***Exploring the Relationship Between Thai EFL Learner's Communication Competence,
Gender, and Extramural English: A Study in Teacher Training University***

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Abstract

The L2 communication competence is a vital skill for enhancing learners' global communication, academic and professional opportunities, cultural understanding, cognitive development, and social integration. This study investigates on the level of Thai EFL learner's communication competence and what relationship between Thai EFL learner's communication competence, gender, and extramural English. The research method is deemed a survey research design. Participants included 102 college students, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in department of English education at Lampang Rajabhat University. They were drawn by using simple random sampling technique. Data was collected by using the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC), Extramural English Use Scale (EEUS), and demographic questions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the participants' demographic. Also, multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the relationship between communication competence, gender, and extramural English. The result revealed that Thai EFL learner percieved thier English communication competence in low level. Multiple regression analysis indicates that extramural English engagement were significant predictors of the communication competence.

Keywords: Communication Competence, Extramural English, EFL Learners

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the emergence of diverse students is assigned to refer streaming the high competencies of 21st century particularly in the area of communication. This shift has posed significant challenges in ensuring effective learning outcomes, especially regarding college students' proficiency in English communication competence (Kang, 2024). Effective communication skills are integral to academic and professional success, suggesting that colleges must address the varied needs of diverse student populations to foster these abilities (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The challenge is enhanced in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) school, where learners often experience difficulties related to cultural, linguistic, and cognitive factors (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, addressing these challenges requires targeted instructional strategies, such as integrating intercultural competence, leveraging technology-enhanced language learning tools, and combined the outside of classroom activites to support diverse students in achieving high levels of English communication competence (Reinders & White, 2016).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with higher communication competence are better equipped to navigate real-world communicative situations, fostering greater confidence and motivation (McCroskey & McCroskey,1988). Additionally, exposure to Extramural English (EE) activities include online interactions and multimedia engagement offers opportunities to enhancecommunicative abilities in informal settings (Sundqvist, 2009). To propose high benefit for English learner especially in communication competence, effective communication competence could facilitates language learning and promotes intercultural understanding, adaptability, and the ability to integrate into English-speaking environments. As a result, fostering communication competence is asignificant component of EFL education that enabling learners to achieve their learning goal.

Of great significance to educators today is the shift in teaching and learning management which involves transforming traditional classroom instruction into learning platforms. These platforms emphasized online or outside-the-classroom learning. On the other hand, in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts where learners frequently encounter opportunities to use English in daily life. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Thailand have limited exposure to English particularly in communicative settings outside the classroom. They also engage with English through activities as extramural English which refers to the use of English outside formal classroom. One argument also highlights gender differences in language competence. Gender differences have been identified as varying factors influencing communication competence emphasizing distinct patterns in how females and males approach communication. This suggests a focus on understanding how communication competence differs across genders.

However, there is little study describing and presenting an understanding of whether EFL learner develop their communication competence through real- life activities or extramural English activities integrated with technology, and how their communication competence can be predicted using extramural English activities. In this regard, it should be investigated to account the level of Thai EFL learner's communication competence and examined the relationship between Thai EFL learner's communication competence, gender, and extramural English.

Literature Review

Communication Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) conceptualized communicative competence as a synthesis of knowledge and skills necessary for effective communication, encompassing four main components: grammatical competence (understanding grammar, vocabulary, and language rules), sociolinguistic competence (using language appropriately in social contexts), discourse competence (organizing communication cohesively and coherently), and strategic competence. Later models, Byram (1997) and McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) expanded on this by incorporating intercultural competence, actional competence, and the function of communication apprehension. These approaches underline that communicative competence is more than linguistic knowledge. It is also about adapting language use to social, cultural, and emotional circumstances, which is essential for meaningful and effective communication especially among EFL students. Furthermore, McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) mentionted the need of both communicative ability and communication anxiety in effective communication. Communication competence encompasses verbal and cognitive skills as well as an individual's willingness to communicate. These include both the confidence in expressing oneself and a proactive desire to interact. McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) also mentioned that establishing supportive the environment can assist students minimize anxiety, increasing their willingness to participate and boosting overall communicative outcomes.

