A GRADE-LEVEL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATION ANXIETY AND ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS SELF-EFFICACY OF ENGLISH PROGRAM GRADES 7 TO 9 STUDENTS AT THE DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL OF RAMKHAMHAENG UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This study investigated students' perception of English communication anxiety and of English oral skills self-efficacy, and subsequently conducted a grade-level comparison in terms of these variables. The sample of this study consisted of 66 English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University in the academic year 2018 - 2019. The study employed a quantitative research methodology utilizing two questionnaires to collect data. The first questionnaire focused on issues relevant to anxiety, shyness, and physical reactions towards speaking in an English language classroom. The second questionnaire asked students to make judgments about their capabilities to accomplish specific tasks using English in listening and speaking contexts. The quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics – means and standard deviations, while statistical hypotheses were tested by One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). There were four main findings. First, the respondents had an overall moderate level of English communication anxiety. Second, the respondents had an overall high level of English oral skills selfefficacy. Third, there was not a significant grade-level difference in English communication anxiety. Finally, there was not a significant grade-level difference in English oral skills self-efficacy. The study concludes with recommendations for practice and for future research.

Keywords: English Communication Anxiety, English Oral Skills Self-Efficacy, Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.

Introduction

There is a demand for people who are proficient in English because it enables the reciprocation of ideas and services and more people can obtain access to international opportunities (EF Education First, 2017). For this reason, people in the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), including Thais, must use English to communicate and collaborate.

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English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University study all subjects using English as the medium of instruction except for Thai language, art, and music. The researcher, who taught 21 hours of basic English each week, observed that most students could passably converse in English. Likewise, most of the students understood verbal classroom instructions explained in English. The students demonstrated their English oral skills with confidence and ease. In this context, the students were perceived to possess adequate English proficiency with varying degrees of competence.

Previous research has indicated that several predictors of students' English language learning outcomes can be traced to non-linguistic attributes (Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre, 1995; Pajares, 1996; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000b). In the context of Thai education, there have been studies done relating to English speaking anxiety and mathematics self-efficacy of students in public and private schools (e.g., Manachon, 2015; Parsons, 2018; Partridge, 2015). However, there have been few studies done regarding English communication anxiety or English oral skills self-efficacy of demonstration school students in Thailand.

Objectives

The following are research objectives that will be addressed by this study.

- 1. To determine the levels of English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
 - 1.1. To determine the level of English communication anxiety of English Program Grade 7 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
 - 1.2. To determine the level of English communication anxiety of English Program Grade 8 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
 - 1.3. To determine the level of English communication anxiety of English Program Grade 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
- 2. To determine the levels of English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
 - 2.1. To determine the level of English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grade 7 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.

- 2.2. To determine the level of English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grade 8 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
- 2.3. To determine the level of English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grade 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
- 3. To determine if there is a significant grade-level difference in English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.
- 4. To determine if there is a significant grade-level difference in English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University.

Literature Review

English Oral Skills and Language Learning in Thailand

Oral communication (i.e., listening and speaking) is an important factor for literacy learning and is necessary for the students' overall progress in learning a language. It can either be an informal or formal personal communication in a school or work setting (Rocio, 2012). In Thailand however, grammar has been central to learning English as a foreign language and does not contribute to the learners' success in work settings. Foreign language learners must be able to speak and listen in order to communicate with people from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds (Estar, 2005). Baker (2012) did not believe that having only linguistic knowledge such as grammar or vocabulary is adequate for intercultural communication. Niamthet (2016), of Thammasat University Bangkok, conducted a survey of 50 Thai international workers. The survey revealed that the respondents were most concerned with speaking and learning English pronunciation. In terms of learning English as a foreign language in Thailand, there is a need to focus on English oral skills.

Anxiety and Learning

Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from an anticipated intimidating event or situation, which can negatively affect physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Folk & Folk, 2018). It also refers to a person's internal fear and nervousness about their ability to correctly solve problems in a specific area and the consequences of failure. It is the state of an individual's feeling of being uneasy, frustrated, self-doubting, or worried like any other specific anxiety (Scovel, 1978).

