Components Contributing to English Oral Proficiency: A Case Study of the Undergraduates of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok*

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Abstract

The research aims to investigate the relationships between oral proficiency and pertinent factors. The subjects were 275 KMITNB undergraduate students who enrolled in English Conversation I. The data were collected through survey questionnaires. Arithmetic means, S.D., percentage, Pearson product moment correlations, and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The analyses revealed positive relationships between oral proficiency and independent variables, i.e. previous oral ability, recent English grade, duration of English study, daily English exposure, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation; while a negative relationship with anxiety was explored. Contrary to the conjecture; however, the relationship between independent learning style and oral proficiency was not supported. Further analyses indicated four components influencing learners' oral proficiency, i.e. prior oral competence, recent English grade, daily English exposure, and extrinsic motivation. These four variables together accounted for 46.5% of the total variability and were demonstrated as the best predictors to learners' oral proficiency.

Keywords: oral proficiency, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, class anxiety, independent learning

1. Introduction

English has been accepted as a language used throughout the world for international communication and the users worldwide could be estimated over two billion people (Kachru, 1992). Undoubtedly, those with mastery of this language would be likely to have more opportunities to succeed. Thailand is an Asian country where English has been taught as a primary foreign language. Unlike a number of countries where English is used as a native language or second language, Thai learners generally have limitation in restricted contact with English native speakers and inadequate opportunities to be exposed to English language environment. In addition, academic curriculums generally highlight the importance of language skills like reading and structure writing instead of a good command in communicative oral skill. These are main reasons why attempts to master English speaking ability has been a tough problem for Thai students. The researcher thus purposed to investigate the factors that were likely to affect oral proficiency in such context.

King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok has offered academic service to students particularly in engineering, science and technology for over four decades. One of the requirements for graduation of all undergraduates were passing two compulsory English courses which basically involve integral linguistic skills including foundation reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Following these two courses, students could take some other language electives, and English conversation I (810316) is one of the elective courses provided to enhance students' oral ability.

In the second semester of the academic year 2004, there were 347 undergraduate students taking English Conversation I (810316). With an assumption that background knowledge in English will assist further acquisition, those enrolling in English Conversation I (810316) would have fundamental language skills from the foundation courses English I (810301) and English II (810302) in a certain level

2. The Theoretical Framework

From previous studies , a variety of factors regarding L2 speaking competence were investigated and can be concluded as follows: Ramage (1990) asserted the predictive ability of motivational and attitudinal factors in achievement in learning English and continuation of foreign language study among high school Hungarian students. The study explained that students' intrinsic motivation (studying for fulfilling their interest) and extrinsic motivation (studying for practical goals) were prerequisite to their attentiveness, final grade, and continuation of studying that language. Students with an interest in L2 culture and a desire to master English were more likely to gain high grade and seemed to continue their English study in the higher level rather than simply studying to fulfill a college requirement. The study also insisted the effectiveness of an early start in L2 success and in promoting persistence in foreign language study. The earlier students started to study English, the more success in language acquisition and more interest they attained. As a result, they were more likely to continue studying L2 beyond the required level.

The study of Samimy and Tabuse (1992) administered by series of questionnaires to American undergraduate students who took basic Japanese courses not only supported the relationships between such affective variables as attitudes, motivation, class discomfort -- and linguistic performance, but also indicated that motivation and attitudinal factors, previous experience with L2, i.e. learners' opportunities to speak Japanese outside of the classroom, were critical in predicting students' success in the target language. Furthermore, anxiety could produce negative results as those students who felt uncomfortable in class tended not to take risks in communicating in the target language. This corroborated Bailey's (1983) earlier findings which claimed the negative relationships between L2 acquisition and several causal factors

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such as class apprehension, embarrassment of speaking L2, psychologically insecure learning environment, and fear of negative evaluation. The researcher insisted that too much anxiety could have a negative effect on learning outcomes. However, a merely moderate amount of anxiety could be facilitative and produce positive results.

