

An Assessment of English Speaking Ability of Technical and Business Students: A Case of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

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Abstract— The purposes of this research were 1) to assess English speaking ability of technical and business students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, 2) to compare the English speaking ability of the students before and after teaching speaking skill in the classroom, and 3) to study opinions of business and technical students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

Research samples were 72 students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology in second semester of 2012 academic year through simple random sampling technique. The instruments used for gathering data were the English speaking skills assessment form and opened-end questionnaire. The statistics employed for analyzing the data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and contents analysis.

The research findings were as following; 1) effects of an assessment of English speaking ability of business and technical students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology were at high level, 2) the students' English speaking achievement after teaching speaking skill was significantly higher than that before teaching speaking skill at 0.05 level, and 3) the students had additional suggestions as follows; Speech contest should be set every semester to improve listening skill, teachers should teach speaking skill both in class and outside class, communication in English should be arranged outside class, and Sightseeing in foreign countries should be managed every year to share cultures and cross cultures..

Keywords— *English Speaking Assessment, Language Learning, English Speech Ability*

I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is a part of L2 learning skills, speaking strategy is a crucial part of the whole of language learning strategy. Speaking strategies are assumed to be used by foreign and second language learners to exercise their oral performance in the target language. At Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, a large number of students are studying in Speech and Presentation in English. The EFL learners use speaking strategies to enhance speaking skill in English.

As English increasingly becomes the language used for international communication, it is vital that speakers of English, whether they are native or non-native speakers, are able to exchange meaning effectively. In fact, in recent discussions of English language teaching, the unrealistic idea that learners should sound and speak like native speakers is fast disappearing [1]. According to Burns (2003), it is more important that speakers of English can achieve; intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability.

Like other language skills, speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information [2], [3]. In order to speak successfully the learners should not only know how to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence), but also to use the language properly (sociolinguistic competence). Furthermore, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions that are different from the written language [4], [5]. The learners should therefore be provided with opportunities where they can learn and experience the language through communicative tasks [6], [7].

With respect to assessing the speaking ability of learners studying English as a foreign or second language, there is a general agreement that evaluating students' oral ability is not only a difficult task, but also time consuming. Henning [8] states that the greatest draw-back with scales for testing oral ability is that they tend to have rather low reliability because of subjective measures. Therefore, teachers should be recommended to use rating scales which provide them with a clear and precise definition concerning each scale point so that most measurement errors would be minimized. Kitao and Kitao [9] assert that evaluating speaking ability is a difficult task that requires simultaneous use of different abilities. The components of speaking that might be considered in the assessment scale are grammar, pronunciation, fluency, content, organization and vocabulary. Even though methods of testing speaking are not perfect, they have significant effects on teaching and classroom instruction. Spolsky [10] maintains that diagnostic or formative assessment is typically curriculum-oriented which provides feedback to students and teachers.

In conclusion, researcher studied the an assessment of English speaking ability of business and technical students at Thai-Nichi institute of Technology by creating research tool as questionnaire and speaking assessment form in order to study English speaking skill of students. This research was purposely focused on the TNI students from faculties of Business Administration, Engineering, and Information Technology in 2012 academic year. In this way, the results gained from the research will be used as a channel to solve, improve and develop teaching-learning process as well as teaching materials to be more effective and efficient.

Research Purposes

- 1) To assess English speaking ability of technical and business students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology
- 2) To compare the English speaking ability of the students before and after teaching speaking skill in the classroom, and
- 3) To study opinions of business and technical students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The data was gathered and analyzed as follows.

A. Population and sampling

1. The population was undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, in second semester of 2012 academic year. There were 1,200 students from 3 faculties which are Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Information Technology, and Faculty of Engineering.

2. The sample consisted of 72 students, and was derived from a simple random sampling technique.

B. Contents used in experiment

The topics consisted of *introduce your favorite places, the significance of technology, the importance of education, sufficiency economy, demonstrate the factors to reduce global warming, and how do you prepare yourself for AEC* which were chosen based on a survey of students' needs questionnaire.

The topic for speaking test was on "What is the most important factor to achieve in English learning?"

