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## Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Proficiency: Perspective from English Pre-service Teachers Teaching in southern Thailand

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### Abstract

To create teaching speaking strategies, English teachers need to understand the factors affecting the oral proficiency of learners which should worthy of attention. This study aimed to investigate what the factors affecting students' speaking proficiency based on perspective from English pre-service teachers while teaching in Thailand. The participants were three pre-service English teachers who had done teaching practicum in southern Thailand for four months. They taught at same level which was secondary level especially upper secondary level on EFL students. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used as research instruments. Thematic analysis was employed in the analysis of the data gathered from the teachers. The finding revealed that some of factors affecting students' speaking proficiency based on pre-service teachers perspective are Cognitive, Linguistic and Affective factors.

**Keywords:** Factors Affecting, Speaking Proficiency, Pre-service English Teachers, Teaching Practice Program.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In speaking class, learners often encounter difficulties to learning English language. There are many things that occur to students not to willing to talk in the classroom. In this case, according to Wang (2014) mentioned there are some factors that affect EFL learners' speaking competence, such as cognitive factors, linguistics factors and affective factors. Many people regard as speaking skill is one of the hardest parts. Shastri (2010) claimed that "s/he has to put a lot of effort-in speaking the

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**Citation in APA style:** Rachmawati Nur, M., & Isrina Septiana. (2025). Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Proficiency: Perspective from English Pre-service Teachers Teaching in southern Thailand. *JADEs Journal of Academia in English Education*, 6(1), 128-144. Received Jun 4, 2025; Accepted Jun 29, 2025; Published June 30, 2025

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v6i1.11465>

language". Moreover, Harmer (2001) stated that speaking involves language features. In this case, learners should know over vocabulary and, they have to speak grammatically. Students often feel afraid to be judging by others while they are speaking. Besides, speaking also involves phonological system which students are confused of pronouncing the words.

There were previous studies that have discussed about factors affecting students' speaking proficiency by several researchers. Pangket (2019) mentioned some main factors affecting the oral English proficiency of the pupils are motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Teaching strategies and curriculum are contributory factors. Besides, Khamkhien (2011) revealed that factors influencing Thai students' oral communication skills, such as motivation, personality, attitudes towards teachers, classroom environment and instructional media, and attitudes towards the English language. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate about the perspective English pre-service teachers in investigating the factors that affect students' speaking proficiency in Thai classroom. The findings of this study will be useful for English pre-service teachers to identify the problems that they might encounter in English as Foreign Language (EFL) school.

The result of this study is expected to know the factors which affect students' speaking proficiency based on perspective of English student-teachers who have conducted pre-service teachers' teaching in southern Thailand. Another significance of the research is that it can be used as follow up researcher of factors affecting students' speaking proficiency in investigating pre-service teacher. It is expected that all readers get information as a reference or additional insight in knowing the factors which affect students' speaking proficiency as one of influence for teaching speaking.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Speaking Proficiency

Speaking is the way to convey information one another orally. Speaking is not only about producing the words but also the use of language to relay meanings that other people can make sense of them (Cameron, 2001). In order for the message to be received by the interlocutor, the speaker should convey a message distinctly to obtain

successful communication. According to Goh (2007) mentioned that there are four key to acquire effective communication, it involves the skill of phonological, speech function, interaction management, and extended discourse organisation.

Moreover, according to Harmer (2000: 14) speaking proficiency involves not just language competence (grammar, vocabulary, etc) but also knowledge of how language is used appropriately and how language is organized as discourse. In this instance, there are some factors behind that learners gain this proficienc in speaking. However, based on Adam (1980) as cited in Iwashita et al (2008), he investigated the five factors that influence learners' proficiency can be measured through (i.e. accent, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and grammar) which that identified by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Oral Interview Test of Speaking.

### 2.1.1 Level of Speaking Proficiency

For acknowledging how proficient learners in spoken language, there are guideliness to measure proficiency of language learners. In this case, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and proficiency levels based on Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale that is set by the U.S. [Foreign Service Institute](#) (FSI) are described as follow:

- a) 0 - No Proficiency is beginners at learning foreign language.
- b) 1 - Elementary Proficiency is speakers enable to make basic sentence and ask simple questions.
- c) 2 - Limited Working Proficiency is speakers have a confident to communicate because of they may produce sentences accurately.
- d) 3 - Professional Working Proficiency is speakers have a skill in language.
- e) 4 - Full Professional Proficiency, it means that students enable to master the whole aspects completely.

