

**A STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS  
OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT  
MAHACHULALONGKORNRAJAVIDYALAYA UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract**

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the Problems of English Speaking Skills of the first year students, majoring in English (Bilingual Program), Faculty of Humanities at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. 2) to purpose the ways to improve English speaking skills for the first year students in the academic year 2016. The study was both qualitative and quantitative methods. The tool used for collecting data was questionnaires. The samplings were comprised 63 first year students. In-depth interview was conducted with 6 lecturers of MCU. The statistics used for analyzing data were Frequency, Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.), and Percentage (%). The results of the research were as follows 1. The first year students, aged 18-20 years (27%) because of their practicing and aged 30 up years (19%) because of their practicing a little bit in English. were at a moderate high level (3.34%) 2. The first year students, aged 21-30 years can use speaking skills better than other ages comprising 54% were at a high level of (3.50%) Mean. 3. Students were very satisfied with the improvement of English speaking skills in daily conversation through practicing English speaking skills by watching BBC, CNN news. Self-confidence can also help speaking 3.57% were at the high level. Suggestions for the further study of the problems of English speaking skills of the first year students are: 1) students should be constantly speak English through public speaking especially to learn and understand using face to face communication as well as knowing more extensively vocabulary. 2) Enhancement in applying English sentence structures for interaction between people, so that students are able to improve their confidence in speaking English correctly and completely.

**Key words:** Age, Academic Year, English Subject, Gender

## 1. Introduction

English is exceedingly important for communication of many people in the world as being an international language. Besides, English is not owned by its native speakers and non-native speakers everywhere must become aware of the widespread shift in attitudes and assumptions about the language. (Richard A. Via and Larry E. Smith, 1983: 11) At the present, it is generally accepted that English leads the people from all over the world with different cultures to live and join together.

Like that, English language is to have the important role in the business and education around the world, they support the people who can speak English or use it very well, then it is the best chance for all levels of important learners and used it in community. However, English is to be standard language and society of globalization. In many countries, English language is used for developing in many multiple purposes such as economy, education, and tourism, etc.

Currently, English is very necessary for this reason, which speaking skills are essential part to effectively apply the language from the speakers to use in the extensive world of social online and communicate with other people over the world. Especially, there are about 375 million people to speak English as the first language and approximately 750 million people to speak English as a second language.

Human is a social being that always needs company in his life. Man also needs an education, because is the organized development, human resource for intellectual and physical by their individual and social use directed toward the union of these activities with their creator as their final end. (Ramelan, 1992: 9)

Anyway, English is the most famous language and also the most demanding skills in our daily life. Every person needs for communication with others through speaking. Speaking plays an important role in making social interactions with other people in order to gain information. Thus, it is necessary for every person to have a good speaking skill. (Nurmala Yusni Febriyanti, 2012)

Besides, it provides benefits for people those who can use or speak to contact with foreigners through English speaking skills. Moreover, it is better and better for who can apply in daily life in learning or developing education and interpretation. Otherwise, English has an important weapon of speakers in the school, organization, college. Especially in the university is always used for academic purpose, career advancement or investments, and traveling abroad as easy way. All in all, we have known that English communication is important helping in the world today, because it is widely used English as a tool of communication for learning new language. This

reason can point out that learning speaking usually learns to listen first, then to speak, then to read and finally to write to be fluent in English, which students should have a good speaking skill.

Additionally, most people can speak English effectively and students often make mistakes in the accent and pronunciation. According to the speaking problems in Thailand, that emphasizes English grammar and writing skills, do not focuses on speaking and listening even through the educational system of Thailand, that have provided a model of developing countries into Thai schools and Universities, most Thai people still speak Thai native language in classes, they do not have many opportunities to use English communication, many students lack of confidence in English speaking skills in different situations as well.

Thus, English communication's obstacle is "one of the most widespread problems among learners of foreign languages, which are considerably lower speaking performance when compared to their passive knowledge". (Young & J, 1986: 19) Learners are expected to get the general knowledge and to study clearly of the ability and development in Using English speaking skills, but it is the big problem of a lack of confidence in their daily life. Most of the first year students are not disciplined in using the target language in the learning process.

