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Factors, Problems, And Needs in Developing English Language Skills Among Students at The Faculty of Foreign Languages, Souphanouvong University

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Factors, Problems, And Needs in Developing English Language Skills Among Students at The Faculty of Foreign Languages, Souphanouvong University

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Abstract

English plays a vital role as an international language in education, business, tourism, technology, and global communication. For university students, particularly those studying foreign languages, English proficiency is essential for academic achievement and career development. This article examines the factors influencing English language development, the challenges encountered, and the learning needs of students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Souphanouvong University, with a focus on the four core language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Drawing upon relevant theories and previous empirical studies, the article analyzes the determinants of English language learning and identifies common barriers faced by learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

The findings reveal that students experience substantial difficulties related to limited vocabulary, inadequate grammatical knowledge, low confidence in oral communication, weak listening comprehension, and insufficient opportunities for authentic language use. These challenges are shaped by multiple factors, including learner characteristics, instructional approaches, learning resources, technological support, classroom environment, and affective variables. Previous studies conducted at Souphanouvong University further indicate that speaking anxiety and lack of self-confidence remain significant obstacles to effective language acquisition. The analysis also highlights the importance of emotional readiness and self-efficacy in promoting successful language learning outcomes. The study identifies a strong need for communicative learning activities, technology-enhanced instruction, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, authentic learning materials, and increased opportunities for meaningful language practice. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge on EFL learning in higher education by providing a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors affecting English language development among university students in

Laos. The article recommends adopting communicative and learner-centered teaching approaches that integrate the four language skills and emphasize practical language use. Strengthening English proficiency can enhance students' academic performance, communicative competence, and preparedness for participation in an increasingly globalized workforce.

Keywords: English Language Skills, Learning Problems, Student Needs, Tourism Education, Higher Education

Introduction

English has become the dominant lingua franca in the contemporary globalized world, serving as a critical medium for international communication, education, business, tourism, technology, and cross-cultural exchange. As a result, proficiency in English is increasingly recognized as an essential competency for individuals seeking academic advancement and professional success in both local and international contexts. In many non-English-speaking countries, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) to equip learners with the linguistic skills necessary for higher education, employment, and participation in the global economy. In the context of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the importance of English language proficiency has grown substantially in recent decades due to regional integration, international investment, and the expansion of the tourism sector. As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Lao PDR has experienced increasing interaction with international stakeholders, creating a greater demand for graduates who can communicate effectively in English. Consequently, higher education institutions play a crucial role in developing students' English language competencies to meet the linguistic demands of an increasingly interconnected world.

The Faculty of Economics and Tourism at Souphanouvong University is responsible for preparing students for careers in tourism, hospitality, business administration, entrepreneurship, and related professions. These fields require graduates to interact with international tourists, foreign investors, multinational organizations, and business partners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, English language proficiency is not merely an academic requirement but a professional necessity for students pursuing careers in these sectors. Strong English language skills enable students to access global knowledge resources, engage in academic discourse, participate in international learning opportunities, and enhance their employability. English proficiency facilitates the comprehension of academic literature, participation in classroom discussions, preparation of reports and presentations, and effective communication in professional environments. Consequently, improving students' English language competence remains a key objective of higher education institutions seeking to enhance graduate quality and competitiveness. Despite the recognized importance of English proficiency, previous studies have identified persistent challenges among university students in Lao PDR. For example, Kaseumsouk et al. (2024) reported that Tourism Management students at Souphanouvong University experienced considerable difficulties in English-speaking performance. The major challenges

included low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, and limited opportunities to practice English in authentic communicative situations. These findings suggest that substantial barriers continue to hinder students' English language development and communicative competence.

The literature indicates that language learning outcomes are influenced by multiple cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. Brown (2015) emphasized that successful language acquisition is strongly associated with learners' motivation, attitudes, self-confidence, and opportunities for language use. Similarly, Nunan (2003) argued that meaningful interaction and active learner participation are fundamental components of effective language learning. These perspectives highlight that language development extends beyond the acquisition of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, requiring learners to engage actively in authentic communicative practices. In addition to linguistic and pedagogical factors, psychological and emotional dimensions play an important role in learning success. Promchin et al. (2026) demonstrated that emotional stability, self-awareness, and self-confidence contribute significantly to learners' readiness for personal and academic development. Students who effectively manage stress and maintain positive self-perceptions are more likely to participate actively in learning activities, overcome communication anxiety, and achieve favorable educational outcomes.

