

## Beliefs about English Language Learning, Attitudes and Motivation of Undergraduate Students of Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus

### ความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ ทักษะคติ และแรงจูงใจของนักศึกษา ระดับปริญญาตรีมหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตสุราษฎร์ธานี

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#### ABSTRACT

Previous research studies confirm that students with positive beliefs about language learning, good attitudes and high motivation are likely to be successful language learners. Likewise, fostering and maintaining positive beliefs, good attitudes and motivation are important because the students can be propelled to their furthest language learning potential. However, less is known what Thai EFL university students' beliefs, attitudes and motivation are like and whether or not they have changed over time. This research aimed to fill in this gap by using a cross-sectional research design to investigate these psychological variables among first-year to fourth-year undergraduate students of Prince of Songkla University. The findings revealed that a marked change of beliefs, attitudes and motivation can be clearly observed as fluctuated over time. The mean scores showed that the third-year students possessed the strongest beliefs, the most positive attitudes, and the highest motivation. One-Way ANOVA displayed statistically significant differences of beliefs, attitudes and motivation among the students of all four years, ( $F(3, 228)=9.51, p<.05$ ), ( $F(3, 228)=8.00, p<.05$ ), and ( $F(3, 228)=6.17, p<.05$ ), respectively. The Scheffe post hoc test also confirmed the differences among specific groups of students, that is, beliefs, attitudes and motivation of the third-year students were higher than those of the first- and the fourth-year ones in a statistically significant way. It is interesting to note that the first-year students seemed not ready when compared to the third-year students whose beliefs, attitudes, and motivation were relatively highly positive. Language teachers should therefore shape and foster positive beliefs, attitudes, and motivation with regards to language learning in the first-year students. Additionally, curriculum developers and administrators are challenged to reconsider English language study plan so as to introduce English language courses to the time when students are psychologically ready to study.

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## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาที่ผ่านมายืนยันว่านักศึกษาที่มีความเชื่อในการเรียนภาษาในทางบวก มีทัศนคติที่ดีและมีแรงจูงใจในการเรียนสูง มีแนวโน้มว่าจะประสบความสำเร็จในการเรียนภาษาในตนเองเกี่ยวกับการปลูกฝังและคงไว้ซึ่งความเชื่อในเชิงบวก ทัศนคติที่ดี และแรงจูงใจเป็นสิ่งสำคัญเพราะนักศึกษาสามารถได้รับการส่งเสริมให้ก้าวหน้าในการเรียนรู้ภาษาได้ อย่างไรก็ตามยังมีข้อมูลไม่มากนักว่าลักษณะความเชื่อ ทัศนคติและแรงจูงใจของนักศึกษาเป็นอย่างไร และตัวแปรเหล่านี้เปลี่ยนแปลงไปตามเวลาหรือไม่ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อตอบข้อสงสัยดังกล่าวโดยใช้รูปแบบการวิจัยเชิงตัดขวางเพื่อศึกษาตัวแปรทางจิตวิทยาเหล่านี้กับกลุ่มนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ชั้นปีที่หนึ่งถึงชั้นปีที่สี่ ผลการวิจัยพบว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงของความเชื่อ ทัศนคติและแรงจูงใจของนักศึกษามีความผันผวนและสามารถสังเกตได้ ค่าเฉลี่ยแสดงให้เห็นว่านักศึกษาชั้นปีที่สามมีความเชื่อที่แน่นอน มีทัศนคติเชิงบวกและมีแรงจูงใจมากที่สุด การวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนแบบทางเดียวพบความแตกต่างของความเชื่อ ทัศนคติและแรงจูงใจในกลุ่มนักศึกษาทั้งสี่ชั้นปีอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ( $F(3, 228) = 9.51, p < .05$ ), ( $F(3, 228) = 8.00, p < .05$ ), และ ( $F(3, 228) = 6.17, p < .05$ ) ตามลำดับ การทดสอบหลังการวิเคราะห์ (Scheffe) ยืนยันความแตกต่างรายคู่ โดยที่นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่สามมีความเชื่อ ทัศนคติและแรงจูงใจสูงกว่านักศึกษาชั้นปีที่หนึ่งและชั้นปีที่สี่อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ สิ่งที่น่าสนใจคือ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่หนึ่งดูเหมือนว่าจะไม่มีความพร้อมในการเรียน เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่สามซึ่งมีความเชื่อ ทัศนคติ และแรงจูงใจในเชิงบวกสูง อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาควรปรับและปลูกฝังความเชื่อ ทัศนคติและแรงจูงใจให้เป็นไปในเชิงบวก นักพัฒนาหลักสูตรและผู้บริหารควรพิจารณาแผนในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ โดยให้นักศึกษาริเริ่มเรียนเมื่อมีความพร้อมที่จะเรียน

## Motivation of the Study

In terms of language learning, one of the problems found at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Surat Thani campus is that most first-year undergraduate students demonstrate quite relatively low English language proficiency, which is also demonstrated in their admission English scores. Also, regarding the PSU context, many students, especially the science-major students, do not put much effort to learn English, and seem to avoid studying it. Although many students realize the importance of English, they feel that English is quite complicated to learn, and it is difficult for them to fully succeed in learning it. To address this issue, the university has launched a new policy to use English score as a requirement for graduation in order to promote and encourage all teachers to take action to improve their students' English language proficiency. In order to implement the policy successfully, it is important to understand the root causes that contribute to such dissatisfactory behaviors, as mentioned previously, so that realistic solutions can be put forward.

