

Attitudes and Motivation of Thai Undergraduate Students towards Learning English Language

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Abstract

English language learning and teaching is a complex process; its success depends on factors like attitude, the in their efforts and ability to learn the English language. motivation that influences learning and teaching conditions, the role of teachers, and teaching strategies. The present study was classroom action research conducted by the teacher with a sample of 129 Engineering students of Technical English Classrooms in a Private University in Thailand. These students were selected to find ways for improving motivation in a Thai EFL classroom. This article presents the attitudes and the motivating factors (intrinsic or extrinsic) for English language learning and the classroom activities that can support students' interest in learning English. The result found that teaching speaking practice with activities as 'Job Interview', either in pair or small group activity and 'Role-Play' was met with lots of enthusiasm among the Thai students, and these activities are important to increase student's motivation in learning English language and to have lively English class. The study concluded that this research report provides the teacher an opportunity to obtain an in-depth insight into what type of assigned activities increases students' interest in learning English. The result will help in improving the teaching methodology, with the causality that is, generating a favorable attitude increases students' motivation

Keywords: Attitude, English language learning and teaching, Intrinsic motivation, Extrinsic motivation, Thailand

Introduction

The English language is a common language all over the world, and the United Nations use it as one of the six official languages. English is the worldly language for engineering, business, technical, or science education as stated by previous researches (Pritchard & Nasr, 2004; Pendergrass et al., 2001; Venkatraman & Prema, 2007; Zhao, 2007). These scholars have reported on the importance of integrating the English language into Engineering, Science, and

Mathematics Course as it will help to improve the students' all over performance in written or oral English. Also, teaching Technical English of Engineering students is different from teaching English of Arts stream in terms of course content, style of presentation, or methodology with due consideration of their specific need purposes (Ganesan, 2020). This has been supported by Jafari Pazoki and Alemi (2019), who conducted a study at three Engineering Universities in Iran using a mixed methodology of both qualitative as well qualitative data with aims to identify factors that affect students' motivation for learning Technical English, and found that course that contains long term goals and daily life practicalities motivates more students to learn English. Learning a new language is a complex process, and its success depends on many factors such as motivation, attitude, teaching conditions, and the teacher. So, the teachers need to design the course contents and improve the teaching methods with activities to increase the motivation of students (Taguchi et al., 2009; Dornyei, 2001). It is, therefore, considered necessary to analyze the motivating factors in language learning as it might be more meaningful for successful learning. In this context, teachers need to increase students' motivation by improving the contents of the teaching materials that are communicative, exciting and useful, or practical in their daily life and future career development (Oxford & Ehrman, 1992; Sayadian & Lashkarian, 2010). This means that some related factors are essential for teachers to improve to bring attitude change of students from unfavorable to favorable (Nair & Iy, 2008; Morgan, 1993). Teachers, therefore, should design their lessons and course contents according to specific requirements, since students have different purposes for learning English (Read, 2008). Kormos (2002) found that students' motivations and interests increased when they were assigned activities *such as conversing* with foreigners, writing an email, or translating of both written and oral text. In brief, the roles of teachers are to increase the motivation of their students to make the class more interesting by changing the technique of delivering lessons, the course contents, and teaching environments. This article is aimed at addressing the following questions:

1. To what extent are students' attitudes and motivation contribute to their English learning experience?
2. What activities or teaching strategies do teachers need to know to better support students' interest in learning English?

With these mentioned above questions, the study investigated the attitude and motivating factors of EFL learners, with the target to improve student's interest. By students, the researcher meant the whole class instead of a unit student. The paper is organized into the following parts: introduction, literature review, methods and materials, results and discussion, and conclusion and recommendation.

Literature review

Bobkina and Fernandez de Caleyá Dalmau (2012), Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) investigated the motivation patterns of English language learning of Engineering students in Spain and Yemen, in 3 forms, integrative, instrumental and, personal motivations. The result of their studies shows the importance of instrumental motivation along with personal goals as

getting a good job or becoming a well-prepared professional, as more critical than integrative motivation. Similarly, Goktepe (2014) found that most students were motivated instrumentally for career or professional building. Apart from the importance of creating a favorable attitude and motivation of students, the study pointed out the need for improvement of teaching strategies, methods, and activities to facilitate effective English language learning. On the other hand, Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) found integrative motivation strategies more effective than instrumentality in their study with Iranian EFL University students. About English teaching in Thailand, the research result found that even though Thai students have a positive attitude, and are influenced more by instrumental motivation, they cannot learn online English autonomously because of poor English, but need to be guided by teachers in the process of learning English from the internet (Laiphrakpam & Saeng-Uthai, 2008; Kitjaroonchai, 2012; Soranastaporn, 1993).

