A Study of Attribution for Success and Failure in English Communication Skills of Thai EFL Adult Learners in Bangkok

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Abstract

This study investigated potential causes of success and failure of Thai employees (EFL adult learners) using four skills of English for communicating in workplaces based on the framework of Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985). Twenty Thai EFL adult learners gave reasons through self-evaluation whether they successfully attained their career goals. The participants were also asked to discuss important factors that help to develop their communicative competence in workplaces. A qualitative questionnaire and an in-depth interview were used for gaining such insight. Ability, effort, task difficulty, luck, interest, confidence, social factors, and cultural factors were found as causal attributions. There are six factors considered as attributions of success in using English for communication at work. Internal factors concerned ability, effort, interest, and confidence, whereas external factors concerned society and culture. Seven factors were revealed as attributions of failure in using English for communication at work. Ability, effort, interest, and confidence were internal factors, whereas external factors were task difficulty, social factors, and luck. The participants also suggested that in order to boost English communication success, factors such as effort and social factors must be involved. English training classes provided by organizations were highlighted. Spending more time learning English outside of work whether formally at language schools or informally in free time was also emphasized as paths to success.

Keywords: Attribution theory, Thai EFL adult learners, causal explanation, English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

In this time of globalization, there is an international language used as a shared means of communication. Among the most recent updates in the world's top 10 most spoken languages, English is the primary tool of communicating internationally among the 1.1 billion people around the world who speak it (Ang, 2021). People around the world can connect with each other more easily by using a shared language instead of their own mother tongues. Hence, learning to communicate in English as a lingua franca is paramount in today's world.

Thailand, like many other countries, has been attempting to assimilate with the world's international language. In the current school system in Thailand, English is the mandatory foreign language, being taught from grade 1 in primary to grade 12 in secondary school. It is one of the eight subjects that students must take in their required courses during this 12-year period of learning (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Moreover, in spite of the various reforms that Thailand's educational system has experienced over the past 2 decades, it is still evident that the Thai population consistently has too low a level of English proficiency to compete in the international community. Whereas there have been numerous studies attempting to find explanations to this known phenomenon, only a small number have actually investigated past classroom concerns (Young, 2021).

Although the study of English in primary and secondary schools for Thai students covers a period spanning 12 years, the results are still poor compared to those in neighboring countries. As a result, most Thais' English expertise is comparatively low. According to the latest EF English Proficiency Index of 2020 (EF EPI, 2020), Thailand ranked 89th out of 100 globally of non-native English-speaking countries. It currently resides in the "very low proficiency" group. Academically and professionally speaking, contributing factors such as educational administrators' policy view, commitment and motivation of students, and effective teaching methods in Thai schools and universities are claimed to be at fault. Statistically, a number of Thai students still have disappointing levels of English-language proficiency (Phothongsunan, 2015).

The obstacles in studying and teaching the English language in Thailand can be identified in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. Biyaem (1997) suggests that these obstacles could be seen from two aspects, which are teacher's and learner's perspectives. From the Thai teacher's side, there are a number of inadequate conditions including tight schedules, overcrowded classrooms with approximately 45-60 students per class, and poor English knowledge especially authentic native-speaker's cultural knowledge. Moreover, they cannot provide classrooms that are fully equipped with modern and useful technology. Aside from that, from the Thai learner's perspective, most learners are not encouraged enough to confidently use the English language whether in verbal or written form. One reason is their fearful mindset regarding English language; they think that it is impossible to be fluent in English. Undeniably, one of the significant factors that decreases their ability to comprehend is the Thai language structure, such as its grammar, syntax, and sentence formation. More importantly, they rarely have opportunity to use English in everyday life. However, a significant proportion of Thai learners believe that English is important and they wish to be able to use it fluently. Yet, they still lack confidence in using English language in public.

Generally, not only young EFL learners are facing various obstacles in learning English language but adult EFL learners are also encountering similar challenges. In Kazakhstan, Assel (2014) emphasized the difficulties adult EFL learners face during the process of acquiring communicative skills of English language. Knowing grammatical and semantic rules does not seem to be enough. Learners also need to be exposed to how native speakers use the language while interacting. While in the Thai context, Jeharsae (2012) conducted a study on Thai employees in the customer service department at an international workplace to investigate existing problems in English oral communication. It was found that having trouble with listening comprehension and producing grammatical errors are the main problems reported by the members of customer service teams. One plausible reason for these problems among adult Thai EFL learners could be limited experience with or exposure to English interaction both inside and outside classroom. Such challenges would inevitably hinder the process of mastering

English oral communication for any EFL learners (Boonkit, 2010).