The construct of learning style preference has also been discussed as a contributor to language acquisition. As learners have individual attributes relating to the intake of new information, they are likely to have preference on some methods of learning to the others. Learning styles are multidimensional and can be categorized into several aspects, some of which include independent, dependent, verbal, analytical, impulsive, reflective, participatory, avoidant, competitive, collaborative, and so on (Shumin, 1999). Among these, the two traits frequently mentioned are independent and dependent learning styles. Independent learning style is the learning method in which students take responsibility for their own progress and achievement. Such students tend to study at their own pace and options, possess self-reliance, need little guidance from the teacher or peers, and have minimal desire to collaborate with the classmates. On the contrary, dependent students would prefer to work with peers and within structured guidance of the teacher or an authority figures. Due to the nature of learning traits, independent subjects may learn more efficiently as such learning style emphasizes autonomy and extensive self-reliance. In an EFL situation where contact with English native speakers is limited, individual practice, self direction and regular use of English with considerable and persistent efforts might affect students' oral ability.

In a study of Diaz and Cartnal (1999), the researchers compared on-line and on-campus instruction of 70 students enrolling in the same course. The Grasha-Riechmann learning style inventory was administered to determine students' learning style categories. The result revealed that those enrolling in the on-line section were more independent learners who needed only some guidance for meeting teachers' expectation whereas the on-campus class were more dependent learners who favored collaborative styles. This might come from the fact that autonomy better suited a distant learning environment. In addition, Shumin (1999) stated that learners' performances could be enhanced by adapting the instructional methods to individual differences in learning styles. The researcher thus conjectured that independent learning style, in which learners took responsibility for their own progress would correspond with the EFL situation where students had only restricted contact with English native speakers. In spite of such limitation, students could achieve oral proficiency by independent practice at their own pace. For example, they could improve their spoken competence by practicing at the self-assessment center, speaking in the target language regularly with English native teachers, developing their pronunciation and fluency using materials in the Language Center, recording their voice and listening to raise awareness of their own strengths and weakness, seeking constructive feedback from teachers or being assessed by instructional software. Therefore, independent learning style might be a factor contributing to success in oral proficiency.

From these studies, the researcher aimed to explore 8 research questions relevant to the final score of English conversation (oral proficiency), and thus set up the hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1 : Previous oral ability (midterm score) is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 2 : Recent English grade, attained from the previous grade in English II (810302), is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 3 : The early start, i.e. duration in studying English is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 4 : Daily exposure to English language is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 5 : Learning anxiety is negatively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 6 : Intrinsic motivation, which reflects the students' interest in English for its own sake, is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 7 : Extrinsic motivation, which reflects a determination to acquire English to achieve direct pragmatic benefits such as intention to attend higher degree, future career, satisfied grade, social recognition, is positively related to oral proficiency.

Hypothesis 8 : Independent learning style which delineating self-pace instruction, self-reliance, and self-discipline in regard to one's study, is positively related to oral proficiency.

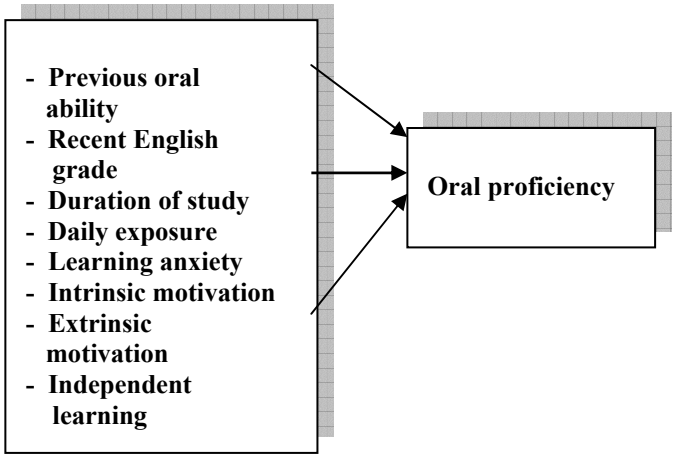

Figure 1 : Schematic representation of the conceptualized constructs to oral proficiency

The target population for this study was all 347 undergraduates students from 12 sections. They had enrolled in English Conversation I (810316) in the second semester of the academic year 2004. The accessible samples consisted of 275 (79.25%) subjects who voluntarily returned the questionnaires.

