

Why Some Thai Students Cannot Speak English Fluently?

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Abstract

Most Thai students cannot speak English fluently even though they have been learning English from elementary school. A lot of students know grammar and vocabulary well, but they still cannot speak English and this will have an effect on their career in the future. There are two main objectives for this research: 1) to learn from the students what they would recommend and gain fluency in speaking English, and 2) to know the real problem and find out the way to solve that problem of their English-speaking skills. Samples were used as Thai students for 200 students, and the researcher selected 83 male students and 117 female students from many Universities and different majors from first year until fourth year students. The data was collected through a questionnaire having alternate items. The main finding of study was: most Thai students of the 200 students that did a questionnaire can speak English and understand when other people are speaking English with them. Thai students can communicate in English, but not perfect and fluently at all, and they still need to improve in terms of vocabulary and spelling in English. Since applying to university learning English as a subject is not a major concern (learning with a Thai professor in Thai) that is why Thai students cannot speak English fluently. Although the teachers and students are equally responsible for the poor speaking ability, yet the teachers are more responsible by having the professional knowledge and skills. To improve the speaking ability, more stress needs to be placed on the quality of books at the basic level and professors to teach the subject of English.

Keywords: *Thai students and English language, speaking English skill, Thai students cannot speak English, learning English in Thailand*

1. Introduction

English is a dominant language being an international language and its importance cannot be denied and therefore it is spoken everywhere in the world, and to learn English is actually very complex. There are four skills in English learning such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Most people in many countries speak English for communicating with people. According to many Thai students, they have been learning the English language for many years since elementary school until university, but they still cannot speak English fluently. Based on the fact that some Thai students may hate English because there are many things to remember for example past, present, and future and all of them use different grammar to speak out, so a lot of students know how important the English language is, but they cannot speak English fluently even though they have been learning English for many years. It will be a problem in the future to apply a job. It is a good opportunity for people who have good English skills, as there are more jobs available in the future and easier to apply than those who cannot speak English. The purpose of this research is to suggest students who are not fluent in English speaking and know the real problem and find a way to solve the problem of their English-speaking skills. This research will be conducted by questionnaire from Thai students in a university. Then find out the way to improve the problem.

To speak English fluently there must be a chance to practice even in terms of vocabulary and opportunity. They also believe that anyone could speak English, when given the time to practice, as they believe about English Language self-perception to Thai students (Wang, & Rajprasit, 2015). Not only vocabulary, but the opportunity to practice, including pronunciation and improving English stress by using an e-learning program to improve speaking skills. The first-year student at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University did a pre-test then did a post-test after 4 weeks. It was found that the student improves their pronunciation after they used the e-learning program (Yangklang, 2013). Moreover, there are three main factors that have influence on the development in English pronunciation skills. First, the main factors are instructors, students, and a teaching method. Second, the influential factors are duration and frequency of learning and teaching. Last, the environmental supportive factors are the equipment from all of the tests. All of them are the factors which influence English pronunciation skills in primary students to help them to be good at English speaking (Sriudomkij, & Sopirak, 2013). The varieties of English consonants pronunciation

among English undergraduate students (2016) is a big problem for Thai student to speak English fluently, in terms of consonant phonemes. On the other hand, Thai upper secondary school students believe in different education contexts about language learning (Aparirach & Vibuphol, 2015). When comparing English program students and Thai program students, the English program students have more exposure to English and found to have more facilitative belief about language learning than those in a regular program who have limited exposure to English. They also believed that they could find online learning resources for self – practice. They tended to focus on the mastery of speaking skills because they believed it could lead to career opportunities in the future for those who have English speaking skills.

