

ความต้องการในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาของพนักงานโฮมสเตย์ชาวไทยใน บริบทการท่องเที่ยววิถีใหม่ จังหวัดเชียงใหม่

Needs for Improving Non-Verbal Communication Skills of Thai Homestay Staff in the New Normal Tourism Context, Chiang Mai

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาความต้องการในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาของพนักงานโฮมสเตย์เพื่อให้บริการนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติ ในบริบทการท่องเที่ยววิถีใหม่ การวิจัยเชิงผสมวิธีนี้ประกอบด้วย 2 ระยะ ระยะที่ 1 การศึกษาเบื้องต้นจากการสังเกตการณ์และการสัมภาษณ์เกี่ยวกับความต้องการในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของผู้ประกอบการและพนักงานโฮมสเตย์ จำนวน 8 คน ในตำบลแม่ทะ อำเภอดอยสะเก็ด และระยะที่ 2 การสำรวจความต้องการในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาของพนักงานโฮมสเตย์ในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ จำนวน 15 คน โดยใช้แบบสอบถามมาตราส่วนประมาณค่า 5 ระดับ เกี่ยวกับความสำคัญของอวัจนภาษา ความถี่ในการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาและปัญหาการสื่อสารในโฮมสเตย์ ผลการวิจัยพบว่าการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษามีความสำคัญในการแสดงความรู้สึกและเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพในการสื่อสารกับชาวต่างชาติ การสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาที่พบบ่อยที่สุด คือ ท่าทาง การสบตา และสัญลักษณ์มือ นอกจากนี้การสื่อสารในธุรกิจโฮมสเตย์ที่ทำนายมากที่สุด คือ การขอความร่วมมือในการรักษาระยะห่าง การพูดคุยเกี่ยวกับการบริการรถรับส่งและการแนะนำสุxonามัยที่เหมาะสม ข้อเสนอแนะในการพัฒนาสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาของพนักงานโฮมสเตย์ ได้แก่ เพิ่มความตระหนักและความเข้าใจในการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษาของประเทศต่างๆ ฝึก

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ใช้วัจนภาษาควบคู่กับคำและสำนวนภาษาอังกฤษ คำอ่านและการแปลความหมายภาษาไทย ตลอดจนเรียนรู้จากสื่อรูปภาพสัญลักษณ์เพื่อเพิ่มความเข้าใจในการสื่อสารวัจนภาษา

คำสำคัญ

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Abstract

This research investigated the needs to improve the non-verbal communication (NVC) skills of homestay staff for accommodating international tourists in the new normal tourism context. The mixed-methods design comprised two phases. In Phase 1, the preliminary study was conducted by observation and semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the needs for developing English communication skills. Eight homestay providers and staff in Mae Na, Chiangdao District were the focus. In Phase 2, the needs survey for improving NVC was conducted with 15 homestay staff in Chiang Mai, using a five-point rating scale questionnaire regarding the significance of NVC, frequency of using NVC, and communication problems in homestay. The results showed that NVC was essential for expressing their feelings and enhancing their interaction with international tourists. The most common NVC included gestures, eye contact, and hand symbols. Besides, the most challenging communicative tasks in homestay were asking for cooperation in keeping distance in English, talking about shuttle service in English, and introducing proper hygiene in English. Implications for improving their NVC skills included raising awareness and understanding of NVC used in different countries; practicing NVC along with English vocabulary and expressions, Thai transcriptions, and translation; as well as learning from visualizations to gain understandings of NVC.

Keywords

Non-Verbal Communication (NVC), New Normal Tourism, Homestay

Introduction

In many ASEAN countries, Community Based Tourism (CBT) is set up to improve the quality of life of local people by generating income for local culture, arts and crafts business, as well as promoting awareness to conserve historical, cultural, and natural resources in the rural areas. Also, homestay programs are promoted continuously in CBT as an affordable form of holiday, providing tourists' new experiences in local ways of life and community activities.

An increasing number of international travelers and dwellers looking for rural experiences in many ASEAN countries have contributed to establishing the ASEAN homestay standard to ensure the quality of homestay services and tourists' satisfaction. The standard includes many criteria set for 1) host, 2) accommodation, 3) activities, 4) management, 5) location, 6) hygiene and cleanliness, 7) safety and security, 8) marketing and promotion, and 9) sustainability principles (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2016).