In the same way, English speaking is an one of the most common problems which found much in Thai universities. Although the most foreign language learners always manage to pass many vocabulary or pronunciation tests and English courses of Bachelor's Degree students. However, many students avoid enrolling in these courses due to problems, such as shyness, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, sentence, grammar, pronunciation, unfamiliar situation, sense of isolation, self-consciousness and the fear of looking foolish, etc. (Gslina Kavalaukience, 2006). And also it was found in A study which had been conducted on the issue of students "low speaking performance indicated that English is highly regarded as the gateway to global marketplace and finding the way to improve English not only the students." (Bassano, S., & Chirstison, M., 1987: 201-207) Especially, the Ministry of Education has designed scopes of knowledge management to take the foreign teachers and native speakers to teach English for students in the university as much as possible, to learn include to improve English and to use the ways of the English language that is popular to use around the world.

Thereupon, students may not be recognized for the importance of language and do not follow the direction, which is focused on grammar and structures of

communication. In fact, they have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty moments and shy to speak more. Among these characteristics are: language proficiency level, memory, affect, age, gender, learning disabilities in L1, and background knowledge as well as aptitude, processing skills, background biases, motivation, and confidence level." (Joan Robin, 1994: 199-221.) As a result, a lot of students need to learn how to speak as well as special techniques to be perfect. Anyway, if they know how their English speaking skills levels, they will be able to bring to the process of the solution and across any which validly try to find new sources to improve English language.

At this point, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University where it will stand as the central of Buddhism of Thailand, is the two major schools of Buddhism, they are Theravada and Mahayana sections. As previously known that the Buddhism is the main religion by following the Buddha's teaching to spread the doctrines into the 21 century, which is trying to develop potential and support the human resources for peaceful world. Besides, people who came to study at MCU, they will get the knowledge and valuable experiences about the teaching of the Buddha. On the other hand, according to the university's policies are having the main objectives for enhancing and developing the English speaking skills of Undergraduate students and the significant mission of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University for finding the ways to improve both the monks themselves and universities together.

Also, first year students those who have been studying English for many years.

A researcher mentioned that "speaking in the foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experiences." (Hemerka & Vacav., 2009: 10) Learners always face problem when they will have to communicate in English language. However, the teacher provided the ways for students to be understood in higher levels when they encounter English communication problems while using accurate grammatical structures, in order to be able to communicate with people in all areas; they must be able to speak English as a second language with precise pronunciation, self-confidence and also join English activities.

Henceforth, the goal of first year students of MCU is to improve the students' ability to speak English. However, the main problems of English learners unable to communicate and rarely speak English in the fields and the real life. As Woenraad Kuiper and W. Scott Allan had suggested that the hesitant situation is more difficult in English languages that are not physical objects like cars". (Koenraad Kuiper &

W. Scott Allan, 1996: 1). Actually, it proves that students listen and respond to language before they learn to talk. For this reason, students hesitated to practice speaking in a foreign language. Hence, the policies of the Faculty of Humanities are looking forward to develop abilities of students. All in all, they must have to use English speaking in daily conversation as their first language.

In summary, the problems will lead to conduct the effective English speaking skills, the majority of students who speak the first native language in English classes. So, students have to practice with the actual speaking activities or foreign friends to communicates fluently and correctly, to achieve a goal. Therefore, expression in the second language is the problems for them. The purpose of this study is to help learners to have more confidences and speaking skills. That can really help them to have efficient and accurate to speak English with foreigners and gaining better opportunities in their future careers.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study is to investigate the main purpose of the problems of English speaking skills of students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University as follows:

1. To study the problems of English speaking skills of the first year students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.
2. To purpose the ways to improve English speaking skills for the first year students.

## 3. Scope of the Study

This research is aimed to study of the problems of English speaking skills of the first year students of Bachelor of Arts in English, Bilingual Program in the Faculty of Humanities of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Main Campus), Wangnoi, Ayutthaya Province, who are asked to be participated by answering the questions about the problems of English speaking skills. Therefore, this study is divided into four scopes as follows:

### 3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 To collect data from English articles, thesis, journal, internet, textbooks, documents, and academic books of English language, which are very important resources in previous institutes, i.e. Ramkhamheang University Center Library, Mahidol University Library, Kasetsart University Library, Thammasat University Library, Chulalongkorn University Library.

