Challenges and Obstacles in Learning English as a Second Language Among MCU Buddhist Students

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Abstract

In the Kingdom of Thailand, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Kingdom of Cambodia, and Lao People's Democratic Republic, monk education plays a vital role. Monks' ESL education is critical for the continuation of Buddha's teachings and the monks themselves. The purpose of this study were (1) to identify the primary cause of challenges encountered when learning English as a second language among MCU Buddhist student monks, (2) to determine whether the places of study and language exposure have a substantial effect on the acquisition of English as a second language, and (3) to find out remedies of the challenges that are associated with the acquisition of English as a second language. This study used a random sample of 50 monks' ESL students. Data were collected via a questionnaire, and to interpret the results mixed method was employed. The findings established that ESL instruction is critical for monks' future communication. Students had numerous hurdles and difficulties while pursuing ESL learning, therefore, many recommendations were given to enhance monks' ESL learning.

Keywords: Challenges; Obstacles; English Second Language Learning;

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Introduction

Language enables people to think, and it provides a space in which they can reflect on their thoughts and learn how the world works and use that knowledge to their advantage. With the evolution of technology, English has become increasingly important in various fields, including medical, engineering, and education. In addition, due to the effective use of the English language, the university's requirements, and the amount of demand for highly skilled foreign language talent. To connect with the rest of the world or a larger audience, one must comprehend the English language. Due to the effective use of the English language, many Buddhist monks are pursuing second language acquisition to broaden their linguistic perspectives; however, most Buddhist monks begin studying English as a second language in their late twenties; the challenges, obstacles, and difficulties are inescapable.

According to Foley, English is a compulsory subject for Thai students from primary to secondary school[1], and this also holds true for high school of Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Kingdom of Cambodia, and Lao People's Democratic Republic. On the other hand, English is a mandatory subject and available within the high school, whereas, in most monasteries, Buddhist monks can only study the Pali language. Therefore, it is plausible that those who studied the Pali language are likely to learn or study in their native dialect, allowing them to understand the Pali language with minimum effort. However, the English language was significantly different from their native languages, such as sound, grammar, writing styles, and culture. English second language learners often adopt the structure from their language, by doing so makes them comfortable speaking and straightforward writing, but they are not advancing much in terms of language learning; thus, many errors occurred in their language speaking or writing. Khan & Khan also address the problem of EFL students automatically employing their first language. Learners might quickly slip into the habit of utilizing their mother tongue, and in this way, they confront more challenges in the learning process[2]. Yusica highlighted how Thai students experienced unique challenges due to

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[1]   Foley, Joseph A. "English in... Thailand", **RELC journal. Vol. 36**, no. 2 (2005): 223-234.

[2]   Khan, Shumaila Riaz, and Mohammed Riaz Khan. "Error analysis in english writing", **International Multidisciplinary Research Journal.** Vol.4 no.2 (2016): 232-243.

its distinctive sociocultural influences in Thailand that affected their oral communication abilities[3]. The language barrier creates distance between cultures and people around the world. Arguably, the English language is the primary factor of cultural globalization around the world. Cultures are separated by languages, which limits communication and interferes with learning. Rozaki, E. stated that another feature of culture that contributes to interpersonal communication obstacles is the way people establish distance around themselves[4]. Analyzing the foreign language barrier is essential in order to understand the language barrier and how it could be overcome. Differences in language, culture, and geography result in diverse ways of expressing ourselves. With unfamiliar sound, speaking, and writing style, Buddhist monks would undoubtedly experience numerous difficulties while studying ESL. Buddhist student monks account for more than 70% of the student body at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. A significant increase in the number of Buddhist student monks at Mahachulalongkorn-rajavidyalaya University has attracted attention in recent years, with that number rising exponentially and being considered essential in international education. This subset of international students requires a greater understanding of their expectations and needs and how they handle different academic environment.