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), “attitudes do not have direct influences on learning, but they lead to motivation and attitude is to be measured by taking a subject to evaluate an object” (Gardner, 1972, p.3). There are two types of attitudes in English language learning as 1) attitudes to the people who speak the target language and 2) attitudes to the practical use to which the learner assumes that he or she can put the language being learned (Gardner, 1985; cited in Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009, p.1). ‘Motivation, therefore refers to a combination of efforts along with interest for goal achievement to learn the language and the satisfaction experienced in the activity’ (Gardner, 1985, p.10). There are two kinds of motivation, integrative (intrinsic) and instrumental (extrinsic) motivation. The characteristic of integrative motivation is similar to learners learning English to belong to the ‘English speaking group’, while instrumental motivation is learners learning English for achieving some goals, rewards, such as raising one’s job position, getting a scholarship or praise from parents, teachers, and friends when they achieve a high score (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Many other researchers supported the above views (Reiss, 2012; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Ramage, 1990; Lepper, 1988). Dornyei (1990) reported more importance to integrative than instrumental motivation in foreign language acquisition. The above review of the literature reveals the growing importance of attitude towards learning English, motivational factors of students, and the teaching strategies for effective learning.

Methods and Materials

Theoretical Framework

The present study used the socio-educational theoretical framework model as first proposed by Gardner (Gardner, 2001). The major concept used in the present paper was attitude, integrative (intrinsic) motivation, and instrumental (extrinsic) motivation. The present study was classroom-centered research (CCR) in the form of small action research, that is, a kind of research generally selected by untrained researchers or teachers, but practices as a tool for improving teaching methodology and for all over improvement to both teachers and learners. Adopting and trying new activities and methods enabled the teacher to be an effective

decision-maker. This research also helped the teacher in developing a reflective, analytical approach to teaching.

Population and sample

The population was 1360 students, studying English of various courses in all faculties of Thonburi University, Bangkok, during the term 2004-2005. It used a purposive sampling method, in which the researcher carefully selected 129 students comprising of Electrical, Mechanical, and Industrial engineering department, who were her students during the first term from November 2004 to March 2005. Out of these students, 29 have again studied Technical English 2 with the researcher during the second term, from June 2005 to October 2005. The total sample respondents of the first term with the departments are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Distribution of the respondents of the first term by departments

| Department | Frequency (N) | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Mechanical Engineering(ME) | 28 | 21.7 |
| Industrial Engineering (IE) | 41 | 31.8 |
| Electrical Engineering (EE) | 60 | 46.5 |
| Total | 129 | 100.0 |

The researcher used a mixed method of data collection, including observation, interview schedule, questionnaire, and secondary literature review from different sources. However, the major portion of the data was collected by administering the questionnaire, which contained in the first section, attitudes-test questions, modified from Gardner's "Attitude/Motivation Test Battery" (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985; 2004) as given in Table 2. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, it was pre-tested with five students before the actual administration. The second section of the questionnaire contained questions the rating of students' motives in those activities done in Technical English 1 and Technical English 2 classes during the first term. Students were assigned to rate the activities done in the classroom by ranking from 1 -5 scale, 1 is measured as very boring, and 5 as very interesting, as given in Figure 3. All instructions and the contents of the questionnaire were set in two languages, Thai and English. After the questionnaire was printed, it was administered to the selected sample on a scheduled day before starting the English class by the researcher and the teacher and told them that it would not be shared with anyone. During the second term, a further evaluative investigation of activities was conducted by 29 students of Technical English 2.

Results and discussion

Attitudes

Many scholars have defined the term. “Attitudes are crucial in growth, decay, restoration, or destruction of language. The status and importance of a language in society and within an individual derive largely from adopted or learned attitudes” (Baker, 1988, p.112) because attitudes generate within a frame of reference, consisting of language, teacher, activities, etc. (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). The operational definition of attitude is that promotes a student’s behaviors in learning the English language. Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents by their attitudes.