Regarding language learning, it is widely known that students achieve different outcomes and demonstrate different levels of proficiency although they are in the same teaching and learning environment. For instance, Lightbown and Spada (2006) pointed out that some students make rapid progress, while some are quite slower than peers. In addition, many studies concerning factors affecting language learning (Dörnyei, 1998; Horwitz, 1987; Kalajahi, Nimehchisalem, & Pourshahian, 2012; Oxford, 1990; Rifai, 2010; Wenden, 1987; Wong & Nunan, 2011) have been carried out for the past

few decades, and it is clear that psychological variables are crucial. Some examples of these variables include beliefs, attitudes and motivation. Moreover, studies on good language learners (Griffiths, 2008; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wahyudi, 2014) yielded different sets of learning behaviors between good and poor language learners. Thus, these different emotional and behavioral attributes bring about varying levels of language learning success. White (2008) stated that good language learners should possess a set of positive beliefs. Similarly, Ushioda (2008) mentioned that good language learners should possess good attitudes and motivation. Additionally, Eshghinejad (2016) pointed out that high motivation and positive attitudes facilitate learners' language learning.

Based on previous studies, it can be seen that beliefs, attitudes and motivation are related to success in language learning. However, it is also important to note that most of these studies investigate these psychological variables in students as a group. Furthermore, such studies do not indicate whether these variables are stable or can be changed over time. It is considered that empirical research that examines these psychological variables at a learner's level is important so as to gain understanding on how such variables can be changed, shaped, and fostered as well as how they affect language learning in individual learners. The results can be beneficial both to curriculum developers and administrators who are responsible for the design of English courses to meet the university's new policy and to language teachers who are the main driving force in moving their students forward in English language learning. In the end, not only that favorable language learning behaviors will be formed but that the solution to the university's current concern on students' English language proficiency will be addressed.

The present study therefore addressed two research questions:

1. What are the beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning of PSU undergraduate students in different years of study?
2. Are there any patterns of beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning of PSU undergraduate students that can be observed? If so, what are the similarities and/or differences of such patterns among students in different years of study?

## **Literature review**

### *Beliefs about language learning*

Beliefs about language learning are important factors influencing language learning behavior. Scholars have defined beliefs in various ways. In the area of language learning, beliefs refer to learners' opinions about language learning issues (Horwitz, 1988), about the nature of language and language learning (Barcelos, 2003), and about themselves, language, and language learning, including the

learning contexts (White, 2008). Based on the definitions, learners' beliefs are related to learners' opinions about themselves, as well as to their opinions about language teaching and learning situations. Therefore, learners' preconceived ideas about language learning and teaching formed on the basis of their experience can influence their language learning behaviors and learning process.

In addition, Wenden (1987) provided empirical evidence that learners' beliefs about language learning affect their language learning strategies. That is, learning behaviors are exhibited according to what learners believe. This is important because, according to UNESCO's 2013 report, what is significant to learners is not only the education they receive but also their own beliefs in the possibilities to achieve success. This is because, unlike inherited intelligence, achievement is mainly a product of hard work, indicating to learners that success in education is attainable if they study hard enough. Those who have such beliefs would willingly put their efforts to learn in the hope of success, and this is how beliefs affect learning behaviors which, in turn, affect learners' achievement.

Various empirical studies have supported the relationships between beliefs and language learning outcomes. For instance, Abedini, Rahimi & Zare-ee (2011) examined Iranian university students' beliefs about language learning, language learning strategies and language proficiency. Their findings revealed that EFL students' beliefs influenced their language use strategy and language proficiency. Another study conducted by Bagherzadeh (2012) investigated 125 non-English major students' beliefs about language learning and their English proficiency. The research findings showed that students with higher proficiency held more positive beliefs in language learning and possessed higher learning motivation and achievement expectations.

Therefore, it can be seen that beliefs play a powerful role in the success or failure in language learning (Horwitz, 1987, 1988). Dörnyei (2008) also stated that beliefs produce a great effect on behaviors. He also asserted that beliefs were deeply embedded in learners' mind, which were rooted from their experiences and reflected in their behaviors. Thus, beliefs in language learning are the foundation of learners' behaviors toward learning a language, which consequently results in the degree of achievement in language learning outcomes.

### *Attitudes in language learning*

Attitudes can be considered as a psychological variable that contributes to language learning success. Attitudes are influenced by beliefs, as attitudes are responses—both positive and negative—which an individual forms in given situations or to particular matters based on his or her beliefs or experiences. Regarding formal definitions of attitudes, Bartram (2010) reviewed definitions focusing

on the idea of evaluative responses toward a referent or situation. Similar definitions proposed by Gardner (1985) and Eagley and Chaiken (1998) stated that attitudes refer to both positive and negative responses which an individual makes to a referent based on his/her beliefs or experience. Moreover, looking at attitudes from a social-psychological view, Ajzen (1988) demonstrated linkages between attitudes and behaviors. Bartram (2010) also confirmed the relationship between attitudes and learning performance or achievement.