C. Duration in experiment

The experiment ran for 16 weeks (1 semester)

D. Variables

Variables in this study were as follows:

1. The English speaking ability of undergraduate TNI students before and after the class.
2. The opinions and suggestions of undergraduate TNI students

E. Research Instruments

1. The English speaking skill assessment form
2. Open-ended questionnaire
3. English speaking lesson plans

Construction of Research Instruments

The researcher constructed the EFL speaking lesson plans in the following way:

First, the researcher studied the objectives of EFL speaking learning and focused on English speaking skills and strategies. Emphasis was placed on impromptu speaking and prepared speaking.

Second, the researcher derived six topics from the survey of needs questionnaire and interviewed the participants regarding topics required for undergraduate students. The topics were as follows:

Rank	Topic	Mean	S.D	Meaning
1	Introduce your favorite places	4.62	0.55	Strongly needs
2	The significance of technology	4.59	0.66	Strongly needs
3	The importance of education	4.55	0.69	Strongly needs
4	Sufficiency economy	4.52	0.78	Strongly needs
5	Demonstrate the factors to reduce global warming	4.48	0.69	Needs
6	How do you prepare yourself for AEC?	4.45	0.72	Needs

Last, these six topics were applied to suit undergraduate students by giving the students examples with tape scripts and audio files. Then, the table of contents specification was designed by determining the objectives, contents, topics, desired speaking skills, speaking activities, and evaluation.

Speaking test

Students were given pre- and post-class tests on the topic **What is the most important factor to achieve in English learning?**. The tests had the same format and consisted of 5 aspects of criteria (50 scores). The duration of each student was 3 minutes. The researcher created a table of criteria which consisted of speaking, presentation, and persuasiveness. The score criteria were as follows:

Contents	Scores
1. Speaking	
1.1 Grammar and Vocabulary	10
1.2 Structures (process of speaking, easy to understand)	10
1.3 Fluency and pronunciation	10
2. Presentation	
(Self-confidence, Eye contact, Good performance)	10
3. Persuasiveness	
(Good and positive communication, delivery of warmth to audience, give the audience good feeling at the end of the speech)	10
Total	/50

Data Analysis

1. The data from the questionnaire were rated to find the mean and standard deviation and then translated based on criteria developed by Best [11] as follows:

- 1.00 ≤ \bar{x} < 1.50 indicates the lowest English speaking skill
- 1.50 ≤ \bar{x} < 2.50 indicates low English speaking skill
- 2.50 ≤ \bar{x} < 3.50 indicates moderate English speaking skill
- 3.50 ≤ \bar{x} < 4.50 indicates high English speaking skill
- 4.50 ≤ \bar{x} ≤ 5.00 indicates the highest English speaking skill

2. The comparison between the pre-test and post-test was done using t-test, which was calculated by computer program.

The statistics employed for analyzing the data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and contents analysis.

III. RESULTS

Phase 1: The results of demographic variables of TNI undergraduate students.

The analysis of the data from the student questionnaire reported by business and technical students in the 2012 academic year is presented in the first section deals with the demographic variables from the students' responses to Part 1 of the questionnaire: genders and majors as following table.

Table 1: Table of the results of demographic data of respondents

Demographic data of respondents	n	Percentage
Genders		
1.1 male	32	44.44
1.2 female	40	55.56
Total	72	100
Faculty		
2.1 Engineering	28	38.88
2.2 Information Technology	23	31.94
2.3 Business Administration	21	29.16
Total	72	100

Table shows that the percentages of the respondents in genders ranged from 44.44 % for male and 55.56% for female; in faculties ranged from 38.88% for Engineering, 31.94% for Information Technology, 29.16% for Business Administration.

Phase 2: The results of assessment English speaking skill of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students

Table 2: Table of mean and standard deviation of assessment English speaking skill of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students

Components	n	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1. Grammar and Vocabulary	72	3.85	0.64	high
2. Structures (process of speaking, easy to understand)	72	3.68	0.86	high
3. Fluency and pronunciation	72	3.77	0.74	high
4. Self-confidence, Eye contact, Good performance	72	3.75	0.65	high
5. Persuasiveness (Good and positive communication, delivery of warmth to Audience)	72	3.58	0.91	high
Total	72	3.72	0.76	high

Table 2 above indicated that the overall students' English speaking level was at high level ($\bar{x} = 3.72$). When each aspect was considered, the following areas were found to exist at a high level: grammar and vocabulary ($\bar{x} = 3.85$), fluency and pronunciation ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), self-confidence ($\bar{x} = 3.75$), structures ($\bar{x} = 3.68$), and persuasiveness ($\bar{x} = 3.58$).