Table 2 Distribution of the respondents by their attitudes (%)

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Dis- Agree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total | Mean |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Learning English is easy | 5 (3.9) | 11(8.5) | 87(67.4) | 25(19.4) | 1(0.8) | 129(100.0) | 3.05 |
| Like the sound of English | 6(4.7) | 9(7.0) | 75(58.1) | 36(27.9) | 3(2.3) | 129(100.0) | 3.16 |
| Learning English is fun | 2(1.6) | 8(6.2) | 57(44.2) | 49(38.0) | 13(10.1) | 129(100.0) | 3.74 |
| If given a choice, would not study | 46(35.7) | 47(36.4) | 23(17.8) | 7.9(7.0) | 4(3.1) | 129(100.0) | 2.05 |
| English is needed in my daily life | 3(2.3) | 9(7.0) | 90(69.8) | 21(16.3) | 6(4.7) | 129(100.0) | 3.14 |
| My parents want me to study | 30(23.3) | 59(45.7) | 24(18.6) | 8(6.2) | 8(6.2) | 129(100.0) | 2.26 |
| My friends like learning English | 6(4.7) | 25(19.4) | 75(58.1) | 21(16.3) | 2(1.6) | 129(100.0) | 2.91 |
| Speaking English is not important | 44(34.1) | 57(44.2) | 17(13.2) | 6(4.7) | 5(3.9) | 129(100.0) | 2.00 |

On examining Table 2, it is found that the majority (67.4 percent, 58.1 percent, 44.2 percent, 69.8 percent, and 58.1 percent respectively) have a neutral attitude to the following statements: learning English is easy, to like the sound of English, learning English is fun, English is necessary for their daily life, and lastly most of their friends like learning English. A high proportion of the respondents have strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement they would not study English if given a choice. This means that respondents like to learn English. Similarly, the majority of the respondents (44.2 percent and 34.1 percent respectively) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement that learning English is not important to them, suggesting the importance of English in their daily life and the necessities of learning it. This indicates that the respondents have a favorable attitude in learning English and realizes the benefits and utilities for learning to speak English. The analysis of data reveals that students have favorable attitudes in English learning.

Motivation

The concept of motivation is vital in English language learning (Dornyei, 2003; 1998; Gardner, 1988) due to the student’s increasing interest and participation in the process of learning (Harter, 1981). As different students have different interests, their motivation in learning English may be enhanced if their aims and purposes can be fulfilled as an outcome of the learning process. There are many views about the benefits of both instrumental and integrative motivation (Goktepe, 2014; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ellis, 1994). To see the result from this research study, the students were administered a questionnaire containing questions to determine their integrative motivation, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by integrative (intrinsic) motivation (%)

| Statement | Strongly disagree f (%) | Disagree f (%) | Neutral f (%) | Agree f (%) | Strongly agree f (%) | Total f (%) | Mean |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|------|
| 1. Studying English can be important to me because it will help me to more comfortable with other English speakers. | 3 (2.3) | 1 (0.8) | 14 (10.9) | 40 (31.0) | 71 (55.0) | 129 (100.0) | 4.36 |
| 2. Studying English can be important to me because it will enable me to meet and converse with more and varied people. | 3 (2.3) | 1 (0.8) | 24 (18.6) | 43 (33.3) | 58 (45.0) | 129 (100.0) | 4.18 |
| 3. Studying English can be important because it will enable me to understand and appreciate foreign art and literature. | 2 (1.6) | 8 (6.2) | 39 (30.2) | 52 (40.3) | 28 (21.7) | 129 (100.0) | 3.74 |
| 3. Studying English can be important to me because it will enable me to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups. | 3 (2.3) | 7 (5.4) | 36 (27.9) | 58 (45.0) | 25 (19.4) | 129 (100.0) | 3.74 |

It is found that a high proportion of the students- respondents have agreed or strongly agreed that studying English can be important to them because it will enable them to be more comfortable to have interaction with other people who speak English, that is, they have high integrative (intrinsic) motivation too. The second statement “Studying English can be important to them because it will provide them a chance to meet and communicate with a variety of people” follows this where 45 percent have strongly agreed, and another 33.3 percent have simply agreed to it. Similarly, a high proportion, 40.3 percent, and 21.7 percent respectively, have agreed and strongly agreed that studying English is important to them because it will enable them to understand better and appreciate foreign art and literature. Table 4 gives the distribution of the respondents by their instrumental or extrinsic motivation.