In terms of homestay managements, communication is among the required essential skills to include in the training to maximize homestay services capacity. English communication, in particular, is the most prioritized skill for training local homestay staff. However, while being proficient in English could increase local homestay business opportunities (Panyalert, 2015), improving English communication is somewhat challenging. English is regarded as a foreign language (EFL) in Thailand and particularly in the rural areas; Thai EFL learners rarely have opportunities to use and practice English in and outside classrooms due to insufficient EFL teachers, teaching materials, and financial support. Such circumstances negatively affect their English language proficiencies, confidence to communicate in English, and motivation to learn English (Noom-ura, 2013).

Besides, improving Thai EFL local people's communication skills is even more challenging in the recently transforming global protocols for "Safe Travel" due to COVID-19 pandemics (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). Communication across cultures, verbally and non-verbally, has become a vital and sensitive issue in the new normal tourism context. Homestay staff are required to ask the homestay guests for cooperation to follow health, hygiene, and safety regulations politely and properly. However, communication with homestay guests from different cultural and language backgrounds may not always be successful and lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Perhaps, being aware of the positive and negative meanings of verbal and non-verbal clues from different cultures would enable EFL learners to understand and interpret the meaning of messages more easily (Abu-Arqoub & Alserhan, 2019). It could also help foster mutual understanding and cooperation. Thus, it is essential to look into how local people's verbal and non-verbal communication skills could be improved to promote CBT homestay programs in the new normal tourism context.

Several research studies were commonly conducted in academic tourism programs to examine the needs and develop EFL communication skills to equip students for a future career in tourism-related areas. The findings of these studies may not fully be generalized or

applicable to the local community's working context. Little research has been conducted to investigate the needs to improve English communication skills in the local community. For example, Kiatkheeree, Konchiab, and Kiatkiri (2020) analyzed the need to develop Thai EFL local vendors' English communication skills. They found that they needed to improve verbal communication skills to greet the customer, give general information, sell their products, advertise their products, and deal with bargaining. Suya-ai (2018) investigated problems and needs to improve communication skills of Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. Consequently, he designed self-access learning package to improve their English speaking and listening skills. In another local context, Khureerang (2020) compared verbal and non-verbal communication strategies used by a Thai-cooking instructor and international tourists. Interestingly, apart from verbal communication strategies, non-verbal communication was found second-most common among tourists. The significance of English language communication in homestay business, in particular, was discussed in Panyalert's (2015) study. Unfortunately, specific needs to improve communication skills were not elaborately discussed in this study. Therefore, it is necessary to study the needs further to improve communication skills, verbal and non-verbal, for Thai EFL homestay staff.

Research Objectives

This research was conducted with groups of homestay providers and staff in Chaing Mai, Thailand. It aimed to investigate their needs to improve communication skills, particularly NVC as a VC counterpart. It was guided by the research question, "In what way do the Thai EFL homestay staff need to improve NVC in the new normal tourism context?"

Literature Review

Definition and classification of NVC

Non-verbal communication is a process of creating and conveying meanings, using behaviors other than words (Jones, 2016). It aims to convey the message, exchange information, and express feelings, desires, intentions, attitudes, and opinions (Lekhanovaa & Glukhovaa, 2016). According to Hargie (2011), both verbal and non-verbal communication can be vocal and non-vocal. Verbal communication (VC) can be vocal (e.g., spoken words) and non-vocal (e.g., writing and sign language). In the same vein, non-verbal communication (NVC) can also be vocal (e.g., paralanguage) and non-vocal (e.g., body language).

