



## An Analysis of Student Language Errors: A Case Study from a Thai Institutional Language Test

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### Abstract

This study analyzed student errors from the Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University English Test (PSRU ET), a standardized test developed by Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University to measure English language proficiency. Modeled after the TOEIC test, the PSRU ET has two sections, listening and reading, with this study focusing on the listening section. The listening section consists of four sections: 1) pictures, 2) question-response, 3) conversations, and 4) talks. The study aimed to identify which sections most significantly impacted student performance and involved compiling and analyzing the results from 1,981 student test papers. The study focused on identifying the percentage of incorrect responses and qualitative analysis of the question items with the highest rate of wrong responses. The sections with the highest percentages of negative answers were Section 2 (63.82%), Section 3 (52.32%), Section 4 (51.72%), and Section 1 (47.82%). These findings suggested that the question-response section poses the most significant challenge, potentially due to the format of the section, which stresses the importance of students' English lexical knowledge, particularly their knowledge of vocabulary and spoken English. The results highlighted the need for targeted instructional strategies to improve student performance in these areas, contributing to enhanced language proficiency and test-taking ability.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Student Errors, PSRU English Test

### Introduction

In Thailand, all university students must achieve a B2 level of English proficiency standards before graduating (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, 2024). This mandate comes from the importance of English in guaranteeing that the nation remains competitive in the global economy. To demonstrate their knowledge of the English language, university students often sit for internationally recognized standardized tests such as the IELTS, TOEIC, or TOEFL exams. These exams improve a student's chance of admission into the top universities in Thailand and help graduating students find employment in varying economic sectors where English language skills are vital. Therefore, universities in Thailand have begun to develop or have already developed their own standardized English proficiency exams, such as the CU-TEP which is produced by Chulalongkorn University (Charnchairerk, 2021). Typically, graduate students need to meet English proficiency levels before they can embark on their course of study or as they progress through their degree program, and depending upon the university they are attending, they often sit for the exam developed and provided by the university (Charnchairerk, 2021). However, they can sit for the IELTS, TOEIC, or TOEFL exams, a route many students take as many universities often lack the resources to develop their exams, though this frequently comes at a significant cost to their students.

In response to this mandate, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University (PSRU) recently began developing its English proficiency exam (Sengchuen, 2023). Based on the TOEIC exam, the university's exam follows the same general pattern and measures the students' listening and reading abilities and lexical and grammatical competencies. Similarly, the PSRU English Test (PSRU ET) features questions based on real-life situations that students may encounter while working in an international environment. The listening section of the PSRU ET mirrors the TOEIC,



with parts dedicated to Photographs, Question–Response, Conversations, and Talks, and the test requires that students master several skills to pass the exam successfully. Another benefit to creating the PSRU ET is that the university has total control over the exam, which it would not have if it relied on a proprietary standardized exam. Since PSRU controls the collection of test results, they can compare and analyze student responses against the actual test items, allowing them to gain valuable insights that can inform the instructional approaches of their teaching staff and influence the direction of materials development. The importance of this insight highlights student errors' role in education; however, the challenge comes from determining the root cause of student errors. In a prior study, Sengchuen (2023) assessed the exam's vocabulary at a CEFR level of A2–B2, with B1 being the predominant vocabulary level followed by B2. The results of the study indicated that the vocabulary found in the exam tested the students' ability to function in an everyday English–language setting, challenging instructors and students alike since a large percentage of students at PSRU come from lower–income areas, suggesting they may not have had access to sufficient English education. They may have also not had an early interest in learning the language or the environmental conditions conducive to those commonly found in the more developed areas of Thailand (Ueasiriwatthanachai, 2013). The lack of access to such an environment means that students may enter the university with a lack of English language knowledge and proficiency (Wang, 2009), including a lack of specific word knowledge necessary for students to complete English proficiency exams (Almeida, 2021) since many students entering PSRU lack the kind of exposure to the English language essential to help them achieve a high score in the university's test.

Several factors affect L2 learners' performance and cause them to perform poorly on listening sections in standardized tests, such as a lack of vocabulary knowledge or unfamiliarity with different accents and pronunciation styles (Darti & Asmawati, 2017). Stakeholders must consider these factors before analyzing learner errors, especially as the types of errors students make on listening tests are not production–related but caused by deficiencies in the learners' ability to comprehend the target language. Performing this task enables educators and policymakers to make informed decisions that can influence change. For example, stakeholders should understand how affective factors such as listening anxiety and self–efficacy impact L2 learners' performance on listening tests, with higher levels of anxiety correlating with negative comprehension. In comparison, students with low levels of anxiety typically experience higher levels of comprehension (Chen et al., 2023). Additionally, students with higher self–efficacy in listening tasks usually perform better than those with lower self–efficacy (Zhang & Xu, 2025), though this is not always true (Du & Man, 2022). Nevertheless, self–efficacy promotes positive classroom outcomes by increasing student L2 vocabulary size and improving overall listening task performance (de Bree & Zee, 2020).

