Translanguaging Practices Used by First-Year English for Business Communication Students at a University in Eastern Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) explore the attitudes of the students majoring in English for Business Communication towards translanguaging practices in learning English, and 2) investigate the advantages of translanguaging practices perceived among English for Business Communication students at a university in Eastern Thailand. A mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative (N = 64) by convenient sampling and qualitative (N = 10) by convenient selection. Data collection instruments were online questionnaires and semi-structured interview form. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, and percentage), while qualitative data were examined through content analysis. This research article was part of a research project approved by Burapha University Research Ethics Committee Approval No.HU127/2567 (E2).

The findings indicated that 1) most of the students felt motivated when lecturers used both English and Thai in classrooms (46.9%). Additionally, the significance of translanguaging practices was acknowledged to have a strong effect on the students, with an average rating of 3.95. Thus, the students felt that translanguaging allows them to connect prior knowledge (82.81%), followed by the influences on their daily communication (78.12%). Overall, the students found translanguaging practices beneficial for their English language learning, using it when necessary. The study suggests that instructors should integrate translanguaging strategies, particularly for students struggling with English. Encouraging a flexible English language approach in the classrooms could create a more inclusive and conducive English language learning environment.

Keywords: Benefits of translanguaging, Strategies for teaching English, Translanguaging, Translanguaging strategy

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Introduction

Language is essential for communication in various fields, including education, business, politics, and economics. With approximately 6,500 languages spoken globally, English functions as a universal medium that bridges linguistic gaps in many countries including Thailand. Many international visitors come to Thailand for educational and other purposes, yet Thai students often face difficulties in English communication within classrooms (Juntakun, 2019). To mitigate this challenge, educators implement learning strategies such as translanguaging, a bilingual teaching method that combines Thai and English to improve comprehension. First formalized and named the approach by Cen Williams in the 1994, translanguaging has demonstrated its effectiveness in bilingual education by fostering a supportive learning atmosphere and enhancing knowledge acquisition. It enables students to utilize their linguistic abilities freely, leading to better understanding and engagement. In Thai-English classrooms, translanguaging has been applied to assist English for Business Communication students by enhancing content comprehension, strengthening weaker language skills, and facilitating interactions between proficient and novice speakers. Although beneficial, translanguaging is frequently confused with code-switching. While code-switching involves alternating between languages within a conversation, translanguaging integrates linguistic elements seamlessly to optimize communication. The overarching aim of dual-language education is to cultivate fluent bilinguals, with translanguaging acting as a natural and effective approach for multilingual individuals. The rising significance of English as a foreign language has led to the adoption of diverse teaching methodologies. Around 375 million people worldwide are learning English as a foreign language, necessitating innovative educational strategies. Various theories on translanguaging exist, with two primary perspectives: the dual correspondence theory, which posits that each language has its own grammatical structure, and the unitary system theory, which suggests that multilingual individuals operate from a single, integrated linguistic framework. This study is grounded in the theories of Garcia (2009) and Lopez et al. (2017), proposing that translanguaging enhances language learning. It provides a structured approach that enables students to acquire, write, and speak in both English and their native language. Additionally, it fosters classroom engagement by assisting students in recognizing and understanding new vocabulary and instructional content in both languages. The effectiveness of translanguaging as a bilingual learning strategy is influenced by attitudes shaped through cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. This study explores translanguaging's impact on English for Business Communication students at Eastern University Thailand. The approach creates a dynamic learning space where students integrate languages

naturally, promoting deeper comprehension and knowledge-building. However, the university policies in eastern Thailand often discourage its use, favoring target-language instruction instead.

