The Study of Problems and Defense Mechanism in Studying English of the First-year Bangkok University Students

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Abstract

The research aims at 1) studying the problems and defense mechanism in studying English of the first-year Bangkok University students, 2) examining some factors affecting the problems of studying English, and 3) investigating the relationship between the problems in studying English and defense mechanism. The data were collected from 410 students enrolling in EN 111 in the first semester of 2010 by a five-point Likert rating scale questionnaire. The data were analyzed by means, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson Correlation. The findings revealed that the overall problems and problems in four skills were at a moderate level. Moreover, factors affecting the students' problems in studying English included taking remedial courses and having experience abroad while gender did not have an effect on their problems. The research also found out that there was no significant relationship between the students' problems in studying English and their overall use of defense mechanism. However, when 2 types of defense mechanism: escaping and fighting were analyzed. It was found that problems in studying English had a negative relationship with escaping defense mechanism while a positive relationship existed between problems in studying English and fighting defense mechanism.

Key words: problems, studying English, defense mechanism, Bangkok University

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาปัญหาและกลวิธาน และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างปัญหาและกลวิธานในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลได้แก่ แบบสอบถามแบบมาตราส่วนประมาณค่า 5 ระดับของ Likert เพื่อเก็บข้อมูลจากนักศึกษาจำนวน 410 คน ที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนวิชา EN 111 ในภาคการศึกษาที่ 1 ปีการศึกษา 2553 นำข้อมูลมาวิเคราะห์ด้วยโปรแกรม SPSS เพื่อหาค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ค่า t-test และค่าสหสัมพันธ์ของเพียร์สัน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ปัญหาในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษทั้ง 4 ทักษะของนักศึกษาอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง ปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อปัญหาในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษได้แก่ การกวดวิชา และประสบการณ์ในต่างประเทศ ในขณะที่เพศไม่มีผลต่อปัญหาดังกล่าว นอกจากนี้การวิจัยยังค้นพบว่า ไม่มีความสัมพันธ์กันระหว่างปัญหาในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษและการใช้กลวิธานโดยรวมของนักศึกษา อย่างไรก็ตามเมื่อวิเคราะห์โดยการแบ่งกลวิธานเป็นสองประเภท พบว่า ปัญหาในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษมีความสัมพันธ์เชิงลบกับการใช้กลวิธานแบบหนีปัญหา ในขณะที่ปัญหาในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษมีความสัมพันธ์เชิงบวกกับการใช้กลวิธานแบบสู้ปัญหา

Introduction

Students' ability to communicate fluently and confidently is the utmost goal of language teaching. According to Cremin (2009, p.1), teaching and learning English is, at its richest, an energizing, purposeful and imaginatively vital experience for all involved, developing youngsters' competence, confidence and creativity as well as building positive attitudes to learning. At its poorest, English teaching and learning can be a dry, didactic experience, focused on the instruction of assessable skills, and paying little attention to children's affective or creative development as language learners and language users. Despite the task-based approach with the integration of the 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), students can be witnessed as having problems in studying English as seen from the result of O-NET 2011 that the average scores of English test were only 19.22 ("Shockingly low college, 2011, p. 1).

As the obstacles matter the students' learning ability, a number of researchers examined the problems encountered by Thai students (Pawapatcharaudom, 2007, Wongsepaet, 1999, Chailosee, 2004). In addition, how the students cope with their anxiety is another interesting issue taken by researchers (Ng-ampring, 2006, Sawir, 2005, Yani, 2008). Investigating the problems in studying English together with the defense mechanisms used to cope with those problems is very advantageous to teachers to create pleasant learning atmosphere for students to acquire the language successfully. Moreover, for Bangkok University students, this aspect of study has never been examined before. With these reasons, the researcher would like to find out the problems and defense mechanisms Bangkok University students use to help them achieve the utmost goal more effectively.

The objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the problems in studying English in four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing of first-year students at Bangkok University.
2. To compare the students' problems in studying English classified by their gender, faculty, remedial course, and experience abroad.
3. To study the defense mechanism used by Bangkok University.
4. To study the relationship between problems in studying English and defense mechanism used.

Literature Review

Problems in Language Learning

Problems in language learning are any obstacles that block the language learners from implementing the language successfully. There are many recent researches conducted to survey the problems of second language learners in studying English. Khunsamrong (2010) studied the problems faced by Thai students in acquiring English with specific reference to the first-year students at the Northern Campuses of Mahachulalongkorn-rajavidyalaya University and found that students had problems in reading, understanding and writing long sentences including listening and speaking to English speaking persons. Furthermore, understanding English grammar and its structure and understanding English tenses are also problems among the students.

Pawapatcharaudom (2007) has investigated the problems of Thai students' English Language in the international program at Mahidol University. The results revealed that the participants' serious problems in listening are they cannot understand the tone of voice of a native speaker especially when speaking at normal speed while those in speaking are they cannot explain their idea clearly in English and feel uncomfortable in talking with a native speaker instructor in the classroom. As for the reading skill problems, the students cannot understand the English idioms or read English academic textbooks and cannot explain the main idea and summarize the passage while their serious problems in writing include the difficulty in writing an essay within limited time, writing an English academic paper as well as the use of perfect grammatical rules.

Amornratanasak (1999) did a research with Ramkhamhaeng University students and found that the problems and obstacles of learning and teaching English include the lack of opportunities in using English outside classrooms especially with foreigners, poor background in English, and bad attitude towards English. Furthermore, the finding also showed that there was no statistically significant difference among students from different faculties.

Wongsepaet (1999) conducted a research on the study of problems and needs in English language learning with 83 first-year higher-vocational students of Agriculture and Technology College. The results found that the students had problems in studying English in the high level in all four skills ranging from the highest to the lowest as writing, listening, reading and speaking respectively. It also revealed that students with different sex had different problems in learning English; however, the problematic skill for both is writing. Moreover, educational background had problems in language learning. While the most problematic skill for the students with vocational education certificates and high school diplomas (formal education) is writing, that for the students with high school diplomas (informal education) is speaking.

Correspondingly, Chaikosee (2004) demonstrated in the study of problems and needs in studying technical English of industrial mechanic students of Rajamangkhala Technology Institute (Technic Krungthep Campus) that there was moderate level of English learning problems with speaking as the most problematic skill.

Ng-ampring (2006) conducted a research on the study of problems and defense mechanism in solving problems in English language of Matayomsuksa 5 students in Kalasin province and found out that the students have problems in studying English as a whole in a moderate level in all skills ranging from the highest mean to the lowest as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Moreover, the results showed that students with low achievement in English have had more problems in listening, reading, and writing skills than those with moderate achievement with significance at the level of .05.

Sawir (2005) studied the language difficulties of international students in Australia by interviewing students from five Asian nations. The research found that the learning difficulties of those students are grounded in weaknesses in

their prior learning experiences focusing on grammar and reading skills.

The finding was also supported by the research of Yani (2008) on English learning difficulties faced by the students at the second year of SMP N 2 Pagentan Banjarnegara. The results showed that those learning difficulties include pronunciation, vocabulary and students interest.

Moreover, there are studies on the relationship between remedial or support courses and students' better grade in English courses, which reflects fewer problems in their English study.

Zhai and Skerl (2000) studied the impact of remedial English courses on student college-level coursework performance and persistence of students taking remedial (ENG 020) and their two other require college-level English courses (ENG 120 & ENG 121). The study found that ENG 020 prepares students effectively for ENG 120 and 121.

The research done by Alvarez (2008) showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between not completing a required remedial writing course and more achievement in English Composition I. The result was confirmed by Alden (2007), who studied 'Preparing the developmental English student: Their perceptions of their writing skills'. The findings illustrated that students completing a developmental English class admitted to being 'better' writers or 'good' writer; they no longer feared writing and felt confident to tackle long, written assignments.

