

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS

The discussions of the research findings are sequenced according to the research questions.

5.1 Perceived English Competence

One of the research questions was how the student participants perceived their English competency. The student participants perceived that they had a medium level of English competency. It was also found that the MBA and DBA students did not differ in their perception of their English proficiency. The mean of the MBA students (N=113) was 2.86 (SD=.78). This means that they perceived themselves as having an average level of English proficiency. The MBA students' perception was similar to that of the DBA's one: the mean of the DBA students was N=10 at 2.40 (SD=.96).

The fact that very few participants have self-rated their English ability as 'good' or 'excellent' provided useful information for program providers. Clearly, this finding signals that their English competency was insufficient to handle complex and advanced scholarship and research. Poor English skills have been reported by the Thailand's Office of Education Council as having a negative effect on the quality of Thai graduates (Office of Education Council of Thailand, BE 2551).

The respondents' English skills should be improved, as they are of significant factors in two spheres: study and employment. A newspaper report by Nanchanok Wongsamuth (15 December 2009) has quoted Yupadee Yudhanaraweesak, managing director of an executive recruitment agency Boyden Associates, as saying that, in 2015, Thailand will be disadvantaged by the limited English skills of its skilled workforce. A recent news article published online also stated that Thai graduates, in general, were weak at English skills (Barnes, 2005). The education establishment should be alarmed to learn that Thai graduates hoping to study overseas such as Australia or America would have problems using English in their studies. However, it is worth noting here that a big problem facing many international students in English-speaking countries is that they do not have adequate English skills to complete their studies (Baty and Caulcutt, 2005).

To be competent in English, as mentioned by many students during the roundtable seminars, may take time. It requires their active participation in the academic discourse community over a certain period. They need to engage in the academic English activities. Active engagement may refer to providing graduate students opportunities to learn from more experienced academics. This is consistent with previous research conducted by Somjit Kaewmanee (BE 2551) who investigated the problems of 81 graduate students in conducting their thesis at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University. The researcher found that the graduate students would like the professors offer them opportunities to take part in their research while they are taking their graduate courses. They said that such offer would allow them to gain direct experience before working on their research. This research has revealed that the respondents prefer more English, and the only remedial English available is inadequate.

5.2 Conceptions of the Thai Academics

Another research question asked was related to student participants' conception of the Thai academics in business administration. Most of the respondents surveyed did not perceive themselves as academics. However, most identified themselves as *part* of the academic community.

Their main reason (for 'No' to being an academic) was that they lacked the knowledge, abilities and skills required. Some of their reasons were as follows:

No, I do not think that I'm an academic. In my opinion, an academic is a person who works in academic-related areas. We are only students, and our aim is to use knowledge from this education to develop our organizations.

One of them stated this reason. "No, I'm still a student". Other reasons were: "*No, I haven't got the knowledge and ability required*"; "No, I'm still a student. Haven't graduated yet, and my knowledge is not adequate to qualify me as one of the academics".

In short, the respondents who said they were not academics had reasoned that they were still students and were not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills.

The reasons for 'Yes; (that they considered themselves 'academics')': "Yes, but still lacking one qualification --- the (English) language ability". This may reflect the importance of English proficiency as one of the criteria for being an academic in the Thai academic

community. This belief is in line with the notion of English as a gate-keeping tool in many societies (Pennycook, 1994).

All participants of the roundtable seminars recognized that English as a global language necessary for Thai academics in business administration. They reasoned that textbooks and reading materials are mostly in English. In fact, several of them reasoned that the bodies and knowledge and theories are encoded in the English language. However, based on the same sources, most of them said that English is only one of the many things that they have to know. For example, one participant said, “Not just English, but English is one of the criteria. I mean you need to have knowledge of other things as well.” Similarly, another MBA said: “I’d find it not easy to engage in the community if we feel that we lack the ability and knowledge”.

