

Relationship Between English-Speaking Ability and Anxiety of Undergraduate Students: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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Abstracts

This cross-sectional study aimed to examine the relationship between English-speaking ability and anxiety of undergraduate students. A total of 395 undergraduate students' in Thai University were selected using a multi-stage sampling method and the data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Results showed that the English-speaking ability of undergraduate students was at the moderate level (\bar{x} = 2.946, S.D. = .419), anxiety of undergraduate students was at the moderate level (\bar{x} = 2.955, S.D. = .415) and these measures were negatively correlated between English-speaking ability and the levels of undergraduate students' at a level of significance of .001 (r = -.225).

Keywords: Anxiety, English speaking ability, Undergraduate Students.

Introduction

Generally, anxiety refers to unpleasant sensations that attack human emotions and psychology leading to negative assumptions, anxiety, nervousness, and low self-confidence¹. Anxiety is often identified in the field of educational research² as a common and recognized phenomenon occurring in English language learning classrooms.

English is the most prevalent language in the world either as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) making it the global international language³. English proficiency is normally measured in terms of four language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing⁴. Among these skills, speaking English could be the most challenging for regular EFL learners⁵.

University students are considered essential human resources for national development in the future⁶⁻⁹. In

addition, English learners tend to be less cooperative in answering questions or participating in activities. Santikarn¹⁰ stated that being nervous and embarrassed to attend class activities leads to anxiety about making mistakes. It is a major barrier to learning languages and contributing to stress, shyness, and anxiety in language learning¹¹⁻¹². In other words, anxiety could detrimentally affect the English language learning ability of students¹³⁻¹⁴.

English is recognized as being instrumental for communication across the borders of students¹⁵. Undergraduate students are expected to learn and improve English skills required for their current study and future career as professionals or scientific researchers¹⁶. However, the main obstacle to studying English in Thailand is mostly due to shame and fear of committing grammar or pronunciation mistakes which may lead to anxiety¹⁷⁻¹⁸. For these reasons, the purpose of this cross-sectional study was to examine the relationship between English-speaking ability and anxiety of undergraduate students. The results of this study could be used to develop interventions aiming to decrease the anxiety levels due to low English-speaking ability and consequently improve the self-confidence and psychological health of undergraduate students.

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Method

In this study, a cross-sectional method was used to examine the English-speaking ability and anxiety of undergraduate students' levels and to examine the relationship between English-speaking ability and anxiety of undergraduate students.

Setting and Sample: This study was conducted at Thai university in the second semester of the academic year, March- May 2020. Based on Krejcie, Morgan ¹⁹ table for determining the sample size which resulted in a sample size of 395 participants.

Research Instruments: There were three instruments used in this study including: 1) anxiety measurement; using the method developed by Jampawal²⁰ which consisted of 19 items and the internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.95, 2) English-speaking ability; consisted of 28 items with internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.72, and 3) demographic data consisted of sex, age, academic year, and faculty or college.

Data Collection: After explaining the purpose and processes of our study, we asked permission from the participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria and we also informed them that participation or non-participation would not affect their grades. We used a convenience sampling of eligible undergraduate students who are willing to participate in the study. Upon signing the consent form, each student completed the questionnaires in around 10-15 minutes.

Data Analysis: The researchers used descriptive statistics to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine correlations of English-speaking ability and anxiety variables at a level of significance of 0.05. All data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.

Result

As shown in Table 1, majority of the participants were female, 60.0%, most of participants age was 21 years, 35.2%, and the majority of academic year was fourth year (52.4%) and the largest percentage of participants were the students in the College of Politics and Governance (32.0%).