3.1.2 To choose 63 undergraduate students of the first year class who are studying in English, Bilingual program, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Main Campus), Wangnoi District, Ayutthaya province.

3.1.3 To study about the problems of English speaking skills by using questionnaires for testing students, which are classified definitely in the method.

#### **Key informant**

In this study, it is qualitative and quantitative methods, aiming to study English speaking techniques and analyzing the data, including the usage of the tools that are questionnaires and interview. Questionnaires are used for testing 63 first year students. All interviewees are five English teachers and one an English native speaker who are currently teaching English subjects at Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

### **3.2 Sample Design**

#### **3.2.1 The Respondents and Sample methods**

The respondents of the study are consisted of 63 first year undergraduate students, who are now studying English, Bilingual program, Faculty of Humanities, at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. (Main campus), Lamsai Sub-District, Wangnoi District, Phranakorn Sri Ayutthaya Province, in the second semester of the academic year 2016. Therefore, it is possible that the first year undergraduate students are from many English speaking levels. Thus, they should know the problems and the ways to improve English speaking skills.

#### **3.2.2 Information of respondents**

The information of the respondents involved with gender, age, English subject and academic year. All of these are measured in a nominal scale that can be described in the following;

**Gender** is clearly showed the number of the monks, novices, male and female who are now studying at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, which can be classified into 4 groups, namely monk, novice, male and female.

**Age** is the obvious studying of the first year students, which shows the different age of students, who come to study at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University that has been divided into three groups;

18 - 20 years old

21 - 30 years old

30 years up

**English subject** is an international subject which refers to English major, bilingual program, as an important tool for learners to improve speaking skills of English language.

**Academic year** is current studying of training and instructions, especially of monks, novices and young people, including students in schools, colleges, university, etc. Then, designing to develop the knowledge and the ability in using English speaking skills of the first year students.

In addition, the respondents are eligible students who are always studying in daily communication classes and often repeat the lesson both in the university and outside. So, the students would have been comprehended and understood English speaking skills.

### 3.3 Research Tools

#### 3.3.1 The Qualitative Method

This section is specially used in-depth interview, this is the most appropriate tool for collecting data as the main tool for this research study as the following:

In-depth Interview

Researcher points out to interview people who are skillful teachers at English language, especially in speaking skills, related to five English teachers and one English native speaker.

#### 3.3.2 The Quantitative method

The format of the questionnaires is making to develop English speaking skills by using questions; to survey of the first year students

Part one: Personal information of the participants

This questionnaire involved the background about personal information of participants. Demographic detail includes monks, novices, male, female, gender, age, English subject and academic year of 63 first year students.

Part two: The problems of English speaking skills.

In this section, it is especially aimed to answer research questions of this research, designed by using 63 questionnaires about the problems of English speaking skills by using a Five-Point Likert Scale to measure the 63 first year students consisting of five choices: strongly agree, agree, moderately, disagree, and strongly disagree.

#### 4. The results of the problems of English speaking skills and to find out the ways to improve English speaking skills

The results of the study mainly to presents the background information of the respondents, especially included status, age, how long have you studied English, English speaking subject. As indicated in this study focus at the Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Main Campus). Ayutthaya Province, Thailand. As the majority of the participants are 31 monks with 49%, while 22 novices with 35%, 5 males with 8%, and 5 females with 8%.

According to the the average age of the respondents who are studying at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Main Campus), Ayutthaya Province, Thailand. About the age of respondents, there are all 63 first year students. Most of them are 21-30 years old with 54%, while period of 18-20 years old with 27%. Preferably, students are more than 30 up with 19%.

It is particularly shows the result from the problems of English speaking skills. It is found that the mean rate of overall English speaking problems of the first year students at 3.34% as the moderately level of all students.

The overall mean score for the problems of English speaking skills of respondents in this study with the amount of ( $\bar{X} = 3.50\%$ ), it can be interpreted as the high level of the ways to improve English speaking skills.