What are the essential qualities of graduate students? A prominent Thai scholar, Dr. Vichit Sri-Sa-Arn, has outlined three qualities of a graduate study; one of them is the so-called ‘scholarship.’ He put it this way:

When we talk about graduate study, we often refer to characteristics, which I think are universal across all disciplines. ... The first characteristic is that at this level, the focus is on the creation of specialization, aiming to develop a specialist for a given field. ... The second is that such the study emphasizes the creation of ‘new knowledge’ through research process.... The third is that a graduate study aims to create ‘scholarship’ in a person... that person would be a learned person, a person with scholarship.... or to develop an academic or a scholar.

Even though English competency is important, it is perceived to be one of the many things deemed necessary for a person to identify him/herself as an academic. When designing a program or a curriculum, educationists and policy makers need to take a broader perspective when designing an advanced-level curriculum such as the MBA or DBA programs. The need seems to go beyond the traditional conception of English competency; it is evidenced from this research that what they also need to acquire is a group of academic discourses. English is just a part of the many forms of literacy, and it should be perceived in broader terms than the traditional conception of literacy as the ability to read and write, be it in Thai and in English. In order for a person to be a member of a discourse community, they need to use the same language as other members of that community (Gee, 1990). Several participants said that they recognized their academic community through the use of the same language --- business jargon and similar styles of writing and speaking, both in Thai and English.

Yes, I can see it (my academic community). I can see that there are people who speak the same language as mine. We can share and exchange the opinions. I'm sure my community exists.

5.3 English use within members of the Thai academic community

Despite the fact that English was perceived as an important aspect of the community, their use of the language was limited. Across the four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it was found that the reading skill was the most frequently used skill according to the participants. Most of them rarely had to write in English, except for some key academic expressions and technical terms. Their levels of English use with other members of the Thai academic community were from low to moderate. The level of English use across the four skills was 'low'. This finding was similar to previous reports of Thai graduates' use of English (Pinyosunun, 2005).

Most of the students lacked overseas training. It was found that their level of such training was low. Of the total respondents of 130, only 24 (19%) said they have experienced training in countries outside of Thailand. The majority of them (106 or 81%) said they did not have such experience. The number of the participants who have experienced English language training overseas was also low. Of the total number of respondents, only 5 of them (4%) said they have done so. The majority of them said they never had such the experience (125 or 96%). The study found the relationships between the three domains of English use: for education, within the academic community, and at the workplace.

Table 5.1 Respondents' English use in three domains

Domains	Responses	Mean	SD	Meaning
Workplace	127	2.37	1.03	Low
Education	130	3.29	1.03	Moderate
Academic Community	130	2.47	1.05	Low

Table 5.1 shows that the majority of them used English for educational purposes ($\bar{X} = 3.29$). The correlation between the Use of English at workplace, the use English for education, and the Use of English within the community was statistically significant.

Table 5.2 Relationships between three Domains of English Use

Domains of English Use	Workplace	Education	Community
Workplace	1.00	.18*	.45**
Education	-	1.00	.44**
Community	-	-	1.00

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Most of the respondents moderately used English in their graduate study ($\bar{X} = 3.00$). Like other graduate students such as the study by Prinyajarn and Wannaruk (2008), the subjects of this study have limited opportunities to use and practice English in their graduate study.

5.4 Problems / Difficulties of English Use

Overall, they said that they experienced moderate difficulty communicating in English, across the four skills ($M = 3.29$). This is not a surprise as most of them said that their proficiency was at a medium level.

The finding is similar to a study by Porn Prommaharach (BE 2545) who investigated thesis writing problems of the graduate students of the Faculty of Science, Chiang Mai University. Among the top problems reported was their English ability. In particular, the students had difficulties using English to help them complete their research projects.