Jones (2016) proposed a comprehensive classification of NVC, adapted from Hargie (2011). Seven areas of NVC included Kinesics (body language), Haptics (touch), Vocalics (paralanguage), Proxemics (space and distance), Chronemics (time), Personal presentation, and Environment. As shown in Figure 1, firstly, Kinesics or body language involves movements of body, hand, arm, eyes, and face. It can be subcategorized into four types: gesture, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions. Secondly, Haptics or touch includes a handshake and a pat on the arm or the shoulder. Thirdly, Vocalics or body paralanguage involves pitch, tone of voice, volume, speaking rate, and verbal fillers (e.g., uh, ah, uh). Fourthly, Proxemics deals with space and distance within communication such as public, social, and personal spaces. Fifthly, Chronemics (Time) is concerned with time's influence on the way to communication. Sixthly, the personal presentation includes physical characteristics (e.g., body shape, height, weight, and attractiveness) and adornments (e.g., clothes, jewelry, and hairstyles). Lastly, the environment affects the communication atmosphere and facilitates interaction processes, such as objects, magazines, and furniture.

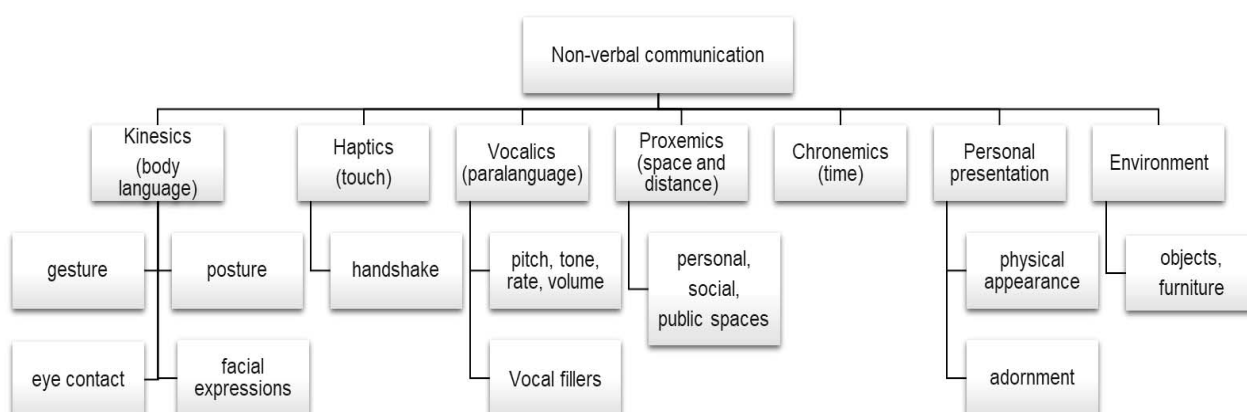


Figure 1: Classification of NVC, adapted from Jones (2016)

Significant roles of NVC

Nonverbal communication plays many roles in human interaction. According to Jones (2016), NVC generally conveys more meaning; it is also more involuntary, ambiguous, and credible than VC. Firstly, to convey the meaning, NVC can reinforce, substitute, complement, or contradict VC. For example, individuals with language difficulties use NVC to substitute for VC to help convey the meaning. Also, using VC may not be as applicable as NVC to convey

the meaning in a noisy and crowded setting. Secondly, NVC can influence others because it involves an involuntary and uncontrollable act believed to be more credible and convincing. Thirdly, NVC helps maintain the flow of the conversation and gives cues to signal turn-taking. For example, pitch gives cues to understand speakers' intentions; a rising pitch implies a question while a falling pitch signifies the end of a turn. Fourthly, NVC affects relationships positively and negatively by expressing a feeling, creating social bonds, and maintaining engagement. Lastly, NVC can represent individuals' identities. Such identities were based on culture and subculture of a group of individuals that can be illustrated by costumes, adornments, accents, and tone of voice that are unique.

Previous studies

Many studies revealed the significance of NVC. For instance, Bailey (2018) explored the perceptions of 50 university administrators, staff, and faculty members on the importance and the way to teach NVC in business. The data from the questionnaire revealed three key findings. The majority of them found nonverbal communication was crucial in their work. Using body language effectively enabled them to communicate clearly, read and understand others, and enhance self-confidence. Also, they tended to focus on kinesics, appearance and dress, chronemics, and paralinguistic to teach students. Birlik and Kaur (2020) investigated non-verbal communication strategy (NVCS) to convey and interpret meaning in the business context. Based on the conversation analysis of business meeting interaction, head nod, hand pointing gesture, and eye contact were used to enhance and contextualize verbal communication, promote clarity and feedback, and enhance understanding. Raising learners' awareness of NVCS in business or other English for specific purposes (ESP) courses could promote learners' communicative competence.