Furthermore, understanding the influence of cognitive factors on language learning is essential, especially when attempting to differentiate between a large body of students from diverse backgrounds with varying levels and qualities of exposure to the English language inside and outside the classroom. As previously stated, vocabulary knowledge, including aural lexical size, meaning the ability to identify and comprehend spoken language, significantly predicts L2 listening comprehension outcomes (Zhang & Zhang, 2020; Du & Man, 2022). Students who have had the opportunity to study with foreign teachers are usually more familiar with different accents, including native varieties, meaning that listening tests based on native English contexts are not daunting for them. These students have had the opportunity to learn new vocabulary incidentally and intentionally, suggesting that they have developed some metacognitive awareness in the context of listening (Yu et al., 2021). Metacognitive awareness, another cognitive factor impacting L2 listening comprehension, contributes positively to listening comprehension outcomes



when students can employ various listening strategies during listening tests (Du & Man, 2022). This relationship indicates that learners, especially those with lower language proficiency, benefit from focused instruction that prepares them to complete various listening tasks like those they would find in a standardized English language test (Holzknecht & Brunfaut, 2022). On the other hand, some studies suggest that while language knowledge and test skills are impactful, they do not necessarily account for all of the issues that impact L2 listening comprehension success (Zhang & Kimura, 2024).

Another factor worth considering when analyzing learner errors is the role of Working Memory (WM) in determining and influencing L2 listening comprehension outcomes. WM is the term used to describe the mental processes responsible for temporarily storing and manipulating information, with the latter having more to do with cognition than memory (Juffs & Harrington, 2011). For example, WM involves integrating new data with information already stored in long-term memory (Ortega, 2009). In L2 listening comprehension, learners receive spoken information that they then put through an interpretive process, using their previous L2 linguistic knowledge to interpret and formulate a response (Teng & Zhang, 2023). Individual differences decide short-term memory capacity, with some learners able to store more information than others (Wen & Jackson, 2022). At the same time, some can interpret newly received data at a higher and more efficient rate than less proficient learners. The relationship between WM and L2 listening comprehension is crucial in influencing learner outcomes, especially when the learners come from various educational and social backgrounds (Santacruz & Ortega, 2018). For example, Satori (2021) found that less proficient learners rely more on WM and executive processing than more proficient ones due to their limited linguistic knowledge. In other words, these learners spend more time balancing new information with the information they already have stored in their long-term memory than proficient learners who can quickly identify and interpret verbal utterances.

#### **Research Objective**

To identify student errors and their frequency in each part of the PSRU ET listening test.

#### **Research Question**

What types of errors do students make, and how frequently do these errors occur in each part of the PSRU English Test listening section?

### **Research Methodology**

#### **The Development of PSRU English Listening Test**

1. The PSRU English Listening test structure was determined based on the vocabulary items, along with their difficulty levels, and categorized according to the CEFR framework. It was found that most of the vocabulary appearing in the TOEIC Listening Part was at the B1 level. Sengchuen (2023) selected 95% of highest-frequency words resulting in a total of 3,788 vocabulary items from a pool of 3,987. The vocabulary used to develop the test was focusing on General Service List (GSL) words at CEFR levels A2 to B2, which served as the framework for test development. The two sets of the PSRU English listening test were divided into four sections with a total of 100 items each. High-frequency vocabulary, useful for learners and recommended for prior learning, was included in the test by selecting 95% of the most frequently used words. The Index of Consonance (IOC) is 0.99, and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for both versions is 0.904.

2. According to Navawatana (2024) the quality assessment of the standard English listening test for Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, based on the Item Response Theory (IRT) method, revealed that Set 1 had



item difficulty scores ranging from 0.70 to 2.47, a discrimination power (b) ranging from -2.23 to 1.62, and distractor functionality ranging from 0.00 to 0.26. Meanwhile, set 2 had item difficulty scores ranging from 0.31 to 2.48, discrimination power (a) ranging from -1.47 to 2.62, and guessing ranging from 0.00 to 0.29. A total of 56 items in Set1 and 76 items in Set2 passed the IRT criteria. The overall number of qualified test items from both sets is 132.

3. The listening sections were divided into four parts as follows: Part 1: photographs-7 items, Part 2: Question-Response-27 items, Part 3: conversations-36 items and, Part 4: short talks-30 items.

4. The administration stage arranged for proctors and test scorers, held the meeting, prepared equipment and examination rooms to ensure everything was well-prepared before the test day.

5. The PSRU English Listening Test results were collected from 8 faculties 1) Faculty of Education, 2) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 3) Faculty of Management Science, 4) Faculty of Science and Technology, 5) Faculty of Agricultural Technology and Food, 6) Faculty of Industrial Technology, 7) Faculty of Social Sciences and Local Development, and 8) Faculty of Nursing during the academic year of 2565 (2022). In total, 1,981 papers were collected. The sample was selected from students who voluntarily expressed interest in participating in the test.