The level proficiency based on The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) as known Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Below is a comparison of the assessment on speaking proficiency by (ACTFL) and (ILR).

Figure 1.1

The visualization of two scales (ACTFL) and (ILR) are compared.

ACTFL	ILR
Novice (Low/Mid/High)	0/0+/1
Intermediate (Low/Mid/High)	1+
Advanced Low	2
Advanced Mid	2+
Advanced High	3/3+
Superior	4+

### 2.1.2 Speaking English Proficiency in Thailand

Thai EFL students' backgrounds Non-native English speakers learning English in a country where English is not widely spoken are referred to as learning English as a foreign language (Wright as cited in Inkaew and Thumawongsa, 2018). Based on the result of Education First English Proficiency.

Index (EF EPI) 2020 compared to other country in Asia that Thailand one of the country that had very low level of English proficiency. In the other words, the EF EPI proficiency bands of Very Low Proficiency 2020 described, "students only introduce themselves on name, age, and country of origin, understand simple signs, and provide basic directions to foreigners". In fact, Thai EFL students' proficiency levels sat on 20th from 24 countries in Asia.

Figure 1.2

The Ranking of English Proficiency of People in Asia Countries 2020



In this case, based on the results of Noom-ura (2008) that speaking performance were acquired from EFL Thai students' pre and post test had difference significant. When students conducted the pre-test, their position was in 0-1 level which students only answered simple questions. Besides, after conducting pre-test (post-test) part of the students reached 1+ and 2 level which students enable to answer the questions structurally. Meanwhile, as supported by Padermprach (2017), students assumed that speaking skill were very difficult since the linguistics of Thai and English are different. This cases due to various aspects involving pronunciation and grammar. When Thai students tried to translate Thai to target language (English), the sentences were unstructured and the sounds were different.

Considering the discussion about students' English proficiency and speaking performance, Thailand is still very low position on English which ranked on 20 of 24 countries by data of EF EPI. In addition, based on American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (as cited in Brown, 2000) defined that students that have lack of vocabulary, incomplete grammatically, and difficulties in articulation so that the level kind of this cases are Novice level which describe on Inter-agency Language Round-table (ILR) is 0-1 level.

## **2.2 Factors Affecting Speaking Proficiency**

In speaking class, learners often encounter difficulties to learning English language. There are many things that occur to students not to willing to talk in the classroom. In this case, according to Wang (2014) mentioned there are some factors that affect EFL learners' speaking competence namely cognitive factors, linguistics factors and affective factors.

## **2.3 Problems in Teaching and Learning Speaking**

Speaking is one of the most challenges skill among listening, reading, and writing. Ur (1996, p. 121) mentioned that there are some speaking problem come across in teaching. The problems that students encountered in classroom are worried about saying words in English which they are not used to using English in daily life. Hence, this issue cause students being silent in front of class and they feel blank (what kind of words that I should say). In addition, they are not confident when they speak in front of other students because if they made mistake, they were to be judging by others.

## 2.4 Pre-Service Teacher

Before being professional teachers, students university conduct teaching practice to share their knowledge to students and observe how to manage the classroom situation at school. According to Delgado et al. (2020) "pre-service teachers, that is, students who are registered to a university program learning to be teachers, need to experience real contexts during the practicum phase". In other words, pre-service teachers is students university who take the teaching practice program to improve their teaching skill.

## 3. METHODS

Qualitative research is used in this research. According to Creswell (2012) "qualitative research is exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon". Hence, the researcher plans this research to investigate factors affecting students' speaking proficiency by pre-service teachers' perspective while they were doing teaching practice program in southern Thailand.

The researcher conducted this study with the pre-service teachers' perspective about investigating factors affecting students' speaking proficiency after they conducted the teaching practice program in southern Thailand where they role as English teachers who taught EFL students. They were spread in different private schools individually or group in different districts such as Channa, Bandan, Singhanakhon. Moreover, the pre-service teachers has been teaching for about four months in teaching English in the EFL classroom.