English Conversation I (810316) is an elective course following two prerequisite English I (810301) and English II (81302). The course focused on regular practice of language rules, common expressions, listening and speaking. The syllabus was based on a communicative American textbook which introduced learners to the use of English listening and speaking in a variety of familiar topics such as self - introduction, vacation, customs, recreation, entertainment, health, travel, and technology. All classes met for a 3-hour period a week. The activities included listening to dialogues and short stories for aural comprehension, learning structures, daily expressions , carrying individual assignments, pair work, and group work practice. Oral proficiency scores were assessed from response time, complexity in discussion, sentence structures, discourse

comprehension, and expression variety. The percentage of the midterm score was 35 and that of the final score was 40%. Classroom involvement was obligatory as it accounted for 25% of the total score.

3. Method and Instrument

The survey questionnaire was initially designed and validated for face validity and content validity, i.e. to assess whether the questionnaires items were good representatives of investigated constructs. Then it was pre-tested with a sample group of 35 undergraduates. The Cronbach alpha of the whole questionnaire was 0.78 which indicated a range of statistical acceptability and objectivity (Shifflet, 2005). Then the questionnaire was distributed to the students of 12 sections during one class period after midterm examination. The questionnaire items were adapted from involved theories and research work. The survey comprised two parts. The first part assessed demographic information including sex, year level, department, students' English II (810302) grade, and their duration of studying English in class. The second part assessed the level of studied constructs i.e. daily exposure to English, learning anxiety, motivational attitudes , and independent learning style. These variables were evaluated through arranged items with a 5-point rating scale. Students indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Negatively worded items were reversed prior to calculation of the scale score. The details of the scales in each section, along with Cronbach alpha (α) index of internal consistency are as follows:

1. Daily Exposure to English. A total of 4 items were used to assess regular opportunities to use English in regard to listening , reading, writing, and speaking ($\alpha = 0.67$)
2. Anxiety. Five items, three positively and two negatively worded assessed the students' anxiety toward learning situation ($\alpha = 0.68$).
3. Intrinsic Motivation. Three items evaluated the degree of effort the students exerted when learning English ($\alpha = 0.82$).
4. Extrinsic Motivation. Six items assessed pragmatic rewards from learning English ($\alpha = 0.75$).
5. Independent Learning Style. Four items evaluated the extent to which students take responsibility for their own progress with minimal dependence ($\alpha = 0.69$).

Cronbach alpha values of these constructs were between 0.67 - 0.82, while the alpha of the whole questionnaire was 0.74. According to Shifflett (2005), for interpreting coefficient alpha, a value equal to or over 0.70 reflects good objectivity. The questionnaire was therefore could be considered relatively reliable.

4. Results and Discussion

Statistical analyses using SPSS/PC for windows were used to address the research questions that were concerned with the study. Arithmetic mean (X), standard deviation (S.D.), and percentage were used to analyze demographic data whereas Pearson product-moment correlations and stepwise multiple regression were applied for investigation of important factors contributing to oral proficiency.

The questionnaire was distributed to all students who took English Conversation. The survey was carried out after mid-term oral examination. In so doing, students would have opinions in regard to class instruction, personal expectation, their enthusiasm, individual effort and practice, as well as learning style, attitudes, and particular motives towards the conversation course.

From 347 population, 275 undergraduate students (79.25%) returned the questionnaire. The large majority of students (n = 238) were male and only a small group (n = 37) were female. In proportion to the undergraduates taking this course, three-fourths came from the Faculty of Engineering, and the rest one-fourth from the Faculty of Applied Science, Industrial Education , Industrial Management, and College of Industrial Technology.

Table 1 : Number of students by department

Department	Frequency	Percent
Faculty of Engineering		
Chemical Engineering	3	1.1
Industrial Engineering	10	3.6
Mechanical Engineering	37	13.5
Production Engineering	3	1.1
Electrical Engineering	36	13.1
Computer Engineering	3	1.1
Civil Engineering	75	27.3
Materials Engineering	38	13.8
Faculty of Applied Science		
Applied Statistics	4	1.5
Industrial Chemistry	5	1.8
Industrial Physics	2	.7
Faculty of Technical Education		
Mechanical Engineering	3	1.1
Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management		
Agricultural Machinery	24	8.7
Industrial Management	3	.1
College of Industrial Technology		
Electronics Engineering	29	10.5
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Table 1 presents the distribution of students from fifteen divisions. The large majority were Civil Engineering students (CE), which accounted for one-fourth of the sampling group, followed by those from Material Engineering (MATE), Mechanical Engineering (ME), Electrical Engineering (EE), and Electronics Engineering Technology (ENET), each of which accounted for over 10% of the total samplings.

