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English Skills Problems of the Education Faculty Students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University for Entering the ASEAN Community

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาวิจัยในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัญหาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษทั้ง 4 ทักษะในการเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียนของนักศึกษาคณะครุศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏธนบุรี ได้แก่ ทักษะการฟัง ทักษะการพูด ทักษะการอ่าน และทักษะการเขียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้คือนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 ของคณะครุศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏธนบุรี ปีการศึกษา 2556 จานวนทั้งสิ้น 361 คน การศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงสำรวจ ดังนั้น เครื่องที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลคือแบบสอบถามมาตราส่วนประมาณค่า 5 ระดับตามวิธีการของลิเคิร์ท ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมนามาคำนวณและวิเคราะห์หาค่าทางสถิติ และในการวัดค่าระดับของปัญหาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มตัวอย่างใช้มาตราส่วนประมาณค่า 5 ระดับตามวิธีการของลิเคิร์ท ผลจากการศึกษาวิจัยในครั้งนี้ พบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีปัญหาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษในการเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียนเฉลี่ยรวมทั้งสี่ด้านอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง เมื่อพิจารณาปัญหาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษรายด้าน พบว่า ปัญหาทักษะการฟัง การพูด การอ่าน และการเขียน อยู่ในระดับปานกลาง เมื่อพิจารณาเฉพาะปัญหาทักษะการฟัง พบว่า ปัญหาจากข้อคาถามในข้อ 4 ข้อ 5 และข้อ 9 อยู่ในระดับมาก ส่วนปัญหาจากข้อคาถามที่เหลืออีก 7 ข้อ อยู่ในระดับปานกลาง เมื่อพิจารณาเฉพาะปัญหาทักษะการพูด พบว่า ปัญหาจากข้อคาถามส่วนใหญ่อยู่ในระดับปานกลาง แต่ปัญหาจากคาถามข้อ 14 อยู่ในระดับมาก ในทางกลับกัน ปัญหาจากคาถามข้อ 17 อยู่ในระดับน้อย เมื่อพิจารณาเฉพาะปัญหาทักษะการอ่าน พบว่า ปัญหาจากข้อคาถามทุกข้ออยู่ในระดับปานกลาง และเมื่อพิจารณาเฉพาะปัญหาทักษะการเขียน พบว่า ปัญหาจากคาถามข้อ 36 อยู่ในระดับมาก ส่วนปัญหาจากข้อคาถามที่เหลืออีก 9 ข้อ อยู่ในระดับปานกลาง

คำสำคัญ: ทักษะภาษาอังกฤษ / ปัญหา / ประชาคมอาเซียน

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the four English skills problems of the Education Faculty students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University for entering the ASEAN community; namely listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill, and writing skill. The respondents in this study were 361 fourth year students of the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University in the the academic year of 2013. The survey technique was employed; therefore, questionnaires were used as a tool for collecting data. The data obtained were calculated and analyzed for statistical information. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents the degree of the English skill problems. According to the findings from the study, it was found that the respondents possessed English skills problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the "Moderate" level. Regarding the four English skills, the problems of listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill were all found at the "Moderate" level. Regarding listening skill, the problems from the three questions (4th, 5th, and 9th) were found at the "High" level while the problems from the remaining seven questions were found at the "Moderate"level. Regarding speaking skill, most of the problems were found at the "Moderate" level. However, the problem from the 14th question was found at the "High" level; on the other hand, the problem from the 17th question was found at the "Low" level. Regarding reading skill, it was found that all problems were found at the "Moderate" level. Regarding writing skill, the problem from the 36th question was found at the "High" level while the problems from the remaining nine questions were found at the "Moderate" level.

Keywords: English skills / Problems / ASEAN Community

Background

At present, Thai people have far more opportunities to interact with foreigners. This is as a result of the considerable increase in the import-export and tourism businesses. The Thai government has been promoting foreign investments in Thailand in various types of businesses. Due to the economic crisis in Thailand, Thai university students have been very concerned about unemployment. After graduating, they have to prepare themselves to encounter high competition for jobs after their graduation. For this reason, international or foreign organizations are becoming better options for them. To have the chance to be employed in a foreign company, a graduate is firstly required to have a good command of English, as this is considered the international business language. As a result, there has been a significant increase in language related businesses in Bangkok and other big cities in Thailand such as language centers, language schools, or language institutes in both public and private educational institutions. English has long been announced as the official language of ASEAN community and it is the international language widely used all around the world as well. Therefore, the Thai government has been enforcing academic institutes of all levels to add

English language as compulsory courses in all grades of education. All Thai students must learn English so that they can use it as a tool to earn a living after their graduation. They must be able to communicate with foreigners. This will help them to cope with the high competition in their careers as well as to get ready for ASEAN or international community in the near future.