At present, English communication has become an international mess, especially in the workplace for Thai engineering students (Sarada, 2013). There are four main levels of English oral communication competency: pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and interaction competency. It found that there are miss pronunciations of land also they fail to choose correct words to describe the accidents in construction sites. The difficulties of fluency areas mostly found in forms of speech rate, broker words and refusing to speak English. For interaction, they still use their native language to maintain a conversation. Thai engineering students suggest that there should be a revision of all factors relate to the teaching and learning. From Sriarunrasmee, Techataweewan, and Mebusaya (2015), they studied about the effect to developing communication skills of students at Srinakharinwirot University. By collected data from two groups of students consisting of self-directed learning and communication skills test. Compared between students who learn in blended classes by study via the internet, individual, and the face-to-face learning course. The other group learned in normal classes. It was found that the student had higher scores in self- directed learning communication skills than those students taught in a normal classroom.

2. Objectives

As Thai students have been learning English for many years since elementary school, but they cannot speak English fluently. English language is very important nowadays, but those who do not have language skills will find it hard to find a job in the future. There are two main objectives for this research:

1. To learn from the students what they would recommend and gain fluency in speaking English
2. To know the real problem and find out the way to solve the problem of their English-speaking skills

3. Materials and Methods

This research used questionnaire quantitative for collecting data from 200 Thai students from many universities in differences majors and the questionnaires were conducted from students 17-23 years old from first year until fourth year. The sample of 200 students were selected from an online questionnaire and the researcher provided a link on social media (to conduct the questionnaire). The questionnaire provides three parts: for part one the question focusses on the problem of speaking English and the cause why Thai students cannot speak fluently, by providing the answer in terms of: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Then the researcher will select the biggest problem from part one to find out the way of that problem. In part two, the question asks about how much they can understand, which part of English still is a problem, and what they prefer in English as a subject. Last, the question about vocabulary. Then, the researcher collected the whole information and summary to find out the best solution and solve the problem that they got.

4. Result and Discussion

From the result data that was gathered through offline questionnaires and online questionnaires, the researchers divided the question in three parts including part one, the reason English is a problem toward Thai students. The second part is about the way of improving English skills from Thai student perspective and the last part which emphasizes on vocabulary problems of Thai students that important for Thai student in order to improve English skills. The result shows descriptive data and pie-chart data that was gathered online and offline channels that are shown in information descriptive statistics.

Options	Number of students respond the question from 1-15															Total%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	
Strongly Agree (5)	20	29	26	15	41	53	38	27	42	35	53	43	39	42	16	17.30
Agree (4)	39	50	49	45	65	70	65	42	56	47	66	55	58	54	24	26.17
Not Sure (3)	48	27	40	26	22	31	30	30	37	35	23	30	44	36	16	15.83
Disagree (2)	57	60	58	74	46	32	40	63	43	52	40	45	36	41	91	25.93
Strongly Disagree (1)	36	34	27	40	26	14	26	38	22	31	18	24	23	27	53	14.63

Table 1 Graph showing the percentage of question part one where the researcher takes out the highest problem for Thai students who cannot speak English fluently and find out the way to solve the problem

From Table 1 the researcher chooses the most students who agree with and the highest percentage of the question that would be a problem for Thai students. It shows that the biggest problem is they do not know enough vocabulary by 86 students agree with and 70%. Next, a cause from they do not know how to make a complete sentence in English by 73 students and 66%. Also, they do not have a chance to speak or practice English speaking by 72 students and 65%, same as they do not understand what other people say that is why they cannot speak English by 74 students and 65%.



Figure 1 The graph show how often the student speak English

From the graph “sometimes” is the highest answer from 200 students, even speak English in the class, speak with foreigner, also speaking English in a week. The student has less time or a chance to speak English.

From other questions in part two they also need more activities and international professor to teach in university. Most students do not understand at all of talking in English, some sentences they can understand but not whole conversations. It means not only the problem that was found in part one, but listening would be a big problem to make them being able to speak English as well.

