Selected Factors Influencing Nursing Students' Self-Perception of

English Communication Skills, Asia‑Pacific International University, Thailand[1]

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Abstract

While English communication is important for Thai students, it remains a national problem. Self-perception is a variable which may affect a student's development of communication skills. To better support this development, this study aimed to identify factors influencing self-perception of English communication skills among nursing students. A random sampling technique was used to recruit 70 junior nursing students. A research instrument was developed that was composed of demographic data, along with learners (13 items), learning and teaching (8 items), social factors (5 items), and self-perception of English communication skills. The instrument was tested for validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Stepwise Multiple Regression. The results revealed the most significant predictor was self-perception of English communication skills, with others accounting for 39.9% of variance. A predictive equation was developed composed of learner (2 items), learning and teaching (3 items), and social (2 items) factors. It accounted for 71.4% of the overall variance. These findings suggested that instructors and administrators might develop strategies to promote students' confidence in expressing English with teachers and others, supply adequate materials, develop interesting teaching and learning methods, and provide an international environment for practicing English both inside and outside classroom.

Keywords: *Self‑perception, English communication skills, nursing students, Thailand*

Introduction

The English language has been assigned as the working language in communication among members of the ASEAN countries, according to the ASEAN Charter, Section 34. Consequently, people in all 10 ASEAN countries are strongly encouraged to learn and use English, alongside their national or native languages. While Thailand is a member of the ASEAN community, and a member of the ASEAN Economic Community since 2015 (Asian Knowledge Institute, 2012), it was found that when compared with other ASEAN countries, only 10% of Thai people could use English to communicate. This places Thailand in fifth place among 10 ASEAN countries (Siam EduNews, 2016). Additionally, when comparing TOEFL scores among graduates from the 10 ASEAN countries, Thai graduates ranked in the lowest score group (score lower than 500), the same as Laos (Vimonmass, 2014). These observations indicate that English communication skills among Thai students remain a challenge for the nation.

English as a foreign language is included in the basic curriculum by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry designated that the language be learned and taught from the elementary level, in order to encourage the acquisition of English language knowledge that may be useful for discovering new knowledge and expanding future career opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2008). However, even with this emphasis from the Ministry, most Thai students only have fair English speaking abilities (Plailek, 2011).

From the literature, three main factors were found to affect one's success in speaking English. These factors are the learners, the learning and teaching environment, and social factors. First, learner factors relate to the original basic knowledge possessed by learners, such as knowing less vocabulary and incorrectly using grammatical structures. This affects their confidence in using English, and skills are lost through avoidance of speaking English, owing to fear and embarrassment caused by speaking errors. Other related factors include the learners' attitudes towards their English

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[1] This paper was presented at the 2018 International Scholars' Conference, held on October 29-30, 2018 and hosted by Adventist University of the Philippines.

courses, as well as their academic history of English exposure (Arunsuksawang & Sungrugsa, 2015; Phuenpha, 2013). Second, learning and teaching factors relate to the learning and teaching plans, instructors' behavior, and instructor learning and teaching activity arrangements (Arunsuksawang & Sungrugsa, 2015; Plailek, 2011). Finally, social factors consist of family support and encouragement to do extra study in English and to use every opportunity to communicate in English with those nearby, especially foreigners (Plailek, 2011). Thus, the above-mentioned factors are essential for Thai students' to succeed in speaking English.

In the context of this study, new students of the Mission Faculty of Nursing learn English prior to commencing the first semester of their first year, in order to give them an English language foundation. They also study nine credits of English in the first and second years to improve their ability in reading, writing, grammar, and listening (Mission Faculty of Nursing, 2012), as well as being engaged in English conversations on a daily basis. Furthermore, students spend their everyday lives with other international students for two years before moving to the Mission Faculty of Nursing's Bangkok Campus for their remaining two years of study. Noticeably, the Faculty's bachelor nursing curriculum has foreseen the importance and indispensability of English usage, as the language affects professional nursing development, specifically the increasing demand for use of the English language in communication in the nursing field. Nevertheless, most nursing students speak little of the English language, and there are those who have the ability to speak but are afraid.

