



# English Communication Skills under the Project to Propagate Dhamma to Foreigners of Monk Chat Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Chiang Mai Campus

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## Abstract

The objectives of this research were: 1) to examine the process of developing English communication skills within the Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai project for propagating Dhamma to foreigners, and 2) to propose models for improving English communication for Dhamma propagators involved in the project. The findings showed that 1) the Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai project uses English communication methods such as discussions, question-and-answer sessions, presentations, and meditation retreats to share Buddhist teachings with international audiences. 2) Effective models for English communication for Dhamma propagators emphasize the four key characteristics of the Buddha's teachings: Clarity (making the teachings understandable), Engagement (inviting the listener to participate and practice), Motivation (inspiring the listener to be active and diligent), and Comfort (providing reassurance and mental clarity).

However, the development of 21st-century English communication skills needs to be integrated with the five qualities of Dhamma propagators (Dhammadesaaka). The project provides a valuable platform for Buddhist monks to improve their English skills and enhance cross-cultural communication with foreign visitors. Nevertheless, some students continue to face challenges in areas such as English listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar, which can impact effective communication with foreigners. Addressing these issues will ensure that the Monk Chat project benefits both the monks and participants, leading to even greater success.



**Keywords:** Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai, English communication skills, Innovation Education, propagation of Buddhism, and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Chiang Mai Campus

## Introduction

In the 21st century, innovation and sustainable development of communication skills for various purposes are essential. According to Visit Ketratanakul, Natthawat Sutthiyotin, and Karn Bunsiri (2020), communication has played a vital role throughout history, serving as a mechanism for progress in all sectors of society. In ancient times, oral communication was the primary means of exchanging information, typically limited to specific groups within a community. However, with advancements in communication technology and the integration of media, exchanging information has become more efficient and accessible, benefiting communities at large.

Today, Buddhism has gained widespread acceptance in Western societies, with English being the primary language for the exchange of ideas (Arkorn Ukhote, Phacharaphong Phaenthong, & Phra Supawat Sukhawattano, 2023, p. 75). However, while English communication skills are crucial for propagating Buddhism to foreigners, they alone are not sufficient. As Phrachonyanmune, Boonton Dockthaisong, and Phramaha Boonlert Indhapanyo (2017) note, the process of disseminating Buddhism must be open to global society by providing opportunities for people of all levels, nations, and languages to access education.

The successful propagation of Buddhism by exemplary monks like Phra Dhammamongkol (Viriyong) and Phra Bhavanavitesa (Khemmadhammo) followed five key virtues of teaching:

1. Structuring lessons with progressive detail,
2. Using reasoning and cause-and-effect in instruction,
3. Teaching with compassion for the benefit of others,
4. Teaching without expecting financial gain, and
5. Teaching in a way that avoids harming oneself or others.



In addition to these virtues, a solid education and deep understanding of Dhamma are essential. The use of 21st-century innovations to develop education, communication skills, and the propagation of Buddhism is necessary because the conditions of ancient times differ significantly from the present. These innovations will be beneficial for various purposes (Somboon Watana & Yaoping Liu, 2021).

Globalization, facilitated by the use of online social media, has accelerated worldwide communication. If Thai Buddhism does not embrace social media, it will face challenges in spreading the Buddha's teachings and promoting morality and ethics in society.

However, some monastic students participating in the Monk Chat MCU project still face challenges in communicating with and understanding foreign guests. Some students reported difficulty understanding English, especially when foreign visitors spoke quickly. Others mentioned that their limited language skills hindered meaningful conversations, particularly when translating Pali words into English, as some Pali terms lack direct equivalents in English and require additional explanation for clarity. These students need to improve their oral English communication skills to avoid misunderstandings and enhance their proficiency in the language.

## Content

### 1. The propagation of Buddhism in the Buddha Era

Buddhism was able to expand throughout India during the lifetime of the Buddha because he adopted an approach of journeying from person to person, preaching on different occasions using various teaching philosophies and styles. Later, during the period of King Ashoka, nine Buddhist ambassadors were sent to propagate Buddhism throughout various nations (Phra Srisittivites & Phra Mahamit Thitpanyo, 2021:234). The main characteristic of the Buddha's teaching was oral communication. As Phra Krusunthornsangkhapinit and Phra-



khruhaitighaatippanangorn Laolee (2015) explained, the Buddha initially propagated his teachings orally to mankind, traveling from village to village and city to city. In the digital age, humans must adjust their daily activities to the evolving instruments of technology. For instance, while humans used to speak face-to-face, we now connect through digital tools like smartphones.

In conclusion, the teaching and propagation of Buddhism during the Buddha's time were conducted by the Buddha himself, and later this duty belonged to the four Buddhist assemblies. The method of teaching and propagation at that time, both by the Buddha and Buddhist ambassadors, was oral communication using various methods.

