



The Impact of Job Position on English Communication Problems in the Construction Industry: A Case Study of Phuket

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Abstract

English language proficiency has become increasingly important in Thailand's construction industry, particularly in Phuket, where tourism growth has driven foreign investment and international projects. This study had two aims. The first was to identify the English communication problems faced by employees in Phuket's top 10 construction companies. The second was to determine whether these problems varied across job positions. A quantitative survey of 65 employees, including administrators, engineers, foremen, and architects, was conducted using a structured questionnaire validated with the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). The results revealed that speaking was the most problematic skill, followed by writing, reading, and listening respectively. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences across job positions ($F = 0.871$, $p = 0.461$), indicating that challenges are widespread throughout the organization. These findings highlight the need for ESP-informed training programs that address all four language skills and reflect the specific communicative demands of each occupational group.

Keywords: construction industry, English communication problems, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Phuket

Introduction

English has become the dominant language of international business and now functions as a global lingua franca (ELF), a shared medium used among people who do not have the same first language (Seidlhofer, 2011). In professional settings, this role has shaped the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an approach to language teaching built around the real communicative needs of learners in a particular occupation or discipline (Hutchinson &

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Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). From this perspective, performing well in a workplace depends not only on grammatical accuracy but on communicative competence: the ability to use language appropriately to carry out real tasks (Canale & Swain, 1980).

In Thailand, research on workplace English has concentrated heavily on tourism, hospitality, and business services, where contact with English is most visible (Franco & Roach, 2018). The construction industry has received far less attention, even though it is increasingly exposed to international clients, investors, and contractors. This is especially true in Phuket, where the rapid expansion of tourism and real estate has attracted substantial foreign investment and produced construction projects that routinely involve cross-border collaboration (Chanatong, 2025; Moukomla & Marome, 2025).

As these projects become more multinational, English serves as the working language that links local employees with foreign partners. In such multilingual workplaces, communication does not always run smoothly. Language barriers, that is, difficulties in conveying or understanding information that arise from limited proficiency in a shared language, can impede the flow of information, delay decision-making, and lower the overall quality of work (Gamil & Abdul Rahman, 2017). These barriers may appear across all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

It is sometimes assumed that English demands differ by job position, with managerial and engineering roles requiring more advanced skills than operational ones because they interact more often with international partners (Allanyazov et al., 2025). Whether these assumed differences actually translate into different levels of communication difficulty, however, remains an open empirical question, particularly in the Thai construction context, where evidence is scarce (Ne'Matullah et al., 2021).

Recently, few studies have examined the English communication problems of construction employees in Thailand, and fewer still have done so in Phuket, where the need for cross-cultural communication is arguably most acute. This leaves a clear gap in localized ESP research: the specific language difficulties of this workforce, and whether those difficulties vary across roles, are not yet well understood. Addressing this gap matters both for extending ESP scholarship into an under-studied sector and for informing training that responds to genuine needs.

Literature Review

1. Conceptual Foundation: ESP, ELF, and Workplace Communication

The use of English at work is best understood through English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an approach that designs language provision around the real communicative needs of learners in a given occupation, identified through needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In international workplaces, English typically operates as a *lingua franca* (ELF), a shared working language among speakers of different first languages (Jenkins, 2007). What matters in these settings is less native-like accuracy than communicative

competence, the ability to use language appropriately to achieve work tasks (Hymes, 1972), and the command of professional discourse specific to the field.

These concepts also clarify the terms used in this study, which are related but not identical. English proficiency refers to general language ability; communicative competence refers to the ability to use that ability appropriately in context; language barriers are the obstacles that arise when shared proficiency is limited; and English communication problems, the focus of this study, are the specific difficulties employees encounter while doing their jobs. Keeping these distinct avoids treating a national proficiency score as if it measured workplace communication directly.

2. English in the Construction Industry

Within ESP, the construction sector has been studied far less than tourism or business, yet the available work points in a consistent direction. Dashti et al. (2024), in a mixed-methods study at a Kuwaiti construction training institute, found that English served as the medium of instruction and that trainees, despite varied linguistic backgrounds and limited proficiency, recognized it as a requirement for future international projects. Hodges and Seawright (2023) reached a comparable conclusion for engineering professionals, who routinely communicate with colleagues and clients abroad and rely on English as a common medium. Read together, these studies suggest that the need for occupational English in construction is widely acknowledged by practitioners themselves, even where actual proficiency lags behind. Sureeyatanapas, Boonma and Thalangkan (2016) extend this point to career mobility, arguing that English has become a competitive asset that opens access to international networks. The expansion of construction in tourism-led economies such as Phuket, driven by foreign investment and international contractors, has only sharpened this demand (Moukomla & Marome, 2025).