Although previous studies have identified several challenges affecting English language learning among university students, limited research has comprehensively examined the factors, problems, and learning needs associated with English language development among students in the Faculty of Economics and Tourism at Souphanouvong University. A deeper understanding of these issues is essential for designing effective instructional strategies, improving language support services, and enhancing students' communicative competence. Therefore, this study investigates the factors, challenges, and learning needs related to English language learning among students at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism, Souphanouvong University, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations for improving English language education in this context.

Importance of English Language Skills

English language proficiency includes four basic skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. These skills work together and help people communicate effectively. Reading is important because it helps students gain knowledge from textbooks, research articles, tourism information, and business documents. Listening helps students understand lectures, presentations, conversations, and spoken English in real situations. Speaking allows students to share ideas, join discussions, and communicate with international visitors. Writing is important for preparing reports, assignments, emails, and other professional documents. For students in economics and tourism, these four skills are very important. They help students succeed in their studies and prepare for future careers. Graduates need to communicate with people from

different countries and cultures, work in international environments, and interact confidently with tourists, customers, business partners, and other professionals.

Factors Affecting English Language Skill Development Many factors affect the development of English language skills. Some factors come from the students themselves, while others come from teachers, learning resources, technology, and the learning environment. Understanding these factors can help improve English language teaching and learning.

1. Learner Factors Learner-related factors play an important role in English language learning. These factors include motivation, attitude, learning strategies, confidence, and educational background. Students who are interested in learning English and understand its importance are more likely to spend time practicing and improving their skills. Motivation is one of the most important factors. Students who have clear goals, such as studying abroad, finding a good job, or communicating with international people, often show greater effort in learning English. Positive attitudes toward English also help students enjoy learning and become more active in classroom activities. Confidence is another important factor. Students who believe in their abilities are usually more willing to speak English, ask questions, and participate in discussions. In contrast, students with low confidence may be afraid of making mistakes and avoid using English. In addition, students who have a strong educational background or previous experience with English often find language learning easier than those with limited exposure.

2. Psychological and Emotional Factors Psychological and emotional factors also affect English language learning. Learning a language is not only about grammar and vocabulary but also about feelings, emotions, and confidence. Many students feel nervous when they have to speak English in front of others. Some are afraid of making mistakes, being criticized, or being laughed at by their classmates. Speaking and listening activities often require quick responses and active communication. Therefore, students who feel anxious may have difficulty expressing their ideas clearly. Anxiety can reduce participation and make language learning more difficult. Promchin et al. (2026) found that emotional stability, mindfulness, and self-control help learners manage stress and improve their readiness to learn. Students who can control their emotions and maintain confidence are more likely to participate actively in learning activities. Therefore, teachers should create a friendly and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable speaking English, asking questions, and learning from their mistakes without fear.

3. Teacher Factors Teachers play a key role in helping students develop English language skills. The way teachers teach, motivate students, and manage the classroom can greatly influence learning outcomes. Effective teachers use a variety of teaching methods to make lessons interesting and engaging. They encourage students to participate in activities such as discussions, presentations, role plays, and group work. Good teachers also provide clear explanations and useful feedback to help students improve their language skills. In addition, teachers can build students' confidence by encouraging them to communicate in English and by creating a positive learning atmosphere. When students feel supported by their teachers, they are more willing to participate and practice English regularly.

4. **Learning Resources and Technology** Learning resources and technology are important tools for language development. Students who have access to a variety of learning materials often have more opportunities to improve their English skills. Traditional learning resources such as textbooks, dictionaries, and reference books remain useful. However, technology has expanded learning opportunities through videos, podcasts, online courses, mobile applications, social media, and artificial intelligence tools. Technology allows students to learn anytime and anywhere. They can practice listening through videos, improve pronunciation using language-learning applications, and communicate with others through online platforms. Technology also supports independent learning and helps students learn at their own pace. As technology continues to develop, it becomes an increasingly important part of English language education and can help students improve all four language skills more effectively.

5. **Language Exposure** Language exposure refers to the amount of English that students see, hear, read, and use in their daily lives. It is another important factor that affects language learning. Students who regularly encounter English outside the classroom often develop stronger language skills. They may watch English movies, listen to English songs, read online articles, follow social media content, or communicate with international friends. These activities help students become familiar with vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence patterns, and natural language use. For students in tourism and economics programs, opportunities to communicate with foreign visitors and international organizations can also provide valuable language practice. Real-life exposure helps students use English in meaningful situations and increases their confidence in communication. On the other hand, students with limited exposure to English may have fewer opportunities to practice and improve their skills. Therefore, educational institutions should encourage students to use English both inside and outside the classroom to support continuous language development.