Despite the importance of the English language in business environments, the emphasis on English in the Thai curriculum is remains insufficient. Communication skills are important for English usage in the workplace. Therefore, a good command of all four skills in English – reading, writing, speaking, and listening are required to fully communicate in the business world. Unfortunately, it is evident that the English curriculum in the Thai tertiary education does not pay enough attention to all of the essential four skills as a whole (Wiriyachitra, 2002).

In this case, it can be argued that Thai education infrastructure facilitating the English-language learning may not be preparing Thai learners to enter this flourishing world. The major reason for this can very well be the ineptitude of Thai educators and learners along with the lack of exposure to the language altogether. This contributes to Thailand being inferior to other countries in terms of business, economic, science, and technology. Take the scope of information technology in Thailand for example; Thailand's technological efficiency is considerably high. However, insufficient English capability actually contributes to the fact that Thai people still cannot thrive in the world of science and technology. This leads to the main concern regarding the importance of English-language education in Thailand, and whether the traditional pedagogy is entirely inadequate (Wiriyachitra, 2002).

Therefore, given the current lack of interest in EFL attribution research, the researchers would like to place importance on how working people perceive themselves regarding their success and failure in English communication. It should be fundamental to gain a comprehensive grasp of how adult Thai employees evaluate their own English-language performance in the workplace within the international business context in order to discover the causes of successful and unsuccessful communication via the English language.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework of Attribution Theory

Concerning individuals' behavior and achievement in the area of EFL, various theories have evolved in the search for explaining the existing phenomena. Among these theories, attribution theory is one that has been paid attention to and developed by many scholars. It is centered on causes which can be determined by either internal or by external factors and is considered as an approach that can be utilized for assessing how people perceive their own behaviors and those of others'. Hence, attribution theory is about how people make explanations for the reasons why people act or perform the way they do.

According to Weiner (1985, 2010), the theory mainly concerns language-learning achievement and focuses on understanding how individual learners interpret events which then leads to explanations of their beliefs, actions, and behaviors. This effort can then explain various causes behind their actions.

Attribution can be classified into three causal aspects or properties including locus of control, stability, and controllability. Firstly, locus of control (location within or outside of the person) has internal and external factors. To elaborate, efficiency and attempt are internal while difficulty and luck are external locus of control. Secondly, stability (endurance over time) is

related to changes over time. For instance, efficiency and attempt are both internal causes, but efficiency can be viewed as stable while attempt is unstable. Thirdly, controllability defines the extent to which a person has control over causes. There are some causes that can be controlled and some that cannot be controlled. Controllable causes are often associated with internal factors such as personal skills and productivity. On the other hand, uncontrollable causes are external factors that often cannot be foreseen nor changed, such as talent, emotion, others' behaviors, and luck. To summarize, these three causal aspects contribute to the causes of any success and failure and will be the important concepts mentioned in this study.

Research on Factors Attributing to Successes and Failures in EFL

There are numerous factors uncovered by various studies in EFL in terms of understanding successes and failures in foreign-language learning.

Age and Gender

Regarding gender difference specifically in attribution to success, Saticilar (2006) found that there was similarity between male and female learners. The differences only appeared in details such as Turkish female learners attributed their success to effort (internal factor) more frequently than male counterparts. Turkish male learners tended to attribute their success to ability (internal factor) more compared to female learners. Concomitant to this, Genç's (2016) study on Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' attributions toward success and failure and the effects of gender, age, and perceived success on their attributions showed that gender is not a key component in determining a student's reasons for success and failure with respect to the reasons involving ability, effort, interest, task difficulty, luck, and factors concerning teachers and schools.

From the same research, age was not considered as an influential factor for EFL students in attribution of success and failure. In another Turkish research, Yavuz and Höl (2017) investigated the attributions of Turkish EFL learners on success and failure in learning English. The results show that there is no significant difference between the two groups; however, female students tended to accredit their success in learning English more toward internal factors than male participants. However, dissimilarity is shown in the Iranian context in the work of Mohammadi and Sharififar (2016). The study examined the attributions of Iranian English-language learners for their successes and failures and investigated the relationship between learners' gender and attributions. The research found that there is a relationship between learner's gender, proficiency level, and attributions. It seemed that male students attributed their success and failure to ability (internal) more than female students. On the other hand, females attributed their success and failures to luck (external) more than male learners.