### **There are four characteristics of the Buddha's teaching:**

**1. Sandassana:** Explaining clearly—explaining, analyzing, and giving reasons until the listener understands.

**2. Samādapanā:** Inviting the mind to accept and practice.

**3. Samuttejana:** Arousing courage—stimulating the mind to be active, diligent, strong-minded, and confident of success.

**4. Sampahaṃsana:** Comforting the mind—making it bright and clear, nourishing joy by pointing out the benefits to be received.

The five qualities of Buddhist propagators, known as the **Dhammade-saka-dhamma**—teaching methods that teachers must know and adjust appropriately to suit the time and place—are:

**1. Anupubbikathā:** Speaking in order—explaining the principles or content sequentially, from the simple to the profound.

**2. Pariyāyadassāvī:** Explaining and citing reasons to make it understandable—clarifying each aspect and issue thoroughly.

**3. Anudayatāpaṭicca:** Teaching with loving-kindness—aiming to benefit the audience.

**4. Anāmisā:** Not teaching for the sake of gain—not seeking profit or benefits in return.



**5. Attapañca parañca anupahacca:** Teaching without harming oneself and others—adhering to principles and content. (Mahidol University, n.d.: online)

**There are many methods of teaching or preaching, such as:**

**1. Lecture:** This method is always used, mostly in settings with a large audience.

**2. Conversation:** Often used because the audience has the opportunity to express their opinions, making teaching engaging.

**3. Question-and-Answer:** Divided into four types:

(1) Answering directly without evasion or conditions.

(2) Asking back before answering; some questions require clarification before a proper response.

(3) Separating the issues; sometimes answers are divided into different issues.

(4) Declining to answer, which is called “Avyākata” problems. (Payutto.net, n.d.: online)

In conclusion, the history and methods of spreading Buddhism during the time of the Buddha involved the Buddha himself teaching, allowing Buddhism to spread throughout India during his lifetime. After the Buddha passed away, the propagation was undertaken by the four groups of Buddhists: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The Buddha preached through various conversations containing his teachings. His method involved setting the purpose of each teaching, preparing the content or subjects, and considering the audience’s ability to understand and apply the teachings, thereby creating a desire to learn and increasing interest.



## Effective English Communication skills in the 21st century

English offers numerous advantages, including fostering connections within the global speech community and enhancing modern education. As a result, English is considered a global language for those who value effective communication with people from different countries. In today's society, where exchanges and communication are more frequent, Thai people increasingly utilize English. Given its significance, English is essential not only for professionals who use it for various purposes but also for its impact on education (Wongkumsai, 2023, p. 237).

In the 21st century, effective communication skills in English are key to success in various contexts. Globalization and cross-cultural communication demand an understanding of diverse cultural norms, nonverbal cues, and differences in directness and formality. Communicators must develop cultural sensitivity, active listening, and the ability to adapt their communication styles to different audiences (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000). Additionally, proficiency in digital literacy and multimodal communication is crucial. This includes using a range of digital platforms and tools, such as email, videoconferencing, and social media, and effectively combining text, visuals, audio, and other multimedia elements (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000).

Moreover, adaptability and a mindset of lifelong learning are essential for staying current with emerging communication trends and technologies. Effective communicators must be able to adjust their strategies in response to a rapidly evolving landscape. The British Council Thailand (n.d.) also emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and innovation as necessary 21st-century skills.

In conclusion, effective communication in today's globalized and digital world requires a multifaceted approach that includes cross-cultural sensitivity, digital literacy, audience-centered attention, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and lifelong learning. By mastering these skills, individuals can successfully navigate modern communication challenges, engage meaningfully with



others, solve problems creatively, and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

## Overall Monk Chat Project of MUC Chiang Mai Campus

### 1. Propagate Dhamma to Foreigners under the Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai project

Monk Chat.Net (n.d.) provides communication guidelines for foreigners interested in contacting the Monk Chat program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Chiang Mai Campus. Visitors can reach the program via email at monkchat2023@gmail.com or through the website <https://www.monk-chat.net/web2020/index.php>. The website welcomes foreign tourists to visit the “MONK CHAT” program, which allows informal conversations with monks. Through these discussions, participants can learn about the monk’s life, Thai culture and traditions, Buddhism, meditation, and more.

For those interested in the “Meditation Retreat,” contact monkchat2023@gmail.com or the Academic Affairs office at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, located at Wat Suan Dok, Suthep Road, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand. The Monk Chat program operates Monday through Friday, from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm (private groups are required to schedule in advance). Visitors and tourists can also drop by at any time to get information about meditation retreats, and if monks are available, they can engage in a monk chat session.