It was found that the level of English proficiency of graduates from Thailand was lower than the TOEFL score of 550, which is the required international standard for acceptance in overseas graduate studies. In contrast, the average TOEFL scores of graduates from Singapore and the Philippines were above 550, while the scores of graduates from Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia were above 500. Graduates from Thailand who wanted to further their studies abroad, as well as graduates from Laos, had average TOEFL scores below 500. Therefore, Thai graduates who want to further their studies either in Thailand or overseas urgently need to develop their English knowledge and skills in order to be able to catch up with their peers from the neighboring countries and with the world community in general, for knowledge and information exchange (Prappol, K. & Ophanon-amata, P. 2010: Abstract). It was found that the degree of learning satisfaction experienced by the learners was considered one of the most important factors for the achievement of English learning. Success in learning encouraged learners to put in even more efforts in learning English. Learners were always curious to learning new things (Savigon, 1997, p. 24). Nowadays, the Communicative Approach in Learning English as a foreign language has been used widely. This approach focuses on communicating in English in real life situations. This learning method focuses on various kinds of learning activities as well as learning materials (Littlewood, 1995, pp. 120-121).

The mission of the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University is to produce graduates in the field of teaching or education, which it has done for 64 years. In the year 2013, the total number of undergraduate students was 2,693. The competences of the students consist of 3 categories; namely 1) ethics and morality, 2) computer skills, and 3) English skills (Dhonburi Rajabhat University. 2013: online). Most of the graduates from the Education Faculty have worked for the government as both teaching and supporting staff. The skills and knowledge supporting them to get jobs were their competencies in English and computer skills. Moreover, the two skill competences facilitated the new graduates for their new career (Nongyao and others, 2007, pp. 40-68). According to the English achievement test results of 749 students of the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University taking English for Teachers courses in the year 1/2013, it was found that only 319 students (42.59%) passed (50% passing mark) the English grammar part while only 234 students (31.24%) passed (50% passing mark) all 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (Education Faculty, Dhonburi Rajabhat University, 2013, pp. 51-65).

For these reasons, as an English lecturer and coordinator of English courses at the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University, the researcher was strongly interested in "English skills problems of the Education Faculty students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University for entering the ASEAN community". The findings obtained from this research could be used as the database for setting the lesson contents and activities for the development of "English Enhancement Training Program for the Education Faculty Students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University" as well as the crucial information for the development of instructional materials, school syllabi, curricula, and learning systems for English courses in educational institutes in which the graduates from the Education Faculty will be teaching in the future.

Research Objectives

This research aimed at the investigation of the 4 English skills problems of the Education Faculty students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University for entering the ASEAN community; namely listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill, and writing skill.

Research Metodology

Population and Sample: The population in this study was 2,693 fourth year students of the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University in the academic year of 2013 (Dhonburi Rajabhat University, 2013). The 361 students were used as research samples as well.

Research Instrument and Data Collection: In this research the most important tool employed for the data collection was the questionnaire entitled "The Assessment Form of Language Skill Problems for the Education Faculty Students of Dhonburi Rajabhat University for Entering the ASEAN Community". The questionnaire was constructed in the form of Five-Point Likert Scale. The questionnaire was composed of 40 questions which were divided into 4 main parts, namely Listening Skill Problems, Speaking Skill Problems. Each part contained ten questions.

All of the 40 questions in the questionnaire were analyzed and approved by 5 specialists and then calculated for the "Index of Congruence or IOC" as well as the "Content Validity". The IOC of each question must be between 0.8 and 1. Moreover, the researcher executed the try-out of the questionnaire with 30 fourth year students of the Education Faculty of Dhonburi Rajabhat University to find out the Discrimination Power of the 40 questions through the dependent sample t-test at the significant level of 95 % (0.05). The dependent sample t-test was done through the comparison between the 2 groups, 27 percent of the high score group (8 persons) and 27 percent of the low score group (8 persons) (Field, 2005, pp. 288-294). From the try-out of the 40 questions, the reliability of the questionnaire was analyzed as well, through the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Method (Cronbach, 1970, pp. 169). It was found that the reliability of the whole 40 questions

of the questionnaire was 0.901. Regarding each of the 4 parts of the questionnaire, the reliability indices were 0.816, 0.876, 0.877 and 0.882 for the Listening Skill part, the Speaking Skill Part, the Reading Skill part, and the Writing Skill part, consecutively.