Literature Review

Defining translanguaging

Translanguaging is a complex concept with various definitions and applications. Initially formalized by Welsh educator Cen Williams in the 1994, it referred to the structured use of two languages in a lesson. Over time, its scope has expanded beyond education, becoming a linguistic resource for bilingual and multilingual communities. Translanguaging sees language as a social construct rather than a lexical or structural system, facilitating knowledge acquisition, thought articulation, and communication (Li, 2011). In classrooms, translanguaging enables students to use multiple languages within the same lesson, fostering bilingual proficiency and a more inclusive learning environment. While language separation is still a common practice, integrating translanguaging can enhance content understanding, support weaker language skills, and connect fluent speakers with early learners (Jones, 2017). Despite its widespread use in Thai-English classrooms, research on Thai learners' experiences with translanguaging in English Medium Instrcution settings remains limited (Ambele, 2022; Kampittayakul, 2018).

Translanguaging teaching strategy

Translanguaging is an instructional strategy that integrates multiple languages to enhance learning and communication. Ooi and Aziz (2021) noted that different languages initiate interactions, blending naturally in conversations. Lopez et al. (2017) emphasized its role in improving communication and optimizing learning outcomes. In English for Business Communication classrooms, it fosters inclusivity, enabling students to express ideas freely (Champlin, 2016). Wang (2019) highlighted its flexibility, allowing learners to utilize all linguistic resources for deeper understanding. Garcia and Lin (2016) introduced tools like documentation, rings, and transformative spaces to support linguistic growth. Documentation tracks progress, rings connect languages, and spaces build confidence. Translanguaging extends beyond classrooms, aiding bilingual learners in various settings (Lee et al., 2021). While some institutions favor monolingual instruction, adopting translanguaging encourages creativity and engagement, benefiting students in multilingual environments (Hamman, 2018). Teachers are key facilitators in using translanguaging in the classroom, helping to create an inclusive and effective learning environment where students can use all their linguistic resources to learn and communicate. Their role involves actively designing lessons that intentionally integrate students' full language repertoires, not just the target language, to promote deeper understanding. Teachers must also

establish a classroom culture that validates and values students' home languages, ensuring they feel confident to express themselves. This approach helps bridge the gap between students' existing knowledge and new concepts, making academic content more accessible and meaningful.

Advantages and disadvantages of using translanguaging

Translanguaging, the practice of using multiple languages in communication, has both benefits and drawbacks, depending on its context and application. It can enhance communication and comprehension among bilinguals, making learning more culturally and socially relevant, especially when learners draw on their linguistic resources (Zheng & Wei, 2021). This approach fosters meaningful discussions and helps bilinguals connect with the world around them, promoting a supportive classroom environment where students' bilingualism is valued (Palmer et al., 2014). However, translanguaging may discourage students from practicing the target language, particularly in dual-language schools. It could lead to a preference for dominant languages, like English, potentially creating tensions among students from different linguistic backgrounds (Zheng & Wei, 2021). A balanced solution might involve combining language separation with flexible practices, allowing students to use their home language when needed for comprehension, while still prioritizing the target language for conversation (Jones, 2017). In the dual language classroom, translanguaging helps develop metalinguistic awareness, improves comprehension, and connects languages with content. It supports multilingual learners by encouraging diverse communication strategies, fostering creativity, and enabling them to engage with complex academic material (Garcia, 2011; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). Ultimately, translanguaging empowers students to utilize all their linguistic resources for effective learning.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the attitudes of students majoring in English for Business Communication towards translanguaging practices in English learning.

