



PRIMARY RESEARCH

## Attitudes toward English: A study of first-year students at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok

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**Abstract.** This paper addresses the students' attitudes toward the users and uses of English at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok in Thailand. The participants were 550 non-English major first-year students from six different faculties. The students were required to study English in a foreign language learning environment where there is little immediate need to use English for real communication. The students' attitudes regarding the users of English and the uses of English in five different contexts were investigated: personal, recreational, educational, professional, and international. A questionnaire assessing attitudes regarding three attitudinal components— affective, behavioral, and cognitive components—and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The collected data were analyzed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that the students from all six faculties had overall positive attitudes toward English, with the agro-industry students showing the highest mean score regarding English language users, while the industrial technology and management students showed the lowest mean scores in four contexts of language use; namely, recreational, educational, professional, and international. Moreover, the results indicated that most items rated as highly positive belonged to the cognitive component, while those rated as negative mostly came from the affective component. This paper also discusses some of the correlations among the six attitudinal aspects and pedagogical implications.

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### INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that English is very important as it has become the international language for communication. Some people want to study English because they think that it offers a chance for advancement in their professional life or simply because it enables them to travel the world and socialize with other people. However, some language students study English only because it is in the curriculum. Regarding Thai students, many of them have learned English for many years, but it appears that they still fail to use English effectively.

At King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB), most of the students are studying the engineering and science-technology fields, and none of them is majoring in English. They are required to study at least two courses of fundamental English. However, according to the mean scores for the courses from several past academic years, it was found that the students' average English proficiency was quite low, so it is important to find the factors that make the students not so successful in the acquisition of English. In fact, there are many factors that could affect the students' success in foreign language learning, but the students' attitudes are foremost on researchers' minds. This

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is because attitudes are relatively enduring beliefs that can have a significant bearing on how learning proceeds (Alkaff, 2013). They can influence the students' choice of actions concerning what to learn, how to learn, or even whether to learn.

A number of researches have been carried out on undergraduate students' attitudes toward English learning both in Thailand and in other countries, and this reflects the fact that attitude is a big concern among EFL teachers worldwide. Nevertheless, the research results have varied, consisting of positive, neutral, and negative attitudes, and more importantly, the results are quite participant-specific and thus cannot be generalized to the students at KMUTNB. With regard to attitude studies undertaken in Thailand (Thadphoothon 2001; Nuchnoi, 2008; Chaihiranwattana and Sirikun, 2011), it seems that their main focus has been on investigating Thai students' attitudes toward English only in an educational context. Therefore, not enough attention has been directed to English in other kinds of contexts.

Unlike previous studies, this paper aims to examine Thai undergraduate students' attitudes toward English in a wider range of contexts, including personal, recreational, educational, professional, and international ones. In addition, this paper also examines the students' attitudes toward Thai users of English and investigates if there is a correlation between the users and the uses of English in five contexts. It is expected that when considering together attitudes toward English language users and uses of English in different contexts, we will be able to gain a broader and deeper understanding of what the students think and feel about the target language. With a better understanding of the students' attitudes, teachers can then make better informed decisions about teaching-assessing methods, teaching objectives, tasks and materials, etc.

#### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) To investigate the students' attitudes toward the users and uses of English in five contexts—the personal, recreational, educational, professional, and international
- 2) To compare the students' overall attitudes among six faculties, namely Engineering, Applied Sciences, Technical Education, Industrial Technology and Management, Agro-Industry, and Architecture and Design
- 3) To ascertain if there is a correlation between the users and the uses of English in the five contexts

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since attitude is the key concept investigated in this study, the following topics are reviewed in this section: 1) the definitions of attitude, 2) the components of attitude, 3) the importance of attitude in foreign language learning, 4) attitudes and motivations, and 5) previous studies.

#### **Definitions of Attitude**

In general, an attitude is a psychological construct, defined by Michael and Graham (2005, 150) as "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies toward socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols". It is also viewed as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly and Shelly 1993, 1).

In a language-learning context, the term "language attitude" is defined more specifically in the (Richards and Richard, 2002, 297) as follows: "The attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have toward each other's languages or to their

own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings toward a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes toward a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Language attitudes may have an effect on second language or foreign language learning. The measurement of language attitudes provides information which is useful in language teaching and language learning.”