In the Thai context, the importance of NVC in business and social interaction was also discussed in many studies. For example, Wisankosol (2018) conducted a qualitative study on the importance and benefits of NVC in business. The participants were 20 business executives, leaders, managers, and sales representatives. Data analysis from interviews and observation revealed that NVC was the most significant in business communication, either in careers and lives. They were also aware of NVC in different cultures and viewed that smiles, dress code, eye contact, active-listening sounds, and mirroring helped develop rapport in business contexts. Similarly, Laomeechaicharoen et al. (2017) studied the roles of nonverbal

communication played in hiring decision-making by 20 employers through interviews and observation. The finding showed that candidates' punctuality, dress, manner, and speech were most important when making hiring decisions. They also considered the qualities of NVC, including self-initiative, self-confidence, enthusiasm, motivation, intelligence, leadership, potential, maturity, persuasiveness, pleasant personality, and positive attitude. Interestingly, Damarongsinsakul (2007) investigated NVC that triggered negative attitudes in the workplace. The data were collected from 24 Thai staff in the international company, using questionnaire and interview. The findings revealed that facial expressions and eye contact, body movement, distance, and space tended to create negative attitudes. With the significance of using NVC properly, Noonkong, Damnet and Charttrakul (2019) developed IIM innovative program to promote NVC competence in requests and refusals for 45 Thai engineering students. This study showed that the program encouraged the proper use of eye contact, facial expressions, and touching and increased learners' motivation and learning achievement.

Some research emphasized the roles of NVC as communication strategies (CSs) and compared them across groups of language proficiencies. For example, Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) and Metcalfe and Noom-Ura (2013) compared CSs used by Thai EFL learners with high and low proficiencies. Both studies found that non-verbal strategies (e.g., hand gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions) were among highly ranked CSs used by both groups. Nevertheless, the qualitative study of Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) also showed that the lower group used paralanguage, non-lexicalized fillers (e.g., uh, ah, uh) more often than the high proficient group. Due to limited language resources, the lower group tended to use fillers to think what to say. This is also evident in Wannaruk's (2003) study, showing that gesture and mime were among the most common CSs used by the lower group of proficiency. Likewise, Phonhan (2019) investigated CSs used by Thai EFL Engineering students, and Pojanapong and Moonpunya (2020) explored problems and CSs used by Thai EFL students from different disciplines. Both studies also found that NVC was the most common CSs. Since NVC behavior did not require linguistic efforts, it appeared most common among Thai EFL students and those with lower proficiency. However, using NVC extensively tended to reflect students' limited linguistic resources to deal with communication problems. The overuse of NVC may also cause distraction, non-productive communication, and adverse effects (Klinzing & Gerada-Aloisio, 2004). Furthermore, being unaware of cultural differences could also possibly

lead to misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and misuse of NVC (Jones, 2016). Thus, it is vital to learn to use NVC properly and appropriately in international and intercultural contexts.

Previous studies revealed the significant roles of NVC in international business and higher educational contexts. It could also be essential for tourism businesses in the local community, including homestay businesses, to improve NVC skills so that they would be more aware of NVC from different countries and use NVC properly and appropriately. Thus, the current research attempted to investigate the needs to improve local homestay staff's non-verbal communication skills. Based on the finding, the pedagogical implications were proposed for encouraging homestay staff's use of NVC to be more proper and effective in the new normal CBT context.

Research Methodology

1. Research design

The sequential mixed-methods design was the focus of this study. The data were collected and analyzed in two consecutive and dependent phases. Primarily, qualitative data were collected through observation and interview to identify deep needs to improve English communication skills. Based on the first phase's finding, quantitative data were subsequently collected by questionnaires to explore details of specific needs from the broader perspectives. Focusing on qualitative and quantitative data helps validate the findings while gaining in-depth understandings of participants' experiences (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).

2. Research Participants

Twenty-three homestay staff were purposively selected in the research, divided into two groups. Eight homestay providers and staff in Mae Na, Chiang Dao District were the focus in the preliminary study. This group was chosen because Mae Na is a popular area of community-based tourism and provided homestays for Thai and International tourists. Another group included 15 homestay providers and staff in Mae Taeng and Mae Rim Districts, Chiang Mai was asked to be involved in the needs survey. These districts tended to share similar features of community-based tourism. The majority were local people, aged between the 20s and 30s, and completed secondary education as the highest qualification. They provided hospitality service as housekeepers, receptionists, and drivers in a homestay.