Hassaskhah and Vahabi (2010) investigated the relationship between three age-groups and four attribution patterns (effort, difficulty of the task, ability, and luck) for academic success or failures in an Iranian EFL context. The age groups were divided into three categories: children, teenagers, and adults to see whether there was any relationship between age and their perceived causes for their success and failure in learning English. The findings show that different age groups shared the same perception of what factors hold the most and the least important position in their learning, but with different degrees toward specific factors.

Location

Farrha (2004) conducted a study between high and low achiever EFL learners within a Pakistani context. The result showed that there was no significant difference between urban and rural students concerning their successes and failures. In contrast, the work of Gobel et al. (2013) explored Malaysian urban and rural students' attributions for success and failure in learning English as a second language and showed that location is one of the most influential factors in attribution to success and failure in language-learning tasks. Urban students attributed their success more to their own abilities, whereas rural students tended to attribute their failure to lack of ability. The reasons behind such results could be because of the learners' attitude and the different level of English-language exposure. While undoubtedly learners who live in the city have greater exposure to English as a practical medium of communication, learners in rural areas struggle to have such opportunity (Gobel & Mori, 2007). In rural settings, rural learners often formed the view toward learning English language as something they could not relate to. In other words, English was forced upon them in a way that they had no control over.

Culture

It was found in a literature review of cross-cultural studies across the globe that culture could be considered as one of the most important elements. Different cultures are compellingly proven to yield different outcomes. The following four investigations were conducted in Asia, Middle East, and Western Europe.

In accordance with a study conducted in Asia by Mori et al. (2010), both Thai and Japanese university students attributed their success more toward external factors of teachers and classroom atmosphere. They also attributed their failure more toward internal factors of lack of ability and effort. This might imply that there are certain shared values among these two Asian cultures. The explanation to such tendency was presented by Markus and Kitayama (1991, as cited in Mori et al., 2010) that cultural differences may play a part in this. A number of Western cultures such as those of North America promote individualism (independence), while many non-Western cultures such as those of Japan and Thailand place the emphasis on collectivism (interdependence and connectedness). In such cultures, modesty is valued highly, taking credit for one's own success with explicit self-confidence is often considered as arrogance.

However, in other research conducted solely on Thai EFL university students, Nimitniwat (2012) found that the students attribute both their academic success and failure more toward internal factors, pointing most significantly at their own positive outlook. It was also reported that the attributions to failure are from internal factors which are credited as greater than the external factors, revealing their lack of ability as the most significant factor.

Comparably, within the Middle Eastern culture, Mohammadi and Sharififar (2016) conducted a study of the attributions of Iranian English-language learners for their successes and failures in learning English as a foreign language. The result, unlike Thai and Japanese students as in the work of Mori et al. (2010), suggested that attribution to both success and failure is derived more from the external factors. In an attempt to provide a reasonable explanation for the results above, applying Hofstede's (2011) cross-cultural concept seems appropriate. Middle Eastern cultural values are unique and different from those in Western countries and the rest of the world. In the Arab world, most people are conservative and modesty is a positive trait spoken about in the Koran. Therefore, it could explain why taking

credit for one's own success (internal) is not an option and they would rather attribute the reason to external factors. Moreover, countries in the Arab world exhibit high uncertainty avoidance, meaning that there are a number of societal restrictions and obligations culturally set in place. Such uncontrollable causes are naturally considered as external factors and might be used as a scapegoat responsible for one's failure in this case.

Interestingly, Genç (2016) conducted a study of Turkish tertiary-level EFL learner attributions to success and failure. Success tends more toward internal reasons and failure tends toward the external reasons which seems opposite to the work of Mori et al. (2010). A similar trend seemed to appear in the investigation into the attributions of Turkish EFL learners on success and failure in learning English by Yavuz & Höl (2017). The findings reveal that learners attribute their success and failure to both internal and external attributions but they attribute more toward internal factors. It could be concluded that a universal culture is not pertinent in this EFL attribution to success and failure; it varies from research to research to say the least.