Extramural English

Extramural English (EE) has been extensively discussed in language learning research. Sundqvist (2009) defines EE as English exposure and involvement outside the classroom, encompassing activities like gaming, watching television, reading, or engaging with online communities. This definition emphasizes learner-initiated engagement, highlighting that EE is voluntary and may serve both deliberate and incidental language learning purposes (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Similarly, Kuppens (2010) identifies EE as a critical aspect of informal language learning through media and digital platforms, underscoring its role in vocabulary acquisition and language competence. Reinders and Benson (2017) expand the concept by connecting EE with out-of-class autonomous language learning, highlighting its potential for fostering language proficiency through self-directed practices. Moreover, Chan (2016) presented extracurricular activities participation can result in even more impact and playing important parts in whole-person education and life-wide learning. To summary, EE represents a dynamic and flexible mode of language learning that integrates seamlessly into learners'everyday lives, offering both structured and incidental opportunities for English acquisition.

Gender Difference

Gender differences have been stated in vary role of the factor influencing communication competence with highlighting distinct patterns in how females and males approach communication. Females often demonstrate stronger interpersonal communication skills than male include empathy, active listening, and the use of supportive language, which are critical components of communication competence (O'Neill et al., 2016; Burleson, 2003). However, males often exhibit greater confidence in public speaking and leadership communication, potentially influencing their communicative behaviors in professional and academic settings (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This recent findings indicating that females excel in collaborative

communication due to their emphasis on empathy and mutual understanding, whereas males demonstrate strengths in goal-oriented and directive communication, particularly in professional contexts (Burleson, 2003). These insights emphasize the nuanced interplay of gender in shaping communication competence, highlighting the importance of fostering balanced approaches to improve inclusivity and effectiveness in diverse communicative settings.

Researchers analyzed and synthesized the concept and theories according to the variables that include in this study. The research concern the gender difference and extramural English influence learners' communication competence. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.
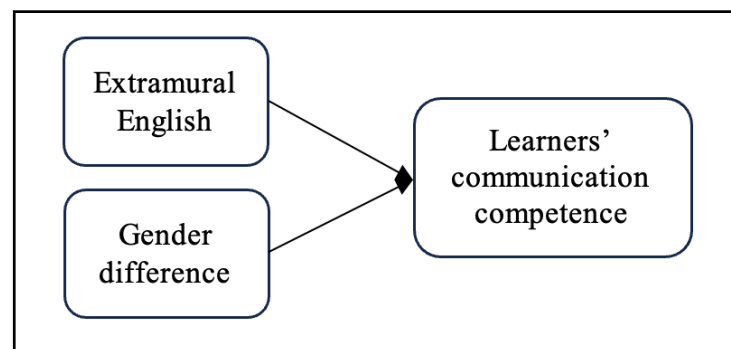

Figure 1: The Relationship of Learners' Communication Competence, Extramural English, and Gender Difference Model

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigates the level of Thai EFL learner's communication competence and to examine the relationship between Thai EFL learner's communication competence, gender, and extramural English. The research method is deemed as survey research that collected data using the online survey.

Participants

The samples were drawn by using simple random sampling technique from college students who learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at Lampang Rajabhat University, Thailand- the teacher training University. There were 102 college students in English major included 80 females (76.92%) and 24 males (23.08%).

Measurement

The Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) was utilized for capturing the leaners' communication competence. The SPCC was the scale that scoreed ranking from 0 to 100 with seven subscales and 12 items. The Extramural English Use Scale (EEUS) was utilized for measuring how often learner do activity that the scale was modified based on the original developed by Coskun and Mutlu (2017) include 6 items. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.82 ($\alpha = 0.82$) that indicated high reliability of the scale. Furturemore, 4 items of demographic questions included in the scale.