As can be seen in the above definitions, an attitude can be simply described as an opinion and feeling which we usually have about something, and this opinion and feeling can influence our behaviors.

### Components of Attitude

According to Wenden (1991), the term “attitude” can be classified into three interrelated components: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. These three attitudinal components are based on the three theoretical approaches of humanism, behaviorism, and cognitivism respectively (Abidin *et al.*, 2012).

The affective component involves the individual’s feelings and emotions toward an object. According to Choy and Salah (2006), Harn (2015) and Liu (2016) the learning process is an emotional one and is affected by different emotional factors. Attitude can also help learners express if they like or dislike the objects or the surrounding environment. Choy and Salah (2006) stated that the inner feelings and emotions of foreign language learners influence their perspectives toward the target language.

The behavioral component of attitude deals with the way in which one behaves and reacts in particular situations. In other words, it refers to the tendency to adopt particular learning behaviors (Abidin *et al.*, 2012). According to Kara (2009), a positive attitude can lead to learners’ positive behaviors toward courses of study. Such learners have been observed to be more eager to solve problems, to acquire the information and skills useful for their daily life, and to engage themselves emotionally.

The cognitive component involves the beliefs, thoughts or viewpoints about the object of the attitude (Abidin *et al.*, 2012). In the process of language learning, this aspect of attitude includes the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge that they have received and their understanding. The cognitive attitude can be classified into the four steps of a) connecting the background knowledge and the new one, b) creating new knowledge, c) checking new knowledge, and d) applying the new knowledge in many situations.

To sum up, these three attitudinal components are called the ABC model of attitudes (McLeod, 2009), which consists of what we feel, what we do, and what we think about someone or something. For example, “I’m scared of my English teacher,” “I’ll avoid speaking English to him,” and “I think he is too strict.” Johnston (2014) states that feelings, behaviors, and thoughts are all related, but the last two are easier to change than the first one. This is because we have more control over what we think and what we do. For the present study, the questionnaire items were designed to cover all the three attitudinal components, so that the research would yield a holistic view of the students’ attitudes.

### Importance of Attitude in Foreign Language Learning

Gardner and Lambert (cited in Abidin *et al.*, 2012) state that achievement in foreign language learning relies not only on learners’ intellectual capacity and study skills, but also on their attitudes toward a target language. The learners’ positive attitudes could enhance the process of language learning and positively influence the nature of the learners’ behaviors. This view is supported by many researchers. Inal *et al.* (2003) for example found that there was a high relationship between attitude toward English and English achievement on

the part of final-year high school students in eastern Turkey. Further, Al-Mansour (2014) discovered that having positive attitudes was one of the factors that helped learners in Saudi Arabia acquire the best pronunciation. Additionally, Vipathananon (1990) found a significantly positive correlation between Thai students' attitudes toward English reading and their reading comprehension. On the other hand, a lack of a positive attitude can contribute to learners' low achievement. If learners have negative attitudes toward language learning, they are less likely to be motivated and enthusiastic in class. For example, Kiptui and Mbugua (2009) found that negative attitudes toward English were the strongest affective and psychological factor that influenced poor English performance among secondary school students in Kenya.

Furthermore, identifying learners' attitudes benefits not only the learners themselves, but also other stakeholders. According to Al Noursi (2013), understanding learners' attitudes benefits all stakeholders in different ways. For example, it can help language teachers, syllabus designers, and curriculum developers select better teaching strategies, design better lesson plans, and develop better language curricula for a particular group of students. Consequently, it is hoped that the results of the present study will provide valuable insights into the students' attitudes, which will in turn enable all stakeholders, especially teachers, to make better decisions regarding the English teaching-learning situation at KMUTNB.

#### **Attitudes and Motivation**

Motivation in second language learning is a complex phenomenon which can be defined as the most important factor affecting the success of students' learning because it can lead them to choose or ignore the instructional goal. It also defines what students will do rather than what they can do Harmer (cited in Jaipetch, 2007; Heinich, 2002).

