

THE REASONS WHY FILIPINO STUDENTS CAN SPEAK ENGLISH BETTER THAN THAI STUDENTS

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Abstract

Generally, in Thailand, Thai students have been studying English since primary school. However, even they reached tertiary level; most of them have difficulty in communicating English with foreigners. Compared to Filipino students, most of them started studying English at the same age as Thai students but it was evident that Filipino students can speak better English. In this study, the researchers explored the reasons behind these successes of Filipino students and the probable causes that Thai students are lagged behind. The participants of this study were limited to 4 Thai students who were studying English for Communication at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi and 4 Filipino students from De La Salle University Dasmaringas (DLSU-D). This was a qualitative research using a semi-structured interview and lasted for two weeks to collect and analyze the data of the respondents. The findings of this study indicated both internal and external factors affecting success of Filipino learners and failure of Thai learners. Some of the internal factors that lead to Filipino success are Filipino overt personality and friendliness while Thai learners are scared to commit mistakes and shy to communicate in other language. For the external factor on the other hand, the Philippines was colonized by the Americans for more than 50 years and this leads to the extensive use and availability of English language anywhere in the Philippines. Thailand, though, had never been colonized and hence, there is a rampant scarcity of English language use. The findings of this study have tremendous implication in language teaching and learning in Thailand as it provides clear comparison of how and what learning styles needed in order to be successful language learners.

Keywords: learning style, cultural background, Filipino learners, Thai learners

1. Background of the Study

Darasawang (2007) claimed that in history, it can be seen that English has always played an important role in Thai education from the time when it was first introduced, testifying to its importance for the country's economic and technological development. It has been part of the curricula from the primary school to the university level. However, there is still a question why most Thai students are not capable to communicate effectively using English. This proposition leads to many comparisons to Thailand's neighboring countries such as the Philippines. Compared to students in the Philippines, "English is part of the curriculum from primary to secondary education, many Filipinos write and speak in fluent Philippine English, although there might be differences in diction and

pronunciation" (Isabel, 2008). Furthermore, Gonzalez (2009) said that "Most schools in the Philippines, however, are staffed by teachers who are speakers of Philippines English and hence notable differences from the American English from which it was derived are observable. Philippine English traditionally followed American English spelling and grammar, except when it comes to punctuation as well as date notations." In this conception, the researchers explored the reasons why Filipino students can speak English better than Thai students in order to shed light what boundaries may have to help Thai learners improve their English language.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were: a) to know the problems why

Filipino can speak English better than Thai students and b) to analyze the reasons why Thai students have difficulty in speaking English to communicate with foreigners compare to Filipino students. This study also analyzed the problem of Thai students in speaking with English speaking foreigners.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Specifically, this researched answered the following questions.

Specifically, it will answer the following questions.

1. What are the common problems of Thai students in communicating with foreigners?
2. Why Thai students have difficulty in speaking English to communicate with foreigners?
3. Why Filipino students can speak better English?
4. What are the strategies that most Filipino students use in order to communicate effectively?
5. What are the best communication practices of Filipino students that can be adopted in Thai context?

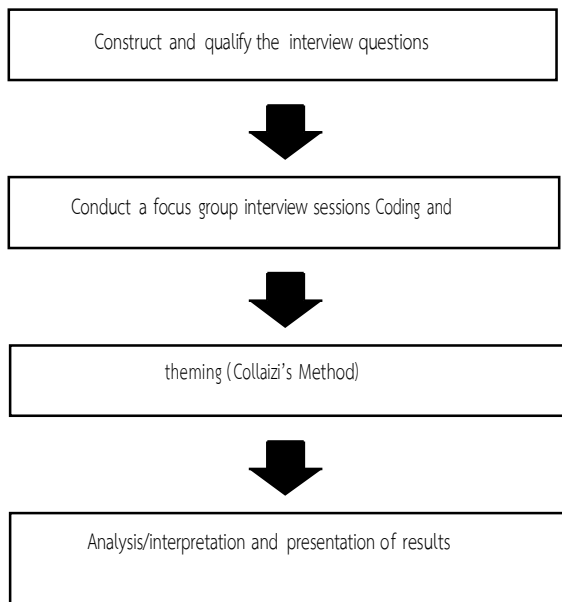
2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study was qualitative research using semi-structure interview questions. The qualitative phase has been designed and divided into four main phases as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The qualitative procedures of the study



The interview questions were validated using Index Item Congruence by three experts. All items in the interview questions were constructed theoretically according to the four components and they will be written by the researcher in order to meet Filipino and Thai students' context. The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) will be used to qualify the content validity of the questions. If an expert thinks the item is appropriate, 1 point was being given to that item. If an expert thinks the item is not appropriate, -1 point was given to that item whereas if an expert is not sure about the appropriateness of the item, 0 point was given to that item. Thus, three experts considered each item collaboratively and the mean score of each item was calculated to justify the appropriateness in using that item. The IOC mean score is between 0.00 – 1.00 whereas the mean score on each item equally to 0.5 is the minimal acceptance. After which, the actual distribution of the questionnaires to the respondents then commenced.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study were four students from De La Salle University (DLSUD), College of Liberal Arts, and 4 English for Communication students from Rajamangala University of Technology Thunyaburi (RMUTT) by purposive sampling. The informants gave suggestions about the reasons why Filipino students can speak English better than Thai students and why Thai students are lag behind.

