

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION



Background

English has reached the status of being accepted as an international auxiliary language. The evidence lies in the fact that most cosmopolitan conferences that deal with international problems and concerns use English as the medium of communication. Knowledge of English as a foreign language is highly valued in Thailand and is regarded as a social, professional and economic asset. English programs have been incorporated into the syllabi of educational institutions at all levels. At the tertiary level, all students must satisfy a foreign language requirement; for virtually all students the foreign language, by obligation or choice, is English. Repeated attempts have been made to upgrade the teaching and learning of English for university students. Nevertheless, several studies on the English achievement of university students in Thailand have shown that students' level of proficiency in the language in question is far from satisfactory. Examples of such studies are those

ศูนย์วิจัยภาษาและวัฒนธรรม
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

conducted by Kanda Thammongkol,¹ Kusuma Manasunton,² Poonsup Janyasupab,³ and Smuck Suphanratana.⁴

With the '70s came renewed emphasis on the individual. How do individuals learn? What are their learning strategies? Foreign language teachers became wary of presuming they could teach a language and began to seek ways in which students could be given opportunities, situations, and time to learn as their individual capabilities permitted. To upgrade student achievement in English along

¹Kanda Thammongkol, "The English Reading Ability of Thai Undergraduate Students," (Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1969).

²Kusuma Manasunton, "The English Reading and Writing Ability of First-Year University Students," (Master's thesis, Department of Secondary Education, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1976).

³Poonsup Janyasupab, "An Analysis of the English Complementation Usage of University Freshmen," (Master's thesis, Department of Secondary Education, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1979).

⁴Smuck Suphanratana, "Alternative Methods for Teaching English to Students in Thailand," (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1981).

these lines, it is essential that important aspects of foreign language learning concerning student variables be investigated. The findings of this type of study may lead to a greater understanding of how Thai university students acquire a foreign language and, as a result, a more valid language program and teaching practices aligned more closely to the characteristics of the students may be proposed.

Purposes

This study aims at examining the interrelationships among selected student variables which may contribute to success in learning English as a foreign language by Thai university students. Using Thammasat University freshmen as subjects, this study attempts to explore:

1. the relationships between language learning aptitude and achievement in English.
2. the relationships between attitude toward learning English as a foreign language and achievement in English.
3. the relationships between student grade point average (GPA) and English achievement.
4. the interrelationships among language learning aptitude, attitude toward learning English as a foreign language, GPA, and achievement in English of Thammasat University freshmen, and

5. the extent to which the selected student variables in single and in combination predict student achievement in English.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that language learning aptitude attitude toward learning English as a foreign language and GPA are associated with achievement in English.

Scope of the Study

The study examined 175 Thai first year students in Thammasat University in the second semester of the 1980-81 academic year. They all had had at least 8 years' experience in compulsory classes in English as a foreign language and were enrolled in the first year fundamental English courses labelled EG002, EG141, and EG142 for the purpose of fulfilling the university foreign language requirement.

The selection of subjects was made without reference to the subjects' intelligence, socio-economic background, or personality. The independent variables taken into particular consideration were language aptitude, attitude, GPA for the first semester, other learner characteristics were not taken into account.

Basic Assumptions

1. The language aptitude scores as measured by the Thai Language Aptitude Test Form A are reliable and valid. This test has been standardized and all examinees followed

the same testing procedures.

2. The random sample was fairly representative of the total population.

3. The attitude questionnaire had acceptable construct validity because it had been adapted from those of well-known authorities such as Gardner & Lambert and Jakobovits. The translated version was approved by a foreign language testing specialist and was pretested with an equivalent group. The statistical analysis of the scales denoted high reliability coefficient

Significance of the Study

1. This study may substantiate the crucial role of certain learner factors in foreign language acquisition and the importance of knowing just what the learner variables contribute to the learning process so that it can be taken into account in the teaching process.

2. It may stimulate the teachers' awareness of the significance of learner variables, and thus the teachers may become more enthusiastic in promoting a positive attitude toward learning English as a foreign language in particular and all foreign language studies in general.

3. The findings would provide the answer as to the relative priority between aptitudinal and attitudinal variables that educational practitioners should take into account.

4. This study may pave a way toward further research dealing with predictor variables of achievement in English of Thai university students.

Clarification of Terms

Aptitude: refers to a composite score on the Thai Language Aptitude Test Form A. This aptitude battery consists of 5 subparts: Vocabulary Form, Structural Function, Language Analysis, Phonetic Association, and Numerical Perception.

Attitude: refers to scores obtained from responses to 6 point Likert-type rating scales. These scales were designed for measuring Thai university students' intensity and direction of attitude toward learning English as a foreign language.

Achievement in English: Here, the term is represented by English scores as measured by teacher-made tests which demonstrated how much the students could achieve in their formal learning context. The scores were obtained from 4 subparts: Structure, Vocabulary, Reading, and Writing.