



**ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS
AMONG THAI PRE-ENGINEERING STUDENTS**

BY

MS. SUKANYA WATTANAWONG

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2020
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ENTITLED

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG THAI PRE-
ENGINEERING STUDENTS

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Teaching

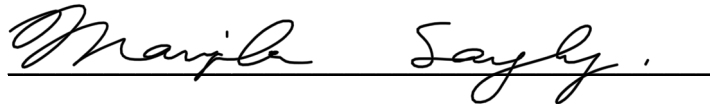
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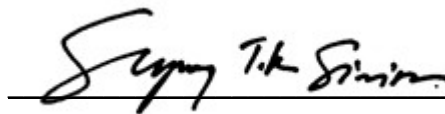
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes towards speaking skills of pre-engineering students in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants were 81 students. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to collect data. The findings showed that the students have positive attitudes towards speaking skills and saw the importance of English speaking skills for their future, both academically and professionally. In addition, this study revealed that the challenges they face in language classroom are their lack of confidence, unfamiliar topics, and students' own unpreparedness when performing a speaking task. Furthermore, students suggested class presentations, collaborative group work, and class discussions as their preferred speaking activities.

Keywords: English speaking skills, Attitudes, Pre-engineering students

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Ms. Sukanya Wattanawong

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the 21st century, globalization allows a flow of labor in many parts of the world and offers countless opportunities in workforce. English, which is considered the most widespread language in the world, is used not only in education but also in communication of information, business, and professions. It serves as a gateway to knowledge, a means of communication amongst foreign researchers, and a neutral language in a corporate world (Coleman, 2010).

In the field of engineering, several sets of skills, especially communication skills, are essential for an individual to be a competitive engineer (Riemer, 2007). Moreover, multinational companies use English as a means of communication. In order to be successful in a profession, many daily tasks and duties for engineers are reported as follows: giving presentations, attending meetings, speaking with foreigners both internally and in external organizations, and talking about situations in daily life. (Kaewpet, 2009, Spence & Liu, 2013). Therefore, communication skills cannot be overlooked. Studies conducted in several parts of the world show the specific language communication skills needed for different fields of engineering. Thai stakeholders in food engineering provided insights into how professional English oral communication skills are valuable (Uampittaya & Siritaratn, 2018). Ethiopian's textile industries rank speaking skill as the most frequently used skill (Belachew, 2020), which is in accordance with the Malaysian engineering context which emphasizes the importance of oral communication skills (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012). Additionally, two other studies conducted in high-tech industries in Taiwan and Silicon Valley, USA show oral communication skills are in high demand and employers need graduates with strong communication skills (Spence & Liu, 2013; Stevens, 2005).

As a language teacher, one of the most important questions is how to equip students with essential skills which would enable them to be successful language learners and this study will examine the speaking skill. There seems to be some obstacles in oral communication skills. Donnell et al. (2011), stated that engineering

graduates' communication skills are considered weak. Previous studies show EFL students have difficulties in learning speaking skills and many factors are identified; psychological issues such as anxiety, level of confidence, and unwillingness to communicate (Al-Roud, 2016; Thakur et al., 2013; Alemi et al., 2011; Abedini & Chalak, 2017). According to Jarupan (2013) and Mohamed et al., (2020), the low level of language competency and the gap between the development of language abilities and what is needed in the engineering classroom affects communication skills among engineering students. Literature suggests a need for improvement of students' communication skills.

In an EFL setting, where target language exposure is limited to mostly inside the classroom, attitudes are important in language learning. There is some evidence showing the relationship between language attitude and communication skills. Bui & Intaraprasert (2013) and Toomnan & Intaraprasert (2015) illustrated that students' communication breakdown is related to levels of attitudes towards speaking English. Students who have positive attitudes employ higher use of communicative strategies. There was a confirmation of this from Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak (2017) that language competency was determined to have a positive and direct effect on Thai engineers' readiness for careers. For reasons, the findings of the investigation of students' attitudes regarding English speaking skill may be valuable in conducting an effective language class.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives of the study, the research questions are:

- 1) What are the attitudes towards English speaking skills of Thai pre-engineering students?
- 2) What challenges do students encounter during an English speaking activity?
- 3) What are students' preferred speaking activities in an English classroom?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are:

- 1) To examine Thai pre-engineering students' attitudes towards English speaking skills.

- 2) To explore students' challenges that they face when performing a speaking activity.
- 3) To investigate students' preferences of speaking activities in a classroom.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- Students refers to the second-year pre-engineering students in a vocational school in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Attitudes towards English speaking skills refer to the level of students' feelings towards speaking in English for different purposes.
- Speaking skills refer to students' ability to communicate in English within and outside the classroom.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted at a public vocational school in Bangkok, Thailand. The school offers three different programs which are mechanical, electrical and electronic, and civil and construction engineering. English is one of the compulsory courses. Participants were second-year students (equivalent to eleventh grade) and the total number of students was 81. The purpose of this research is to explore students' attitudes towards English speaking skills and to obtain their opinions regarding their difficulties and preferences in speaking activity in order increase their positive attitudes towards English speaking skills.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