McMurray's research (2006) on the impact of a meta-cognitive college reading course on students' comprehension, reading self-efficacy, and subsequent English course grades illustrated that students taking preparatory course (CTRS 117: Advanced Critical Thinking and Reading) made significant gains when they studied English 1010 and in each of the eight years studied, developmental students who successfully completed CTRS 1170 earned higher grades than the students who did not have to take the reading course. Likewise, the study by Massar (2009) found that students' reading achievement and reading grade levels improved after participating in the Corrective Reading Program. The result was backed up by Young (2008) that even the participants who were unsuccessful in completing developmental courses continued to be as motivated and confident as those who had completed the courses successfully. They were satisfied with the degree of interaction and validation received from developmental reading faculty members both in- and-outside of the classroom.

Another interesting and concrete concept of helping students reduce their problems in using the language was initiated by Krashen (1988) in his book: *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. He pointed out that

"Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the messages they are conveying and understanding. The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that

improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful."

Krashen also indicated that the length of time a person stays in a foreign country is closely linked with his level of language acquisition. This is supported by Singleton (1989) that the opportunities to be close to the language or use the language frequently are necessary to promote native-like proficiency.

It can be concluded that exposure to the real situation using English as a means of communication with both native and non-native English speakers especially by going abroad has great effect on effective language acquisition.

Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanism is the way people use to reduce anxiety or conflict in their mind. It does not only help solve the problem itself but also help reduce the anxiety caused from the problem. The defense mechanism can be grouped into 2 types: fighting or facing methods and escaping or avoiding methods, with details as follows: (Morgan and King, 1971)

1. Fighting or facing problems

Details	Meaning	Example
1. Rationalization	creating false but credible justifications	Sally said that her low mark was caused by her having no time to study due to a lot of housework.
2. Projection	attributing uncomfortable feelings to others	John said that he failed in the exam because what his teacher taught made him confused.
3. Displacement	redirecting emotions to a substitute target	Mary was scolded by her sister so she turned to scold the cat.
4. Compensation	using outstanding trait to hide the inferiority	Elizabeth is short and not beautiful but she is the top of the class in mathematics.
5. Substitution	changing the unacceptable action into the acceptable one	Tom changes his aggressiveness into boxing.

2. Escaping or avoiding problems

Details	Meaning	Example
1. Isolation	setting themselves apart from others	Judy keeps herself alone in her own world without paying any attention to others or what's going on.
2. Regression	going back to acting as a child	Charles tries to seek help from others.
3. Conversion	converting emotional conflicts into physical symptoms that have no organic basis	Linda feels sick whenever she has to attend English class.
4. Introjection	Identifying with some idea or object so deeply that it becomes a part of that person	When someone looked down upon Anna, she thought that she deserved it because she was so poor.
5. Fantasy	retreating into fantasy in order to resolve inner and outer conflicts	David is poor in mathematics but he always dreams of being the top of his math class without trying harder or paying more attention in math class..

There are many pieces of research on how students cope with their language anxiety. One of them is the research by Ng-ampring (2006) in the study of problems and defense mechanism in solving problems in English language of Matayomsuksa 5 students in Kalasin province. The findings revealed that those students have applied the defense mechanism in their learning English at a moderate level. The most frequently-used mechanisms are sitting near students with high achievement in English, paying more attention to what the teacher teaching and looking up the English-Thai dictionary when reading difficult texts.

Suwantharathip (2010) studied the use of strategies to reduce anxiety of Bangkok University students. The subjects were 400 second-year students who enrolled in EN 211: Intermediate English. The findings of the study reveal that students use the strategies at a low level. It was also found that the most frequently-used strategies to cope with their language anxiety are attending every class to learn a little bit every week, seek out opportunities to practice the foreign language, and ask friends or ask for help from friends.

