

# Developing and Equipping Effective English Communication Skills for Non-Native English Students: Creating and Nurturing English Speaking Environments

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## Abstract

The objective of this academic article was to provide a descriptive presentation about the need and importance of creating and nurturing English speaking environments for non-native English students which enabled them to learn the English language in ways that were most effective and efficient. These English language environments served as learning avenues wherein the students were able to intentionally use the English language as a medium of communication to develop

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their English language skills, particularly their communication skills, with self-confidence and without hesitation. It presented the problems that impede the learning acquisition of the English language for non-native students concerning their developmental growth in trying to become familiar and well-rounded in usage. Furthermore, it also explored educational ways as to how these English speaking environments could be catalyzed in ways that were creative and sustainable while stimulating the sense of need amongst the students to use the English language in their daily communication. This later became a part of a language culture that opened a wider spectrum of approaches in how to get a good sense of acquaintance with the English language as a medium of communication in day-to-day affairs. It was observable that these English-speaking environments, in many non-native English-speaking countries, did not naturally occur or present itself due to a lack of intentionality on the part of the educators to create and nurture these language environments. It was expected that by creating and nurturing English-speaking environments, the non-native English speaking students would be able to use the English language practically and naturally as a vital part of their daily life and their future professions.

**Keywords:** Developing and Equipping, Effective English Communication skills, Non-native English Students, Creating and Nurturing

## Introduction

One of the challenges for non-native English speakers face is the lack of English-speaking environments where they can put into practice while learning in the classroom. In many cases, students have access to formal education with numerous textbooks and excellent English language teachers. However, acquisition of the English language takes time. In the worst scenarios, some students remain ineffective in using the English language as their medium of communication. Creating and nourishing an English speaking environment with a high sense of intentionality is a way to immerse the students into the language, so they can practically use it as a medium of communication whenever they converse, interact, and discuss things in a foreign language (Hashim & Yunus, 2018; Castello, 2015, pp. 211-212). A language environment plays a vital role in developing language skills. It is considered as a learning avenue. It serves as a cradle for the language skills to be developed and sharpened.

## The Overture

In the 21st century, people have a vast array of options of interaction via social media such as Facebook, twitter, messenger, line, and so forth. Therefore, we gain easy access to each other. Technology has conquered almost all facets of our life and part of it has a tremendous effect on our education, particularly on our approaches of learning a language. For instance, it has been said that

the use of information technology and communication have shaped traditional teaching concerning assisting the adoption of new curricula and courses (Petridou & Spathis, 2001, pp. 185-195). Social media is one of the “big impact” tools for communication, which indeed has become part of our virtual world and created the need for us to communicate in understanding each other. It has impacted and influenced multifarious aspects of our modern life today particularly our interpersonal communication skills (Subramanian, 2017, Online).

To discuss the role of the English language as a medium of communication in today’s world, one has to accept the fact that English speaking environments are needed whether in the context of virtual (Social Media) or actual (Real-personal encounters) scenarios. As a matter of fact, in the field of education, the 21st-century competency for English learners has been emphasized. It is recognized that the students’ necessary preparation skills as to know how they can learn English such as collaboration and teamwork, creativity and imagination, critical thinking, problem-solving, social responsibility and ethics, and technology literacy (Envision, 2017, Online). All of these learning avenues take place in the context of a language environment in which the students intentionally use the English language to communicate, converse, interact, and discuss. This intentionality springs out of the realization that learning to communicate in English is not just an educated person but it is indeed a need for the non-native speakers to thrive and survive in their chosen fields and careers, and if possible, lead them to be successful on a global scale.