The primary goal of this paper is to present the challenges toward second language acquisition. However, it is also necessary to develop answers to these challenges; furthermore, the finding of this study may give a better understanding of how the language barriers, along with their subsequent assimilation into their studies and a new society and culture, have affected them. The specific objectives of this study are as follow;

Research Objectives

1. To identify the primary cause of challenges encountered when learning English as a second language among MCU Buddhist student monks.

2. To determine whether the medium of study and language exposure have a substantial effect on the acquisition of English as a second language.

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[3] Yusica, U. "Problem faced by Thai student in speaking English. **Academia. 1-9**", (2014).

[4] Rozaki, Elisavet. "Gregory Katsas **Food as Culture**", (21, July, 2020).

3. To find out remedies of the challenges that are associated with the acquisition of English as a second language.

Literature Reviews

Transitions in learning may be quite intimidating for students, even more so when they involve with an unfamiliar language. Most Buddhist monks entered the monastery to liberate themselves from suffering, and it was the only place in those days where education was accessible. It is reasonable to assume that individuals who learned the Pali language were taught in their native tongue, which is simple to follow in speaking, writing, listening, and reading, but the English language was different from what they learned. Numerous research investigations have been conducted to ascertain students' challenges when learning a second language. Pronunciation, writing, reading, listening, speaking, grammar, sex, location, management, and other academic study skills were critical issues. Notably, Bitchener & Basturkmen mentioned the problems encountered when writing the discussion and outcome portions of their respective theses[5]. Academic writing challenges exist at all levels of writing, from elementary grammar to the sophisticated discussion phase of a dissertation, where complex concepts must be presented logically and academically argued. To write or to speak, often ESL learners adopt the structure or style from their language, although doing so makes them comfortable speaking and straightforward to write, and they are not advancing much in terms of language learning; thus, many errors occurred in their language speaking or writing. In much the same way, Khan & Khan also address the problem of EFL students automatically employing their first language. Learners might quickly slip into the habit of utilizing their mother tongue, and in this way, they confront more challenges in learning English[6].

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[5] Bitchener, John, and Helen Basturkmen. "Perceptions of the difficulties of postgraduate L2 thesis students writing the discussion section", **Journal of English for Academic Purposes** Vol.5 no. 1 (2006): 4-18.

[6] Khan, Shumaila Riaz, and Mohammed Riaz Khan. "Error analysis in English writing", **International Multidisciplinary Research Journal.** Vol.4 no. 2 (2016): 232-243.

Additionally, Singaravelu discovered a meaningful relationship between students' difficulties with pronunciation, learning grammar, knowledge of sentence patterns, memorization without comprehension, sex, location, and type of management[7]. Other researcher also had highlighted how Thai students experienced unique challenges due to its distinctive sociocultural influences in Thailand that affected their oral communication abilities. As a result of our cultural and geographical differences, our voices also differ. Pronunciation is a significant challenge due to the absence of some English consonants in Thai. Apart from writing and speaking, reading is a significant challenge in second language acquisition; for example, a study from Ho shows that Taiwanese and international students lacked disciplinary reading and writing abilities at Taiwan University; therefore, students cannot correctly comprehend the texts[8]. Listening skills were one of the most often reported obstacles in second language learning. Listening is a crucial skill for classroom activities and communication amongst classmates, and a lack of listening skills will result in a significant problem for learners. When students lacked sufficient quality and general vocabulary, students had difficulty comprehending their classmates' presentations and lectures due to the accents, slang, speaking speed, and discussions.

Numerous legitimate measures and recommended studies have been taken to strengthen students' skills for learning English as second language. According to Christopher Bergmann, speaking a second language (L2) is a difficult endeavor, and even those who consider themselves 'fluent' in the L2 may occasionally be uncertain about proper grammatical usage or at a loss for the right phrases. The most evident reason for this lack of fluency is a lack of skill, as well as an insufficient knowledge of and practice with the L2.[9] It has been suggested that second language acquisition can

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[7] Singaravelu, G. "A Study of the problems of students of higher secondary classes in learning English as a second language in Thiruvarur District", **(Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Educational Technology, Bharathidasan University**, 2001).