2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection lasted for two weeks in finding out the reasons why Filipino students can speak English better than Thai students. The informants (4 students from DLSU-D and 4 RMUTT) were requested to come to the office where the researchers were working. The interview included a basic information and the techniques for improve an English speaking skills.

The interview questions had the following parts:

1. Personal bio data
2. English skills' practice and techniques
3. The understanding/problems about English

All of data analyses by using the interview to collect the information from participants. The interview is used widely to supplement and extend our knowledge about individual(s) thoughts, feelings our knowledge about individual(s) thoughts, feelings and behaviors, meanings,

interpretations, etc. The researcher collects detailed personal information from individuals usually in one to one situations using oral questions and summarizes the data to find out what are the problems. To analyze qualitative data, a typological analysis Chanthawanit (2011) was used to categorize and group data according to type. Inductive data analysis, was used in which patterns, themes, and categories of analysis “emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data a collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 390). In terms of scrutinizing each transcript, the author, however, was able to identify common themes and patterns. Moreover, each interviewee was assigned code and listed in a coding matrix. So that the procedures enabled the authors to note which codes were evident within each interview, and when several interviewees discussed similar issues or concerns within any given theme. From this procedure, code matrix, that is a list of common codes and themes, was constructed.

2.4 Trustworthiness and Validity

The term *trustworthiness*, according to Merriam (1998), is considered an essential element of conducting any type of qualitative research. It consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, *credibility* was addressed in twofold, a) approval of the actual interview transcripts and b) reconfirming the final findings and interpretations to the respective respondents of this study. Furthermore, triangulation of data collection as well as member checking was done in order to increase the credibility of the findings. For the *transferability* issue, the researchers in this study provided a thick description of the research context and the full transcriptions. In addition, complete theme and code were presented in the full report to enable other researchers the benefit of transferring or adopting the results in other context. The *dependability* and *confirmability* issue was addressed by proper documentation of the research process and data collection procedures and asking independent coders to code qualitative data. Lastly, Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to validate the content of the interview questions.

3.

Results

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate the reasons why Filipino students can speak English better than Thai students. To address the objectives of this research, the results were categorized

according to the aforementioned research questions:

Research question 1: *What are the problems of Thai students in speaking with foreigners?*

To study the problems of Thai students in speaking with English foreigners through the interview. We found that the main problems are shyness, fear and lack of vocabulary knowledge. These problems happened because Thai students were not very confident enough to speak English with foreigners.

On shyness

In terms of shyness, most Thai students admitted that they are shy to talk to foreigners. Participant No. 7 said that “sometimes I feel shy when a foreigner asks me something and I just don’t want to speak more.” Apart from this, it can be concluded that shyness can be the primary reason why Thai could not communicate well in English.

On Fear

For the factors of fear, Thai students seemed like they are afraid to make mistakes by using wrong grammar. Most participants mentioned that “I have problem about grammar.” As an analysis, grammatical is still be number one of the fact that why Thai students afraid to speak English.

On lack of vocabulary

Another factor that hampers Thai students to communicate effectively is the lack of vocabulary. One of the participants mentioned that “I don’t know how to explain some words in English.” From this, it can be interpreted that learning vocabulary is the most important thing to do while studying in English.

To support this claim, Juhana (2002) explained that:

“Fear of mistakes, anxious, shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation are included into psychological factors. Those become the main factor which affect the students’ condition because it comes from the individual.”

Research question 2: *Why Thai students have difficulty in speaking English to communicate with foreigners?*

Cultural aspect

Generally, Thai people don’t really speak English to each other and that is one the reasons why Thai students are having a hard time in speaking English.

A study by Mokkarawut (2006)

“I support this idea in the finding that students succeeded in speaking

English because they needed to use English for studying and working in both Thailand and foreign countries. This type of motivation was instrumental and drove them to reach their goals.”

Personality aspect

Most of Thai students are really afraid of using wrong grammatical, pronouncing and fear of using the wrong words. As our first language is not English so that means it is even harder to correct the sentence with perfectly grammar.