6. The PSRU English Test results were collected and graded by the administrative staff of Humanities and Social Sciences. The data collected during this process appears below. The percentage was analyzed using software to attain the overall distribution of the scores, to examine which questions the majority of the participants answered incorrectly, and to identify any obstacles items.

#### **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study involves collecting quantitative data and qualitative data, primarily using quantitative data supported by qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) aimed to analyze students' errors on English listening Section of the PSRU English Test. The research involved with sample group and the process of data collection as follows:

#### **Research Instrument (PSRU English Test: Listening Parts)**

The PSRU English Test consisting of 100 items, with a total limited time of 45 minutes. The test items were divided as follows:

The listening parts of the PSRU English Test has 4 parts:

- **Photographs:** 7 items which participants had to select the appropriate sentence corresponding to a given picture.
- **Question-Response:** 27 items which participants had to choose the correct response to a given question or statement.
- **Conversations:** 36 items which participants had to choose the correct answer after listening to conversations between two or three people.
- **Short Talks:** 30 items which participants had to choose the correct answer after listening to various types of short talks, such as reports or lectures from only one speaker.

#### **Data Analysis**

The PSRU English Test results were collected and graded by the administrative staff of Humanities and Social Sciences. The data collected during this process appears below, with only the percentages of incorrect answers appearing in the tables, a decision made to emphasize the parts of the test where learners struggled. The percentages



were analyzed using software to attain the overall distribution of the scores, to examine which questions the majority of participants answered incorrectly. Afterward the questions were analyzed with the intention of developing a better understanding of why students might have struggled with these questions.

## Results

**Table 1** Percentage of Incorrect Answers in Each Listening Part of the Test

Parts Listed in Order of Difficulty	Description of Listening Part	Percentage ( % ) of Incorrect Answers During Each Part
2	Question-Response	63.82
3	Conversations	52.32
4	Talks	51.72
1	Photographs	47.82

Table 1 shows that participants struggled the most during the Question-Response section as the total percentage of incorrect answers was 63.82%. Additionally, the participants struggled during the Conversations and Talks test sections, with the total percentage of incorrect answers at 52.32% and 51.72%, respectively. Conversely, the Photographs section saw the lowest percentage of incorrect answers at 47.82%.

**Table 2** Percentage of Incorrect Answers in Listening Part 1 (Photographs)

Number of Items	Number of Incorrect Answer	Percentage of Incorrect Answers ( % )
1	589	29.73
2	1,168	58.05
3	1,108	55.92
4	1,239	62.55
5	955	48.20
6	1,008	50.88
7	549	27.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,616</b>	<b>47.82</b>

Table 2 shows varying levels of difficulty across all items in Part 1, with Item 1 (29.73%) and Item 7 (27.72%) having the lowest percentages of incorrect answers, while Items 2 (58.05%), 3 (55.92%), and 4 (62.55%) had the highest percentages of incorrect answers.

**Table 3** Percentage of Incorrect Answers in Listening Part 2 (Question-Response)

Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent
8	1,225	61.84	17	1,353	68.30	26	1,431	72.20
9	1,300	65.62	18	1,417	71.50	27	1,158	58.50
10	1,433	72.34	19	1,331	67.20	28	1,159	58.50
11	1,217	61.40	20	1,322	66.70	29	1,065	53.80
12	1,291	65.20	21	926	46.70	30	1,299	65.60
13	1,179	59.50	22	1,256	63.40	31	1,301	65.70
14	1,067	59.90	23	1,279	64.60	32	1,361	68.70
15	1,276	64.40	24	1,392	70.30	33	1,305	65.88
16	1,163	58.70	25	1,170	59.10	34	1,146	



Table 3 shows the items with the highest percentage of incorrect answers, indicating the difficulty of the questions. Item 21 has the lowest incorrect response rate at 46.70% while Item 10 has the lowest percentage at 27.66%. The majority of the items were answered incorrectly at percentages above 60%, with Item 10 having the highest percentage of incorrect answers at 72.34%.

**Table 4** Percentage of Incorrect Answers in Listening Part 3 (Conversations)

Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent
35	1,113	56.18	47	1,239	62.54	59	1,083	54.67
36	1,469	74.15	48	1,356	68.45	60	1,182	59.67
37	1,081	54.52	49	1,172	59.16	61	629	31.75
38	901	45.48	50	839	42.35	62	687	34.68
39	1,362	68.75	51	1,275	64.36	63	1,700	85.82
40	1,440	72.69	51	1,098	55.43	64	959	48.41
41	1,600	80.77	53	1,245	62.85	65	458	23.12
42	1,435	72.44	54	976	49.27	66	903	45.58
43	1,408	71.80	55	1,046	52.80	67	412	20.80
44	1,286	64.92	56	865	43.66	68	726	36.65
45	1,151	58.10	57	1,291	65.17	69	768	38.77
46	1,366	68.96	58	1,028	51.89	70	467	23.57

Table 4 shows that Item 67 had the lowest percentage of incorrect answers (20.80%). In contrast, item 63 had the highest percentage of incorrect answers (85.82%). Additionally, students struggled with items 36 (74.15%) and 41 (80.77%).