2. To investigate the advantages of translanguaging practices for English for Business Communication students at a university in Eastern Thailand.
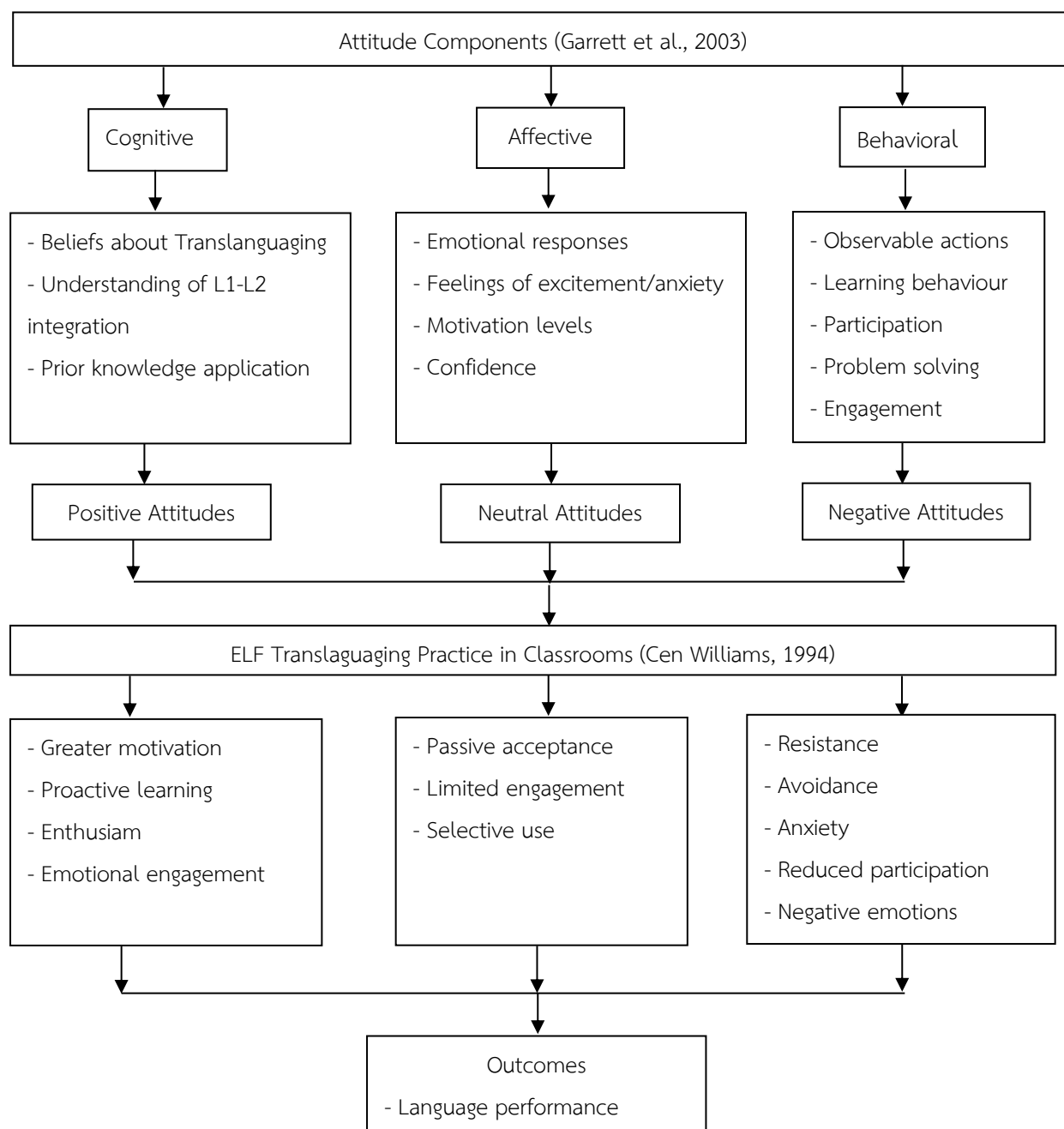
Figure 1. The conceptual framework of attitude in EFL translaguaging practice classrooms

Research Methodology

Participants' background information

The study involved 64 Thai students enrolling in an English for Business Communication program. All of them were using English as a foreign language (EFL) in classrooms where English is a medium of instruction. The classroom was predominantly female. 64 students were selected conveniently to respond to the questionnaires, based on their consent and convenience to participate and 10 students were also

conveniently selected for interview. The researcher also participated in classroom activities to observe students using translanguaging strategies, ensuring diverse representation of student activity levels.

Research instruments

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as its primary research instruments.