Table 1 Characteristics of participants (n = 395)

Demographics data	N	%
Sex		
Male	158	40.0
Female	237	60.0
Age (Year)		
18	26	6.6
19	42	10.6
20	62	15.7
21	139	35.2
>21	126	31.9
Academic Year		
1	47	11.9
2	61	15.4
3	80	20.3
4	207	52.4
Faculty/College		
College of Politics and Governance	127	32.0
Faculty of Laws	88	22.0
Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts	32	8.4
Faculty of Cultural Sciences	11	3.0
Faculty of Engineering	49	12.4
Faculty of Science	40	10.1
Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies	14	3.5
Faculty of Public Health	19	4.8
Faculty of Nursing	7	1.8
Faculty of Pharmacy	8	2.0

Based on table 2, the overall English-speaking ability of undergraduate students based on four criteria was of moderate level $2.946 \pm .419$ (Mean \pm SD). Meanwhile, table 3 shows that most students experienced moderate level anxiety (\bar{x} = 2.955, S.D. = .415).

Table 2: English-Speaking Ability levels of undergraduate students (n=395)

English-Speaking Ability	\bar{X}	S.D.	Levels
Language or grammatical proficiency ability	3.013	.556	Moderate
Social linguistic ability	2.712	.552	Moderate
Pronunciation ability	2.835	.602	Moderate
Vocabulary ability	3.225	.767	Moderate
Overall	2.946	.419	Moderate

Table 3 Overall of anxiety level (n=395)

Anxiety level	\bar{X}	S.D.	Category
Overall of anxiety level	2.955	.415	Moderate

Table 4: The relationship between English-Speaking Ability and anxiety level of undergraduate students (n=395)

English-Speaking Ability	Anxiety (r)	p-value
Language or grammatical proficiency ability	.212***	<.001
Social linguistic ability	-.214***	<.001
Pronunciation ability	-.091***	<.001
Vocabulary ability	-.132***	<.001
Overall	-.225***	<.001

Based on table 4, we found that language or grammatical proficiency ability ($r = .212$), social linguistic ability ($r = -.214$), pronunciation ability ($r = -.091$), and vocabulary ability ($r = -.132$) had a statistically significant relationship via Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis ($p\text{-value} < .001$).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between English-speaking ability and anxiety of undergraduate students. Results indicated that English-speaking ability of undergraduate students was moderate level ($\bar{x} = 2.946$, S.D. = .419) which could be due to their inadequate knowledge of English language, insufficient amount of vocabulary, and a lack of English communicative skills in real world communication. The findings are consistent with that of Pongpanich²¹ who found that the problems in English-speaking ability of students consisted of: 1) lack of self-confidence and; 2) lack of ability to express critical thinking and giving a logical reason. In addition, these results also closely corroborate with that of Arunsuksawang²² who found that the ability to use English in grade 12 students was moderate level.

The results also showed that the anxiety level of students was moderate ($\bar{x} = 2.955$, S.D. = .415). In fact, Ritthirat²³ studied 50 third-year students from five faculties at a Thai university and the researcher found that the oral proficiency of the nursing, engineering, and accounting students needed to be improved. The researcher also found that there was a significant relationship between oral proficiency and certain

problems such as anxiety when speaking English, lack of vocabulary knowledge, lack of time to speaking practice, dislike to speaking English in class, and having to think in Thai before speaking English²⁴. In addition, these results also closely corroborate with that of Chaiparn et al.,¹⁷ and Kammungkun et al.,¹⁸ who found that the students had moderate anxiety in speaking English.

In terms of the relationship between English speaking ability and anxiety level of undergraduate students, the researchers found a negative correlation ($r = -.225$) suggesting that students with poor English ability experience more anxiety. The findings are consistent with that of Ritthirat and Chiramanee²⁴ who found that the main problems and obstacles of Thai university students were anxiety and fairness when speaking English. In the study of Kitano²⁵ on 212 students enrolled in Japanese language course in the United States, they found that anxiety was higher for students who perceived that their English-speaking ability is lower than that of classmates and native speakers.

Conclusion

On the basis of our research, anxiety is an issue that is affecting lots of students and is certainly affecting English-speaking ability of students. Therefore, we provide evidence that English-speaking ability is linked to anxiety in the majority of the undergraduate students. Moreover, we found that the levels of anxiety in the English-speaking of undergraduate students was at a moderate level. This suggests that universities, teachers, and other health care providers should promote and encourage activities that inspire students to be more productive through their eager to research, practice, and improve their speaking ability.

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