**Table 5** Percentage of Incorrect Answers in Listening Part 4 (Talks)

Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent	Item	Incorrect	Percent
71	1,134	57.24	81	1,038	62.54	91	1,053	53.15
72	623	31.45	82	890	68.45	92	1,616	81.57
73	1,560	78.75	83	1,100	59.16	93	995	50.23
74	1,082	54.62	84	661	42.35	94	1,394	70.37
75	1,018	51.39	85	585	29.53	95	1,212	61.18
76	1,603	80.92	86	1,183	55.43	96	916	46.24
77	1,390	70.17	87	695	62.85	97	1,131	57.09
78	1,092	55.12	88	790	49.27	98	1,333	67.29
79	1,643	82.94	89	1,550	52.80	99	1,025	51.74
80	847	42.76	90	898	43.66	100	693	34.98

Table 5 shows the percentage of incorrect answers varies significantly, indicating differing levels of difficulty or varying performance across different numbers of items. The item with the lowest percentage of incorrect answers was Item 85 (29.53%), while item with the highest percentage of incorrect answers was Item 79 (82.94%).

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students struggled with each part of the listening test. However, the researcher expected that students would struggle with Part 2 (Question-Response) given the lack of visual information available on the test paper, such as in Parts 3 (Conversations) and 4 (Talks). Overall, Students performed poorly throughout



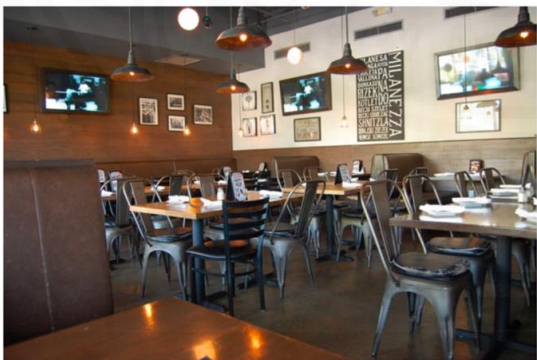


the listening test, with the cumulative results showing that more than half of all responses were incorrect. However, students could correctly answer Part 1 (Photographs) at a percentage higher than fifty percent. The performance metrics suggest that students struggled with listening comprehension. On the other hand, the variability of the results across different test items indicates that some items were more difficult than others. Understanding why this appeared to be the case is necessary going forward, as the results of this test may have future implications concerning the development of curriculum and teaching methods designed to mitigate the challenges posed by the listening test.

Due to its potential impact on student listening comprehension and the ability of students to learn and maintain an extensive vocabulary, understanding working memory plays an essential role in helping educators determine potential pathways to improve student performance. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of working memory-focused vocabulary instruction (Santacruz & Ortega, 2018), and the outcome suggests that instruction aimed at improving working memory has a tremendous impact on L2 learners. There are two interpretations of working memory, one focused on storage and the other on executive functions of the brain (Teng & Zhang, 2023); however, the combination of these interpretations encourages a clearer understanding of the impact of working memory on student test-taking performance. Not only do students have to store input received during the examination quickly, but they must also interpret this input quickly before responding. Furthermore, students must use their aural vocabulary knowledge when trying to understand what they are hearing during the test-taking process, which is necessary when they do not receive any visual assistance in the form of images or text.

When looking at the results of Part 1 (Table 2), students struggled the most with questions 2, 3, and 4. To understand why, it is essential to look at these questions closely to help students in the future. The analysis will follow numerical order, and the image and answer responses will precede the description of the study. When looking at the following questions, it is essential to consider how asking students to analyze subtle details in a photograph while processing aural language output can impact student performance in a listening test, especially one based on Part 1 of the TOEIC test. It is important to note that while students can see a photograph, they cannot see the answer choices and instead need to listen for the appropriate phrase.

**Table 6** An Example from Part 1 (Photographs)


Question 2	
Image	Question
	<p>A. There are some lights hanging from the ceiling.</p> <p>B. There are a lot of people in the restaurant.</p> <p>C. There are many neon signs.</p> <p>D. There are no lights in the restaurant.</p>

When looking at Table 6, the image is of an empty restaurant. The student can see tables, chairs, and lights hanging from the ceiling. There are also pictures and signs on the walls. The picture is mundane and devoid of any prominent or exceptional details. This mundaneness can create issues for students expecting something more obvious, like an action or distinct object. While (A) is the correct answer, the vocabulary in the available choices could confuse students. Words like 'hanging', 'ceiling', and 'neon signs' may catch students off guard as they



may be unfamiliar with these terms. Answer choices (B) and (C) could also confuse students because of the similarity between the word ‘many’ and the phrase ‘a lot of’. This similarity creates the illusion of false answer choices as the image contains a collection of chairs, tables, lights, and other restaurant-related items. Furthermore, the negation in (D) could entice students to choose this answer because it sticks out from the other answer choices.