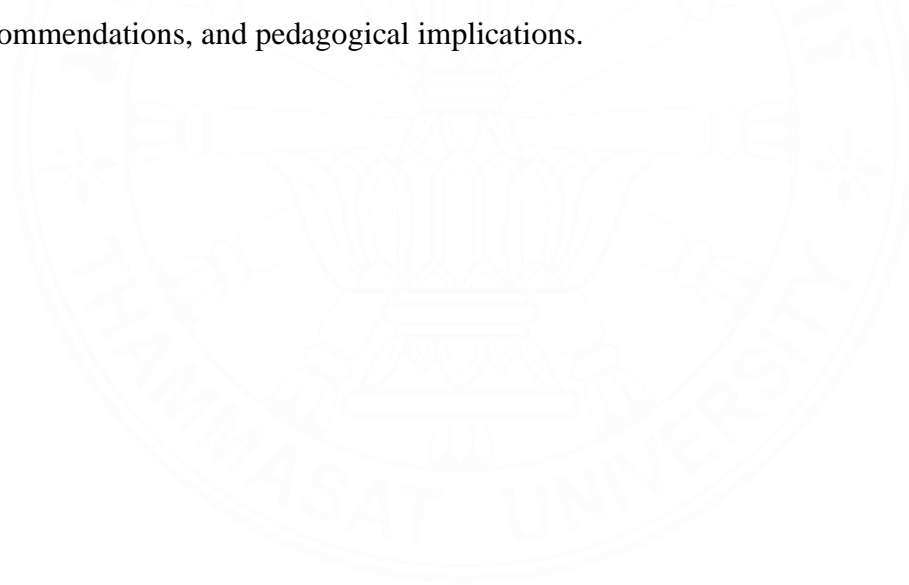
The findings of this study would be useful for English language teachers in terms of adjusting the way to teach general English classes for engineering students and also for learners in different technical fields. It is additionally hoped that the discovery of this study would emphasize the importance of improving students 'positive attitude towards learning the language and the importance of conducting the class in a more communicative manner in order to facilitate students' speaking skills.

1.7 LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study were obtained from only a small and specific group of participants; therefore, the generalizability is limited due to the particular characteristics of contexts and participants.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This report consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces readers to the background of the study, scope of the study, research questions and its objectives, a definition of terms, as well as its significance and limitations. The second chapter, the literature review, establishes the understanding of theories and previous studies from different viewpoints. The third chapter describes the methodology used in this study and data analysis in details. The fourth chapter is for providing results to research questions. Finally, the final chapter offers conclusions, discussions, further research recommendations, and pedagogical implications.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literatures in five areas: definitions of attitudes, components of attitudes, attitude towards language learning, EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking skills, and EFL engineering students' speaking skills and needs.

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF ATTITUDE

The word “Attitude” is defined in various ways in literature. However, it seems to be difficult to give a standard definition. Gardner (1985) gave a definition to attitude as “an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinion about the referent”. According to Oskamp and Schultz (2005), attitude is defined as “a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given attitude object.” Attitude is also defined by Hosseini & Pourmandnia (2013) as “a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing such as an idea, object, person, or situation.” From the mentioned definitions, it is possible to conclude that attitudes act as a predictor of behavior.

2.2 COMPONENTS OF ATTITUDES

Wenden (1991) proposed a definition of attitudes and it consists of three components. As a result, the definition is divided into three parts: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Each of these components has unique characteristics that influence language attitude outcomes.

The first one is the cognitive component which is related to beliefs, opinions, and thoughts towards an object or a situation. It represents an individual’s knowledge about what is true or false, and good or bad. This element of attitude refers to learners' attitudes about the information they obtain and their comprehension of it during the learning process.

The second one is the emotional component. It is sometimes called affective component; feelings and emotions towards an object. Feng and Chen (2009) stated

that the learning process is an emotional process. It is influenced by several emotional factors.

The last component is behavioral. The behavioral component of attitude is concerned with how people act and respond in specific circumstances. Regarding learning, As stated by Kara (2009), positive attitudes contribute to positive actions toward courses of study. Students have also been found to be more motivated to solve problems, and learn knowledge and useful skills.

Gardner (2008) claimed that attitudes and motivation are related to each other. He stated that "...attitudes have motivational properties and motivation has attitudinal implications". Öztürk (2014) unveiled that, among the participants of a Turkish university study of students, there was a strong and positive relationship between 2 variables; the former was learners' attitudes towards learning English and the latter was language learning motivation. Attitudes relate to beliefs influencing learners' behaviors and performance. As a result, it is crucial for teachers to identify and understand their students' attitudes towards learning.

2.3 ATTITUDE TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING

There is a strong link between attitudes towards learning a language, the amount of effort learners put into the learning and achievement (Gardner et al., 1985; Gardner, 1985). "Attitude variables support motivation to learn another language and that motivation promotes second language achievement." (Gardner and Smythe 1975; as cited in Dornyei, 2003).

A research study in the Philippines conducted by Alaga (2016) demonstrated that freshman students tend to have positive attitudes towards learning English because of their perception of language importance. Additionally, a significant relationship between students' level of motivation and attitudes towards learning English is displayed in the study.

Latif et al. (2011) conducted a large-scale survey using the adapted version of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) with 755 university students in Malaysia. The researchers' objectives were to determine the connections between motivation, anxiety, and instrumental orientation and their impact on learners'

performance. The study revealed that all 4 socio-psychological variables are highly correlated with learners' performance.

Sandoval-Pineda (2011) completed a study with 296 Mexican university students from 3 different programs; school of medicine, school of engineering, and school of animal science. She identified factors influencing students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language and the relationship between attitudes and English score by adapting the AMTB questionnaire as the quantitative data collection instrument and utilizing semi-structured group interviews and observation as a qualitative instrument.

Lai & Aksornjarung (2018) explored the attitudes towards language learning among 71 medical and nursing university students in Thailand. The researchers adopted a questionnaire for data collection. It was revealed that medical students have significantly greater positive attitude than their counterparts which is reflected by the aspect of having better scores. Similarly, the findings from Samadani & Ibnian (2015) indicate that high GPA students have the most positive attitudes towards learning English. The study was conducted with 112 university students in Saudi Arabia via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. It can be inferred that there are strong correlations between attitude and performance.

