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## Oral Communication Achievement of the Bachelor of Arts Students Major in English at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Thailand

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### Abstract

Thailand has always been a country with one official language, Thai. English is the first foreign language that students must study in schools. The problem in English oral communication achievement could be attributed to the students' limited opportunities to practice the language they are acquiring. Thus, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) offers the English for International Communication (EIC) program to provide the necessary language and cultural skills for students to enter, participate, and thrive in a number of English related fields of study and work where communicative competency in English is the key to academic and professional success. This study sought to examine the factors affecting English oral communication achievement of the students enrolled in Bachelor of Arts major in EIC at RMUTL, Tak Campus, Thailand. Sixty-nine students were included in the survey. The researcher-made questionnaire was validated by three experts and piloted in another university campus to explore the reliability and usability of the questionnaire in the current study. The results revealed that the Thai university students have average English oral communication level and they perceived aptitude, attitude and motivation as significant factors that affect their English oral communication skills. The learning intervention program must be designed to offer students fun-filled learning activities, coaching, group dynamics and English language oral communication exposure. Furthermore, the university instructors should make efforts to identify students who have low English oral communication skills to help them to improve. The university may consider investing on the special intervention program to further realize the university's mission and vision concerning English for International Communication course; giving the graduates more chances to secure a job; and making them well-prepared for their future careers.

**Keywords:** Oral Communication, Learning Motivation, Aptitude, Attitude, Achievement

### Introduction

Thailand is actively promoting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community. With much anticipation of the economic effects, English language is getting more popular in business sector of the society as well as in the academic institutions. In preparation

for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Thailand government is investing large amount of their fund to cater the growing demand of English speakers and English proficient workforce.

Samakoses (2012) chairman of Educational Standard Committee said "Better skills in using English are also important to Thailand as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations," which aims to bring its members together as one community in 2015. However, the level of English proficiency among the overall population of Thai students is far worse than reflected in Thailand's Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. It is dismal as Saiyasombut (2012) wrote in Bangkok post; the article entitled Thai Educational Failure. Thai university applicants scored an average 28.34% in English in the recent university entrance exams. It is little wonder that Thailand produces a "workforce with some of the world's weakest English-language skills." In 2012, International Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness reported that Thailand was ranked 54th out of 56 countries globally for English proficiency, the second-lowest in Asia. Singapore was third, Malaysia 28th and Korea 46th.

Pawapatcharaudom (2007) stressed that in a general educational program, the speaking and listening skills in English of Thai students has been minimal. Because students have little chance to practice speaking English in or outside the classroom. Students respond to the teacher only when called upon and the learning atmosphere is individualistic.

The role of English in Thailand is quite important as it is in many other developing countries. New technology and the adoption of the internet have resulted in a major transition in terms of business, education, science, and technological progress, all of which demand high proficiency in English. With the economic downturn in Thailand a few years ago, a large number of Thai companies have embraced cooperation regionally and internationally. Mergers, associations, and takeovers are common and English is used as the means to communicate, negotiate and execute transactions by participants where one partner can be a native speaker of English or none of the partners are native speakers of English.

However, Thailand has always been a country with one official language, Thai. The Thai people are proud that they have never been colonized. Another reason for having been a country with one language is the concept of national stability. There have been proposals to make Thailand a country with two languages, Thai and English, but this has never materialized due to the above mentioned reasons. English can, therefore, be at most the first foreign language that students must study in schools. Hence, Thais' level of English proficiency is low in comparison with many countries in Asia (for example, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore). According to the speech given by the Minister of the Ministry of University Affairs on March 6, 2000, the average TOEFL scores of Thais are the same as for Mongolians but higher than for North Koreans and Japanese (Wiriyaichitra, 2001).

Globally, the world job market has become more competitive than ever and English language has been widely used as the most common language in the world. Multi-national companies are becoming more selective just as the business environment is becoming more challenging. Producing more employable university graduates is an important agenda for many higher learning institutions in ASEAN countries. According to Khoo (2001), poor oral communication skills has been attributed as among the factors that lead to unemployable graduates.

The problem in English communication proficiency could be attributed to the students' limited opportunities to practice the language they are acquiring. While on the other hand, it could be due to the flaw of institutional curricular programs. Proficiency is very important aspect of language teaching and learning to deal with. The goal of language learning is to furnish the students until they will be proficient enough.