Table 7 An Example from Part 1 (Photographs)

Question 3	
Image	Question
	<p>A. She is preparing a presentation.</p> <p>B. She is cleaning her eyeglasses.</p> <p>C. Her eyeglasses are on the table.</p> <p>D. She is typing something on her laptop.</p>

The photograph in Table 7 features a person sleeping at their desk with books, a laptop, a notebook, and a pair of glasses nearby. The answer choices focus on this sleeping individual and their immediate possessions. What separates (A), (B), and (D) from the correct answer (C) is their use of active verbs that relate to objects seen in the photograph. This focus on action could have distracted students struggling to connect the language in the answer choices to the photograph’s context, especially as Thai students typically have issues with verb forms (Takahashi & Thumawongsa, 2024). Rather than focus on the stationary detail of the glasses, they might have instead connected the presence of the objects to verbs they are familiar with, such as ‘cleaning’ or ‘typing’, after noticing the laptop or eyeglasses. However, their struggles with verb forms might have prevented them from making the distinctions necessary to guide them to the correct answer.

Table 8 An Example from Part 1 (Photographs)


Question 4	
Image	Question
	<p>A. Some work colleagues are having a meeting.</p> <p>B. The man is focusing on the screen.</p> <p>C. The man is reading an annual project report.</p> <p>D. A woman is taking a sip from her coffee.</p>

Table 8 presents several challenges to students, and these obstacles contributed to their struggles in answering the test item correctly. Since the photograph does not give students much context, they must determine what the picture is conveying. Additionally, answer choices (B) and (C) describe specific actions that occur in the workplace, and this may cause students to overlook the importance of the term ‘meeting’ that appears in answer





choice (A), the correct answer. Furthermore, answer choice (D) contains an action ('taking a sip from her coffee') that students might connect to the photograph because of the coffee cups on the meeting table. However, they may be unfamiliar with the term 'sip' and fail to recognize that no one at the table is drinking from their cups.

As previously mentioned, the results show that students struggled with Part 2 more than the other three sections of the test, as they could only answer the test questions correctly 36.18% of the time. To be fair to the students, this was probably a given, considering the low English language ability of the students and the lack of visual information available on the test paper. Like the TOEIC test, the PSRU ET does not provide visual information on the answer sheet like Parts 3 and 4. Instead, students must listen to the audio recording to identify the question and the response. In addition to measuring a student's language proficiency, Part 2 of the test measures a student's working memory. In other words, this part of the test places the onus entirely upon the test taker, challenging their abilities more than the other parts as they do not have a visual item, such as a written answer choice, that they can compare with what they think they heard, a process that can help students (Keidser et al., 2023). Therefore, students who lack suitable English language proficiency will struggle with this test section. As test results show, PSRU students struggled with Part 2 more than any other section of the test, demonstrating that they lack sufficient English language knowledge required to complete this section.

For example, students struggled with question 10, as the data shows 72.34% incorrectly answered the question. A higher percentage of students struggled with this question than with any other in Part 2 of the exam. Looking at Table 9, we can identify possible reasons why students had issues with this question.

**Table 9** An Example from Part 2 (Question-Response)

10.	<p>You work in this building, don't you?</p> <p>A. I enjoy working here.</p> <p>B. Your building is huge.</p> <p>C. Yes, my office is on the second floor.</p>
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The answer to this question is (C). This answer might confuse students who cannot connect the term "office" to the word "building", as seen in Table 9. Students may also have difficulty if they miss the phrase 'in the building' as it suggests a location-based inquiry. While students may recognize the term 'work', missing the phrase 'in the building' could cause them to choose incorrect responses. Additionally, the question begins with a statement followed by a question tag. The question tag indicates that the first speaker expects a response confirming or adding details about the workplace. Question tags are functions of language that intermediate students in Thailand sometimes struggle with (Wattananukij & Pongpairoj, 2022), and the data from the PSRU ET reveals that the students' English proficiency is far below an intermediate level.

In addition to challenging students' linguistic knowledge, the TOEIC test often asks students to make inferences on unstated or implied information, and students with low language proficiency usually struggle to perform this task. For example, students struggled to correctly answer question 18, with 71.50% of test takers incorrectly answering the question.