Positive attitudes toward language learning have been shown to link with higher language achievement. For instance, the study carried out by Yang and Lau (2003), following students from secondary school to university graduation, revealed that the students possessed positive attitudes toward English resulting in academic success and personal growth. Another study conducted by Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) also illustrated the importance of students' possessing positive attitudes and motivation toward language learning in raising their proficiency level. Thus, it is clear that positive attitudes toward language learning can bring about better language learning outcomes.

Additionally, Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Ushioda, 2008, p.20) made a speculation that "learners' underlying attitudes to the target language culture and people...have a significant influence on their motivation and thus their success in learning the language." A re-statement is made in Gardner's study (1985), signifying that learners who have positive attitudes toward the culture and people of the language they are learning, and who are willing to integrate themselves into that culture or try to be like people in that community, seem to be more successful in learning that language. This shows that attitudes also have a direct influence on motivation, and motivation in turn leads to language learning success.

### *Motivation in language learning*

Originally, the word *motivation* comes from a Latin verb meaning *to move*. Ushioda (2013, p.3763) concluded that motivation concerns "what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, and to persist in action." Tremblay and Gardner (1995), who were the pioneers in studying the causal relationship among attitudes, motivation and language achievement, stated that language attitudes influenced goal salience, valence and self-efficacy. In turn, these three constructs had effects on behaviors and consequently on language achievement. This means that goal salience, valence and self-efficacy are mediators of the relationship between language attitudes and behaviors, and behaviors directly lead to language achievement. In this study, two variables were selected to be measures of motivation, namely self-efficacy and behaviors.

Self-efficacy refers to “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). The importance of self-efficacy is emphasized by researchers in that self-efficacy can influence motivational level (Yunus & Abdullah, 2011). The other selected measure, behaviors, is defined as “the characteristics of an individual that can be perceived by an observer” (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995, p. 515). It is a significant determinant of achievement.

Another study done by Jafari (2013) showed that motivated students seem to achieve more success in language learning than unmotivated ones. That is, language learning would be successful when learners are highly motivated. Thus, as suggested, teachers play influential roles to motivate their learners to learn and become more successful in language learning.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study was a quantitative research employing a cross-sectional research design to investigate beliefs, attitudes and motivation among first-year to fourth-year undergraduate students of Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Surat Thani Campus.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 232 students from four groups of undergraduates majoring in Languages, Communication and Business (LCB) at PSU, Surat Thani Campus. LCB students mainly study English language courses, so they can be considered English-major students. However, the LCB curriculum also includes courses in business and Chinese language. Of the 232 participants, 67 were freshmen (28.88%), 53 were sophomores (22.84%), 56 were juniors (24.14%) and 56 were seniors (24.14%). The participants were selected through purposive sampling technique.

### **Research instrument**

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of four sections: (1) personal background, (2) beliefs about language learning, (3) attitudes toward language learning, and (4) motivation. The first section collected the participants’ personal information. In the second section, the participants’ beliefs about language learning were elicited by a modified version of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), developed by Horwitz (1987). The modified BALLI in this study included three areas, out of five in the original: (1) foreign language aptitude, (2) the difficulty of language learning, and (3) the nature of language learning. The other two areas of the original BALLI were not included because they overlapped with other variables in the main study.

The third section of the questionnaire addressed the attitudes of the participants with regards to six subcategories: (1) attitudes toward English speakers, (2) attitudes toward the English course, (3) attitudes toward the English teacher, (4) interest in foreign languages, (5) integrative orientation, and (6) instrumental orientation. The last part of the questionnaire investigated students' motivation which included two main categories: self-efficacy and behaviors. Self-efficacy consisted of three sub-scales: (1) English use anxiety, (2) English class anxiety, and (3) performance expectancy. Behaviors also consisted of three sub-scales: (1) motivational intensity, (2) attention, and (3) persistence. The items in the attitudes and motivation sections were adapted from the Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985, 2004), whereas some items in the sub-scales, such as attention, persistence, and performance expectancy, were adapted from the study conducted by Tremblay and Gardner (1995).

All items in the questionnaire were in the five-point Likert-scale format, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This instrument was validated by three experts in the field of language instruction in order to confirm the content validity of the questionnaire. Moreover, all items were translated into Thai in order to avoid any misunderstanding and difficulty when the participants completed the questionnaire.

### **Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics (i.e., percentage) was employed to analyze the beliefs, attitudes and motivation data from the Likert scale. Then, in order to capture mean differences among students of different years, one-way ANOVA was performed, and Scheffe Post-Hoc analysis was conducted to confirm where the differences occurred between groups of students with unequal numbers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for Microsoft Windows was utilized.

## **Findings and Discussions**

The findings of the study are presented according to the research questions, as follows:

*1. What are the beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning of PSU undergraduate students in different years of study?*

The responses to this research question revealed underlying beliefs about language learning, attitudes and motivation of all PSU undergraduate students in the study. Table 1 illustrates the percentages of students' responses to beliefs about language learning.