Society

Considering factors concerning influences of society on English-language learners' success and failure, Williams et al. (2001) conducted a study of 25 English learners in Bahrain and concluded that not only positive mindset and constant practice, but also encouraging family were the most significant influential factors in English-learning success. Contrastingly, incapability of understanding skills, teacher's teaching strategies, and unfavorable social aspects on the lack of encouraging learning atmosphere and consistent discouragement were considered as factors for English-learning failure. To support this further, Nimitniwat (2012) revealed that the academic success rate has different causal attributions concerning social factors which include learners and parents' financial status, eagerness for success, temporary occupations, and learners and parents' academic background. Hometown, however, did not demonstrate different influential factors to learners' learning success.

English Proficiency

Gobel and Mori (2007) studied 233 Japanese university freshmen students in EFL oral communication and reading classes and found that there is a significant relationship among exam results and the attributions of likes, task difficulty, and proficiency of English. Thepsiri and Pojanapunya (2010) reported that, among freshmen university students in engineering and science related majors, effort, grades, class environment, and teacher's impact are influential factors on their success; whereas lack of effort, poor preparation, low proficiency of English, and improper learning approaches account for their EFL learning failure.

In addition, Hashemi and Zabihi (2011) found that internal factors and English-language competency actually develop a significant relationship in the Iranian subjects in the study. In other words, students' English-proficiency levels and internal attributions such as effort and interest are proportionally related. Furthermore, Yavuz and Höl (2017) also conducted a study of two groups of Turkish EFL students; one possessing a pre-intermediate level of English and another possessing an intermediate level of English. The study aimed to examine their attributions regarding success and failure in English-language learning. The difference in English proficiency level does not hold a statistical significance as one of dominant factors in attributions to success.

In contrast, Mohammadi and Sharififar (2016) compared two groups of Iranian students, elementary and advanced, and suggested that learners' English proficiency levels were attributed to part of their achievements and their proficiency levels are actually influenced by different aspects such as effort, deep down capabilities, and the difficulty of instant exams. Even though there was no significant difference in external attributions such as luck and students' competency levels, it still can be concluded that the levels of English-language proficiency and attributions are significantly related.

Methodology

Site and Samples

The participants in this research are a group of 20 young working adults between the ages of 23-35 years old and having worked for between 2-10 years. They were currently working for different companies in the private sector. The types of business they worked in were diverse, including medical health care, education, food and beverages, import and export, hospitality, media and graphics, and real estate. All the participants were purposively selected based on four criteria. For the first criterion, they must hold a bachelor's degree from either a public or private Thai university. Second, they studied in a non-English major. Third, they were working in a private company in Bangkok. Most importantly, for the fourth criterion, their employment entails using English as a means of communication at work.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

The researcher considered qualitative questionnaires and interviews as appropriate data collection techniques to identify the factors. The qualitative approach employed in this study helps answer the research questions appropriately and adequately as it comprehensively analyzes real evidence obtained from interviews with actual participants. In addition, qualitative research provides empirical inquiry of events based on the context from real life that can penetrate into the participants' point of view through current interaction in trying to understand the participants' aspect and essence (Merriam, 1998). Hence, the approach suits the study's agenda to describe and explain rather than make numerical determinations. Questions in the interview were developed through triangulate using both questionnaire and interview validity.

Qualitative Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. In the first stage of the study, the first set of the questions which pertain to the participants' demographic information was sent out to 60 working people the researcher had access to. Only a few selected individuals met all the criteria and were eligible to participate in the study at this stage. In the second stage, a set of qualitative questions which were designed to carry qualitative value consisting of eight open-ended questions, was then sent out to the selected participants. The researcher distributed the qualitative questionnaire to each participant via email in order to collect the respondent's self-report on their personal view of EFL English for communicating in the workplace. Even though the researcher did not directly explain what "attribution" meant, throughout the questionnaire all the question items were clear and easy to understand.