**Table 10** An Example from Part 2 (Question-Response)

18.	<p>Why didn't you attend the annual conference yesterday?</p> <p>A. My schedules were mixed up.</p> <p>B. I will attend to it right now.</p> <p>C. I've never been to the conference room.</p>
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As seen in Table 10, the question suggests that the receiving party of the utterance did not attend a scheduled event, implying that there might have been a scheduling issue or some other issue to explain their absence. The correct answer is response (A), but the speaker gives no other details. Students may have struggled with this question because they are unfamiliar with responding to questions and asking them to provide reasons. The correct response does not mention the conference; it only states that there was a scheduling conflict. The other two responses contain vocabulary heard in the question, ‘attend’ and ‘conference’, respectively, and it is possible that students recognized one of these terms when choosing their response. Students’ inability to make inferences from incomplete information and deficiencies in their language proficiency more than likely contributed to the high percentage of incorrect responses to this question.

Looking at question 26, students were unsuccessful in answering this question, with the data showing that 72.20% failed to respond correctly. Looking at Table 11, we can conclude why this was so.

**Table 11** An Example from Part 2 (Question-Response)

26.	What did the education research focus on?
	A. It looked at the learning behavior between boys and girls.
	B. I’m searching for a new job.
	C. Call me as soon as possible.

As evidenced by the previous example, most students struggle with making inferences and lack the necessary linguistic knowledge to answer this question. If Table 9 revealed that PSRU students are below an intermediate level of English, the examples shown in Tables 10 and 11 reiterate this revelation. Since the correct answer is (A), the inability to answer the question correctly demonstrates that they lack specific lexical knowledge related to compound nouns. Students may have been unable to link the phrasal verb in the question to research findings. Perhaps due to their inability to make this connection, students might have decided (B) was the correct response after confusing ‘research’ from the question with ‘searching’ as seen in the answer item.

Before analyzing the questions from Part 3 that students struggled with, it is crucial to provide context so that the analysis can accurately describe the situation. In Part 3, the students hear a dialogue between two people but do not see it. Instead, they can see the questions and answers on their answer sheet. For each dialogue, there are three questions.

**Table 12** An Example from Part 3 (Conversations)

Question 36	
Dialogue	Question
<b>Man:</b> Citibank. How can I help you?	What is the inquiry about?
<b>Woman:</b> Hello, I’m calling to check the status of my debit card. I haven’t received it in the mail yet.	A. A fraudulent transaction.
<b>Man:</b> I see. Would you like me to check the status of your card?	B. A bank book.
<b>Woman:</b> Yes, and I would also like to know what to do if I don’t receive the card.	C. A credit card.
	D. A debit card.

In Table 12, the dialogue features a discussion between a man and a woman where the woman appears to be contacting a call center about the status of her debit card. Given that the terms ‘debit card’ and ‘credit card’ both refer to cards, students with low English proficiency may struggle to distinguish between the two terms. Furthermore, given that they may be unfamiliar with debit cards since they are not common in Thailand, students



may choose the more familiar term and select answer choice (C). Students may also choose answer choice (B) due to their familiarity with bank books, which are common in Thailand.

**Table 13** An Example from Part 3 (Conversations)

Question 41	
Dialogue	Question
<b>Woman:</b> Do you know when Kerry Express closes? I need to send a package to Bangkok.	41. What does the woman want to do?
<b>Man:</b> It closes at 6:00 pm on weekdays, and it's closed on the weekends.	A. Send a package.
<b>Woman:</b> Well it's already 6:30. I guess I'll have to wait until Monday.	B. Talk to a customer service representative.
<b>Man:</b> Yeah, you won't be able to send your package today.	C. Return an item.
	D. Receive a package.

In Table 13, a woman directly states that she wants to send a package to Bangkok, but the man informs her that she cannot send it because the business is closed. The question directs the student to judge the woman's intentions, and even though it appears in the dialogue, she does not directly state that she wants to send a package. Instead, she uses the term 'need', which some students may not connect with the question, as they may expect her to use 'want'. Looking at the answer choices will reveal issues the students might have encountered. For example, option (B) could mislead students because, in the dialogue, she asks for information, and students might connect this action with the language in the answer choice. Similarly, answer choices (C) and (D) contain actions that students who focus on the general context of the dialogue.

**Table 14** An Example from Part 3 (Conversations)

Question 63	
Dialogue	Question
<b>Woman:</b> Hi... Caleb. Thanks for stopping by my office. Can you meet with a new client today? They're interested in purchasing a software package.	63. Why is Justine unable to attend the meeting?
<b>Man:</b> Sure, but I thought that was supposed to be Justine's client.	
<b>Woman:</b> It is but her flight from Los Angeles has been canceled so she won't be able to come in today. Normally, as the sales manager I would attend the meeting but I have an urgent appointment at that time.	
<b>Man:</b> What time is the meeting and is there anything I should know about the client?	
<b>Woman:</b> It's at 3.30 in conference room B and please be sure to check that the projector works ahead of time. We've been having trouble with it.	
	A. Her flight was canceled.
	B. Her car has broken down.
	C. She is on vacation.
	D. She is feeling sick.