**Table 1.** Percentages of the undergraduate students' responses to beliefs about language learning

|   |   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>I. Beliefs about foreign language aptitude</b>         |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 1   | It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.                                | 0.00              | 10.78    | 21.55   | 39.66 | 28.02          |
| 2   | Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.                                | 2.16              | 2.59     | 11.21   | 46.98 | 37.07          |
| 3   | People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.         | 11.21             | 17.24    | 26.29   | 26.72 | 18.53          |
| 4   | I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.  | 3.02              | 9.91     | 50.00   | 31.47 | 5.60           |
| 5   | Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.  | 19.40             | 29.74    | 32.33   | 13.36 | 5.17           |
| 6   | Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.   | 1.72              | 0.00     | 8.62    | 4.57  | 65.09          |
| <b>II. Beliefs about difficulty of language learning</b>  |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 7   | Some languages are easier to learn than others.   | 2.59              | 3.88     | 15.95   | 47.41 | 30.17          |
| 8   | English is a very easy language.  | 4.74              | 16.38    | 52.59   | 21.55 | 4.74           |
| 9   | I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.   | 1.29              | 4.74     | 35.78   | 42.24 | 10.78          |
| 10  | It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.                           | 9.05              | 22.84    | 34.91   | 25.00 | 8.19           |
| <b>III. Beliefs about the nature of language learning</b> |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 11  | It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.                | 0.90              | 4.30     | 20.69   | 40.09 | 33.19          |
| 12  | It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.                                       | 0.86              | 5.17     | 14.66   | 33.62 | 45.69          |
| 13  | The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.              | 0.00              | 1.72     | 11.21   | 22.84 | 64.22          |
| 14  | The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.                       | 1.29              | 6.47     | 25.00   | 33.19 | 34.05          |
| 15  | The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language. | 3.45              | 7.33     | 25.86   | 37.50 | 25.86          |

Table 1 demonstrates several interesting points. In Part I, beliefs about foreign language aptitude, item 6: "Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language" received the highest agreement (65.09%). The second highest agreement (37.07%) went to item 2: "Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages." As seen from these two items, the majority of the students strongly reflected their positive attitudes toward people's potential for language learning. They believed that everyone had potential to learn a foreign language, but they did not think they had such ability. These results were consistent with the study conducted by Horwitz (1988). The students believed that good language learners would be gifted, but they were not that type. From the results of items 6 and 2 in

Part I, students' beliefs that everyone had potential to learn a foreign language should be maintained, but the belief about their own ability should be made more positive.

In addition, the statement in item 1: "It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language" obtained strong agreement (28.02%) and agreement (39.66%) among the students. Their responses were in line with the study carried out by Chirdchoo and Wudthayagorn (2001) that young students were better language learners. Also, the students showed their strong agreement (18.53%) on the statement in item 3: "People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages." Horwitz (1988) confirmed that foreign language aptitude can lead to negative perspectives on language learning. Their beliefs that they are unable or less able to learn a foreign language can bring about negative expectations about themselves and their own abilities to language learning. Thus, such negative beliefs should be re-shaped so that students will have more confidence in their abilities and can expect themselves to perform better in language learning and become more successful.

The findings of Part II, beliefs about difficulty of language learning, the majority of students strongly agreed and agreed to the statement in item 7: "Some languages are easier to learn than others." (30.17% and 47.41%, respectively). It is clear that students held the concept of language difficulty hierarchy, ranging from easy to difficult to learn. However, for the statement in item 8: "English is a very easy language," the responses were different, with the majority of the students (52.59%) responded in the neutral scale. It meant that English was neither easy nor difficult for them to learn. Similarly, the majority of students seemed neutral toward the statement in item 10: "It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it" but at the same time, they tended to agree with the statement in item 9, "I believe that I can learn to speak English very well," with responses in the strongly agree and agree scales of 10.78% and 47.41%, respectively.

From the responses in Part II, it could be concluded that the students held somewhat positive beliefs that should be further nourished to develop further motivation. While the students believe that some languages are more difficult to learn than others, they are neutral on the difficulty of English and are to a certain extent positive of their own ability to develop English speaking skill. Also, it seems that the students' judgment on their learning outcome depends on their beliefs about language difficulty (Horwitz, 1988). If they believe that English is easy, they may put more effort on their learning and expect success. On the contrary, those who think English is difficult may put minimal effort and give up learning. Therefore, this belief of perceived language difficulty should be shaped or re-shaped, so that the students will be more willing to put effort into learning English and aim at being successful English language learners.

The last part, Part III, of beliefs about language learning was the nature of language learning. Notably, the findings revealed that the students displayed their strong agreement in all items in this part. That is, the majority of students believed that cultural knowledge, language immersion, vocabulary, grammar and translation were important in English language learning. However, as can be seen from the responses in Part III, the students overwhelmingly acknowledged the importance of vocabulary learning, and they seemed to think that vocabulary was the most important element that language learners should acquire. This is in line with Hu and Nation (2000) who stated the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading skills, in that readers need to know about 98 percent of words in order to adequately comprehend the passage without using references. In all, the students recognized the importance of culture, cultural immersion, grammar and translation and considered that learning English in an English-speaking country would be the best way to master the language.