Semi-structured Interviews

As the main focus of this study was to explore how working people attribute their successes and failures in English communication at work, the researcher administered her own Interview Guide that included a mix of more or less structured interview questions to elicit their EFL learning experiences. All questions used were versatile in terms of flexibility and responsiveness. A semi-structured interview was used guided by questions prepared specifically to draw out descriptive answers, while the participants could still freely express their points of view. Moreover, this interview was conducted in both Thai and English individually for approximately 45-60 minutes. In this last step of data collection procedure, the individual semi-structured interviews took place a week after obtaining qualitative questionnaire responses from each participant. The interviews were conducted based on the key questions listed in the Interview Guide which was developed with the aim to obtain data about potential causes of successes and failures in English communication skills of Thai EFL adult learners and important factors that help develop the learners' English communicative competence in workplace. At this stage, the participants were allowed to discuss their experiences in a way in which they were comfortable. All the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed into text as a way to prepare the raw data for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study employed an overall inductive strategy for data analysis. This inductive analysis ultimately yielded a description of the informant's key perceptions of their attribution to success and failure in English communication in their workplace. The researcher adopted Weiner's framework (1985) to set themes of dimensional classification scheme for causal attributions for the study.

Findings

This part presents the results in response to research questions.

RQ 1: "What are the EFL Thai adult learners' attributions for success in using English to communicate at work?"

Six factors were found as attributions for success in using English to communicate at work among the 20 participants who participated in both questionnaire and interview sessions. The study examined the role of locus of causality attributions closely. For internal factors, the factors concerned were ability, effort, interest, and confidence. For external factors, the factors concerned were related to society and culture.

From both questionnaire and interview, most of the participants attributed their success to internal factors which were ability, effort, interest, and confidence. In the open-ended questionnaire, 14 participants out of 20 accredited their success to internal factors and four participants gave credit to external factors. Two participants attributed their success to both internal and external. Moreover, during the interview sessions, all 20 participants ascribed their success to internal factors. This shows that both the answers from the questionnaire and the interview were triangulated.

Ability

> *"I think it was when my boss assigned me to be a customer service in an international department. I have ability to speak so the department mostly send me to take care of our foreign customers, also other departments often ask me for help in English."* (Participant D, Customer service)

> *"Back then it was when I received compliments about my English, that's when I knew I was doing something right. Now it's more about me getting better and better when it comes to English."* (Participant T, International coordinator)

Effort

> "*I try to get into a situation where I can offer my assistance in English, 90% of the patients I meet are international patients. This way I can practice using English daily that means I won't forget how to use it."* (Participant I, Nurse)

> *"To help with my work, I am currently taking a course in English, and I also learn specific terms used in my work on my own. I try to remember new 10 words per day especially vocabulary related to the products and sales."* (Participant O, Sales)

RQ 2: "What are the EFL Thai adult learners' attributions of failure in using English to communicate at work?"

In this study, seven factors were found as attributions of failure in using English to communicate at work. For internal factors, there were ability, effort, interest, and confidence. For external factors, there were task difficulty, luck, and social factors.

From the questionnaire findings, 9 out of the 20 participants accredited their failure to internal factors whereas seven pointed out external factors and four other participants claimed their failure was due to both external and internal factors. From the interview, 12 out of the 20 participants attributed their failure to internal factors. Five of them ascribed their lack of success to external factors. Two claimed that both external and internal factors were accountable for their failure, and one asserted that she had no failure in English communication at the workplace. This shows that both the answers from the questionnaire and the interview were triangulated with each other as the identical answer presenting itself by revealing most subjects' failure occurs due to internal factors.

Ability

> *"When I don't do well in English is when I cannot think of a word, and I need to open a dictionary for it, I forget how to spell because I don't use it a lot. Writing is also difficult for me, I am not good in grammar and also speaking I don't have good accent and cannot stress the word properly."* (Participant B, Staff Officer)

> "*Probably the lack of background knowledge and specific terms used in that particular context. I also want to add unfamiliar accents or unclear pronunciation/ bad enunciation from people I talk to when it comes to listening. Like some people are just hard to understand when they speak English."* (Participant T, International Coordinator)

Task difficulty

> *"But if I have to pick, it's probably listening skill because it's involved understanding people with different accents. And having to respond simultaneously. I can't choose to listen to just those ones I can understand easily, you know. I can't think of any particular incident. But the situations that usually give me a hard time are involved with listening to someone who can't speak English well or if they can speak English but with weird accents then that is hard for me to respond because I can't fully understand them."* (Participant T, International coordinator)

Effort

> *"When I don't do well is when I don't prepare enough, like in presenting the work, which it comes out bad."* (Participant G, Business process Excellent)

RQ 3: "What could be important factors that develop communicative competence of the EFL Thai adult learners?"