On the other hand, negative attitudes may hinder learning progress. For instance, Jain and Sidhu (2013) administered questionnaires and interviews to obtain information from 60 Malaysian university students. The findings shows that there is a negative yet substantial relationship between the level of anxiety and attitude towards English learning, and learning motivation. Looking at the past literature, it can be concluded that learners with positive attitudes towards speaking are likely to participate more in speaking activities while ones with negative attitudes are less willing to be involved in the activities.

2.4 EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPEAKING SKILLS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, language communication skills are in high demand in the globalized corporate world. Attitude is acknowledged as one of the important predictors of speaking skills and achievement (House & Prion, 1998).

Zeinivand et al. (2015) explored the correlation between attitude and speaking proficiency. The study was conducted in a quantitative manner using the AMTB questionnaire. The participants, 70 Iranian EFL learners, show positive attitudes and the relationship between attitude and speaking proficiency is significant.

Canceran & Temporal (2018) investigated the attitudes of 47 high school students in the Philippines using an English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire. Their findings underline the importance of speaking English. Furthermore, participants in this study tended to be willing to put effort into practicing the skill. Chalak & Kassian (2010) found that Iranian students who have positive attitudes towards English speaking want to communicate with people in the English speaking community.

Bui & Intaraprasert (2013) explored the relationship of attitudes towards speaking English, oral communication language exposure, and communication strategies used by 995 Vietnamese university students. The result shows that level of attitude towards speaking English is strongly associated with the use of communication strategies. This study also is in accordance with Toomnan & Intaraprasert (2015) in emphasizing the relationship between communication strategies used and students' attitudes towards English speaking. Among 949 Thai university students who participated in answering the questionnaire, those with positive attitudes are reported to have used a variety of communication strategies.

Another research in a Thai EFL context is Jindathai (2015). The objective of this quantitative study is to investigate the factors affecting English speaking problems and difficulties among Thai engineering students. Although the findings demonstrate a moderate level of problems in learning English speaking, participants' degree of motivation and attitude is considered low.

2.5 EFL ENGINEERING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS AND NEEDS

It is undeniable that English is important for students' future careers especially in the engineering field. The requirement of English mastery and speaking skills are necessary for this profession, as stated in the preceding chapter. However, due to the nature of the EFL setting where target language input outside the classroom is limited, students' English speaking skills need improving.

Gözüyeşil (2014) reported that 133 Turkish engineering students need to improve their reading and speaking skills because they acknowledge that these 2 skills have the highest priority in the department. The finding is in accordance with Alsamadani's (2017) case study of 200 civil and industrial engineering students in Saudi Arabia. The study reveals students' productive skills (speaking and writing) are far behind their receptive skills (listening and reading) due to the lack of practice both in and outside the classroom. Participants also list writing, reading, and speaking as the most needed skills.

Md Yasin et al. (2010) employed a questionnaire to survey 171 civil engineering students in Malaysia and discovered that the participants' frequency and ability of using English language were low. In addition, they identified the most highly valued skills as being those related to both academic and job tasks. A skill gap analysis was conducted and investigated. Presentation skills are perceived as the most significant skill.

Hossain (2013) provided information regarding speaking skills of Bangladeshi engineering students. The questionnaire was used with 103 participants. The researcher discovered that all of the students (100%) have weaknesses in speaking, especially the ability to speak in contexts, fluency, and intonation.

In Thailand, Rajprasit et al. (2015) surveyed 130 fourth-year engineering students and found that they perceive their English proficiency level as fair. However, they rank speaking and writing skills to be the most difficult aspects of communication and their speaking skills are reported as poor. Findings from Thepseenu (2020) mixed methodology study with 85 third-year engineering students reveal some similarities in students' overall English ability, which is in a relatively low level, as well as their high demand for improving speaking ability.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigated pre-engineering students' attitudes towards English speaking skills. The methodology is both quantitative and qualitative since it adopted a questionnaire from previous studies and a small group interview. This chapter describes participants and settings, instrument, data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

A convenience sampling method was employed for this study. The participants were studying in the second year in a pre-engineering vocational school in Bangkok, Thailand. They are from 3 different programs: mechanical, electrical and electronics, and civil and construction engineering. The total number of participants from all three programs was 81. Most of the participants were between 16-20 years old with different language proficiency ranging from beginner to upper intermediate level. In the semester of 2/2020, they were studying General English, which was a requisite course. The amount of time studying English was three hours per week. The semester lasted 16 weeks.

3.2 INSTRUMENTS

3.2.1 English Attitude Questionnaire

An attitude questionnaire towards English speaking skills was adapted from the Communication Skills Attitude Scale (Rees et al, 2002; Rees & Sheard, 2003; Kovac & Sirkovic, 2017). Some items from the mentioned questionnaires which are not related to speaking skill will be omitted. The total number of items are 15 and all were translated into Thai. The questionnaire used to assess the students' attitudes toward English speaking skills was divided into two parts. The first part consisting of 3 items is about general demographic and background information including age, gender, and their English grade from the previous semester. The second part is about students' attitudes towards English speaking skill consisting of 12 items. Each item is

accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) as follows;

Table 3.1 Criteria for mean score interpretation

| Scale | Meaning | Weighted means |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly Disagree | 1.0-1.80 |
| 2 | Disagree | 1.81-2.6 |
| 3 | Neutral | 2.61- 3.40 |
| 4 | Agree | 3.41-4.20 |
| 5 | Strongly Agree | 4.21-5.0 |

3.2.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The objective of semi-structured interview was to allow participants to talk freely. Small groups of students from the study were interviewed in a relaxed classroom environment. It provided the researcher the opportunity to explore participants' past learning experiences, their attitudes, opinions towards speaking the language, challenges they have experienced as well as speaking activities they preferred. The interview part contained four open-ended questions.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Before the distribution of the questionnaire, participants were informed of the objectives and the significance of the study. The questionnaire was administrated online via Google Form. An instruction of how to rate the questionnaire was given to students prior to the distribution. Participants took about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester.

