QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE VIEWS OF THAI EFL LEARNERS' LEARNING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

As an impact of globalization, English has become an international language and a means not only to obtain further information or knowledge but also to access and socialize in international professional or academic communities. It is also considered the most important and popular foreign language taught in school in every country, including Thailand. As a result, effective teaching and learning English is vital. However, amongst the four macro language skills, speaking skills seem to be difficult for Thai learners because of the lack of opportunities to be exposed to authentic English and thus failed to achieve the standards required. To be successful in improving English speaking skills, this study has the principle objective of investigating five variables affecting Thai learners' development of oral proficiency. To accomplish this goal, 327 Thai learners participated in this study. Based on an extensive review of literature, a systematically-designed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used. The findings indicated that most of Thai learners relatively had high extrinsic motivation in learning English. They also had positive attitudes towards the English language which helped them learn English. However, many of them had inhibitions, hindering their success in mastering their English speaking competence. The implications of the findings are useful in providing a basis for improving English speaking instruction in general, and classroom activities and environment, and textbook development in particular.

Keywords: Thai learners, oral communication, factors, speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that English is increasingly used as the global lingua franca, and thus is used in almost every domain of communication world-wide. Consequently, the demand for English language skills and English language education, as English language professionals are most acutely aware, has exploded. As a result, learning English apart from first language or national language is substantially needed nowadays. English is, thus, the most widely taught foreign language at all stages of education system of several countries, including Thailand.

Concerning English education in Thailand, along with the Thai language, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies, English is considered one of the core subjects and is regarded as a necessity in Thai society (Wongsothorn, 2003). In the view of most Thai institutes, it is regarded to be an important subject because English proficiency has become a requirement for both career and further studies. In this regard, amongst the four macro skills, English speaking ability is seen crucial and the most important in learning foreign language (Ur, 1996). Since speaking ability as an active skill can show how learners know or acquire a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary, they not only need to know how to assemble sentences in the abstract, but they also have to produce them and adapt them to the circumstances.

To help boost Thai learners' English speaking proficiency, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been used in the English classroom in Thailand for a number of years. However, it seems that CLT often fails to create sufficient opportunities for genuine interaction in the English classroom (Khamkhien, 2010). Often times, when it is time to speak, most Thai students cannot correctly produce the target language. This suggests that proficiency might not depend on linguistic knowledge.

In other words, language knowledge is secondary, compared to the functional ability of understanding and speaking. Therefore, while a structured syllabus can provide some language knowledge, it is only through the effort to communicate that complete communicative competence is acquired. According to Harmer (1992), the full process, from passive listening to understanding and from active thinking to speaking, needs to be thoroughly exercised. This can be achieved only through real human interactions.

As previous research studies have established, and despite the enormous number of speaking-based studies in second and foreign language teaching and learning, speaking ability has remained a key interest and has continued to attract a number of studies (e.g., Graham, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 2002). However, the findings of these studies need to be verified in several aspects. For example, some studies involve a relatively specific context (Graham, 2004), leading to detrimental consequences of obtaining limited generalization. In addition, a large number of previous studies (e.g., Bernaus et al., 2004; Graham, 2004; Sakui & Gaies, 1999) focusing on factors affecting learners' speaking skills tend to investigate only one factor in a study. These reasons suggest a need for further studies in this research area.

Therefore, despite the fact that a constant effort put by involved parties has been made to the curriculum to improve Thai learners' English proficiency and English speaking, their English speaking skills are somewhat far from satisfaction. Since a number of factors were claimed to be impeding or contributing factors to learners' speaking skills, the principle objective of this study is to investigate the roles of five variables possibly contribute to Thai learners' development of English communicative competence. It is expected that the knowledge generated from this study will be particularly beneficial to Thai learners, enabling them to be aware of factors which have some influences on their learning English speaking, and teachers and educators, helping them create new initiatives that can successfully improve learners' English speaking ability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section provides a review of previous studies which have investigated factors related to the second language learning process and the roles of motivation, personality, attitudes towards English teachers, classroom environment and instructional media, and attitudes towards the English language on students' development of oral communication.