When anxiety is restricted to instances relating to language learning, it is categorized as a specific anxiety reaction (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

One of the reasons people fear talking is related to communication anxiety. In most classrooms, students might shy away from talking because they are unprepared, uninterested, unwilling to disclose, alienated from the class, lacking confidence in their competence, or because they fear communicating (Horwitz & Young, 1991). However, anxiety should not be thought of as a stumbling block to the learning process or an unpleasant feeling towards learning. As a matter of fact, managing and facilitating anxiety motivates the student to persevere while debilitating anxiety can cause the student to avoid the learning process (Tanveer, 2007).

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

There are three observable factors relating to foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). The first factor is communication apprehension, which is characterized as a fear of communicating with others (Horwitz et al., 1986). Fear is magnified by the introduction of a foreign language because students tend to have less control over a situation where communication is essential, but they have less capability navigating the situation in a non-native language. This perspective of FLCA has been linked to academic failure in foreign language learning (Tuncer & Dogan, 2015). This is particularly true of speaking and listening because these skills often take place in public and are observable.

Social Cognitive Theory: Reciprocal Determinism

In the triadic reciprocal determinism, Bandura (1989) conceptualized the relationship of (1) personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological measures, (2) behavior, and (3) environmental factors. The relationship of the factors is reciprocal. This means that no single factor is an independent determinant, rather the factors interact and determine one another. Figure 1 illustrates the triadic reciprocal determinism model.

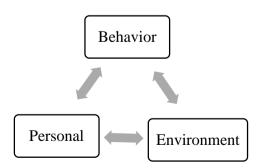


Figure 1. The triadic reciprocal determinism model (adapted from Pajares, 1996, p. 544)

Self-efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's beliefs in their ability to successfully accomplish specific tasks (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 2000a). An individual's actual ability does not necessarily match their beliefs about their ability to succeed. It is a belief that will cause action despite the current circumstance. If a person has a belief that they can achieve a goal they will tend to persist in working towards the task even if they have strong doubts about success (Bandura, 1993).

People that persevere and complete difficult tasks will often experience an increase in self-efficacy levels, but people who give up quickly will often attribute failure to lack of ability and reinforce their low self-efficacy levels. People with high self-efficacy levels will interpret occasional failures as a lack of preparation or effort and will strive harder for the next task. In the face of failure, or after setbacks, they increase their effort and sustain their effort expecting success (Bandura, 1994). Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

Conceptual Framework

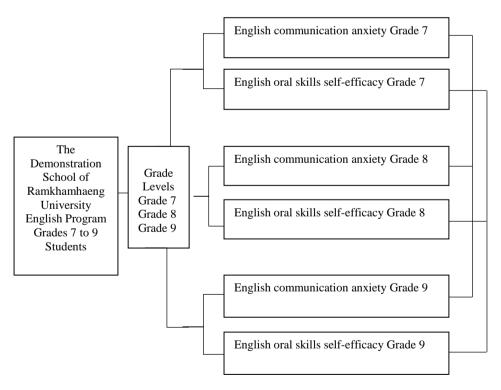


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of This Study.

Method/Procedure

This research examined the levels of English communication anxiety and English oral skills self-efficacy and conducted a grade-level comparison of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students in terms of these variables at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University. The population of this study was male and female English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. The convenience sample of this study was 66 English Program Grades 7 to 9 students.

Two research instruments were used: (1) to measure levels of English communication anxiety and, (2) to measure levels of English oral skills selfefficacy. The first instrument - the English Communication Anxiety Scale, composed of 11 items, focused on issues relevant to anxiety, shyness, and physical reactions towards speaking in a foreign language classroom. The first instrument had a Cronbach's alpha value of .91 for the communication apprehension factor, giving the sub-variable a high internal reliability (Cao, 2011). The second instrument – the Self-efficacy for Learning English Oral Skills Scale, was composed of 16 items, and asked students to make judgments about their capabilities to accomplish specific tasks using English in listening and speaking contexts. The second instrument had a Cronbach's alpha value of .85 for items pertained to self-efficacy for listening and a Cronbach's alpha value of .91 for items pertained to self-efficacy for speaking, which gave both sub-variables high internal reliability (Yu, Xu, & Zheng, 2017). To determine the levels of English communication anxiety and English oral skills selfefficacy, descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations were used. To determine the statistical inference of the variables, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated.

Findings/Results

Research Objective One

The level of English communication anxiety of grade levels 7 to 9 students was moderate. Table 1 shows that the means of English communication anxiety of grade levels 7 to 9 was 2.70.