After completing a questionnaire, a small group of students from each engineering program was asked voluntarily to participate in a small group interview. A total of seven volunteer students were interviewed. The interviews were conducted

in Thai to maximize the advantages of using students' first language to illicit needed information. The duration of interview for each group was about 15-20 minutes.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed and calculated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 22 to show descriptive statistics including the means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data from the in-depth interview was transcribed, interpreted, and coded into themes.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reports results of the data collected from the participants according to the previous chapter. The questionnaire part consisted of students' general information, and level of attitude towards English speaking skills while the interview part was aimed to explore students' challenges in studying in class and types of speaking activities they prefer. The last part is a discussion.

4.1 RESULTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4.1.1 Demographic information of participants

This following presents the overall demographic information of the participants. The data includes gender, age, and their English grade from the previous semester.

Table 4.1 Participants' demographic information

| Students' Demographic Information | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| - Male | 55 | 67.9 |
| - Female | 26 | 32.1 |
| Total | 81 | 100 |
| Age | | |
| - 16 | 4 | 4.9 |
| - 17 | 56 | 69.1 |
| - 18 | 17 | 21.0 |
| - 19 | 3 | 3.7 |
| - 20 | 1 | 1.2 |
| Grade from previous semester | | |
| - A | 36 | 44.4 |
| - B+ | 12 | 14.8 |
| - B | 17 | 21.0 |
| - C+ | 5 | 6.2 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| - C | 8 | 9.9 |
| - D+ | 3 | 3.7 |
| - D | 0 | 0 |

As shown in Table 4.1, most of the participants in this study were 55 male (67.9%), with only 26 female students (32.1%). The students' ages were between 16-20 years old with most of them were at 17 years old (69.1%). The present study also revealed that in the previous semester, most students (n=65) got English grades: A, B+, or B at 44.4%, 14.8%, and 21% respectively.

4.1.2 Descriptive statistics of students' attitude towards English speaking skills

Regarding the questionnaire used in this study, there were two types of statements: positive and negative. The items were categorized into eight positive attitude scales (items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12) and four negative attitude scales (items 2, 6, 9, and 11).

Table 4.2 Speaking skill attitudes with positive statements

| Item | Questionnaire on English speaking skills attitudes | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|------|--|------|------|----------------|
| 1 | I need to have good English-speaking skills if I intend to become a successful engineer. | 4.41 | 0.65 | Strongly agree |
| 3 | English speaking skills are as important as engineering skills. | 4.14 | 0.85 | Agree |
| 4 | My self-esteem has increased after studying in the English course. | 4.20 | 0.80 | Agree |
| 5 | My presentation skills have significantly improved after the completion of the course. | 3.82 | 1.03 | Agree |
| 7 | The English speaking course is very interesting. | 3.93 | 0.85 | Agree |
| 8 | I am aware of my English speaking skills. | 3.53 | 1.00 | Agree |
| 10 | It is difficult for me to admit my own English speaking problems. | 2.53 | 1.28 | Disagree |
| 12 | English speaking skills can be mastered through formal instruction. | 3.53 | 1.03 | Agree |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Overall | 3.76 | 0.93 | Agree |
|--|----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|

As can be seen in Table 4.2, the overall mean score of 3.76 on the positive attitude statements was obtained. It demonstrated that pre-engineering students had high levels of positive attitude towards English speaking skills. The highest mean score was item 1 (I need to have good English-speaking skills if I intend to become a successful engineer) followed by the second highest mean score of item 4 (My self-esteem has increased after studying in the English course). Participants saw the importance of English speaking skills as much as their engineering skills as revealed in item 3 with the mean score of 4.14. Since the questionnaire was distributed at the end of the course, students felt positive towards their speaking skills so the mean scores of items 7 and 5 (English speaking course is very interesting / My presentation skills have significantly improved after the completion of the course) were 3.93 and 3.82. Followed by item 8 and 12 (I am aware of my English speaking skills / English speaking skills can be mastered through formal instruction), their mean scores were at 3.53 while the lowest mean score of 2.53 was for item 10 (It is difficult for me to admit my own English speaking problems).

Table 4.3 Speaking skill attitudes with negative statements

| Item | Questionnaire on English speaking skills attitudes | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 2 | I do not see the point in studying English speaking skills. | 1.56 | 1.07 | Disagree |
| 6 | I do not have enough time to study English speaking skills. | 2.53 | 1.00 | Disagree |
| 9 | English speaking skills are not necessary for engineering students. | 1.49 | 0.69 | Strongly disagree |
| 11 | English speaking skills is an unnecessary course. | 1.69 | 1.08 | Strongly disagree |
| | Overall | 1.82 | 0.96 | Disagree |

The overall mean score for negative statements was 1.82. The highest mean score at 2.53 was for a negative statement on item 6 (I do not have enough time to study English speaking skills) while the mean score for items 11, 2, and 9 (English speaking skills is an unnecessary course / I do not see the point in studying English speaking skills / English speaking skills are not necessary for engineering students) were at 1.69, 1.56, and 1.49, respectively.

4.2 RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

The following information is from the semi-structured interview. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes in students' interviews. Seven volunteer students, six male and one female, participated in the interview.