Motivation

During the past two decades, a large body of research on second language learning and motivation has been accumulated. A number of previous studies identify that motivation can be typically divided into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Harmer (1992), for instance, notes that the former is concerned with what takes place inside the classroom, whereas the latter is concerned with factors outside the classroom. In this regard, extrinsic motivation can be divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. To be precise, integrative motivation means those who would like to learn a language in order to join in the society as a whole of the culture of that target language society, while instrumental motivation refers to those who learn a language aiming to get a better job, position or status, or to pass an examination.

Previous research studies have been well documented the influences of motivation in second language acquisition. As Ellis (1997) contends, for example, both integrative and instrumental motivations are regarded as essential elements of learning success, particularly integrative motivation which has been found to sustain long-term success when learning a second language. Meanwhile, Gardner (1985) proposes that motivation and attitudes are the primary sources contributing to individual language learning. Gardner has also described the phenomenon of motivation as consisting of four components: a goal, effort, want, and attitudes towards the learning activity. In addition, congruent with Harmer (1992), the concept of motivation can be classified into two orientations of reasons: integrative and instrumental. The former refers to the individual's willingness and interest in having social interaction with members of the L2 (second language) group. This orientation occurs when students wish to truly become part of the culture of the language being learned. An instrumental orientation is more self-

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oriented, described as when students have utilitarian reasons such as they want to pass an exam or they want to get a job. This statement was supported by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), concluding that both instrumental and integrative orientations lead to more proficiency, but integrative orientation motivated students to learn more.

Personality

One of the important factors contributing to learning success is personality. As described by Wenden (1991), personality denotes to personal traits, such as extroversion and introversion, social skills, inhibition and the intrinsic side of factors influencing learners' behavior, such as self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, and empathy.

A study focused on learners' personality conducted by Rubin and Thompson (1994) confirmed that extroversion seemed to be a prior personality characteristic which affects the learner's success in learning a language. They asserted that sociable learners who used every opportunity to talk with native speakers might be more successful because they had more chances to hear, use and expose to the new language. Onwuegbuziea et al. (2000) also investigated the ability of cognitive, affective, personality, and demographic variables to predict second-language acquisition among college students. The results revealed that variables from each of the four domains were important predictors of foreign-language achievement. Based on the foregoing research studies, it can be summarized that personality is one of factors affecting language performance and achievement.

Attitudes towards English Teachers

The roles of teachers cannot be overlooked in a learning situation as it is undeniable that teachers are sources of language acquisition in a language classroom. According to Kanoksilapatham (2007), teachers play a crucial role in English language teaching for two major reasons. Primarily, teachers are the persons who work most closely with learners. Additionally, as masters in their own classrooms, teachers can test small ideas or innovations. In short, teachers need to be able to apply an appropriate teaching method or combinations of methods which benefit their target learners most to help learners improve their language learning and performance.

In this light, a recent research study on attitudes towards English-language usage and teachers was conducted by Lindermann (2000), investigating how learners' attitudes about non-native accents might influence their comprehension of the speech of non-native speakers. The results showed that there existed the relationship between attitude and perceived success of interaction. Congruent with Lindermann's study, Hargraves' (2000) study provided a clear picture about the relationship between students' attitudes towards teachers. The study highlighted that posturing the use of daily notebooks to assist in short and long-term planning, persuading students to request assistance and clarification, advocating use of study skill development, and recommending involvement in extra curricular activities could build a positive learner's character and achievement. Thus, as can be seen from previous research, students' attitudes towards their English teachers can contribute to their language learning achievement in a certain extent.

Classroom environment and instructional media

It is known that learners learn a foreign language into two ways: formal learning and informal learning. Rubin and Thompson (1994) point out that formal learning refers learning environment that learners learn a foreign language inside a classroom. In this regard, a number of researchers (e.g., Brown, 1994; Onwuegbuziea et al., 2000) made some pertinent comments on formal learning that classroom do not offer strong motivation for communication or the opportunity for learners to understand the way language is used in real life. Meanwhile, informal setting or natural setting is described as a real-life environment, where learners can expose to the target language without being aware that they are learning (Wenden, 1991). This suggests a large number of insights into the nature of interaction and how to use a language appropriately. Therefore, compared to formal setting, informal setting seems to offer unlimited opportunities to learners for practicing speaking in the real situation.