3. English Challenges Across Job Positions

Evidence on the specific English communication challenges encountered by employees across different job positions points to a consistent pattern of difficulty, though the nature of those challenges tends to vary by occupational role. In the hotel sector, Pinsirikul et al. (2023) found that front staff reported greater difficulty managing English interactions as the complexity of their responsibilities increased. It suggested that higher-level roles bring with them more demanding communication challenges that many employees feel unprepared to handle. In engineering contexts, Hassan (2010) found that Bangladeshi engineering staff were widely regarded by employers as lacking the communication skills needed to perform effectively on the job, while Khatun et al. (2022) reported that nearly half of employers felt job applicants did not meet the English communication standards expected in technical workplaces. Chaudhury (2021) similarly documented inadequate English as a recruitment barrier across multiple technical sectors. These contrasting patterns, hierarchical in hospitality but broadly shared in engineering, indicate that the relationship between job position and English difficulty cannot be assumed in advance and may depend on the sector studied.

4. English Problems in Thai Context

Research on workplace English in Thailand has concentrated largely on the hospitality and tourism sectors, where the need for English communication with international visitors is most visible (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2025). Studies in these fields consistently show that limited English proficiency creates practical difficulties for both employees and employers, affecting not only daily work performance but also career advancement for those who cannot meet the communication standards their roles demand (Poon-Eiad et al., 2025).

Within the Thai construction sector, however, evidence remains sparse. While it is reasonable to expect that different job positions face different types and levels of English communication challenges given the distinct nature of their work, this assumption has not yet been tested empirically in the Thai context. The few studies that do exist tend to address English needs in general terms rather than examining specific communication difficulties across individual roles or skills (Junnont, 2023).

Overall, the literature establishes that occupational English matters in construction, and the relationship between job position and communication difficulty remains unsettled. What is missing is direct evidence from the Thai construction workforce: no study has yet examined which specific communication challenges employees face across the four language skills, or whether those challenges differ by job position, in a setting such as Phuket where cross-border collaboration is routine. The present study addresses this gap.

Research Objectives

This study pursued two objectives:

1. To investigate the English communication problems experienced by employees in the top 10 construction companies in Phuket across the four language skills
2. To determine whether these problems differ significantly across job positions

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, survey-based design to address two objectives: 1) to examine the English communication problems faced by employees in the top 10 construction companies in Phuket across the four language skills; and 2) to determine whether these problems differ significantly across job positions. A quantitative design was appropriate because the study sought to measure the extent of communication problems in a sizeable workforce and to compare occupational groups statistically.

2. Population and Samples

The population of this study comprised 325 Thai employees working for the top 10 construction companies in Phuket, ranked by their highest revenues in 2025 (Department of Business Development, 2025). These companies were selected because they primarily handle high-end luxury real estate projects and frequently communicate with international clients.

Phuket was chosen as the research site owing to its substantial expansion in the real estate sector, which has made it a major hub for condominiums and vacation homes in recent years. This context renders the province particularly suitable for examining English communication in the workplace.

A sample of 65 employees, representing a sampling fraction of 20% of the population, was selected using stratified random sampling with proportional allocation (Cochran, 1977). The population was first divided into four occupational positions—foreman, architect, engineer, and administrator—because these groups differ in the nature and frequency of their English communication with international clients. The number of participants drawn from each position was then determined proportionally using the formula

$$n_h = (N_h/N) \times n$$

Where n_h denotes the sample size of stratum h , N_h the population size of position h , N the total population, and n the total sample. Within each position, participants were subsequently selected through simple random sampling. This procedure ensured that every occupational group was represented in proportion to its size in the population, thereby reflecting the occupational diversity of employees across the companies. The distribution of the population and the corresponding sample for each stratum is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of the Population and Sample by Job Positions

Job Positions	Population (N_h)	Sample (n_h)	% of population
Engineer	137	27	41.5%
Architect	73	15	23.1%
Foreman	58	12	18.5%
Administrator	57	11	16.9%
Total	325	65	100%

Note. Sample sizes were obtained through proportional allocation, $n_h = (N_h/N) \times n$ (Cochran, 1977). Fractional values were rounded to the nearest integer so that the position samples summed to the total sample of 65.

3. Instrument and Procedures

Data were collected with a closed-ended questionnaire measuring English communication problems across the four skills.