4.2.1 Students' attitudes towards English speaking

From the interview, it was found that all students perceived that English speaking skills are important for their future in every aspect of life. All of them mentioned the possibility of studying and working abroad and in multinational companies. They emphasized the possibility to have a good quality of life if they can work abroad.

“To continue my study abroad, gives me a lot of future opportunities” (Student 2).

“My life would be different from living in Thailand. I want to work in other countries so I can have a lot of income. Being able to speak English is very important” (Student 7).

“In the field of my interest which is industrial engineering, English is very important because I can work as a representative of various engineering branches because I have to contact customers from other countries (Student 3).

Additionally, one of the students mentioned the ability to speak good English would allow him to be able to work in multiple countries.

“If I can speak English well, I want to continue my study abroad and maybe fly to Canada or Europe especially Germany or Switzerland to work there. I heard they have good social welfare” (Student 6).

Surprisingly, of all the students in this interview, one student talked about his shift in career interest but still acknowledged the importance of English speaking skills.

“I do not do well in engineering-related subjects and nowadays I spend a lot of time in the kitchen. I want to be a chef, maybe I can work in a hotel or on a cruise ship. I know I need to speak English well” (Student 5).

4.2.2 Challenges during English speaking activities

When discussing about challenges or difficulties they encounter during English speaking activities, numerous students mentioned a lack of confidence, unfamiliar topics and their own unpreparedness.

4.2.2.1 A lack of confidence

“I am not very good at English, just an average level student so I am not confident at all when speaking in class” (Student 6).

4.2.2.2 Unfamiliar topics

“When the teacher asks me to speak or discuss something I am not familiar with, I do not like it. I have no confidence at all” (Student 2).

“I quite enjoy a class discussion but sometimes when I do not have knowledge about that topic, I feel lost. But if I know a bit about it, I can find the way to discuss it with my classmates” (Student 1).

4.2.2.3 Unpreparedness

“Even if I am not good at English, I really like presenting in class because I can prepare what I want to speak from home. But if I must talk about a new topic assigned by the teacher, I struggle a lot” (Student 3).

The next challenges are the lack of vocabulary, mistakes in grammar and sentence structure, and pronunciation.

4.2.2.4 A lack of vocabulary

“I am worried the most about my vocabulary. Most of the time I do not know the words and how to speak the sentence correctly. It makes me feel bad” (Student 4).

4.2.2.5 Grammatical and structure errors

“If I must talk about some topics I am interested in, I can do it confidently because I know about the vocabulary to use. But what I am concerned about more is my sentence structure. I would make a lot of mistakes” (Student 2).

4.2.2.6 Pronunciation

“When I need to speak in class, I have a problem with the pronunciation. I just do not know how to say it” (Student 5).

4.2.3 Preferred speaking activities

Several speaking activities were suggested by the students including class discussions, presentations, small group work, and role plays.

4.2.3.1 Presentations

“Presentation in front of the class is my favorite because I can prepare it beforehand, and I like reading things on the internet, so I enjoy presenting it to the class” (Student 2).

4.2.3.2 Group work or pair work

“Group work is fun. I can talk with friends in a relaxed environment” (Student 5).

“I am very anxious when I have to speak directly to my teacher. So I prefer to talk or discuss with a small group of friends” (Student 6).

4.2.3.3 Class discussions

“My teacher would play a video clip on YouTube and after that we will have a Q&A session to check if we understand the video” (Student 1).

4.2.3.4 Role plays

“I love role play the most. It is entertaining because I can act or speak about funny things with friends” (Student 7).

4.3 DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that pre-engineering students have positive attitudes towards English speaking skills. From the findings, it can be interpreted that students realized the importance of English speaking skills towards their future academic and career success especially in the field of technology and science. The reason why particular questionnaire items related to their engineering career had the

highest mean scores could be interpreted that vocational students spent a larger number of hours per week in the workshop practicing their technical and engineering skills rather than sitting and listening to a lecture in a classroom. Moreover, it was compatible with the students' interview that English was barely used in the workshop. It was only used for some technical words and they almost never communicated with each other in full English sentences. Students acknowledged that their main source of English language input was still inside the language classroom. As a result, the questionnaire item regarding their belief in the ability to master speaking skills could be accomplished in a classroom setting was rated high. Nonetheless the questionnaire item with the lowest mean score portrayed that students did not have sufficient time and opportunity to practice speaking skills outside in an English classroom.

The results are similar to Karahan (2007), who investigated Turkish students' attitudes towards English and found that positive language attitudes allows learner to have a positive orientation towards learning the language. However, the concept of negative attitudes cannot be overlooked. Abidin et al. (2012) found out that students' negative attitude towards English may lead to the conclusion that the students, themselves, do not realize how important it is.

For the information from the students' interview about challenges, they raised some concerns related to the challenges they face when performing speaking activities in the classroom. The highest ranked challenges were a lack of confidence, content unfamiliarity, and their own unpreparedness, respectively.

Self-confidence is one of the factors influencing students' speaking performance. Amiryousefi (2018) suggested that communicative self-confidence can predict EFL learners' L2 speaking. MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed three important variables which affect learners' decision to initiate speech including interindividual motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 confidence. Considering these findings, it is important to enhance students' confidence in the language classroom.

Content familiarity was the second ranked challenge. The study by Qiu (2020) indicated that students produced a more complex speech structure under familiar conditions. She recommended task repetition to increase learners' complexity, accuracy, and fluency.

The next challenge mentioned by participants in this study was unpreparedness. Murad and Jalambo (2019) found that when students are unprepared for a speaking class, it leads to a “sense of stupidity, embarrassment and increases their silence” Ay (2010) also pointed out the effect of “unpreparedness” on Turkish students’ speaking anxiety. Their anxiety rises when learners are “required to speak without having prepared in advance”.