It was also found out that the large majority of 192 undergraduates (69.8%) was the second year students and about 30 % was those in the third and fourth year.

Table 2 : Background variables

variables	N	X	S.D.
Oral proficiency	274	31.56	3.18
Previous oral ability	274	27.71	3.18
English duration	230	11.88	2.93
Recent English grade	271	2.85	.71

Oral proficiency was assessed from the final speaking score (X= 31.56 from 40%) whereas previous oral ability was obtained from the midterm score (X = 27.71 from 35%). The average period of formal English study was 12 years and the average grade of the recent prerequisite English course (English II) was 2.85, which represented a moderate level (around C+).

Table 3 : The mean scores obtained from a 5-point Likert type scale questionnaire

variables	N	X	S.D.
Daily Exposure	275	2.98	.81
Learning anxiety	275	3.11	.75
Intrinsic motivation	273	3.63	.84
Extrinsic motivation	270	3.73	.67
Independent learning style	270	3.15	.71

The constructs of daily exposure to English, learning anxiety, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and independent learning style were measured from a rating scale questionnaire which contained 22 items. Respondents indicated their strength of agreement to these items ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to " 5" (strongly agree).

Learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations towards learning English were comparatively and relatively high, (X = 3.63-3.73) whereas the attitudinal dimension of class anxiety, the dimension of daily exposure to English, and learners' independent learning style were assessed at a moderate level (X = 2.98-3.15). The data implied students' motivation, i.e. willing to learn and practice their oral competence at the constraint of amount of input and affective filter.

To investigate further hypotheses on the relationships between oral proficiency and other eight independent variables, Pearson product-moment correlations revealed the following results

Table 4 : Correlations between oral proficiency and background variables

	Previous Oral Ability	English Duration	Recent English Grade
Oral Proficiency	.62**	.13*	.38**
Previous Oral Ability		.17**	.34**
English Duration			.25**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

The results asserted that oral proficiency (final score) and previous oral ability (midterm score) were significantly and highly correlated ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). In addition, oral proficiency was moderately correlated with recent English grade ($r = .38$, $p < .01$) and slightly correlated with English duration of study ($r = 0.13$, $p < .05$). In other words, students with high midterm scores, with high grades in English II (810302), and with extended period of formal English study tended to obtain high final scores of English conversation, i.e. possessed strong oral proficiency.

The study of Samimy and Tabuse (1992) indicated that previous proficiency and daily exposure to the target language were critical in predicting students' success or failure in L2. The data were collected from American undergraduates who took basic Japanese during three successive courses. Those who put effort and energy into learning Japanese and who had opportunities to speak Japanese outside the classroom received high grades at the end of the three consecutive quarters. Undoubtedly, students with low final grades in the first course attained significantly lower grades in the following quarters, and thus their persistent low linguistic performance and high attrition rate were observable. It could be that successful students were more familiar with noncognate L2 through constant effort and practice, and thus could apply the language background and knowledge for advanced courses. On the other hand, those with low grades were understandable to have a poor background in the language which might cause a strong negative affective reaction and thus in turn affect their linguistic performance. The outcomes implied that language proficiency was cumulative. To attain achievement in oral performance, an individual needed integrative and continual practice in a variety of language dimensions. For instance, a good command of speaking emerged from one's ability in listening comprehension in order to continue discussion, an ability to handle English structures into comprehensible discourses, and a certain amount of vocabulary for intelligible conversation. In short, the progress of L2 speaking would probably not happen by means of insufficient language background and in a limited period of instruction.

From correlational analysis in table 4, background traits were associated with one another. For example, those with high scores in midterm conversation tended to have longer time of formal English study, and also were more likely to attain higher grades in the prerequisite English II. Similarly, students with high grades in English II, with high midterm and final scores would have had a longer period of formal English study. Nonetheless, the correlation between English duration of formal study and oral proficiency was notably small ($r = .13$, $p<.05$) indicating that period of English study merely affected oral skill at a minimal level. Considering L2 environment and instruction in Thailand, English curriculum mostly emphasizes grammatical structures, reading, and vocabulary memorization rather than output production as speaking. Even the national entrance examination highlighted reading comprehension and syntax structures while conversation ability could only be assessed in a paper-pencil form. With minimum chance of real speaking practice and assessment, it was rather difficult for Thai students to master oral ability, no matter how long they had taken English lessons or how efficient they were in comprehending English syntax and semantics.