Part 1 collected demographic information (gender, education, work experience, and job position).

Part 2 comprised 50 items distributed across listening (13 items), speaking (13 items), reading (12 items), and writing (12 items), each rated on a five-point Likert scale.

Validity. Content validity was established through review by five experts (four in English language teaching, one in construction) using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC; Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). Experts rated each item for clarity, item construction, and relevance to the research objectives. All items fell within the acceptable range of 0.50–1.00, with an overall IOC of 0.80, indicating satisfactory content validity. Items receiving lower ratings were revised before piloting.

Table 2
Interpretation of Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation Level
1.00-1.80	Very Low
1.81-2.60	Low
2.61-3.40	Moderate
3.41-4.20	High
4.21-5.00	Very High

Piloting

The revised questionnaire was piloted with 50 employees who a) currently worked in one of the ten companies and b) held one of the four target positions. These participants were selected purposively and excluded from the main study. Internal-consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The overall coefficient was $\alpha = 0.88$, with subscale values of listening = 0.82, speaking = 0.79, reading = 0.85, writing = .80, indicating good reliability.

Ethical Considerations

The study was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Phuket Rajabhat University, approval number PKRU2568/55. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the data were used solely for research purposes.

4. Data Collection

The questionnaire aimed to examine whether job positions in construction companies in Phuket have an impact on the English communication problems encountered in job performance. The questionnaire was administered to the 65 sampled employees—including foremen, architects, engineers, and administrators—drawn from the top 10 construction companies in Phuket. Data collection took place in December 2025, and the questionnaire was distributed through two channels: Google Forms and printed paper. This dual-mode distribution allowed for broader reach, ensuring that participants from the different job positions in the construction industry could contribute to the study.

5. Data Analysis

To analyze the data on English communication problems faced by employees in construction companies in Phuket, two main statistical methods were applied. The first method aimed to gather demographic information of the participants and to explore the English communication problems experienced by construction workers. Descriptive statistical methods such as frequency distribution and percentage were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender, education level, and job position. Additionally, the mean and standard deviation were calculated to assess the extent of English communication problems faced by the workers.

The second method involved using an F-Test (One-Way ANOVA) to determine whether there were significant differences in English communication problems across different job positions within the construction sector. This test helped analyze if the performance issues related to English communication varied depending on the job role. By comparing the mean scores of communication problems across various groups, such as foreman, architect, engineer, and administrator, the One-Way ANOVA assessed whether the level of difficulty in using English for communication was influenced by the participants' specific job positions.

Results

Part 1: Analysis of Demographic Information of Survey Respondents

Table 3

Demographic Information

Category	Type	Number of People	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	64.62
	Female	23	35.38
Work Experience	1–5 years	25	38.5
	6–10 years	8	12.3
	11–15 years	10	15.4
	16-20 years	8	12.3
	21-25 years	7	10.8
	25+ years	7	10.8
Education	Bachelor's degree	45	69.23
	Master's degree	13	19.05
	Vocational Certificate	7	11.11

Table 3 (continued)

Category	Type	Number of People	Percentage (%)
Job Position	Engineer	27	41.54
	Architect	15	23.08
	Foreman	12	18.46
	Administrator	11	16.92

It was found that the employees in construction companies in Phuket who responded to the questionnaire consisted of 42 males (64.62%) and 23 females (35.38%). Regarding work experience, the largest group of employees had 1–5 years of experience (25 people, 38.5%), followed by 11–15 years (10 people, 15.4%), 6–10 years (8 people, 12.3%), 16–20 years (8 people, 12.3%), 21–25 years (7 people, 10.8%), and 25 years or more (7 people, 10.8%). For educational level, most employees held a Bachelor's degree (45 people, 69.84%), followed by a Master's degree (13 people, 19.05%), and a Vocational Certificate (7 people, 11.11%). In terms of job positions, the majority were Engineers (27 people, 41.54%), followed by Architects (15 people, 23.08%), Foremen (12 people, 18.46%), and Administrators (11 people, 16.92%).

Part 2: Analysis of Challenges in English Communication in the Workplace among Construction Employees

Table 4

Administrator Position

English Communication Skills	M	S.D.	Meaning
Listening	3.28	0.73	Moderate
Speaking	4.84	0.4	Very high
Reading	4.7	0.45	Very high
Writing	3.5	0.5	High
Total	4.08	0.425	High

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

The study revealed that English communication challenges among employees in the Administrator department of a construction company were generally high, with an overall mean score of 4.08.