In general, motivation can be described as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action (Brown, 1994). Harmer (cited in Jaipetch, 2007) separates motivation into two main categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The former arises when learners seem to engage in activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. In a language-learning classroom, what happens in the classroom will be important factors affecting this kind of motivation. These factors include physical conditions, methods, the teacher, and success in tasks. Extrinsic motivation, according to Brown (1994), comes from outside an individual. This kind of motivation occurs when learners wish to achieve something or receive extrinsic rewards such as money, prizes, grades, and even positive feedback. Moreover, motivation can be defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and their attitudes toward the second language community (Ahmed, 2015). In the aspect of learners' communicative needs, if learners need to speak the second language in a wide range of social situations or to fulfill professional ambitions, they will perceive the communicative value of the second language and will therefore be motivated to acquire proficiency in it. Similarly, if learners have positive attitudes toward the speakers of the language, they will want to come into contact with them. Gardner and Lambert (cited in Ahmed, 2015) also suggested two main types of motivation, integrative and instrumental. The term "integrative motivation" was defined to refer to language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment. This type of motivation arises when learners are attracted by the culture or community of the language and when they want to know about or integrate themselves into that culture. Instrumental motivation on the other hand is used for language learning for more immediate or practical goals. It can be described as the learner's belief that language can lead him or her to get a better job or pass an exam Harmer (cited in Jaipetch, 2007).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that learners who feel more warmly about a language and who want to become integrated into the culture of its speakers are more highly motivated (and learn more successfully) than those who are only learning language as a means to an end. In other words, integrative motivation is more powerful than instrumental motivation. Similarly, Bohannon (2014) has suggested that the intrinsic motivation tends to correlate better with long-term success than the extrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, it is clear that highly-motivated students, whatever kind of motivation they have, do better than those without any motivation at all (Gardner and Lambert, cited in Ahmed, 2015).

Learning a second language can also be source of enrichment or a source of resentment, depending on the learners' attitudes (Ahmed, 2015). If external pressure is the learner's only reason for learning a language, internal motivation may be minimal and general attitudes toward learning may be negative. In addition, one factor which often affects motivation is the social dynamic or power relationship between the languages. That is, members of a minority group learning the language of a majority group may have different attitudes and motivation from those of majority group members learning a minority language.

A lot of research has been conducted on the role of attitudes and motivation in second language learning. Overall, the findings show that success in second language learning is influenced by positive attitudes and motivations (Gardner, cited in Ahmed, 2015). However, it cannot be clearly asserted whether it is the attitude and motivation that produce successful learning, or the successful learning that enhances attitude and motivation, or if both are affected by each other. In other words, the question is whether learners are more highly motivated because they are successful, or if they are successful because they are highly motivated (Skehan, cited in Ahmed, 2015).

#### PREVIOUS STUDIES

Many studies have been conducted to explore the nature of students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language in general and EFL in particular. For example, Abidin *et al.* (2012) undertook a research with 180 secondary school students from three specializations—basic sciences, life sciences, and social sciences—to investigate their attitudes toward learning English in terms of the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. The finding revealed their negative attitudes toward learning English, and there were statistically-significant attitudinal differences regarding gender and the field of study but not year of study.

Alkaff (2013) directed a research with science and art students in order to ascertain the students' attitudes toward learning English. The study showed that most of them had a positive attitude, and they tried to improve their English even though there were few opportunities to practice. Al Noursi (2013) investigated whether the students' attitudes were affected by the teacher's country of origin. The result revealed that the majority of the students had positive attitudes toward learning the English language, and the teacher's country of origin did not influence their positive orientation toward their English language. Ahmed (2015) conducted a study with non-major English learners in Malaysia in order to investigate their attitudes toward English learning and what might have hindered their learning. The finding showed that their attitudes toward English learning and use were extremely positive.

In terms of the studies undertaken in Thailand, Chaihiranwattana and Sirikun (2011) carried out a survey to identify the attitudes toward English language learning of 388 undergraduate non-English major students from Siam University. The findings showed that most of students had a positive attitude while Thadphoothon (2001) found that the under-

graduate students from Dhurakij Pundit University had neutral attitudes toward English learning. In the study done by Nuchnoi (2008), the results indicated that undergraduates from Rangsit University were highly motivated and found English learning very interesting, necessary, and useful. However, this did not come as a surprise because these Rangsit University undergraduates were English majors.

Although several researchers have already investigated whether Thai undergraduate students have positive attitudes toward English learning, one of the still less explored areas is whether Thai undergraduate students in the field of science and technology also possess positive attitudes toward English.