Although it can be said that informal setting should be supported and implemented in a foreign language classroom, formal settings cannot be overlooked. To successfully achieve in teaching and learning a foreign language, both are crucial. This is because it cannot be said which environment can be more beneficial for learners.

Given the roles of instructional media, other evidences to effectively using a wide range of instructional technology and materials were borne out in studies of native and non-native speaking students, indicating the positive effects of instructional technology on learning. A large body of research studies (e.g., Diem, 2000; Lam, 2000; Lambert & Balderstone, 2000), reported the extent of the utilization and benefits of instructional media. For example, as observed by Lambert & Balderstone (2000), in terms of effectiveness, using televisions in the classroom could increase some significant contribution to the teaching and learning. Such media could help effectively develop students' knowledge, vocabulary, awareness and interpretation skill. Further, teachers can go far from just illustrating the content to exploring values, attitudes and beliefs from the media.

Attitudes towards the English language

As stated by Starks and Paltridge (1996), learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages. Rubin and Thompson (1994) assert that attitudes deal with the way learners feel about the foreign culture and its people. Since attitudes are defined as emotions and thoughts, learners may admire the culture and prefer to learn more about the target language by becoming fluent in the foreign language, or they may like the people speaking the language and wish to be accepted by them.

A great amount of studies focusing on the roles of attitudes towards the English language claim that there is a certain relationship between attitudes and success when English language learners have positive attitudes and an opportunity to know native speakers of English. For example, Chiba et al. (1995) reported that Japanese students seemed to resort to American English when it came to deciding the model for their English. Their study showed that Japanese students with more instrumental motivation had more positive opinion towards non-native English accents than those with less instrumental motivation. Moreover, their familiarity with accents had an influence on their acceptance of varieties of English. Congruent with their study, Smith's (1994) study suggests that affective variables such as inhibition attitudes towards language and anxiety are important factors in second language mastery and are aspects of intrapersonal intelligence, helping learners examine their strengths and weakness in language learning processes.

From the previous research studies established, the roles of these five variables are suggested to be factors apparently influencing language learning process. However, as mentioned earlier, most of the studies above tend to investigate only one factor in a study. Also, given the different learning context of learners in the literature, the results form the previous studies might not be generalizable to the Thai context. These reasons suggest a need to identify the roles of these variables on Thai learners' development of oral communication.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Three hundred and twenty-seven Thai EFL learners (126 male and 201 female students) from Kasetsart University, Thailand participated in the present study. They were, at the time of the study, taking Foundation English courses for the academic year of 2009. They were from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Agriculture, Education, and Engineering. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20. It should be noted that these participants shared almost the same amount of English study before they enrolled in Foundation English courses. That is, they had experiences in studying English from grade 1 onwards. They constituted a representative sample of Thai learners in that they were admitted from all over the country. Further, they learned English as a university subject for mostly academic, not everyday communicative purposes.

Instruments

Two main instruments used in this study are self-created questionnaire, consisting 42 statements and semi-structured interviews. Based on an extensive review of the relevant studies, the questionnaire was specifically designed by the author, covering five variables to be investigated in the present study. It was checked for their accuracy and understanding by two experts in the field of second language acquisition and applied linguistics. All of the statements in the questionnaire were listed in English. This questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one is the questionnaire eliciting personal information of the participants. Part two involves the five variables that might affect English speaking skills, which are the main focus of this study. The variables consist of: 1) motivation to study English speaking skills; 2) personality; 3) attitudes towards English teachers; 4) attitudes towards the classroom environment and instructional media; and 5) attitudes towards the English language. This questionnaire asked the participants to respond to each statement on a Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree,' to 'agree,' 'not sure,' 'disagree,' and 'strongly disagree.' Scoring purposes of 5 to 1 were assigned for these five positions.

In order to check the reliability and trustfulness of the results gained from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted. To elicit the participants' attitudes towards these variables contributing to the development of their oral skills, 5 participants were randomly selected and individually interviewed by the author. The interviews were conducted in Thai, the mother tongue of the participants. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes and was taped-recorded with the consent of participants.