Table 14 features a dialogue between a man and a woman explaining why a woman named Justine cannot attend a meeting. This dialogue contains indirect language that students must connect with the implication that she cannot attend the meeting. The correct answer (A) provides a reason mentioned in the dialogue, but the female speaker does not directly connect this reason to Justine's inability to attend the meeting. Instead, students need to make this connection themselves. This indirect language may have confused learners whose low English proficiency may have also caused them to connect the subject of the missed flight with answer choice (C). Choices (B) and (D) provide plausible reasons for Justine's absence, and if students had missed the mention of the missed flight, they might have chosen one of these responses instead.

Part 4 of the PSRU ET requires students to listen to monologues and answer three questions. These monologues can cover various topics, such as business advertisements and opening statements of presentations or speeches.



During this part of the test, students must listen carefully to the dialogue and the questions, since neither appears on their test papers.

**Table 15** An Example from Part 4 (Talks)

Part 4	
Question 76	
Dialogue	Question
<p><b>Man:</b> If you are looking to make a good first impression for your next interview without burning too big of a hole in your wallet, then Gladwell &amp; Co. may have what you are looking for. At Gladwell &amp; Co. we take pride in producing quality suits for working professionals at a reasonable price guaranteed to not break the bank. With our patented breathable lining, our suits can be worn regardless of the weather outside. And if you are looking for a suit to fit a formal, business or casual situation, Gladwell &amp; Co. has a tailored suit suited for every occasion. This Labor Day we will be having a sale. If you buy two suits, you get an additional suit at no extra cost. Come pay us a visit.</p>	<p>What special deal is being advertised?</p> <p>A. Buy two suits, get one free. B. Buy two suits, get two free. C. Buy one suit, get two free. D. Buy three suits, get one free.</p>

The dialogue in Table 15 features a Labor Day sale advertisement and a promotion where customers who buy two suits can get an additional suit for free. The phrase ‘at no extra cost’ could have confused students, unaware that it implies a free item. Furthermore, students might have been unfamiliar with promotional language in English, meaning they might have struggled to understand the answer choices. However, this does not seem likely, as Thai promotional language follows a similar structure outside of noticeable lexical differences. It is probably more likely that students struggled to understand the phrase at no extra cost, in addition to any struggles they might have had trying to understand the complex sentence structures used in this dialogue.

**Table 16** An Example from Part 4 (Talks)

Question 79	
Dialogue	Question
<p><b>Man:</b> Attention, passengers awaiting Eva Air flight 7 from Shanghai to Osaka. We regret to inform you that the flight has been delayed. We had hoped that by now the weather conditions in and around Osaka would have improved, but we’re told they have not. At this time, we’d like to provide hotel accommodations for all ticketed passengers. Outside terminal 6, a bus is waiting to take you to the Pavilion Hotel, where you will spend the night. Eva Air agents will distribute meal vouchers as you board the bus. The vouchers are good for one free dinner and one free breakfast. At 8 A.M. the bus will leave the hotel to bring you back to the terminal. We have rescheduled the flight for 10 o’clock tomorrow morning. So, please be waiting out in front of the hotel tomorrow morning at 8 A.M.</p>	<p>When must the passengers be ready to leave the hotel?</p> <p>A. In the morning. B. In the afternoon. C. In the evening. D. At midnight.</p>

In Table 16, students hear an announcement informing passengers that they must be ready at 8.00 a.m. the following day to return to the airport terminal. The correct answer (A) does not provide a specific time but a time of day, which might have confused students who concentrated on listening to the entire dialogue, focusing on details unrelated to this question. Students may also be unfamiliar with English time expressions such as a.m. and p.m., possibly causing them to be confused and choose answers (B) or (C), both of which feature time



expressions that indicate periods past midday. Similarly, students may find the subject of the overnight delay confusing and assume the times mentioned refer to later in the day.

**Table 17** An Example from Part 4 (Talks)

Question 92	
Dialogue	Question
<p><b>Man:</b> Yes. Good morning. This is Tony Romano, and it's seven thirty on Wednesday morning. I'm calling about my appointment at four p.m. this afternoon with Dr. Moriarty. I'm sorry, but I won't be able to make it, as I've been called out of town on an emergency, something to do with my job. I know this is last minute, but there's nothing I can do about it. I'll be back on Saturday, so I'll call again next week to speak with someone about rescheduling. I'm very sorry for any inconvenience I've caused. Thank you so much. Have a great day.</p>	<p>What time did the man call the doctor's office?</p> <p>A. 2:00</p> <p>B. 4:00</p> <p>C. 11:30</p> <p>D. 7:30</p>

In Table 17, the speaker informs the doctor's office that he cannot make his appointment. The question asks when the man made the phone call, and the correct answer is (D). However, the caller mentioned two times during the phone call: 7:30, when he was calling, and 4:00, the previously scheduled time of the appointment. Students who cannot distinguish the significance of these two times may struggle to answer the question correctly. Furthermore, since 7:30 appears at the beginning of the dialogue, students might have overlooked it only to settle on the latter, less relevant time stated later in the call.