Data Analysis: The researcher collected, checked the completion and the correctness as well as scored of all the 361 recorded questionaires by himself. Then, the data and scores of all the 361 questionaires were calculated for the two most important statistical values, namely Mean and Standard Deviation (SD), for each question, each part (10 questions) as well as for the total of 40 questions. The findings calculated were as follows:

1) English Skill Problems on Average

Table 1 Findings of English skills problems for entering the ASEAN community on average

No.	English Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
1	Listening Skill	3.396	0.557	Moderate
2	Speaking Skill	3.008	0.660	Moderate
3	Reading Skill	3.042	0.645	Moderate
4	Writing Skill	3.234	0.655	Moderate
	Total	**3.170**	**0.554**	**Moderate**

From table 1, it was found that the respondents possessed English skills problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.170; SD = 0.554). Regarding each of the four parts (Four Skills), it was found that the listening skill problem was in the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.396; SD = 0.557), the speaking skill problem was was in the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.008; SD = 0.645), the reading skill problem was in the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.042; SD = 0.645) and the writing skill problem was in the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.234; SD = 0.655) as well.

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2) English Listening Skill Problems

Table 2 Findings of English listening skill Problems for entering the ASEAN community

No.	English Listening Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
1	The contents of English courses did not focus directly on listening skill practice for learners.	3.313	0.829	Moderate
2	Lesson contents and activities for listening skill practice were not emphasized on specific situations and/or on specific purposes for entering the ASEAN community.	3.304	0.901	Moderate
3	The contents and activities for listening skill practice did not emphasize on various English accents spoken in ASEAN countries.	3.277	0.940	Moderate
4	Learners had no chance to hear various English accents spoken in ASEAN countries in daily life.	3.570	0.983	High
5	Learners did not have enough communicative English vocabulary necessary for English listening.	3.592	0.893	High
6	Media and materials used for English listening skill practice in the university were obsolete.	3.329	0.859	Moderate
7	The learners did not have sufficient basic English grammar to understand English listening.	3.493	0.850	Moderate
8	Learners were not able to apply their background knowledge and/or their daily experience to understand their English listening.	3.268	0.848	Moderate
9	The learners were confused with various English accents spoken in different countries.	3.540	0.878	High
10	Media and materials as well as supplements for English listening skill practice were not enough for the number of learners.	3.249	0.915	Moderate
	Total	**3.396**	**0.557**	**Moderate**

From table 2, it was found that the respondents possessed the English listening skill problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.396; SD = 0.557). Regarding each of the 10 questions, it was found that the listening skill problems of most of the students were in the “Moderate” level. Regarding the 4th, 5th and 9th questions, however, it was found that the students possessed the English listening skill problems for entering the ASEAN community at the “High” level.

3) English Speaking Skill Problems

Table 3 Findings of English speaking skill problems for entering the ASEAN community

No.	English Speaking Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
11	The contents of the English course did not focus directly on speaking skill practice for learners.	3.083	0.915	Moderate
12	Lesson contents and activities for English speaking skill practice were not emphasized on specific situations and/or on specific purposes for entering the ASEAN community.	3.116	0.911	Moderate
13	The instructors did not set up English environment in the classroom for teaching and learning.	3.030	0.961	Moderate
14	Learners did not have opportunities to speak with people in other ASEAN countries in daily life.	3.584	0.933	High
15	Instructors rarely let learners speak English in the classroom.	2.786	0.986	Moderate
16	Media and materials used for English speaking skill practice in the university were obsolete.	3.274	0.878	Moderate
17	Instructors teaching English speaking could not speak English fluently or clearly, and/or pronounced English words with foreign accent.	2.451	1.099	Low
18	Instructors did not speak just English but spoken both Thai and English in the classroom.	2.878	1.006	Moderate
19	The contents and activities for English speaking skill practice did not suit the English level of each group of learners, in that some basic sentences essential for daily communication in ASEAN community were not emphasized.	2.828	0.956	Moderate
20	Media and materials as well as supplements for English speaking skill practice were not enough for the number of learners.	3.052	0.933	Moderate
	Total	**3.008**	**0.660**	**Moderate**

From table 3, it was found that the respondents possessed the English speaking skill problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.008; SD = 0.660). Regarding each of the 10 questions, it was found that the speaking skill

problems of most of the students were in the “Moderate” level. Regarding the 14th and 17th questions, however, it was found that the students possessed the English speaking skill problems for entering the ASEAN community at the “High” level (Mean = 3.584; SD = 0.933) and the “Low” level (Mean = 2.451; SD = 1.099) consecutively.