Prior to the data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 30 students taking an English course at the context of the study. All of these students shared some common characteristics including their field of studies and backgrounds of studying English at the university. The pilot study was conducted in order to estimate the amount of time needed for the participants to complete the inventory and to find out whether there were any unclear statements for them. In so doing, it was found that 30 minutes was appropriate for the test administration. Also, the reliability analysis of the instrument was completed, showing that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .826 which indicates that the instrument can be considered as a reliable tool to be used for the purposes of this present study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to students enrolling Foundation English courses, academic year 2009, Kasetsart University, Thailand. The researcher explained instruction as how to complete the questionnaire. To obtain the reliability of the data, this group of participants was informed that there was no right or wrong answer, and thus the questionnaire was only created for research purposes. The data obtained from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed to establish frequency distribution in the form of descriptive statistics. Separate t-tests and separate ANOVAs were performed to determine a main effect of the five variables. The data from the interviews were transcribed and translated, and qualitative data were also classified and analyzed.

RESULTS

Results of the items covered in the questionnaire and the interviews are presented in this section. In attempting to understand the students' variables impeding the development of their oral communication skills, the data gathered through the questionnaire were analyzed and categorized into five major themes in which motivation, personality, attitudes towards teachers, classroom environment and instructional media, and attitudes towards the English language.

As for the personal data elicited from the first part of the questionnaire, the details of the participants in this study are summarized in Table 1. Subsequently, the questionnaire data were quantitatively analyzed (minimum, maximum, mean, and SD values). The results from the questionnaire and interviews on the investigation of the influences of the five variables on learners' studying English speaking are individually reported as follows.

Table 1. Personal Data of the Participants

	No. of participants	Percent
Gender		
Male	126	38.53
Female	201	61.47
Faculty		
Arts and Science	93	28.44
Agriculture	87	26.61
Education	62	18.96
Engineering	85	25.99

Motivation

To examine how the participants' motivation affects their development of English oral communication skills, the data elicited by the statements related to motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were analyzed. A number of intriguing points were found. The results of the analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Participants' Motivation to Study English Speaking

	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
I am learning English because it is a compulsory subject.	1	5	3.32	1.27
I like learning English because the lessons are interesting.	1	5	3.55	1.17
Learning speaking will enable me to further my education in other institutions of higher learning.	1	5	4.43	0.86
The ability to speak English fluently will help me get a job after education.	1	5	4.62	0.74
I am learning English in order to communicate with foreigners.	1	5	3.77	1.21
When I hear someone speaking English fluently, I wish I could speak like that.	2	5	4.61	0.80
I want to speak English because I want to communicate with foreign friends.	1	5	3.46	1.22
I learn English so that I can understand foreign cultures.	1	5	3.40	1.14
I want to be able to understand English movies and songs.	1	5	4.08	1.09
I want to speak English as beautifully as my teacher.	2	5	4.47	0.76

Focusing on motivation of the participants, Table 2 demonstrates that most of the participants reported high motivation (M = 3.97), regarding instrument motivation. Specifically, they strongly agreed that speaking English fluently would help them get a job after graduation (M = 4.62), followed by their preference of speaking English fluently (M = 4.61). Moreover, they wanted to speak English as beautifully as their teacher (M = 4.47). Likewise, in terms of integrative motivation, the analysis showed that the participants are mostly not sure whether they wanted to learn English because it is described as a compulsory subject (M =3.32). It is surprising that the t-test revealed a statistically significant different (t = 4.19, p = .00), indicating that motivation has a main effect for the development of oral communication.

The results from the semi-structured interviews confirm the participants' opinion about their motivation, specifically the instrumental reasons, to study English speaking. Two respondents expressed their opinion more openly as illustrated:

    (1)   *I want to learn English because I think it is a key subject that can help me get a good job after my graduation.*   *[S2]*

    (2)   *If I can speak English fluently, I will get a good job with high salary. This is because I can work for a foreign company or an*

> *international organization.* [S4]

(3) *Learning English can help me a lot because I have to read English textbooks. Moreover, it can help me get a good job in the future.* [S5]

However, it is interesting to note that two participants mentioned that they learned English as it is a compulsory subject. Also, they would not like to learn English because it is not their major subject.