The findings of the second psychological variable, attitudes, are reported in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Percentages of PSU undergraduate students' responses to attitudes on language learning

|  |   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>I. Attitudes toward English-speaking people</b> |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 1  | Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with.              | 6.47              | 8.19     | 44.40   | 34.05 | 6.90           |
| 2  | I wish I could have many native English speaking friends.                             | 1.29              | 0.86     | 21.12   | 34.48 | 42.24          |
| 3  | The more I get to know native English speakers, the more I like them.                 | 0.86              | 2.59     | 39.66   | 34.91 | 21.98          |
| 4  | You can always trust native English speakers.   | 3.02              | 13.36    | 43.97   | 30.17 | 9.48           |
| <b>II. Attitudes toward the English course</b>     |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 5  | I enjoy the activities of our English class much more than those of my other classes. | 2.16              | 11.21    | 25.00   | 45.69 | 15.95          |
| 6  | I look forward to the time I spend in English class.                                  | 1.72              | 9.48     | 40.95   | 37.07 | 10.78          |
| 7  | English is one of my favorite courses.  | 1.72              | 2.16     | 25.00   | 41.81 | 29.31          |
| <b>III. Attitudes toward the English teacher</b>   |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 8  | I look forward to going to class because my English teacher is so good.               | 1.29              | 3.45     | 40.95   | 39.66 | 14.66          |
| 9  | My English teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style.                      | 0.43              | 3.88     | 27.59   | 54.31 | 13.79          |
| 10   | My English teacher is a great source of inspiration to me.                            | 0.43              | 6.47     | 33.19   | 44.83 | 15.09          |

**Table 2.** Percentages of PSU undergraduate students' responses to attitudes on language learning (con.)

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>IV. Interest in foreign languages</b>   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 11 I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly.  | 1.72              | 3.45     | 6.90    | 44.40 | 43.53          |
| 12 I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages.   | 0.00              | 6.47     | 12.93   | 41.81 | 38.79          |
| 13 I enjoy meeting people who speak foreign languages.   | 0.00              | 4.31     | 18.53   | 41.81 | 35.34          |
| <b>V. Integrative orientation</b>  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 14 Studying English is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak English.                    | 0.00              | 2.59     | 18.97   | 48.71 | 29.74          |
| 15 Studying English is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature.     | 0.00              | 5.60     | 32.33   | 41.81 | 20.26          |
| 16 Studying English is important because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups. | 0.00              | 4.31     | 14.22   | 50.86 | 30.60          |
| <b>VI. Instrumental orientation</b>  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 17 Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.  | 2.16              | 3.88     | 23.71   | 36.21 | 34.05          |
| 18 Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.  | 0.00              | 0.00     | 10.78   | 23.71 | 65.52          |
| 19 Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.          | 3.88              | 6.47     | 24.57   | 35.78 | 29.31          |

In Table 2, the findings of Part I, attitudes toward English-speaking people, revealed that the majority of the students (42.24%) strongly agreed on the statement in item 2: "I wish I could have many native English speaking friends." Although the rest of the items in this part received the most responses in the neutral scale, the items still showed tendency toward agreement. Therefore, the overall findings of this part seemed to show that the students held positive attitudes toward the people of English-speaking country.

In Part II, attitudes toward the English course, the majority of the students agreed on the statement in item 5 regarding their enjoyment of English activities (45.69%) and on the statement in item 7 regarding their preference on English course (41.81%). The responses in Part II showed that, in overall, the students displayed good attitudes toward the English course that they had been taking.

Next, in Part III, attitudes toward the English teacher, the highest agreement was on the statement in item 9: "My teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style," and item 10: "My teacher

is a great source of inspiration.” The responses in this part thus showed that the students were positive about their English teacher’s teaching style and regarded the teacher as a great source of inspiration.

With regard to Part IV, interest in foreign languages, the majority of students agreed with all statements in this part, which are item 11: “I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly” (44.40%), item 12: “I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages” (41.81%), and item 13: “I enjoy meeting people who speak foreign languages” (41.81%). The findings from this part implied the students’ interest in using foreign languages, both to obtain information and to communicate with foreigners.

Similarly, in Part V, integrative orientation, the students showed agreement on all items in this part. They recognized the importance of English in helping them to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups (50.86%), to be more at ease when interacting with English-speaking people (48.71%), and to understand and appreciate English art and literature (41.81%). The findings in this part showed that the students realized the importance of English in helping them to become part of other cultural groups and to integrate themselves into those communities.

The last part, Part VI, instrumental orientation, item 18: “Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job” received the highest responses in the strongly agree scale (65.52%). The majority of students strongly agreed and agreed to the statement in item 17: “Studying English is important because it will make me more educated” (34.05% and 36.21%, respectively). Similarly, item 19: “Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language” received the highest responses in the agree scale (35.78%), followed by the strongly agree scale (29.31%). It is notable that the importance of English opening up job opportunities received an overwhelming acknowledgement from the majority of students. Moreover, knowledge of English was regarded as a tool to develop personal skill as well as gain social respects.

As can be seen from the findings in Table 2, the students realized the importance of foreign languages, notably English, and would like to effectively use them in both spoken and written forms of communication. This positive attitude is a good sign, as it shows that students have inclination to become more successful in language learning. They would like to immerse themselves in other cultures and become part of English-speaking communities so that they could broaden their worldview as well as master their English. Additionally, the students were intensely aware of the importance and necessity of English with regard to job opportunities. They also perceived that English signified being more educated and thus receiving higher status in the society.