Another research was conducted by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2003) in strategies for coping with language anxiety: the case of students English in Japan. The findings showed 5 strategies categories of defense mechanism the participants used: preparation (studying hard, trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes), relaxation (taking a deep breath, trying to

calm down), positive thinking (imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension), peer seeking (looking for others who are having difficulty controlling their anxiety, asking other students if they understand the class), and resignation (giving up, sleeping in class). Similarly, Cook (2006) found in a study of thirty foreign college students in the United States that avoiding English language situations where shame might be experienced was common among the subjects.

Huang (2009) revealed that ten Taiwanese graduate students use a variety of coping strategies for dealing with issues of language anxiety, which include reviewing or asking classmates for help, and seeking feedback on writing from the writing center, their professors, or a paid American editor. Their coping strategies in their daily lives outside of the classroom include watching local TV and making special efforts to speak and overcome the fear of losing face.

Hauck and Hurd (2003) explored the link between language anxiety and learner self-management in open language learning contexts and found that the three frequently-employed strategies include using positive self-talk (I can do it; it doesn't matter if I make mistakes; others make mistakes), actively encouraging themselves to take risks in language learning (guessing meanings or trying to speak even though they might make some mistakes); and imagining that when they are speaking in front of others, it is just a friendly informal chat.

Significance of the study

The study is aimed to help the instructors understand the problems of studying English of first-year students and find out how to overcome these problems. The results of their learning strategy will enhance the instructors to provide learning environment to encourage the students to fully acquire the language successfully. Most of all, the findings of this study will be guidelines for the executives who deal with policy and decision making to help the students overcome their difficulties, improve their language skills and accomplish their academic success.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Samples

The population of this study was 6,001 Bangkok University first-year students who enrolled in EN 111: Fundamental English I in the first semester of 2010 academic year. The samples were 410 students to be selected using stratified Random Sampling technique to get all fields of study based on Internal Quality Assurance Assessment of Bangkok University (Accounting, Business Administration, Communication Arts, Law, Humanities, Science and Technology, Economics, Fine and Applied Arts, and Engineering) because of the students' differed characteristics. The sample size was calculated from Taro Yamane table. A 95% of confidence level was used with a precision rate of ±5%. When the population is 6,000, the samples should be at least 375. However, the researcher agreed to employ 410 samples in this study

2. Research Instrument

The instrument of this study is a self-assessing questionnaire, comprising 3 main sections. Section 1 contains demographic data such as age, gender, institution graduated, achievement and prior experience of English study. Section 2 includes the students' English problems in four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The last section collects data on the students' defense mechanism.

3. Data Analysis

The data were statistically analyzed by SPSS/Window program using mean, standard deviation, t-test, One-way Analysis of Variance, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

Research Results

Research Question 1: To what extent did the students have problems in studying English in 4 skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing?

This question examined problems in studying English in 4 skills. The data were grouped into four categories

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Problems in Studying English Shown in 4 Skills

Problems in Studying English	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of Importance	Rank
1. Listening Skill	2.84	2.84	moderate	3
2. Speaking Skill	2.98	2.98	moderate	1
3. Reading Skill	2.75	2.75	moderate	4
4. Writing Skill	2.94	2.94	moderate	2
Total	**2.88**	**2.88**	moderate	

The result shown in Table 1 indicated that the overall mean score of students' problems in studying English was at a moderate level ($\overline{x}$ = 2.88). When considering all skills, it was found that the problems in four skills were also at a moderate level. Among the four skills, the mean scores could be arranged in order of importance as follows: speaking skill ($\overline{x}$ = 2.98), writing skill ($\overline{x}$ = 2.94), listening skill ($\overline{x}$ = 2.84), and reading skill ($\overline{x}$ = 2.75).

Research Question 2: Are there any differences in students' problems in studying English among BU students with different background (e.g. genders, remedial course, experience abroad, and fields of study)?

This question examined whether there was any difference in students' problems in studying English between male and female students.