[8] Ho, Mei-Ching. "The difficulties in disciplinary research writing: A case study of first year graduate students in Taiwan", **Journal of teaching and teacher education.** Vol.2 No.4 (2013): 77-87.

[9] Bergmann, C., Sprenger, S. A., & Schmid, M. S. The impact of language co-activation on L1 and L2 speech fluency. **Acta Psychologica**, (2015) : 161, 25–35.

occur within a social and cultural framework by Gardner's Socio-Educational Model. According to this theory, the students' language proficiency may be influenced by cultural beliefs and the community in which he or she lives. If, for example, the societal assumption is that learning a second language is difficult, low levels of performance are likely. Individual differences such as IQ, language aptitude, drive, and situational anxiety are all included in the model. One of these four elements will have an impact on someone's attitudes and personality.[10] Shinbo addressed the deficiencies and needs of legacy language students, as well as their strengths and challenges. Questionnaires, interviews, observations, and e-mails were used to collect the data. According to the findings, participants firmly agreed that they needed to enhance their abilities in reading, writing, and speaking. Instructors of foreign languages believed that students should strengthen their speaking abilities in order to use them in academic and professional settings.[11] The findings identified two distinct types of learning problems. As a foreign language learner, you may face challenges such as a lack of familiarity with terminology, inability to correctly read and write the Japanese characters (kanji), inability to follow grammatical rules, and a tendency to combine discursive styles and registers. Students also face peer pressure, class speed, and negative perceptions when it comes to excelling.

Scope of the Research

The contents of this chapter discuss the difficulties encountered in the acquisition of English as a second language by MCU Buddhist student monks at MCU University in Ayutthaya, Thailand. Respondents are Buddhist monks enrolled in bachelor's and master's programs at MCU University in Bangkok's Ayutthaya area for the academic year 2021. 50 Buddhist student monks comprised the total population. The Area's scope is limited to Buddhist student monks enrolled in MCU University's Faculty of Humanity and IBSC in Ayutthaya, Bangkok, Thailand.

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[10] Gardner, R. C., & Lalonde, R. N. Second Language Acquisition: A Social Psychological Perspective, **The Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association**, (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985), pp. 3-24.

[11] Shinbo, Yayoi. "Challenges, needs, and contributions of heritage language students in foreign language classrooms", (**PhD diss., University of British Columbia**, 2004), pp. 1-115.

Research Methodology

During the beginning stages of studying English as a Second Language, students experience several obstacles and barriers. The primary goal of this practical project is to address the common difficulties encountered during this early stage of English learning. Another reason is to inform learners and teachers about the various difficulties encountered by students. Therefore, this research is to investigate the sources of difficulties encountered when learning a second language. To obtain accurate data, this study employed a quantitative approach which is a modified version of the work of Choosri Banditvilai and Robert Cullen[12], and this study analyzed quantitative data through the use of statistics counts. As a result, this study collected data by questionnaire. The study is limited to Buddhist student monks enrolled in Bachelor programs at MCU University. This inquiry took place over a six-month period in the summer and fall of 2021. The researchers collected data from respondents via questionnaire. This study's questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first component of the questionnaire contains questions about the respondents' demographic characteristics, such as their age, medium of study, program, and year of study. The second section of the questionnaire seeks responses to questions about difficulties with grammar, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and anxiety. A questionnaire was issued to respondents enrolled at MCU University in the province of Ayutthaya. The responders were given a total of 45 questionnaires.

Participants

The subjects were 50 students who enrolled in Bachelor program in the academic year 2021 at Faculty of Humanity and IBSC in Ayutthaya province, Thailand. The purpose of participant selection and recruitment was to capture as much variation as possible in terms of learners' ages and prior learning experiences, and learners' educational backgrounds. Prospective participants were informed that the research will focus on educational experiences.