In summary, English language proficiency consists of four integrated skills—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—that are essential for academic success and professional communication, particularly in economics and tourism. The development of these skills is influenced by learner-related factors (e.g., motivation, confidence, attitudes, and prior experience), psychological factors (e.g., anxiety and self-regulation), teacher support, learning resources and technology, and exposure to English in authentic contexts. Together, these factors significantly shape language learning outcomes and should be considered in the design of effective English language education programs.

Problems in Developing English Language Skills

Despite the importance of English, many students still face difficulties in developing their English language skills. These challenges affect their academic performance and their ability to communicate effectively in English. The problems can be found in all four language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

1. **Reading Problems** Reading is an important skill because it helps students gain knowledge and access information from different sources. However, many students face difficulties when reading English texts. One of the main problems is limited vocabulary knowledge. Students often encounter unfamiliar words, making it difficult to understand the meaning of sentences and paragraphs. In addition, many students have difficulty understanding academic texts, journal articles, reports, and other reading materials written in English. Some students rely heavily on dictionaries, which can slow down their reading process and reduce comprehension. Limited reading practice also affects students' ability to identify main ideas, make inferences, and think critically about what they read. Furthermore, students may feel less motivated to read English materials because they find them difficult or time-consuming. As a result, they often avoid reading activities, which limits opportunities to improve their reading skills.

2. **Listening Problems** Listening is one of the most challenging skills for many students. Understanding spoken English requires learners to recognize sounds, vocabulary, pronunciation, and meaning at the same time. Many students struggle to understand English when native speakers speak quickly or use unfamiliar expressions. Different accents can also create difficulties. Students may become familiar with the accent used by their teachers but find it difficult to understand speakers from different countries. In addition, unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures often make listening tasks more difficult. Another challenge is the limited opportunity to hear English outside the classroom. Many students do not regularly listen to English conversations, podcasts, videos, or other authentic materials. As a result, they have less exposure to natural English and fewer opportunities to develop listening comprehension skills.

3. **Speaking Problems** Speaking is often considered the most difficult English language skill. Many students feel nervous when speaking English, especially in front of classmates or teachers. They are often afraid of making mistakes, using incorrect grammar, or pronouncing words incorrectly. Lack of confidence is one of the biggest barriers to speaking English. Some students know what they want to say but hesitate because they worry about being judged by others. Limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge can also make it difficult for students to express their ideas clearly and fluently. Pronunciation is another common problem. Students may have difficulty producing certain English sounds or using correct stress and intonation. As a result, they may feel uncomfortable when communicating in English. These findings are consistent with Kaseumsouk et al. (2024), who found that Tourism Management students experienced difficulties in comprehension, pronunciation, and speaking fluency before participating in video-based learning activities. After using video-supported learning activities, students showed clear improvement in speaking performance. This suggests that speaking skills can improve when students have more opportunities to practice English in meaningful and realistic situations.

4. **Writing Problems** Writing is another skill that many students find challenging. Common problems include grammatical errors, incorrect word choice, weak sentence structure, and poor

organization of ideas. Students often struggle to express their thoughts clearly and logically in written English.

Many students translate directly from Lao into English when writing. This often results in unnatural sentence patterns and unclear meanings because the structure of Lao and English is different. In addition, students may have limited vocabulary, making it difficult to choose appropriate words and expressions. Students also face difficulties in organizing their ideas into paragraphs and longer pieces of writing. Some essays and reports may lack clear introductions, supporting details, or conclusions. Limited writing practice and insufficient feedback can further slow the development of writing skills.

In summary, students continue to face significant challenges across the four core English language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. These difficulties are primarily associated with limited vocabulary, insufficient language exposure, lack of confidence, pronunciation issues, grammatical weaknesses, and inadequate opportunities for practice. Such challenges can hinder both academic achievement and effective communication in English. Addressing these issues requires sustained language practice, increased exposure to authentic English materials, and supportive learning environments that encourage active participation and skill development. Strengthening these areas is essential for improving students' overall English language proficiency.

Needs in Developing English Language Skills

Students have several important needs for improving their English language skills. These needs are related to the difficulties they face in learning English and the skills they need for their future studies and careers.

