

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Background

English is a leading international language and has spread into many countries, including Thailand, as the main language of globalization. Globalization is bringing about a major transition in business and education in Thailand. It is forcing workplaces and educational institutions to adapt more to international integration. The growth of multinational businesses causes domestic firms to restructure their organization and operations to suit a larger, rapidly changing economic environment. In order to compete effectively with multinational companies in today's global economy, domestic Thai companies need qualified personnel with good English skills for business communication. Obviously, in both domestic and multinational corporations, one of the basic qualifications required in almost every position is a "good command of English" (Griggers, 2004). In other words, English language proficiency is one of the most important criteria for staff recruitment and promotion.

The increased significance of English language proficiency in employment and career development has resulted in Thai graduates needing to be equipped with a recognised qualification of English proficiency. One of the most reliable measures of English proficiency is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Frequently, a TOEIC score is used as an indicator of English proficiency by those seeking career opportunities in domestic and multinational companies (Rogers, 2003; Educational Testing Service, 2005).

Different levels of English proficiency for job candidates can generally be measured according to the range of TOEIC scores as shown in Table 1.1 (Rymniak, 1997: 11).

Table 1.1 Guideline to TOEIC Score Interpretation (for Job Candidates)

TOEIC Score	Proficiency Level	Proficiency Description
200	Elementary Proficiency	Able to satisfy basic survival requirements
400	Intermediate Proficiency	Can initiate and maintain face-to-face conversations; satisfy limited social demands
600	Working Proficiency	Able to satisfy limited work requirements and routine social demands
800	Advanced Working Proficiency	Able to satisfy most work requirements with acceptable and effective language usage

Many jobs in Thailand require varying TOEIC test scores. Table 1.2 shows the range of TOEIC scores required for various domestic and multinational positions in the Thai workforce. For example, a position as an airport information clerk requires a TOEIC score of 400 or more; a position as a customs agent or a customer service representative requires a TOEIC score of 550 or more; a position as a flight attendant, a sales manager or an accountant requires a TOEIC score of 600 to 650; while the position of logistics coordinator requires a score as high as 800 or more.

Table 1.2 TOEIC-required Positions in Domestic and Multinational Companies in Thailand

Minimum Score Requirements	Positions
300	hotel waiter/waitress/bartender
350	hotel room-service order taker
400	airport information clerk, bookkeeper, hotel head waiter, operations officer, shipping and receiving clerk
500	aircraft maintenance engineer
550	business service center agent, customs agent, customer service representative
600	assistant hotel manager, flight attendant, sales manager
650	accountant, engineer, system analyst
700	sales coordinator
740	cooperate secretary officer
750	logistics engineer
800	executive manager, executive secretary, general manager, logistics coordinator, marketing manager, senior accountant

The information shown in Table 1.2 has been gathered from several sources from October 12, 2005 to March 31, 2006: The Nation ('Jobs', page 4-10), Bangkok Post ('Classified', page 1-5), TOEIC Examinee Handbook (page 39), and the Internet (<http://www.jobbkk.com>; <http://jobstone.blogspot.com>; and <http://www.jobpub.com/articles/showarticle.asp?id=500>).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There seems to be a contradiction between the relatively great demand placed on English language proficiency and the actually inadequate English proficiency of Thai learners. It is arguable that Thai learners generally spend about thirteen years on studying English in school but many of them still cannot communicate in English (Ruksasut, 1985; cited in Thongpinit, 1996). Moreover, Thai learners who study English at every level do not reach the criteria of the particular level to which they study (Sukamonson, 1990; cited in Thongpinit, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2002).

Currently, inadequate English proficiency is a significant problem for Thai learners trying to meet the requirements of employers for staff to possess adequate English language skills. Based on one of the 2005 TOEIC test results, Thai test takers did not do well when compared with test takers in neighboring countries like the Philippines, Singapore and Cambodia. The average score of Thai TOEIC test takers came fourth among six Asian countries in 2005 as shown in Table 1.3 (The Weekly Manager, August 22-28, 2005; Educational Testing Service, 2005; and http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2005/08/10/headlines/data/headlines_18305734.html).