4) English Reading Skill Problems

Table 4 Findings of English reading skill problems for entering the ASEAN community

No.	English Reading Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
21	Contents of the English courses did not focus directly on reading skill practice for learners.	2.919	0.995	Moderate
22	Lesson contents and activities for English reading skill practice were not emphasized on specific situations and/or on specific purposes for entering the ASEAN community.	3.027	0.871	Moderate
23	Vocabulary in the contents and activities for English reading skill practice did not suit the English level of learners and could not be apllied for daily communication in ASEAN community.	2.789	1.011	Moderate
24	In daily life, learners had less opportunity to read English articles and published media concerning the ASEAN community.	3.290	0.986	Moderate
25	Formats and styles of English writing in the articles or published media were not suitable to learners, were not related to daily life or to the ASEAN community.	2.930	0.899	Moderate
26	Published media used for English reading skill practice were rarely found in daily life by learners, such as obsolete poetry or dated speeches.	3.193	0.882	Moderate
27	Instructors did not explain reading techniques clearly to learners.	2.764	0.995	Moderate
28	Learners did not have enough English grammar knowledge to understand the content of published media they were reading.	3.332	0.891	Moderate

No.	English Reading Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
29	Learners could not apply their life experience and/or their background knowledge to guess the meanings of some unfamiliar words in the published media they were reading.	3.149	0.894	Moderate
30	Media and materials as well as supplements for English reading skill practice were not enough for the number of learners.	3.022	0.930	Moderate
	Total	**3.042**	**0.645**	**Moderate**

From table 4, it was found that the respondents possessed the English reading skill problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the "Moderate" level (Mean = 3.042; SD = 0.645). Regarding each of the 10 questions, it was found that the reading skill problems of all of the students were in the "Moderate" level.

5) English Writing Skill Problems

Table 5 Findings of English writing skill problems for entering the ASEAN community

No.	English Writing Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
31	The contents of the English courses did not focus directly on writing skill practice for learners.	2.828	1.023	Moderate
32	Lesson contents and activities for English writing skill practice were not emphasized on specific situations and/or on specific purposes for entering the ASEAN community.	2.922	0.951	Moderate
33	Learners lacked knowledge and skill in choosing English words for various types of writing tasks as well as for writing tasks for different situations.	3.429	0.913	Moderate
34	In daily life, learners had less opportunity to practise writing skill continuously.	3.390	0.933	Moderate
35	Learners lacked translation skill from Thai to English causing the incorrect written tasks as well as slow writing skill of the learners.	3.490	0.949	Moderate
36	Learners lacked translation skill from English to Thai causing the incorrect written tasks as well as slow writing skill of the learners.	3.545	0.896	High

No.	English Writing Skill Problems	Mean	SD	Level of Problems
37	Instructors did not explain writing techniques for various types of writing tasks as well as for writing tasks for different situations clearly to learners.	2.880	0.921	Moderate
38	Learners did not have enough English grammar knowledge to write various types of writing tasks as well as for writing tasks for different situations.	3.473	0.906	Moderate
39	Learners could not apply their life experience and/or their background knowledge to write various types of writing tasks as well as for writing tasks for different situations.	3.274	0.936	Moderate
40	Media and materials as well as supplements for English writing skill practice were not enough for the number of learners.	3.110	0.968	Moderate
	Total	**3.234**	**0.655**	**Moderate**

From table 5, it was found that the respondents possessed the English writing skill problems for entering the ASEAN community on average at the “Moderate” level (Mean = 3.234; SD = 0.655). Regarding each of the 10 questions, it was found that the listening skill problems of most of the students were in the “Moderate” level. Regarding the 36th question, however, it was found that the students possessed English writing skill problems at the “High” level (Mean = 3.545; SD = 1.143)

Conclusion and Discussion:

In conclusion, it was found that the respondents possessed English skills problems for entering the ASEAN community at the “Moderate” level. Regarding the four English skills, the problems of listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill were all found in the “Moderate” level. The problems of each of the four English skills could be concluded as follows:

Regarding the English listening skill problems, there were three questions wherein the students possessed the English listening skill problems for entering the ASEAN community at the “High” level, namely the 4th question, the 5th question and the 9th question. Regarding the 4th question, it was found that learners had no chance to hear various English accents spoken in ASEAN countries in daily life. Similarly, learners were confused with various English accents spoken in different countries. Moreover, regarding the 5th question, learners did not have enough communicative English vocabulary necessary for English listening. Therefore, the English listening skill problems from the three questions must be set as the first priority for

developing an English training program for the students. However, the remaining problems must be considered as the second priority.