Table3: Means, standard deviation, and ranking of mean scores in each topic

Topic	Scores	Mean Scores (\bar{x})	S.D.	%	Rank
1	05	36.78	5.31	73.56	6
2	05	38.56	4.88	77.12	5
3	05	41.08	4.44	82.16	3
4	05	39.22	5.32	78.44	4
0	05	42.35	4.88	84.70	2
6	05	44.48	4.07	88.96	1
Total	50	40.41	4.81	80.82	

The mean scores of all six topics were 40.41 (S.D. = 4.81). The highest mean scores were on topic 6 ($\bar{x} = 44.48$, S.D. = 4.07). The second highest mean scores were on topic 5 ($\bar{x} = 42.35$, S.D. = 4.88). The lowest mean scores were on topic 1 ($\bar{x} = 36.78$, S.D. = 5.31). The overall mean scores of six topics were 40.41 (S.D. = 4.81). Results indicated that students speaking ability was at high.

Phase 3: The comparison of the before and after speaking tests for the 72 students were as follows:

Test	Number of Sample	Total score	(\bar{x})	S.D	(D)	t	Sig
Pretest	72	50	23.07	0.89	19.49	28.541	5.555*
Posttest	72	50	42.56	0.62		63.810	

*Statistical significance at 0.05 level

The post-test scores were higher than the pretest scores by 0.05 (Sig = 0.000 < 0.05). The mean score of the posttest was 42.56, higher than the pretest (23.07 out of 50). The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was 19.49, and for the t-test it was 63.815. Results indicated that students speaking ability was improved by the course.

Phase 4: Suggestions and Opinion from Open-ended

Opinions and suggestions in speaking English of TNI students	No.	Fre	%
	72		
Suggestions	42		58.33
1. Speech contest should be set every semester to improve listening skill		15	20.83
2. Teachers should teach speaking skill both in class and outside class,		12	16.66
3. Communication in English should be arranged outside class,		10	13.88
4. Sightseeing in foreign countries should be managed every year to share cultures and cross cultures.		5	6.94
Opinions	30		41.67
1. Speaking skill is very useful for all students.		14	19.44
2. Speech contest makes the students improve speaking skill.		9	12.50
3. Speaking in classroom and public speaking make me enhance my confidence.		7	9.72



IV. DISCUSSION

According to the study and data analysis, the results of this study could be discussed as follows. The result of assessment English speaking skill of business and technical students at TNI in five areas was at high level. In this way, it might concern with reasons as follows.

1. In assessment of English speaking skill was at high level which might be from TNI students set goals in speaking and motivated themselves to get a good grade so they tried very hard to speak it which related to a point of view of Dornyei [12] who advocated that a learner may be highly motivated in listening if he or she thinks that the chance of getting a task properly done is high and regards such a completion of task as meaningful and significant.

2. The students' English speaking achievement after teaching speaking skill was significantly higher than that before teaching speaking skill at 0.05 level which might be from teachers assess students' ability from various components which related to a point of view of Kitao and Kitao [9] who advocated that evaluating speaking ability is a difficult task that requires simultaneous use of different abilities. The components of speaking that might be considered in the assessment scale are grammar, pronunciation, fluency, content, organization and vocabulary.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the study and data analysis, the results of this study were as follows.

1. Effects of an assessment of English speaking ability of business and technical students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology were at high level.

2. The students' English speaking achievement after teaching speaking skill was significantly higher than that before teaching speaking skill at 0.05 level.

3. The students had additional suggestions as follows; Speech contest should be set every semester to improve listening skill, teachers should teach speaking skill both in class and outside class, communication in English should be arranged outside class, and Sightseeing in foreign countries should be managed every year to share cultures and cross cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is supported by College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand.

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APPENDIX

Evaluation sheet

Name of competitor: _____

Contents	Scores
1. Speaking	
1.1 Grammar and Vocabulary	10
1.2 Structures (process of speaking, easy to understand)	10
1.3 Fluency and pronunciation	10
2.Presentation	
(Self-confidence, Eye contact, Good performance)	10
3.Persuasiveness	
(Good and positive communication, delivery of warmth to audience, give the audience good feeling at the end of the speech)	10
Total	<u> </u> /50

Total Scores = _____/50

Judge's name: _____