Table 2 A Comparison of Mean Scores of Students' Problems in Studying English Classified by Genders

Problems in Studying English	Variable		n	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	df	t
1. Listening Skill	genders	male	242	2.89	.79	408	1.35
		female	168	2.78	.73	376.29	
2. Speaking Skill	genders	male	242	3.01	.78	408	.80
		female	168	2.95	.79	355.63	
3. Reading Skill	genders	male	242	2.78	.83	408	1.10
		female	168	2.69	.84	355.77	
4. Writing Skill	genders	male	242	2.95	.85	408	.208
		female	168	2.93	.87	353.90	
Total	**genders**	**male**	**242**	**2.91**	**.75**	**408**	**.918**
		female	**168**	**2.84**	**.74**	**362.242**	

*p < .05

Table 2 indicates that male students had more problems in studying English than female students ($\overline{x}$ = 2.91,2.84). The t-test was employed to examine a significant difference in problems between male and female students. The result revealed that no statistically significant difference was found in students' overall problems in studying English and in all categories between two groups at level of .05. This means that male and female students did not have different problems in studying English.

Table 3 A Comparison of Mean Scores of Students' Problems in Studying English Classified by Students' Experience in Remedial Courses

Problems	Variable		n	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	df	t
1. Listening Skill	Remedial courses	Yes	258	2.71	.74	408	-4.90*
		No	152	3.10	.76	311.59	
2. Speaking Skill	Remedial courses	Yes	258	2.87	.76	408	-3.78*
		No	152	3.17	.78	311.32	
3. Reading Skill	Remedial courses	Yes	258	2.61	.82	408	-4.37*
		No	152	3.10	.80	323.25	
4. Writing Skill	Remedial courses	Yes	258	2.82	.86	408	-3.82*
		No	152	3.15	.82	326.72	
Total	**Remedial courses**	**Yes**	**258**	**2.75**	**.73**	**408**	**-4.57***
		No	**152**	**3.10**	**.73**	**318.27**	

*p < .05

Table 3 shows that the overall problem of students who had experiences taking remedial courses was lower than that of students who didn't take remedial courses ($\overline{X}$ = 3.10, 2.75).

The t-test was employed to examine a significant difference between students who had experiences taking remedial courses and those who didn't. The results show that there were statistically significant differences in students' overall problems in studying English and in all categories between two groups at level of .05. This means that students who took remedial courses had fewer problems in studying English than those who didn't.

Table 4 A Comparison of Mean Scores of Students' Problems in Studying English Classified by Students' Experience Abroad

Problems	Variable		n	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	df	t
1. Listening Skill	Experience abroad	Yes	103	2.63	.79	407	-3.38*
		No	306	2.92	.74	166.44	
2. Speaking Skill	Experience abroad	Yes	103	2.77	.84	407	-3.27*
		No	306	3.10	.75	160.38	
3. Reading Skill	Experience abroad	Yes	103	2.57	.86	407	-2.43*
		No	306	2.80	.82	167.77	
4. Writing Skill	Experience abroad	Yes	103	2.77	.93	407	-2.31*
		No	306	3.01	.83	159.58	
Total	**Experience abroad**	**Yes**	**103**	**2.69**	**.79**	**407**	**-3.07***
		No	**306**	**2.94**	**.72**	**163.23**	

* $p < .05$

Table 4 shows that the overall problem of students who had experiences abroad was lower than that of students who didn't ($\bar{X}$ = .79 and .72). The t-test was employed to examine a significant difference between students who had experience abroad and those who didn't. The results indicated that there are statistically significant differences found in students' overall problems in studying English and in all categories between two groups at the level of .05. This means that students with experience abroad have fewer problems in studying English than those without experience abroad.