Regarding the English speaking skill problem, there was only one question wherein the students possessed the English speaking skill problems for entering the ASEAN community at the "High" level, namely the14th question. It was found that learners did not have opportunities to speak with people in other ASEAN countries in daily life. Therefore, the problems must be set as the first priority for developing an English training program for the students. However, the remaining problems must be considered as the second priority.

Regarding the English reading skill problem, it was found that all problems from all of the 10 questions were at the "Moderate" level. Therefore, all of the English reading skill problems must be set at an equal priority for developing an English training program for the students.

Regarding the English writing skill problem, there was only one problem from the 36th question, wherein the students possessed the English writing skill problems at the "High" level. It was found that learners lacked translation skill from English to Thai causing the incorrect written tasks as well as slow writing skill of the learners. Therefore, the problem must be set as the first priority for developing an English training program for the students. However, the remaining problems must be considered as the second priority.

According to the English listening and speaking skills problems, it is believed that the English pronunciation problems of Thai students are caused by two main factors, namely the differences between Thai and English sound systems and the teaching methods for English pronunciation. In fact, the Thai government is concerned about this problem and very much encourages Thai learners to improve their English pronunciation. Even so, Thai learners still have problems with English pronunciation. There are many factors influencing the teaching methods for English pronunciation in Thailand including the curricula,
the learners themselves, the teachers themselves, and the learning environment (classroom and teaching materials). Like other skills of English learning, speaking needs regular practice. However, the English curricula at any level of educational institution in Thailand does not encourage or provide adequate speaking practice to Thai students. This is because there are too many students in one class (about 40-60 students) and it is therefore very difficult
for each student to have enough individual speaking practice with the teacher. Moreover, the course objectives and evaluation of English for all levels of instruction actually focus on three main parts, namely grammar, reading comprehension, and writing, although the English teaching policy set by the government encourages Thai students to be competent in all four skills. Thai students, therefore, are not motivated to practice or improve their speaking or pronunciation. They pay more attention to parts of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, which are main components of the university entrance exam. According to

the findings from this study, it was found that almost all of the reading and writing skills problems were found at the "Moderate" level.

These findings were correspondent with Nantana Ronnakiet (2002: 1-28), who noted that Thai people found that it was quite difficult for them to speak English correctly or to have acceptable English pronunciation. This is because a lot of English sounds are not found in the Thai language. In fact all human beings have the same speech organs unless he or she is defective in it. To succeed in using the speech organs to produce unfamiliar English sounds, the most important factor is the age of the person. The sooner the person starts practicing how to use these organs, the more successfully he or she can naturally pronounce the unfamiliar English sounds.

According to Crystal (1985, pp. 157-170), unlike dialect, an accent pertains only to a pronunciation system but not to vocabulary or sentence structure. An accent, also called pronunciation, can be used to identify where a speaker is from, as for example, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa or Singapore.

Smith (2013) mentioned in the article titled, "Readings in English as an International Language" that at present, it has been found that non-native speakers are using English more and more often with other non-native speakers in international situations. English is considered an international language. A Thai, for example, does not need to sound like an American in order to use English well with a Filipino at an ASEAN meeting, and a Japanese person does not need an appreciation of a British life style in order to use English in his business with a Malaysian. In fact, English is just the means of expression of the speaker's culture, but not an imitation of the culture of Great Britain, the United States, or any other native English speaking country.

Skapinker (2013) stated in *The Financial Times* that although Australia or South African English are generally understood by English speakers, thousands of their words are not. It is also found that the population of second-language countries is growing much faster than those of first-language countries; consequently, the English language becomes more international. The second-language speakers often speak several distinctive forms of English. Many Singaporeans, for example, speak Singlish—a mixture of English and Chinese—while many Filipinos speak Taglish—a mixture of English and Tagalog.

Recommendations

The lesson contents and activities of the training program must be set up based on the priority of the English skills problems obtained form this research. For example, as listening and speaking are shown to be the biggest problem of learners, the training program should emphasize development of these skills. This might be achieved by using new technologies, allowing more independent learning, increasing their exposure to various accents and conversations, particularly those spoken in ASEAN.

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