(4) *Actually, I don't want to learn English because I don't like it at all. It is a very difficult subject. If I can choose the subjects to learn, I won't take any English courses.* [S1]

(5) *I'm not good at English. I don't want to speak English because I always feel embarrassed when I mispronounce English words.* [S3]

In short, two observations can be made from the above findings. First, English is vital as it is a necessary instrument for finding a good job after graduation. This reflects the influence of on the significant of English in Thailand. Another observation is that English is useful for students, however they would not like to learn it as they found themselves have some difficulties in learning English.

Personality

The second variable investigated in this study is the participants' personality. The following table presents the results of the analysis regarding how the participants' personality affects the development of English speaking ability.

Table 3. Participants' Personality and English Speaking

	Min	*Max*	*Mean*	*S.D.*
When I speak English, I worry a lot about making mistakes.	1	5	4.19	1.04
I am afraid people will laugh at me if I do not say things right.	1	5	3.96	1.07
I am nervous when I have to speak English in front of other people.	2	5	4.09	0.97
I feel embarrassed when I speak English incorrectly.	1	5	3.88	1.13
What ideas I have or what I think, I am not brave enough to tell other people in English.	1	5	2.86	1.26
In the classroom, if I am not certain about the answer in English, I'll never speak up.	1	5	3.25	1.28
I find it hard to start a conversation in English.	1	5	2.99	1.34

Of 327 participants, it can be concluded from the table that the majority of the participants expressed that, when they spoke English, they were worried about making mistakes (M = 4.19), followed by the fact that they would feel embarrassed when speaking English in front of other people (M = 4.09), and thus were afraid that people would laugh at them if they did not say things or pronounce words correctly (M = 3.96). Also, as analyzed by ANOVA, the mean scores were significantly different, F = 4.85, p = .00, suggesting that similar to motivation, a significant interaction was obtained between the mean scores and their personality. These findings are somehow expected in the Thai context because it is common that most of the Thai learners were nervous when they had to speak English in front of other people and felt shy and embarrassed when they spoke English incorrectly. As of the inhibited personality, most of the participants did not have a lot of inhibitions when in a social situation and speaking in their own language.

With regard to risk-taking, the results from the interviews showed that most of the participants were not sure whether they wanted to take any risk in answering questions if they did not know the correct answer. In this respect, lack of confidence also played a vital part in their speaking ability as they were not confident about sharing their ideas over topics with other people.

(6) *I don't like to speak English in front of my classmate or when the teacher asks me to read out loud because I don't want*

> *him to correct me.*   *[S1]*

(7)   *When I'm not sure about the answer, most of the times I will*
       keep quiet and wait for my friends' answer. But I will try to
       answer the questions.   *[S2]*

The responses from two students also indicated that while learning English, if they did not understand English words or did not feel at ease to speak English, they would use Thai as their mother tongue to help them learn English. In other words, L1 has an important role when learning a foreign language.

(8)   *I always have difficulty in communicating with my teacher and*
       my friends in English. I sometimes ask my teacher to explain
       the lesson in Thai, but sometimes I try to answer some simple
       questions.   *[S4]*

(9)   *Speaking English for me is fun. However, if I can't think of*
       English words, it will use Thai instead.   *[S5]*

The following interview also illustrates that taking risk plays a prominent role in learning English as one of the respondents expressed:

(10)   *I think I should be ashamed of myself. Even though my teacher*
        says my speaking is unclear or cannot be understandable to her,
        I don't really care. I know it really is, but I tell myself that
        English is not my mother tongue.   *[S3]*

Attitudes towards English teachers

Further analysis was conducted to explore the participants' attitudes towards their English teachers. The analysis indicates that English teachers deem to be an important factor determining how much students maximize their English learning. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' Attitudes towards English Teachers and Studying English

	Min	*Max*	*Mean*	*S.D.*
My teacher has good teaching techniques.	2	5	4.65	0.65
My teacher is kind and helpful.	1	5	4.64	0.65
My teacher is qualified to teach English.	2	5	4.76	0.56
My teacher makes me like to study English.	1	5	4.47	0.79
My teacher is experienced and confident in his / her teaching.	3	5	4.83	0.43
My teacher's characteristics are satisfactory.	1	5	4.57	0.74
My teacher makes me feel bored with studying English.	1	5	1.84	1.22
My teacher speaks English very well, so I want to be like him / her.	1	5	4.53	0.83