In addition, previous researches did not direct enough attention to the use of English beyond the educational context. Consequently, the present research aims to fill this gap and also to explore whether there is a significant attitudinal difference among students from six different faculties, and whether there is a correlation between the users and the uses of English in five different contexts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The population was approximately 4,200 non-English major, first-year students at KMUTNB representing six faculties: engineering, applied sciences, technical education, industrial technology and management, agro-industry, and architecture and design. The students' age range was 18-21.

The survey participants of this study were 550 students (332 males and 218 females) who were randomly selected from each of the six faculties. According to Krejcie and Daryle (1970), this was a sufficient sample size as it was at the 95% confidence level. For the interview, the sample involved 60 students (ten from each faculty) who were also randomly selected from the 550 students.

### **Research Instruments**

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used as the instruments in this study. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the students' responses regarding their attitudes toward the users of English and the uses of English in five contexts—personal, recreational, educational, professional, and international—by using four-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

The term "English users" in this study refers to Thai people who can speak English quite well. For the five contexts of language use, their different dimensions were adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and are illustrated in the table 1. However, the table is only illustrative, not exhaustive.

The questionnaire was developed to cover the three components of attitudes: affective, cognitive, and behavioral (Wenden, 1991). There were in total 40 items, with an open-ended part for additional comments (if any). The questionnaire was written in Thai to ensure correct understanding. The table 2 shows the structure of the questionnaire.

### **Data Collection**

With the help of 14 colleagues at KMUTNB, it took around one month to collect all of the questionnaires. Two weeks later, the semi-structured interview was conducted in Thai and tape-recorded by the two researchers. It was conducted six times at six different faculties.

**TABLE 1.** Context of language use

Contexts	Locations	Institutions	Persons	Events	Activities
Personal	- own home	- the family	- parents	family meals	- living routines
	- friend's home	- social networks	- siblings	- holidays	- chatting
Recreational	- bedrooms		- friends	- parties	- games/sports
	- own space		- oneself	- leisure time	- entertaining
Educational	- schools	- schools	- teachers	- lessons	- studying
	- classrooms	- universities	- advisers	- lab work	- presenting
	- laboratories	- colleges	- classmates	- seminars	- discussing
Professional	- offices	- corporations	- employers	- meetings	- managing
	- factories	- industries	- colleagues	- interviews	- marketing
	- workshops	- trade unions	- clients	- conferences	- production
International	- abroad	- hotels	- foreigners	- travelling	- shopping
	- airports	- airlines	- tourists	- excursion	- socializing
	- attractions	- travel agencies	- salespersons	- fairs	- training

**TABLE 2.** Structure of the questionnaire

Attitudinal Aspects	Components of Attitudes			Total No. of Items
	Affective	Cognitive	Behavioral	
Users	3	2	2	7
Personal	2	3	2	7
Recreational	2	2	2	6
Educational	2	3	2	7
Professional	2	2	3	7
International	2	2	2	6

### Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, aiming to find out the students' attitudes toward the users and uses of English in five contexts, the data from all of the questionnaire items were analyzed by means of arithmetic mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Additionally, the data from the open-ended part of the questionnaire and the interview were analyzed and classified under positive or negative responses.

Next, in order to answer the second research question, aiming to compare the students' overall attitudes among six different faculties, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc tests were used.

Last, in order to answer the third research question, aiming to examine if there was a correlation between the six attitudinal aspects, the Pearson correlation coefficient was computed.

## RESULTS

### Students' Overall Attitudes toward the Users and Uses of English in Five Contexts

The analyses were based on 40 questionnaire items, where four-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) were used. In order to interpret the statistical findings, the following evaluation criteria were applied.

1.00-1.75 means that the student's attitude was highly negative.

1.76-2.50 means that the student's attitude was negative.

2.51-3.25 means that the student's attitude was positive.

3.26-4.00 means that the student's attitude was highly positive.

The findings regarding the overall attitudes of the students from all faculties and those from each of the six faculties are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

**TABLE 3 .** Overall attitudes of the students from all faculties

Attitudinal Aspects	M	SD	Interpretation
English users	3.11	.37	Positive
Personal	3.12	.35	Positive
Recreational	2.72	.39	Positive
Educational	2.81	.38	Positive
Professional	2.92	.34	Positive
International	2.83	.39	Positive
All aspects	2.92	.27	Positive

According to Table 3, the 550 students from all six faculties had overall positive attitudes toward the users and uses of English ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .27$ ). While their attitude toward the use of English in the personal context was rated as highest ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = .35$ ), their attitude toward the use of English in the recreational context was rated as lowest ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .39$ ).