3. Research methods

3.1 Field observation

Field observation was conducted to understand the homestay business context by exploring the environment and capturing people, behaviors, and interactions. The POEMS framework is a structured approach used to observe five themes: People (P), Object (O), Environment (E), Message and Media (M), and Services (S). Table 1 illustrates the examples of guided questions for the field observation, adapted from Lee (2017).

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview was used to gain insights into the deep needs of homestay providers and staff. Guided questions for the interviews were outlined into three categories. The first category dealt with questions regarding demographic data (e.g., age, genders, occupation, lifestyle, likes, and dislikes), for example, "What is your duty in a homestay?" and "What do you usually do in your free time?". The second category comprised the questions regarding personal motivation, aspiration, inspiration, and challenges, for instances, "Are you happy working here?", "Why did you work here?" and "What do you want to do in the future?" The last category involved the questions regarding motivation, challenges, and obstacles for improving in English communication skills in the homestay, such as "How often do you speak English with the tourists?", "Did you have any problems when communicating with tourists" and "What did you do to solve problems?"

Table 1

A Field Observation Framework: POEMS

| Themes | Examples of guided questions |
|-----------------------|---|
| People (P) | Who are involved?/ What roles do they play? / What is the relationship? |
| Object (O) | What artifacts are important? What roles do they play? How does the object influence people's behavior? |
| Environment (E) | Where is the action taking place? / What is happening? / What is the atmosphere like? / How does the environment influence people's behavior? |
| Messages & Medias (M) | What are messages and media used? / What roles do they play? |
| Services (S) | What are the services and support systems provided? |

3.3 Non-verbal communication needs questionnaires

The five-point rating scale questionnaire was used to explore usage and needs for developing non-verbal communication skills. It comprised three parts. Part I included five

statements regarding the significance of NVC that required participants to rate from 5 as the most important and 1 as the least important. Part II comprised 16 types of NVC, adapted from Hargie (2011) and Jones (2016). Participants were required to rate from 5 as the most frequently used to 1 as the least frequently used. Part III consisted of 15 English communication situations with international guests that required participants to rate from 5 as the most challenging to 1 as the least challenging situations. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to validate the content by three experts in teaching English for tourism. The items with the average IOC scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were included in the questionnaire.

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1 Informed consent was undertaken to ensure that all participants fully understood the research's aims and process and their roles and rights. Permission of the site visits was also gained before the visits for the field observation and interviews.

4.2 The preliminary study was carried out in December 2019 to understand the homestay business context and gain insights into the deep needs for improving English communication skills in the homestay. The data were collected by the field observation. After reviewing the observation data, the interview questions were outlined carefully before visiting the site to interview homestay providers and staff in Mae Na districts. The data were then coded, clustered, and interpreted to address the deep needs to improve English communication skills. As a result, NVC was the focus to improve communication skills in the homestay.

4.3 Based on the primary needs to improve the NVC of homestay staff, the data were collected by the questionnaire in August 2020 to explore more perspectives on the usage of and needs for NVC among 15 homestay providers and staff in Mae Taeng and Mae Rim Districts. In this phase, means and standard deviations were used to show 1) the levels of NVC significance, 2) the frequency of non-verbal communication usage, and 3) the degree of communication challenges. Mean scores and their levels of interpretation are listed below.

| Ranges | Levels of NVBC significance | Frequencies of NVBC usage | Degrees of challenges |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4.51 – 5.00 | The most important | The most frequent | The most challenging |
| 3.51 – 4.50 | More important | More frequent | More challenging |

| | | | |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 2.51 – 3.50 | Important | Frequent | Challenging |
| 1.51 – 2.50 | Less important | Less frequent | Less challenging |
| 1.00 – 1.50 | The least important | The least frequent | The least challenging |

