

วารสารวิชาการ
คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์

Improving Thai University Students' English Speaking Ability
on Thai Studies through Classroom Discussion
การพัฒนาความสามารถการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
ในการเรียนไทยศึกษา โดยใช้การอภิปรายในชั้นเรียน
ของนักศึกษาไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัย

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A b s t r a c t

This study aimed to study the English speaking ability on Thai Studies through classroom discussion and to investigate the opinions of Thai university students towards the classroom discussion. The participants of this study, were 36 third year English majors at Buriram Rajabhat University who enrolled in the course "Thai Studies" in 2012 academic year, selected by simple random sampling. The participants were taught through classroom discussion for 9 weeks, and then the English speaking tests were administered. The students' English speaking ability was evaluated by two teachers and peers. Also, they were asked to give the comments on the classroom discussion via facebook. The data obtained from English speaking tests was analyzed by mean and percentage, and compared with the criterion from Harris (1986), while the data from the online open - ended questions were analyzed by content analysis. The findings revealed that the overall English speaking ability on Thai Studies of Thai university students was at a good level. When considering each aspect, it was found that students had the highest average score in "comprehension"; and the lowest average score in "pronunciation". In addition, most students had positive opinions towards the classroom discussion.

The findings suggest that the classroom discussion is effective in improving English speaking ability; therefore, it should be applied in teaching and learning English, especially to improve students' English speaking ability.

Keywords :

English speaking ability, Thai university students, Thai Studies, classroom discussion

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสามารถการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนไทยศึกษาโดยใช้การอภิปรายในชั้นเรียนของนักศึกษาไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัย และศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัยที่มีต่อการอภิปรายในชั้นเรียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างของการวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 3 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏบุรีรัมย์ จำนวน 36 คน ที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนรายวิชาไทยศึกษาปีการศึกษา 2555 ได้มาโดยการสุ่มอย่างง่าย กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้รับการสอนโดยใช้การอภิปรายในชั้นเรียนเป็นระยะเวลา 9 สัปดาห์ จากนั้นทำการทดสอบความสามารถในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ และประเมินโดยครูสองคนและเพื่อนร่วมชั้น นอกจากนั้นนักศึกษาได้ให้ความคิดเห็นที่มีต่อการอภิปรายในชั้นเรียนโดยผ่านทางเฟสบุค ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการทดสอบความสามารถการพูดภาษาอังกฤษนำมาวิเคราะห์โดยใช้ค่าเฉลี่ยและค่าร้อยละ จากนั้นนำมาเปรียบเทียบกับเกณฑ์ความสามารถในการพูดของแฮร์ริส (1986) ส่วนข้อมูลจากคำถามปลายเปิดออนไลน์นำมาวิเคราะห์โดยการวิเคราะห์เชิงเนื้อหา ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความสามารถในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนไทยศึกษาของนักศึกษาไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัยโดยภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับดี เมื่อพิจารณาเป็นรายด้าน พบว่า นักศึกษามีคะแนนสูงสุดในด้านความเข้าใจ ในขณะที่ด้านการออกเสียงมีค่าคะแนนต่ำสุด นอกจากนี้ นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีความคิดเห็นเชิงบวกต่อวิธีการอภิปรายในชั้นเรียน

จากผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่า การอภิปรายในชั้นเรียนมี
ประสิทธิภาพในการพัฒนาความสามารถการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ
ดังนั้นจึงควรนำวิธีการดังกล่าวไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการเรียนการสอน
ภาษาอังกฤษ โดยเฉพาะการพัฒนาความสามารถการพูดภาษา
อังกฤษของนักศึกษา

คำสำคัญ :

ความสามารถการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ, นักศึกษาไทย
ระดับมหาวิทยาลัย, ไทยศึกษา, การอภิปราย
ในชั้นเรียน

Introduction

In the era of globalization, English has become the crucial recognized international language for communication. When people from countries where English is not the first or official language come together, they have to choose a language to communicate. Very often, the language chosen is English. Besides communication purpose, English is used as a means to transfer thoughts and cultures and to create good relationships between people in different countries. As a result, English has become an international language and is widely used as a medium for understanding and exchanging ideas among people all over the world.