The MONK CHAT program also offers a weekly meditation retreat for those interested in practicing meditation. The retreat schedule is as follows:

1-day retreat: Mondays & Fridays, from 9:30 am to 5:00 pm

2-day retreat: Tuesdays & Wednesdays, starting at 1:30 pm

4-day retreat: Tuesdays, starting at 1:30 pm, and finishing on Fridays at 3:00 pm.



According to Phramaha Varasaya Varasayananda and Chanomkorn Prakrai (2020), monks who serve as instructors rely heavily on English for instruction and communication. If monks serving as ambassadors of the Dhamma are proficient in English, they can translate the Tipitaka and interpret Buddhist texts to propagate Buddhism in other countries. Therefore, monks must have strong English communication skills.

Wongsi, Katbandit (2018) emphasizes that one of the primary roles and responsibilities of monks in monasteries is to impart the knowledge of the Dhamma, or the Buddha's teachings. As a result, monks have long played a crucial role in spreading the Dhamma of the Buddha.

2. The problems of the students using English with foreign tourists at Monk chat MCU Chiang Mai

Several students mentioned that they continued to face challenges in understanding and interacting with foreign visitors. Some reported difficulty in comprehending English when spoken quickly by international visitors. Others stated that their limited language skills prevented them from effectively communicating with foreign visitors, particularly when trying to form complete or complex sentences (Chaiyasit, 2018, pp. 49-50).

A significant number of first-year students struggle with using English to communicate with foreigners, especially since English is the primary language used in Thailand when interacting with international visitors. Despite this, many Thai people still find it difficult to communicate with and understand Westerners. Improving oral communication skills in English is crucial for Thai people, particularly those who regularly interact with foreigners, to eliminate misunderstandings and enhance their proficiency in the language. Effective communication in English is especially important in the business sector, where it can help boost foreign investment and trade. Furthermore, it plays a significant role in promoting Thailand's domestic tourism industry (Leelaviriyawong, 2015, p. 1).





3. The process of English communication skills under the monk chat MCU Chiang Mai project to propagate Dhamma to foreigners.

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, launched the **MONK CHAT** initiative in 1999 to teach Buddhist principles. The three main tenets of this initiative—dialogue, Q&A sessions, and mindfulness exercises—serve as a platform for student Buddhist monks to practice English while sharing their knowledge with foreigners on various topics, including Buddhism and Thai culture. This conversational format begins with an overview of the subject and progresses to a deeper understanding of how Buddhism is integrated into everyday life. The **Monk Chat MCU Project** also provides monastic students with the opportunity to enhance their English skills and engage in the exchange of knowledge, religion, culture, and other related subjects (Phongsiri, 2017, p. 1).

Additionally, Monk Chat offers foreigners the chance to discuss Dhamma with monks from Sangha University, which benefits both the monks' English language training and the dissemination of Buddhism to a global audience. It also supports academic services related to Buddhism (Creative Chiang Mai, n.d.).

In conclusion, the **Monk Chat Project** of MCU Chiang Mai Campus, initiated in 1999, aims to propagate Buddhist principles through informal conversations with monks. Participants can learn about the life of a monk, Thai culture and tradition, Buddhism, meditation, and more. While the language monks use for instruction and communication is primarily English, some monks face challenges in understanding and interacting with foreign tourists, particularly due to the fast pace of spoken English. Despite these challenges, the three main tenets of dialogue, Q&A sessions, and mindfulness exercises continue to be effective tools for propagating Buddhism, improving English communication skills, and sharing knowledge on general topics, Buddhism, and Thai culture.

