

## **Internal and External Factors that Lead to English Language Conversational Anxieties among Thai Undergraduate Students: Basis for Instructional Improvement**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to assess the factors that cause anxieties among Thai undergraduate students when they converse in the English language: to develop an action plan that will eliminate the conversational anxieties of the target group. The findings in this study showed that the internal factors being known as experiential, motivational, linguistic, acuity and physical and the external factors defined as contextual and cultural have a direct effect on student respondents' anxieties when conversing through English language. Findings proved that the internal and external factors perceived by the student respondents had significance in their demographic profile; by gender to experiential factors; year level and program to contextual factors but no significance in their place of birth, more so, there is correlation between the internal and external factors with the physical and motivational factor having the highest correlation coefficient.

**Keywords:** Internal and external factors, conversational anxieties, English as a foreign language

## **Introduction**

As individuals we have different means of expressing ourselves, but we interact ultimately by conversing verbally. We express our thoughts through whatever language we feel comfortable using. The complication arises if we converse in a language which we are not comfortable with, needless to say, if this is not our native language. This is the case for most Thai undergraduate students, wherein conversing with the use of English language is a barrier to free and flawless dialogues.

English is considered as the most widespread and important language today. It is a major language of international business, diplomacy and professions. It is the official language of most international organizations. It is used not only for communication between native speakers of English but also between non-native speakers. Therefore, it is safe to say that one acquires a certain degree of conversation advantage if fluent in the English language; especially when living in a country with limited English contact. On the other hand, poor speakers of English suffer from discrimination, thus, giving them additional pressure and anxiety whenever they attempt speaking the universal language.

As countries become increasingly modern and competitive, conversing in English is advantageous for everyone. Thus, institutions of higher education in Thailand have included principled programs, workshops and training to familiarize students in an environment that has English as its primary language. Students are required to speak English, in and outside the campus. The activities and the policies bring out conversational anxieties among many Thai undergraduate students. It is hypothesized that “conversation anxieties” are the result of certain factors which make up the scope of this research. These factors are internal and external factors. Internal factors consist of; experiential, motivational, linguistic, acuity and physical while external factors consist of; contextual and cultural. The inhibiting factors include: lack of motivation, hesitancy, and discomfort, which act as barriers for English language fluently.

## **Methodology**

This research focused on factors that lead to conversational English anxieties among Thai undergraduate students enrolled from 2014-2015. Using the purposive sampling, the study was limited to 300 student-respondents from Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Suan Sunanta Rajabhat University, Bangkok University, Eastern Asia University and Kasem Bundit University.

This study demanded for the accurate descriptions, comparisons and contrasts in the conversational English anxieties being the dependent variable, the independent variables which are the internal and external factors and the demographic profile as the intervening variable.

A personally devised two-part questionnaire was used as the primary means in data collection for the study regarding the internal and external factors that lead to conversational English anxieties of the respondents. The first part determined the profile of the respondents in terms of year level, learning area, age, gender and place of birth. The second part is five-point scale type test items to assess the factors that bring about the student respondents conversational English anxieties in terms of cultural factor, experiential factor, contextual factor, physical factor, motivational factor, linguistic factor and acuity.

The questionnaire was translated into the Thai language for reliability. The questionnaire was tested and re-tested by one hundred non-respondents for item analysis and validation. Then the study was conducted.

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The questionnaire was administered and overseen by Thai lecturers. The questionnaires were given to students from all levels and learning areas of Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Suan Sunanta Rajabhat University, Bangkok University, Eastern Asia University and Kasem Bundit University.

The questionnaires were gathered and recorded, described analyzed and interpreted. The statistical treatment used was frequency count and percentage to show that actual distribution of the purposively selected Thai undergraduate students. Ranking was also used to determine which among the items were given higher weight. The weighted mean was used to determine the extent of perception of the respondents on their assessment of the internal and external factors leading to their conversational English anxiety. Then, T-test and ANOVA to test the null hypothesis of significant difference on the perception of the respondents' conversational English anxieties, correlation coefficient to determine the significant relationship of the dependent variable, the independent variables and the intervening variable.

### **Findings**

It utilized 300 purposively selected Thai undergraduate students as respondents. The descriptive method of research was used with the interview and questionnaire, which served as tools in gathering data and information. The statistical treatments used were the frequency distribution, percentage, ranking, weighted mean, ANOVA, correlation coefficient and correlated t-test.

The demographic profile of the respondents was summarized. The mean average of the respondents' age was 21; hence a majority of them were at their early twenties. Sixty four percent point seven (64.7%) or majority of the respondents were female. Thirty seven point three percent (37.3%) or a majority of the respondents were in their second year. Sixty two percent (62%) or a majority of the respondents were those that have three or less language subjects. Sixty percent (60%) or a majority of the respondents were born from the provinces.