According to Brown (2000), motivation is the fundamental and salient factor that affects foreign-language proficiency. He added that motivation can be viewed from both learner and language learning perspectives. Some speakers of English as a second language (English L2) are able to communicate effectively by uttering just a few words, while others find it difficult to achieve the same level of communication. The former group may use certain devices known as communication strategies (CSs), such as hand gestures, imitation of sounds or movements, paraphrasing, and invention of new words. Poor selection of strategies by students to accomplish language tasks can lead to unsuccessful communication (Cohen and Macaro, 2007; Rubin, 2005).

Introducing a new teaching strategy and intervention is seen viable to bring English communication proficiency to its realization. This could be very challenging and difficult to implement yet it could be more viable thing to do to make sure the students' communication skills really improve and reach a certain level of proficiency. Many available teaching strategies are now available to harness.

Rajamangala University of Technology aims to develop highly qualified graduates into professional executives that reach international standards. In order to realize this vision, the university has established a program called English for International Communication (EIC) under the degree of Bachelor of Arts. The EIC program is offered to produce competent graduates dedicated to language and cultural awareness, and to train students who are well-prepared to move towards the international professional standards. Specifically, the EIC English program provides the necessary language and cultural skills for students to enter, participate, and thrive in a number of English related fields of study and work where communicative competency in English is the key to academic and professional success. The program emphasizes effective communication skills, cultural awareness, and academic excellence.

However, despite the university's ideal program on offer, poor communication skills and low proficiency in English language are observed to be common problems among the students at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL), Tak campus.

This study provides university stakeholders the idea on how to properly address the needs of the students by aligning the offered programs with the factors that significantly hinder student learning especially in learning English as a second language. The findings of the current study may also benefit the university students through the implementation of the researcher's proposed intervention program to enhance their English oral communication skills and achievement in the EIC course.

### Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to investigate the factors affecting the Bachelor of Arts students' achievement in the English for International communication (EIC). Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. *What is the profile of the respondents in terms of: gender, age, year level, frequency of learning English, and teacher's spoken language?*
2. *What is the students' level of achievement in English Communication Course in terms of their General Point Average?*
3. *What is the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect English oral communication achievement in terms of: aptitude, attitude, motivation (both instrumental and integrative)?*
4. *Is there significant relationship between the respondents' demographic profiles and their perception towards the factors that affect their achievement in English for International Communication course?*
5. *What feasible intervention program can be designed to alleviate the problem concerning the students' low English communication skills?*

### Methodology

The researcher used descriptive survey method to examine the factors that significantly affect English oral communication achievement of the students enrolled in BA Major in EIC.

### Population and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak Campus during the school year 2012- 2013. Tak campus is the biggest university campus in terms of land area and second largest in terms of the number of students enrolled among the Lanna campuses. Tak is a province located at the northern part of Thailand. It is 347 kilometers from Bangkok.

The students enrolled in this university can take part in a number of academic as well as career path learning experiences through classroom participation, and other valuable real-world internship programs. The Bachelor of Arts students coming from second year – fourth year were used as the participants in this study. There are 29 from the second year class, 14 from the third year, and 26 from the fourth year class. The first year class was excluded from the current study due to their GPAs unreleased during the period of investigation. Consequently, using complete enumeration, 69 students were included in the survey.

### Data Gathering Tool

The researchers made a self-rating questionnaire from existing literature to determine the profile of the respondents as well as their perception towards the factors that affect their achievement in EIC course. The questionnaire is divided into two parts and used a 5-point Likert scale to quantify the degree of the respondents' agreement and disagreement, as 5 "strongly agree" and 1 as "strongly disagree". Part 1 of the questionnaire determined the respondents' profile in terms of gender, age, year level, frequency of leaning English and their teacher's nationality. The second part of the questionnaire examined the respondents' perception towards the factors that affect their English learning in terms of their aptitude, attitude and motivation.



In addition to the survey questionnaire, the students' grades in the EIC course during the first semester of the school year 2012-2013 was taken from the University Registrar's office to be compared and examined. All data were taken and kept as important tools to measure and determine the underlying factors that affect the students' academic achievement so that appropriate intervention will be designed.

The questionnaire was validated by three language experts and was piloted in another university campus to explore the reliability and usability of the questionnaire in the current study. The validators' suggestions were incorporated to come up with the final questionnaire. Since the respondents' native language is Thai and their English comprehension level is quite low, the questionnaire was translated into Thai version.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The researchers sought permission from the dean of the Bachelor of Arts department prior to the survey. Moreover, the researchers wrote to the University registrar to get access on the respondents' GPA during the first semester of the school year 2012-2013.