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[12] Banditvilai, Choosri, and Robert Cullen. "Problems and Obstacles in Learning English as a Foreign", **International Journal of Social Science and Humanity.** Vol.8 No.12 (2018): 289-293.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires are used to obtain data from the study's sample. The questionnaire is divided into two sections, each of which contains multiple sub-sections. The sections address the following topics: language challenges; grammar, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence. Each variable and question are recognized by a name and defined by a set of acceptable codes or a range of permissible values during the coding process. In general, variables are split and classified and assigned values based on horizontal ascending order (Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, and Strongly Agree=5). The researcher analyzed quantitative data using computer programs (e.g., Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS) after processing the questionnaire. Data analysis has utilized the techniques of statistics that include the aspects of mean, and standard deviation (S.D). Each variable serves as an input to the analysis phase, when it is transformed into the intended output. The score or the level of challenges and obstacles in Learning English as a Second Language according to the Likert Scale as the following;

Mean 4.51 – 5.00 refers to the highest level of challenges and obstacles.

Mean 3.51 – 4.50 means high level of challenges and obstacles.

Mean 2.51 – 3.50 means moderate of challenges and obstacles.

Mean 1.51 – 2.50 means less challenges and obstacles.

Mean 1.00 – 1.50 refers to the lowest level of challenges and obstacles.

Results of the study

The following table describes the educational background of the participants, which presents the age, medium of the study, exposure in English language, Programme of the study, and year of the study.

The following table 1 describes general information of the participants' age, places of study, exposure time of studying English language, studies program, and year of the studies.

No.	Variables	Description	Percentage
1	Ages	26-30	52.0%
		31-35	44.0%
		36-40	4.0%
2	Places of the Study	Monastery	19.6%
		English Class	56.9%
		High School	23.5%
3	Exposure time of studying English language	Less than two years	20.0%
		Third Year	52.0%
		Four Year	22.0%
		Five Year Above	6.0%
4	Studies Program	Buddhist Studies	24.0%
		English International Programme	72.0%
		Linguistics Programme	4.0%
5	Year of the Studies	First year	54.0%
		Second Year	30.0%
		Third Year	10.0%

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents who took part in the study, revealing that 52% of respondents are between the ages of 26-30, while 44% are between the ages of 31 and 35 which is the second largest age proportion among participants. 56.9% of respondents studied English in an English-medium class, 23.5% were from medium of high school, and 19.6% are from monastery. 72% of respondents are from an English international program and 24% are from Buddhist studies. 54% of respondents are in their first year of study for the academic year 2021, and 30% of those participants are second year students. According to the results of the table above, there is a substantial relationship between the study's medium and language exposure. It demonstrated that students who have adequate exposure to the targeted language through the effective platform will face less challenges, as detailed in the following table and its results.

The following table 2 describes the challenges and obstacles in ESL among MCU Buddhist student monks.

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Listening					
I'm having difficulty grasping the central concept or main idea.	50	1.00	5.00	3.46	.90
I am unable to differentiate the sounds of similar words.	50	2.00	5.00	3.42	.92
I do not grasp or catch the meaning in time	50	1.00	5.00	3.24	1.11
I do not know the vocabulary.	50	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.05
I cannot comprehend the accent.	50	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.03
Speaking					
I must first think in my own language.	50	2.00	5.00	4.02	.71
I'm afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly.	50	2.00	5.00	3.74	.75
My vocabulary is limited.	50	2.00	4.00	3.58	.73
I'm afraid of making grammatical mistakes.	50	2.00	4.00	3.16	.93
I find it difficult to speak.	50	1.00	4.00	2.52	.90
Reading					
Insufficient vocabulary contributes to miscommunication.	50	2.00	5.00	3.90	.70
I am unable to comprehend the grammar or structure.	50	1.00	5.00	3.30	.93
I must first interpret into my native tongue.	50	2.00	5.00	3.34	1.02
I lack reading strategies.	50	2.00	5.00	3.50	1.03
I am unable to comprehend the passage's meaning and main ideas.	50	2.00	5.00	3.64	.89
Writing					
I always begin by thinking in my native tongue and then translating into English.	50	2.00	5.00	3.78	.78
My vocabulary range is limited.	50	1.00	5.00	3.60	.96
I am unfamiliar with sentence structure.	50	2.00	5.00	3.44	.81
I'm not really certain of the grammar.	50	1.00	4.00	3.18	.91
I am incapable of writing grammatically correct sentences.	50	1.00	4.00	2.56	1.01