The researcher acquires various perspective from English pre-service teachers on factors affecting students' speaking proficiency. In addition, The English pre-service teachers taught at same level which was secondary level especially upper secondary level on EFL students. According to Laska's definition as cited in (Spolton and King, 1967) for upper secondary level, students' age is around 15 to 17 years old. In this research, the research is going to use questionnaire and interview as an instruments to complete data of the research which obtain factors affecting students' speaking proficiency in EFL classroom. Hence, the researcher used two instruments to collect the data. The researcher became an investigator where she documented and analyze the data . The

researcher conducted this study to find out the factors that affect students' English speaking proficiency in Thai classroom.

#### **4. RESULTS**

This chapter describes the results and places them into four main categories: Data presentation, Research result, Overall result of pre-service teachers' perspective, and discussion. This research was conducted to investigate factors affecting students' speaking proficiency based on perspective from English pre-service teachers while teaching in southern Thailand.

##### **4.1 Data Presentation**

The participants in this research were three pre-service English teachers who have conducted a teaching practice program as English teachers at private schools in southern Thailand for four months. This research used two steps, first, the questionnaire that used to get information about pre-service teachers' perspective on factors affecting students speaking proficiency.

The second was the interview that to follow up data for the first step in-depth about pre-service teachers' perspective on factors that affect Thai EFL students' speaking proficiency. The researcher collected the results of factors affecting students' speaking proficiency based on perspective from English pre-service teachers teaching in southern Thailand. In doing interviews, the questions were given to participants as the same as the questionnaire questions. Hence, the material of the questions was the same. It is to discuss the research problems about the general factors that affect Thai EFL students' speaking proficiency based on perspective from pre-service English teachers while teaching in southern Thailand. The interview result is used by the researcher to convince and strengthen participants responses in the questionnaire.

The researcher analyzed the results both of questionnaires and interviews. This research result will present a description of factors affecting students' speaking proficiency based on the themes and point that the researcher design in the instruments previously. This research has three main themes: (1) Cognitive Factors, (2) Linguistic factors, and (3) Affective factor. As mentioned by the researcher that the themes will be described in three points such as:

#### 4.1.1 Results of Questionnaire

**Table 4.1**  
Speaking Proficiency Among Thai EFL Students

No	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Do you think your students had good English communication?	33,3%	66,6%
2.	Did your students have problem in articulate English words while they were speaking?	100%	0%
3	Do you think your students could speak English grammatically?	0%	100%
4.	Do you think your students were able to pronounce words accurately?	33,3%	66,6%
5.	Do you think your students had positive attitude towards English language?	100%	0%
6.	Do you think your students had motivation in speaking class?	66,6%	33,3%
7.	Did your students have less confident in speaking English?	66,6%	33,3%
8.	Did your students were worried about making mistake while speaking task in the classroom?	66,6%	33,3%

From the above table, it can be seen that the speaking proficiency of Thai EFL students is underdeveloped. As for the English communication, most the participants agreed with students had bad English communication. In this case, students had problem in articulation, could not speak grammatically, and were not able to pronounce words accurately in oral English which affect learners' speaking proficiency. As to the students' behaviour, most the participants admitted that students' had positive attitude towards English language and motivation in speaking class. However, Thai EFL students had less confident while speaking English and feel worried about making mistake when to do speaking tasks in the classroom.

#### 4.1.2 Results of Interviews

Furthermore, interview involving pre-service English teachers who had conducted teaching practicum in southern Thailand. They were chosen purposively that taught at upper secondary level students of EFL classroom. The participants were two female and one male. The participants were coded as 'P1' for the first participant, 'P2' for the second participant, 'P3' for the third participant. The interviews were about the real situation of teaching and learning process in English speaking class. The following results of interview are:

**Question 1.** What were your students' English communication?

**Table 4.2**  
Students English Communication

Pre-Service Teachers	Pre-Service Teachers' Perspective	Factors
P1	“....Even though, <b>their pronunciation made more mistakes</b> , they quickly learned from that mistakes	Linguistic Factors
P2	“Students use their mother tongue (Thai language) and Malay. They cannot use full English. <b>They just speak English word by word and they are still stutter to speak English</b> ”.	Cognitive Factors
P3	“Thai students lack of understanding in English such as vocabulary and pronunciation”.	Linguistic factors