The survey was conducted in the class of each year level so that the researchers can explain the purpose of the survey and to personally thank the students for their involvement. The survey questionnaire was collected right away to ensure 100 percent retrieval. After the data have been collected from the respondents and the university registrar's office, the researchers submitted the raw data to the statistician for treatment and analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Percentage was used to interpret the profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age, year level, frequency of Learning English and teacher's Spoken Language. The perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect English oral communication achievement in terms of aptitude, attitude and motivation particularly in instrumental and integrative was described using weighted mean. Moreover, Goodman's and Kruskal's Gamma (g) was used to test the relationship between the respondents' demographic profiles in terms of age, year level and frequency of Learning English and the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect the achievement in English communication course while Correlation Ratio ( $E^2$ ) was used to test the relationship between the respondents' demographic profiles in terms of sex and teacher's spoken language and the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect the achievement in English communication course.

### **Results and Discussions**

#### ***Demographic Profile of Respondents***

The results dealing with the participants' profile show that female (89.9%) outnumbered male respondents and mostly are aged 20 years old. The Thai university respondents are in their second, third and fourth year in English for International Communication major. Most of them are learning English more than three times a week with the native English speaking teachers.

Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) found out that the diverse language background implies a complexity of a wide range of communication, language and literacy needs in the English teaching and learning context which leads to high frustration, confusion and stress amongst

non-English speaking background students trying to master the language of their disciplines and communicate with confidence and competence in the English tertiary environment.

The teacher's spoken language shows that there is a linguistic gap between the teacher spoken language and the students' first language. Thus this is one of the factors that contribute to their English oral communication achievement. Meanwhile, the frequency of learning at more than three times a week help improve the students' ability to fill the gap of English oral communication. The more frequent the students are exposed to the language the more they get better with their communication skills.

### ***Students' Level of Achievement***

The table below shows the students' level of achievement in English Communication Course in terms of their General Point Average (GPA).

**Table 1. Students' Level of Achievement in English for International Communication Course in terms of GPA**

Weight	Range of Achievement	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretations
4	3.26 – 4.00	0	0	Excellent
3	2.51 – 3.25	22	31.9	Above Average
2	1.76 – 2.50	39	56.5	Average
1	1.00 – 1.75	8	11.6	Below Average
<b>Grade Point Average</b>		<b>2.29</b>		<b>Average</b>

In terms of GPA, 56.5 percent of the respondents have an average grade with a range of 2.51-3.25. There are 22 or 31.9 percent have obtained above average grade with the GPA of 3.26-4.00, and only 8 or 11.6 percent have 1.76-2.50 at a scale of below average. In general, the students' level of achievement in the IEC course is within an average range (GPA 2.29).

Graham (1987) states that while GPA is the most commonly used criterion for academic success, some researchers have noted that it is not always a valid indicator of academic achievement. Heil and Aleamoni (1974), for example, point out that GPA does not take into account the number of courses taken. Students may be able to handle only two courses at a time, due to poor English proficiency, for example, but their GPAs would not reflect this. Heil and Aleamoni (1974) also allude to the widely recognized problem of teachers' giving sympathy or goodwill grades to non-native speakers. For studies of graduate students, an additional problem is the limited spread of grades typically given in graduate schools, which means that significant correlations are less likely to be found. Ho and Spinks (1985) argue that GPAs are "composed of heterogeneous or divergent elements," especially at the university level, where "various academic subjects demand divergent competencies or dispositions". For example, some students might have a gift for logical argument, which would serve them well in one course, and a deficiency of math skills, which would doom them in another. In defense of the use of GPA, it should be pointed out that a study of 2,075 foreign students at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), found that first-semester GPA was "the best index of the student's eventual success" (Sugimoto, 1966).

***Respondents' Perceptions on the Factors Affecting English Oral Communication******Achievement******Aptitude***

The table below highlights the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect English oral communication achievement in terms of aptitude.

The respondents "agreed" that their speaking ability does not worry them and motivating themselves to speak in English and doing a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in English" as well as being good at learning speaking skills could significantly affect their level of oral communication achievement.

However, they are "uncertain" whether "having no problem learning speaking skills; being good at communicating with the international students and lecturers; and having confidence about their speaking abilities" have an adverse impact on their oral communication achievement.