Anxiety					
When I have to stand up in front of the class or make a presentation, I get apprehensive.	50	2.00	5.00	4.04	.96
I become concerned when my lesson incorporates a large amount of vocabulary that I am unfamiliar with.	50	2.00	5.00	4.00	.94
I am afraid to talk or ask questions in English class.	50	2.00	5.00	3.78	.70
When I'm unable to write or communicate myself in English language, I experience anxiety.	50	2.00	5.00	3.52	.99
When the teacher asks me a question for which I am unprepared, I become worried.	50	2.00	5.00	3.32	.89
Valid N (listwise)	50				

According to the table above it shows that student get apprehensive when they have to stand up in front of the class or make a presentation with the mean of $\overline{X}$ = 4.04 and SD = .96. This followed by student have to first think in their mother tongue before speaking with $\overline{X}$ = 4.02 and SD = .71. The third most frequent challenge among MCU students with $\overline{X}$ = 4.00 and SD = .94, is that students become concerned when their lesson incorporates a large amount of vocabulary that they are unfamiliar with. Most participants agree that insufficient vocabulary contributes to miscommunication with $\overline{X}$ = 3.90 and SD = .70. And students always begin by thinking in their native tongue and then translating into English in their writing with $\overline{X}$ = 3.78 and SD = .78. With $\overline{X}$ = 3.78 and SD = .70, it shows that students are hesitant to speak or ask question in class, this is followed by students are afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly with $\overline{X}$ = 3.78 and SD = .75. In reading, students are unable to comprehend the passage's meaning and main ideas with $\overline{X}$ = 3.64 and SD = .89. Vocabulary limitation is a major challenge which illustrated both in their speaking and writing with $\overline{X}$ = 3.60, SD = .96 for writing and $\overline{X}$ = 3.58 and SD = .73 for speaking. Most participants agree that they feel anxious when they are unable to communicate in English with $\overline{X}$ = 3.52 and SD = .99. The results show that student lack of reading strategies with $\overline{X}$ = 3.50 and SD = 1.03, therefore this also linked to another issue which students are having difficulty grasping the central concept or main idea with $\overline{X}$ = 3.46 and SD = .90. Participants are facing problem with unfamiliar sentence structure when writing with $\overline{X}$ = 3.44 and SD = .81. When listening

students are unable to differentiate the sounds of similar words with $\overline{X}$ = 3.42 and SD = .92. When reading students interpret into their native language with $\overline{X}$ = 3.34 and SD = 1.02. Students also face problem when the teacher asks them a question for which they are unprepared, they become worried with $\overline{X}$ = 3.32 and SD = .89. Overall, the results indicate that speaking skills were the primary area of difficulty for participants due to a lack of confidence in standing in front of the class and delivering a presentation, as well as a lack of necessary vocabularies; as a result, they frequently used their native language to think before speaking. The second most common difficulty encountered by MCU students is their nervousness or anxiety when their lesson includes a substantial amount of unfamiliar vocabulary. The third most significant problem students experience is a lack of reading abilities, a lack of reading strategies, and a lack of vocabulary, which most students feel leads to miscommunication. The fourth issue that students experience with their writing, specifically with unfamiliar sentence structures, and the last challenge that students face is with their listening skill, specifically with their inability to detect the sounds of comparable words.