## The Problems

In many cases, non-native English students prefer to use their native language to communicate among their peers even in English language classroom. Most of them find it more effective even though they need to use English language is the great need particularly to non-native students who are majoring in English language. This preference is caused by different internal and external factors. One of the major factors is “The Culture of Fear”. Culture is such a powerful factor in shaping one’s understanding of the world. It has the power to impede an individual to either pursue or simply reject learning. It is believed that all infants are the same not until they are exposed to their surroundings that shape their individuality (Xu, 1997). That is why creating a culture of fear could have a detrimental effect on the learning process. Tinjaca and Contreras (2008) mentioned four causes of English-speaking fears and language anxiety namely, 1) Psychological- Lack of effective support, 2) Methodological- Monotonous classes, 3) Cognitive- Indifference to the learning process, and 4) Social Affective- Public embarrassment. These factors create a culture of fear effected on the learning process of non-native English students. This culture of fear is paralyzing and making the students gravely dubious to speak English because of fear of making mistakes and further embarrassment. Mala (2017, Online) said that Thailand has an educational system that failed to equip its students when it comes to critical thinking, problem-solving, and foreign language proficiency. All these learning avenues take place in the context of a language environment wherein students communicate, converse, interact, and discuss.

This is the very reason why the culture of fear is such a main phenomenon to many non-native speakers. Undoubtedly, it has been the foremost reason that obstructs the learning of non-native students in using the English language in their daily life. Jones (2004, pp. 30-39) named this struggle as a “Fear Provoked”. This takes place when a student is asked to use English as a medium of communication and there is the risk of social embarrassment for making mistakes. Von Worde (2003, pp. 3-5), Turula (2004, p. 28), Vanniarajan (1990, p. 118) along with Jones (2004, pp. 30 - 39) concluded that the language learning process is indeed affected by anxiety. Feeling of insecurity, lack of self-confidence, fears, and nervousness are the inner struggles brought by external factors and are directly related to anxiety about speaking in English in public. As Hantrais (1989, pp. 214-215) said that culture is the set of beliefs and practices that governs our life in society we are all part of it and language is a vehicle to express oneself. Our culture frames our educational system and dictates how we learn both individually and collectively. Some cultures are open and ready to learn new things while the other lack of opportunities which can affect how non-native English learners acquire English language as part of their daily life. The task to develop and equip English communication skills for non-native speakers is a challenge. Englebert (2004, pp. 38 - 39) said that teaching a foreign language is also teaching foreign culture, and it is important to realize and understand the truth that not all our students together involved in the learning process, our colleges, administrators,

and or neighbors, share the same cultural paradigm. Apart from that, many educators purpose many ways to help students learn more and deeper into the aspect of culture and English language by using literature. In the context of learning English language as a medium of communication, kinds of literature provide language use, critical thinking processes, and cultural learning opportunities that students can put into practice. (Katib & Rahimi, 2012, pp. 32-35; Lazar, 1993, pp. 14-15).

Thailand as a non-native English-speaking country, students spend twelve years studying English starting from their primary years up to their secondary years. Unfortunately, the results are not as good as expected. When compared to people in neighboring countries, the English proficiency of Thais is relatively low. This was shown in the 2010 Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) where they got 116th ranked out of 163 countries, Noom-ura (2013, pp. 140-141). In this case, English speaking environment is of great help as it compliments and accompanies the task of learning from literatures along with the entire learning process. However, not all students can be a good reader. Khajloo (2013, p.56) argues that educational literatures that are being thought in our schools do not appeal to students including pictures of books. The real interest of students to learn English is being ignored. They have no sense of interest in the story or think only passing the course.

Furthermore, NEOEnglish (2010) mentioned that language is a set of conventional communicative signals that are being used by people to communicate within their community. It is considered as a possession of a social group that entails an imperative set of rules which help people to relate to each other, to interact with each other, and to co-operate with each other. Language by nature is a dynamic and phenomenon that cannot be learned by dissecting the content of specific literature, memorizing the rules and axioms, and repeating written from the texts. It is registered in the minds of the students; they must learn it by heart. This process happens if the English language is a part of their daily lives. It is not only as knowledge written on the pages of their textbooks but also as a language, they use to communicate with each other. Students need to get exposed to an environment that enhances their need to have learning opportunities to apply their knowledge in their daily affairs both formally and informally. Many researchers examined the English-language classes highlighting some contributing factors that led to the failure of English-language teaching-and-learning. Along with unqualified and poorly-trained teachers, poorly-motivated students, learners of different levels of abilities in overly large classes, the lack of opportunities for students to get exposed to English outside their class time is seen as one factor that causes the failure and the ineffectively of the entire process of learning (Dhanasobhon, 2006).