Results

1. Preliminary study in Mae Na, Chiang Dao

The analysis and interpretation of the data from the field observation and interview resulted in three themes. They included the homestay context, homestay providers' perspectives for improving English communication skills, and homestay staff's needs to improve English communication skills. Firstly, the homestays focused on in this study are located in Mae Na, Chiang Dao District. This area is a popular tourist destination for Thai and international tourists to experience rural lifestyles in a mountain valley and local cultures of different ethnic groups (e.g., Northern Thai, Lahu, Chin-haw, and Lisu). The homestay business was therefore growing rapidly in this area. The majority of homestays were built and decorated with local materials in harmony with nature and rural lifestyles. However, the homestays were a small business that relatively similar to guesthouses and bed and breakfast (B & B). They provided hospitality service to tourists, including private rooms with an en-suite bathroom, housekeeping, food and drinks, and transportations. Many homestays were promoted online via accommodation applications worldwide.

Interestingly, many homestay providers were not local people, but they hired local people to work in the homestay. Only a few staff in each homestay and some small homestays were run as a family business. Many homestay providers and their family members can communicate in English with international tourists, so they were somewhat motivated to improve English communication skills. However, it was more likely that they needed support to improve their local homestay staff's English communication skills.

Based on the homestay staff interview, they were local people who completed compulsory education from local schools. Like other Thai EFL students in rural areas, they lacked opportunities to practice English in and outside schools and further study in higher education. Thus, they preferred to work in their hometown and stay with their family, caring for them. These staff were motivated to use and improve their English communication because working in a homestay is the main income to support their family. However, with the basic English communication skills, they encountered communication problems with

international tourists, and at times they tended to use gestures to deal with these problems. Using gestures did not always help solve communication problems or establish mutual understandings with tourists from different cultures worldwide. Therefore, they needed to understand more about NVC from different cultures and to be able to use NVC properly and effectively. These specific needs were further explored from the broader perspectives of homestay providers and staff in other CBT areas in Chiang Mai.

2. The NVC needs in the homestay

2.1 Significance of NVC for homestay staff

According to Table 2, participants viewed that NVC was the most important when communicating with international tourists, particularly for expressing a feeling, enhancing verbal communication effectiveness, and increasing self-confidence (\bar{x} =4.87, 4.73, and 4.60, respectively). Nevertheless, NVC was more likely essential for minimizing miscommunication with international tourists (\bar{x} =4.13).

Table 2

Significance of Nonverbal Communication

| Item | Questions | Mean | SD | Level |
|--------------|--|------|------|----------------|
| 1. | Non-verbal communication shows one's feelings without saying words. | 4.87 | 0.35 | most important |
| 2. | Non-verbal communication makes verbal communication more effective. | 4.73 | 0.46 | most important |
| 3. | Non-verbal communication helps increase the confidence in interacting with international tourists. | 4.60 | 0.51 | most important |
| 4. | Non-verbal communication helps communicate with international tourists more effectively. | 4.53 | 0.52 | most important |
| 5. | Non-verbal communication helps reduce miscommunication with international tourists. | 4.13 | 0.35 | more important |
| Total | | 4.57 | 0.50 | most important |

2.2 Homestay staffs' use of NVC

It was likely that homestay staff used NVC varyingly and frequently when interacting with international tourists (\bar{x} =4.55), particularly body language. As shown in Table 3, the highest rank was gesture (\bar{x} =4.80), followed by eye contact and hand symbols (\bar{x} =4.67). Many different types of body-language were also most commonly used, including nodding, pointing, smiling, counting fingers, using hands gesture (e.g., wai) and touch (e.g., handshake) to greet international tourists, and standing politely and appropriately. Interestingly, other types of NVC used in homestay included creating a positive environment in a homestay and paralanguage (e.g., different tone of voice).

