

Attitudes of Rangsit University Staff towards Speaking English

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the attitude of Rangsit University staff toward speaking English. The instrument used to collect the data was a questionnaire, which was distributed to 200 full-time Rangsit University employees. The data from the survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program to calculate the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results showed that the employees' attitude toward speaking English was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.94$). The affective component had the highest mean value ($\bar{x} = 4.04$). The respondents felt satisfied when their spoken English was good enough to make friends with people from other countries and they also felt satisfied when they were complimented because they spoke English well. The conative component ($\bar{x} = 3.99$) and cognitive component ($\bar{x} = 3.79$) were also found to be at a high level. The subjects tended to practice speaking English when they had a chance. They agreed that Rangsit University needed staff who could speak English fluently and they also felt that speaking English was important for their work.

Keywords: *Attitude, University staff, speaking English, speaking skill*

1. Introduction

The English language is an important communication tool, especially in higher education institutions. Lecturers and staff need to communicate in English to encourage students to become capable in the language. In the context of workplace communication, good communication skills are fundamental and an additional advantage (Mehta, 2007). Roshid & Chowdhury (2013) stated that good communication skills were a requirement for success in the workplace. English as an international language, and as a basis of communication all over the world, influences prospects of employment, especially in contributing to the possibility of secure and better jobs. According to Panyajirawat (2009), motivation to speak a language depends on both internal factors and external factors. The internal factors are associated with people's attitude toward speaking English. Kelly and Watson (1980, cited in Panyajirawat, 2009) explained that self-acceptance was an essential internal factor because people who knew their own English proficiency level would have a positive attitude toward what they could do and they spoke English more often than others did. External factors represent occasions in an English-speaking environment. People should expose themselves to situations that require speaking English, such as conversation with foreign students. In addition, attitude has an influential effect on behavior; it makes people want to do or reject doing something. Attitude has been defined as having both positive and negative components. People will express dissatisfaction, dislike or disagreement toward an attitude object that causes boredom or hatred. Employees of universities need to have a positive attitude toward speaking English because they work in an international environment. A positive attitude can lead to more people using English within an organization.

This research investigates university employees' attitudes toward speaking English. 200 employees from Rangsit University, one of the top ten private universities in Thailand, were selected as the subjects for this research. Employees from most of the university's faculties have opportunities to use English because many international students attend the university. It has been suggested that attitude toward speaking English is an important factor, which may influence the communication process. Employees' attitude toward speaking English is a challenging and interesting topic to study because it may affect their behavior and have an impact on the failure or success of an organization. It is hoped that this research may be beneficial as a reference for universities or other organizations that are interested in improving their employees' spoken English skills.

2. Attitude Frameworks

Attitudes are important to language growth or decay, restoration or destruction: the status and importance of a language in society and within an individual derive mainly from adopted or learned attitudes. An attitude is individual, but it has origins in collective behavior. Attitude is something an individual has, which defines or promotes certain behaviors. According to Hohenthal (2003), attitude is a hypothetical psychological construct; it touches the reality of language life (as cited in Visconde, 2006). Baker (1988) stressed the importance of attitude in a discussion on bilingualism. He maintained that attitudes were learned predispositions, not inherited.

Oxford (1990) pointed out that attitude affected motivation. He found that attitudes and motivation worked together to influence the performance of language learning itself, global language proficiency and proficiency in specific language skills, such as oral production, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension. Brown (1994) observed that negative attitudes could lead to decreased motivation and in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to the unsuccessful attainment of proficiency. Gardner and Lambert's study (as cited in Spolsky, 1980) attempted to examine the effect of attitude on language learning. They found that motivation was made up of certain attitudes. In certain language environments where the social setting demanded it (e.g. when the L1 is a local vernacular and the L2 is the national language), many people seemed to master an L2, regardless of their aptitude differences (Gardner, 1985). Thus, in addition to the environmental and cognitive factors normally associated with learning in current educational psychology, L2 motivation also contains personality and social dimensions.