Table 4 Distribution of respondents by instrumental (extrinsic) motivation

| Statement | Strongly disagree f (%) | Disagree f (%) | Neutral f (%) | agree f (%) | Strongly agree | Total f (%) | Mean |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------|
| 1. Studying English can be important to me because it will help me to get a good job. | 2 (1.6) | 4 (3.1) | 11 (8.5) | 46 (35.7) | 66 (51.2) | 129 (100.0) | 4.32 |
| 2. Studying English can be important to me because I will use in my future life. | 2 (1.6) | 2 (1.6) | 11 (8.5) | 50 (38.8) | 64 (49.6) | 129 (100.0) | 4.33 |
| 3. Studying English can be important to me because I will need it for my future career. | 2 (1.6) | 2 (1.6) | 13 (10.1) | 55 (42.6) | 57 (44.2) | 129 (100.0) | 4.26 |
| 4. Studying English can be important to me because it will help me to be a more knowledgeable person. | 2 (1.6) | 2 (1.6) | 32 (34.8) | 58 (45.0) | 35 (27.1) | 129 (100.0) | 3.95 |
| 5. Studying English can be important to me because I want to abroad someday. | 7 (5.4) | 9 (7.0) | 44 (34.1) | 37 (28.7) | 32 (24.8) | 129 (100.0) | 3.60 |
| 6. Studying English can be important to me because people will respect me more if I know a foreign language. | | 7 (5.4) | 32 (24.8) | 59 (45.7) | 31 (24.0) | 129 (100.0) | 3.88 |

Upon analysis of the students' instrumental (extrinsic) motivation, it is found that a high proportion, 49.6 percent, and 38.8 percent respectively, have either strongly agreed or simply agreed that English is necessary and will be used in their future life. Similarly, 44.2 percent and 42.6 percent respectively have strongly agreed and simply agreed that studying English can be essential for them because they believe that they would need it for their future career advancement. 51.2 percent of the students have strongly agreed that studying English can be important to them because it will be useful in getting a good job. Thus, most students have higher instrumental motivation as compared to integrative motivation.

Strategies (Learning and teaching conditions)

In the recent decades, there has been a change in teaching and learning conditions, with many teachers increasingly incorporating the humanistic approach into language teaching (Harmer, 1991). As an aid to help each other, the class of the researcher was divided into mixed ability groups as students prefer working in pairs or small groups more than working individually. Some Thai students perceive learning English as boring and useless even though the school curriculum in Thailand makes them learn English from primary schools. So, to increase students' interest, various kinds of activities should be identified and repeat those which are practical and relevant in the daily lives of students (William & Burden, 1997). So, the students were given a questionnaire to rate those classroom activities on a 1-5 rating scale, where 1 = very boring, while 5 = very interesting to find their interests or desire to repeat some activities. Besides, the teacher immediately evaluated new activities introduced during the 2nd term after each activity in class on the same 1-5 rating scales. At the end of the 2nd term, the students were assigned to fill up another questionnaire containing questions, asking them to select the activities they would like to repeat.

After analyzing the responses of the students to the assigned first-term activities and test result, the researcher has some idea about the strategies and the activities to be adopted or repeated in the second-term English assignment or activities by selecting to repeat those that have a high score on the rating scale, while discarding those that have a low score. This methodology has already been reported in previous studies (Nunan, 1989; Oxford et al., 1993). A teacher's role is to relate the contents of the lesson to a student's personal goal, which is considered the motivating factor while discussing increasing motivation in the English classroom. With this obtained idea, the researcher set out to apply activities in her class, which she considered as practical and easy to practice and at the same time relevant and applicable to the learners as leading to their ambition or career development. The first activity adopted was 'Job Interview' speaking practice, either in pair or small group activity, during both the first term and the second term, followed by 'Role- Play, which is important to increase student's involvement in learning the English language. Role-playing is considered necessary for making the students participate in dialogue through speaking and learning what is being played. For doing so, the students have to prepare the dialogue for a particular role and present it in front of the classroom. It is very challenging for the students to prepare a long dialogue. However,

the students try their best to remember it. When the researcher – teacher watched their performance, she was touched by their elaborate preparations. The result of their presentations was so realistic and delightful, which was much greater than the teacher's expectation. In this way, both partners asked and answered questions. Here, the researcher tried to put a little pressure on the pair by saying that each partner has to encourage each other. If one partner gets 5 points and the other gets 1 point, then the average of both was calculated as $5+1=6/2=3$. That is, only 3 points were given to both of them equally. Williams and Burden (1997) highlighted the role and importance of friends or peer groups in group activities or assignments, along with the prestige and appreciation from teachers, parents, and peers, which they considered as motivating factors in getting good marks and thus improving their learning abilities in the language.