The present researchers wanted to study the three aforementioned factors – learners, learning and teaching, and social – and determine how these factors influence the self-perception of nursing students in their English communication skills. We were interested in the junior students at

the Mission Faculty of Nursing.

Conceptual Framework

The hypothesis used in this study was that the three factors illustrated in Figure 1 influence self-perception. In this regard, this study may serve as guidance for better development and management for the learning and teaching of English.
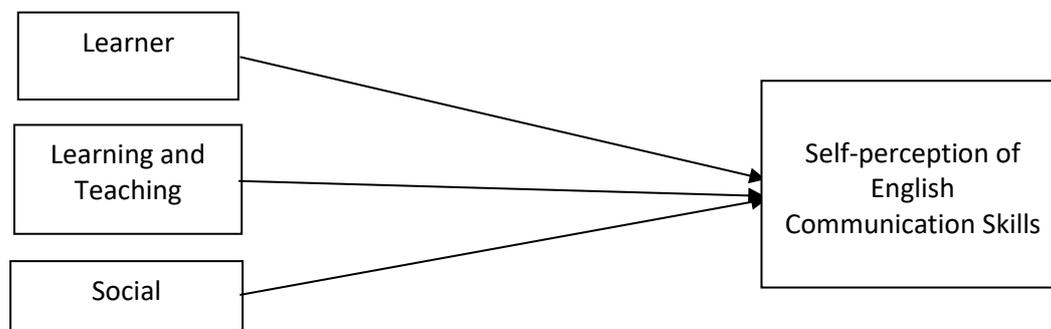

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Used for the Research Investigation

Research Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive predictive, cross-sectional design. Approval was obtained from the research committee and Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. After receiving IRB approval, the researchers made an appointment and met with the junior nursing students. After the researchers explained the study's objectives, methods, and benefits to the sample group, their cooperation was sought. The questionnaires were distributed to the sample group and questions answered. Return of a completed questionnaire was considered to represent consent. After the sample group completed the questionnaire, incomplete questionnaires and those containing multiple answers for any item were returned to the students for correct answers.

Population and Setting

The population used was 82 junior students at the Mission Faculty of Nursing, Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand. Seventy students were selected from the first semester cohort by a simple random sampling method. The sample size was calculated by using multiple regression of the power analysis, which was based on a power of 0.80, an effect size of 0.20, and a 0.05 level of significance. This gave a minimum sample size of 59 subjects (Soper, 2016). The sample size used in this study allowed for over 10% attrition.

Instruments

Five questionnaires were completed by each junior nursing student. The content validity and language suitability of all questionnaires were verified by three experts, composed of two nursing faculty members and one English instructor. A pilot study was conducted among 30 senior nursing students at the Mission Faculty of Nursing. Then, a Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated for each questionnaire. The CVIs of the Learners, Learning and Teaching, Social, and Self-Perception of English Communication Skills were 0.85, 1.0, 1.0, and 1.0, respectively. For the reliability of the instruments, they were tested using internal consistency.

Details concerning the five questionnaires were as follows:

Part 1: A demographic questionnaire was developed by the researchers that consisted of elements relating to gender, age, grade point average in English subjects, extra study in the English language, and extent to which foreign tourists visited their hometowns.

Part 2: Learners' items were adapted from a questionnaire created to identify problems and obstacles in Thai university students' English speaking skills (Rithirat & Chiramanee, 2014). This questionnaire was used to measure problems and obstacles in developing the English speaking skills of Thai university students. It consisted of 13 items on a 4-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (least agree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items #3, #5, #6, #10 and # 11 were negative in meaning and were reverse scored.The total sum of the scores ranged from 13 to 52. Higher scores indicated learners' positive dispositions and attitudes in their ability to communicate in English. Lower scores indicated learners' negative dispositions and attitudes in ability to communicate in English. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for this scale was 0.76.