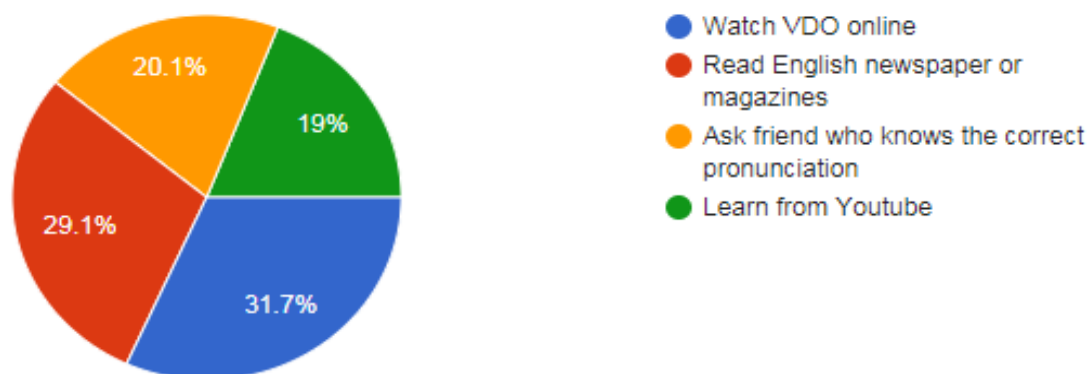


Figure 2 The way to improve English skill of Thai student's perspective from outside their classroom

From the Figure 2, the researcher found that the way to improve English skills of Thai student's perspective from outside of their classroom, as they thought that the best way to improve English skills was to improve from watching videos online which got 31.7% from the data. Secondly the perspective of Thai students' is they thought they have to read English newspapers or magazines to improve English which is 29.1%. Third asking a friend who knows the correct pronunciation is the next one from Thai's perspective that they thought it's the way to improve which got 20.1%, and the last one is learn from YouTube in social media is the last way to improve English skill that got 19% respectively.

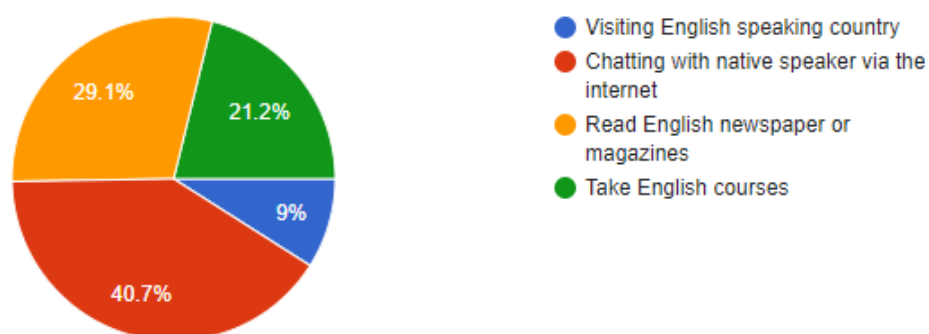


Figure 3 Another way to improve English language skill from Thai's perspective

From Figure 3, the result of another way of improve English skills of Thai's student from their perspective from these aspects. The largest aspect that they thought of another way to improve English is chatting with native speakers via the internet which got 40.7%. Secondly, they thought reading English newspapers or magazines is the next one from Thai student's perspective which got 29.1%. The next one, is take English courses and visiting English speaking countries which got 21.2% and 9 % respectively.

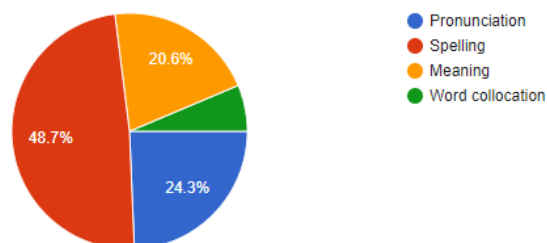


Figure 4 The pie chart data shown the part of vocabulary

Other causes that would be a problem of why some Thai students cannot speak English is partly because of vocabulary, as most of them have a difficulty in spelling (nearly 50%). The second is pronunciation by 24.3%, then a problem of meaning by 20.6%. And the last one is word collocation by 6.4%.