Procedure

The procedure of research took place in three six steps (see also Figure 2). In the first step, identify the particular scope of the topic and develop the topic covering the English learning, then inquire about the information with the step of reviewing literature. The following step is to develop the research design, including the sampling design, measurement design, and analysis design to plan conducting of effective academic research. Also, the online survey utilize for collecting data. After receiving the proper response, data were analyzed by using a statistics program. The research report was conducted from the summary result of this study.
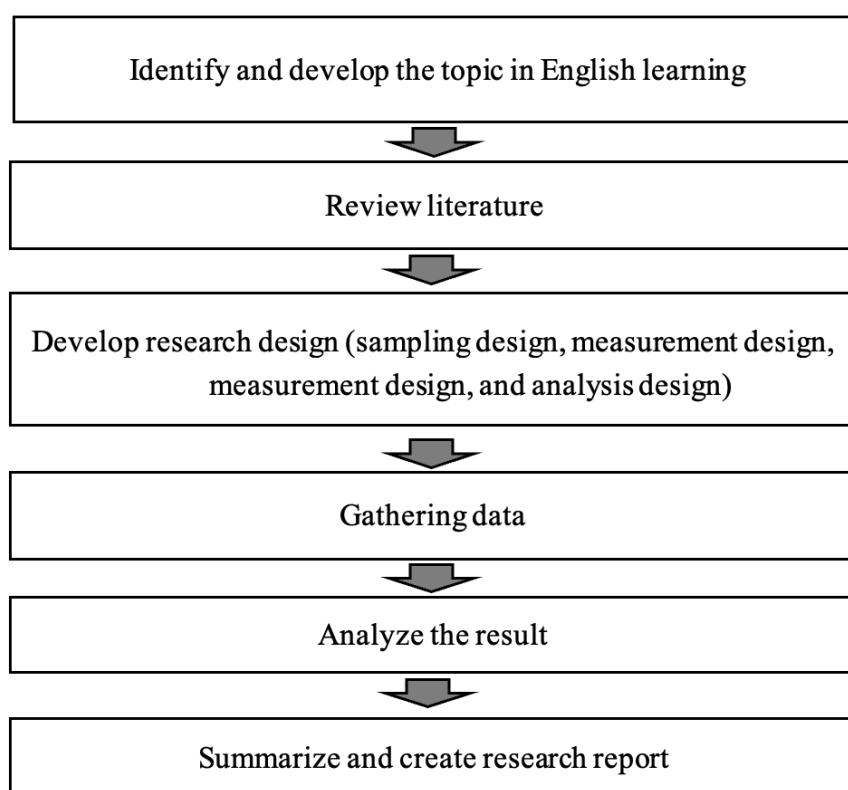
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│      Identify and develop the topic in English learning      │
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│  Develop research design (sampling design, measurement design,  │
│       measurement design, and analysis design)       │
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│                   Gathering data                     │
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│          Summarize and create research report         │
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Figure 2: Flowchart of the Research Process

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to report the result and determine the level of communication competence. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the relationship between communication competence, gender, and extramural English.

To describe learner's communication competence, the competence was interpreted into 3 categories with eigth context or receiver group as shown in Table 1 (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). In summary, higher SPCC scores indicate higher self-perceived communication competence with basic communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad) and receivers (strangers, acquaintance, friend). On the other hand, lower SPCC scores indicate lower self-perceived communication competence with basic communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad) and receivers (strangers, acquaintance, friend).

Table 1: Score and Level of Communication Competence Across
Communication Contexts and Receiver Types

Context/ Receiver	Score	SPCC level	Context/ Receiver	Score	SPCC level
Public	greater than 86	high	**Stranger**	greater than 79	high
	51 - 86	moderate		31 – 79	moderate
	lower than 51	low		lower than 31	low
Meeting	greater than 85	high	**Acquaintance**	greater than 92	high
	51 – 85	moderate		62 – 92	moderate
	lower than 51	low		lower than 62	low
Group	greater than 90	high	**Friend**	greater than 99	high
	61 – 90	moderate		76 – 99	moderate
	lower than 61	low		lower than 76	low
Dyad	greater than 90	high	**Total**	greater than 87	high
	61 – 90	moderate		59 – 87	moderate
	lower than 61	low		lower than 59	low

Results

The Level of Communication Competence

The result of the college students as EFL learners level of communication competence was varing, as shown in Table 2. Overall, the majority of EFL learners were categorized as having low communication competence, accounting for 57.69% which the mean score was 53.48 (as shown in Figure 3).

When considering communication competence within specific basic communication contexts, the highest percentages presented at the low competence levels as follows: 49.04% in the public context, 58.65% in the meeting context, 55.77% in the group context, and 69.23% in the dyadic context. Furthermore, when examining the communication competence based on the receiver types, the data indicated that 52.88% of learners demonstrated a moderate competence level when communicating with strangers, while 61.54% and 66.35% presented the low competence levels when communicating with acquaintances and friends, respectively.