Grade Level	Μ	SD	Interpretation	
Grade 7	2.73	.76	Moderate	
Grade 8	2.71	.68	Moderate	
Grade 9	2.66	.76	Moderate	
Overall	2.70	.71	Moderate	

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations for English Communication Anxiety of Grade Levels 7 to 9 (n=66)

Research Objective Two

The level of English oral skills self-efficacy of grade levels 7 to 9 students was high. Table 2 shows that the means of English oral skills self-efficacy of grade levels 7 to 9 was 5.71.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations for English Oral Skills Self-efficacy of Grade Levels 7 to 9 (n=66)

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Grade Level	М	SD	Interpretation
Grade 7	6.05	.55	Very High
Grade 8	5.58	.68	High
Grade 9	5.69	1.00	High
Overall	5.71	.80	High

Research Objective Three

There was no significant grade-level difference in English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students as determined by one-way ANOVA (F(2,63) = .04, p = .961). It was concluded that there was no significant grade-level difference in English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University at .05 level.

Research Objective Four

There was no significant grade-level difference in English oral skills selfefficacy as determined by one-way ANOVA (F(2,63) = 1.55, p = .220). It was concluded that there was no significant grade-level difference in English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University at .05 level.

Conclusion

The first research objective of this study was to determine the level of English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University. Each grade level reported a moderate level of English communication anxiety. This means that the students' fear of communicating with others in a classroom was at a moderate level. This could be considered as a positive level of facilitative anxiety that functions as a check and correct monitoring process during communication tasks rather than a form of debilitative anxiety that functions to prevent meaningful communication. Further research would be necessary to confirm this supposition. The researcher concluded that most English Program Grades 7 to 9 students were generally able to perform tasks relevant to English communication. Therefore, English communication anxiety was

not a serious issue. Teachers, however, should be aware that the level of English communication anxiety can be lowered.

The second research objective of this study was to determine the level of English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. Each grade level reported a high level of English oral skills self-efficacy. This means the students' beliefs in their ability to successfully accomplish tasks related to speaking and listening in the classroom were at a high level. The researcher concluded that most English Program Grades 7 to 9 students were certainly able to understand and speak English. Therefore, English oral skills self-efficacy was not an issue that teachers needed to be concerned about.

The third research objective of this study was to determine if there was a significant grade-level difference in English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. In a grade-level comparison, the researcher concluded that there was no significant difference in English communication anxiety. Theoretically, the level of English communication anxiety should decrease as students become more comfortable in a familiar setting – same school, classmates, and teachers. But the level of English communication anxiety of neither group was high. Since each group maintained a moderate level of English communication anxiety, it was deemed not a major concern. Teachers, however, should be aware that the level of English communication anxiety could be lowered from one year to the next.

The fourth research objective of this study was to determine if there was a significant grade-level difference in English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. In a grade-level comparison, the researcher concluded that there was no significant difference in English oral skills self-efficacy. Theoretically, the level of English oral skills self-efficacy should increase as students become more comfortable in a familiar setting – same school, classmates, and teachers. But the level of English oral skills self-efficacy of neither group was low. Since each group maintained a high level of English oral skills self-efficacy and did not regress from one year to the next, it was deemed not a major concern and thus not an issue that teachers needed to be concerned about.

Discussion

Although this study was designed as a grade-level comparison of English communication anxiety and English oral skills self-efficacy, it is noteworthy to mention the negative correlation of the variables. Bandura and Adams (1977) conducted two experimental tests of self-efficacy theory of behavioral change and reported that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of behavioral

change, which could mediate anxiety arousal. For example, students who persist in English communication activities will ultimately eliminate their inhibitions through corrective experience, while students who avoid English communication activities due to fear, will retain their self-debilitating expectations and defensive behavior – anxiety. Correlational analysis indicated that the higher a person's level of self-efficacy, the less was their anxiety arousal (Bandura & Adams, 1977). This also means that the stronger the perceived self-efficacy that students have, the more active they are in implementing coping efforts. Therefore, English Program Grades 7 to 9 students who did not have debilitating or high anxiety levels during the task performance tended to perceive the task with enjoyment, subsequently reinforcing their self-efficacy levels.