During the interview, the participants were asked to provide some suggestions of how they could improve their English communication skills. It was found that there were two factors which were effort and social factors in relation to improving and developing communicative competence at work. These two factors share the same type of stability; that is, they are unstable attributions, or temporary factors, which can be changed.

The results from the interview reported that the emphasis on organizational support appeared to be paramount as the participants saw this as a way for working people such as themselves to be able to improve their English communication skills. Nine out of 20 participants expressed that the company should place more emphasis on the importance of English and provide English training classes for employees. However, only one of all the participants reported that the organization had actually provided English training classes. Hence, the support from employing organization for could be considered as a social factor.

> *"I try to remember everything I've done like the vocab used in the menu; also I try to remember how others use English in every situation like how they talk with the boss. I also think that English is important. The company should provide English training courses for the employees so that the work can come out in the same direction and come out well. Because in a company even the announcement is in English, so the staff that don't know English would not be able to understand it."* (Participant A, Menu translator)

Seeking resources, whether through formal or informal learning settings, seems to be equally an important approach the participants considered necessary for them as it could help boost their English communicative skills. Eight of them said that they practiced using English by themselves by engaging in some sort of English entertainment (e.g., movies, news, Netflix), by using social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube), and by reading English books. One participant, in particular, mentioned having English conversation with her friends regularly to improve her speaking skill. These ways of learning were practically undertaken through informal settings.

"I practice by speaking, I have a Thai friend who I always speak English with, and I also chat with my foreign friends. So I won't forget English." (Participant D, Customer service)

"I try to remember what I did wrong and will get the help from my senior. Also I learnt by myself by watching English movies, watching news like BBC and CNN." (Participant F, Import CS)

Two of the participants reported that they were currently taking English class at tutoring schools during their free time. However, only one was taking courses with native English-speaking teachers. This can be considered as another channel of formal learning settings accessed through the expenditure of individual effort to obtain self-development via improved English communication skills.

"Keep practicing, be patience improve skill more and more, take extra class. Right now I am taking an English course with Kru Louk Golf." (Angkriz Academy, the English tutoring school) (Participant B, Staff officer)

"Read more English book, listen to English music, watching English movies and I try to remember how the foreigner speak. Right now, I also take the English extra class." (Participant E, Graphic designer)

Regarding those who expressed the need for English training courses provided by the company, they said that they wanted the company to look back and pay attention to the importance of English in the workplace. They wanted the company to teach them at least the vocabulary used for specific purposes relating to their lines of duty. This could mean that there are most likely several difficulties at work which was very different environment from school. The vocabulary that they learned in school was insufficient for them to apply to the work context, which needs true English proficiency. They mentioned that it would not only enhance the English skills of the employee but also benefit the company as a whole. Though the eyes of the participants, such frustration could be removed by having support from the company. Providing resources needed in terms of specific vocabulary sets could help to save time and make the work process more effective. Communicating in English among those working in the same office could also be a good start to help provide a suitable environment for English communicative skill development in the long term.

Moreover, some of the participants mentioned that they regularly learned and practiced individually. As one respondent stated, *"I practice by speaking, I have a Thai friend who I always speak English with, and I also chat with my foreign friends. So I won't forget English."* (Participant D, Customer service). This shows that at present there is a real concern for the importance of English. Especially in workplaces where English is required, employees need to be proactive in learning the second language on their own as it will result in benefits that will remain with them throughout their career and be transportable from one workplace to another.

In addition, two of the participants mentioned that they were currently taking an English course because they wanted to be good at English. The reason behind this might be because there are a number of employees in their workplace who are proficient at English or perhaps their company particularly is in need of employees who are proficient in English. This shows that the participants are determined to improve themselves by taking extra classes. As one

respondent stated, *"Keep practicing, be patience improve skill more and more, take extra class. Right now I am taking an English course with Kru. Louk Golf."*
(Participant B, Staff officer)

Noticeably, out of the 20 participants, only one reported that her organization had provided English training classes for employees. Thus, it can be concluded that the importance of in-house continual personal development in English language may be being overlooked by most companies.