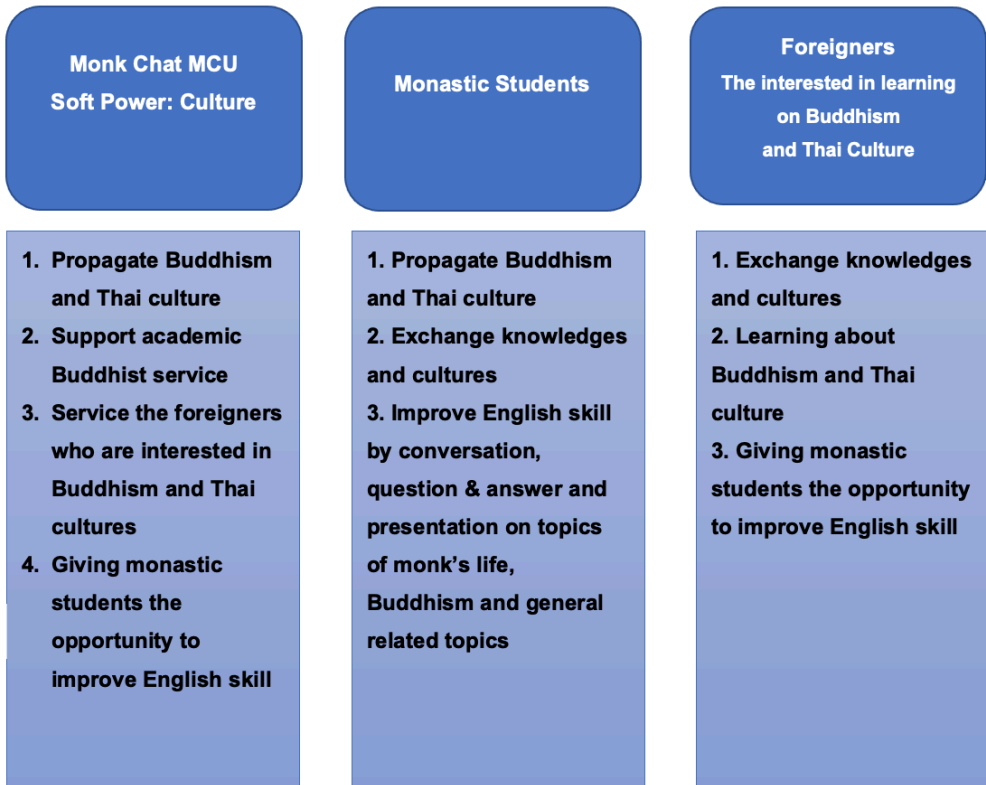


Figure No.1 the processes of Monk Chat Project  
of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Chiang Mai Campus)

## New Theory Knowledge

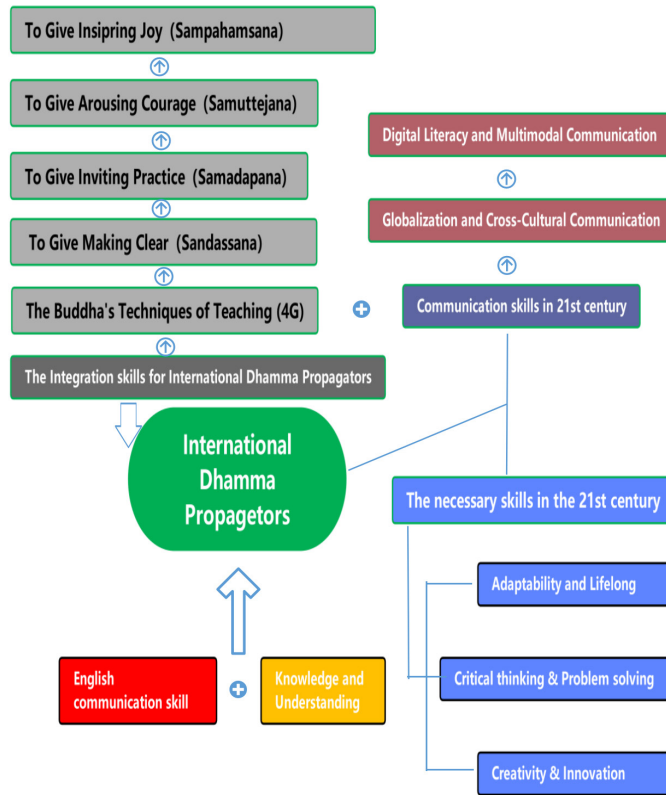


Figure No. 2 New Theory knowledge for International Dhamma Propagators

## Conclusion

1. The **process of developing English communication skills** under the Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai project, aimed at propagating Dhamma to foreigners, revealed that the Dhamma propagators use various forms of English communication, including discussion, Q&A sessions, presentations, and meditation retreats to teach Buddhism to foreigners.

2. The **models for enhancing English communication skills** for Dhamma propagators in the Monk Chat MCU Chiang Mai project include:



1). Integrating the **four characteristics of the Buddha’s teachings**:

- (1) **Sandassana**: Explaining clearly.
- (2) **Samathpanana**: Inviting the mind to accept and practice.
- (3) **Samattechana**: Arousing the mind to be active and diligent.
- (4) **Sampahangsana**: Comforting the mind, making it bright and clear.

These characteristics should be incorporated into teaching methods to spread Buddhism to non-native speakers of English.

2) Developing effective 21st-century English communication skills while enhancing the five characteristics of Buddhist propagators (Dhammade-saka), which involve using appropriate language, order, and intent to share the Dhamma with an international audience.

Suggestions:

**1. Enhance students’ English listening and speaking training** to improve cross-cultural communication skills. Innovative teaching methods such as multimedia tools and role-playing can be employed.

**2. Establish interaction mechanisms** between teachers and students, encouraging communication with foreigners. Provide timely feedback and improvements. Additionally, focus on expanding the **English vocabulary related to Buddhism** to support effective Dhamma propagation.

**3. Maximize the potential of the Monk Chat project** by further enriching interactive formats and increasing the appeal and impact of Dhamma dissemination to foreign audiences.

This approach will foster better communication skills, encourage the sharing of Buddhist teachings, and promote effective cross-cultural dialogue.



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