Table 5 : Correlations between oral proficiency and other independent variables

	Daily Exposure	Learning Anxiety	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation	Independent Learning style
Oral Proficiency	.30**	-.17**	.29**	.10*	.07
Daily Exposure		-.13*	.57**	.47**	.32**
Learning Anxiety			-.37**	-.14**	-.28**
Intrinsic Motivation				.59**	.39**
Extrinsic Motivation					.27**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Oral proficiency had positive relationships with regular use of English ($r = .30$, $p<.01$), intrinsic motivation ($r = .029$, $p<.01$) and extrinsic motivation ($r = .10$, $p<.05$). The findings were supported by Dornyei (1990); Samimy and Tabuse (1992); Clement (1994); and Shuman (1999). L2 learners who were frequently exposed to the target language would become more familiar and gain direct experiences in addition to formal class practice, which in turn benefited their ability to perceive and produce the acquired language effectively.

Intrinsic motivation, i.e. the need to study English for its own sake; and extrinsic motivation, or interest to study as a means to other pragmatic goals were found to be related to mastery in the target language. As confirmed by the study of Ramage (1990), motivational factors had a strong effect on American students in Northern California who took French and Spanish for the college entrance requirements. When the variable of entrance requirement was removed, there was a sharp drop, or clearly speaking --- a 50% decrease of students enrolling in foreign language classes. The study also revealed that students who were interested in a foreign language from their own interest strongly attained a goal of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing. To sum up, intrinsic motives emerged as a prevailing contributor as did extrinsic motives to L2 proficiency. The results could be that students with strong motivation were more enthusiastic to improve their language abilities and willing to put more effort to fulfill their expectation than those with lower motivation. Furthermore, effectiveness of motivation in promoting continuation and persistence in foreign language study were also explored in the mentioned study.

Learning anxiety was found negatively related with oral proficiency ($r =-.17$, $p<.01$), suggesting that students with high anxiety tended to gained less oral scores. The findings that degree of anxiety and learning apprehension had a reversed correlation with oral proficiency corroborated the study of Samimy and Tabuse (1992) which revealed that strength of language class discomfort was one of the crucial predictors of low language performance, avoidance of L2 speaking, and deterioration among American students who studied Japanese. A qualitative study of Bailey (1983) asserted a similar point that language class discomfort, anxiety, and embarrassment affected avoidance of responding, decline of oral proficiency, and attrition rate among learners who were taking Farsi, Spanish, or French as a target language. It could be that students with learning anxiety felt frustrated and thus could not efficiently manage the language they were not familiar with. The results implied foreign language students' needs for encouragement and support rather than threatening and intimidation. Classroom environment thus should be made supportive while pair work and group work activities

Apart from its negative effect towards oral proficiency, learning anxiety were found negatively related with other variables including daily exposure to English ($r = -.13$, $p<.05$), intrinsic motivation ($r = -.37$, $p<.01$), extrinsic motivation ($r = -.14$, $p< .01$), as well as independent learning styles ($r = -.28$, $p<.01$). The results demonstrated that students with a certain amount of anxiety in a conversation class were more likely to have rare use of English language, have low motivation and low independent learning style. These remaining factors were also found interdependent. It could be that insufficient use of the target language caused insecure feelings and thus students searched for assistance from others, which probably would make them more comfortable. Therefore, negative affective filters should be lessened while opportunities to use English as well as learning motivation should be enhanced.

Finally, independent learning style was not significantly related to oral proficiency ($r =.07$, $p>.05$). This contradicted the study of Diaz and Canal (1999) which had disclosed that independent learning style in which learners took responsibility for their own study contributed to success in on-line learning. It could be that the nature of an on-line subject was different from that of a conversation course. In addition to practice listening and speaking at one's own pace, requirements to communicate and to take participation with classmates were insisted all through the class period. Thus, other types of learning style preference like collaborative, participative, or dependent learning might better suit an English conversation course.