The composite mean score of 3.43 implies that the students have positive perception towards the factor that affects their English learning and achievement in terms of aptitude. The finding shows that the respondents appear to believe that they do not have much problem speaking English and are highly motivated to speak using the language in general.

**Table 2. Means of Respondents' Perceptions towards the Factors that Affect English Oral Communication Achievement in terms of Aptitude**

<b>Aptitude</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in English.	3.48	0.72	A	3
2. I am good at learning speaking skills.	3.41	0.73	A	4
3. I do not have any problem speaking in English when I should.	3.32	0.81	U	8
4. I feel confident about my ability to speak clearly.	3.33	0.80	U	7
5. I can motivate myself to speak in English.	3.68	0.85	A	2
6. I can learn and use new English words in my conversation easily.	3.30	0.86	U	9.5
7. When I decide to say something in English, I go ahead and do it.	3.30	0.77	U	9.5
8. I am good at communicating with the international students and lecturers.	3.35	0.78	U	6
9. My speaking ability does not worry me.	3.78	3.54	A	1
10. I have no problem learning speaking skills.	3.39	0.88	U	5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>A</b>	

***Attitude***

Table 3 presents the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect English oral communication achievement in terms of attitude. The respondents "agreed" that they enjoy having group discussions in class when they are done fully in English. They also agreed that they enjoy speaking in English with anybody and doing group oral presentations in class



is also enjoyable. The composite mean score of 3.60 implies that the students have positive perception towards the factor that affects their English learning and achievement in terms of attitude.

As Bandura (1986) points out that self-confidence could influence choice of and interest in these activities. The one factor that contributes to this finding mostly has to do with the classroom group dynamics that most teachers employ during their classes. This is further supported by Crandall (1999), as he asserts that, peer support can be powerful motivator for shy, insecure or even uninterested students. In cooperative groups, individuals know that they can get feedback and assistance in making their contributions as clear, relevant and appropriate as possible. This, in turn, can motivate them to continue to try, especially where peers encourage and support their contributions and boost their attitude towards English oral communication.

**Table 3. Means of Respondents' Perception towards the Factors that Affect English Oral Communication Achievement in terms of Attitude**

Attitude	Mean	SD	VI	Rank
1. I enjoy having group discussions in class when they are done fully in English.	3.72	0.87	A	1
2. I do not find oral presentations hard to do.	3.48	0.82	A	5
3. I enjoy communicating with others in English.	3.59	0.75	A	4
4. Doing individual oral presentations in class is enjoyable.	3.46	0.85	A	6
5. Doing group oral presentations in class is enjoyable.	3.65	0.84	A	3
6. I enjoy speaking in English with anybody.	3.71	0.93	A	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>A</b>	

### **Motivation**

Table 4 presents the perception of the respondents towards the factors that affect English oral communication achievement in terms of instrumental motivation. The students agreed that learning English is important for travelling abroad and for making them knowledgeable and skillful individuals and being more interested in earning a university degree and a good job than learning English language itself. Meanwhile, respondents have positive perception towards the factor that affect their English learning and achievement in terms of being more interested in furthering their higher education than learning English language itself and being proficient in English can lead to more success and achievements in life.

However, being proficient in English makes other people respect them obtained the least weighted mean score of 3.75. The composite mean score of 3.86 implies that the students have positive perception towards the factors that affect their English learning and achievement in terms of instrumental motivation.

**Table 4. Means of Respondents' Perception towards the Factors that Affect English Oral Communication Achievement in terms of Instrumental Motivation**

Instrumental Motivation	Mean	SD	VI	Rank
1. Being proficient in English can lead to more success and achievements in life.	3.78	0.84	A	5
2. I am more interested in earning a university degree and a good job than learning English language itself.	3.90	0.86	A	3
3. I am more interested in furthering my higher education than learning English language itself.	3.83	0.79	A	4
4. Learning English is important for travelling abroad.	3.97	0.82	A	1
5. Being proficient in English makes other people respect me.	3.75	0.81	A	6
6. Learning English is important for making me a knowledgeable and skillful person.	3.91	0.84	A	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>A</b>	

The respondents have positive perception towards the integrative motivation factors that affect their English learning and achievement which means that they have agreement on these categories: studying English enables them to keep in touch with foreign acquaintances; being determined to study English as best as they can to achieve maximum proficiency; studying English enables them to better understand and appreciate the ways of life of native English speakers; studying English enables them to discuss interesting topics in English with the people from other national backgrounds; and it also enables them to participate freely in academic, social, and professional activities among other cultural groups.

