

Components of development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze the components of development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people. It consisted of 2 parts. The first part was a qualitative research consisting of in-depth interviews with 8 experts on the teaching of English and assessment. The second part was a quantitative research to study the components of development the English communicative proficiency of Thai people. The sample size of 384 were selected among Thais workers in Bangkok. The statistical tool used to analyze the data was Factor Analysis.

The research results showed that the English communicative proficiency development came from 3 main sources: learning management, the learner, and extra-curricular activities concerning the society and the environment, involving 50 attributes.

The Results from Factor Analysis on the 50 attributes using Principle Component Analysis and Orthogonal Rotation with Varimax method showed that the attributes could be entered into 5 components, with each component having Eigen values of greater than 1.0 and the Significant Level test produced the significance level of .01. The 5 components were 1) creation of atmosphere for communication in English in various settings 2) learning management strategies of higher institutions 3) English skills practice provided by higher learning institutions 4) learners' engagement and 5) learners' positive attitude. Explanation by these 5 components accounted for 62.251% of variance.

Keywords: Development of English proficiency of Thai people, English communicative proficiency, English skills for communication

Background of the study

Thailand is a country where English is used as a foreign language. However, there is still a great need for developing English communication skills among Thai young people to have the same level of English proficiency as those in other countries, to urgently prepare them for competition, respond to the policy of improving the quality of Thai education (Puncreobutr et al., 2017), as well as to meet the expectation of belonging to the ASEAN community where English is the medium of communication (Puncreobutr, 2014).

There has been a systematic development of the quality of education in Thailand, especially in developing English communication skills for younger people or Thai people of the new generation. In addition, there have been a reform of learning management system and administration of tests of learning outcomes of various subject groups, such as the English subject group by the National Institute of Education Testing Service (Arunsuksawang and Sungrugsu, 2015). In a 2017, the survey on English proficiencies for communications results by a Swedish firm, Education First (EF) showed Thailand's English proficiency (listening, speaking, reading and writing) was ranked 83 of the 90 countries surveyed and ranked 15 of 20 Asian countries. Although these rankings were not so favorable, there has been some improvement (Pomin and Srinonyang, 2020).

Some Higher Education institutions are improving their students' English communicative proficiency in the 21st century by creating language projects for which the learner can choose their own appropriate activities. This is for them to keep pace with the world in the 21st century. For example, in exchanging information among themselves in the real world and virtually on social media, learners have alternatives from which they can use appropriate forms of language. Thus, they are exposed to an environment for a positive and meaningful learning experience of English (Byram (2012) and Batang (2014)).

With regard to proficiency development, some higher education institutions focus on four areas: language structure or grammatical competence, appropriate use of language in context or sociolinguistic competence, relationship of the text or discourse competence, and the use of strategies for meaningful communication or strategic competence (Widdowson (1978), Canale & Swain (1980), Savignon (1983) and Herrera & Murry (2005)).

Some higher education institutions focus on 3 key factors leading to teaching effectiveness. They are (1) teaching factor, for example teacher's teaching behavior, learner's learning strategy, (2) learner factor such as attitude toward learning, motivation for achievement, and (3) learning environment factor (Jakobovits (1971) and Walberg (1989)).

However, graduates from various higher education institutions must apply their knowledge, understanding and learning experience of English to communicate with people in the same organization or those in other organizations, to work in the same society, in the context of Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand that leads to English communicative proficiency of Thai people as a whole (Puncreobutr et al., 2017).

Therefore, in order to accelerate development of the English communicative proficiency of Thai people, a study should be done on how those Thais successfully developed their English communicative proficiency. Components leading to successful development of English communicative proficiency of Thai graduates will be analyzed so that they may be shared or used as common guidelines for all higher education institutions. Results will also be beneficial to faculty members and faculties for curriculum development planning of higher education institutions in the face of the changing society, and in preparation for the changing world as well as competition at the international level.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the components of development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people.

Research methodology

This is a mixed method research consisting of qualitative research and quantitative research. Two steps were involved in the data collection. Details are as follows:

1. The investigation on the development of Thai people's English communicative proficiency.

The method used in the first step was a qualitative study. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts on different aspects of English language teaching. Three were experts in English language teaching at universities; two were English language teaching experts in an English language development center; two were English language skills assessment experts from an internationally recognized English language testing center, and one expert from an English language testing agency. Data from the in-depth interviews were triangulated and analyzed with Content Analysis from which the results were used in the next step of study.

2. The analysis of the components of English communicative proficiency development of Thai people

The second step was a quantitative study. The Sample population in the study was 100,000 Thai people, aged 20-30 years old, working in organizations or agencies in Bangkok with more than 50 employees each. The Sample group in this study consisted of 384 people, randomly selected from the population of 100,000 by using the Systematic Random Sampling method.

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 50 questions on the development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people which were obtained by step 1 above. After the initial pool of questionnaire items were written, qualified experts reviewed the items. It was found that the index of consistency (IOC) was between 0.65-1.00.

