

Research Article

Stress in learning English for agriculture of agriculture students at Maejo University

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Abstract

The objectives of this qualitative and quantitative study were to explore: perception traits of the students based on personality and management ability, a level of stress in learning English for Agriculture, and guidelines for solving stress problems of the students. Respondents in this study consisted of 109 second year Animal Science Students and 39 second Agronomy students. All of them were obtained by purposive sampling. Also, there was focus group discussion among English for Agriculture instructors at MJU. Results of the study revealed that more than one-half of the respondents were female, 20 years old, second year students, and animal Science students. Most of the respondents' domiciles were in northern Thailand and they mainly got allowance from their parents. Their late grade point average in English was 3.50-4.00. Regarding perception traits of the respondents based on personality and management ability, it was found at a high and moderate level, respectively. Besides, the respondents perceived that teaching and learning activities were appropriate at a high level. Besides, it was found that the respondents had moderate level of stress based on relationships with friends. For behavioral and physical disorder of the respondents due to the stress, both were found at lowest level. The following were suggestions: 1) the teacher should be broad minded and accept a level of the student ability to learn English for Agriculture, 2) the teacher should not always follow learning content in the learning material but can make use of other reading selections from other printed materials which are interesting, 3) the teacher should not focus on grammar but English Agricultural technical terms, 4) the teacher should employ diverse teaching methods and modern teaching media to interest the students, and 5) the teacher should always give a chance for the students to truly participate in the teaching and learning process.

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Introduction

English is an international language playing important roles in communication throughout the world. Generally, most Thai students are not competent in English especially to communicate with foreigners. This may be because Thailand considers English as a foreign language. Some Thai students have their own reasons in English learning such as for future occupation, entertainment, and to pursue study abroad. However, some need to study English even though they do not like it because English is a compulsory subject in Thailand. Thus, this is one factor having an effect on stress of Thai students and results in a negative impact on their physical and mental health. In order to forget or reduce stress, some students find ways such as sleeping, listening to music, watching cinema (positive), hanging out at night, smoking drinking, etc. (negative). Meesap (1992) stated that causes making stress of students include educational

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competition especially the University Entrance Examination and they must study English since it is a compulsory subject which they do not like it. Besides, they must follow rules and regulations of the school or university. [Department of Mental Health \(2017\)](#) revealed that the Mental Health Development Plan during the National Social and Economic Development Plan focused on the reduction of stress problems of Thai people to be less than 50 percent. This aimed to enhance their mental strength. Besides, a study of the Department of Mental Health in 1996 showed that people in Thailand aged between 12-60 years were in stress for 67.6%.

According to the aforementioned, English instructors have a direct duty to perceive emotion and feeling of their students towards English language learning. They must facilitated lively teaching and learning activities which can interest students. Also, they must develop their students in terms of 3 aspects of desired traits: 1) smart and be able to integrate subjects which have been enrolled to daily life activities; 2) perfect physical and mental health; and 3) having codes of conducts needed by the university and society ([Phichetboonyakiat et al. 2005](#)).

Therefore, the team of researches agreed to conduct a study on stress in English for Agriculture learning of second year agriculture students at MJU, Chiang Mai, Thailand. It aimed to find facts and open a chance to the students and English instructors to express opinions or ideas as guidelines for preventing the stress problem of students and to develop their English learning performance and quality of life.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the following:

- General condition, environmental conditions teaching/learning English for Agriculture facilitation of Agriculture students at Maejo University, Chiang Mai province,
- Mental traits of the Agriculture students studying English for Agriculture subject,
- A level of stress of the students studying English for Agricultural; and
- A guideline for solving the stress problems in studying English for agriculture of the students.

Review of Related Literature

Stress refers to physical and mental reaction which is stimulated to be ready to face complex life condition such as final examination, being investigated, lover leaving, competition ([Meesap, 1998](#)). [Selye \(1956\)](#) set a theory related to stress called “Selye Stress Theory”. It explained that when stress occurs, there is physical change and, of balance, and response. That is, there are anatomy and bio-chemistry changes in the body. The responsiveness to stimulants causes stress in each person differently based on external factors i.e. age, sex, genetics and external factors i.e. medicine, food, hormone healing, etc. Causes of stress classified by Engel (1962) included: 1) loss of important things such as body’s organs, position, and close relatives; 2) to be in danger, frightening situations, etc; and 3) frustration.