Thailand, as a part of the globalised community, cannot deny that English is one of the strategic keys to the educational development in order to survive in local and global contexts. Moreover, Thailand enters to become the ASEAN community member in 2015, and we must follow the ASEAN Trade Goods Agreement. This agreement will promote the free flow of goods, services, investment and labour among ASEAN member countries. Importantly, this agreement will increase the competitive edge among ASEAN nations. To meet the demands of both global and ASEAN economy, English must be accepted as the lingual franca; in other words, it is the world language used as a means for communication among ASEAN members not only for daily life

but also for trade and negotiation in terms of speaking skill.

According to communication, people can express their ideas in the spoken or written forms. Speaking is an important skill because one of the keys to English communication is speaking ability. Thai people have to be able to master English as an international language. By mastering speaking skills, they can carry out conversation with others, give and share ideas, and change information with interlocutor, and people are able to know the situations that happen in the rapid changing world.

To prepare and get ready to become the ASEAN community completely, Buriram Rajabhat University has offered the course entitled "Thai Studies" to the third year of English major students in order to provide them about Thailand information. The course description of Thai Studies includes all aspects in Thai society, e.g. history, religions, arts, ways of life, literature, foods, ceremonies, folk performances, and places of interest. To pass this course, learners have to read the information in English, and then they have to present the information gained from reading. The expectation of this course is to prepare them to be the good host since most of them will work in the hospitality industry after graduation.

However, for more than 10 years of experiences in teaching this course, the researcher has found that the students cannot produce the spoken language effectively and efficiently.

There were errors in the accuracy, pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation, grammar and vocabulary. Besides that, most of the students view speaking as the most difficult skill. They have encountered some problems when speaking English, such as how to start talking, how to connect from idea to another one, anxiety, nervousness, lack of confidence, and worrying about making mistakes. These problems hinder them from having a fluency in speaking, thus make them think that it is not easy to speak.

As an experienced teacher, the researcher has realized that the most important role is to decrease the problems above. In addition to the trend of student - centered learning, the teaching and learning process should be able to motivate the students to involve actively in building their own knowledge, behaviors and attitudes. Student-centered learning requires that our planning, teaching, and assessment focus on the needs and abilities of our students - how they learn, what they experience, and how they engage with their learning. Student - centered learning describes ways of thinking about learning and teaching that emphasize students' responsibility for such activities as planning learning, interacting with teacher and other students, researching, and assessing learning (Cannon, 2000 cited in Kusmaryasti, 2013).

One of models in student-centered learning that the researcher has found is classroom discussion. The word "discussion"

can be defined as the situations in which teachers and students or students and other students talk with one another and share ideas and opinions. Questions employed to stimulate discussion are usually at a higher cognitive level. This model can help the students when they are talking to their teacher and friends (Kusmaryasti, 2013). Indeed, the goal is to get as many students involved in talking to one another as possible and for the teacher to fade into the background. Students will practice how to talk and to listen to teacher and friends, how to address and look to the authority figures for answers. Dillon (1994, p.1) states that "through speaking of discussion we join with others in forming answer for our questions about contracted some the linguist and teacher to make teaching and learning speaking material affective and enjoyable. In regarding to this, Ur (1981) mentions that the most natural and effective way for learners to practice talking freely in English is by thinking out some problems and situations together through verbal interchange of ideas or simple terms to discuss. It can be summarized that classroom discussion is considered as one of the most effective model that can be used to enhance students' speaking skills.

Based on the aforementioned points, the researcher considers that classroom discussion is beneficial in improving students' English speaking ability where the students will have opportunities to express their opinions by practicing a lot as the key of speaking.

It is hoped that the students will be able to work with others in groups, develop their interpersonal skills, and independence. In addition, they are going to be encouraged, innovated, have creativity through deep learning, and develop their characteristics of life - long learners - motivation, self - evaluation, time management, and skills to access information.

Research Purposes

1. To study the English speaking ability on Thai Studies of the third year English major students after learning by using classroom discussion.
2. To investigate the opinions of the third year English major students towards the classroom discussion.

Literature Review

Speaking is one of the language skills which are important for language teaching and learning because it is one of the four macro language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Brown (2004), speaking is seen as a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed; those observations are invariably colored by the accuracy and effectiveness of a test - taker's listening skill which necessarily compromises the reliability and validity of an oral production test. However, Chaney

and Burke (1998) define speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non - verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. While another expert, Huebner (1960) states that language is essential speech in basic communication by sounds. According to him, speaking is a skill used by someone in daily life communication whether at school or outside. The skill is acquired by much repetition; is primarily a neuromuscular and not an intellectual process. It consists of competence in sending and receiving messages. From the above definitions, it can be inferred that speaking is expressing ideas, opinion, or feeling to others by using words or sounds of articulation in order to inform, to persuade, and to entertain that can be learned by using some teaching and learning methodologies.

