3 ranked third as its mean score was 3.22. The students felt that they couldn't speak English properly because of their nervousness, excitement or fear. The mean score of item 2 was lower than item 3 as the students thought that they were unable to speak English sentences grammatically and accurately ($X = 3.15$). Compared to other items, the mean score of item 1 ranked the lowest at 3.05. The students had a moderate agreement that they couldn't pronounce English words correctly.

When considering reading problems, the results shows that the students moderately agreed with item 1 the most, followed by item 2, 5 and 3 equal to 4 respectively. The students viewed that they didn't understand the meaning of English words the most as the mean score of item 1 ranked the highest at 3.14. Item 2 ranked second as its mean score was 3.10. The students thought that they were unable to read because they didn't understand the meaning of English sentences due to a variety of sentence structures. The students rated lower in agreement on item 5 than item 2, which shows that the students had reading difficulties from the author's expressions lower than the English sentence structures ($X = 3.09$). Besides, the equal mean scores consisted of items 3 and 4 at 3.07. The students pointed out that when they read English texts, they couldn't interpret English words that had similar meanings to Thai (item 3) as well as capture the main points of what they read (item 4).

As for writing problems, the students jointly agreed with the statements at moderate level. The highest mean score went to item 1 (3.26). The students thought that they couldn't spell English words correctly. The following items went to item 4 and 5. To clarify, the students discovered that when they write English texts, they couldn't write and organize sentences accurately with the mean score of 3.21 (item 4). The mean score of item 5 was slightly lower than item 4 which reveals that the students thought that they had lower difficulties with the use of punctuation marks than the organization of texts in writing at 3.20. It was followed by item 4 and 5, which showed the same results at the mean scores of 3.17. The students thought that they couldn't choose English words that presented the same meaning as what they wanted to convey in writing correctly (item 2), and they couldn't write English sentences grammatically and accurately (item 3).

Consequently, it can be concluded that the students had moderate agreements with English communication problems in all aspects. The most moderate agreement of listening problems covered the meanings of a variety of English sentence structures and the English speakers'

fast talking. As for speaking problems, the students had difficulties with English words the most as they couldn't choose them to communicate in contexts appropriately. In addition, when the students read English texts, they struggled with vocabulary problems which affected their reading abilities. Besides, the students were unable to spell English words correctly in writing. Therefore, the instructors shall find and apply teaching techniques that reinforce the students' English communication skills for future development of their language learning.

5.2 What Are the Needs for English Communication Skills of the Non-formal Education Students?

To understand the non-formal education students' needs of development on English communication skills, the questionnaire was distributed to the students afterwards. The findings from the questionnaire explored their attitudes explicitly. The overall results were summed up and displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The students' attitudes towards their needs for development of English communication skills

English Communication Skills	X	S.D.	Interpretation
Listening	3.73	1.27	Agree
Speaking	3.65	1.30	Agree
Reading	3.67	1.28	Agree
Writing	3.62	1.27	Agree

According to Table 3, the results show that the students agreed with the needs for development of English communication skills as the total mean scores were above 3.40. It indicates that the students desired to develop their English communication skills in all aspects. The most desirable skill for development is listening as the mean score ranked the highest at 3.73, followed by reading (3.67), speaking (3.65) and writing (3.62) sequentially. Hence, it can be inferred that the non-formal education students were in need of development on English communication skills, in particular with listening. The aspects of their needs for development of English communication skills are introduced in the following table.

Table 4. The students' attitudes towards the needs on English communication skills

Item	Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
	Listening Skill			
1	English conversation activities in daily life	3.57	1.29	Agree
2	English conversation activities on the phone	3.48	1.29	Agree
3	English conversation activities in meetings	3.40	1.32	Moderately Agree
4	English presentations	3.45	1.30	Agree
5	English conversation activities in job interviews	3.42	1.32	Agree
	Speaking Skill			
1	English conversation activities in daily life	3.55	1.27	Agree
2	English conversation activities on the phone	3.47	1.28	Agree
3	English conversation activities in meetings	3.41	1.29	Agree
4	English presentation activities	3.38	1.26	Moderately Agree
5	English conversation activities in job interviews	3.44	1.27	Agree
	Reading Skill			
1	English reading activities for advertising documents or public relations	3.50	1.15	Agree
2	English reading activities for letter or e-mail	3.51	1.17	Agree
3	English reading activities for meetings	3.41	1.21	Agree
4	English reading activities for presentations	3.43	1.24	Agree
5	English reading activities for application documents, contracts or agreements	3.49	1.25	Agree
	Writing Skill			
1	English writing activities for advertising or public relations	3.46	1.20	Agree
2	English writing activities for English letter or e-mail	3.53	1.18	Agree
3	English writing activities for meetings	3.47	1.21	Agree
4	English writing activities for presentations	3.42	1.20	Agree
5	English writing activities for information in the English job application form	3.47	1.22	Agree