Effects of Stress, [Phichitboonyakiat et al. \(2005\)](#) revealed that, generally, effects arised from stress are related to emotion or feelings arised form an individual retaliates or acts against stress situations such as worriness, depression, irritation, etc. This will result in headache, muscle ache, stomachache, etc. Self-effects include: body, emotion, through, and behavior. Family-effects include conflicts, quarrelling, divorce, etc. Workplace-effects include mistake or error, always be absent, no concentration, etc.

Methodology

This study employed descriptive research. Population and sample group is this study comprised 148 second year Agriculture students at Maejo University, Chiang Mai province who were enrolled English for Agriculture, second semester, academic year 2016 ([Office of Academic Administration and Development. 2016](#)). All of them were considered as a sample group. Research instruments in this study were questionnaire passing the reliability test administered with the sample group and focus group discussion among English for Agriculture lecturers.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The sample group consisted of 110 second year Animal Science students and 34 second year Agronomy students. Variables in this study were:

- Respondent attributes e.g. sex, age, a number of siblings, marital status of parents, etc.
- Mental traits of the respondents i.e. personality and management ability.
- Environmental conditions in the facilitation of English for Agriculture teaching and learning
- Physical and behavioral disorders

Results

Respondent Attributes

Results of the study revealed that more than one-half (58.78%) of the respondents were female and 20 years old. Most of the respondents' domiciles (72.30%) were in northern Thailand and they stayed in a dormitory (85.14%). About one-half of the respondents (50.68%) had 2 siblings and more than one-half (75.00%) of their parents stayed together. Most of the respondents (78.38%) got a monthly allowance from their parents.

Personality of the Respondents

It was found that the respondents had personality at a high level on average in terms of the following: 1) do not like to face problems encountered in studying in order to accomplish tasks successfully ($\bar{x} = 3.68$); 2) time devotion in reading and joining learning activities for success and progress in studying ($\bar{x} = 3.87$); 3) feeling uncomfortable when do not participate in opinion expression about teaching and learning ($\bar{x} = 2.66$); 4) trying hard to do tasks but the teacher does not tell if the assigned tasks are good ($\bar{x} = 2.87$); 5) do not like group work with the same group because new experience is expected ($\bar{x} = 2.78$); and 6) feeling disappointed when not be accepted by the group ($\bar{x} = 2.81$).

Management Ability

Findings showed that management ability of the respondents was found at a moderate level of all aspects ($\bar{x} = 3.01$). This included the following: 1) feeling that having less potential than classmates based on English for Agriculture studying ($\bar{x} = 3.31$); 2) construction of conditions and reason finding on English for Agriculture studying ($\bar{x} = 2.71$); 3) dare not to accept the truth about decision-making and be afraid of being criticized ($\bar{x} = 2.73$); 4) it takes time and to learn to listen to opinions of classmates ($\bar{x} = 2.94$); and 5) uncertainty about communication with classmates if it is clear or straight to the point ($\bar{x} = 3.20$).

Stress in Classroom Environmental Condition

As a whole, it was found that the respondents had stress at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 2.93$). However, there were two aspects found at a high level: Schedule of English for Agriculture studying was appropriate ($\bar{x} = 3.83$) and the university often changes the schedule creating confusion or disturbance toward progress of learning ($\bar{x} = 3.47$). Another three aspects were found to have a low level of stress: 1) the classroom head or the advisors are not willing to listen to problems ($\bar{x} = 2.38$); 2) feeling of suffering or lack of freedom when to meet the advisor for talking about problems in learning ($\bar{x} = 2.31$); and 3) feeling that the lecturer is bias ($\bar{x} = 2.31$).

Appropriateness of Teaching/Learning Activities

As a whole, it was found that teaching/learning activities was found at a high level of appropriateness ($\bar{x} = 3.62$). Hence, this implied that the respondents had a low level of stress. The following aspects are found at a highest level: 1) the lecturer has a sense of humor ($\bar{x} = 4.43$); 2) the lecturer give a positive feedback ($\bar{x} = 4.23$); and 3) the lecturer is competent in English for Agriculture technical terms ($\bar{x} = 4.23$). These denoted that the respondents had a lowest level of stress. However, it was found that the respondents had a highest level of stress in terms of: 1) the lecturer interferes personal matters such as living life during studying at the university and mobile phone using in the classroom ($\bar{x} = 4.46$) and 2) classmates are not willing to help explain what is not understood in classroom activities ($\bar{x} = 4.49$).