A pilot test of the questionnaire was carried out with 30 people who were not in the sample group of the study. It was found that the questionnaire had the discriminatory power of 0.67-0.89 and the reliability of 0.92. The questionnaire was then used to collect data directly with the sample group. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed by means of exploratory component analysis.

Data validation

The following statistics were used for data validation: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) Index; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Principal Component Analysis, and Orthogonal Rotation by Varimax Method.

Data collection was done from March to September 2019.

Findings of study

1. The investigation on the development of Thai people's English communicative proficiency

Results from in-depth interviews with 10 English language teaching experts identified 3 main sources of Thai people's development of their English communicative proficiency, namely,

- 1) Learning management at undergraduate level by higher education institutions
- 2) Learner factor during studying and after graduation
- 3) Extra-curricular activities, society and environment of higher institutions

Further analysis showed that each main source consisted of several attributes: 20 for learning management, 15 for learner factor, and 15 for extra-curricular activities, society and environment of higher

learning institutions. Altogether there were 50 attributes which would be used for further analysis in the next step.

2. The analysis of components of English communicative proficiency development of Thai people

2.1 Validation of correlation matrix between the variables used in the study

Results of the validation of the correlation matrix among the 50 attributes showed that the KMO (Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure of sampling adequacy) value was 0.955, indicating that all 50 attributes were valid at a very high level.

Results of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to test the identity matrix had a chi-square value of 13,986.057, statistically significant at the .01 level, indicating that all 50 attributes were interrelated and valid for further component analysis.

2.2 Analysis of component

2.2.1 First analysis of component

Results of the first analysis of attributes with principle component analysis found that the communality of all 50 attributes was between .401-.842. Being highly interrelated, they seemed to be suitable for component analysis.

Analysis of the orthogonal rotation of the attributes by the Varimax Method resulted in a total of 6 components. Some of them were unclear with 3 attributes carrying a high weight in more than 2 components or Factor Loading was less than 0.30 in each component.

That is each attribute had a specific component weight and the component had a low deviation.

Therefore, these 3 attributes were discarded and another analysis was to be made.

2.2.2 Second analysis of components

The second analysis of components was to analyze the remaining 47 attributes using the same method as the one in the first analysis.

Results from the principle component analysis method showed that the communality of 34 attributes was between .406-.843. Being highly interrelated, they could be classified into any of the components.

The orthogonal rotation analysis by Varimax method yielded a total of 5 components. Each component had Eigen Values of greater than 1.0, consisting of 3 or more attributes, with the weight factor of each attribute exceeding 0.30, statistically significant at 0.01 level. The total weight of all 5 components could explain the variance of the attributes 62.251%.

Based on the results of analysis of each component, a name was given to each component together with its attributes. There were 5 components; details of each component are as follows:

Component 1

Component 1 consisted of 16 attributes, 15 of which were found in extra-curricular activities factor, society and environment, and 1 found in learner factor. The weight of component was .719-.906. The attributes belonging to this component were 1) No use of Thai in the institution 2) Extra-curricular activities to be conducted in English 3) Announcements or information notices printed in English 4) Speech contests in English

5) Humorous speech contests in English 6) Organizing activities for excellent English novel readers 7) Best English article writing activities 8) Theatrical performance contests in English

9) Special lectures in English given by invited international speakers 10) Presentations in international webinar 11) Being a guide for foreigners 12) Proposing CSR projects to foreign companies 13) Organizing a learning community of English communication skills 14) Internship at an international organization 15) Presentation of a portfolio in English 16) Use of social media in communication with international friends

Taking into consideration the characteristics of each attribute, this component could be named component of creation of atmosphere for communication in English in various settings. A weight value of all attributes in this component was 12.796, and the variance of all attributes accounted for 27.225% of the 5 components.

Component 2

Component 2 consisted of 19 attributes, 14 of which were concerned with learning management, and 5 with learner factor. The weight of component was .577-.706 and the attributes classified into this component were 1) Having a mentor student to build learner's confidence in preparation for classes 2) Organizing learning activities on memory strategies for the learner 3) Organizing learning activities on knowledge strategies for the learner 4) Organizing learning activities on analytical thinking strategies for the learner 5) Organizing learning activities on creative thinking strategies for the learner 6) Organizing learning activities on application strategies for the learner 7) Organizing learning activities on problem-solving strategies for the learner 8) Creating settings for using English in everyday life for the learner 9) Using teaching materials appropriate to the learner's context 10) Using various technologies/applications in learning management 11) Organizing study visits to various places where English is used 12) The learner reads English books outside the syllabus in the scheduled hours 13) Learner's daily routines with English such as watching news or movies in

English, listening to music in English 14) Learners making formal and informal notes in English 15) Learners use English books/textbooks for study 16) Learners enjoying using English while studying

Based on characteristics of each attribute, this component could be named component of learning management strategies of higher education institutions. A weight value of all attributes in this component was 9.362 and the variance of all attributes accounted for 19.918% of 5 components.