When examining specific skill areas, speaking skills emerged as the most significant barrier, rated at a very high level with a mean of 4.84. This was followed by reading skills, which also fell within the very high range at a mean of 4.70. Writing skills ranked third, though still at a high level, with a mean score of 3.50.

Table 5

Engineer Position

English Communication Skills	M	S.D.	Meaning
Listening	3.48	0.86	High
Speaking	4.05	0.3	High
Reading	3.16	0.48	Moderate
Writing	3.78	0.71	High
Total	3.62	0.59	High

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

For the Engineer Position, it was found that the overall challenges in English communication in the workplace among employees in the Engineer position in construction companies were at a high level, with an overall mean score of 3.62.

Looking closer at specific skills, speaking was the biggest challenge, rated at a high level with a mean score of 4.05. Writing followed, also at a high level, with a mean of 3.78, while listening came next, maintaining a high level with a mean score of 3.48.

Table 6

Foreman Position

English Communication Skills	M	S.D.	Meaning
Listening	3.24	0.53	Moderate
Speaking	4.05	0.47	High
Reading	3.84	0.84	High
Writing	4.1	0.4	High
Total	3.8	0.56	High

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

For employees in the Foreman position, overall English communication challenges were generally high, with a mean score of 3.8. Looking at specific skills, writing emerged as the most significant challenge, rated at a high level with a mean of 4.1. This was followed closely by speaking, also at a high level, with a mean score of 4.05, while reading ranked third, maintaining a high level with a mean of 3.84.

Table 7

Architect Position

English Communication Skills	M	S.D.	Meaning
Listening	3.64	0.72	High
Speaking	4.16	0.70	High
Reading	3.2	0.49	Moderate
Writing	4.32	0.57	Very high
Total	3.83	0.62	High

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

As for employees in the Architect position, overall English communication challenges were generally high, with a mean score of 3.83. Examining specific skills, writing was the most prominent challenge, rated at a very high level with a mean of 4.32. This was followed by speaking, also at a high level, with a mean score of 4.16, while listening ranked third, remaining at a high level with a mean of 3.64.

Table 8

Summary of Mean Scores by English Communication Problems and Job Position

English Communication Skills	Administrator	Engineer	Foreman	Architect
Listening	3.28	3.48	3.24	3.64
Speaking	4.84	4.05	4.05	4.16
Reading	4.70	3.16	3.84	3.20
Writing	3.50	3.78	4.10	4.32
Total	4.08	3.62	3.80	3.83

Note. All mean scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale.

To provide a clearer picture of how English communication challenges were distributed across job positions, Table 8 brings together the mean scores from all four groups in a single comparison. A few patterns stand out. Speaking was a concern across the board, particularly among administrators, whose mean score of 4.84 was notably higher than the other groups. Writing, on the other hand, tended to weigh more heavily on foremen and architects than on engineers or administrators. Listening consistently returned the lowest scores across all positions, though it was never entirely absent as a concern.

Part 3: ANOVA Analysis of Differences in English Communication Challenges among Employees in Different Departments of Construction Companies

Table 9

ANOVA Analysis of Difference Positions in English Communication

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Square (MS)	F	p-value
Between Groups	3	1.670	0.557	0.871	0.461
Within Groups	61	38.991	0.639		
Total	64	40.661			

Note. df = degrees of freedom; F = F-ratio. Total N = 65; the Total row above reports degrees of freedom ($df = N - 1 = 64$), consistent with the demographic sample size of 65 reported in Table 1 and Table 3.

A study was conducted to compare the level of English communication challenges among employees in construction companies, classified by job positions: Administrators, Engineers, Foremen, and Architects. The statistical analysis found that employees in all positions did not show statistically significant differences in their level of English communication problems ($p = 0.461$).

Furthermore, the statistical test confirmed that the observed differences were not significant, indicating that employees across all departments in construction companies in Phuket face similar levels of challenges in English communication.

Discussion

The present study examined the challenges in English communication among employees in construction companies in Phuket. The respondents were mostly male, held a Bachelor's degree, and had 1–5 years of work experience — a demographic profile that is typical of the construction sector in Thailand and consistent with findings reported in previous studies (Kaewsri & Tongthong, 2012).

Overall, employees across all job positions reported high levels of challenge in English communication, with speaking and writing being the most difficult skills. This is not surprising when viewed through the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), which holds that what people need to learn in English is closely tied to what they need to do in their jobs. Employees in construction companies are regularly expected to read technical documents, negotiate with clients and contractors, and produce written reports in English. These tasks require active, productive language use — and when training programs

do not prepare employees for these real demands, speaking and writing are naturally the areas where gaps become most visible.