To gain more insight of English knowledge acquisition, it should be realized that the issue is not just about having English speaking environments per se but primarily what kind of English speaking

environments need to be catalyzed and sustain to foster learning avenues where non-native English student's language competency can be developed and nurtured in such a way that would be lessened, eliminate, the fear of being embarrassed whenever they make honest mistakes in trying to use English as their medium of communication (El-Omari, 2016, pp. 9-10). An environment where everyone trusts each other for corrections, advice, and suggestions takes place not only between the teacher and students but also among the students themselves. A learning avenue in which the learner is experienced and actualized with sincerity and empathy towards fellow learners is not a competition among the students to diagnose who is better than others or the best among everyone. This pathway is a space provided and available for everyone to commit honest mistakes and learn from the mistakes as they help and encourage each other as they all go through the arduous process of learning English as a medium of communication.

## The Solution

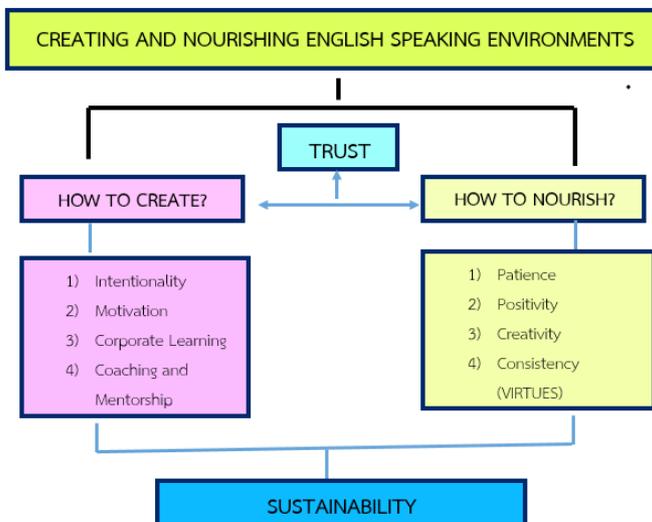
The focal point here is not a matter of intentionally having English speaking environments per se but what kind of English-speaking environments we need to catalyze, create, and nurture. In short, the question does not only circle the need to have English speaking environments but also what constitutes these English-speaking environments needed to be established to help students effectively acquire English language as a medium of communication. For the past

several decades, educators have been trying their very best to come up with a solid curriculum to address this need. Dailey (2009, p. 3) stated in his module that for the last 50 years, linguists have been exerting efforts to figure out motivational factors that would encourage students to learn a foreign language. To motivate is such a big part of learning. It fuels the desire to explore and learn more. It was said that “Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals.” Donyei (1990, p. 3). There are indeed various ways how to unravel the process in addressing this need, but it would be a challenging one simply because the English language serves as a second language to non-native English speakers. To begin with, it is a foreign language that we seek to be used by our students naturally, and intentionally using it as their medium of communication in their daily lives until it becomes their nature. Atkinson (2011, pp. 25-26) stressed the notion that second language acquisition is a convoluted phenomenon that entails a wide range of dimensions, and because of this, there’s no single theory of second language acquisition that delivers a monopolized understanding of it.