As shown in Table 4, of these items, the majority of the participants reported positive responses to their English teachers (M = 4.29). Specifically, they agreed that their teachers were experienced and confident in their teaching (M = 4.83). In this regard, they stated that their teachers were qualified to teach English (M = 4.76), and had good teaching techniques (M = 4.65). ANOVA results on the mean scores of the attitudes towards English teachers yielded significant contrasts, F = 4.64, p = .00, demonstrating that the participants were mostly satisfied with their teachers' characteristics and kindness in teaching English. Moreover, it can be considered that many of the participants indicated that their teachers are regarded as key persons who make them enjoy studying English, and don't make them bored with studying English.

When the author asked the informants the question, "Why do you like to learn or speak English with your teachers?, it might be said that the responses from the questionnaire was confirmed by the responses from the interviews as the following responses illustrate:

(11) *I really know that most of teachers try to explain the lessons intentionally. They also use a lot of teaching techniques to help us enjoy learning English in the classroom.* [S1]

(12) *I think that teachers here have strategies to encourage students to want to learn. The informal nature of the student-teacher relationship help me to learn and speak English, as it means I'm not scared to ask teacher when I have a problem.* [S2]

(13) *I like to study English because my teacher is very kind and helpful.* [S3]

(14) *In English classes, actually, I will ask the teacher the questions when I don't understand because my teacher is so kind.* [S4]

(15) *I love learning and speaking English with my teacher because I think, I can learn a lot of things such as new vocabulary and the way to speak correctly. I try to imitate them so that I will speak English better. That will make me more confident as well.* [S5]

Interestingly, all of the respondents agreed that their English teachers serve as model, helper or facilitator in a classroom, reflecting that the role of English teachers is even more distinct, potentially influencing learners' English learning. This means that the teachers should initially be aware of the expertise expected of teachers and be able to perform a role as a resource person in a classroom.

Classroom environment and instructional media

Another factor needed to be scrutinized in this paper is the roles of classroom environment and instructional media. Table 5 demonstrates the results of the analysis concerning the participants' opinion over classroom environment and instructional media.

Table 5. Attitudes towards Classroom Environment and Instructional Media

	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Classroom activities do not encourage students to speak English.	1	5	2.50	1.23
The contents of the textbooks are too difficult.	1	5	2.10	1.07
The contents of the textbooks are not interesting.	1	5	2.25	0.95
There are too few instructional media.	1	5	2.49	1.09
The instructional media are ineffective and uninteresting.	1	5	2.23	1.06
There is not enough time to learn speaking English.	1	5	3.18	1.12
There is not enough time to learn reading.	1	5	3.09	1.08
Class hours / schedules for speaking English are not appropriate.	1	5	2.93	1.13
Class hours / schedules for reading English are not appropriate.	1	5	2.87	1.06
Classroom environment is not appropriate, e.g. There is disturbing noise, the temperature is too high / low, etc.	1	5	2.33	1.31

When the investigation was focused on the classroom environment and instructional media, as can be observed, Table 5 shows that the majority of the participants suggested that the class hours were not enough to learn speaking and reading English (M = 3.18 and 3.09, respectively). In addition, it can be understood from the table that these students did not generally think that the contents of the textbook were too difficult (M = 2.10). Again, t-test was performed, and revealed that the mean scores of the attitudes towards the classroom environment and instructional media had a statistically significant difference (t = 5.37, p = .00). The result indicates that with making full use of instructional media and classroom facilities, the participants were able to learn English speaking effectively.

Meanwhile, some of the participants gave the comment on topics selected form the textbooks used, stating that some topics were not realistic and authentic. The other topics were too easy to follow for them, not challenging and sometimes boring. They would not be able to use and adapt them in their real life.

(16)   *Some topics presented in the textbook are not interesting.*
       Sometimes I think I cannot use knowledge gained in my
       everyday life because it is too far from me, I mean in the
       Thai context.   *[S2]*

(17)   *Using textbooks is fine, but some of the topics are far*
       from my understanding because I have no experience in
       an English speaking country.   *[S4]*

Moreover, as observed from the interviews, two participants agreed that most of the contents of the textbooks used in English courses focused too much on grammar, which did not help them to practice English speaking.