**Table 5. Means of Respondents' Perception towards the Factors that Affect English Oral Communication Achievement in terms of Integrative Motivation**

Integrative Motivation	Mean	SD	VI	Rank
1. Studying English enables me to understand English books, movies, pop music and others	3.88	0.80	A	6
2. Studying English enables me to better understand and appreciate the ways of life of native English speakers.	3.91	0.84	A	3
3. Studying English enables me to keep in touch with foreign acquaintances.	4.09	0.78	A	1
4. Studying English enables me to discuss interesting topics in English with the people from other national backgrounds.	3.90	0.79	A	4.5
5. Studying English enables me to participate freely in academic, social, and professional activities among other cultural groups.	3.90	0.77	A	4.5
6. I am determined to study English as best as I can to achieve maximum proficiency.	4.07	0.88	A	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>A</b>	

### **Relationship between Profile and Factors Affecting English Communication Achievement**

The results of the study revealed that gender, age, and year level have no significant relationship towards the factors that affect the respondents' English communication achievement. However, frequency of learning English and teacher's spoken language are significantly related to the perceived factors. This does mean that the more frequent they study English with the native English teachers, the better they acquire and develop their English communication skills.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak Campus needs to open up more educational training and seminars for teacher's advancement program concerning current teaching methodologies and techniques that address the learners' aptitude, attitude, and motivation; implementing the teaching strategies in the classrooms as well as bridging theory and practice. The actual delivery of teachers' advancement program should be developed in terms of curriculum modifications and adaptations that are appropriate for students in Bachelor of Arts in English for International Communication.

In order to improve the students' level of English oral communication achievements, special intervention program must be designed. The special intervention program must be inclusive of student's development program in the field of English language learning, offering the students' fun-filled learning activities, coaching, group dynamics and English language oral communication exposure. University instructor and class advisor should make efforts to identify students who are low in English oral communication and achievement; helping them to improve.

The university may consider investing on the special intervention program to further realize the university's mission and vision concerning English for International Communication course; giving the graduates vital chances to secure a job; and making them well prepared for their future careers.

The proposed intervention program is recommended for use in the university and other universities that may have a need for this.

Finally, there is a need for a follow up research to investigate the effect of special intervention program, or even related to this study.

### **Proposed Intervention Program**

Oral communication is a two-way process. In one way is a speaker and on the other is a listener. There must be interaction between the speaker and listener thus communication takes place. One important aspect in oral communication in the classroom is that learners should talk to one another. In the communicative classroom the focus is on interaction. The same idea is given emphasis by Keith Johnson (1983) when he said that the focus is on what people want to say rather than on the mechanics of how they say it. The classroom with communication activities as the main goal should reflect the real life situation. Each learning activity in the classroom setting involving oral communication should be attractive and appealing to the learners.

In order to further improve the students' English oral communication achievements, the researchers believe that special intervention program created and implemented by the university. This special intervention program must be inclusive of student's development program in the field of English language learning, offering the students' fun-filled learning activities, coaching, group dynamic and English language oral communication exposure. University instructors should make valuable efforts to identify students who have low English oral communication skills and help them to improve through innovative and interactive modes of instruction.

As a part of the intervention program, a variety of extracurricular activities for students is seen as necessary (e.g. Reading Club, Movie or Drama Club as well as English Clinic or English Corner) in providing the opportunity for students to use the English language more often outside the classroom. Introducing those activities must take into consideration the students' level of language since it is necessary to cater to all their needs and not put them off for further studying.

**English Oral Communication Intervention Program Matrix**

Goals	Activities	Action Plans	Resources Needed	Persons-In-Charge
To determine the oral communication skills of the freshmen students	English Oral Communication Test	Compulsory entrance test for EIC students	Provided by the University English Entrance Examination Center	English lecturers
To develop social interaction that gives students the opportunity to use the language they have learned	Cultural conversation with foreign lecturers and exchange students	The students are encouraged to interact with the foreign lecturers and exchange program students by setting up a special place in the university for them to hang out.	A special room or learning center provided by the University International Relation Office	Foreign lecturers and foreign exchange program students
To support students' creativity and artistic skills	Drama/ short film-making	To be included in the curriculum as one subject to study among EIC students	Liberal Arts department to create and implement suitable curriculum with the integration	Mr. Rechele B. Ella and volunteer students

			of school performances	
To improve students' English vocabulary	Reading club (book reading)	English lecturers to encourage students to read English materials	English library	Reading club coordinator

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