The last psychological variable, motivation, consisted of two categories: self-efficacy and behavior, and each category contained three sub-categories, whose percentages are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Percentages of PSU undergraduate students' responses to motivation on language learning

|                                  |   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>I. Self-efficacy</b>          |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| <b>A. English use anxiety</b>    |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 1                                | Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried.  | 5.17              | 18.53    | 32.33   | 35.34 | 8.62           |
| 2                                | I feel anxious if someone asks me something in English.   | 6.47              | 16.38    | 33.19   | 36.64 | 7.33           |
| <b>B. English class anxiety</b>  |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 3                                | I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.  | 6.47              | 21.55    | 29.74   | 32.33 | 9.91           |
| 4                                | It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class.  | 4.31              | 25.43    | 33.19   | 26.29 | 10.78          |
| 5                                | It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.   | 6.47              | 15.09    | 31.9    | 32.33 | 14.22          |
| <b>C. Performance expectancy</b> |   |                   |          |         |       |                |
|                                  | I'm likely to be able to...   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 6                                | have everyday conversations with others in English.   | 2.16              | 9.05     | 24.57   | 45.26 | 18.97          |
| 7                                | describe my present job, studies, or other major life activities accurately in details.                                       | 0.00              | 3.88     | 42.24   | 42.24 | 11.64          |
| 8                                | talk about the future plans.  | 1.72              | 3.88     | 41.38   | 43.53 | 9.48           |
| 9                                | speak English well enough to be able to teach my friend.  | 4.31              | 13.79    | 40.52   | 25.86 | 15.52          |
| 10                               | understand simple statements or questions in English  | 0.00              | 6.90     | 30.60   | 43.97 | 18.53          |
| 11                               | understand a native speaker who is speaking to me as quickly and as colloquially as he/ she would to another native speaker.  | 1.29              | 18.10    | 45.26   | 21.55 | 13.79          |
| 12                               | read personal letters, emails or note written to me in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions. | 1.72              | 8.62     | 37.50   | 37.07 | 15.09          |
| 13                               | read popular novels without using a dictionary.   | 4.74              | 26.29    | 34.91   | 22.84 | 11.21          |
| 14                               | write a well-organized paragraph.   | 5.60              | 25.00    | 38.36   | 24.14 | 6.90           |
| 15                               | write an essay in English.  | 4.31              | 24.14    | 39.22   | 25.43 | 6.90           |
| 16                               | edit my friends' writing.   | 6.03              | 28.02    | 40.52   | 19.40 | 6.03           |
| 17                               | work as a writer for an English newspaper.  | 12.07             | 24.14    | 36.64   | 18.53 | 8.62           |

**Table 3.** Percentages of PSU undergraduate students' responses to motivation on language learning (con.)

|                                  |  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>II. Behavior</b>              |  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| <b>A. Motivational intensity</b> |  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 18                               | When I have a problem understanding something in my English class, I always ask my teacher for help. | 2.16              | 13.36    | 38.36   | 34.48 | 11.64          |
| 19                               | I really work hard to learn English.   | 0.00              | 5.17     | 22.84   | 46.12 | 25.86          |
| 20                               | After I get my English assignment back, I always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes.               | 3.45              | 18.10    | 47.84   | 24.14 | 6.47           |
| <b>B. Attention</b>              |  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 21                               | Nothing distracts me when I am studying English.   | 1.72              | 8.62     | 37.50   | 40.95 | 11.21          |
| 22                               | I usually remain focused in class right until the end of a lecture.                                  | 2.16              | 11.21    | 48.28   | 29.31 | 9.05           |
| 23                               | I rarely miss any points presented in a lecture.   | 2.16              | 16.38    | 27.16   | 41.81 | 12.93          |
| <b>C. Persistence</b>            |  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 24                               | I work on my English homework regularly.   | 1.72              | 9.01     | 37.34   | 40.77 | 11.16          |
| 25                               | I usually finish my English homework before watching television or going out.                        | 1.29              | 15.02    | 44.21   | 26.18 | 12.02          |
| 26                               | I usually maintain a high level of effort throughout an entire course.                               | 1.29              | 12.45    | 30.47   | 45.06 | 10.30          |

Table 3 shows two main categories of motivation, which are self-efficacy in Part I and behavior in Part II.

In terms of Part I, self-efficacy, approximately one-third of the students expressed their anxiety about English use, as shown in their agreement on the statements in item 1: "Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried" (35.34%), and item 2: "I feel anxious if someone asks me something in English" (36.64%). This may be due to the students' lack of confidence in their English proficiency, thus making them fear of making mistakes when they need to communicate in English.

The students' English use anxiety is also reflected in their expectancy in English performance. While almost half of the students agreed on statements that they were likely to be able to, in item 6: "have everyday conversations with others in English" (45.26%), in item 10: "understand simple statements or questions in English" (43.97%), and in item 8 "talk about the future plans" (43.53%), the majority of the responses in most other items fell under the agree and neutral scales, and, for a few

items, under the agree and disagree scales. Such responses implied that students only felt certain about their English performance when the subjects involved were simple or closely related to their personal matters. The students did not expect that they could perform well if they were to involve in native-like conversations or carry out tasks that require higher skills and proficiency in English, such as editing others' writing, reading novels without the help of a dictionary, or writing a well-organized paragraph.