From Table 4, the results demonstrate that the students agreed with all statements towards the needs of development on English communication skills. However, there are two items on each listening and speaking skill that were lower than 3.41, so these items are regarded as

‘moderately agree’. Conforming to listening skill, the results show that the students agreed with all statements, except item 3. In other words, the students admitted that they would like to develop their listening skill by using activities that consist of conversation in daily life the most as the mean score of the students’ agreement on item 1 ranked the highest at 3.57. The next activity that the students required to develop their listening ability is telephone conversation. The students rated their agreement on item 2 at the mean score of 3.48. The following items went to item 4 and 5 respectively. To simplify, the students thought that they would like to develop their listening skill via English presentations ($X = 3.45$) and job interview conversations ($X = 3.42$). Meanwhile, the students moderately agreed to use meeting conversation to develop their listening skill as the mean score of item 3 ranked the lowest among other items at 3.40.

As for speaking skill, the results reveal that the non-formal education students marked four items for ‘agree’ attitudes, including item 1, 2, 3 and 5, while item 4 was considered as ‘moderately agree’. It can be presumed that the students would like to improve their speaking abilities in all activities, but the needs of presentation activity introduced in item 4 was the least. To clarify, the students required daily life conversation to improve their speaking skill the most as the mean score of item 1 ranked the highest at 3.55. The next score was item 2, followed by items 5 and 3 consecutively. The students agreed that they were interested in telephone conversation ($X = 3.47$) more than job interview conversation ($X = 3.44$). Even though the students also preferred meeting conversation in item 3 ($X = 3.41$), it was less than all items in ‘agree’ attitudes. Nonetheless, the students rated ‘moderate’ agreement on item 4 only which can be summarized that the students thought they needed to develop their speaking skill through English presentation activity at the mean score of 3.38.

In accord with reading skill, the findings show that the non-formal education students agreed with all statements. That is the students wish to develop their reading skill by a variety of activities. The most desirable type of activities for the students to strengthen their reading skill is letter or email as item 2 ranked the highest mean score at 3.51. This is slightly different from item 1 as its mean score ranked second at 3.50. To simplify, the students required reading activities by using advertising documents or public relations to help them develop their reading abilities. The next item was item 5, followed by items 4 and 3 respectively. The mean score of item 5 was equal to 3.49. The students viewed that learning through application documents, contracts or agreements would fulfil their needs and promote their reading abilities. Besides, the mean score of item 4 was higher than that of item 3, which shows that the students felt necessary for reading abilities via presentation ($X = 3.43$) more than meeting documents ($X = 3.41$) to enhance their reading abilities.

With respect to writing skill, the results point out that the students agreed with all statements, so it can be mentioned that the students would like to develop their writing abilities via all activities, especially English letter or email. To simplify, the mean score of item 2 ranked the highest at 3.53, compared to other items. The students rated their agreements on item 3 and 5 equally with the same mean scores of 3.47. In other words, the meeting documents and job application forms were the two desirable activities that the students have required to improve their writing skill. The next mean score was item 1 which was equal to 3.46. The students

agreed that they were in need of advertising or public relations to develop their writing abilities. This was followed by item 4. Even though the mean score of this item ranked the lowest at 3.42, the students still thought that presentation documents could be used as supportive activity to reinforce their writing development.

In summary, the students were in need of several activities to develop their English communication skills. The most desirable type of activities for the development of their listening and speaking skills is conversation in daily life as this activity ranked the highest mean score in both skills. On the other hand, the students desired to utilize letter or email to boost up their reading and writing abilities. Therefore, the instructors shall design or seek for appropriate teaching activities and tools that can support the students' learning and development on their English communication skills effectively. As a result, the students would have ready skills to create job opportunities and support their own business and living in the future.

Moreover, the open-ended questions in the questionnaire explored the interesting results on the students' perspectives towards their problems and needs on English communication skills that were not specified in the questionnaire to cover and obtain deeply information from their attitudes as presented below.