Part 3: A learning and teaching questionnaire was developed from a review of problems and obstacles identified in Thai university students' English speaking skills (Rithira & Chiramanee, 2014). The instrument, as originally conceived, measured third-year students' opinions about problems and obstacles in developing English speaking skills. It consisted of 8 items on a 4-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (least agree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items #1, #2, #3, #4, #5 and #8 were negative in meaning and were reverse scored. The total sum of scores ranged from 8 to 32, with higher scores indicating that instructors' teaching approaches were suitable. Lower scores indicated that teaching approaches were not suitable. This scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.75.

Part 4: A social questionnaire was developed from a literature review (Plailek, 2011; Yiamsawat, 2016). The questionnaire was used to ask students about learning promotion and support from the family (Plailek, 2011). Questions in this section also delved into the role of the environment. In particular, questions addressed the students' English language classroom anxiety, and the subsequent coping strategy to address this (Yiamsawat, 2016). In this study, nursing students were asked to rate all 5 items on a 4-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (least agree) to 4 (strongly agree). The total sum of the scores ranged from 5 to 20. High scores indicated that the students had social or environmental support that allowed them to improve their English communication skills with others. Low scores meant that students had little or no support from their social circle or their environment. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.77.

Part 5: The self-perception of English communication skills questionnaire was developed based on Tantrakul's (2014), "Development of speaking skills for everyday life using conversation exercises of students who learned in Everyday English Course". It consisted of 3 items. Each item was

rated on a 4-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (least agree) to 4 (strongly agree). The total sum of the scores ranged from 3 to 12. The higher scores indicated that students had higher self-perception of their English communication skills. The lower scores indicated that students had lower self-perception of their English communication skills. Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.72.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was processed using a statistical software package. The demographic characteristics of the samples were summarized by using frequency and percentage figures. The factors of learners, learning and teaching, social, and English speaking ability were analyzed by using Stepwise Multiple Regression methodology. This statistic was used to test the independent variables as they were entered into or removed from the analysis one at a time. The process also based the sequence on the amount of additional variance of the dependent variable that was explained by that particular independent variable (Burn & Grove, 2005).

Results and Discussion

The sample included 70 junior nursing students, which presented a majority of the group. Females accounted for 85.7%; 68.6% were between 21 to 22 years old; 84.3% had grade point averages in basic English ranging from A, B^+, to B; and 57.1% had never taken extra English classes, nor did they reside in an area that was a foreign tourist attraction.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Predictors and Self-perception of English Communication Skills (n = 70)

Variable	M	SD
Learner M = 34.02, SD = 5.58, Min = 25, Max = 49		
1. You like to study courses focused on English speaking	3.21	0.70
2. You are confident in speaking English with others	2.41	0.78
3. You have little English vocabulary	2.67	0.86
4. You listen and understand English when conversing with others	2.61	0.76
5. You are worried about speaking English with incorrect grammar	2.94	0.81
6. You are afraid to be laughed at if speaking or pronunciation is Incorrect	2.74	0.94
7. When you speak English, you always have to think in Thai	3.06	0.83
8. You often speak English	1.94	0.91
9. You like to use English in your conversation	2.27	0.88
10. You are bashful when you have to speak English with foreigners	2.69	0.86
11. You fear asking for clarifying information from teachers while studying or listening to English	2.44	0.84
12. You use applications in English speaking training	2.50	0.83
13. You regularly watch movies or listen to English music	2.53	1.00
Learning and Teaching M = 21.92, SD = 3.86, Min = 15, Max = 32		
14. Insufficiency of media and instruments to supplement English studying and teaching	2.79	0.79
15. English teachers or tutors speak English too fast for students to comprehend the substance	2.63	0.80
16. Teachers' learning and teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes	2.49	0.77
17. Teacher gives you too little opportunity to train in English speaking when studying in class	2.64	0.91
18. In learning and teaching English, teachers do not use media to encourage you to practice your English speaking skills	2.63	0.88
19. Most English teachers use English language in all of their teaching classes	3.16	0.81
20. Teachers emphasize grammar more than speaking skills	2.79	0.72
21. There are activities arranged on the university campus to promote your English speaking ability	2.81	0.90