Table 5 Analysis of Variance of Students' Problems in Studying English Classified by Fields of Study

Problems	Variance	df	SS	MS	F
1. Listening Skill	Between Groups	8	7.58	.95	1.63
	Within Groups	401	232.56	.58	
	Total	409	240.15		
2. Speaking Skill	Between Groups	8	4.75	.59	.97
	Within Groups	401	245.50	.61	
	Total	409	250.25		
3. Reading Skill	Between Groups	8	6.90	.86	1.26
	Within Groups	401	275.35	.69	
	Total	409	282.25		
4. Writing Skill	Between Groups	8	2.85	.36	.48
	Within Groups	401	298.07	.74	
	Total	409	300.92		
Total	**Between Groups**	**8**	**4.39**	**.55**	**.99**
	Within Groups	**401**	**223.17**	**.56**	
	Total	**409**	**227.56**		

*p < .05

From data analysis, it was found that Engineering students had the highest mean scores of problems ($\overline{X}$ = 3.01), followed by Accounting students ($\overline{X}$ = 2.99), and Fine & Applied Arts students ($\overline{X}$ = 2.97). ANOVA test was conducted to investigate any significant differences in students' problems among nine fields of study and the result in Table 5 reveals that there was no statistically significant difference in their problems in studying English among nine faculties.

Table 6 Three Most Popular Escaping or Avoiding and Fighting or Facing Defense Mechanism Used By Students

Escaping or Avoiding Defense Mechanism	$\overline{X}$	SD
1. Avoiding speaking English	3.11	1.12
2. Just studying to pass the exam	2.81	1.21
3. Avoiding contacting foreigners	2.47	1.10
Total	**2.87**	**.58**
Fighting or Facing Defense Mechanism	$\overline{X}$	**SD**
1. Trying to listen to English songs	3.74	1.10
2. Looking up words from dictionaries	3.43	1.10
3. Paying more attention in classes	3.40	0.9
Total	**2.41**	**.73**

The result shown in Table 6 indicated that the overall mean score of students' escaping or avoiding and fighting or facing defense mechanism was at a moderate level ($\overline{X}$ = 2.87 and $\overline{X}$ = 2.41). When considering the students' escaping or avoiding defense mechanism, it was found that the three most popular ways are avoiding speaking English ($\overline{X}$ = 3.11), just studying to pass the exam ($\overline{X}$ = 2.81) and avoiding contacting foreigners ($\overline{X}$ = 2.47). Among the fighting or facing defense mechanism used by the students, the three most popular ways are trying to listen to English songs ($\overline{X}$ = 3.74), looking up words from dictionaries ($\overline{X}$ = 3.43), and paying more attention in classes ($\overline{X}$ = 3.40).

Table 7 Relationships between Students' Problems in Studying English and Their Use of Defense Mechanism

	Speaking Problem	Reading Problem	Writing Problem	Overall problem	Negative Defense Mechanism	Positive Defense Mechanism	Overall Defense Mechanism
Listening Problem	.81*	.82*	.73*	.91*	-.23*	.47*	-.06
Speaking Problem		.82*	.80*	.93*	-.21*	.50*	-.03
Reading Problem			.82*	.94*	-.21*	.52*	-.02
Writing Problem				.91*	-.20*	.46*	-.03
Overall Problem					-.23*	.53*	-.04
Escaping or Avoiding Defense Mechanism						.04	.94*
Fighting or facing Defense Mechanism							.37*

* p< .05

Pearson Correlation test was employed to investigate the relationship between students' overall problems and defense mechanism in studying English they used and the result in Table 7 revealed that there was no relationship between the two factors. However, when the data were analyzed according to types of defense mechanism: negative (escaping) and positive (fighting) defense mechanism, it was found that problems in studying English had a negative relationship with escaping defense mechanism while a positive relationship existed between problems in studying English and fighting defense mechanism. This means the more problems they had the less escaping defense mechanism they employed; the more problems they had, the more defense mechanism they used.

Discussion of Research Findings

1. The finding that Bangkok University students had moderate level of problems in studying English in all skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing corresponds with the study of Chaikosee (2004) and Ng-ampring (2006) who found that that the problems in studying English of their subjects were at a moderate level. This is probably because Language Institute provided more classroom activities in pairs and groups in EN111 course this semester. Working in group project can help to decrease students' anxiety in presenting themselves in front of class as well as promote their collaboration and social interaction. This was believed to make them feel more comfortable and forget the feeling of working alone. In addition, speaking skill was found to be the most problematic skill.