It seems obvious that the language problem affected their ability to complete their education. Research conducted by Sirirut Khoonchak (BE 2539) also reported that poor English reading skills negatively affected the graduate students' ability to complete their theses. Many graduate students at Mahidol University¹, for example, may struggle to cope with the demands of having to write their theses in English. The use of English in reading texts and others relevant to thesis writing was found to be one of the main problems preventing students from graduating.

¹ Graduate students of Mahidol University are required to write their long papers, theses, or dissertations in English. Any exception (in Thai) needs to satisfy the special circumstances that require the formal approval of the dean.

Source: <http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting/en/index.shtml> Retrieved on 20 December 2009.

Table 5.3 Relationships between the respondents' perceived institutional support, their perceived English competence, and their perceived coping ability

#	English Support Needed	Perceived English Competency	Perceived Coping Ability
English Support Needed	1.00	-.28**	-.39**
Perceived English Ability	-	1.00	.33**
Coping Ability	-	-	1.00

** = $P < .01$; * = $P < .05$

The table above shows that the three variables correlated significantly. English support was negatively related to their perceived English ability (-.28). This means that those students who perceived themselves as having lower levels of English competency were those who needed more English support from the program providers. The relationship between English support and their perceived coping ability was also negatively significant (-.39). This means that those whose coping levels were high were those whose need of English support from the university was low.

The significant positive relationship was found between the participants' perceived English competency and their coping ability (.33). The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). It implies that those who could cope well with the demands of English in their study were those whose English competency was at the higher level or vice versa. This finding may confirm a study conducted by Alisa Vanijdee (2009) on the strategies used by Thai students. She found that most Thai undergraduates have low meta-cognitive skills. These skills include their ability to plan and deal with challenges and difficulties.

The results of the two roundtables confirm the findings of previous studies. The participants recognized that their language background was inadequate to cope with the assigned reading,

especially thick textbooks. They called for more attention to English, asking for more English courses. This confirms the findings of the survey on their need of institutional support.

The finding was also confirmed by the data from the roundtables. One MBA student said: "*For the foundation English program, one course for the whole program is inadequate for us to be independent in our study that requires the frequent and advanced used of English.*"

Another aspect of English difficulties mentioned by the students was the need to have lexical competence (academic English). Many of the students, especially the DBA students, were from different occupational backgrounds.

This clearly shows that the English support structure was inadequate or insufficient to render support the challenges of English faced by many graduate students. One of them said he had to deal with the problem himself: "*First of all, I try to cope with the problem myself. Use a dictionary and translate*".

The student participants' use of English may reflect the influence of the Western knowledge on Thai academic culture. The heavy use of reading skills and the use of technical terms and jargon indicate that Thai academia in general relies on the knowledge and expertise from the West, mediated through the use of English. Sinlarat (2005) criticized the Thai academic culture of borrowing Western knowledge. He suggested a new direction and mindset, that is, that Thai academics should create their bodies of knowledge suitable for Thai society. In order to become a knowledge-producer society, the Thai academics need to be more confident in their use of English, especially the writing and speaking skills.

5.5 Coping Ability

As reported in the previous chapter, 131 respondents rated their English coping ability was at the moderate level ($M=3.26$). It was also found that MBA and DBA students did not differ in their coping ability.

Interestingly, it was found that the means of the coping ability of the male and female students were significantly different from each other at the confidence level of .05. The mean of the male students' coping ability was higher than that of the female students. The table below shows the data analysis of the respondents' English coping ability by gender.

Table 5.4 English Coping Ability by Programs

Construct	Program	Responses	Mean	SD
Coping Ability (Listening & Speaking)	MBA	118	3.19	.69
	DBA	13	3.55	.55
Coping (Reading & Writing)	MBA	118	3.28	.61
	DBA	13	3.44	.63
Overall Coping Ability	MBA	118	3.24	.61
	DBA	13	3.40	.53

Table 5.5 Gender and Coping Ability

	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig. (2-Tailed)
English Coping Ability	Male	43	3.43	.55	.02*
	Female	78	3.17	.64	

* $P \geq .05$

This finding could explain the difference in perceived need for English support between male and female students.