**TABLE 4 .** Overall attitudes of the students from each faculty

Attitudinal Aspects	ENG		APP		TEC		IND		AGR		ARC	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
English users	3.13	.39	3.14	.36	3.06	.39	3.06	.34	3.20	.36	3.11	.36
Personal	3.16	.34	3.17	.34	3.11	.33	3.10	.39	3.09	.34	3.09	.34
Recreational	2.78	.36	2.75	.40	2.69	.34	2.57	.39	2.73	.39	2.90	.39
Educational	2.94	.38	2.85	.39	2.77	.33	2.67	.39	2.76	.31	2.93	.37
Professional	3.05	.33	2.97	.36	2.85	.32	2.83	.36	2.95	.27	2.92	.36
International	2.99	.39	2.84	.38	2.74	.36	2.70	.38	2.87	.35	3.00	.33
All aspects	3.01	.25	2.96	.26	2.87	.25	2.82	.28	2.93	.26	2.99	.27

Note: ENG = Engineering, APP = Applied Science, TEC = Technical Education, IND = Industrial Technology and Management, AGR = Agro-Industry, ARC = Architecture and Design, a, n = 81: b, n = 116: c, n = 90: d, n = 130: e, n = 66: f, n = 67

According to Table 4, the students from each of the six faculties had positive attitudes toward each aspect, with the agro-industry students showing the highest mean score regarding the users of English ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .36$ ), whereas the industrial technology and management students showed the lowest mean score in the use of English in the recreational context ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = .39$ ). Regarding attitudes toward all aspects, those having the highest overall mean score were the students from the Faculty of Engineering ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = .25$ ), while those having the lowest overall mean score were the students from the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = .28$ ).

#### Comparisons of the Students' Overall Attitudes among Six Different Faculties

In order to compare the overall attitudes toward the users and uses of English among the students from different faculties and to determine whether there were any significant differences between the attitudes of these six groups, one-way analysis of variance was used and the results are presented in Table 5.



**TABLE 5.** One-way analysis of variance of students' overall attitudes by faculty

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.54	5	.51	7.29	.00
Within groups	37.88	544	.07		
Total	40.42	549			

According to Table 5, there was a statistically-significant difference between the overall attitudes of the six faculties as determined by one-way ANOVA ( $F(5,544) = 7.29, p = .00$ ). Post hoc comparisons using the LSD test indicated the following:

- The overall attitudes of 1) the Faculty of Engineering, 2) the Faculty of Applied Sciences, and 3) the Faculty of Architecture and Design were significantly higher than those of the 1) the Faculty of Technical Education and 2) the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management at  $p < .05$ ; and
- The overall attitude of the Faculty of Agro-Industry was significantly higher than that of the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management at  $p < .05$ ; but
- The overall attitudes of the 1) Faculty of Engineering, 2) the Faculty of Applied Sciences, 3) the Faculty of Architecture and Design, and 4) the Faculty of Agro-Industry did not differ significantly from one another; and
- The overall attitude of the Faculty of Technical Education did not differ significantly from that of 1) the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management, and 2) the Faculty of Agro-Industry.

In summary, the overall attitude of the students from the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management was found to be significantly lower than that of the other five faculties.

#### Inter-correlations between the Six Attitudinal Aspects

In order to examine whether there was a correlation between the six attitudinal aspects, i.e. the attitudes toward the users and uses of English in the five contexts, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated and the results are presented in Table 6.

**TABLE 6.** Correlation matrix for the six attitudinal aspects

Attitudinal Aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6
English users	-					
Personal	.52**	-				
Recreational	.33**	.42**	-			
Educational	.31**	.42**	.50**	-		
Professional	.42**	.48**	.45**	.53**	-	
International	.39**	.40**	.54**	.49**	.51**	-

As shown in Table 6, the six attitudinal aspects were positively inter-correlated. In particular, the statistical results suggested the following:

- The attitude toward the users of English was most strongly correlated with that toward the use of English in the personal context,  $r(550) = .52, p < .01$ ;
- The attitude toward the use of English in the educational context was most strongly correlated with that toward the professional context,  $r(550) = .53, p < .01$ ; and
- The attitude toward the use of English in the recreational context was most strongly correlated with that toward the international context,  $r(550) = .54, p < .01$ .