Stress in Relationships with Classmates

Findings showed that, as a whole, the respondents had stress in relationships with classmates at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.09$) in the following aspects: 1) I am depressed to support and accept opinions of classmates ($\bar{x} = 2.81$); 2) I am little trusted by classmates ($\bar{x} = 2.75$); 3) I am afraid of failure because I feel that my friends will hit me due to failure ($\bar{x} = 2.87$); 4) I feel that some of my friends agree to my opinions but their behavior is opposite ($\bar{x} = 2.68$); and 5) although I have good opinions or suggestions which are beneficial to everyone but it is denied by friends ($\bar{x} = 2.66$). Only one aspect was found at a low level ($\bar{x} = 2.52$): classroom atmosphere does not support the initiative or creative thinking.

Physical and Behavioral Disorder

Results of the study revealed that the respondents had physical and behavioral disorder at low and lowest levels. As a whole, physical disorder was found at a lowest level ($\bar{x} = 1.64$). The following were found at a lowest level: 1) be faint and dizzy ($\bar{x} = 1.71$); 2) high blood pressure ($\bar{x} = 1.33$); 3) body shaking ($\bar{x} = 1.53$); 4) breast ache ($\bar{x} = 1.50$); 5) abnormal heart beating ($\bar{x} = 1.50$); and 6) vomiting ($\bar{x} = 1.28$). Regarding behavioral disorder of the respondents it was found at a low and lowest level. The following were found at a lowest level: smoking addictive ($\bar{x} = 1.33$); sleeping pill addictive ($\bar{x} = 1.15$); often be absent from classroom ($\bar{x} = 1.45$); blaming classmates ($\bar{x} = 1.59$); blaming lover ($\bar{x} = 4.58$); teeth biting ($\bar{x} = 1.49$); and hanging around at night ($\bar{x} = 1.77$).

Methods of problems solving arose from stress of the respondents. Watching movies and listen to songs were found most (91.22%), followed by relaxation and sleeping (89.86%); asking suggestions from parents (60.81%); asking suggestions from friends (53.38%); and not interested in what causes stress (41.22%).

Discussion and Conclusion

According to results of the study, more than one-half of the respondents were female, 20 years old, and they lived in northern Thailand and they mainly got their monthly allowance from parents. According to the [Student Development Division \(2016\)](#) report that students who study at Mae Jo University, the university's service area, which is the northern area. And there are also some that come from every region of the country. And there are still some from neighboring countries. Almost all of them received money or allowance from their families and some students have part-time worked to earn money while studying in establishments around the university. Regarding personal traits of the respondents based on personality and management ability, it was found at high and moderate levels. Especially, the respondents do not like to face problems encountered in studying in order to accomplish tasks successfully, time devotion in reading and joining learning activities for success and progress in studying and feeling uncomfortable when do not participate in opinion expression about teaching and learning. From the foregoing, it may be due to the students being unable to express or interact with teachers during the learning process quickly and promptly, causing them to not understand the content. This is consistent with [Ritthirat and Chiramane \(2014\)](#) and [Yoosub \(2012\)](#) found that stress in learning English may be due to language proficiency. and insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar causing students to be unable to speak for others to understand when students have language problems causing students to worry and lack of confidence to communicate in English, resulting in the students' English not developing. In addition, students lack speak English with teachers. This problem may be caused by the teaching time factor. Teachers should be able to allocate time for themselves interact with learners in order to practice and do activities sufficiently, and a study by [Soureshjani and Riahipour \(2012\)](#) found that teachers tend to pay attention to the students who are better than others at the same time, students with weaker abilities are ignored. This will cause students to lose opportunities to practice of learning skills in the classroom. Besides that in this research found the respondents perceived that teaching and learning activities were appropriate at a high level. It was found that the respondents had a moderate level of stress based on relationships with friends. For behavioral and physical disorders due to stress of the respondents, both were found at a lowest level. According to the results of the study, the development guidelines are for teachers to play an important role in the development of students' self-learning. A good relationship between teachers and students will make students want to learn more and cause less stress ([Tansuwannon and Pianratphimol, 2009](#)). Therefore, teachers should raise awareness of the importance of self-learning English to

learners and shift their roles from teaching to facilitating as a consultant to recommend appropriate learning methods and teach them to assess their own level of competence and success. This will be an important part of the learner's English language development as well as reducing the stress of learning English as well.

Suggestions

Based on focus group discussions among English for Agriculture lecturers, the following were suggestions:

- The teacher should be boarder minded and accept a level of the students' proficiency in English.
- The teacher should not always follow learning content in the reading material but can make use of other reading selections from other printed materials or electronics media which are interesting.
- The teacher should not focus on grammar but technical terms in English for agriculture.
- The teacher should always employ diverse teaching methods and modern teaching media to interest students.
- The teacher should always give a chance for students to truly participate in classroom activities

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