The second activity was made by dividing the classroom into a group of 4 or 5 persons in activities such as quizzes, writing a work process, or instructions and presenting it in front of the classroom. Many weak students like this type of activity since they need the help of their friends. Little John (cited in Crooks & Schimdt, 1991) reported the benefits of group activities, as such activities help the weaker students too in a positive way. The teacher wrote the group names for the quiz as I, II, III, etc., on the whiteboard. Then, any group who could answer correctly got one point, who could not answer got zero. Since all groups were interested in getting the maximum score, they became very attentive. To prevent the same student from answering questions, again and again, the teacher asked the person who answered the question to select anyone from the next group and, they had to answer the next question. The process was repeated until every student got the chance to speak. The summation of the total score of each group was calculated and each student who belonged to a particular group got his score according to his group score. After this activity, the teacher rewarded some small rewards to those students who raised a question or could answer the question correctly. In the case of giving instruction activity, each group was asked to prepare one instruction. They have to write the step by step procedure of the instructions as 'how to wash clothes in the machine', 'how to start the computer', 'how to send e mail,' etc. Then, two or three students belonging to a group came in front of the classroom to present. One student delivered the speech while another did the action or illustrated with pictures to describe the steps and devices used in the instruction. Example: washing machine, clothes, Breeze washing powder, water pipe and tap, plug and socket for power connection, etc. Before giving a presentation, they introduced themselves and explained the ingredients/materials such as: "washing machine, dirty clothes, Breeze washing powder, water pipe and tap, plug and socket for power connection". Then the students pointed at the picture on the whiteboard and proceeded with the instruction. While speaking these steps, the other partner who came to help illustrated with pictures or did demonstration or action. At the end of the presentation, the audience raised a question such as: "How many clothes do you put in the machine? How long do you spin the machine?" They asked questions voluntarily and also with the help of the teacher. The presenter also tried to answer the questions spontaneously. In this way, the students have performed the art of public speaking in English. It is generally observed that students who are exposed to public platforms constantly increase their self-

confidence in public speaking performance as a debate or such other competition as they usually get praise and reward from schools, teachers, parents, and peers. So, the University course curriculum contains activities that train students to experience the art of speaking in English. The other activities were homework and classroom tests on writing a paragraph or dialogue because it is essential to prepare in writing for speaking practice. Another activity was 'test' because it can be used to increase students' motivation, as the student works harder to get higher marks or to pass the test. If the student gets high marks on the test, his result will be considered a high grade, which will bring happiness and confidence to the students. For this purpose, generally, a tactical teacher assigns tests after every lesson to motivate students. Also, after finishing a lesson, the teacher usually reviewed the lesson through quiz activity on the whiteboard. Many students rushed to the whiteboard to get high marks. After putting all these into practice, the researcher found that her students no longer kept silent in class but participated in discussion enthusiastically. Figure 1 gives the distribution of respondents by the evaluation of first term activities.