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Overall Positive Attitudes toward the Users and Uses of English

The results of the study revealed that the students from all six faculties had overall positive attitudes toward the users of English and the uses of English in five contexts ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .27$ ). This result was slightly surprising as it had been expected, due to their in-class behaviors, that the students from some faculties might have had negative attitudes toward the users and uses of English. Nevertheless, this was a hopeful sign that the students might have stronger motivation to learn English than had been perceived, and they could be more than ready to work harder to improve their EFL performance.

The fact that they had positive attitudes toward all six aspects may have been for various reasons, but one important reason could be an increasing awareness about the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which will result in greater demand for the use of English in the workplace. It is undeniable that English is the key to communication in many domains, especially in business. According to the interviews, many students from different faculties agreed that being fluent in English was very important in the job market. Two of them stated the following:

- "Because of the AEC, if we can't speak English, it'll be really difficult to get good jobs;"
- "We need to take learning English more seriously, otherwise we won't be able to compete in the AEC marketplace."

It is worth mentioning that although all attitudinal aspects were rated as positive, none was rated as highly positive. This means that there is still room for attitude improvement. By using appropriate learning materials, teaching techniques, and creating a stimulating learning environment, the students' attitudes toward English can be improved. As English teachers, we should not be satisfied with just a "positive" attitude result; our ideal aim should be a "highly positive" one. We thus should continue putting more effort into helping our students develop more positive attitudes, or at least maintain the existing positive degree, and become better EFL learners. According to the 1999 National Education Act of Thailand, the learning objectives of any English courses, both core and elective, should not be limited to knowledge and skills but should include positive attitudes as well. This suggests that attitudes are definitely among the important factors that affect students' proficiency.

### Attitudes toward the Use of English in the Personal Context

Out of the six attitudinal aspects, the use of English in the personal context obtained the highest mean score ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = .35$ ). This was another surprising finding because, based on the researchers' personal observations, the students were rarely seen conversing with their friends in English out of class. However, if we look closely at the persons involved in the personal context, it also includes the students' parents. According to the questionnaire, the students most highly agreed with the items stating "My parents think learning English is very important" ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) and "My parents have been encouraging me to do my best in English courses" ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .61$ ).

Additionally, according to the interviews, many students pointed out that their parents' expectations were one of the key reasons why they wanted to be successful in mastering English. The following responses are representative of this view: - "My parents want me to excel in English. They said English was a global language and it would help prepare me for the changing world. So I don't want to disappoint them;" and - "I really want to get better at English so that my parents would be proud of me."

Therefore, it can be said that for Thai undergraduate students living in a tight-knit and family-oriented community, their parents still have considerable influence on their attitudes and remain as their extrinsic motivation. This thus may explain why their attitude in the personal context was rated as the most highly positive.

#### **Attitudes toward the Use of English in the Recreational Context**

The attitude toward the use of English in the recreational context obtained the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .39$ ). Among the six attitudinal aspects, using English in the recreational context seemed to be most closely linked to the intrinsic motivation; that is, the motivation to use or learn English comes from within the students themselves. In this case, it means that the students showed the lowest positive attitude toward spending their leisure time using English for personal satisfaction or enjoyment. According to the questionnaire, the items with which the students mostly disagreed belonged to this category. They stated for example the following: "I choose to watch movies in English rather than those dubbed into Thai" ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) and "It is more fun to chat online in English" ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = .65$ ), and "I enjoy reading English magazines" ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .64$ ).

In addition, according to the interviews, some students explained why they found using English as their pastime unenjoyable:

- "I don't like watching movies in English because I don't understand what they're saying or what's going on;"
- "It's difficult to enjoy the movie if you have to keep reading the Thai subtitles, which sometimes appear too briefly;"
- "Chatting online in Thai is much more fun because I can express myself better and quicker, but sometimes I spell Thai words with English letters just to spice up the conversation;"
- and
- "English magazines and newspapers are way too difficult for me. Looking the words up in a dictionary takes away all the pleasure."

Since using English in the recreational context is closely related to the intrinsic motivation, and according to Bohannon (2014) the intrinsic motivation tends to correlate better with long-term success than the extrinsic one, English teachers should find a way to help students incorporate English into their recreational activities. They should train the students in some communicating strategies so that the students gradually develop a sense of personal fulfillment or internal rewards in using English. This is not going to be easy for the teachers to accomplish but it is definitely worthwhile for students. If the students can regularly use English out of class and be internally motivated to practice English for pleasure, their chances of success in acquiring English will be greater.