1. **More Communicative Activities** Students need more opportunities to use English in real communication. Many classes focus mainly on grammar and writing, while speaking activities are limited. Students would like to have more discussions, presentations, role plays, group work, and other interactive activities. These activities help them improve speaking, listening, pronunciation, and confidence. They also make learning more enjoyable and meaningful.

2. **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)** Students also need English that is related to their field of study. For students in economics and tourism, learning general English is important, but they also need vocabulary and communication skills for tourism, hospitality, business, and customer service. ESP courses can help students use English more effectively in their future careers.

3. **Authentic Learning Materials** Students want more authentic materials such as videos, podcasts, interviews, websites, newspapers, and tourism-related media. These materials show how English is used in real life and help students learn natural expressions, new vocabulary, and different accents. Authentic materials can also increase students' interest and motivation to learn English.

4. **Technology-Supported Learning** Students need more opportunities to learn English through technology. Online platforms, mobile applications, artificial intelligence tools, and

multimedia resources make learning more flexible and convenient. Students can practice English anytime and anywhere according to their own learning pace. Kaseumsouk et al. (2024) found that video-based learning increased students' motivation, reduced their anxiety when speaking English, and improved their speaking performance. Therefore, using technology and multimedia in English classes can help students learn more effectively.

5. Supportive Learning Environment Students also need a positive and supportive learning environment. Many students feel nervous or afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. A friendly classroom atmosphere can help them feel more comfortable and confident.

Teachers can support students by giving constructive feedback, encouraging participation, and creating activities where students can learn from their mistakes. Promchin et al. (2026) found that emotional stability and self-confidence support learning readiness and personal development. Therefore, emotional support is also important for successful language learning.

In summary, students need more communication practice, English for Specific Purposes, authentic learning materials, technology-supported learning, and a supportive learning environment. Meeting these needs can help students improve their English language skills and prepare them for academic success and future careers in economics, tourism, hospitality, and business.

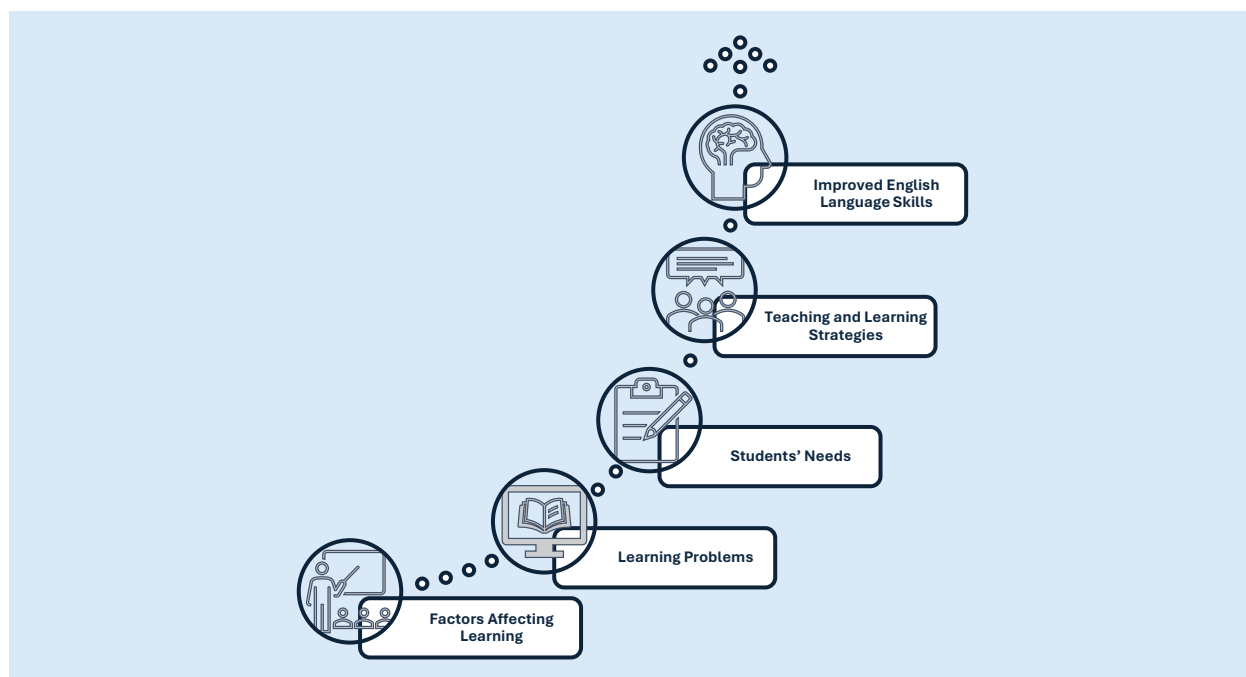


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of English Language Skill Development

The figure illustrates how learning factors influence students' problems and needs, which can be addressed through appropriate teaching strategies to improve English language proficiency.