Questionnaire

An online questionnaire, adapted from Khonjan (2022), was administered to 64 students after they experienced lessons incorporating a translanguaging approach. The questionnaire consisted of 2 parts, with 21 items for each part. Part 1 corresponded to the research objective number 1 and part 2 corresponded to the research objective number 2. This questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms and taking 10-15 minutes to complete, gathered demographic information, students' opinions on lecturers' use of translanguaging (items 1-5), and open-ended questions exploring translanguaging as a learning strategy. The open-ended questions were designed to align with the study's objectives and were modified to suit the students' proficiency level. To ensure clarity and accuracy, the questionnaire was translated into Thai and then back-checked. Questionnaires were chosen for their cost-effectiveness in gathering representative and generalizable data (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021). The questionnaire was evaluated by 5 experts for reliability of the Item Objective Congruence, IOC. The IOC results was 0.92 which can be used for data collection. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated from the Item Objective Congruence, IOC formula stated in Thanapornpan (2007).

Semi-structured Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students who used translanguaging in their classrooms. There was 1 interview question for part 1 of the interview form, corresponding to the research objective number 1, and there were 2 interview questions for part 2 of the interview form, corresponding to the research objective number 2. These interviews aimed to gather detailed, focused, and in-depth insights into the impact of translanguaging as a learning strategy. The interview questions were developed from the questionnaire but expanded upon to explore the topic more comprehensively. This method was chosen for its ability to elicit rich and reliable data, leading to a deeper understanding of students' experiences and attitudes toward translanguaging (Bolderston, 2012; Al Balushi, 2018). The interview questions were evaluated by 5 experts for validity and reliability of the Item Objective Congruence, IOC. The IOC results was 1.00 which can be used for

data collection. Validity and reliability of the interview questions were calculated from the Item Objective Congruence, IOC formula stated in Thanapornpan (2007).

Data analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) via SPSS 24.0. The measurement criteria for the variables were based on a 5-level scale, as proposed by Srisa-ard (2000), to facilitate the effective interpretation of numerical data. The data were grouped into "class intervals" to simplify analysis and create frequency distributions, making the interpretation more accessible.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) by decoding the information from the informants to support the quantitative results. This method focuses on interpreting text data to identify patterns or themes through systematic coding and classification.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were guided by a translanguaging framework. This framework categorizes bilingual practices into two main areas: utilizing the full linguistic repertoire and establishing a translanguaging space for interactive learning. The analysis ultimately highlighted the effectiveness of translanguaging practices for English for Business Communication students at an Eastern University in Thailand.

Results

Quantitative

Table 1: Opinions of learners towards lecturers using translanguaging practices

Lecturers Using Both English and Thai	Frequency	Percentage
Very happy and motivated	21	32.8
Motivated	30	46.9
Neutral	12	18.8
Unhappy	1	1.6
Demotivated	0	0
Total	(N) 64	100

Table 1 shows that most learners felt motivated when lecturers used both English and Thai in the classroom, with 46.9% expressing motivation. Additionally, 32.8% of participants reported that they felt very happy and motivated, while 18.8% remained neutral, and only 1.6% felt unhappy.

Table 2: The benefits of Using Translanguaging Practices

Opinion of Participants	The percentage of occurrence					Total	Mean	S.D.
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
helps to learn the target language (English)	17 (26.56%)	43 (67.18%)	3 (4.68%)	0 0	0 0	64	4.15	0.51
links previously learned knowledge in various situations	8 (12.50%)	53 (82.81%)	3 (4.68%)	0 0	0 0	64	4.07	0.40
help create new knowledge in the learning process	12 (18.75%)	47 (73.43%)	5 (7.81%)	0 0	0 0	64	4.10	0.50
lead to the application of new knowledge in any situation	14 (21.87%)	45 (70.31%)	5 (7.81%)	0 0	0 0	64	4.14	0.52
You dislike using translanguaging	2 (3.12%)	7 (10.93%)	18 (28.12%)	31 (48.43%)	6 (9.37%)	64	2.50	0.91
help understand difficult English content	28 (43.75%)	30 (46.87%)	5 (7.81%)	1 (1.56%)	0	64	4.32	0.68
help acquire more information for English learning	16 (25.00%)	45 (70.31%)	3 (4.68%)	0 0	0 0	64	4.20	0.50