5.6 Perceived English Support Needed from the University

This study found that the respondents needed high levels of support from the university ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .70$). Moreover, the negative correlation between perceived support and their perceived English ability ($-.28$) seemed to suggest that there were some students who needed more support --- students with weaker language skills and ability.

What kinds of supports did they need from the university? One of them said that the support in terms of understanding key words should be useful for them.

We have been assigned to read journal articles related to our field of study, which has been helpful. What I like to see more, more English support from the university is the more emphasis on key concepts and technical terms. This would be helpful in our communication, as we need to use the same discourse.

As many of them mentioned the need to have adequate reading skills to handle the reading load, it seems that they need English support in terms of reading skills the most. But what manner of reading support was preferred? On-task support was the kind of support that has been mentioned. An DBA participant has explained what ‘on task’ means:

I think what is best for us is when we get together as a group, and we read more. If there is a way to help read as we read our articles or texts, and exchange our ideas among us, in *Thai, English or both*. This, I’m sure, will help us better understand the English in our community.

The above excerpt shows that what the graduate students need to master is a special kind of discourse ‘academic English’. They also need to socialize with other members, more or less experienced, of the academic community. They seem to say they need more than just ‘English grammar and vocabulary’ --- they need what Gee (1990) calls ‘discourse’. This need seems to go beyond the distinction between Thai and English. It seems to go deeper into the discourse level. It is similar to the embedment of knowledge manifested through certain use of words and expressions. This requires heavy and serious ‘socialized process’ and the support should be on-going.

5.7 Relationships Among the students’ personal factors and other factors: their use of English, perceived English ability, perceived problems and difficulties in English use, and English support

This study found that there were significant relationships between some of the students’ personal factors (age, gender, overseas training, and perceived identity) and other factors perceived English competency, perceived problems and difficulties, perceived coping ability, and perceived English support needed from the university.

Based on the analysis of quantitative data, this study did not find a significant relationship between the students’ occupation and their use of English. Neither did it find any relationship between their occupation and other factors.

Their ability to cope with English demands did not depend on their occupations. The table below shows the relationship.

Table 5.6 Relationship between Occupation and Coping Ability

Occupation	N	Mean of Coping Ability	SD
Business Owner	15	2.90	.55
Civil Servant	21	3.22	.53
Employee (Private Organization)	46	3.31	.65
Employee (State Enterprise)	12	3.21	.47
Teacher (Private University)	4	2.89	.83
Teacher (Public University)	5	3.65	.48
Student	26	3.46	.53

However, from the roundtable discussions, some students said that the English use mattered in their jobs. For example, one of the roundtable participants stated.

I work at an international college, so I have to use a great deal of English. When there is a meeting, and it's always conducted in English. I have to take notes in English and prepare a report in English.

Their ages and the number of years studying at the university were not significant in explaining the students' use of English and other activities. Results of the data from the questionnaire confirm the result of the roundtables.

Overseas Training Experience and Self-Perceived Competence

We found that overseas training experience and perceived English ability were significantly correlated. The mean of those respondents who had overseas training experience (N=23) stood at 3.17 (SD=.77); those who did not have such the experience outnumbered the former's (N=99) with the mean of perceived English ability at 2.74 (SD = .79). The difference

was significant at the 0.05 level. This may suggest that overseas training experience played a significant role in the students' self-esteem.

Table 5.7 Overseas Training Experience and Self-Perceived Competence

Overseas Training Experience	Responses	Mean of Self-Perceived Competence	SD
YES	23	3.17	.77
NO	99	2.74	.79

Perceived Identity and English Use

This study asked two questions concerning the students' perceived identities: (1) their perceived identity as an academic, and (2) their perceived identity as being part of the academic community. The distinction of the concept was proven to be valid and useful in explaining their use of English and perceived competency. The students' perception of themselves as 'part of the academic community' was found to have significant ability to differentiate their reported use of English in two domains: English use within the community and English in education. As the data from the Table 5.5 suggest, those who perceived themselves as being 'part of the community' said that they had used more English in their studies and in the academic community at large. However, the reported English use at work was not found to be significantly different.