Discussion

Communication Skills of Thai EFL Adult Learners

From the results found in this study, there are eight prominent causal attributions. The four factors are based on the framework of Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985) – ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Four additional factors found were interest, confidence, social factors, and cultural factors. EFL adult learners in this study attributed their success primarily to the internal factors such as ability, effort, interest, and confidence – with little to no recognition of any external factors. To elaborate, the Thai adult learners seemed to perceive their own ability as the key factor that brought them to successful English communicative performance determined by the amount of effort they put into their performance. When unsuccessful English communicative experiences at work were raised; however, the Thai adult learners revealed that external factors (i.e., task difficulty and social factors) were also responsible for their failure as much as internal factors such as ability. Surprisingly, however, one participant divulged that there was no self-perceived failure in her English communicative experiences.

Most research within EFL casual attribution of success and failure has been undertaken mostly within formal schooling contexts. However, this study investigated the rather untouched area of EFL working adults. Between the two different contexts – a Thai working context and a Thai school context – prominent casual attributions could appear differently as the two subject groups by nature have their own distinctive environments. Working people tend to have much greater expectations from their employers, some of which might require employees to undertake challenging tasks that may be difficult to execute well. In this study, which was conducted on working people (not students with support from teachers in school), internal factors were exclusively shown to be more prominent than external ones. Ability and effort appear to be the most found factors among the internal factors that the participants attributed to their success in English communication. The results from this study however could yield different results if the place and time, and most importantly the subject group, happen to change.

Interestingly, the result of this study show dissimilarity based on cultural aspects according to the tendency presented by Markus and Kitayama (1991, as cited in Mori et al., 2010) that cultural differences may play a part in this. A number of Western cultures such as those of North America promote individualism (independence) whereas many non-Western cultures such as those of Japan and Thailand place emphasis on collectivism (interdependence and connectedness). Therefore, in such cultures, modesty is highly valued, taking credit for one's own success with explicit self-confidence is often considered as arrogant. External factors should be seen more as significant influential attributions. However, the findings of this

study revealed that the factors for both success and failure leaned more toward internal factors. This is similar to the finding of Nimitniwat (2012) whose research was conducted solely on Thai EFL university students. It was found that the students attributed both their academic success and failure more toward internal factors, pointing most significantly at their own positive outlook. It was also reported that the attributions to failure were from internal factors which were credited higher than the external factors, with their lack of ability rated as the highest. It might be safe to say that causes are diverse and can be varied across contexts and that the Thai EFL adult-learner context can be unique.

Delving into more of the external factor such as social factors, this study was conducted with EFL adult learners, with social factors playing a major role compared to other external factors in both the attribution to success and failure. This could be because they are no longer students in formal learning schools but are working while still learning through informal settings such as at the workplace. This is not in line with the findings of other research (e.g., Nimitniwat, 2012; Williams et al., 2001) that indicated that family support and teachers were the most influential social factors whereas, in this study, academic background and workplace environment were noteworthy. For instance, one participant working as a logistic and production coordinator elaborated how she was successful in using English for communicating in the workplace. She said, *"I think… it is because my workplace environment is multicultural, so it allows me to use English most of the time."* In contradistinction, another participant, a menu translator for a delivery company, stated that she was not successful in communicating in English. She admitted, *"I'm scared of speaking with foreigners. I'm afraid that what I'm saying will be wrong and colleagues will look down on me. So, I avoid using English at work."* For these reasons, it could be implied that the workplace environment has a strong influence on the participants' success and failure in using English.

In conclusion, both success and failure shown in this study was derived more from internal factors. This does not entirely fit the narrative provided by Kruger (1999) who stated that people tend to connect their success more to internal factors rather than external ones and they often blame external agents when they fail. Generalizations in this case might not be applicable.

Comparing Others' Success to One's Self

Some compelling data emerging from the interview sessions revealed that there were certain factors that could lead one to be more successful than others. The participants shared their thoughts on how family support, place of birth, generation, Thailand's environment, and a person's opportunity could be significantly relevant to one's success and failure in English communication.

Furthermore, two other comments revealed how the participants felt that Thailand was not an environment conducive to the practice of English in daily life. They felt that there were few foreigners in a school or in society to help stimulate an English-learning environment for everyday use. The two participants also mentioned that Thai educational policies and schools had not yet met their goals of enabling students be able to use English in everyday life. It could be the values held within Thai culture that make Thailand so unique, where only Thailand is experiencing such a discouraging environment to develop English language proficiency progressively as a nation.