Rubin & Thompson (1994) defined attitude as the key to success in language learning.

“A learner’s attitude can also be defined as how they feel about other aspects of the target language, such the culture and people associated with it. A student who admires the culture and wants to learn about it may become more familiar with the target language as a result. There is a clear relationship between attitude and success, and a positive attitude will help learners to achieve their goals.”

Peer aspect

To analyses the reasons why Thai students have difficulty in speaking to communicate with foreigners. Due to the problems mentioned above shows that Thai students still had the problems with anxiety to make mistakes. When the students were dominated by this tension during practicing English, it must obstruct students from speaking fluently. Thai students feel uncomfortable or even being confused and panicky every so often when they are faced in training oral language production. As the consequence, they get difficulty to catch the smoothness in speaking (Juhana, 2002).

Research question 3: *Why Filipino students can speak better English?*

Availability of Language Use

The use of English in the Philippines is very dominant. Almost all people in the Philippines can speak English into some extent. We never encounter anyone who couldn’t speak English at all. This one of the main reason why they are good at English because they easily practice it anywhere and anytime. According to Chavez (2013) “I have just come back from the Philippines where English is an official language, along with the local Filipino language. This does not mean that everyone understands or speaks English but it does mean that exposure to the language is so great that those who do speak it can communicate quite fluently. I was impressed that even people who had never stepped outside of the Philippines were fluent in English.”

Participant No. 5 said that “The teacher wants you to learn and to express your feelings in English especially that English is now the global language.”

Historical Aspect

However, one of the reasons why Filipino students can speak better English because they were colonized by American for a short time but twice. The fact is America brought education to the Philippines, they taught Filipino people how to speaking in English even if the Philippines were colonized by Spain for more than 300 years but how Spain controlling the country was totally different. Spain pays tribute to the religion that is the reason why 90% of people here in Philippines are catholic. Because of colonization, majority of the reading materials and articles of good in the Philippines are written in English. For example, the Bible, most churches use English bible to preach and conduct mass. There are many traditions and cultures emanated from the western world too. Christmas is one of the cherished tradition in the Philippines and of course, it comes along all English connotation align with Christmas.

Research question 4: *What are the strategies that most Filipino students use in order to communicate effectively?*

Reading

Most of the Participants (Filipino students) mentioned that they are practicing English by reading novels, articles and magazines which is different from Thai students. Filipinos are people who loves reading. It’s just simply a habit for them. The good side of this is that most of the text or reading materials they have are written or published in English. Reading English text is very common for them.

To support this idea David J. Rosen said that “Reading is the best way to improve your vocabulary. The context of articles, stories, and conversations helps you figure out and understand the meaning of English words in the text that are new to you. Reading also provides repetition of vocabulary words you have already learned to help you remember them.”

Freedom of Speech

Filipinos are very energetic and talkative people. They love talking among themselves and it continues along when they start talking with other nationalities. They simply talk naturally as if they are talking with fellow Filipino. They are very expressing people and most of the time they don’t really care of what to say and how to say it. They simply say it in the manner they they think they are being understood. This is one aspect that makes them good in speaking because they don’t worry

about making mistakes. If they say it incorrectly, they will simply know if the listener doesn't understand. Then they will correct it. In Thailand however, they focus on thinking if they will be understood or not. As a result, most Thai students couldn't even think of saying a word because of this over thinking.

Research question 5: *What are the best communication practices of Filipino students that can be adopted in Thai context?*

Reading for Pleasure

From the participants responses, it shows that they read a lot so they become better in English compared to Thai participants that more likely watch movies or listen to international music. According to SKOLA, "Reading is a great way of practicing your English in your own time. You can take one word at a time at your own pace, without your teacher peering over your shoulder. If you're studying at a beginner to intermediate level, pick up a children's book where the language will be easier than an adult book." From participant No. 4 mentioned that he practices his English skills by reading out loud. If this practice will be adopted in Thai context, it can help Thai students.

Fluency before Accuracy

Most Filipino does not mind making grammatical error. They have patriotism in their language and they think that using English is not a big thing for them. If they make mistakes, they don't care because they know that it is not their native language. As one participant claimed, "If I make mistake, I don't care. It's up to the foreigner to understand me. In fact they should know how to speak certain Filipino words before coming here. It's a respect to one culture and country. In Thailand, Thai people cater foreigner extensively in such a way that Thai adjust in all possible manner including language. Thai people are very submissive in pleasing foreigners. This is different from Filipino. As a result, they speak without worry or being ashamed of losing face because they English is not perfect. In their mind, foreigners should be ashamed of not having knowledge in Filipino language.