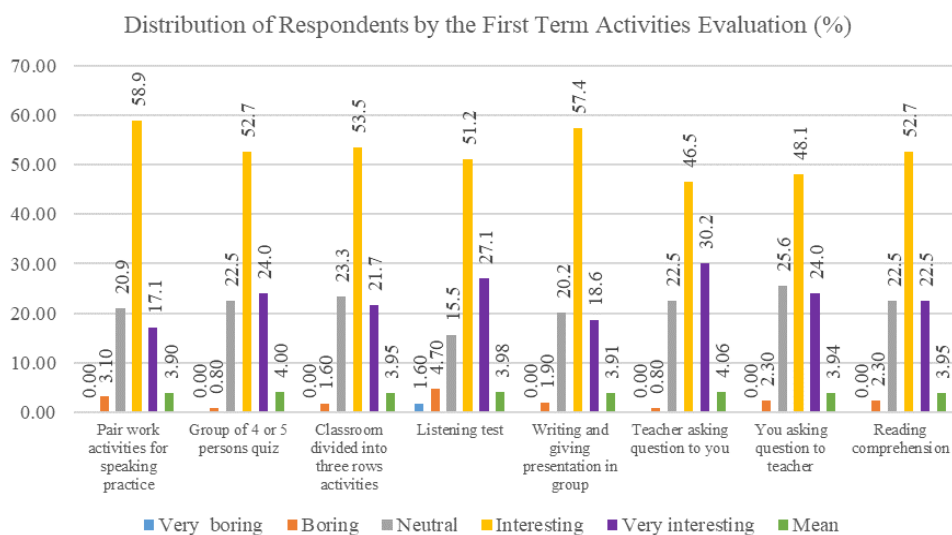


Figure 1 Distribution of respondents by the first term activities evaluation (%)

The majority of the respondents, 58.9 percent and 17.1 percent, respectively consider pair work activities for speaking practice to be interesting or very interesting. Another 52.7 percent and 24.0 percent of students consider a group of 4-5 persons-quiz activities as interesting or very interesting respectively. 53.5 percent and 21.7 percent, consider the classroom divided into three rows- activities to be exciting or very interesting respectively. This suggests that most of the students are either interested or very interested in all group work activities. The comparative presentation of second term activities evaluation is presented in Table 5. It can be seen that the interest and response of the students are better in the second term than their performance during the first term in all kinds of activities undertaken in the classroom.

Table 5 Distribution of respondents by the second term activities evaluation

| Activities | Want to Do Again | Not Want to Do Again | Total |
|---|------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. Group of 4 -5 persons quiz | 28 (96.6) | 1 (3.4) | 29 (100.0) |
| 2. Teacher asks question and you answer it | 26 (89.7) | 3 (10.3) | 29 (100.0) |
| 3. Reward for those who can answer questions | 26 (89.7) | 3 (10.3) | 29 (100.0) |
| 4. Writing and giving a presentation in a group | 19 (65.5) | 10 (34.5) | 29 (100.0) |
| 5. Reading comprehension Test | 19 (65.5) | 10 (34.5) | 29 (100.0) |
| 6. Listening test | 17 (58.6) | 12 (41.4) | 29 (100.0) |
| 7. Vocabularies Test | 17 (58.6) | 12 (41.4) | 29 (100.0) |
| 8. Pair work activities for speaking practice | 14 (48.3) | 15 (51.7) | 29 (100.0) |
| 9. Classroom divided into 3-rows group activities | 14 (48.3) | 15 (51.7) | 29 (100.0) |
| 10. Listening to English song | 11 (37.9) | 18 (62.1) | 29 (100.0) |

Conclusion and recommendations

Attitude and motivation influence English learners to decide to try, sustain activity, put efforts to pursue it, and measure their feelings to the activity. The study resulted in the most notable change with the students' motivation as their interest increased during the second term in most of the activities undertaken in the classroom. This suggests that having students' favorable attitude to learning English is synonymous with improving the motivation of students, which signifies that teachers are increasing students' abilities in learning English. Moreover, study's result can help the teachers to know what type of activities or strategies help the students learned in an EFL classroom in Thailand especially, by increasing their motivation, either instrumental (extrinsic) or integrative (intrinsic). The findings from this study answer the research questions about the contribution of the factors of attitude and motivation in English language learning and this result is expected to help educate other English language teachers too, which they can apply efficient activities or strategies more positively, adapting their teaching methodologies to increase the English proficiency of their students. The above analysis proved that students' motivation did increase in the classroom of the researcher. From the overall analysis of attitude measurement, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and activities, it was found that the students' responses were met with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The activities did bring improvement in the interest to the majority of the student. Therefore, it can be concluded that the research result is helpful to the teacher in providing an in-depth insight, especially of what activities and strategies promote favorable attitudes and their motivation, thereby helping to improve the teaching methodology. Thus, this research on attitude and motivation provide answers to the research question, thus leading to cause and effect relationships. By generating a favorable attitude, teachers are increasing students' motivation in their efforts and ability to learn the language.

The following provides recommendations obtained from the literature review (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011) as:

- A teacher should develop a friendly and helpful environment to make the students relax, raise self-confidence, and enhance their learning.

- Promote self-learning with low anxiety and a flexible schedule outside the classroom hours.
- The course content should be more goal-oriented or instrumental.

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