Table 5. The students' other perspectives towards their problems on English communication skills

Aspects	English Communication Skills	Perspectives
Problems	Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronunciation
	Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English accents
	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading fluency • Translation • Word meanings
	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structures • Word formation

The results from Table 5 reveal that the students struggled with problems on all English communication skills. For speaking skill, they thought that it was difficult for them to pronounce English words. The students also mentioned that they couldn't speak English clearly and fluently. They added that they felt excited and nervous to speak English. Considering listening skill, the students explained that they didn't understand English conversation, and it was because of the English accents of the speakers. In addition to reading skill, the students described that they could read the sentences, but it sometimes was not smooth. The students couldn't comprehend the meanings as they couldn't translate the sentences from English into Thai accurately. As for writing skill, the students couldn't create

English sentences for communication as the students gave reasons that they were unable to organize the words grammatically.

Table 6. The students' other perspectives towards their needs on English communication skills

Aspects	Details	Perspectives
Needs	Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily conversation • Restaurant • Sales • Services and tourism • Telephone conversation • Workplace
	Teaching methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face classes • English teachers
	Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movies • Songs • Video clips

From above table, the students expressed their attitudes towards their needs for development of English communication skills distinctively. The students desired a variety of contents, teaching methods and activities to develop their English communication skills. The students would like to learn English to support their own business and apply this knowledge with their jobs in the future. The contents they preferred to study consisted of English for daily conversation, restaurant, sales, services and tourism, telephone conversation and workplace. For teaching methods, the students preferred to learn English in face-to-face classes and with English teachers. Besides, they would like to learn English through activities that promoted their development on English for communication skills, such as using video clips, movies and songs in language learning.

5.3 What Are the Teachers' Perceptions towards the Non-formal Education Students' English Communication Skills?

With regard to the teachers' perceptions towards the non-formal education students' English communication skills, the results from the semi-structured interview were transcribed according to the content analysis which could be categorized into 8 aspects as summarized below.

Table 7. The teachers' perceptions towards the students' English communication skills

No.	Aspects	Perspectives
1	The kinds of teaching materials/tools/activities applied in classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning resources from the centers • Games • Group activities • Handouts • Role plays • YouTube
2	The attributes of students' current English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak to moderate abilities
3	The students' major problems with English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: accents and pronunciation • Speaking: speaking difficulties • Reading: reading difficulties • Writing: sentence construction
4	The causes of those problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: accent unfamiliarity and pronunciation confusion • Speaking: lack of confidence • Reading: lack of confidence • Writing: lack of writing abilities • Others: inadequate basic knowledge in English, lack of actual language use, loss of learning continuity and absence of learning readiness.
5	The factors that can help the students improve their English communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional media • Learning with English teachers
6	The learning contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English for academic purposes • English in daily life • Professional English
7	The difficulties in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile learning problem • Internet Connection problem • Concentrated problem
8	The methods for solving those problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following up their study in Google Classroom • Learning at the centers • Reviewing their study after classroom

From Table 7, the results from the semi-structured interview point out that the teachers have used a variety of teaching materials, tools or activities to facilitate and develop the students' English communication skills, including learning resources from the Centers of Non-Formal and Informal Education, games, group activities, handouts, role plays and YouTube. The teachers also viewed that the students' skills ranged from weak to moderate levels as the students who studied in the Centers had different backgrounds. To clarify, most students had weak skills, but some students had good skills because they had chances to practice English skills at Islamic seminaries.

When considering the students' major problems on English communication skills, it can be seen clearly that the students had accent and pronunciation problems as they didn't get used to the speakers' accents, and they were confused with the different pronunciations between what they had learned from English classes and on the Internet. Therefore, the students had difficulties comprehending what they had listened to. As for speaking skill, the teachers mentioned that the students felt unconfident to speak English because they were afraid of making mistakes. Thus, the students didn't dare to speak English. Similarly, the teachers added that when it came to reading, the students also felt worried about making mistakes as well, so they didn't have confidence to read texts out loud. Among these skills, the teachers viewed that writing was the hardest skill for the students to overcome their problems. Most students were unable to construct sentences for communication accurately because of their lack of writing abilities. Moreover, the teachers also reveal interesting aspects about other causes of problems that had effects on students' English communication skills, including the students' inadequate basic knowledge in English, lack of actual language use, loss of learning continuity and absence of learning readiness. For these reasons, the teachers thought that the instructional media should be addressed to classrooms, such as movies and VDO or any media that could promote and support the students to practice all English communication skills. Moreover, the students believed that the students' skills would be developed effectively if the students were taught by the English teachers directly rather than by the media only. Furthermore, the teachers described that the Centers had great emphasis on the contents in English for academic purposes, English in daily life and professional English.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the students encountered difficulties with online learning. The most frequent problem was mobile learning as some students didn't have the mobile models that could support student learning. In this regard, the teachers assigned the students to follow up what they had studied in Google Classroom. Besides, students were faced with Internet connection problem in online learning, so the students were suggested to visit the centers to learn onsite. At the Centers, the students could not only connect to the Internet but also use learning tools such as personal computer and TV conveniently. The students' family could also reduce their expenses towards the use of Internet as well. Lastly, the teachers admitted that the students lacked concentration while online learning, so the teachers assigned the students to review the contents of their study after classroom.