The importance of equipping employers with good English speaking skills has grown with the demanding nature of workplace communication. Stevens (2005) reported that employers believed poor language skill was a difficult aspect to overcome for those seeking employment. In the workplace, employees need English speaking skills to be successful at their jobs as they must carry out different communicative tasks such as presentations, meetings, and negotiations. According to Blair and Jeanson (1994, cited in Mohammadi & Moghadam, 2015), proficiency in the English language, especially in oral communication, is beneficial to solving problems that occur at the workplace. Unfortunately, according to Smith, Mikulecky, Kibby, Dreher, & Dole (2000), despite the professional and formal training given to students and graduates, there is still a skills gap in workplace situations. They found that there were significant gaps between the expectations of industries, and what the universities offered to the students.

3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitude of Rangsit University staff toward speaking English and to analyze how three attitude dimensions affect their speaking behavior.

4. Methodology

4.1 Subjects

The population of this study was 398 Rangsit university staff who worked in faculties in six academic areas: (1) Science and Health, (2) Engineering and Technology, (3) Humanities and Society, (4) Economics and Business, (5) Art and Design, and (6) Online Courses, International, and Master & Doctoral Degree excluding staff who worked in service departments. A systematic random sampling technique was employed in this research. According to Taro Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973), 200 was established as a suitable sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

n = sample size N = population e = error of sampling method = 0.05

$$200 = 398 / (1 + (398 \times 0.0025))$$

4.2 Instrument

The instrument employed in this research was a questionnaire consisting of two parts used to gather information relating to the subjects' attitude toward speaking English. The first part dealt with the respondents' background information. The second part contained a set of 18 questions, which were created using a five-point Likert rating scale that was adapted from Lambert (1967). It was concerned with three English-speaking attitudes: affective, cognitive, and conative. Three experts in the field were invited to verify the questionnaire.

4.3 Data collection

The questionnaires were distributed, with instructions, to 200 subjects. They were asked to complete the questionnaires using a Google form. After the 200 questionnaires were returned, they were ready for analysis.

4.4 Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program was used to calculate: frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation and a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the attitude levels. The following rating scale was used to analyze the data: Strongly agree (4.21 – 5.00), Agree (3.41 – 4.20), Undecided (2.61 – 3.40), Disagree (1.81 – 2.60), and Strongly disagree (1.00 – 1.80) (Boonchom Srisa-ard, 1999). The data was analyzed and interpreted in paragraphs. The statistics employed in this study were 1) Percentage, which was used to analyze the subjects' background information, and 2) Percentage, mean, and standard deviation, which were used to calculate the levels of attitude.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Profile

The respondents were female (n=161, 80.50%) and male (n = 39, 19.50%). The majority were aged between 41 and 50 years old (n=81, 40.50%), sixty-six were aged 31–40 (33.00%), and the lowest percentage was under 31 years old (n=53, 26.50%). The majority had completed a bachelor's degree (n =121, 60.50%), slightly less than half had completed a master's degree (n =78, 39.00%), and only a small percentage had completed a doctoral degree (n =1, 0.50%). In addition, the majority worked in the Faculty of Science and Health (n=92, 46.00%) followed by the Faculty of Humanities and Society (n=66, 33.00%), and the smallest percentage worked in the Online Course, International, and Master & Doctoral Degree Faculty (n=12, 6.00%). Seventy-seven percent (n=154) had studied English for 10-15 years and 23.00% (n = 46) had studied English for 16-20 years.

Furthermore, most of the respondents liked the English language (n=165, 82.50%) because they felt that English was an important international language. However, a small number disliked English (n=35, 17.50%) because they perceived the language as difficult to learn; they could not speak English; they lacked *vocabulary*; and they could not remember tenses.

Regarding the respondents' levels of English education, the majority had studied English to Bachelor degree level (n=106, 53.00%) followed by higher than Bachelor degree level (n=74, 37.00%), and a small percentage had studied English at a Language Institute (n=20, 10.00%). To improve their English, the majority attended staff training at Rangsit University (n=131, 65.00%) followed by practicing English by themselves (n=35, 17.50%), watching movies in English, reading short articles/news in the English language on the Internet, studying English on social networking sites, listening to English conversations on YouTube, communicating with foreigners, and playing online games. Additionally, they studied English courses outside the university (n=34, 17.00%). Most of them used English at work "sometimes" (n=89, 44.50%) followed by "often" (n=54, 27.00%), Thirty-two (16%) never used English at work, and the smallest percentage (n=25, 12.50%) used English at work "every day".