As the educators, therefore, it is our responsibility to explore different ways of learning and be creative in addressing the needs that may come along in the learning process. This notion gives us two important implications in approaching things. Firstly, we should be willing to let go of certain things we are used to exhibiting. If necessary, try to unlearn it no matter how conventionally appealing it is or how effective it was in the past. Unfortunately, some teachers take

hold of conventional teaching methodologies at the expense of their students' learning (Ghadiradeh, Hashtroudi, & Shoki, 2012, pp. 190-192). Secondly, along with the willingness to unlearn things is the inclination and genuine desire to learn new things. To stay open and keenly study new approaches provided to our accessibility. Learners change as well as teaching methodologies. Giving all these details one can truly say that it is such an intricate process that requires a high amount of patience, positivity, creativity, and consistency. These are the virtues that would nurture the English-speaking environment for it to thrive and blossom by illustrating a sort of chart as Figure 1 that shows how things interplay together.

Figure 1: ILLUSTRATIVE CHART



## HOW TO CREATE

**1) Intentionality** – To be intentional in learning is a key factor in getting a good grasp of the knowledge one wishes to learn. This intentionality determines the length and quality of time an individual spends exploring details or concepts he or she needs to learn. There are pieces of information we learn incidentally as we mingle with people and witness how others live and use things around them, but intentional learning outweighs its value for the reason that it makes one more intrigued and curious to learn more.

Ahmed (2017, p. 36) in his experimental research about Intentional learning vs Incidental learning declared that intentional learning is better than incidental learning. He further added that learning as a process of attaining knowledge and skills takes place in everyday life whether through incidental or intentional learning. However, though there are several types of learning in psychology, intentional learning produces better results for it makes the learners gain better recall and recognition of things learned.

This is the very rationale why intentionality in learning a second language is given a high sense of value. English language students should be intentional in learning it and the best way to do is by intentionally using the language when they communicate. The more the learners intentionally study the subject the more they can enjoy long-term retention. This has been confirmed and verified in the study of Mondria & Wit (1991, pp. 251 -252). Since learning a foreign language entails learning words, structure, rules, expression, etc.,

it is indeed far better if learners will be intentional in learning it for them to have better retention as they use the language in their daily life.

**2) Motivation** – Motivation is a powerful thing in all kinds of endeavors. Any learning journey or professional pursuit in any field devoid of motivation does not last long. You may be the most talented or skilled person in one field but if you lack motivation, it is useless. Motivation is defined as a cluster of factors that makes one so energized to act and have a sense of proper direction (Baublitz, 2010). It is a powerful variable that determines the success of learning in most cases. It represents the most yet convoluted factors used to explain individual differences in learning a language (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001, p. 370). In the field of language learning, two types of motivation can be classified. The External (Extrinsic) and Internal (Intrinsic) motivation (Oletić & Ilic', 2014). External motivation is driven basically by rewards students look forward as they challenge themselves to do better in and outside the class such as getting a good or a higher score. Internal motivation is commonly understood as something that takes root in a self-determined mindset expressed through personal self-discipline in learning a thing. It is independent of any external rewards a student can get by performing based on the given standard or criteria. It is challenging oneself to learn and explore regardless of the expected reward. Both are needed and should not be opposed to each other. Though intrinsic motivation is driven by a reward or punishment, there is still a good use for this. It is just a matter on the part of the teacher to figure out

how to maximize both as we embark on the journey of creating such a learning environment (Young-Shin & Uichol, 1999, p. 96).

**3) Corporate Learning** – Since what we are trying to establish are learning environments where students can use English language as their medium of communication, we have to keep in mind that the focus of learning here is more communal. Meaning, students must be well-oriented to the notion that though individualistic learning can give a certain degree of benefits, learning together is a value that sustains this kind of learning environment. In this language environment, we try to be intentional in using English, motivating each other to communicate despite the struggles individuals may come across. This is an inter-personal experience of learning. Since language is a big part of culture and culture is shared thing, it is logically rightful to think that language is best learned if it is shared by a community (Liang, Mohan & Early, 1998, p. 14). Experiential learning is defined as a holistic integrative perspective on learning which encompasses experience, cognition, and behavior. He even added that “learning is a continuous process grounded in experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). Language is transferring information involved as people use it to communicate with each other. The idea of community is a key factor. Since learning is said to be a continuous process grounded in experience, it gives us the idea that the learning part takes place within the bounds of a community. Therefore, there should be a clear shift from individualistic learning to corporate learning. The English-speaking environment should be fostered with a sense of intentionality and transforming

motivation. This education takes place in the context of a community that serves as a learning environment for language students' learning.