Table 2: The Level of Communication Competence Among EFL Learners

| Context/ Receiver	SPCC Level			Mean score
	High (percentage of EFL learners)	Moderate (percentage of EFL learners)	Low (percentage of EFL learners)	
Public	6.73	44.23	49.04	53.15
Meeting	7.69	33.65	58.65	47.39
Group	5.77	38.46	55.77	57.43
Dyad	3.85	26.92	69.23	55.53
Stranger	7.69	52.88	39.42	42.26
Acquaintance	2.88	35.58	61.54	53.50
Friend	1.92	31.73	66.35	64.36
Communication Competence	**4.81**	**37.50**	**57.69**	**53.48**
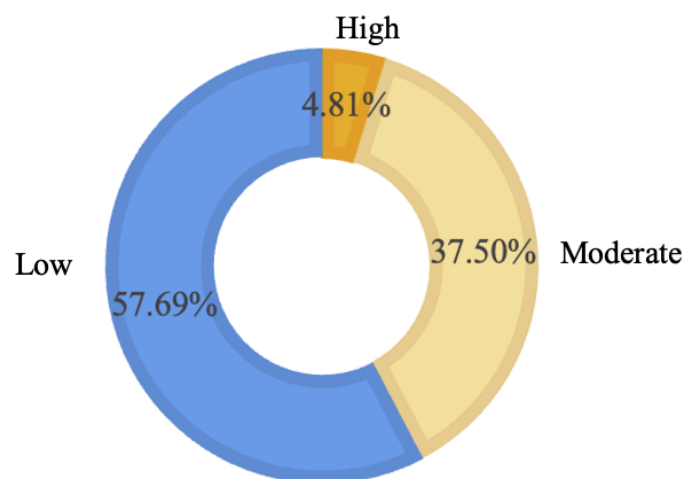
Figure 3: The Porportion of the Level of Communication Competence
Among EFL Learners

The Relationship Between Thai EFL Learner's Communication Competence, Gender, and Extramural English.

The relationship between Thai EFL learner's communication competence, gender, and extramural English was tested that the model was significant fit of the data, $F(1,101) = 10.448$, $p < .001$ (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3: The Result of t-test Analysis of Students' Educational Measurement and
Evaluation Capability Between Posttest and Pretest Score

	B	SE	β	t	p-value
Extramural English	15.061	3.358	.407	4.485	.001
Gender	2.679	4.347	.056	.616	.539
Constant	14.097	9.194		1.533	.000

To realize any relationship, the predicted equation was addressed below.

$$\hat{Y} = 14.097 + 15.061*(\text{Extramural English}) + 2.679\ (\text{Gender female})$$

Conclusions and Discussion

College students as EFL learners reported that their communication competence as moderate to low across most contexts, highlighting potential challenges in achieving higher levels of confidence in interpersonal communication. According to Salikhova (2023) and Yüce (2023) found that EFL learners in higher education self-perceived communication competence levels were moderate. The result variations in EFL learnerss self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) across a basic communication contexts that reported the highest score in communicate in the group contexts. In cohesive groups with positive norms, learners often exhibit high SPCC due to increased confidence and reduced anxiety. In contrast, less cohesive groups, learners may experience lower SPCC, leading to reluctance in participation (Qian & Yuan, 2022). For the communication competence across the receiver types, the highest score in dyad type was reported. According to Burroughs et al. (2003) stated that dyadic settings foster higher SPCC due to personalized interaction. Furthermore, the result revealed that the relationship between Thai EFL learner's communication competence, gender, and extramural English was tested that the model was significant fit of the data.

According to, the finding that significant relationship among students' learning climate and self-efficacy and self-perceived communication competence in a positive way was found (Yüce, 2023). Moreover, Griffiths et al. (2021) and Dickinson et al. (2020) stated that the college students' participation in extracurricular activities include academic and social tasks influenced the anxiety and students' confidence to be high that may support the communicate ability in both female and male. Then, these finding shown the supporting for study result of the extramural English related to Thai EFL learner's communication competence.

For implication, the result of this study could effort that the extramural English play the significant role to increase the Thai EFLs' college students, communication competence. Therefore, the lecturer will decide to include activities that enhance learning through extramural English. In future research, researchers should consider other factors or variables that could enhance college students' communication competence, such as the number of study hours per week.

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