In conclusion, the independent variables in Table 5 demonstrated correlations among themselves. Not only is daily exposure to English related to oral proficiency, but it is also positively and strongly related to the subjects' intrinsic motivation ($r = .57$), to extrinsic motivation ($r = .47$), and moderately related to independent learning preference ($r =$

.32). Thus, students with more opportunities to be exposed to listening, reading, writing, and speaking in the target language would be more likely to have high learning motivation and tended to be less dependent learners. The negative relationship between daily exposure and learning anxiety (r = -.17) pointed out that students with ample opportunities to use English in daily life would have less tendency of class apprehension, and thus in turn would gain higher scores of oral proficiency.

To address the question of which factors influence oral competence, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed. Seven independent variables which were related to the final score (oral proficiency) were used in analysis.

Table 6 : Stepwise regression:
Critical factors contributing to oral proficiency

Step	Variable Entered	Cumulative R square	β Value	p
	(Constant)	---	10.22	.000
1	Previous oral ability	.42	.66	.000
2	Previous oral ability Recent English Grade	.45	.97	.001
3	Previous oral ability Recent English Grade Daily Exposure	.46	.67	.013
4	Previous oral ability Recent English Grade Daily Exposure Extrinsic Motivation	.47	.51	.094

p<.10, Multiple R = .69., S.E. estimation = 2.68

The data collected were analyzed using a stepwise regression to investigate variables that affected oral proficiency. According to Wanichbancha (2005), the stepwise regression computation is a statistical procedure combing the method of Forward Selection and Backward Elimination of expected variables. Independent variables with high relationships with oral proficiency would be computationally selected one by one, and the procedure continued until no more variable could be entered in the equation. In the meantime, Backward Elimination procedure would remove unsuitable factors until no more variables could be moved out.

As demonstrated in Table 6, four factors out of seven corresponding to students' oral proficiency were selected into the hierarchical regression equation. These revealed factors were previous oral ability, recent English grade, daily exposure, and extrinsic motivation.

In view of cumulative R square which described the strength of explanatory power of combined variables, the first variable being selected in the equation was previous oral ability, which accounted for 42 % of oral proficiency total variability. In other words, forty-two percent of students' variance in final scores of English Conversation I (810316) could be predicted by their mid-term scores. The second variable entered was recent English grade. Together with previous oral proficiency, both predictors could explain 45% of the final score variance. The third and fourth variables selected into the equation were daily exposure to English and extrinsic motivation. All these four variables together accounted for 47% of the total variability of oral proficiency. In other words, approximately one-half of students' attribute in English speaking ability could be estimated by these four mentioned variables.

Considering cumulative R square in each step, it was notable that students' background in English language, i.e. prior oral competence was the greatest influential predictors of the final oral score. Forty-two percent of the final score variance could be estimated by the prior midterm oral score. When adding the variables of 810302 English grade, the degree of daily exposure, and the level of extrinsic motivation, the percentage of R square or explanatory power rose up to 45, 46, and 47% respectively. This finding confirmed that L2 speaking ability principally resulted from previous oral ability, which in turn emerged from a strong background in English language, frequent use of the language, and interest in learning English for pragmatic benefits. Considering R square change in each step, it was remarkable the explicatory power of the latter three variables entered in the regression equation -- namely recent English grade, daily exposure, and extrinsic motivation were by far less than the single influence of previous oral ability.

Multiple Regression Prediction Equation

According to Wanichbancha (2005), multiple regression was the analysis between the correlations of one dependent variable and many independent variables. The objectives were to reveal independent factors which would effect the dependent variable, hereby was students' oral proficiency; and to estimate the value of dependent variable when the values of independent variables were known. The estimation of parameters from the regression equation could be displayed in the form of:

$$Y' = a + b1X1 + b2X2 + b3X3 + b4X4$$

Y' = estimated value of the studied variable
X = the X value used to predict Y'
a = the constant value or the point at which the regression line intersects the Y axis in the linear regression graph
b = the weight of importance of each studied variable; in the linear regression graph, b indicates the slope of the regression line; that is, the amount of Y is increasing for each increase of one unit in X

Oral Proficiency (raw scores)

= 10.22 + 0.66 (Previous Oral Ability) + 0.97 (Recent English Grade) + 0.67 (Daily Exposure) + 0.51 (Extrinsic Motivation)

Figure 2 Multiple regression equation in the raw data type

The constant (a) = 10.22 indicated that, without any influence from these independent factors, students would gain 10.22 final score (oral proficiency). Beta coefficient indicates the change of oral proficiency score resulting from the influence of one beta unit. For example, B1 = 0.66 implying the increase of 1 point in midterm oral test would approximately add 0.66 points to the final score. B2 = 0.97, B 3 = 0.67, and B4 = 0.51 indicating that the increase of one grade in English II (810302), the increase of one scale in Daily Exposure construct, and the increase of one scale in Extrinsic Motivation would approximately raise 0.97 , 0.67 , and 0.51 points respectively to students' final score. Consequently, oral proficiency of students could be estimated when stated data were known.