Table 3

The Frequency of Using NVC

| Item | Questions | Mean | SD | frequency |
|--------------|--|------|------|---------------|
| 1. | Using gesture for communicating with tourists | 4.80 | 0.41 | most frequent |
| 2. | Making eye contact when interacting with tourists | 4.67 | 0.49 | most frequent |
| 3. | Using hand symbols when speaking with tourists | 4.67 | 0.49 | most frequent |
| 4. | Greeting international tourists by Wai | 4.60 | 0.51 | most frequent |
| 5. | Head nodding for showing agreement with tourists | 4.60 | 0.51 | most frequent |
| 6. | Pointing to address location of things | 4.60 | 0.51 | most frequent |
| 7. | Creating a relaxing and pleasing environment in a homestay | 4.60 | 0.51 | most frequent |
| 8. | Greeting tourists by shaking hands | 4.53 | 0.52 | most frequent |
| 9. | Smiling to the tourists for building rapport. | 4.53 | 0.52 | most frequent |
| 10. | Using different tones of voice in communication | 4.53 | 0.52 | most frequent |
| 11. | Using fingers to count and quantify things | 4.53 | 0.52 | most frequent |
| 12. | Standing politely and appropriately to welcome tourists | 4.53 | 0.52 | most frequent |
| 13. | Using sign language to give direction | 4.47 | 0.52 | more frequent |
| 14. | Keeping appropriate distance from the tourists | 4.40 | 0.51 | more frequent |
| 15. | Dressing up modestly at work. | 4.40 | 0.51 | more frequent |
| 16. | Greeting international tourists by bowing | 4.33 | 0.49 | more frequent |
| Total | | 4.55 | 0.50 | most frequent |

2.3 Homestay staff's communication problems

The most challenging communicative tasks in homestay were asking for cooperation in keeping distance in English, talking about shuttle service in English, and introducing proper hygiene in English. As shown in Table 4, they found problems related to new normal protocols most challenging, including asking for cooperation in keeping distance in English (\bar{x} =4.60) and introducing proper hygiene in English (\bar{x} =4.53). Other critical problems were talking about shuttle service in English (\bar{x} =4.60), providing the homestay information in English (\bar{x} =4.47), and recommending the menu in English (\bar{x} =4.47). However, the lowest rank was using the variety of English words (\bar{x} =3.20).

Table 4

Communication Problems in Homestay

| Item | Questions | Mean | SD | level |
|--------------|---|------|------|------------------|
| 1. | Asking for cooperation in keeping distance in English | 4.60 | 0.51 | most challenging |
| 2. | Talking about shuttle service in English | 4.60 | 0.51 | most challenging |
| 3. | Introducing proper hygiene in English | 4.53 | 0.52 | most challenging |
| 4. | Providing the homestay information in English | 4.47 | 0.52 | more challenging |
| 5. | Recommending the menu in English | 4.47 | 0.64 | more challenging |
| 6. | Pronunciation in English | 4.40 | 0.51 | more challenging |
| 7. | Informing the price of accommodation in English | 4.40 | 0.51 | more challenging |
| 8. | Giving directions in English | 4.40 | 0.51 | more challenging |
| 9. | Introducing to homestay regulations in English | 4.40 | 0.51 | more challenging |
| 10. | Recommending about homestay extra services in English | 4.40 | 0.51 | more challenging |
| 11. | Listening to various English accent | 4.33 | 0.49 | more challenging |
| 12. | Understanding the meaning of English words | 4.33 | 0.49 | more challenging |
| 13. | Recommending the tourist attractions in English | 4.33 | 0.49 | more challenging |
| 14. | Using correct English sentences | 3.27 | 0.46 | challenging |
| 15. | Using the variety of English words | 3.20 | 0.41 | challenging |
| Total | | 4.28 | 0.64 | more challenging |

Discussion

The answers to the research question, "In what way do the Thai EFL homestay staff need to use NVC in the new normal tourism context?" are discussed in terms of NVC functions. Firstly, they needed to use NVC to solve communication problems due to their limited English proficiencies. The majority of homestay staff were local people with secondary school qualifications; their English language background may not facilitate English interaction and may inevitably lead to communication problems. To cope with such problems, they were more likely to use body language and facial expressions because NVC was easier to access and did not require linguistic efforts. Thus, they tended to use NVC varyingly and most frequently. Their view on NVC reflected the roles of NVC as a substitution for VC. According to Jones (2016), NVC helps individuals convey meaning when encountering language difficulties. Particularly in cross-cultural communication, language code may not always be compatible; still, NVC can be an alternative to substitute for what tended to convey. This is consistent with Nakatani (2010), who considered nonverbal messages as CSs that help EFL learners cope with listening and speaking problems. This is also supported with previous studies into CSs, revealing that NVC is commonly used by Thai EFL learners, particularly those with lower English proficiency (Chuanchaisit & Prapphal, 2009; Wannarak, 2003). However, without linguistic support, relying only on NVC could cause incomprehensible and incomprehensive messages, so homestay staff should be trained to use NVC properly and as a VC counterpart to solve communication problems effectively.