Table 5.8 Perceived Identity and English Use in Three Domains

Domain of English Use	Part of Thai Academic Community	N	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
Workplace	YES	63	2.46	1.11	.680
	NO	40	2.37	.95	
Academic Community	YES	65	2.73	1.09	.009**
	NO	42	2.21	.92	
Education	YES	65	3.56	.98	.005**
	NO	42	3.02	.92	

** $P \geq .01$

The table below shows the powerfulness of perceived identity to affect the respondents' language use. Though their self-perception as academics did not have any effect on their reported use of English across the three categories, but their perception of being 'part' of the community mattered a lot. This seems to indicate the different constructs between the two questions. It was found that their perception of themselves as academics was related to their perceived ability to cope with English challenges.

Table 5.9 Perceived Membership and English Coping Ability

An Academic?	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig. (2-Tailed)
YES	36	3.47	.51	.05*
NO	76	3.18	.64	

* $P \geq .05$

Seeing oneself as an academic is something positive. They would be able to solve problems. Most of them, however, felt they could cope well with the problems.

The role of perceived identity reported in this study may provide another example of the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept. The frequently used construct that has been linked to SC is academic achievement. Lyon (1993) has highlighted the importance of the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, and stated that "academic self concept is theoretically more closely related to academic achievement than most other cognitive variables" (p. 203). The relationship between their overall perceived English ability, the perceived support from the institution, and their coping ability.

Gender and English Use, Coping Ability, and English Support

In terms of English use, it was found that males and females differed in their use of English in three macro-skills, listening, speaking, and reading.

Table 5.10 Gender and English Use

English Use	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Listening	Male	43	2.34	.69	.04*
	Female	78	2.08	.65	
Speaking	Male	43	2.10	.66	.01*
	Female	78	1.78	.59	
Reading	Male	43	2.80	.72	.02*
	Female	78	2.49	.71	
Writing	Male	43	2.23	.77	.29
	Female	78	2.07	.79	

* $P \geq .05$

It was, however, discovered that gender differences affected the respondents' needs of support from the establishment. Compared to the male students, females said they received the higher level of support from the institution.

Table 5.11 Gender and English Support

	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig. (2-Tailed)
English Support	Male	43	3.64	.73	.00**
	Female	78	4.02	.66	

** $P \geq .01$

Female and male respondents rated their perception of support received as 'high'. However, their ratings differ significantly at the .01 level of confidence. Compared with males ($M = 3.64$), the females rated this category as high as 4.02.

One theory could explain the difference between the two genders' need of English support. In terms of language learning strategies, Madeline and Oxford (1988) have reviewed the roles of gender in second language learning, pointing out that females tend to use more social learning strategies, e.g. asking for help and clarification.

Moreover, the relationship between perceived English competency and support needed from DPU --- the correlation is negative and is significant at the .05 level ($-.28$). This means that the students need less support if they have better English competency. Those who said they needed more support were those whose English competency was lower.

Gender also plays a salient role in explaining the perceived coping ability. The English coping ability of males and females differ from each other at the 0.05 level of significance

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the results of study. It was found that there were two personal factors, gender and identity, that played significant roles in many aspects of their language use. Gender influences the perceived English support and their perceived coping ability. Identity influences their perceived English coping ability, perceived English competency, and perceived English use in their graduate study. English was perceived as a useful tool and an important factor determining the self-perception of the graduate students. It is noted that the most frequently used skill among the students, is the reading skill, and the frequent use of technical terms portrays the hegemony of the Western knowledge in Thai academia.