Relating to speaking ability, Tarigan (1981) mentions that speaking ability is a skill to communicate a speech articulation or to speak a talk for expressing an idea and a message. In addition, Lado (1989) states that speaking ability is the ability to report acts or situations, in precise words, or the ability to converse or to express a sequence of ideas fluently. From the two definitions by the above experts, it can be concluded that speaking ability is a skill which is communicating the speech sound for expressing and conveying a message or idea.

According to Harris (1986), speaking ability includes five components/ aspects which are generally recognized in evaluating speaking: 1) Pronunciation consists of the segmental features of vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation patterns; 2) Grammar covers the uses of language with respect to word form and word order at the sentence or discourse level; 3) Vocabulary is one of words include in language, have many words that must mastery to make the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary as essential for successful second language use; 4) Fluency is probably best achieved by allowing the air stream of speech to flow then as some of this speech spill over beyond comprehensibility; and 5) Comprehension in brief speaking requires that not only knowing how to produce it well but also understanding when, what, and why to produce the language.

The ability to speak cannot be separated from the above five components. A good speaker will deliver the topic to make listener understand it easily by applying the above components of the speaking ability as the guidelines. In the present investigation, the researcher employs the English speaking ability aspects from Harris to evaluate the third year English major students when they speak or talk on the topics of Thai Studies. The findings from this study will help the researcher and other language teachers to plan and look for the innovation like the classroom discussion technique to improve their English speaking ability.

Methods

This research is an experimental research done in the classroom taught by using classroom discussion. The research employed an experimental design without pretest. The followings are the details of methodologies.

Population and Participants

The population of this study included 71 third year English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand consisting of two classes: 35 students in one class and 36 students in the other. They enrolled in the course entitled "Thai Studies" in the second semester of academic year 2012.

The participants of this study were one class of 36 third year English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand. They were selected by simple random sampling technique which was used the classrooms as the sampling unit. The reason for choosing this technique is less time and easier to obtain permission to use all students in certain class than several students in two classes. Both classes had an equal chance to be selected as the samples.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in collecting the data were English speaking test, English speaking evaluation form, and online open-ended questions. The followings were the details of each instrument.

1. English speaking test - there are many types of speaking test that can be used to measure the students' ability. In this study, the English speaking test was as the performance assessment, which specifically was oral test in telling the Thai topics. This instrument was derived from the participants' needs in which the Thai topics are easy for them to present without difficulty. The researcher as the teacher let them select four topics through a means of facebook. The four selected topics on Thai Studies were foods, followed by ceremonies, ways of life, and folk performances, respectively. Then each student was asked to draw a slot to choose one topic to present. They had one week for English speaking preparation.

2. English speaking evaluation form - this form was used for evaluating each student's English speaking ability. It was used by three raters (rater 1 is researcher, rater 2 is English native speaker, and rater 3 is 35 peers). The form was adapted from Harris' (1986) speaking ability components which are included five aspects: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Each aspect merits 10 marks, in a total of 50.

3. Online open-ended questions - this instrument was used to find out the opinions of the third year English major students towards the classroom discussion technique. The questions launched for them to express via facebook was "How do you feel about the classroom discussion employed in learning

Thai Studies?, and Does the classroom discussion improve your English speaking ability?”. The students can express their opinions both in Thai and English.

Data Collection

There were four steps in collecting the data in the intact classroom research as follows:

1. The researcher as the teacher gave the lecture on Thai Studies by employing a variety of sources: pictures, real objects, PowerPoint, YouTube, etc. In each class met, the researcher asked the rhetoric questions in each topics relating to Thai Studies, then let the students shared their ideas about the discussed topics. All students were encouraged to discuss or share ideas at least one time (four hours) in each week. The researcher also counted the times whenever they expressed and shared ideas towards the topics learned. Also, English speaking ability of each student when they discussed about the topics was observed and took notes by the researcher in order to see the improvement. The lecture was lasted about 9 weeks for 36 hours.