#### **Attitude toward the Use of English in the Educational Context**

Although the findings showed that the students' attitude toward the use of English in the educational context was generally at a positive level ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = .38$ ), two questionnaire items in this context were found to be disagreed with by the students: "I feel that English is easy to learn" ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .80$ ), and "I'd take English courses even if they weren't compulsory subjects at the university" ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .76$ ).

This was a striking contrast to the general findings and triggered us to think that there could be something wrong with the way English has been taught and learned at the university. In order to understand the situation better, the following are some of the students' comments from the interviews:

- "I think English was really difficult to learn because we put too much emphasis on tenses and structures and also translations;" - "I've never found studying English easy. After many years of studying, I still don't understand English. I still can't use English to communicate in real situations;"

- "If English was just an elective course, I wouldn't enroll because it's not fun to study. It's always been a stressful subject for me. And I'm afraid of getting bad grades which will lower my GPA;"

- "If I can choose, I'd only enroll in an English course which focuses on speaking, listening, or business communication. I don't like studying grammar because they're too difficult and not a practical type of knowledge."

From the above comments, it was quite conclusive that despite having general positive attitudes toward studying English, an English course whose focus was on grammatical structures was not a preferable subject for the students. This implies changes not only in the course objectives, course contents, and course assessments, but also in the teaching-learning methods and classroom atmosphere. It seems that a communicative method is preferred to the translation method, which has obviously been practiced by many teachers.

Moreover, in Thadphoothon's (2001) study, it was found that the attitudes toward studying English, among other variables, contributed up to 17% of the students' achievements. The question thus arises how we can improve the students' attitudes and move them in a preferable direction or to a higher level. A concrete answer to this question is beyond the scope of the present study. However, the correlation results in this study indicated that the attitude in the educational context was most strongly correlated with the attitude in the professional context,  $r(550) = .53, p < .01$ . This means that the more that students realize the importance of English for their future employment, the greater is the possibility that they will have positive attitudes toward their current English study.

A helpful suggestion, consequently, would be to show the students the real-life benefits of how being competent in English can help provide them with a competitive edge over others and enable them to advance in their future career. This could be done in many ways, such as introducing successful graduates in their fields to them or exposing them to authentic workplaces. Furthermore, the teaching and learning at the university level should reflect and prepare the students for the real use of English in their occupations. Since many companies in Thailand increasingly require their employees to be able to listen to and speak English fluently, the majority of class time should be spent on listening and speaking skills and familiarizing the students with useful occupational-related expressions. This will help them understand the real occupational benefits of learning, see the link between their effort and outcome, and perhaps become more goal-oriented toward learning English.

#### **The Students from the Faculty of Technical Education and the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management Having the Lowest Positive Attitudes**

One of the major findings in this study was that the students from the Faculty of Technical Education and the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management were found to have the lowest positive attitudes toward the users and uses of English in the five contexts. Their mean scores were 2.87 (SD = .25) and 2.82 (SD = .28) respectively. Nevertheless, these results were not entirely unexpected because, based on their learning achievements, their grades were below average, and based on the researchers' teaching experiences, their English competency was generally lower than that of the students from the other four fac-

ulties. Although the students' learning achievement was not a variable investigated in the present study, this somehow suggested a positive correlation between the students' learning achievements and the students' attitudes. This suggestion agrees with the findings in the studies carried out by Thadphoothon (2001) and Chaihiranwattana and Sirikun (2011), which reported that students with a higher degree of positive attitudes did better in their English courses.

On average, the students from these two faculties were low achievers of English. This, in turn, may explain why some students in the interviews clearly expressed a negative attitude toward the use of English in the professional context. They stated that they were not confident in their English ability, and they did not want to work in an international company after graduating. The following excerpts represent their negativity:

- "I'm not going to apply for a job in an international company because I don't want to go through a job interview conducted in English;" and

- "I don't want to be in serious trouble or be under a lot of stress because I'm unable to communicate in English with my foreign bosses or colleagues."