Finally, regarding the respondents' English language ability, the majority had average listening skills (n=90, 45.00%) followed by poor listening skills (n=58, 29.00%). However, one respondent had excellent listening skills (n=1, 0.50%). For speaking, the majority had average speaking skills (n=109, 54.50) followed by poor speaking skills (2nd n=45, 22.50%). However, a small number had excellent speaking skills (5th n=5, 2.50%).

5.2 Attitudes towards Speaking English

Table 1 Affective attitude toward speaking English

Items	Attitude					
	High		Medium		Low	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
Speaking English.	4.09	0.86				
English because I like the English language.	3.65	0.93				
worry about making mistakes when I speak English.	4.09	1.05				

Items	Attitude					
	High		Medium		Low	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
satisfied when I receive a compliment for speaking English well.	4.10	0.99				
satisfied when I have more foreign friends because I speak English well.	4.26	0.91				
satisfied when my English-speaking skills can help those around me who cannot communicate well.	4.08	0.89				
	4.04					

Overall, the affective component was found to be at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.04$). When considering items (1-6), Table 1 shows that Item 5, “I am satisfied when I have more foreign friends because I speak English well.” had the highest mean value ($\bar{x} = 4.26$) followed by Item 4, “I am satisfied when I receive a compliment for speaking English well” ($\bar{x} = 4.10$). Then, two items had the same average value “I enjoy speaking English” and “I do not worry about making mistakes when I speak English” ($\bar{x} = 4.09$). Next, Item 6, “I am satisfied when my English-speaking skills can help those around me who cannot communicate well” ($\bar{x} = 4.09$). Finally, “I speak English because I like the English language.” had the lowest mean value ($\bar{x} = 3.65$).

Table 2 Cognitive attitude toward speaking English

Items	Attitude					
	High		Medium		Low	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
Speaking English is important to my personal life.	3.38	0.79				
Speaking English is important for my work.	3.98	0.92				
Currently, the university needs staff who are able to speak English fluently.	4.10	0.79				
In the next 5-10 years, the university will need staff who can speak English well.	3.93	1.13				
5. Speaking English well will land me a good job.			2.71	1.05		
6. I speak English because I want respect.			2.81	1.19		
\bar{x}	3.79					

Overall, the cognitive component was found to be at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.79$). When considering items (1-6), Table 2 shows that Item 3, “Currently, the university needs staff who are able to speak English fluently.” had the highest mean value ($\bar{x} = 4.10$) followed by Item 2, “Speaking English is important for my work” ($\bar{x} = 3.98$), Item 4, “In the next 5-10 years, the university will need staff who can speak English well” ($\bar{x} = 3.93$), and Item 1, “Speaking English is important to my personal life” ($\bar{x} = 3.38$). However, two items

were at the medium level: Item 6, “I speak English because I want respect.” (\bar{x} = 2.81) and Item 5, “Speaking English well will land me a good job” (\bar{x} = 2.71).

Table 3 Conative attitude toward speaking English

Items	Attitude					
	High		Medium		Low	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
1. I speak English because I would like to show my speaking skill.			2.38	1.07		
2. I speak English even though I do not have to.	3.40	0.92				
3. I tend to speak English more.	3.29	0.87				
4. When I have to speak English, I can do it well.	4.12	0.82				
5. If I have a chance to practice speaking English, I will do my best.	4.17	0.81				
6. I can improve my English-speaking skills through my own efforts.	4.16	0.79				
\bar{x}	3.99					

Overall, the conative component was found to be at a high level (\bar{x} = 3.99). When considering items (1-6), the table shows that Item 5, “If I have a chance to practice speaking English, I will do my best.” had the highest mean value (\bar{x} = 4.17) followed by Item 6, “I can improve my English-speaking skills through my own efforts” (\bar{x} = 4.16), Item 4, “When I have to speak English, I can do it well” (\bar{x} = 4.12), Item 2, “I speak English even though I do not have to” (\bar{x} = 3.40), and item 3, “I tend to speak English more” (\bar{x} = 3.29). However, there was one item at the medium level, Item 1, “I speak English because I would like to show my speaking skill” (\bar{x} = 2.38