**4) Coaching and Mentorship** - To do coaching and mentoring entails exuberant efforts, time management, and sharing of resources. Coaching and mentorship are effective supplementary work to ensure the learning outcomes of language students. Many are confused about these two and think that they are the same thing or used interchangeably in all facets of life. Educators have sorted things out to surface the differences between the two to understand at a higher level how these two-affect learning process. "Both coaching and mentoring are designed to help a person to develop, but they approach in different ways, with a different focus, and often with different intended results" (MTD Training, 2010). It could be said that these two can be intertwined and each one cannot stand without the other, sometimes there are considerable differences in their aspect that we need to know and understand should we wish to apply it. Coaching usually takes its end when the task is already accomplished while mentoring takes a longer time for the reason that it tends to be more personal where the mentor is allowed to share his personal and/or professional difficulties in the learning process (Heeralal, 2014, pp. 511-512).

## HOW TO NOURISH

1) **Patience** - knowing that not all students have the same pace when it comes to learning. Some are proficiency some are non-proficiency learners. In the learning environment, there will always be variety amongst student learning styles. Thus, teachers need to be patient as they coach and mentor their target learners. Brooks (1968, pp. 128-129) suggested that though we may share the same features physically and mentally, the interactions that take place between individuals or groups vary widely from one place to another.

2) **Positivity** - for the language environment to be sustained, students must be supported and encouraged to reach the level of learning we expect from them. Positivity contributes to the level of involvement in some expected human activities. Khan (2016, pp. 440-441) concluded in his study that a positive attitude towards target language is one of the most important factors. It is suggested that the teachers' roles are the crucial connection of the language learner proficiency.

3) **Creativity** - dealing with students having different learning styles demands for ever-developing kinds of teaching methods and approaches. As educators, we must keep on learning too if we want our students to exercise the same passion in learning new things in English language. Creativity requires flexibility and versatility. A language environment that lacks creativity produces dull students. In classroom language, to be creative and foster innovative ways so that students can reach potential in the learning environment. For instance, maximize the use of media, incorporate technology, and integrate things is also an important methodology in language creativity (Mensor, 2016).

4) **Consistency** - being consistent in our supervision of everything from the materials we use, approaches, learning venues, and all activities we want to implement to nurture the language environment should be emphasized (Yunus, Osman, & Ishak, 2011, p. 2639). Consistency is the ability to move forward focusing on the objective despite all the challenges. As an educator, we must prepare ourselves, and realize that every learning process takes time.

### **Conclusion:**

In today's world people are becoming more exposed to different cultures. Information can easily be accessed through modern technology. Teaching methods used for our students should also be brought up to the modern time. Cultural lag also affects our educational system. It impacts the lives of our students including how they learn. High profile textbooks have been provided together with high-quality teachers in order to achieve an outstanding education. An English speaking environment is needed to supplement the language acquisition. It is indeed not an easy thing to create and nourish this kind of environment. Developing and equipping effective English communication skills for non-native English students is indeed a long process. In order to accomplish this goal, educators must be willing to exhibit an exuberant effort to explore different learning approaches that can be effective in their teaching contexts. Therefore, differing ways of how to value and acquire a second language to be used as a means of communication by people of diverse cultural back-

ground must be explored. In this case, English language is considered a global language. It is where we all meet to understand each other. Having an environment where one can use it is good training ground in order to be successful in whatever field of endeavor one chooses.

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