Table 1. (Continued)

Variable	M	SD
Social M = 11.50, SD = 3.30, Min = 5, Max = 20		
22. You have opportunities to converse in English with foreigners or other people in real situations	2.74	0.89
23. You have study resources outside of the university campus in English speaking training	2.46	1.03
24. Your resident community speaks English	1.87	0.90
25. Your community residents' ideal is of the opinion that Thais should speak Thai language	2.30	0.98
26. People all around say that when you spoke English, you were acting and imitating foreigners' accents	2.13	0.97
Self-Perception in English Communication Skills M = 7.18, SD = 2.28, Min = 3, Max = 12		
27. You can interactively speak English with others in your daily life	2.27	0.86
28. You understand when others speak in English	2.61	0.82
29. Your English speaking accent level can make others comprehend	2.30	0.82

Descriptive statistics for all predictors and dependent variables are presented in Table 1. The total score for the learner factor ranged from 25 to 49, with an average of 34.02 (SD = 5.58). It appeared that most students liked studying courses that focused on English speaking (M = 3.21, SD = 0.70), while some rated highly the item that indicated when speaking in English, they had to use Thai to think (M = 3.06, 0.83). On the other hand, very few students often spoke English (M = 1.94, SD = 0.91). This was followed by liking to use English in conversations (M = 2.27, SD = 0.88).

The total score for learning and teaching ranged from 15 to 32, with a mean of 21.92 (SD = 3.86). The highest mean score related to the item "most English teachers use English language in all of their teaching classes" (M = 3.16, SD = 0.81); the lowest mean score was associated with item "teachers' learning and teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes" (M = 2.49, SD = 0.77).

The total score for the social elements ranged from 5 to 20 (M = 11.50, SD = 3.30). An item "You have opportunities to converse English with foreigners or other people in real situations" had the highest mean score (M = 2.74, SD = 0.89), and the lowest mean score was "your resident community speaks English" (M = 1.87, SD = 0.90). The mean total score of self-perception in English communicating skills was 7.18 (SD = 2.28) and ranged from 3 to 12. The highest mean score was "student understand when others speak in English" (M = 2.61, SD = 0.82), and the mean lowest score was "student can interactively speak English with others in your daily life" (M = 2.27, SD = 0.86).

Predictors of Self-Perception in English Communication Skills

The analysis from the Stepwise Multiple Regression found for items listed in Table 1 were interpreted as follows.

In Model 1: The most significant predictor of self-perception of English communication skills accounted for 39.9% of variance (R^2 = 0.399, p < 0.001); this predictor was confidence in speaking English with others.

In Model 7: There were seven independent variable predictors of self-perception in English communication skills, which together accounted for 71.4% of variance, with a significance level of 0.05 (R^2 = 0.714, p < 0.05). The first independent variable was confidence in speaking English with others (b = 0.299), accounting for 39.9% of variance (R^2 = 0.399, p < 0.001). The second variable was having opportunities to converse in English with foreigners or others in real situations (b = 0.232), accounting for 13.6% of variance (R^2 = 0.535, p = 0.001). The third variable related to insufficiency of media and instruments to supplement English studying and teaching (b = 0.221), which explained 5.7% of variance (R^2 = 0.592, p < 0.01). The fourth predictor was when most English teachers used English language in all of their teaching classes (b = 0.199), which accounted for 4.6% of the variance (R^2 = 0.638, p < 0.01). The fifth predictor was when people commonly said that you when you spoke