Curious Character

Filipinos are very curious. They are very eager to know and learn whatever that comes along. They see opportunity for learning in every way. Language learning is not their main objective but it goes along because Philippines is an English context society. English is everywhere from advertisement, movies, laws and signboards. Even beggars can speak English fluently.

4. Conclusions and Discussions

4.1 Summary

The objectives of this study were to (1) to know the problems of Thai students in speaking with foreigners (2) to analyze the reasons why Thai students have difficulty in speaking English to communicate with foreigners (3) to discuss why Filipino students can speak better English than Thai students, (4) what are possible best practices that can be adopted in Thai context. The participants of this study included students' undergraduate at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi and DLSU-D students from any collage. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher designed a research instrument including interview, the researcher selected 8 students from the sample and interviewed individually. The interview showed that Thai students had difficulty in speaking in English as English language is not their first language so that they were not too confident when they communicate compared to Filipino students, they can speak better English even they are not majoring in English. Apart from that, as a highest result, it is possible that Thai participants were lack of vocabulary knowledge and afraid to make mistakes. Some of them were stressful when it comes to English. Even not in the language learning environment, including physical and habit are not linking to affect to their stressful. Their all body part particular their mentally that bear upon the stressful or anxiety symptom. However, Filipino students were way more confident when they are speaking in English. The researcher trusts there may be other variables which interact with these considerations that have not been investigated in the study.

4.2 Conclusions

Regarding the research question number 1, the analysis of each question during the interview shows that the Thai participants are too shy when they have to communicate in English and they also fear to make mistakes. As referred to the research question number 2, shows that one of the reason why Thai students have difficulty in speaking in English to communicate with foreigners is lack of vocabulary knowledge. From the research question number 3, shows that why Filipino students can speak better English is they were colonized by American and they used the same letters as English. One more important reason is they are speaking in Taglish or Tagalog-English. Regarding the research question number 4, shows that Filipino students read a lot. They improve their English skills by reading. From the research question number 5, the best communication practices of

Filipino students that can be adopted in Thai context is to read more. Thai students don't really like to read so they only listen to music and watch English programs which is not helping that much.

4.3 Discussions

As referred to the research question number 1, shows that the participants are lack of confidence. Thai students have studied English since they were in primary school. However, they cannot use vocabulary correctly. Some of them cannot remember easy words. It is possible that they are not interested in English enough or have a negative thinking about the language and they are not study hard enough. Regarding the research question number 2, analyses that the reason why Thai students have difficulty in speaking in English. Most of the participants do not pay attention to the vocabulary much owing to they are focus on grammar more. In addition, they will face with problems when they communicate with foreigners such as they cannot fully understand what the foreigners speak or how they speak with foreigners. So, they avoid speaking with foreigners. From the research question number 3, shows that why Filipino students can speak better English. Participants are well communicating in English based on their Taglish language. However, from the research question number 4, shows that Filipino students and Thai students are using differently tool of practice English by reading and listening. From the research question number 5, shows that Thai students should learn by reading more so they can also read out loud and that might help them remember the meaning of the words and how to pronounce those words correctly.

4.4 Limitation of the Study

During the interview shows that the Thai participants have difficulty in speaking English due to the shyness, confidence and vocabulary knowledge. Some of the Filipino samples were afraid to speak because they do not know how to speak correctly and that means the researcher did not get the information as much as it should be.

4.5 Recommendations

Students who are not fluently in English should find their own ways to practice more in English and they should gradually decrease hesitation to think about the correct sentences to response during the conversation. They should gain more confidence and try to speak out. The research shows that the result made by some of the participants who can communicate in English quite good. They suggest that the teachers should add more speaking and listening classes and

make sure those classes are not too boring or stressful.

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6. Appendices

Interview Questions

The questions are as follows:

1. Please tell me about yourself: age, career
2. What does your family do for a living?
3. Have you ever taken TOEIC test and what score did you get?
4. Could you give me information about your school from the beginning until now?
5. When did the English class start in your school and how many hours did you have English class per week?
6. How did you feel with English subject?
7. What grade did you get on English subject?
8. How was the atmosphere in English classes?
9. Please explain how the school provided English courses for students.
10. Did the school hire any English native speaker to be a teacher?
11. Did the teachers assign you to work in group or in pair in English classes?
12. How did you feel with English teachers?

13. Did you have any chance in using English outside classroom?
14. Do you have a problem in learning English? What is it?
15. Did your English teachers influence on your English proficiency?
16. How did you improve your English skills? What strategy or technique did you use?
17. Did you feel good with American or Western people?
18. How often do you use English?
19. Do you have any motivation and inspiration in studying English?
20. Did you take any extra English course at tutorial school?
21. Do you have any problem with Western culture?
22. Do you think uncontrolled exciting situations will affect your English Speaking ability?
23. Are you capable of communicating in English with foreigners?

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