The phenomenon seen in the findings of Part I, is supported by Horwitz (2010), who asserted that language anxiety would impede learners' language learning. Also, anxiety seems to influence learners' decision to accept or reject to learn a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001). In fact, situations that incur low anxiety are preferred by second or foreign language learners. It could be assumed that the students expressed their anxiety in English use due to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation by others, whether interlocutors or peers (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Moreover, they may compare themselves with others and may feel inferior with respect to their English proficiency. Thus, such anxiety would inevitably affect the students' language learning, as it was found that foreign language anxiety had negative relationship with learning outcomes (Elias, 2017; Elkhafaifi, 2005) In this regard, English teachers—being regarded quite positively by students, as seen in the results of Table 2, can play an important role to help students overcome such anxiety and lead students to success in English learning.

With respect to Part II, behavior, the students' responses also fell mostly into the agree and neutral scales in all three sub-categories: motivational intensity, attention and persistence. For instance, in motivational intensity item 18: "When I have a problem understanding something in my English class, I always ask my teacher for help," the majority of the responses were neutral (38.36%), followed by agree (34.48%). Similarly, for item 20: "After I get my English assignment back, I always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes," students were mostly neutral, and some agreed, on this statement (47.84% and 24.14%, respectively). Yet, students reported that they put their effort and worked hard to learn English, as seen in responses of item 19: "I really work hard to learn English," which received the highest number of responses in the agree scale (46.12%), followed by the strongly agree scale (25.86%).

Similar to behavior, the students' responses in the three items under attention also fell mostly into the agree and neutral scales. Responses for statements in item 21: "Nothing distracts me when I am studying English" and item 23: "I rarely miss any points presented in a lecture" were geared toward the agree scale, followed by the neutral scale (item 21 agree 40.95%, neutral 37.50%; item

23 agree 41.81%, neutral 27.16%). Almost half of the students (48.28%), however, were neutral with regard to their continued focused in English class, even though approximately one-third of them (29.31%) agreed that they remained so all through the lecture. This same pattern emerged in the three items under persistence as well—that the majority of the students responded that they agreed or were neutral with regard to their regularity in and giving priority to doing English homework as well as with regard to their continued efforts throughout the English course.

Thus, in all, students showed mostly neutral, with a slight agreement stance, with regard to their attention and persistence in learning English. These behavior aspects can be enhanced, once again, through English teachers' giving positive reinforcement and encouragement. This would consequently bring about higher student motivation to learn English and would further enhance their success in English learning outcome.

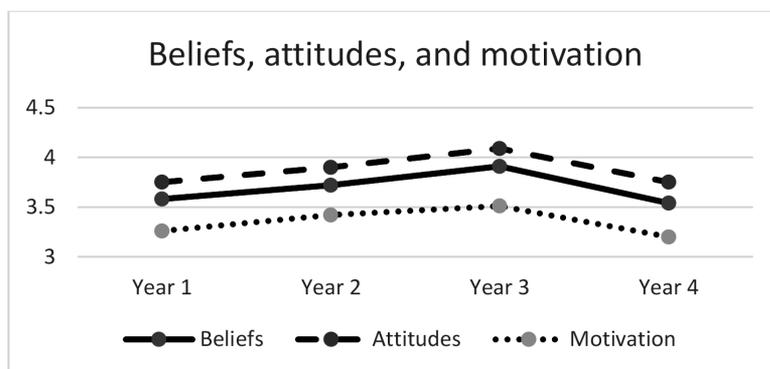
As seen from the findings on the three psychological variables—beliefs, attitudes and motivation on language learning—presented above, it can be concluded that the students in this study had positive beliefs in language learning and were mostly neutral, although with an inclination toward the positive, in attitudes and motivation toward language learning. This implies that the students in fact possessed good foundation with respect to psychological characteristics that could lead them to become good language learners. With proper cultivation and positive encouragement from English teachers, and English education as a whole, the students are very much likely to become successful English language learners and users.

*2. Are there any patterns of beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning of PSU undergraduate students that can be observed? If so, what are the similarities and/or differences of such patterns among students in different years of study?*

To answer this question, patterns and differences of beliefs, attitudes and motivation across years were demonstrated.

### *2.1 Patterns of beliefs, attitudes, and motivation across years of study*

Regarding this question, mean scores of beliefs, attitudes and motivation were computed. Figure 1 shows a pattern of these three variables across years of study.



**Figure 1.** The change in patterns of beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning among PSU undergraduate students in different years of study

As seen, beliefs about language learning among the students from the first year to the third year increased steadily from 3.58 to 3.91. However, its mean scores dropped sharply when they were in the fourth year. The same trends were also observed in attitudes and motivation. To illustrate, the participants' attitudes went up from 3.75 in the first year to 4.09 in the third year, then fell sharply to 3.75 in the fourth year. Similarly, the mean scores of motivation rose from 3.26 in the first year to 3.51 in the third year, but then went down to 3.20 in the fourth year.