Table 4.3 showed the result of pre-service English teachers' perspective about students' English communication. P1 said that her students have problem in pronouncing English words even though they are able to communicate in English. P2 he argued that because of Thai students use their mother tongue namely Thai language and other is Malay, students cannot use full English in daily life because they are not used to it. They just speak English word by word and they have inhibit to speak English which this case affected by cognitive factors. Meanwhile, P3 mentioned that Thai students do not have good English communication because of they have lack of understanding in English such as vocabulary and pronunciation.

**Questions 2.** What were your students' difficulty in speaking especially in the English language?

**Table 4.3**  
Students' difficulty In English Speaking

Pre-service teachers	Pre-service teachers' perspective	Factors
P1	“ ....perhaps because of the region, like Indonesian with their dialect when they speak English. Thai people, when they speak (your welcome) become (yow wewkam). In this case, the letter (l) is very rarely spoken by them. Even learners who can <b>speak English is difficult to articulate properly because of their dialect</b> . And also when I asked them (what we have learnt about last week?) <b>then they said to the point in simple word. Students' English is not neatly organized</b> ”	Cognitive Factors
P2	“If there are some words that used letter (l) in English, <b>they cannot articulate it well</b> . It is because their mother tongue is SIAM which have different way to speak. <b>To understand the</b>	Cognitive and Linguistic Factors

	<b>context they are difficult, let alone they speak English using grammar.</b> They can just speak word by word such as (I sleep night)"	
P3	" <b>because of students' anxiety</b> which causes their articulation improperly. And also <b>they don't know what the point of grammar is</b> (how to use it)"	Affective and Linguistic Factors

Table 4.4 described that cognitive factors (conceptualisation, formulation, articulation) and linguistic factors (pronunciation and grammatical) were dominated that affect students' English speaking proficiency. P1 said that Thai students' have difficulties because of dialect. Every country has their own dialect to speak English such as Thailand. P1 and P2 argued that Thai learners unable to articulate letter *l* which can cause English words that contain the letter *l* difficult to pronounce. P1 mentioned sentence that students said such as *your welcome* in English become *yow wewkam* in Thai's pronouncing so that Thai students cannot articulate *your welcome* in English properly. Moreover, all the participants told the same argument, most students unable to speak English structurally. They can only speak word by word and answering the teachers' questions in simple words. Therefore, this can affect the students' anxiety when they try to speak English as to what P1 argued about students' problems in speaking especially English.

**Question 3.** What were your students' behaviour in the classroom?

**Table 4.4**  
**Students' behaviour in the Classroom**

Pre-service teachers	Pre-service teachers' perspective	Factors
P1	" <b>They always presents in my class</b> , they have good attitude in English classroom".	Affective Factors
P2	"They had a positive attitude in learning English. when I gave a task, they willing to do it, obedient, and had awareness to learn English. However, when they try to speak English, they had less confident because they were afraid of making mistakes. Sometimes, if I asked them yes or no questions, they still took a look their friend. And also I asked them "How are you?" and then they still asked their friends"	Affective Factors
P3	"They want to try to learn English and understand it. <b>if I asked students to do the tasks such as presentation or dialogue in front of the</b>	Affective Factors

	<p>class, they willing to do it". But, they feeling anxiety, less vocabulary, grammatical eror and they did not know how to pronounce English words unless the students who can speak English when they to do the speaking.</p>	
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Based on the table 4.5, it could be concluded that Thai students have positive attitude toward English classroom. However, they have problem when they try to speak English. All the participants argued that students are always present in their class. Students willing to learn English and doing the tasks when pre-service teachers asked them to do it. Nevertheless, when P2 and P3 asked them to do the presentation or dialogue in front of their friends, they have less self-confidence because of they were afraid of making mistakes. Moreover, if P2 asked basic questions to the students, they feel hesitate what pre-service teacher asked about. Therefore, P3 argued that this is due to they feeling anxiety, less vocabulary, grammatical eror and they did not know how to pronounce English words.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the result of the data above, this section is going to discuss the data results. This part presents to answer the research problem of the study. The research question that would be discussed in this section were: *what are factors that affect Thai EFL students' speaking proficiency based on perspective from English pre-service teachers while teaching in southern Thailand?* Based on the research finding from questionnaire and interview, it found that there are some factors that affect students' speaking proficiency. The main factors were related with students' cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors. The discussion will be presented as follows:

### 5.1. Cognitive Factors

The result showed most the participants assumed that Thai students do not have good English communication. This was supported by previous study from Pangket (2019), "pupils have difficulty in speaking especially in the English language". They are inhibited when they try to speak English so that they just speak word by word. In other words, their mother tongue affects their second language which causes lack of understanding in English such as vocabulary and pronunciation.

Moreover, the researcher concluded that most of participants assumed that students have problem when they articulate English words.

The factor that most influences the problem in articulation is region where each region must have its own dialect such as Thailand. Their mother tongue is SIAM which they very rarely use the letter l as in English sentence your welcome become to 'yow wewkam'. This is due to the dialect that they have. Therefore, it can also affect students' anxiety in articulating words so that they cannot articulate English words appropriately. It is supported by Khamkhien (2010), the problem that faced by Thai learners when they are speaking English is their pronunciation. It looks like they have difficulties to sound a word in English.

## 5.2 Linguistic Factors

In linguistic factors themes, the researcher can conclude the result of English pre-service teachers perspective on factors that affect students' speaking proficiency such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical. It is supported by Derakhshan et al., (2016), there are three features of linguistic factors such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical. The result that most of participants assumed that students could not speak English in language structure. It is stated that students is difficult in speaking English, let alone to speak English grammatically. The only speak word by word and simple words to say because they do not know how to use it.

The researcher concluded that most of the participants argued that students have problem in pronouncing English words. It is because of their region is Thailand that have their own dialect to speak English. It can be seen by two participants in the interview that when students say a word in English there is a letter that they cannot say. For example, in English word fish to 'fid' in Thai's pronunciation. It is supported by Khamkhien (2010), he mentioned that the letter 's' and 'r' are difficulties for Thai learners like a word run become 'lan' and in a word finish, Thai learners say it 'finid'.

## 5.3 Affective Factors

In affective factors themes, the researcher share the topic about students' motivation in English speaking. The result can be found that the participants assumed that the students have motivation in English classroom. In this case, they always came over the classroom to learn English. It is supported by Gines et al. (2004) students are more likely to accomplish the required work when they have positive attitudes toward the teachers or the subject. On the other hands, this relate to the students'

motivation which can affect their attitudes. Hence, this study also showed students' attitude toward English which Thai student willing to learn English when pre-service teachers teaching in their classroom.

Moreover, the results that most of students have less self-confidence. They are afraid of answering the question from their teachers so that they take a look to their friend and ask them about what teacher are saying. In this instance, the students are not confident because of they feel anxiety, less vocabulary and afraid of making mistake about grammar, they did not know how to pronounce English words. It is supported by previous study of Pangket (2019), "When learners have poor vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, they may likely lose their confidence which explains why they are shy and choose to be silent."

In addition, most of participants assumed that anxiety affect Thai students' speaking proficiency. It because of students feel afraid, unconfident, shy when they try to speak English. This feeling exists when teacher asked them to come forward to present their task. Based on (Spielberger as cited in Brown, 2007), "Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system".

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the data of the results and discussion that have been presented in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that over time with experience in the classroom. The researcher concludes most of the students English speaking proficiency were affected by cognitive, affective and linguistic factors. For instance; students' had motivation in speaking English class. They always came over to the class to learn English. However, the process of becoming fluent speaker takes long time. It because Thai students' dialect affected their second language.

Most the participants admited that students in speaking class expressed their afraid of making mistake and feel anxiety. Their mother tongue is SIAM which have different way to pronounce words in English so that students had problem in articulation. They also lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammarly. They just can speak English word by word or answer the questions in simple word. On the other hand, this issues Thai students have low English level especially English speaking that the level based on ACTFL, Thai students position is in Novice level.

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