About students’ preferred speaking activities, most participants in the study advised presentations and small group speaking activities as their favorite. A few students suggested class discussions and role plays. Learners' pragmatic skill in spoken interactions such as requests or refusals can be assessed through a role play.

The information from the interview aligned with Nguyen (2013) who demonstrated that collaborative pair work fosters learning environments in which peers assist one another as well as the way students assisted each other in planning and presenting class presentations. This allowed them to save time and effort while still achieving the task objectives.

The use of role play as a speaking activity provides benefits to the classroom. Ryan et al. (2017) found that students in Ireland appreciated the activity and saw a benefit to both teaching and learning. The findings were in line with Kuśnierek (2015). The researcher revealed that the implementation of role plays in the classroom develop students speaking skills. Improved speaking skills and being able to overcome fear of speaking in front of people were reported by the participants. Overall, role-playing seems to be an effective speaking practice.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study, its findings, followed by conclusions of the research and recommendations for further studies.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This section summarizes the objectives of the study, participants, instruments, and the procedure of the study.

5.1.1 Objectives of the study

The purposes of the study were: 1) to evaluate students' attitude towards English speaking skills 2) to investigate challenges or difficulties that students face when participating in a speaking activity and 3) to learn about students' preferences for classroom speaking tasks.

5.1.2 Participants, methodology, and procedure

The participants of this study were the 81 students who were studying at Pre-Engineering School in Bangkok, Thailand. They were in the second year and General English is a requisite subject.

The first instrument used in this study was an attitude questionnaire. Eighty-one questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the end of their academic semester. Eighty-one questionnaires were completed and then were analyzed statistically. The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were reported.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview which was used to extract information concerning the students' opinions about challenges they face in the classroom and how they would prefer their speaking activities to be. This qualitative instrument was also used to triangulate the data.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section includes a summary of demographic findings, students' attitudes towards English speaking skills, and an investigation of participants' opinions about challenges in classroom and their preferences.

5.2.1 Demographic information

Out of 81 participants, 55 respondents were male and only 26 respondents were female. They were aged between 16-20 years old. For their English performance in the previous semester, 44.4% of students received A, 14.8% B+, 21% B, and the rest, 19.8%, received C+, C, and D+.

5.2.2 Students' attitudes towards English speaking skills

The statistics showed that pre-engineering students have positive attitude towards English speaking skills at the mean score of 3.76 which was interpreted as a high level of attitude. Item 1 had the highest mean score of 4.41 (I need to have good English-speaking skills if I intend to become a successful engineer), followed by item 4 with the second highest mean score of 4.20 (My self-esteem has increased after studying in the English course). The third highest mean score was item 3 which was calculated to be 4.14 (English speaking skills are as important as engineering skills). In other words, participants in this study value the importance of English speaking skills.

The overall mean score of 1.82 for negative statements can be interpreted as low. It is also a confirmation that students have positive attitudes in this study. Item 9 had the lowest mean score of 1.49 (English speaking skills are not necessary for engineering students). In the meantime, items 2 and 11 had mean scores of 1.56 for the former (I do not see the point in studying English speaking skills), and 1.69 for the latter (English speaking skills is an unnecessary course).

Students' positive attitudes reflected their realization of the value of English speaking skills in their future careers. They recognize that English speaking would play a critical part in their professional growth and future schooling, based on information from the interview.

5.2.3 Challenges during English speaking activities

The most frequently reported issues or difficulties which students encountered during English speaking activities are their lack of confidence, being asked to discuss unfamiliar subjects and their own lack of preparation before participating in a discussion. In addition, a minority of students mentioned a lack of vocabulary and grammatical and sentence structure errors as problems. Furthermore, the challenge about pronunciation was the least mentioned in the interview.

5.2.4 Preferred speaking activities

Students proposed different speaking activities such as class discussions, presentations, small group work, and role plays as examples of speaking activities. The most common activities, however, are presentations, group or pair work, accompanied by a class discussion and role plays. However, one student suggested an interesting activity: a comprehension check via a Q&A following the viewing of a video from the internet.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This study investigated Thai pre-engineering students' attitudes towards speaking skills. The result revealed that the participants regard speaking skills as a vital role in their successes in both academic and future careers. In the aspect of their attitudes, the finding indicates that they have high positive attitudes towards English speaking skills. Based on the preceding statement, it is reasonable to conclude that attitudes play a critical role in language learning success, especially for language learners in an EFL setting. Furthermore, the findings also shed some light on those challenges they face while performing a speaking task in the classroom as well as what students prefer their English speaking activities to be. The researcher is convinced that the findings from this study will be beneficial to both EFL teachers and learners, especially that the in-depth information gathered from the interview, will be utilized for improvement in future classrooms.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings as well as the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that further research is necessary.

5.5.1 Since this investigation was limited to a small number of students from a specific school, its results may not be used to generalize the attitudes of students who are in different institutes. A future research with a larger sample size is needed.

5.5.2 Further research with students from other majors would be useful because the researcher would be able to see various viewpoints on the topic and be able to receive constructive feedback and suggestions.

5.5.3 Identifying learners' needs should play a part in the planning and development of a language course. It is crucial to understand what the students really want from the course. This will assist learners in meeting their requirements and achieving their learning objectives.

5.5 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings can be used as a starting point for pedagogical implications that should be considered by English teachers. The first point is that engineering students hold positive attitudes towards English speaking, according to the study. As a result, English language classes should be created with this goal in mind. In other words, to maintain students' positive attitudes towards speaking skills, it is important to create a stimulating and friendly learning environment, and use instructional speaking tasks which encourage students to work collaboratively with both classmates and teachers. It is undeniable that positive feedback from teachers boosts students' confidence during speaking performances.