As a matter of fact, the teachers' perceptions towards the students' English communication skills in all aforementioned aspects could be useful for the teachers at the Centers as well as the researcher to design and select teaching activities, methods or materials that meet the

non-formal education students' needs to help them effectively solve the problems with English communication skills.

6. Discussion

To elevate the educational level of non-formal education students and provide quality of education equally, it is important for non-formal education students to have English communication skills, especially the students in the eastern economic corridor, namely Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao as these three areas are considered to be the main locations for ASEAN, China and India with the potential of transport systems and free trade zones (Thailand Board of Investment, 2016) which can attract a lot of foreigners to come to Thailand to do business and travel. To help the non-formal education students improve and have ready skills for job opportunities relevant to foreign affairs and business and for their own sake in the near future, it is important for instructors to understand the students' problems and know their needs for English communication skills at a very early stage. As a result, it would help if the instructors find ways to develop and promote the students' English communication skills productively. Thus, this study was conducted under three main purposes as discussed distinctively below.

6.1 What Are the Problems with English Communication Skills of the Non-formal Education Students?

The findings of this current study showed that students had listening problems in particular with the comprehension of sentences with mixed structures and the fast talking of the English speakers. The results were supported by two studies. First, the study led by Suwannasit (2019) addressed the input factor, including the fast speed transfer, unfamiliar words and ideas, and the length of the listening texts as one of the major causes of listening problems among Thai students. Similarly, the results from the study conducted by Nushi and Orouji (2020) supported that the students should have abilities to understand, decode and analyze the input including new vocabulary, complex structure, connected speech, and intonation as these elements were important for them to achieve listening comprehension. As for speaking problems, the results revealed that students were unable to choose appropriate words to communicate with English speakers in contexts. This was all because of the students' lack of vocabulary knowledge (Ratnasari, 2020; Dewi & Jim, 2018). This deficiency had effects on their sentence formation and interaction when the students communicated with their interlocutors (Dewi & Jim, 2018). Moreover, the students' small size of vocabulary also led to reading difficulties because they were unable to understand the meanings of vocabularies in the texts. To that extent, the students would try to guess the meanings by using the context clues instead (Rungswang & Kosashunhanan, 2021). By this method, it is highly possible to have misinterpretation of the content meanings of the passages. Additionally, the limited knowledge of vocabulary can obstruct students from writing achievement. The students admitted that they couldn't spell vocabularies in writing correctly. These results were in accordance with the study of Sultani and Himat (2021) which stated that the students made spelling errors in written performance, and the major factors were derived from the students' carelessness, proper guide provision and L1 interference. It can be seen precisely that the

non-formal education students presented various aspects of problems on English communication skills. To have skills that are ready for EEC policy, their problems shall be urgently addressed.

6.2 What Are the Needs for English Communication Skills of the Non-formal Education Students?

In addition to the non-formal education students' needs on English communication skills, the results marked that those students required several activities to improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Conforming to the study of Piamsai (2017), it was found that the students preferred to improve all skills to have daily effective communication. The most desirable activity for the students was conversation in daily life as they thought this activity would boost up their listening and speaking skills. It was similar with the study of Sertpunya (2019) which supported the communicative activities, such as information exchange activities, data conclusions, role plays and simulation could increase hotel receptionists' listening and speaking abilities. Thus, the activities that promoted actual and daily uses of language would help students solve their listening problems efficiently (Suwannasit, 2019). Also, the students were in need of text activities, such as letter or email to improve their reading and writing abilities. Khalaf (2017) examined whether email and WhatsApp could develop the students' reading abilities or not, and the results found that the students not only improved their reading abilities: skimming and scanning skills, but these tools may also raise student awareness of the usefulness of email and WhatsApp. The study of Pimthong, Chumpavan, and Suksaeresup (2017) also suggested to use business email with new formats and styles to gain knowledge and improve writing abilities of Thai employees in international companies. Along these lines, if teachers design or find activities that meet the students' needs, the non-formal education students would have willing to communicate (WTC), which was considered as the foremost factor that made a great impact on the students' development on English communication skills (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021).