These examples show that students who lack English proficiency will struggle to answer questions in an English proficiency test. When we combine their lack of linguistic knowledge and ability with challenges such as working memory, unfamiliarity with accents, and lack of interaction with non-Thai teachers, they will perform poorly on standardized tests designed to measure their English language knowledge.

In contrast, when looking at the results of Parts 3 and 4, we can see that students performed much better than in Part 2, suggesting that having visible answer choices helped them overcome some issues they had in the previous section. Instead of looking at these parts individually, discussing them together for a few reasons is better. For example, the percentage of correct answers is statistically similar enough that any conclusions we make about one part would likely apply to the other. Of course, these sections are inherently different, with Part 3 focusing on students' abilities to parse through conversational English and Part 4 requiring students to listen to a single speaker give a long talk. However, in both parts, students are tasked with identifying context, which requires them to correctly identify the meaning, usage, and pronunciation of various vocabulary terms and possess some cultural knowledge. Furthermore, these parts are similar because students can preview the answers to each question before, during, and after listening to the audio track, since they appear on the test paper. The statistical similarity between the results of both parts reveals that students could take advantage of the answer responses appearing on the test paper compared to Part 2, perhaps triggering their inhibitory control and helping them concentrate, but lacked the necessary linguistic and contextual knowledge to score higher.

This study's results show that most PSRU students lack sufficient English language proficiency to gain a high score on the PSRU ET, as evidenced by the low percentage of correct answers recorded during Parts 2, 3, and 4 of the exam, though not as apparent when looking at the results from Part 1. Furthermore, it seems that PSRU students struggle with working memory, a key skill in listening comprehension, as the listening part of the test provides students with zero to minimal visual feedback, forcing them to rely on their executive functions. However,





since this skill connects to language proficiency, Satori (2021) suggests that the best way to improve an L2 student's working memory in the target language is to improve their proficiency in the language. Therefore, when designing instruction to help these students achieve better results on the PRSU English Test and in English classroom performance, it is crucial to consider the substantial impact individual differences play in assisting students to develop their working memory in English, and design instruction with this purpose in mind.

### Conclusions and Suggestions

In many ways, the classroom applications of this study are obvious. Students with low English proficiency struggled to take the test due to a lack of lexical and aural English vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, classroom instruction should focus on helping students improve their understanding of English vocabulary. This expanded focus would incorporate frequent vocabulary practice with synonyms and context-specific language to help students differentiate between similar words in various settings. Furthermore, students should combine language instruction with test-taking strategies aimed at the challenges presented by each test part, as this should help them better understand the ins and outs of the test and its requirements. For example, students should practice listening carefully for keywords or phrases to help them determine the correct response and develop their listening comprehension and understanding of implied information.

Regarding Part 3, students should engage with a wider variety of authentic dialogues covering topics that are prominent in the PSRU ET, and much of this focus should be on listening for contextual clues and specific details. To help students improve in this area, activities like selective listening can help students identify keywords or target phrases that are likely to appear in the PSRU ET. Since students come from various economic and social backgrounds (Ueasiriwatthanachai, 2013), enhancing their language cognitive skills is necessary to ensure they succeed when taking the university's English proficiency test. Additionally, students who have successfully mastered the test content will be better equipped to navigate the challenges of a globalized world.

To this end, developing materials that reflect the language students will encounter during the PSRU ET should consider different approaches to developing student language proficiency, such as Game-Based Learning (GBL). Meccawy et al. (2023) found that GBL materials significantly impacted student self-efficacy, especially when the materials are similar in content and structure to the assessment tool. While their study did not find any correlation between GBL materials and improved student performance, the materials' impact on student self-efficacy suggests that students may continue to develop their English language proficiency positively as well as lower their anxiety. This situation connects to research mentioned earlier in this paper on the role of self-efficacy in improving learner outcomes. Furthermore, Saraiwang and Worawong (2023) discovered that GBL activities contributed to an enjoyable learning atmosphere that could improve student English proficiency. They also noted that both approaches contributed to improved student motivation, leading to positive outcomes rather than negative ones. Sounthornwiboon et al. (2025) link GBL to improved outcomes as the approach contributes to developing cognitive skills, including working memory, which is essential to improving student performance in listening tasks.

The researcher did not control the data collection process, indicating one of this study's limitations, but while this certainly limited the scope of the study, the overall analysis of the test results offered suggestions for future research and actions. The findings of this study have helped the researcher identify the types of listening questions students struggle with as they appear in the PSRU ET. Additionally, analyzing the questions with the highest percentages of incorrect answers, the researcher identified avenues for further research. Based on extant research



referring to the benefits of GBL, the researcher aims to develop teaching materials that take full advantage of the benefits of GBL while incorporating mock questions reminiscent of the types of questions students struggled with the most, namely those found in Part 2. To this end, future research will explore the development of a game designed to improve students' language and cognitive skills.

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