Component 3

The third component consisted of 5 attributes related to the learner factor, with a weight of .616-.729. The attributes in this component were: 1) The learner practiced active listening worksheets and exercises 2) The learner practiced active speaking worksheets and exercises 3) The learner practiced active reading worksheets and exercises 4) The learner practiced active writing worksheets and exercises 5) The learner practiced active TOEIC/TOEFL tests

Taking into account characteristics of each attribute, this component could be called component of higher learning institution's English skills practice. The weight of all attributes was 2.913 and the variance accounted for 6.199% of the 5 components.

Component 4

The fourth component consisted of 3 attributes involving learning management, with a weight of .680-.742. The attributes were as follows: 1) Organizing Task-Based learning activities 2) Organizing Problem-Based learning activities 3) Organizing Project-Based learning activities

As far as each attribute was concerned, this component could be called component of learners' Engagement, with a weight of 2.236, and the variance accounted for 4.758% of the 5 components.

Component 5

Component 5 consisted of 4 attributes related to the learner, with a weight of 0.369-0.653. The variables in this component were 1) Having a clear objective of English skills development 2) Trying to use English without fear 3) Enthusiasm in using English in communication with foreigners 4) Determined to develop communication skills in English every day on a regular basis.

Considering the characteristics of each attribute, this component could appropriately be called component of the learner's positive attitude. A weight of all attributes was 1.951 and the variance accounted for 4.150% of the 5 components.

Results of the overall component analysis can be summarized as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Component analysis of English communicative proficiency development of Thai people

Component	Eigen Values	% of Variance	Name of component
1	12.796	27.225	Creation of atmosphere for communication in English in various settings
2	9.362	19.918	Learning management strategies of higher education institutions
3	2.913	6.199	English skills practice of higher education institutions
4	2.236	4.758	Learners' Engagement
5	1.951	4.150	Learners' positive attitude

Data in Table 1 shows that the development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people consisted of 5 components with an Eigen value of higher than 1, and the variance accounting for 62.251%.

Summary of the study

1. The investigation on the development of English communicative proficiency of Thai people

The study found that the respondents developed their English communicative proficiency both during their previous undergraduate study and after graduation.

The development from undergraduate learning management accounted for 20 attributes, from during their studies and after graduation accounting for 15 attributes, and from extra-curricular activities, society and the environment, accounting for 15 attributes, totaling 50 attributes.

2. The analysis of the components of English communicative proficiency development of Thai people

Analysis of the components done by principle component analysis and orthogonal rotation with Varimax method found that there were 5 components, namely 1) Creation of atmosphere for communication in English in various settings 2) Learning management strategies of higher education institutions 3) English skills practice of higher education institutions 4) Learners' engagement 5) Learners' positive attitude

All these 5 components were able to explain the variance of the attributes 62.251%.

2.1 Component of creation of atmosphere for communication in English in various settings resulted from 15 attributes related to extra-curricular activities, society and environment, and 1 variable found in the learner factor, totaling 16 attributes. The component weight was 0.719-0.906.

2.2 Components of learning management strategies of higher learning institutions resulted from 14 attributes related to learning management, and 5 attributes related to the learner factor, totaling 19 attributes, with a component weight of 0.577-0.706.

2.3 Component of English skills practice provided by higher learning institutions resulted from 5 attributes concerned with the learner, with a component weight of 0.616-0.729.

2.4 Component of learners' engagement resulted from 3 attributes involving learning management, with a component weight of 0.680-0.742.

2.5 Component of learners' positive attitude resulted from 4 attributes related to learner factor, with a component weight of 0.369-0.653.

Suggestions

Suggestions for application of the research results

Research results show that the development of English communicative proficiency of Thai samples was a result of learning in higher education institutions and learning after graduation. In particular, many attributes were involved while they were learning in higher education institutions. Thus, institutions should focus on the development of learning management process, learner development during their study and after graduation as well as development of extra-curricular activities. This is to create an environment for a positive learning experience, which is in accordance with the changing world and Thai society. In addition, research results have found 5 components of development of English communicative proficiency of Thai samples. They are component of creation of atmosphere for English communication in various settings, component of learning management strategies of higher learning institutions, component of English language skills practice provided by the higher learning institutions, component of learners' engagement, and component of learners' positive attitude. The findings should be relevant to administrators of higher learning institutions, deans, and curriculum administrators of English for communication to take them into consideration when they plan or revising a study program.

Suggestions for further research

From the study of the components of development of the English communicative proficiency of Thai people was able to explain the variance of the variables at 62.251% which was at a high level.

There should be a further study, a cross-sectional study, on the development of the English communicative proficiency of Thai people every 2-3 years. This is to keep track of development trends and to see Thailand's ranking of the English proficiency when compared to other countries and regions in surveys done by international organizations.

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