Besides creating a relaxed and friendly classroom environment, it is recommended for teachers to adjust the language content to be more communicative rather than focusing on grammatical rules and vocabulary. Engineering students rarely get the opportunity to practice target language skills outside of the classroom, as the interview shows. This means that the current General English course was deemed insufficient in terms of providing students with the necessary language skills.

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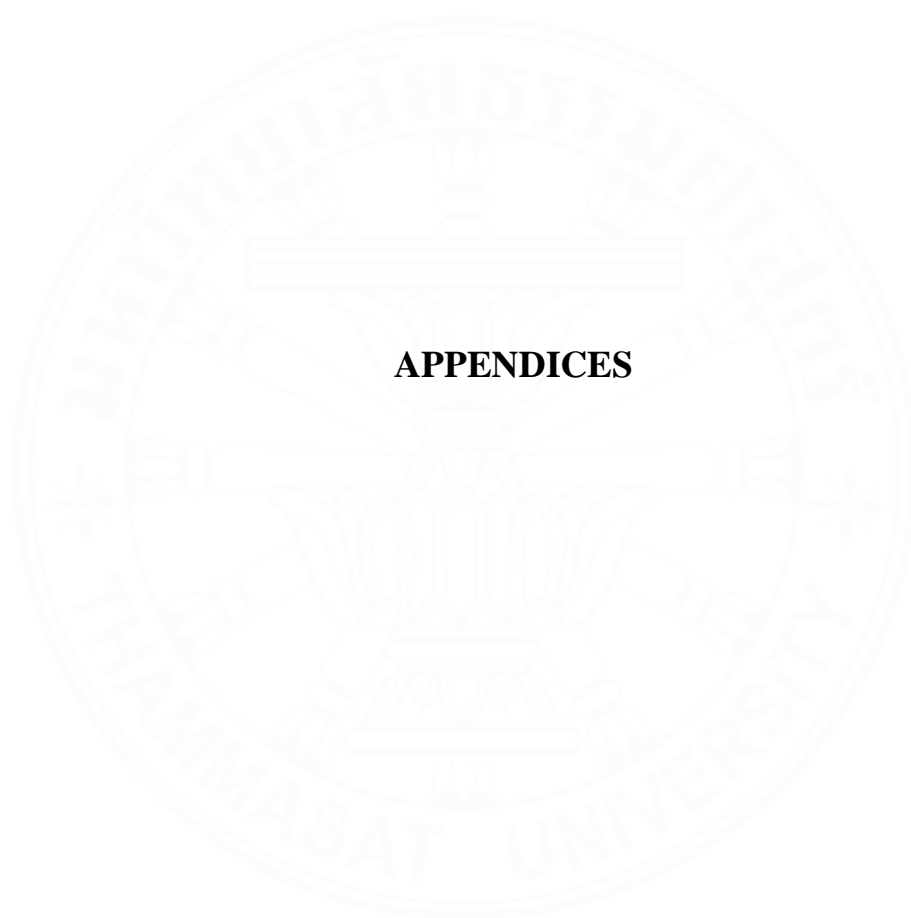
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APPENDIX A

ENGLISH SPEAKING ATTITUDES QUESTIONNAIRE

Part 1: Students' Background Information

1. เพศ (ช/ญ)
2. อายุ (16-20 ปี)
3. เกรดวิชาภาษาอังกฤษในเทอมที่ผ่านมา (D-A)

Part 2: Attitudes towards English Speaking (5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree))

1. ฉันจำเป็นต้องมีทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษที่ดี หากฉันต้องการจะเป็นวิศวกรที่ประสบความสำเร็จ
(I need to have good English-speaking skills if I intend to become a successful engineer.)
2. ฉันไม่เห็นประโยชน์ของการเรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
(I do not see the point in studying English speaking skills.)
3. ทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษนั้นสำคัญเท่ากับทักษะเทคนิคทางวิศวกรรม
(English speaking skills are as important as engineering skills.)
4. ฉันมีความภาคภูมิใจในตนเองเพิ่มขึ้นหลังการเรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
(My self-esteem has increased after studying English course.)
5. ทักษะการนำเสนองานของฉันพัฒนาขึ้นอย่างเห็นได้ชัดภายหลังจากการเรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
(My presentation skills have significantly improved after the completion of the course.)
6. ฉันไม่มีเวลาพอที่จะเรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
(I do not have enough time to study English speaking skills.)
7. หลักสูตรทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษนี้น่าสนใจอย่างมาก
(English speaking course is very interesting.)

8. ฉันทราบระดับความสามารถด้านทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของตัวเอง

(I am aware of my English speaking skills.)

9. ทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษไม่จำเป็นสำหรับนักเรียนวิศวกรรม

(English speaking skills are not necessary for Engineering students.)