Table 2: The benefits of Using Translanguaging Practices

Opinion of Participants	The percentage of occurrence					Total	Mean	S.D.
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
influence daily life communication	9 (14.06%)	50 (78.12%)	4 (6.25%)	1 (1.56%)	0 0	64	4.04	0.51
help strive to learn more about target language in various situations	13 (20.31%)	43 (67.18%)	6 (9.37%)	2 (3.12%)	0 0	64	4.04	0.64
Total							3.95	0.58

Table 2 shows that most participants (67.18%) in the study believed that translanguaging effectively aided their English learning (see Table 2). A significant majority felt it helped them connect prior knowledge (82.81%) and construct new learning (73.43%). Participants also recognized its value in applying knowledge to diverse situations (70.31%).

Despite these perceived benefits, nearly half of the participants (48.43%) disliked using translanguaging in the classroom. When they did use it, their primary motivations were to comprehend challenging English content (46.87%) and to acquire additional information (70.31%). Furthermore, translanguaging was seen to influence their daily communication (78.12%) and boost their motivation to learn more (67.18%)

Qualitative

The interview data from ten students underscores a strong consensus on the benefits of translanguaging (Thai-English integration) in Thai EFL classrooms. Students, particularly those with limited proficiency, emphasized its role in enhancing comprehension, vocabulary retention (especially technical terms), and engagement, while reducing anxiety linked to English-only instruction. Translanguaging fostered inclusivity by accommodating diverse proficiency levels and allowing peer support during discussions. Emotional comfort was a recurring theme, as students reported feeling less stressed and more

confident when Thai explanations bridged comprehension gaps. However, a minority advocated for increased English exposure, arguing that it aligns with the rigor expected in an English for Business Communication program and provides necessary challenges for skill development. Despite this, most students, including those who disliked English, viewed translanguaging as vital for accessibility and reducing resistance to learning, suggesting a scaffolded approach—phasing in English while retaining Thai support—to balance immersion and comprehension.

While translanguaging was widely endorsed, higher-proficiency students highlighted potential drawbacks, such as reduced English immersion, slower language processing, or disengagement if overused. These learners recommended strategic application—reserving Thai for complex content—to maintain academic rigor. Notably, all students expressed strong motivation to master English, recognizing its global importance for career opportunities, cross-cultural communication, and personal growth. Many shared self-directed learning strategies (e.g., consuming English media, attending immersive programs) to supplement classroom instruction. Even those advocating moderation acknowledged translanguaging's utility in facilitating peer collaboration and clarifying challenging material. Collectively, the findings advocate for a flexible, context-sensitive implementation of translanguaging, tailored to proficiency levels and learning objectives, to optimize both cognitive and affective outcomes in Thai EFL contexts.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study, involving 64 Thai students in an English for Business Communication course, revealed that most participants, whose mother tongue is predominantly Thai (96.9%) and who primarily learn through English Medium Instruction (EMI) (90.6%), actively used translanguaging (Thai and English) in their English language learning. A significant portion of students (73.4%) reported average English proficiency, while 18.8% claimed good proficiency. These findings align with Dobinson et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of accepting learners' use of native languages in language acquisition.

Students consistently valued the use of both Thai and English in instruction, noting its effectiveness in comprehending content, a finding supported by Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012). Furthermore, a large majority of students (81.3%) engaged in daily English study for over an hour. Many expressed increased motivation and comfort with translanguaging in the classroom, corroborating Bouguerra's (2024) observation that translanguaging fosters a sense of security and enhances learning.