6.3 What Are the Teachers' Perceptions towards the Non-formal Education Students' English Communication Skills?

To deeply perceive the students' attitudes with English communication skills, teachers from the Centers of Non-Formal and Informal Education were interviewed. The findings certified that the students all had English communication problems ranging from weak to moderate levels. The major problems of listening skill were caused by accents and pronunciation. The study of Jaya (2017) supported that the students who were unfamiliar with English accents could have difficulty with listening comprehension. Additionally, Nushi and Orouji (2020) shed light on three elements that affect students' listening difficulties which include pronunciation, individual characteristics and content. Thus, the student could get confused when they listen to different and unclear pronunciation of English speakers (Nadhira & Warni, 2021). Moreover, the teachers stated that the students had been faced with hidden problems of speaking which were associated with the fear and anxiety of making mistakes which resulted in loss of confidence when speaking English. The results were supported by the study of Santiwatthanasiri (2018). Asysyfa, Handyani, and Rizkiani (2019) which also

revealed various factors that influence students' speaking difficulties, including lack of preparation, being afraid of being left behind in understanding the material, making mistakes and being ridiculed by their peers, and lack of confidence in spelling, pronunciation and word selection. In this regard, the teachers should provide opportunities to students to improve their speaking abilities in friendly atmospheres so that the students would feel relaxed to speak out loud as well as organize activities that truly promote the use of students' everyday conversation (Yamsri et al., 2020). The anxiety of making mistakes also affected the students' reading abilities (Al Farug, 2019; Tsai & Lee, 2018). For example, Al Farug (2019) found that the material features, namely unfamiliar words and culture along with the personal factors of making mistakes were the two significant causes of students' anxiety. However, the teachers can help students overcome their fear and anxiety by encouraging them to feel more confident and not be scared of doing mistakes. Furthermore, the teachers thought that the students lacked of writing abilities, so they were unable to construct English sentence structures to be used in communication successfully. The teachers added that that writing skill seemed to be the most difficult skill for the students to master (Kampookaew, 2020). It was supported by Alharthi (2021) who mentioned that EFL students didn't prefer to do writing activities primarily, but it was the essential skill that the students were required to learn. Also, the teachers believed that writing would be the last skill that the students could achieve its proficiency which was in line with Peter and Singaravelu (2021). However, the teachers stated that linguistic aspects were not only the factors that limited their communicative abilities, but there were also other factors, such as the students' lack of basic knowledge, actual language use, learning continuity and learning readiness.

7. Conclusion

This present study reported the non-formal education students' problems and needs with English communication skills. The paper also uncovered the teachers' perceptions towards the students' skills in significant aspects. The results from the study showed that the students had listening problems in line with the meanings of sentences with mixed structures and the fast talk of the English speakers. When the students talked in English, they were unable to choose words to communicate with the speakers in contexts appropriately. The vocabularies also affected reading abilities as the students didn't understand word meanings, this problem led to writing problems. When writing, the students admitted that they couldn't spell words accurately. In addition, the results from the students' needs for English communication skills revealed that the students required a variety of activities to improve their skills. By way of explanation, the students believed that conversation in daily life would help develop their listening and speaking skills the most, and letter or email would be effective activities to improve their reading and writing skills.

With regard to the teachers' perceptions towards the students' English communication skills, the results revealed that the students' English abilities were different as some students in the Centers of Non-Formal and Informal Education had chances to learn English outside the Centers, so they would have better skills than the ones who didn't have these chances. Moreover, the teachers reported that the major listening problems were derived from accents and pronunciation. It was difficult for students to understand the English accents of the

speakers, and the students felt confused when they heard different pronunciations. The teachers also agreed that students lacked confidence to speak English and read texts because they were worried about and afraid of making mistakes. Most importantly, the teachers conceived that the students lacked writing abilities to construct English sentence structures for communication. If all skills were compared, the teachers gave opinions that writing skill was the most difficult skill for the students to master. The teachers believed that the students would finally have written competency if they could reach listening, speaking and reading achievements.

Accordingly, the results of this survey would give beneficial outcomes and alternatives for organizational administrators, instructors and scholars to select and design appropriate teaching activities and materials that meet the students' needs and can reinforce the students' English communication skills effectively. As a result, the students would have ready skills to create job opportunities and support their own business in the future. Lastly, the students' quality of education would be elevated equally.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the Offices of Non-Formal and Informal Education in the eastern economic corridor (EEC), Thailand for their cooperation in the data collection process. My greatest appreciation was also extended to the teachers and the students who participated in this study. Additionally, I wish to express my sincerest thanks to Mr. Michael Cooke for his kindness and dedication to proofread my manuscript as well as his valuable comments and suggestion.

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