Secondly, homestay staff needed to understand and use NVC for establishing mutual understandings and promoting cooperation among international tourists, particularly in the line of health and safety protocols in the new normal tourism context. Staff found asking for cooperation in keeping distance and introducing proper English hygiene were the most challenging communicative situations in a homestay. Some other services indirectly related to new normal protocols, such as transfer arrangements and dining service, were also problematic. In keeping distance, the guests must sit separately in the transportation or on the dining table, wear masks, and keep personal hygiene constantly. In such sensitive and complicated cases, body language (e.g., nodding, hand symbol, and facial expressions), and appropriate physical distances, are more appropriate than touching (e.g., handshake) or volume (e.g., too soft or too loud) to achieve mutual understanding while keeping social distance. More importantly, facial expressions (e.g., smiles) and tone of voice (e.g., friendly and

soft) along with polite requests should help promote cooperation among international guests who were less likely aware of health and hygiene regulations in a homestay. This is supported by Noonkong, Damnet, and Charttrakul (2019), who found eye contact and facial expressions were politeness strategies in requests and refusals in the intercultural context.

It was likely that homestay staff commonly practiced NVC to develop rapport with international tourists in polite, friendly, and humble manners. As NVC can be universally recognized and culture-specific, interaction with people with different cultural backgrounds might be challenging and could inevitably lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Hence, to avoid misinterpretation of NVC and misunderstanding of communication caused by different cultures and perhaps perceptions on the health and safety protocols, homestay staff needed to be more aware of NVC used in different countries. They should also learn more about universal signs that are comprehensible and applicable worldwide related to Covid-19 measures and prevention. Then, they would be able to use those signs in the homestay to ensure that tourists understand and be willing to cooperate while maintaining a healthy, safe environment.

Conclusion, implication, limitation, and recommendation

It may be concluded that homestay staff in Chiang Mai required improving their English communication skills. Particularly NVC was the most familiar strategies that homestay staff often used to deal with language difficulties and establish mutual understanding and cooperation in the new normal context. However, overuse of NVC and unawareness of NVC from different cultures might lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. To maximize communication effectiveness, pedagogical implications for improving homestay staff's NVC skills are proposed as follows:

- 1) Intercultural awareness should be integrated into NVC practice in a homestay to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of NVC from different cultures. Focusing on the most challenging tasks home stay staff encountered, they should learn about different ways of greeting with corresponding language expressions from different cultures, appropriateness of dining manners of Thai and other countries, and the meanings of hand gestures used in different countries.

- 2) Non-verbal communication should be introduced to homestay staff, along with simple English vocabulary and expressions with Thai translations and Thai transcriptions. This

is to encourage homestay staff to use VC to complement NVC because VC and NVC commonly work side by side to get the meaning across (Jones, 2016). Thai translations and transcription could also help them understand the meanings of VC and NVC counterparts, try it out in the homestay context, and be gradually confident to use VC and NVC to maximize communication effectiveness.

3) Visuals, signs, and infographics appeared to be beneficial to facilitate the understanding of NVC. Local people may not be familiar with NVC across cultures; visualization could easily help understand NVC. Infographics, for instance, help facilitate learning as they comprise images, icons, and minimal text that are striking, memorable, and easier-to-understand than pure text (Peerachaakkarachai, 2018).

The limitation of this research was a small sample size. Only 15 homestay staff voluntarily participated in the needs survey, completing the questionnaire because data collection was conducted during Covid19 pandemics. Due to the social distancing measures and travel restrictions, approaching participants in the rural areas was challenging. Thus, the findings from this study might not well represent the diversity of homestay staff in Chiang Mai. It is recommended that future research focus on the development, implementation, and evaluation of the instruction based on the needs of homestay staff. The needs analysis could also be conducted with the various groups in the CBT area. Supporting local communities by providing them more opportunities to improve English communication skills would enable them to cope with new normal protocols in the tourism business, leading to sustainable development in the community.

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