(18)   *The contents of the textbook used focused on grammar.*
       The explanation is also provided in English which I think
       it's hard to understand when I review the lesson before the exam.   *[S1]*

(19)   *The textbook focused too much on grammar rules. I can't*
       apply them to my English speaking and practices as I don't
       know appropriate English words in each context.   *[S3]*

With regards to speaking practices, one participant stated that English practice in class was insufficient since in most cases, the class schedule lasted only 90 minutes, and there were only two periods a week. Thus, it seems that this time allocation is not sufficient for every student to get a chance to practice speaking English.

(18)   *I think it would be better if every one in the classroom has*
       enough time to practice English speaking. That is because
       in some activities, our teacher does not have time to speak with
       us or listen to what we're saying or talking about.   *[S5]*

The result of the interview above suggests that everyone in the classroom should have an opportunity to speak, and both teachers and their peers should use English as a medium during class. Moreover, this rule should be made to require everyone in class to use only English in class.

Attitudes towards the English Language

Finally, the last variable explored in this study is the attitudes of the participants towards the English language. Generally, the result demonstrates positive responses towards English as they believed that the knowledge of English was important for their daily life. The following table summarizes the result of the analysis.

Table 6. Participants' Attitudes towards the English Language

	Min	*Max*	*Mean*	*S.D.*
The knowledge of English is important for daily life.	2	5	4.54	0.78
I think all Thai people should be able to speak English.	1	5	4.40	0.79
The knowledge of English enables me to be well-informed.	2	5	4.48	0.75
A person who has good knowledge of English is superior to others in terms of job opportunities such as getting a better job and higher salary.	1	5	4.63	0.72
Thai people who can speak good English are smarter than those who cannot.	2	5	4.25	0.86
A person with good English knowledge is regarded as highly educated.	1	5	4.14	0.89
The knowledge of English enables me to further my higher education easily.	2	5	4.42	0.80

When the participants' attitudes towards the English language were examined, as is clear from Table 6, it was found that they believed that in the Thai society, a person who has good knowledge of English seemed to be superior to others in terms of job opportunities such as getting a better job and higher salary (M = 4.63). Moreover, they thought that the knowledge of English is crucial (M = 4.54) since being proficient in English can enable them to be well-informed (M = 4.48). ANOVA was performed on the mean scores and showed that there is a significantly difference, F = 2.10, p = .006, demonstrating a main effect for the attitudes towards the English language. This result highlights that, in the Thai context, the more knowledgeable the students are the easier it is for them to find a job and get a high salary after graduation.

In this regard, from the findings of the interviews, it is interesting to note that most of the informants considered that English is necessary and important for daily life as the statistical result shows that the mean score is relatively high (4.41), and the SD value is 0.48. This result is also reflected in the interviews as all of the respondents expressed that:

(18)   *I know that English is important nowadays as you can see from job advertisements. I will have more chance to choose jobs if my English is better than this.*   [S1]

(19)   *I think nowadays English is very necessary in the Thai society. We can see that, when applying for a job after graduation, English proficiency is also generally required as one of the qualifications.*   [S2]

(20)   *I think English is important. It is good if I can speak English fluently. Of course, I can get a good job in the future.*   [S3]

(21)   *When I hear someone speak English fluently, I think that he or she is very smart, especially when he or she is talking to a foreigner.*   [S4]

(22)   *To be honest, I want to speak English correctly and fluently, like a native speaker. Thai people mostly view that a person who speaks native-like English is richer and smarter than others because they think that he or she must hold a degree from a university in an English speaking country or study in an international program.*   [S5]

In conclusion, from the above analysis, the findings provide the details of how the five variables influence the participants' development of oral communication. Overall the statistical results revealed the five variables have main effects on Thai learners' learning English speaking. To further determine which of these five variables are significantly different, statistical procedures like t-tests or ANOVAs were performed. The statistical results revealed significant differences among the five variables. In other words, the five variables are significant predictors of students' development in learning English speaking.

DISCUSSION

This study has the goal of investigating the possible variable affecting the speaking ability of Thai learners. The findings indicated that most of the Thai learners in this study reported high extrinsic motivation in studying English. In general, they had positive attitudes towards the English language, teachers and English instructions, enabling them learn English speaking and improve their English speaking proficiency.