#### 5. Discussions

The finding of this research study represents the notable points in the results of the analysis of the study in the following areas: the problems of English speaking skills, the ways to improve English speaking skills

5.1 Regarding to the respondents' English speaking skills of the first year students and according to researcher found that almost all of them have the basic English grammar and using English in speaking more than other skills, but lacking confidence in using vocabulary and pronunciation in the speaking, because the first year class, that there are 63 students in one room per class sizes. Similarly Xinqin states that interviewed Chinese students and identified and summarized the cause of their anxiety about speaking. The first problems was related to a lack of proficiency in English, the second was the fear of making mistakes and being subject to ridicule, and the third was related to large class sizes, followed by an unwillingness to take risk. (Xinqin & Z. 34-39) More importantly, due to several reasons. For instance, fear of

exam and lack of self-confidence in accordance with Krashent's theory explains that the students will pronounce that learned when passing learning that language by getting input meaningful can be understood and learner must learn language without force and is also consistent with research of Siriwatchhas Lukkana said anxiety is feeling kind of queasy, which will come in the form of fear such as fear the examination, fear that can't exam. (Krashen & S, 1995: 76)

According to the results of the MacIntyre et al. study (1997) revealed that anxious students communicate less information in a less proficient manner. Language anxiety also negatively correlated with actual and perceived L2 proficiency, with anxious learners underestimating their language abilities. Furthermore, learners still have shyness to look forward to express and fear of presenting that is the cause of environment in the classroom's problems as according to Prastisonpreda noted a sense of anxiety that refers to the upheavals caused by the anticipating that something that happens from within self the mind (Subjective Danger) and the fear is caused by something outside (Outside Danger). (Prasatisonpreda, 1988: 45) Additionally, when they have to use in class in front of people in public speaking or etc., they want to speak as face to face more than a group of speaking class. Especially, teachers should support and encourage students in speaking skills. In the same way, students should identify the problems themselves to advisor for checking the correctness and finding solutions to enhance confidence and information sources for students. All in all, the effective way to solve these problems to help and develop the students is practice every day to become more capable and proficient learners.

5.2 It shows previously that most of respondents are unable to speak English quite good especially shyness to speaking as concerned with the previous study of Littlewood pointed out that some learners also lack the motivation to speak English. They do not see a real need to learn or speak English. Actually motivation is the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks in a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he preserves. (Littlewood, W., 1984: 53) Sustainable to enhance and improve their knowledge at a higher level, but sentences were quite complicated to speak English in the long sentences and new vocabularies. As prominently mentioned that lecturers who have experienced many abilities and skills in order to attempt and make these students more effective language learners. In other word, as well as congruent with foreign language learning is a unique experience for every learner. Even those learners who learn a foreign language in the same environment, under the same conditions, achieve various success in the foreign

language. The cause of this variability may be a set of learner characteristics defined as individual differences. They include intelligence, aptitude, age, gender, attitudes and motivation, language anxiety, learning styles, strategies and willingness to communicate. (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009: 199-225). For this reason, teachers should indicate learners to improve their communication competence to complete their speaking skills in daily conversation continuously increasing, and often practice face to face or every time they do. Hence, if they were always able to speak what they wants to say when using English, they can speak English comfortably and preferably native speaker or whatever they need in the worldwide, they will be able to solve the problems and carry out a conversation successfully in the target.

## 6. Suggestions

As this study has been conducted of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Main Campus).

1. Further studies should improve vocabulary and confidence in English sentences, when they have to speak English and encounter the problems in speaking English of the first year students' class, majoring in English, Bilingual program of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

2. Further study students should give attentions to new techniques and try to listen English songs, watching movies, motivation to execute and games and English activities can help elevate motivate the students be interested in learning more English speaking skills' ability in English vocabulary and using in daily spoken conversation in English at all.

3. Further study can be recommended that learners should have to train more various kinds of practicing not only for enhancing by teachers in English' classes or courses of institute to speak English, but also try to speak with foreign friends or joining an English club or conversation group or people who have experienced in English speaking skills then pay particular attention to speed and pronunciation.

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