2. The finding indicates that gender did not have an effect on students' problems in studying English. There was no statistically significant difference in studying English between male and female students. This was in contrast with Wongsepaet (1999)'s work in her study of problems and needs in English language learning of higher-vocational students that students with different sex had different problems in learning English.

3. Students with experiences in remedial courses had fewer problems in studying English than those who didn't. This finding matches with the studies of Zhai and Skerl (2001), Alvarez (2008), McMurray (2006), and Massar (2009) that the students' achievement improved after having taking remedial courses in the subjects. Even participants who were unsuccessful in completing developmental courses were motivated and confident as those who had completed the courses successfully (Young, 2008).

4. Students with experience abroad had fewer problems in studying English than those without experience abroad. This is consistent with Krashen (1988) and Singleton (1989) that the length of time a person stays in a foreign country is closely linked with his level of language acquisition and that the opportunities to be close to the language or use the language frequently are necessary to promote native-like proficiency.

5. Students' fields of study show no effect on the level of problems in studying English. This corresponds with the finding from the research of Amornratanasak (1999) that the problems and obstacles of learning and teaching English of Ramkhamhaeng University students from different faculties had no statistically significant difference. However, it is interesting that Engineering students are among the top three study fields that have high scores of problem in studying English. It can be because Engineering students in Bangkok University were graduated from both secondary and vocational levels, in which English was not emphasized in their curriculum.

6. The finding that students as a whole use defense mechanisms at a moderate level comes in line with the study of Ng-ampring (2006). However, this finding is in contrast with that of Suwantharathip (2010), who found that the second-year students of Bangkok University exercised the strategies to cope with their anxiety at a low level. Of the two categories of defense mechanism used by the students, it was found that the three most popular

escaping or avoiding defense mechanism were avoiding speaking English, just studying to pass the exam, and avoiding contacting foreigners. As for the fighting or facing defense mechanism, they included trying to listen to English songs, looking up words from dictionaries, and paying more attention in classes. These findings are in accordance with the studies of Ng-ampring (2006) and that paying more attention to what the teacher teaching and looking up the meaning of difficult words in the dictionary are among the most frequently-used strategies to cope with their language anxiety. Huang (2009) also revealed that those mechanisms include daily lives strategies outside of the classroom such as watching local TV and listening to English songs. Moreover, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2003) and Cook (2006) found in their studies that giving up, sleeping in class and avoiding English language situations were common among the subjects.

7. Based on the finding, there was no relationship between students' overall problems and defense mechanism in studying English they used. Furthermore, the finding showed that the more problems they had, the less escaping defense mechanism they employed; the more problems they had, the more defense mechanism they used. This might be because English is one of the compulsory subjects required for their graduation. No matter whether they like it or not, they have to pass the subject. Another reason is that class activities both in pairs and in groups help them to create the feeling of not working alone with friends to help them overcome the problems. In addition, students admit that English is very important in working after graduation; it is an important tool to get better job and salary. As a result, they try to seek the best solutions to their problems of studying English.

Conclusion

As seen from the study, of all the problems encountered by the students, speaking is classified as the most problematic skill in studying English. Moreover, the positive and negative defense mechanism the students employed are trying to listen to English songs and avoid speaking English. These results are very useful to teachers in providing studying English environment to enhance their utmost achievement. Speaking activities should be focused by language teachers to help them get used to English. Activity like 'buddy program' giving students an opportunity to speak with foreigners in informal atmosphere will promote their confidence in using English as well as overcome the avoiding speaking English in the real situation.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. There should be a study investigating problems in studying English classified by attitude, curriculum, or instructional media.

2. A study should be done to examine the problems and defense mechanisms of international program students.

3. There should be a research on the relationship between the problems and defense mechanisms in the four skills separately.

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