10. มันเป็นเรื่องยากที่ฉันจะยอมรับว่าตนเองมีปัญหาด้านทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ

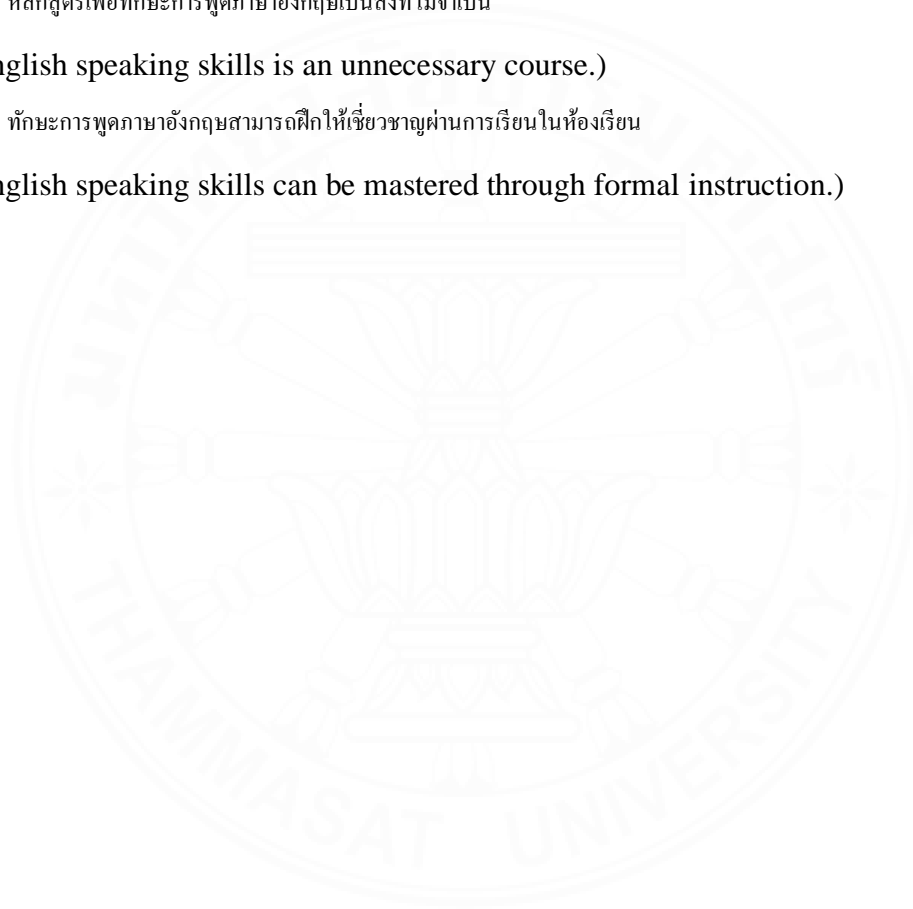
(It is difficult for me to admit my own English speaking problems.)

11. หลักสูตรเพื่อทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสิ่งที่ไม่จำเป็น

(English speaking skills is an unnecessary course.)

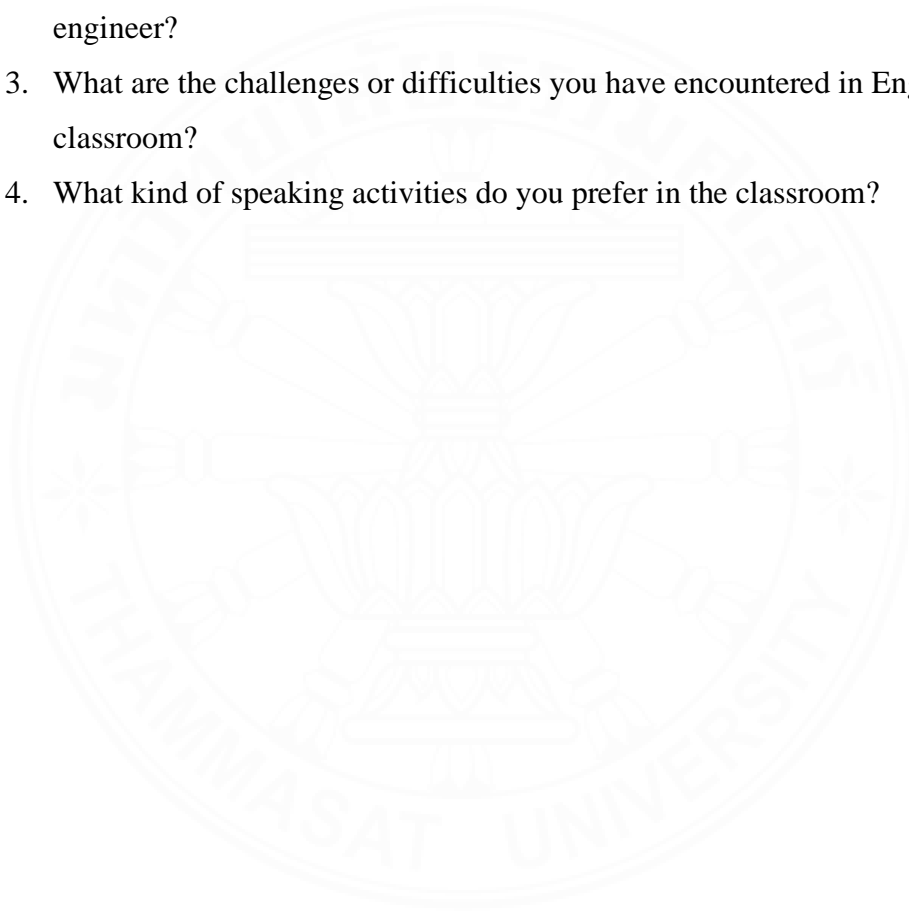
12. ทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษสามารถฝึกให้เชี่ยวชาญผ่านการเรียนในห้องเรียน

(English speaking skills can be mastered through formal instruction.)



APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEW

1. How do you feel about practicing speaking skills in an English class?
2. Do you think English speaking skills are important for your future career as an engineer?
3. What are the challenges or difficulties you have encountered in English classroom?
4. What kind of speaking activities do you prefer in the classroom?



BIOGRAPHY

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Name | Ms. Sukanya Wattanawong |
| Date of Birth | October 19, 1983 |
| Educational Attainment | 2005: Bachelor of Arts (English) |
| Work Position | English Teacher Thai-German Pre-Engineering School |