The results of this study yielded pedagogical implications for English teachers among which is the importance of factors affecting Thai students' development of oral proficiency. First, the analysis showed that some of the participants had inhibitions, which could hinder their pathway to success in mastering English speaking skills. It was also found that they were very worried about making mistakes in pronunciation. One possible factor is that they are afraid that people would laugh at them if they pronounce English words incorrectly. This is probably because their teachers place too much emphasis on speaking grammatically correct English and correct them in front of others, which makes them embarrassed during studying or speaking English. Based on these findings, it is suggested that teachers can help Thai learners to acquire the target language skills in a number of ways, such as encouraging them to overcome their inhibitions, designing tasks and activities in an innovative way, and supporting them to use more English inside and outside classroom. Moreover, Thai learners should be provided with classroom activities in which they have an opportunity to practice speaking skills. Taking risk is another dimension that teachers should encourage students to employ in teaching English speaking.

Focusing on improving teaching speaking skills, it should be noted that every student should have a chance to speak in an English class since the results of this study demonstrated that classroom activities might not encourage them to speak English. Moreover, most of them agreed that class hours for speaking English were not appropriate. To solve these problems, innovation and initiatives that can encourage the whole class to have an opportunity to create the real language, both by speaking to the teacher individually and by speaking to their peers, using learning activities such as group work, jigsaws, role plays and group discussion. Given the class size of a language classroom in Thailand which is normally about 45 students, this critical issue is an important factor that should be also taken into account. Ideally, students should have plenty of opportunity to personalize the topic and share their own ideas and experiences.

In addition, the results from the interviews indicated that most of the participants were not sure whether the instructional media used in the classroom were enough and efficient. It is possibly due to the fact that some teachers employ inadequate instructional media in class, which students could not evaluate the use of such instructional media. Thus, it is suggested that using instructional media in class should be more substantiated. For instance, in a speaking and listening class, teachers should encourage students to expose to authentic English as much as possible by using tape recordings, video tapes, listening via the internet, video clips and role plays.

Likewise, some of the participants revealed that textbooks used in English speaking courses might not be good and interesting. At this juncture, it was found that some topics were not realistic, and students could not use them in real life. One possible reason is that some contents in the textbooks were too easy, while others might be too difficult for them to tackle. Thus, to increase students' interests,

although textbooks have been made available, the contents or the topics covered in the textbooks need to be carefully selected. Teachers should connect the topics in the materials to what students have already known in terms of their language skills, personal lives, and real world situations. As suggested by Kanoksilapatham (2007), decisions need to be made on which commercial textbooks are to be adopted and which aspects of the textbooks are to be adapted, explored, and expanded in response to the teachers' needs and the learners' interests.

As for the attitudes toward English teachers, it was found that the majority of the participants were satisfied with their English teachers' teaching techniques and characteristics. Taken together, most of the participants reported high motivation in learning English and good attitudes towards the English language. It is possible that their teachers really encouraged them, knowing how to increase motivation. Also, they might have a good relationship with their students, and their help created positive attitudes and motivation in student, which is crucial for effective and successful teaching English speaking. Bearing this in mind, English teachers should develop themselves in order to provide a model of speaking and learning English for their students. Taken together, the teachers should take responsibilities for devising strategies to help them speak English effectively to meet the international demands.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the effect of the five variables on Thai learners' development of oral proficiency. Although researchers and teacher educators have made great efforts and have called for more attention to the importance of English speaking instruction in English classes in Thailand, based on the mean score of each factor explored in this study, Thai students had some inhibitions and classroom management particularly textbook and class hours for speaking English should be taken into account to improve English speaking instruction. The results clearly shed lights onto some insightful pedagogical significance, contributing to a better understanding of the roles of variables and barriers which have influences in mastering English speaking of Thai learners. However, given the scope of this study, this study remains to be addressed and investigated by further studies. The data elicited from the questionnaire are somewhat limited, focusing on the small number of variables. Future research should also include many more salient individual difference factors such as learning anxiety and length of time being studied. Moreover, future research should be replicated with more participants, and the data should be elicited from thinking aloud protocal, diaries and interviews. This will provide additional insights and justifications with regard to other factors that hinder their oral proficiency and how to improve students' speaking skills.

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