The extent of assessments of the respondents on the effects of internal factors were summarized. Student respondents' composite mean in experiential factor resulted to 3.10, motivational factor to 3.32, acuity factor to 3.24 and physical factor to 3.27, all were interpreted as "Sometimes", while linguistic factor resulted to 3.63 interpreted as "Often". All Internal factors have direct effect to the respondents, making them anxious when conversing through English language.

Overall, out of the five internal factors, the linguistic factors had the most effect. This could be attributed to the student respondents' limited technical know-how of the English language; vocabulary, grammar-structure, etc. In conclusion, their assessment of their abilities and their mastery of the English language are very low, hence, resulting in their low esteem towards conversing through English language. Correspondingly, their motivational factors ranked second.

The extent of assessments of the respondents on the effects of external factors were also summarized. Student respondents' composite mean in contextual factor resulted to 3.84 interpreted as "Often", while culture factor resulted to 2.93 interpreted as "Sometimes". Hence, both contextual and cultural factors have direct effect on the respondents, making them anxious when conversing through English language.

In summary, out of the two external factors, contextual factors had the most effect. This could be attributed to situational or incidental opportunities by which the student respondents had have the use of conversing through the English language. Even the educators

prefer the use of their native language rather than English, their learning skills and opportunities inhibit them from conversing effectively in English language.

There was a significant difference in the assessments of the internal and external factors in terms of their demographic profile. After testing the significance of the factors in terms of student respondents' demographic profile, the results were, when tested with their Gender; their experiential factors had significance to their gender; Year level; their contextual factors had significance to their year level; Program; their contextual factors had significance to their Program; and Place of birth, none of the factors have any significance to their place of birth.

There were correlations between the internal and external factors. Physical factor had the highest correlation coefficient with the motivational factor. This could be attributed to the student respondents low esteem and anxiety when conversing through English language, since they perceive themselves as having low physical skill i.e. inability to pronounce correctly and articulate English words correctly. Hence, these factors affect their confidence in conversing effectively.

### **Recommendations**

Reflected on the foregoing findings and conclusion, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

The English fundamentals of the students should be strengthened by giving an achievement exam geared to determine the English proficiency of the student before the initial enrolment. If students fail the said test, they shall be required to enroll into a remedial subject that should serve to refresh and strengthen their English proficiency.

The optimal use of English language requires students to speak English in class most of the time by engaging them in activities that would encourage them to speak. Skinner's theory of rewarding is proven effective, and this theory could greatly help English fluency – driven activities. The university, university departments and student affairs office could assign rewards for students who utilize the second language for the said activities' success.

The students' personalities should be developed in order to build confidence when they converse in English: an integration of the elements of the personality development and speech classes. A speech class tackles the technicalities of speaking proper intonation, enunciation, pronunciation and voice modulation among other things, while, a personality class, as the name suggests, develops character. Now, if those elements are combined and formed as a subject, the conversational anxiety of a student shall be eradicated. Not only would the student learn the proper way of conversing, his confidence of doing so would be developed as well.

Speech therapy could be a great exercise. A student, upon his initial interview with the school, must be diagnosed for potential speaking disabilities. If the students have disabilities they must be referred to therapists or experts in the field. In the way, the disability would be given attention, thus helping the students to become good communicators, if not fluent ones.

A daily dose of advice could be a good way to make the students realize the importance to be able to communicate in English. Since speaking in the native tongue (L1) is undeniably a part of ones' culture and is a norm of the society, the students can do nothing but change their perception of the language.

Considering the given recommendations an action plan must be developed. An action plan would stimulate the learners interests towards learning and conversing fluently and effectively through the English language; to impart to the students the significance of

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being able to communicate fluently in English in social and professional interactions; to stimulate the students' awareness to use English language through different programs and activities; to present and provide programs and activities for the University Lecturers.

<b>Area of Concern</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Department /People Involved</b>	<b>Expected outcome</b>
General English Courses	Have more effective lecturers. Follow up with enhancement activities.	Inter-Lingual Institute Faculty Deans Course Coordinator	Motivate to speak English without anxiety.
Optimal use of language centre and /or academic resources and information technology	Engage students to learning at their own phase, with their own peers.	Inter-Lingual Institute Language Coordinators Staff	Students practice freely with materials that are trendy and updated.
Reinforcing and strengthening the lecturers' English language competence.	Refresher seminars and intensive English classes	Inter-Lingual InstituteUniversity Lecturers Staff	A better command in English thus provide good examples to students
A high regard of the students under English programs ( Humanities & Social Sciences and Education Faculties)	Intensive seminars and workshops specifically designed to advance their level of English.	English Major Students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Faculty of Education	Producing fluent and confident English speakers.

Table 1 Action plan for the improvement of instruction.

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