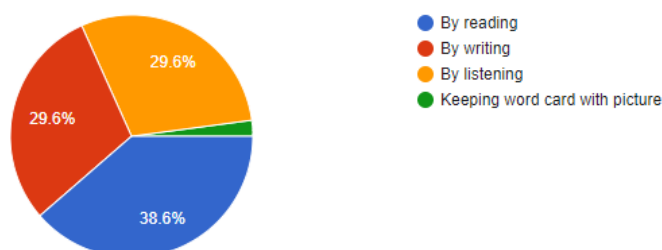


Figure 5 The pie chart showing the way Thai students improve their English vocabulary

The way that they improve their English skill is by reading such as a newspaper, cartoon, and a book that they like by 38.6%. For writing and listening are the same (29.6%) that they learn to improve. Lastly, keeping word cards with pictures was only 2.2%. All of the ways in the pie chart can improve English skills in many parts such as grammar, vocabulary, and accent.

This paper obtains the different age, major, and gender, conducted from 200 students. The responses from each person who did the question was divided into two groups by male 83 persons or 41.5%, and female 117 persons or 58.5%, and between the age of 17-20 and 21-23 years old. The education level was in third year students by 40%, 29% in fourth year, 20.5% in second year, and first year was 10.5%. This research was conducted in many universities and several majors and the researcher took out only the highest percentage from the result as the highest percentage was in International Business (IB), Geo information system (GEO), and International relations development (IRD) students. The result of this research about how to improve English speaking skills and to know the real problem and find out the way to solve the problem of their English-speaking skills. Part one of the questions is to reply whether they strongly agree (5), agree (4), not sure (3), disagree (2), and strongly agree (1). The researcher took only the high percentage of these statements that would be a real problem for them and find out the solution. The total of part one found that most of students do not understand what others say, so they cannot speak English with them by 65 persons or 26.17% agree with this statement. At the same time students agree that they do not have a chance to speak English by 65% and also 70 people agree that they do not know enough vocabulary. The other problem is they do not know how to make a complete sentence in English and 66 students agree with this statement. A way to resolved these problems is participating in more English activities such as English camp, watch a video or anything in English with subtitles and write down the word and meaning in a notebook, but the important one is to make a student speak English with a new word, then they must try to speak out that word they never used before. Next, it is quite difficult to have a chance to speak English in a Thai University even in an international course, but the way to solve this problem could to not allow Thai instructors not teach English subjects in university. The solution is to make a complete sentence, first would be to try to understand grammar (past, present, and future, etc.). Second is

to learn from a book by reading, as they will remember that sentence and try to speak it. Such as watching the news from BBC or CNN will be help a lot with English. Parts 2-3, the question provides how often students speak English in a classroom with foreigner in a week. Overall these questions were sometimes that they speak English. A lot of students prefer more activities and international professors help their English skills. And for 43.9% they cannot understand what others say and they don't know how to speak English by 41.8%. In addition, vocabulary is very important to make a sentence in English. These results tell several problems for why Thai students cannot speak English fluently after that they find out a solution to solve these problems. Moreover, listening is a problem to speak English, as it is not clear and do not understand. The best way is they have to listen a lot of English by movies and music, and avoid to watch or listen in Thai language. Even though, students have to pay attention and learn a lot outside of the classroom, but the students' environment and professor also have to influence to make students speak English perfectly.

5. Conclusions

As the result of the questionnaire tells both problems and suggestions. Based on the objective to improve and to know the real problem and find out the way to solve the problem of their English-speaking skills for students who cannot speak English fluently, most students need more international professors to teach English subjects and more activities in the classroom to practice English skills. Thai students need more skills or techniques to make a sentence in English. On the other hand, they do not have a chance to speak English and don't know enough vocabulary to communicate with each other, as only learning in a classroom is not enough to help a student. Maybe studying by themselves such as learning from a movie or reading a newspaper everyday will improve in terms of vocabulary and making English sentences even if they don't understand the word. Another way is taking English courses in some English-speaking countries. Overall, universities and professors have most effect on students, so there should be more activities to practice English and learn from themselves is the best way to succeed in the development of English skills. In addition, even if they know how to improve and solve a problem the important thing is to improve English skills by trying to speak out a new word and sentence, and do not be shy to speak even if the grammar is wrong.

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