Table 1 Factors, Problems, and Needs in English Language Skill Development

No.	Component	Description
1	Factors	Motivation, confidence, teaching methods, learning resources, technology, emotional readiness, and language exposure
2	Problems	Limited vocabulary, grammar difficulties, low confidence, listening difficulties, pronunciation problems, and writing errors
3	Needs	Communication practice, ESP learning, authentic materials, technology-supported learning, and emotional support
4	Expected Outcomes	Improved reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills

The table summarizes the key factors influencing language learning, the major problems experienced by students, and the needs required to improve English language proficiency.

Overall, improving English proficiency requires a balanced focus on communicative practice, ESP instruction, authentic input, technology integration, and emotional support. Addressing these needs can significantly enhance students' language competence and better prepare them for academic success and future careers in economics, tourism, hospitality, and business.

Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing English language skill development, the challenges encountered by students, and the learning needs required to enhance English proficiency among students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Souphanouvong University. The findings indicate that English language development is a multidimensional process shaped by learner-related, pedagogical, technological, environmental, and psychological factors. Students continue to face significant challenges across the four language skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, listening comprehension, speaking confidence, pronunciation, and academic writing. The study further reveals that affective factors, including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and emotional readiness, play a crucial role in determining language learning outcomes. Limited exposure to authentic English communication and insufficient opportunities for meaningful language practice were identified as major barriers to language development. In response to these challenges, students expressed strong needs for communicative learning activities, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, authentic

learning materials, technology-enhanced learning environments, and supportive classroom practices.

The findings underscore the importance of adopting learner-centered and communicative teaching approaches that integrate the four language skills while promoting active participation and authentic language use. Strengthening English language education through innovative instructional strategies and appropriate institutional support can significantly enhance students' communicative competence, academic performance, and professional preparedness in an increasingly globalized environment.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Implementation

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations are proposed for educators, administrators, and curriculum developers:

1. Strengthen communicative language teaching (CLT) practices by incorporating discussions, role-plays, presentations, simulations, and collaborative learning activities that encourage active language use.
2. Integrate technology-enhanced learning through digital platforms, language-learning applications, multimedia resources, artificial intelligence tools, and online communication activities to increase learner engagement and autonomous learning.
3. Develop English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses that align with students' academic disciplines and future career requirements, enabling them to acquire profession-specific vocabulary and communication skills.
4. Increase students' exposure to authentic English materials, including podcasts, videos, academic articles, tourism-related media, and real-world communication tasks, to improve language comprehension and practical language use.
5. Establish supportive learning environments that reduce language anxiety and promote learner confidence through constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and positive classroom interactions.
6. Provide continuous professional development for English instructors to enhance their pedagogical competencies in communicative, technology-assisted, and learner-centered teaching methodologies.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may extend the current research in several directions:

1. Conduct empirical investigations involving larger and more diverse student populations across multiple universities in Lao PDR to improve the generalizability of findings.

2. Examine the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions, such as technology-assisted learning, project-based learning, blended learning, and AI-supported language instruction, in improving English language proficiency.

3. Explore the relationships among motivation, self-efficacy, language anxiety, emotional intelligence, and English language achievement using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches.

4. Investigate English language needs in specific academic disciplines and professional sectors to support the development of contextually relevant ESP curricula.

5. Undertake longitudinal studies to examine changes in students' language proficiency and learning behaviors over time.

6. Explore the impact of authentic language exposure and international communication experiences on students' communicative competence and intercultural awareness.

Declaration of Interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of this article.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with accepted academic and research ethics principles. The study relied primarily on document analysis, theoretical review, and previously published scholarly sources. All sources were appropriately cited and acknowledged. No human participants were directly involved in data collection, and no personal or confidential information was collected or disclosed. If you actually collected questionnaire, interview, or survey data from students, replace the above paragraph with: Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and all data were used solely for academic research purposes.

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Definition of Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest, such as research integrity, may be influenced by a secondary interest, including financial gain, personal relationships, institutional affiliations, or other external considerations. In accordance with international publication standards, the authors declare that no actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest exist regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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