Another important negativity expressed by the students from these two faculties was related to the use of English in the international context. According to the questionnaire, the item stating "If I had a chance to visit an English-speaking country, I'd try to speak English to the native speakers as often as possible" obtained a low mean score of 2.20 (SD = .77), and according to the interviews, some of the students explained the reasons behind their avoidance of communicating with the native speakers as follows:

- "I avoid speaking to foreigners because I'm afraid they would speak too fast and I wouldn't be able to understand them. It's going to make me feel really embarrassed;"

- "If I go abroad, I just want to have fun. I don't want to feel pressured or lose face in front of others because I can't answer English questions;" and

- "If possible, I'd try to stay close to my Thai friends or other Thai people. Let them do the translations for me. And I'll just read the English signs."

From the above excerpts, it can be seen that some of the students from these two faculties lacked confidence in communicating in English and opted instead for avoidance both in the professional and international contexts. This may partly be a result of the students' own introverted personality and the dominant concept of face-saving in Thai culture. Therefore, this implies that the students should be drilled more in speaking and listening skills. They should also be introduced to and practice various communicative strategies. They should have as many chances as possible to practice speaking with foreigners so that eventually they will feel at ease when speaking English.

#### Highly Positive Items versus Negative Items

One last finding worth discussing is the fact that most of the questionnaire items, which were rated as highly positive, belonged to the cognitive component of attitude while those that were rated as negative mostly came from the affective component. Among the 40 questionnaire items, eleven, twenty, and nine items were rated as highly positive, positive, and negative respectively. Out of the eleven highly-positive items, eight items belonged to the cognitive component, such as "I think English is really necessary for my future career" (M = 3.72, SD = .47) and "If we're fluent in English, it'll be a definite plus over other job candidates" (M = 3.72, SD = .50). However, out of the nine negative items, six items came from the affective component, such as "I like speaking English with my friends" (M = 2.50, SD = .65) and "I enjoy working with English-speaking foreigners" (M = 2.50, SD = .66).

This finding suggested that the students knew and realized that English was important for them, but they still could not find studying and using English pleasurable. Consequently, an important question for English teachers is not how they can make the students appreciate the importance of English, but how they can make studying English an enjoyable experience for them. According to Johnston (2014), the affective component of attitude is the most difficult component to change. Our feelings are powerful and the way we feel cannot be changed as easily as the way we think or the way we behave. Therefore, making learning and using English fun for students is another challenging task for teachers. However, if this task is achieved, the students' attitudes toward the use of English in the educational context could be higher, the student-teacher relationship could be better, and they could become more cooperative and attentive perhaps both in and out of class.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The present study is not without its limitations. Since the participants in this study included only non-English major first-year students in Thai programs, the results might not be generalizable to other groups of students, such as English-major students, those in their final year of university study, and those studying in English or international programs. It should be noted that if different research participants were used, the results could be yielded differently.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The present study revealed that the first-year undergraduate students at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok had overall positive attitudes toward the users and uses of English in the five different contexts focused on. The results from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview provided a deeper understanding of how and why the students had such attitudes in each context. It was discovered that the students from the Faculty of Engineering showed the highest overall mean score. However, special attention was drawn to the students from the Faculty of Technical Education and the Faculty of Industrial Technology and Management, for their attitudes were found to be the lowest in the study.

Another important finding was the fact that the students showed the lowest positive attitudes in the recreational context, and this finding reflected their low intrinsic motivation regarding English learning. Finally, the strong correlation between the uses of English in the educational and professional contexts was also pointed out. Various pedagogical implications of the findings have been suggested in the discussion. For example, 1) instead of grammatical structures, the focus of English courses should be placed more on speaking and listening skills; 2) the communicative teaching method is preferred to the translation method; and 3) the link between the students' learning effort and their occupational benefits should be strengthened.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the findings indicated that the students already had positive attitudes toward the users and uses of English, their low learning achievements may not lie with their attitudes. Therefore, what factors contribute to such low learning achievements remain to be investigated and discovered.

They could be factors from both the teachers' and students' parts, such as mismatches between teaching techniques and learning styles, between course objectives and students' expectations, or between the difficulty levels of the course content and the students' proficiency, etc. Moreover, it would also be of interest to investigate 1) whether ESP courses

such as English for Work or English for other specific occupations, whose emphases are on speaking and listening, can really bring about a positive change in students' attitudes, and 2) what teaching-learning methods can lead to the most pleasurable and suitable learning experiences for KMUTNB's science and technology-oriented students.

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— This article does not have any appendix. —