English Communication Anxiety

The findings of the first research objective revealed that Grades 7, 8, and 9 students all experienced comparable levels of English communication anxiety. Overall, each grade level experienced a moderate level of English communication anxiety. The reason that none of the grade levels experienced a high level of English communication anxiety could be because all 66 students had previously learned in either an English or a bilingual program throughout their years in primary school. According to Timina (2015), with respect to psychological causes in speaking anxiety, it is mostly beginning students who feel anxious when speaking English due to fear of not having understood or misunderstood the teacher's instructions (as cited in O'Connor, 2016, p. 2). Since it was not their first-time learning English, Grades 7, 8, and 9 students may have already developed some level of strategy use to manage their English classroom anxiety, thus converting potentially negative debilitative anxiety into positive facilitative anxiety.

The overall means, a moderate level of English communication anxiety, shares a similarity to that of a study done in Buriram Province, Thailand. O'Connor (2016) conducted a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) study of 119 English Program Grade 9 students of Buriram Pittayakorn School. O'Connor investigated and compared levels of English-speaking anxiety of three program types: (1) English Program (EP) – students studied with foreign teachers 19 periods per week, (2) Intensive Communicative English Program (ICEP) – students studied with foreign teachers 5 periods per week, and (3) Conversational English Program (CEP) – students studied with foreign teachers 1 period per week. Although they were distinct program types, O'Connor's study found that the overall level of FLCA of the three program types was at a moderate level. Furthermore, O'Connor concluded that English Program students experienced the lowest level of English-speaking anxiety. The more exposure to English students had, the less English-speaking anxiety they experienced (O'Connor, 2016). This statement is consistent with the English Program Grades 7 to 9 students, who were exposed to English communication at least 19 periods per week.

Anxiety can influence English language learning activities, such as listening and comprehension (MacIntyre, 1995). For example, anxious students may worry about misunderstanding language structures or worry about inferring meaning from context. Grades 7, 8, and 9 students, however, reported a lowlevel mean score for item number 2 - It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English language. Also, Grades 8 and 9 students reported a low-level mean score for item number 9 - I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says. In terms of listening anxiety, the comparable mean scores across all three grade levels were consistent with the overall findings.

English Oral Skills Self-efficacy

The findings of the second research objective revealed that Grades 7, 8, and 9 students all experienced a comparable level of English oral skills self-efficacy. Overall, each grade level experienced a high level of English oral skills self-efficacy. The reason that each grade level experienced a high level of English oral skills self-efficacy could be because all 66 students had previously learned in either an English or a bilingual program throughout their years in primary school. This accumulation of successful learning experiences is referred to as mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977), an individual's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed by four main sources of influence. One of those main sources is categorized as mastery experiences – performance accomplishments.

Bandura (1977) stated that early failures or successive failures reduce selfefficacy levels. However, English Program Grades 7, 8, and 9 students had the support of their teachers to avoid successive failures throughout their years in primary education. Their success in learning in the English Program was evident in their advancement of grade levels. This year to year advancement also contributed to their self-efficacy levels. As stated by Usher and Pajares (2009), past successful experiences can have a lasting effect on a learner's self-efficacy.

Grade-level Comparison of English Communication Anxiety

The findings of the third research objective illustrated no statistical significance in English communication anxiety of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. The findings are not consistent with the notion in which students

who persist in English communication activities will ultimately eliminate their inhibitions through corrective experience (Bandura & Adams, 1977). The researcher, who taught the students during the 2018-2019 academic year, learned that the school replaced its English teachers every year. This issue could be one of the causations of continuous levels of English communication anxiety. The less familiar the situation and the people involved, the greater the situational apprehension (Horwitz & Young, 1991). This means that the lack of familiarity with new teachers likely contributed to lowering English communication anxiety from year to year.

The researcher, as the English teacher for the sample, may have possibly contributed to the levels of English communication anxiety being comparable across all three grade levels. For example, the researcher did not punish students for talking in class. As stated by Effiong (2013), teaching approaches can influence anxiety in the classroom. All 66 students were exposed to comparable instructional approaches and techniques carried out by the researcher during the entire academic year.

Grade-level Comparison of English Oral Skills Self-efficacy

The findings of the fourth research objective illustrated no statistical significance in English oral skills self-efficacy of English Program Grades 7 to 9 students. The students' beliefs in their ability to successfully accomplish tasks related to speaking and listening in the classroom were constantly at a high level. This can be explained by the notion that mastery experiences are not forgotten easily. Students who experience success through perseverance after occasional failures can increase self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2009).