5. Conclusion

The present study explored the possible influence of various components contributing to the oral performance of students in an EFL context where English is not the mother tongue. It was hypothesized that background knowledge (previous oral ability and recent English grade), duration of study, opportunities to use English, learning apprehension, and affective factors regarding strength of motivations could play a strong role in determining students' communicative performance. The results obtained were similar to the studies of Bailey ,1983; Dornyei, 1990; Ramage, 1990; Samimy and Tabuse, 1992; Clement, Dornyei, and Noels, 1994, in which there were significant relationships between oral proficiency and formerly mentioned variables; therefore the hypotheses 1 - 7 were accepted. However, the exception was that the present study explored no relationship between independent learning style and oral competence. The last hypothesis was thus rejected. Although such insignificant relationship was still unclear at this point, the researcher assumed this might come from the fact that independent learning style which required self-direction, autonomy, responsibility to study at one's pace, and preference to work or practice on their own in individual activities would probably match other courses such as on-line learning or distance education where minimal instructors' explicit guidance is needed. On the contrary, in an EFL environment in which students have insufficient experience in the second language, independent learning might not work well with English a basic conversation class. It was probably that L2 learners still required suggestions and instruction from the authority figure, i.e. the class teacher in a great extent. The assistance to facilitate conversation learning were typically in terms of adding explanation to specific expressions, correction of pronunciation and complex syntax structures, as well as overall feedback for speaking activities in class. In addition, the nature of this basic conversation class emphasizes collaborative activities such as pair work and group work practice in addition to individual practice like listening in the laboratory or carrying out extra assignments. Therefore, other types of learning, e.g. cooperative, participative, dependent , or collaborative learning style might appeal more to the learners. Further investigation was recommended in the future study.

6. Implications

The outcomes of the study which reveals the relationship among oral competence and other variables could be applied to construct helpful approaches for enhancing oral proficiency for students in the context where English is not the mother tongue.

The study reveals that the primary factors for oral achievement comes from the learners themselves. They need not only prior oral ability but also a strong background in integral English language, i.e. a good listening skill would enhance comprehension, a strong syntax skill promotes accurate and comprehensible spoken output, while widespread use of expressions endorses more appealing discourses. This implies that L2 oral skill is a result from lifelong learning which requires time and constant effort for individual success. Students should be encouraged to have informal contact with English native speakers or have maximum exposure to the language through films, songs, entertainment, or cutting edge media technology. Students may perform self-paced practice by using a language laboratory or a variety of computer software. If possible, collaborate attempts could be made between institutes via exchange programs or visiting scholars.

In regard to pedagogical implication, as extrinsic motivation effects oral competence, it would be useful for the instructor to discuss possible benefits in the mastery of such communicative skill, particularly in these days when career paths and studying in a higher degree need a good command of speaking competence. Learners' motivation can also be heightened by pointing the widespread use of English and its power in many areas such as social, industrial, educational, professional and business sectors. To sum up, supportive strategies to enhance learners' strength of motivation, their achievement, and desire to continue their practice should be raised.

Apart from maintaining possible encouraging components, the teachers should minimize students' debilitating anxiety by acknowledging its existence in foreign language study. The teachers could make the class less threatening by finding effective ways to respond to learners' apprehension. To cope with class anxiety, unconfident students could be psychologically reinforced by a teacher's praise or recognition. Also they should be given reasonable expectations in terms of time and effort in language learning where oral proficiency is aimed.

Finally, it might be interesting to conduct a similar research in different contexts, or make a longitudinal study so that the anticipated progress could be chronologically observed. Further comparable studies could be done to examine other possible outcomes such as rate of attrition or deterioration of performance in addition to students' achievement. Some sample factors proposed for future research comprise perceived group cohesion, group satisfaction, perceived one's level of English proficiency, teaching styles, teacher's evaluation of the class and vice versa.

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