Family and financial support were seen as one of the uncontrollable external factors that can drive one who receives it to success at being proficient at English. One participant, for instance, shared that school's location could be one of the factors for Thai EFL learners becoming successful in English. The participant noted that she used to study in a suburban area when she was young and she perceived this as being (uncontrollably) a disadvantage when it came to learning English. Time and globalization might also be factors due to English becoming more and more important nowadays. One participant shared her view on attitudes toward the importance of English from different generations.

Comparing Past and Present Trends

In comparison to the past, Thailand and Thai people show more understanding of the importance of English language and have been striving to improve English communication skills at a national level. However, in the workplace, Thais seem to struggle when English is commonly set as a requirement. Most of the participants said that they learned through practice. They learned from actual tasks at work. They said that the work was very specific which made them feel like they had to start over again when communicating in English in their workplaces. They learned from mistakes, not from learning obtained at school. Thus, they bettered themselves in the work environment. This raises questions regarding how Thai formal education prepares students for the professional world where English is essential. As one participant noted, it was not easy to use English at work because the assigned tasks were specific. This is not a new problem; however, it remains unresolved. In addition, this could be linked to whether it is possible for Thailand to move out of this English inefficient level as a nation. Those with better resources seem to find their way out on their own, but those without such resources seem to remain stagnant in their progress to become successful in the era of globalization.

Additional findings from the questionnaire and the interview

Some interesting perspectives could be drawn from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview. Remarkably, educational background in a formal setting and self-development in relation to English-language proficiency obtained from informal settings were involved. Different educational backgrounds can be seen as one of the interesting points. The participants who had previous formal education from international schools accredited their success to the years they had spent at school whereas those who had studied in Thai schools did not associate their success with their educational background. Intriguingly, some of the participants who received their formal 12 years and undergraduate years from a Thai program were taking extra English courses outside of work to improve their English communicative skills. All of the participants, in fact, participated in some forms of informal learning (i.e., self-study). This could imply that the formal setting (mandatory schooling) in Thailand might be lacking in the sense of providing sustainable knowledge that students could take to their future workplace to create successful English communication.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the data collection being in the form of qualitative questionnaire and semi-structured interview, and all participants knowing the researchers personally, some information or experiences that participants did not wish to share might have been withheld. Types of

schools and universities the participants attended were also diverse (either international school/university or Thai-medium school/university). It could be ideal to only focus on one type at a time and future comparative studies would be greatly encouraged. Limited accessibility was one of the two major concerns when sample selection process occurred. The researchers did not have accessibility to one specific organization; instead the 20 participants were from 20 different organizations. The scope can certainly show variety; however, this might not be specific enough if one seeks to make inferences about one particular company or business field. Another major concern was limited time constraining data collection and analysis.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study examined factors contributing to success and failure of the Thai EFL adult learners in using English to communicate at work and what could be important factors that develop communicative competence. Further research in the future will greatly benefit this area of EFL. Looking into EFL adult learners rather than those in school only, will contribute significantly to the understanding of how English communication in the workplace can be developed, particularly by investigating how the English subject is being taught in school and how existing educational policies can be of practical application in the arena of actual employment. Further studies, whether quantitative or qualitative, should be conducted due to the lack of exploration into this particular target population in the area of EFL informal settings.

Conclusion

Concerning EFL Thai adult learners' context of this study, most feedback drawn from the qualitative questionnaire and the in-depth interview revealed prominent causal attributions for success and failure in using English to communicate at work leaning toward internal factors. However, external factors particularly in the workplace environment also play an important role. The researcher has also concluded that there are two factors involved improving and developing communicative competence at work which are effort and social factors. These two factors share the same type of stability; they are unstable attributions, or temporary factors, which can be changed. Most participants wished that their companies could place more importance on the English language and the employers should provide English training classes for the employees (social factors). Furthermore, learning in informal settings whether by engaging in English-related activities and taking extra English classes can be viewed as self-reliance (effort). By doing so, this self-reliance can help to ensure that self-development still occurs even without support from workplaces.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge Thai workers' perceptions toward the reasons behind successes and failures of English language usage in workplace. This will be profitable for the future elimination of potential factors that obstruct Thai workers' English communication skills. When both teachers and learners come to the realization of the factors contributing to successful and unsuccessful communication in English, the suitable approaches to create successful EFL learners can be determined. Consequently, efficient English language communicators in workplaces should no longer be uncommon in the future Thai context.

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