Considering the change patterns, it was apparent that PSU undergraduate students' beliefs about language learning, attitudes and motivation changed over time, and the change patterns of the selected psychological variables were in the same directions. The first year students had lower levels of beliefs, attitudes and motivation, but they were higher in the second and third years. However, these levels lowered again (even lower than they were in the first year) when they were in the fourth year. It seems that the best year for the students to successfully promote their English learning was the third year of university study. This was because they reached the highest change, and it signified that they held positive beliefs and attitudes, and high motivation and were in readiness for language learning enhancement. This is in line with many studies (Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Ushioda, 2008; White, 2008) that learners with positive beliefs and attitudes, and high motivation possess characteristics of good language learners who seem to be successful in language learning. So far, a marked change of beliefs, attitudes and motivation can be documented.

### 2.2 Differences of beliefs, attitudes, and motivation across years of study

One-way ANOVA revealed that the students from different years of study held different beliefs about language learning ( $F(3, 228) = 9.51, p < .05$ ), attitudes ( $F(3, 228) = 8.00, p < .05$ ), and

motivation ( $F(3, 228) = 6.17, p < .05$ ) in a statistically significant way.

Regarding beliefs about language learning, Scheffe Post-Hoc analysis showed two pairs of differences, that is, the first- and the third-year, and the third- and the fourth-year.

Regarding attitudes, the significant differences of the same pairs of students as in beliefs, which are the first- and the third-year, and the third- and the fourth-year, were also found.

The last one, motivation, Scheffe Post-Hoc analysis revealed two pairs of differences, that is the first- and the third-year, and the third- and the fourth year.

So far, we have seen that the first- and the third- year, and the third- and the fourth-year students were statistically different in terms of the aforementioned variables. The marked change was at the third year where their beliefs about language learning, attitudes and motivation were highest. This pattern was clearly observed.

Based on the aforementioned findings, the change patterns of beliefs about language learning, attitudes and motivation across years were obviously observed, and there were some discussions regarding the PSU context. The first-year students having low levels of all variables seem that they are quite new to the new learning system and environment, and they try to adjust themselves accordingly. In the meantime, the second-year students can adjust themselves to the university learning system, so the levels are getting better. When they are in the third year, they tend to have more confidence about their language and their beliefs, attitudes and motivation reach the highest points. It means that the third-year students are open and ready to get English enhancement and they seem to have enough foundation to move forward. However, the beliefs, attitudes and motivation of the fourth-year students decreased dramatically, which may be because of the internship in the fourth year of study. They may lack confidence when they need to use English in the real world or in working contexts, and they may face difficulty with the real world English for work. This is in accordance with Kojima (2014), who discovered that students' beliefs could be changed because of major changes in their environment. Also, the study conducted by Peng (2011) yielded similar results. The students' beliefs markedly changed during the transition from high school to university study due to the stress of new learning environment in university study.

### **Limitation of the study**

As the present study was a cross-sectional study, the results might not reveal the real changes of the students' beliefs, attitudes and motivation from their first-year to fourth-year studying English in the university. Although the students in this study had similar characteristics, they were not the same

groups of students. Also, the results from this study have limited generalizability to other contexts because the study only focused on the context of PSU, and the data were collected from the students in this particular university only.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings from this study showed that the beliefs, attitudes and motivation in English language learning of Thai undergraduate students vary in different years of their study. A similar pattern for changes in the level of beliefs, attitudes, and motivation could be observed, in that the level of all three psychological variables gradually rose from the first year to the third year, but in the fourth year the level dropped to the level of, or a little bit below that of, the first year. Thus, among students in the four years of undergraduate study, it seems that third-year students would be most receptive in learning a foreign language—specifically English, for the context of this study. It is thus suggested that an optimum level of English language education would be provided to students in their third year of undergraduate study, which is when they are psychologically ready and would thus achieve better learning outcome as a consequence.

Specifically in terms of pedagogical implications, it is suggested that language teachers assess and understand their students' beliefs, attitudes and motivation in language learning, both in terms of the nature of such psychological variables—e.g., negative or positive—and in terms of their level—e.g., high or low—from the very first year that students enter the university. This is so that language teachers change, shape, and foster positive aspects of these psychological variables with appropriate pedagogical approaches in the language classroom. As suggested by Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), language teachers play a crucial role in promoting students' attitudes and motivation through effective language teaching strategies and techniques.

Another consideration on the students' beliefs, attitudes and motivation is the fact that the level of such psychological variables is constantly in dynamics and fluctuates over time. Language teachers who are aware of this fact would be able to detect the fluctuation and thus help the students move forward despite the period of, for example, an attitude drop. For example, language teachers can provide extra support to fourth-year students who could be facing difficulties in dealing with real-world English and undergoing self-doubts in their language ability.

Apart from pedagogical implications for teachers, it is also noteworthy to curriculum developers and administrators to understand such facts and facets of students' psychological variables. This is so that they can design, plan, and implement language curriculum that would be of optimum benefits

to the students.

With regard to research implications, it is suggested that future research investigating students' psychological variables—such as beliefs, attitudes and motivation—be conducted in an in-depth manner. The investigation could involve exploration of factors affecting the pattern or the fluctuation of such psychological variables. In addition, the cause of such pattern or fluctuation could also be investigated in order to better understand such phenomenon. Finally, another possibility for further research would be to monitor these psychological variables in various environments so as to observe any differences or similarities in psychological patterns or changes that emerge in different contexts.

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