Conclusion and Implications

Given the participants' varied linguistic conditions and target language learning contexts, the findings indicated a range of student responses and perspectives concerning English language acquisition and challenges. Among the significant findings in the area of speaking and nervousness or confidence were the majority of participants need English instruction. According to the data, "speaking" was viewed as the primary issue for students due to a general difficulty with limited vocabulary and having to think in their native language first before speaking, which can impede their language development progress. "Anxiety" was ranked second in difficulty by the students. "Reading" skills were ranked third overall. The primary issue of students in this area was a lack of reading strategies and an inability to comprehend the passage's significance and core concepts. Due to a lack of vocabulary and difficulty distinguishing sentence structure, "writing" skills were ranked fourth for participants in difficulty. "Listening" was perceived to be the least problematic issue by the students, despite the fact that the majority of them have difficulty distinguishing the sounds of similar words. The findings of this study provide

insight on respondents' perspectives of the challenges associated with second language acquisition. Although students were aware of the considerable problems associated with ESL, there was a deficiency of effort and energy directed toward those barriers; this effort should be enhanced, which will need an increase in study time.

The results of Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate unequivocally that there is a relationship between the amount of language exposure and its effectiveness. And also, the study found that, as stated in the corresponding table and its results, students who receive appropriate exposure to the targeted language through an effective platform will have fewer obstacles. Apart from other linguistic and affective aspects, prior learning experience is recognized as the primary reason for learners' reluctance in English acquisition. The learning experiences and environment have a significant impact on the acquisition of a second language. The remedies for second language acquisition difficulties, the lecturer or teacher should design a system that encourages students to speak more in class, as "speaking" was a key difficulty for students, it is vital to consider for future courses. Anxiety or confidence is critical for students because the majority of participants indicated a high level of nervousness, confidence, or anxiety. As a result, the lecturer or teacher should encourage their students and make students to feel comfortable when presenting their project or engage in conversation with the students to encourage them to speak more. For reading, the results indicate that students lack reading strategies, which is critical for students to develop since their work is primarily based on reading and writing. And hence, the lecturer or teacher should implement reading strategies for their students in order to overcome reading challenges; however, there is a problem with implementing those strategies with a great number of vocabularies, as the results indicate that students become nervous when they see a large number of vocabularies. Other tactics to employ for MCU students include expanding student vocabulary in order to increase their comprehension of new terms or language that is required for their study. In all four skills, it is clear that a lack of vocabulary is another significant barrier for students, and so the lecturer or teacher should apply or introduce additional vocabulary to help students acquire new words and comprehend the passage's meaning. While writing is critical for students, the results indicate that students are having difficulty distinguishing grammar sentence form. This

could be due to a lack of grammatical rules or the medium in which students interacted prior to entering the academic environment. Regardless of the medium or linguistic exposure of the students, the lecturer or teacher should teach or assist students in improving their writing skills, as this is one of the most critical for students. Although listening presented the least difficulty for students, it remains a significant concern since the majority of participants were unable to distinguish the sound from a similar word. Therefore, a listening session or listening strategies should be implemented by the lecturer or teacher to improve students' listening ability. The sample of this study was a very small, and it is clear that further studies are needed in order to improve or enhancing MCU Buddhist student monks' skills in English. Due to the fact that this study involved only 50 Bachelor students and may not be applicable to all sectors, an additional suggestion for further studies will be listed below;

Recommendations for further study

1. Improving the speaking ability in English from students' perspective

2. The Influence of Anxiety in Second Language Learning: A Case Study with MCU Buddhist Students in MCU University, Thailand.

3. Constraints and difficulties in the process of writing acquisition among MCU Buddhist students.

4. The effect of reading strategies on the improvement of the reading skills of MCU students.

5. A Study on listening skills and perspectives to first year Buddhist students at MCU University.

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