2. The students were asked to choose four from nine significant topics about Thailand via face book. The nine topics were history, religions, arts, ways of life, literature, foods, ceremonies, folk performances, and places of interest. The topics selected were being easy for them to present without difficulty by speaking. They were also asked to give reasons for the chosen topics.

3. Again, the students were asked to draw one topic about Thailand selected from step 2, and they had one week to prepare for speaking. In addition, the topics according with the names of student were launched on face book in order to let their friends and teacher to suggest the ways to present each topic. Each student prepared their English speaking presentation based on the comments from their friends and teacher.

4. Each student presented his/her topic given about three to five minutes to the class. In the time of presentation, three raters (two teachers and peers) evaluated their English speaking ability. All presentations were recorded in case of the uncertainty of scoring by both students and teachers which can be repeated it again.

5. The students were asked to give comments on the classroom discussion technique employed in studying Thai Studies via face book. They can write both in Thai and English.

Data Analysis

1. The scores from the English speaking evaluation form evaluated by three raters (two teachers and peers) were calculated by using mean (\bar{x}), and conversed to percent (%). In order to see the level of the students' English speaking ability, the criteria from Harris (1986) were applied as follows:

Test score	Level of English speaking ability
81 - 100	Excellent
61 - 80	Good
41 - 60	Mediocre
21 - 40	Poor
0 - 20	Very poor

2. The data from the student record and online open-ended questions were analyzed by using frequency and content analysis technique.

Findings

1. English Speaking ability on Thai Studies of the third year English major students after learning through classroom discussion

The students' scores from the English speaking test were evaluated by the raters (researcher, English native speaker, and 35 students which were as their peers). After calculating the real scores of the students from raters, the researcher computed the students' scores from each rater to know the percents of the students who got excellent, good, mediocre, poor, and very poor levels in English speaking ability on Thai Studies. The results can be seen in the following table.

Table 1 : Frequency and percent of the students' English speaking ability on Thai Studies according to raters

Score range	Level of speaking ability	Frequency	Percent
81 - 100	Excellent	3	8.33
61 - 80	Good	28	77.78
41 - 60	Mediocre	5	13.89
21 - 40	Poor	0	0.00
0 - 20	Very poor	0	0.00
Total		36	100.00

As shown in Table 1, it reveals that most of students ($f = 28$, 77.78%) were in good level, 5 students (13.89%) were in mediocre, 3 students (8.33%) were in excellent, and none of students was in poor and very poor levels of English speaking ability. It could be concluded that the third year English major students were in good level of English speaking ability on Thai Studies.

After getting the scores of the students from the raters, the researcher classified the students' scores based on each component of English speaking as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 illustrates the students' average scores for each aspect of English speaking on Thai Studies according to the three raters (researcher, English native speaker, and 35 peers). The findings show that the average score of the third year English major students in English speaking on Thai Studies in overall was 70.98%. The highest average score was comprehension (77.80%),

Table 2 : The students’ average scores for each aspect of English speaking according to raters

Aspects of speaking	Rater 1		Rater 2		Rater 3		Average scores (%)
	\bar{x}	%	\bar{x}	%	\bar{x}	%	
Pronunciation	6.17	61.70	6.42	64.20	6.54	65.40	63.77
Grammar	6.76	67.60	6.83	68.30	6.98	69.80	68.57
Fluency	7.12	71.20	7.04	70.40	7.46	74.60	72.07
Vocabulary	7.25	72.50	7.18	71.80	7.37	73.70	72.67
Comprehension	7.78	77.80	7.69	76.90	7.87	78.70	77.80
Total	7.02	70.20	7.03	70.30	7.24	72.40	70.98

Note: Rater 1 (Researcher), Rater 2 (English native speaker), rater 3 (35 peers)

followed by vocabulary (72.67%). In contrast, the lowest average score was pronunciation (63.77%).

2. Opinions of the third year English major students towards the classroom discussion

The 36 third year English major students were asked about how they feel about using classroom discussion technique in learning Thai Studies online via facebook. Most of them (about 95%) mentioned that they like discussion technique because it allowed them to practice and improve English speaking skill. Also, they enjoyed sharing and listening to their friends' opinions and ideas. Here are some of the results found on facebook:

"I like the technique you used in my class. It's very good for me to practice speaking in class with you and my lovely friends."