Table 4 Attitude of Rangsit University Staff toward each component

Attitudes toward speaking English	\bar{x}	SD	Interpretation
Affective	4.04	0.71	High
Cognitive	3.79	0.81	High
Conative	3.99	0.67	High
Average	3.94	0.73	High

Overall, the attitude of Rangsit University staff toward speaking English was found to be at a high level (\bar{x} = 3.94). The affective component had the highest average

value ($\bar{x} = 4.04$) followed by the conative component ($\bar{x} = 3.99$). The cognitive component had the lowest mean value ($\bar{x} = 3.79$).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the attitude of Rangsit University staff towards speaking English was found to be at a high level (3.94). The attitudinal components were affective (4.04), conative (3.99), and cognitive (3.79). There are reasons for these.

Firstly, the affective attitude component, which consists of emotional reactions toward an attitude object, showed the highest average value of 4.04. The respondents felt satisfied when they made friends with people from other countries because their spoken English was good and they felt satisfied when they were complimented for speaking good English. Since 2005, Rangsit University has realized the importance of internationalizing education to meet new requirements generated by globalization. Therefore, most university staff had experienced working in an international environment and they liked English because they felt that it was an important international language that was used for global communication. Conversely, a few respondents did not like the English language because they thought that English was difficult to learn and they could not communicate well in English. Further analysis of the results showed that the respondents who did not like English were from the Faculty of Science and Health and the Faculty of Engineering and Technology. This might be because there were few foreign lecturers and exchange students in these faculties. Liking or disliking English is associated with the frequency of speaking English at the workplace.

In conclusion, the affective component had the greatest influence on speaking English. However, it is rather difficult to be certain that the affective factors caused the differences in language achievement. Negative feelings can impede progress while positive emotions and attitudes can make language learning far more effective and enjoyable (Oxford, 1990).

Secondly, the conative or behavioral component, which is related to behavior or behavioral intentions, represents the tendency to act or resolve in a specific way. The average value of this component was 3.99. The respondents said that they practiced speaking English when they had a chance to. In addition, they improved their English-speaking skills through their own efforts. The results showed that the respondents' attitude toward the conative component was at a high level, they were aware of the importance of English as a global language and they tried to improve their English skills by participating in short training courses. Moreover, they practiced by watching English movies, watching YouTube, and communicating with foreign colleagues at work. When people have positive attitudes toward speaking English and have self-acceptance of what they can do, they can take advantage or get more opportunities to practice and improve their communication skills. Self-confidence is an important aspect that gives people a positive perception of their aptitude. It is attributed to individual characteristics such as optimism, enthusiasm, affection, pride, independence and emotional maturity (Sihera, 2007).

Finally, the cognitive component, which refers to beliefs, knowledge, and thoughts, had the average value of 3.79. Most of the respondents agreed that the university needed teaching staff members who were able to speak English fluently and they thought that speaking English was important to their work. In addition, further analysis of the results showed that the most of the respondents who worked in the Faculty of Humanities and Society believed that they needed English for their work because they worked with foreign lecturers. Integrative and instrumental motivation both influence language learning. A learner with integrative motivation has a genuine interest in learning

the language to communicate more satisfactorily and to gain closer contact with the language speaking community. However, a learner with instrumental motivation is more interested in how the second language can be a useful instrument toward furthering other goals, such as gaining a necessary qualification or improving employment prospects. The latter desire is an integrative motivation, which is a better support for language learning, while an instrumental motivation is associated with a desire to learn a second language for pragmatic gains such as getting a better job or a higher salary (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for further research.

- 1) The opinions and preferences collected in this research can serve as a starting point for future studies. The sample size could be increased to collect data from a more varied population.
- 2) A study of attitude toward speaking English with Rangsit University staff from other departments, which deal with international students such as the Registration office, International Service Center, and other faculties which offer international programs, could be undertaken.
- 3) Comparative studies could be carried out by surveying the attitudes of staff who work for other organizations and companies, such as local Thai owned companies and foreign-owned subsidiaries.
- 4) Other interesting variables that are said to influence attitudes toward speaking English such as communicative strategies, age, and sex could be considered to give more depth to future research.

8. The Authors

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