Regarding attitudes towards translanguaging, 46.88% of students preferred lecturers who used both Thai and English, finding it beneficial for content understanding. This aligns with Khonjan and Ambele's

(2023) findings that most teachers use translanguaging to facilitate meaning-making. Students reported that this bilingual approach made them feel more comfortable and motivated, reinforcing Bouguerra's (2024) assertion about positive learning experiences. Conversely, 42.18% preferred English-only instruction, believing it would enhance their language skills, echoing Hatoss's (2019) findings on student preferences for immersion. The study also highlighted that translanguaging aided in comprehending complex content and vocabulary, as students often translated English material into Thai. This supports research by Memari (2024) and Almashour (2024) on translanguaging's role in enhancing understanding and cultural connections. Students also noted improved classroom discussion engagement, leading to better fluency and participation (Le & Le, 2022).

Students overwhelmingly perceived translanguaging as a beneficial strategy for English learning, with 67.18% agreeing and 26.56% strongly agreeing that it aids comprehension and cognitive engagement (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). This positive perception is consistent with Peercy (2016), who highlights its role in fostering a positive learning environment, and Almashour (2024), who emphasizes its impact on identity expression by linking cultural backgrounds with academic settings. Students leveraged translanguaging to connect prior knowledge (82.81% agree) and generate new knowledge (73.43% agree) (Sayer, 2013), a role further supported by Ambele (2022) and Garcia (2011) in expanding learning experiences. However, 48.43% of participants expressed concerns about potential over-reliance on translanguaging hindering English proficiency (Khonjan & Ambele, 2023). Nevertheless, its benefits in enhancing comprehension and class participation were evident (Ooi & Aziz, 2021; Dobinson et al., 2024). Students acknowledged its advantages, particularly in understanding complex content (King, 2013; Gort & Sembiante, 2015), though some suggested limiting its use to essential explanations to maintain a balance with English immersion (Chronaki et al., 2022). Translanguaging also positively influenced daily communication and motivated language learning (Almashour, 2024). These findings collectively underscore the necessity of recognizing translanguaging as a valuable educational tool in multilingual classrooms.

Translanguaging has proven to be an effective strategy for English language learning within an English for Business Communication context. For the predominantly Thai-speaking participants, most of whom learn through EMI and report average English proficiency, the use of both Thai and English in the classroom was largely encouraged by lecturers (85.9%) and perceived positively by students. Students, many of whom study English for over an hour daily and engage with English online, reported feeling

motivated when lecturers used translanguaging (46.9%). This strategy significantly aided students in acquiring the target language by connecting prior knowledge, facilitating the creation of new knowledge, supporting the understanding of complex content, enhancing cognitive application, and aiding in identity expression. It also improved English vocabulary and comprehension, particularly for lower-proficiency learners, leading to more active classroom participation. Students generally favored translanguaging for easing their learning process, viewing it as crucial for understanding English content and facilitating effective communication in their future careers. They also believed it assisted in vocabulary comprehension, reduced learning time, and promoted better information retention. Ultimately, translanguaging is highly valued by students for its role in English language acquisition, comprehension, and application, enabling deeper content engagement and preparing them for professional interactions. Their positive attitudes suggest it is an essential tool for English language development, especially for those struggling with proficiency, and significantly influences learner motivation and engagement.

The interviews supported these quantitative results that students, especially those with limited proficiency, reported that translanguaging enhanced comprehension and vocabulary retention, while reducing the anxiety associated with English-only instruction. This creates a more inclusive environment, as supported by research from Peercy (2016). Students also noted improved classroom discussion engagement, which contributed to better fluency and participation.

Recommendation

Given that this study involved 64 participants from a specific English for Business Communication program at a university in Thailand, its findings may not be generalizable to all learners. Future research should include a broader range of English proficiency levels across Thailand, examining both English and non-English majors. Comparing these groups could provide valuable insights into the most effective teaching methods for diverse learners, ultimately contributing to improved teaching practices and language learning strategies.

Acknowledgements

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