"I think my English speaking skills have improved because I can share with you and my friends. I'm very happy that you told me last two weeks that my English is good."

"My beloved teacher, I want to tell you that the discussion technique that you use in my class makes me enjoyable. I can share my ideas with my friends and you. I have many experiences and know more about Thailand"

Besides, they mentioned that they had more confidence to speak English in classroom as well as their reading, translation, and thinking skills are improved. The followings are the written expressions from the face book:

"I think I'm confident in speaking more than in the past before I study with you. You let me talk and share the ideas with my friends about Thailand."

"In your classroom, you want us to share our ideas about Thai studies so I have to read your text and search for information from the internet in advance. I have to prepare and think for speaking in the class by writing. Therefore, I think my reading, writing and thinking skill are improved.

"I have to think about the lessons that I learned from secondary school level in order to talk in my class. When I can recall them, I try to translate from my Thai into English so that my translation is better than in the past."

According to their reflections on facebook, it can be summarized that classroom discussion had the positive effects on the improvement of English speaking ability on Thai Studies of the third year English major students. In addition, classroom discussion can help develop English reading, writing, translating and thinking skills.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. English speaking ability on Thai Studies of the third year English major students after learning through classroom discussion

The findings revealed that the English speaking ability on Thai Studies of the third year English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University as a whole was at good level. This could be explained by the fact that classroom discussion can motivate them to share and answer the questions. They can freely express and share their opinions and ideas with the topics learned. The researcher serves only as the motivator and facilitator and also monitor in doing the discussion during the classroom. Additionally, the students were taught how to discuss so that it is very easy for them to share, express and answer the questions. Besides, the topics for classroom discussion are familiar with them as well as they are the third year English major students with the assumption that their English is acceptable; that is, these may affect their English speaking ability as in good level. This finding is consistent with Ur (1981) who stated that discussion technique is the most natural and effective way for learners to practice talking freely in English. Also, the finding is similar to Kusmaryasti (2013) who insisted that classroom discussion can help the students when they are talking to their teacher and friends.

When considering at each aspect, it was found that students had the highest average score in "comprehension"; whereas,

they had the lowest average score in “pronunciation” This means that comprehension seems to be the easiest aspect in speaking while pronunciation tends to be the most difficult in English speaking on Thai Studies of the third year English major students.

In terms of pronunciation, it could be clearly explained that the vocabulary about Thai Studies are not familiar with them and are rarely used in their daily life speaking; therefore, they will have some problems in pronouncing the words. This problem may make their English speaking is difficult to understand by the listeners (raters). Moreover, they have a problem in pronouncing the words which are little bit long, such as experience, vegetables, monastery, etc. so that they have to repeat those mentioned words again and again. Based on this, it could be concluded that their English speaking ability faced the problem in the aspect of pronunciation. This finding is similar to Khalidah, Gultom and Harini (2013) who stated that pronunciation is the most difficult aspect in speaking.

Regarding to comprehension, it is perhaps explained that the topics presented are familiar with students since the topics are about Thailand and they had learned when they were at secondary school level. In addition, they had already read from the text provided from the researcher and variety of sources, such as Internet, printed materials, etc. Importantly, they had gained knowledge about the Thai topics from the classroom

discussion employed in learning Thai Studies as well as they had one week for speaking preparation and suggesting the ways to present from their friends and teacher from facebook; therefore, they can speak on the selected topics without difficulty. Based on the reasons above, the raters can understand the content and are easy to follow the English speaking presentation on Thai Studies. This finding supports of Khalidah, Gultom and Harini (2013) who mentioned that the students had the highest score in the aspect of comprehension when they were evaluated the English speaking ability.

2. Opinions of the third year English major students towards the classroom discussion

The findings shows that most of the third year English major students had positive opinions towards the discussion technique employed in Thai Studies classroom in order to improve English speaking ability. Moreover, it can develop English reading, writing, translating and thinking skills. It could be explained that the classroom discussion provides the students the opportunity to share and express the ideas and opinions. Besides, the students are also able to give real opinion orally. As a result, this may help them speak English confidently and happily.

In conclusion, the result of this study indicates that the classroom discussion is effective in improving English speaking ability of the third year English major students to reach the goal

of teaching and learning on Thai Studies. It is hoped that the teacher and relevant persons who are interested in this technique (one of the models of the student - centered) to apply in teaching and learning English, especially to improve students' English speaking ability.

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