Table 1.3 The 2005 Average TOEIC Scores

Average TOEIC Scores (2004-2005)	
Country	Average Score (Maximum Possible Score: 990)
1. Philippines	751
2. Singapore	628
3. Cambodia	606
4. Thailand	524
5. Indonesia	471
6. Vietnam	446

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The average TOEIC score of Thai test takers was at 524 (Table 1.3, page 4) which fell into the intermediate English proficiency level in Table 1.1 on page 2 but this score met only the requirements for the positions of hotel waiter/waitress/bartender, hotel room-service order taker, and airport information clerk (Table 1.2, page 3). This indicates that this intermediate level of Thai examinees' English proficiency is still low and inadequate to meet other several jobs such as accountants, customer service representatives, flight attendants, system analysts, and logistics coordinators. There are also many other studies revealing the low levels of Thai learners' average English proficiency measured by TOEIC (Wilson and Chavanich, 1989; Wilson and Stupak, 2001, Wilson et al., 2004; and Educational Testing Service, 2005).

As English proficiency leads to employment opportunities, it is obvious that low English language proficiency must be considered a barrier to Thai university graduates' career prospects, since more and more jobs demand an ability to communicate in English, particularly in the workplaces where English is a required language. This requirement for English communication ability in the Thai workforce challenges Thai educational institutions to produce graduates who can meet the intense demands of proficiency in English. However, in the survey investigating employers' career satisfaction conducted by the Planning and Development Division, Prince of Songkla University (PSU) in 2005, employers of the PSU graduates in 2003 ranked the graduates' English language proficiency as the third most unsatisfactory job qualification, after leadership and management ability (See <http://www.psu.ac.th/planning/webvijai/Bunjob.html> and <http://www.psu.ac.th/planning/webvijai/satisfy.html>).

1.3 Rationale of the Study

With reference to the average TOEIC test score of Thai examinees (Wilson and Chavanich, 1989; Wilson and Stupak, 2001; Wilson et al., 2004; Educational Testing Service, 2005) and the finding regarding employers'

dissatisfaction with the English language proficiency of the 2003 PSU graduates

previously mentioned, it appears that the English proficiency of Thai test takers is relatively low and that of PSU graduates might not sufficiently meet employers' requirements and stated job qualifications. This low or insufficient English proficiency must be considered a serious problem for the career opportunities of Thai graduates and other job applicants, since one of the most important job requirements is proficiency in English and a satisfactory level of communicative English skills. There could be several factors in English language learning that are related to learners' English language proficiency such as motivation, attitudes, and anxiety about using English. It should be pointed out that there have been a relatively small number of studies on Thai university fourth-year students' English proficiency with relation to career opportunities and on motivation and motivational variables towards the students' English language learning.

Hence, it would be helpful to investigate the relationships among motivation, motivational variables, and English language proficiency of the fourth-year PSU students. The results of the study may provide information resources that would raise students' awareness of the significance of English proficiency on their career prospects, and may have useful implications for language learners and teachers in the development of English language learning and teaching to keep pace with the highly competitive era of globalization, in which English plays a major role in achieving success.

1.4 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study are:

1. To examine whether the subjects' English proficiency can be regarded as sufficient for most working positions in the Thai workforce to which the subjects' fields of study are relevant.
2. To investigate whether and how the subjects' English language learning motivation and motivational variables are related to the attainment of their English proficiency.

3. To determine whether there are any differences in motivation and motivational variables of the high and low proficiency subjects.
4. To find out whether and how motivation and motivational variables of the high and low proficiency subjects are related to their English language proficiency.

1.5 Research Questions

The present research addresses the following questions.

1. What is the English language proficiency of the subjects?
2. What are the relationships among motivation, motivational variables, and English language proficiency of the subjects?
3. Are there any differences in motivation and motivational variables between the high and low proficiency subjects?
4. What are the relationships among motivation, motivational variables, and English language proficiency of the high and low proficiency subjects?

1.6 Definitions of Terms

The key terms used in this study are defined as below.

1. **Motivation:** an internal state or condition of need, impulse, or desire that initiates, directs, and maintains a learner's behavior to move to a particular performance. In this study, motivation is classified into four types: intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation (Brown, 1994).
2. **Motivational variables:** factors affecting language learning motivation which are attitudes and anxiety (Oxford and Shearin, 1994).

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1. The study focuses on a purposive sample group of the 80 fourth-year Management Sciences PSU students, who took the official TOEIC examination from January 30th to February 1st, 2006, in the 2005 academic year at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus, Thailand. Thus, all findings from the study were only applicable to this sample group which did not represent all fourth-year Management Sciences PSU students.
2. The English proficiency of the subjects referred to in this study is based on the official TOEIC test scores gathered from January 30th to February 1st, 2006.
3. The important motivational variables focused on in this study are limited to attitudes and anxiety.