English, you were acting and imitating foreigners' accents (b = 0.150), accounted for 3.1% of variance (R^2 = 0.669, p < 0.05). The next was negative, relating to fear of clarifying information with teachers while studying or listening English (b = -0.221), accounting for 2.6% of variance (R^2 = 0.695, p < 0.01). Finally, if the teachers' learning/teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes (b = 0.173), this accounted for 1.9% of variance (R^2 = 0.714, p < 0.05). Detailed data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Predicting English Communication Skills (n = 70)

Model	Independent Variables	R^2	F	Regression Coefficients			T-values
				b	**SE**	**Beta**	
1	- Confidence in speaking English with others	0.399	45.092***	0.610	0.091	0.631	6.715***
7	- Confidence in speaking English with others (X_1)	0.399	22.134***	0.299	0.077	0.310	3.862***
	- Having opportunities to converse in English with foreigners or other people in real situations (X_2)	0.535		0.232	0.068	0.273	3.392***
	- Insufficiency of media and instruments to supplement English studying and teaching (X_3)	0.592		0.221	0.072	0.231	3.074**
	- Most of English teachers used English language in all of their teaching classes (X_4)	0.638		0.199	0.072	0.211	2.758**
	- People all-around saying that you spoke English you were acting and imitated foreigners' accent (X_5)	0.669		0.150	0.060	0.192	2.502*
	- Fear of clarifying information from teachers while studying or listening English (X_6)	0.695		-0.221	0.074	-0.245	-2.274**
	- Teachers' learning and teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes (X_7)	0.714		0.173	0.085	0.176	2.040*
	Constant = - 0.417, R^2 = 0.714, F = 22.134, p < 0.05						

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

From the analysis detailed in Table 2, a regression equation was created to predict the raw data as follows: $Y = b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7$ + a constant, with R^2 (coefficient of determination) equal to 0.714; the sum of all the *beta* values was 0.636. The following equation shows the regression *Beta* values in their predictive order: Self-perception of English communication skills (Y) = 0.299 (confidence in speaking English with others) + 0.232 (having opportunities to converse in English with foreigners or other people in real situations) + 0.221 (insufficiency of media and instruments to supplement English studying and teaching) + 0.199 (most English teachers used English language in all of their teaching classes) + 0.150 (people all around saying that when you spoke English, you were acting and imitating foreigners' accents) − 0.221 (fear of clarifying information from teachers while studying or listening in English) + 0.173 (teachers' learning and teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes).

Eleven factors were found to be not significant. They are as follows: 1) You like to study courses focused on English speaking; 2) You have little English vocabulary; 3) You listen to and understand English when conversing with others; 4) You are worried about speaking English using incorrect grammar; 5) You are afraid to be laughed at if speaking or pronunciation is incorrect; 6) When you speak English, you always have to think in Thai; 7) You often speak English; 8) You like to use English in your conversation; 9) You are bashful when you have to speak English with foreigners;

10) You use applications in English speaking training; and 11) You regularly watch movies or listen to English music.

Furthermore, there were five factors of learning and teaching which were not significant. They are as follows: 1) English teachers or tutors speak English too fast for students to comprehend the substance; 2) Teacher gives you too little opportunity to train in English speaking when studying in class; 3) Teacher does not use media to encourage you to practice your English speaking skills; 4) Teachers emphasize grammar more than speaking skills; and 5) There are activities arranged on the university campus to promote your English speaking ability.

Three social factors that were found to be insignificant. They are as follows: 1) You have study resources outside the university campus in English speaking training; 2) Your resident community speaks English; and 3) Your community residents' ideal is of the opinion that Thais should speak the Thai language; these had an insignificant effect on respondents' self-perception of English communication skills.

Since these items were not significant in the statistical analysis, they cannot predict any self-perception of English communication skills in this study. Hence, discussion is not required.