This finding also reflects what Canale and Swain (1980) described in their model of communicative competence, which involves not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in social and professional contexts. Many employees may have acquired basic grammar through formal schooling, yet still find it difficult to communicate confidently and effectively in English at work. This gap between classroom learning and real-world language use is a recurring issue in Thai EFL contexts, where teaching has long prioritized reading and grammar over actual speaking and writing practice (Changpueng & Pattanapichet, 2023).

When the results are examined by job position, some clear occupational patterns emerge. Architects and engineers reported the greatest challenges in writing and speaking, which aligns with the nature of their work — drafting technical documents, preparing design reports, and communicating with clients. A similar pattern was found by Perinpasingam et al., (2015), whose study of architecture interns in Malaysia showed that spoken and written communication were both the most important and the most underdeveloped skills in professional settings. As Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out, ESP programs need to be built around a careful analysis of what specific groups of workers actually need to do in English; otherwise, training may not address the right skills at all.

Administrators, on the other hand, reported particular difficulty with reading and speaking. This makes sense given that administrative work involves handling large volumes of formal written materials — such as contracts, financial reports, regulations, and official correspondence — as well as communicating with colleagues and stakeholders across the organization. The reading difficulties they reported are likely due to the complexity and formality of these document types rather than a lack of general language ability. This is consistent with Sukserm and Sukserm (2026), who found that in administrative roles, reading challenges often arise from unfamiliar vocabulary, dense sentence structures, and the conventions of formal institutional writing.

The ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences in English communication challenges across job positions. This finding, however, should not be taken to mean that all groups face exactly the same difficulties. What it more likely suggests is that the challenges are widespread, presenting across all roles and departments. This points to a shared gap in English language support within the organization as a whole. Putra et al., (2022) made a similar observation in his extensive review of second language acquisition research. They noted that in EFL workplace settings, communication difficulties tend to reflect institutional conditions, such as a lack of structured training opportunities, rather than differences in individual ability or effort.

Taken together, the findings point clearly to the need for well-designed ESP training programs that respond to what employees actually need to do in English at work. Following the needs

analysis approach outlined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), training should be grounded in real workplace tasks and cover all four skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing — in practical and relevant contexts. A single program delivered uniformly to all staff is unlikely to be enough. Instead, training modules tailored to the specific communication demands of engineers, architects, foremen, and administrators would help ensure that all employees receive support that is genuinely useful for their routine work.

Conclusion

Generally, employees in construction companies in Phuket experienced high levels of challenges in English communication. The extent of challenges across different English skills was ranked as follows: 1) speaking; 2) writing; 3) reading; and 4) listening. Administrators reported very high challenges in speaking and reading, while architects faced very high challenges in writing and speaking. Engineers and foremen also reported high challenges, particularly in speaking and writing. These findings indicate that productive skills—speaking and writing—are the most problematic for employees in the construction sector, consistent with previous studies on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Asia.

There is evidence from this study showing that English proficiency is essential for effective communication in construction projects, particularly as Phuket continues to attract foreign investors and international contractors. First, the descriptive statistics revealed that all employee groups reported high levels of challenges across the four language skills, showing that English communication difficulties are widespread within the construction industry. Second, the one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences across job positions. Rather than suggesting that all groups experience identical difficulties, this result points to a shared and systemic gap in English language support that extends across the organization as a whole. As Kailuenam and Piamsawas (2025) noted, such widespread difficulties in EFL workplace settings often reflect institutional limitations in training provision rather than differences in individual ability.

Recommendations

1. Implications

1.1 Employees in all positions in Phuket’s construction companies face significant challenges in English communication, especially in speaking and writing. This suggests that organizations should provide training programs covering all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—so that every employee can communicate effectively with international clients and colleagues.

1.2 Although no statistically significant differences were found between positions, training programs should still be tailored to the specific practical needs of each job role. For instance, front-desk staff may benefit more from client-interaction exercises, while back-office staff may focus on report writing or project meetings. Tailoring training in this way ensures that

employees develop skills that are most relevant and useful for their daily work, reflecting descriptive patterns and task-specific demands even when overall statistical differences are not significant.

2. Further Studies

2.1 Future research could use qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to explore the underlying reasons why employees experience difficulties in English communication within the construction sector. Understanding these causes would help design more effective training programs.

2.2 Another area for further study is to evaluate the comparative studies across different regions of Thailand, or among mid-range construction projects, could provide further insights into how English language challenges vary by project type and organizational context.

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