The researcher, who taught English for English Program Grades 7 to 9 students during the 2018-2019 academic year, may have possibly contributed to the levels of English oral skills self-efficacy being comparable across all three grade levels. Bandura maintained that early failures or successive failures reduce self-efficacy levels. The researcher ensured that students did not experience successive failures. For example, the researcher consistently gave a positive response to students whether or not each answer was right or wrong. All 66 students were exposed to comparable instructional approaches and techniques carried out by the researcher during the entire academic year.

Recommendations for Administrators

Administrators should apply this study in areas of learning resources, personnel recruitment and development. As previously mentioned, teachers' approaches can influence anxiety in the classroom. When recruiting teachers or administrative professionals, administrators should not employ highly

apprehensive people. Because once in a job, they are usually less satisfied with their work and less successful (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Consequently, dissatisfied administrative professionals are unhelpful toward teachers.

Failure to employ low apprehensive teachers could cause administrators to face a high rate of attrition, consequently lending to classroom anxiety. Administrators should employ less apprehensive teachers because they are more receptive to professional development – workshops. For example, professional training can help teachers to improve their classroom management skills and confidence. A teacher's high perceived efficacy in effective classroom management will likely influence their students to develop perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, similar high 1994). Therefore. administrators should support teachers by providing adequate learning resources that can help them achieve the expected learning outcomes and foster positive interactions in the classroom.

Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers should identify and control students' avoidance behaviors. Teachers must remember that teaching approaches can influence anxiety in the classroom. Practicing comprehensible input can lower the role of anxiety in English language activities, such as listening and comprehension. Teachers should make adaptations of their speech and body language to ease learning tasks – input. For example, teachers could make verbal adaptations by (1) speaking clearly, (2) pausing between major ideas, and (3) varying volume and intonation to emphasize meaning. For nonverbal adaptations, teachers could make body language adaptations by using hand gestures, pantomimes, vocalization, and facial expressions.

Among vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physical and mental states; mastery experiences are the strongest of the four main sources that can influence self-efficacy. Since performance is significantly positively correlated with self-efficacy, teachers should adapt teaching methods and resources to increase self-efficacy. Teachers are recommended to pay attention to a student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – the gap between what a learner can perform with help and what he or she can perform independently. One example of teaching within the ZPD to help students achieve performance is by applying the scaffolding technique. Teachers should model or demonstrate the learning tasks and then step back, offering support as needed. Students who are given the support they need while learning something new have a better chance of using that knowledge independently.

Together with the scaffolding technique, teachers should engage in positive interactions with the students. They should teach at level students can understand and then build on that understanding. For example, teachers should present the problem and think aloud as they go about solving it. Next, they should model or demonstrate by using comprehensible input – actions, images, and language. Teachers should then repeat the process a couple of times, asking questions of the students along the way. They should give a positive response to students whether or not each answer was right or wrong. Bandura maintained that early failures or successive failures reduce self-efficacy levels. So positive interactions, employing efficacy-related feedback, will likely encourage participation, and positive experiences will likely lead to high perceived self-efficacy. Therefore, teachers should continue to encourage students to engage in guided practice exercises even if they think they have already mastered the subject matter.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study was conducted with English Program Grades 7 to 9 students at The Demonstration School of Ramkhamhaeng University. Therefore, the findings are limited to English Program Grades 7 to 9 students in 2018 - 2019 academic year. It is recommended for future researchers to consider larger sample sizes which might include other English Program grade levels or even Thai Program grade levels. If time permits, future researchers could study a single grade level over a period of three years. There are other factors that can influence the levels of English communication anxiety and English oral skills selfefficacy. Future researchers should also consider a study involving additional variables such as gender, English oral skills achievement, English academic performance - scores, learning motivation, parental encouragement, or another demonstration school. Studies including English language achievement as an outcome variable can get to an understanding of the forms of anxiety (debilitative or facilitative) that are operative in the classroom.

Horwitz (1988) stated that anxiety is a dissimilar network of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with classroom language learning that results from the distinctiveness of the language learning process. Future researchers should consider a study that combines two methods. Besides using a self-report instrument – the quantitative method used in this study, communication apprehension level could also be measured using a qualitative method. By conducting a focus group and or one-on-one interviews with randomly selected students, future researchers could make behavioral observations or ratings. They could observe and rate visible signs of nervousness or fear in a speaker such as fidgeting, reduced gaze, stuttering, and stammering (Horwitz & Young, 1991).

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