Factors Predicting Self-Perception of English Communication Skills

Overall prediction of self-perception of English communication skills consisted of the factors derived from how learners perceive their English communication skills, the learning and teaching environment, and their social environments.

The first predictors related to how learners perceive their English communication skills. Two strong items in this factor were: 1) confidence in speaking English with others, and 2) fear of asking for clarifying information from teachers while studying or listening to English. These two might be a result of Thai students' bashful behavior; they are often fearful of expressing themselves or fearful of friends' laughter. If they don't know a vocabulary word or even how to ask about it, they are nervous and worried. This was found to be the case, even though the sample population had English CGPAs of A, B+, and B. Included in this is the nervousness of having to speak English when unprepared, and worry when students don't understand what a teacher has said in English (see also Chaiparn, Promkaew, & Seenak, 2013; Pongpanich, 2011; Yiamsawat, 2016). Furthermore, 57.1% of the sample group had never taken extra English courses, resulting in less exposure to English vocabulary, which might well be a factor that affected the students' confidence in using English. This may reflect the necessity of having a firm English language foundation, and its value for future learning or speaking of English language skills (Pheunpha, 2013).

The learning and teaching environment also was a predictor in self-perception in many aspects of English communication skills. They were: 1) insufficient access to media and instruments to supplement English study and teaching; 2) most English teachers used English language in all of their teaching classes; and 3) teachers' learning and teaching arrangements were uninteresting in classes. These aspects about teachers might be attributed to large classes. Teachers had to divide students into several groups, which could have led to a misunderstanding that materials for students were insufficient. Moreover, teachers were foreigners who could not communicate with students in Thai. This may have caused students to feel uncomfortable, as they could not communicate with the teachers about what they did not understand. First- and second-year students were also focused on studying foundational elements of the English language (e.g. English grammar, reading, listening, writing, and speaking English at a basic level). The content in each level of classes progressively becomes harder, and teaching approaches may not be attractive. The difficulties students face might discourage them from studying English. When students' study histories were examined, it was found that 84% of students received A, B+ and B grades in Basic English courses. In later classes, student grades at these levels declined to 64.3%, 61.4%, and 51.4% respectively in English 1, 2 and 3. Teachers are key figures to encourage students to develop their English speaking skills.

Social factors also exerted effects on self-perception of English communication skills. Strong aspects were: 1) having opportunities to converse in English with foreigners or other people in real

situations; and 2) people saying that when speaking English, students were acting and imitating foreigners' accents. The reasons might be accounted for by the fact that the Bachelor degree program in nursing at Asia-Pacific International University is a Thai curriculum, and so 100% of the students are Thais, and use only Thai in communication. Because of this, English conversations with foreigners and other people in real situations were infrequent or lacking. When considering personal data, it was found that 57.1% of the sample group resided in hometowns with foreign tourist attractions, while the remaining 42.9% had never lived in places with foreign tourist attractions. These circumstances may affect students' English speaking ability, as it is established that human behaviors are affected by external environments, and so living arrangements may impart or deny learning benefits (Wongyai, 2011).

Conclusions

The limitation of this research is that the results may not be generalized to other nursing students in other universities, especially since the curriculum structure of the nursing program where the sample was enrolled varies from those of other universities.

This study showed several types of factors that can affect the ability to confidently converse in English. These factor groups include learner and social factors, as well as factors involved with creation of the learning and teaching environment. These factors returned a regression value of 0.714 (P < 0.05) when a relationship was sought with self-perception of English communication skills. Additionally, the most important variable for predicting self-perception in language was confidence in speaking English with others (R^2 = 0.399; P < 0.05). Thus, these findings suggest that instructors, program instructors, and administrators should develop strategies to promote students' confidence in expressing English with teachers and others. Specifically, teachers should consider employing social strategies in order to encourage students to speak English outside the classroom. Moreover, program instructors and administrators should prepare and supply adequate materials, as well as encourage the development of interesting teaching and learning methods.

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