

THE STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING ABILITIES OF THE FIRST YEAR VOCATIONAL CERTIFICATE STUDENTS AT EAMLA-OR VOCATIONAL COLLEGE*

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Abstract

This research aimed to: 1) examine the factors affecting the English listening and speaking abilities of first-year vocational certificate students at Eamla-or Vocational College, and 2) investigate these factors across different proficiency levels. The study population consisted of 119 students enrolled in the English Listening and Speaking course during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. The research instrument was a 62-item structured questionnaire covering four domains: learner, family, college environmental, and social factors. The instrument demonstrated high content validity ($IOC \geq .50$) and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Furthermore, Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to determine the extent to which these four domains predicted students' listening and speaking abilities.

The findings revealed that learner factors and social factors significantly affected students' English listening and speaking abilities at a high level, while college environmental and family factors were at a moderate level. Multiple Regression Analysis indicated that for all students, all four factors significantly and positively predicted English proficiency ($p \leq 0.01$), with learner factors being the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.603$), followed by societal and environmental factors. When compared across proficiency levels, the primary predictors varied:

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for the high and moderate groups, learner factors were the most influential ($\beta = 0.397$ and $\beta = 0.823$, respectively), whereas for the low proficiency group, family factors emerged as the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.568$, $p \leq 0.01$). The results indicated that English listening and speaking proficiency is shaped by the interplay between internal and external factors. Therefore, fostering 21st-century English communication skills requires a holistic approach by integrating student-centered curricula to enhance self-regulated learning abilities, alongside proactive collaboration between families and educational institutions to further develop students' listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: Vocational Students in Thailand, English Listening and Speaking Ability, Factors Affecting English Listening and Speaking Ability

Introduction

English plays a pivotal role in Thailand's economic and industrial development, particularly in service industries such as tourism and hospitality. Recognizing this, the Ministry of Education and the Vocational Education Commission (2019) have emphasized the necessity of English proficiency—specifically listening and speaking skills—in the vocational curriculum to prepare learners for real-world communication. However, despite over twelve years of basic education, Thai students continue to face significant challenges in acquiring English proficiency.

Current data highlights a critical gap in learning outcomes. At Eamla-or Vocational College, results from the Vocational National Test (V-NET) revealed a decline in average English scores from 44.71% in the 2023 academic year to 29.05% in 2024 (National Institute of Educational Testing, 2024). Furthermore, internal assessments indicate that only 12% of students achieved grades in the high proficiency range (B+ to A), while the majority struggled with basic application. These statistics suggest that the current curriculum objectives regarding communicative competence are not being fully met.

Scholars suggest that language acquisition is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Previous studies indicate that

psychological attributes, such as self-confidence and anxiety (Tantiwich, 2021), alongside environmental factors like family support and classroom atmosphere (Sukumal, 2011; Chuensirimongkol et al., 2011), directly impact student performance. Kongkachat (2019) further noted that the lack of an immersive English-speaking environment is a primary barrier for vocational students.

Therefore, to address these deficiencies, it is essential to identify the specific variables affecting learners in this context. This study aims to explore the internal and external factors influencing English listening and speaking abilities of the first year vocational certificate students at Eamla-or Vocational College. The findings will provide a framework for developing instructional strategies and support systems to enhance students' communicative skills effectively.

Research Questions

1. What factors affect the English listening and speaking ability of the first year vocational certificate students?
2. How do the influencing factors of English listening and speaking ability differ among the first year vocational certificate students with different proficiency levels?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the factors affecting listening and speaking ability among the first year vocational certificate students at different proficiency levels.
2. To investigate the factors influencing students' listening and speaking skills with different levels of proficiency.

Literature Review

1. English Instruction and Communicative Competence in Vocational Contexts

In the context of vocational education, English instruction aims to equip students with practical skills for professional success. At Eamla-or Vocational College, the curriculum adopts a competency-based approach derived from the Office of Vocational Education Commission (2023), emphasizing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to foster real-world application

(Harmer, 2015). Within this framework, listening and speaking are interdependent skills essential for workplace interactions (Rost, 2013; Brown, 2014). Proficiency in these areas requires mastery of sub-skills such as accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Thornbury, 2005; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). However, vocational students often face barriers due to limited exposure to authentic usage and varying proficiency levels (Dornyei, 2005; Basturkmen, 2010), necessitating a deeper investigation into the factors influencing their performance.

2. Factors Influencing Listening and Speaking Abilities

Academic achievement in English communication is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external variables.

2.1 Internal Factors: The Learner

Psychological traits are primary predictors of language acquisition success. Key constructs such as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation significantly influence academic persistence (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, learners possessing a "growth mindset" tend to exhibit a higher willingness to communicate and greater resilience against language anxiety (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Lou & Noels, 2017). In the Thai context, high-proficiency students are characterized by stronger self-regulation and internal drive compared to lower-proficiency peers (Wongsothorn, 2000; Boonchum, 2020).

2.2 External Factors: Family, College Environmental, and Social

Family: Socioeconomic status (SES) and parental involvement are foundational to a student's academic achievement. Research by Epstein (2001) and Sirin (2005) indicates that active parental support and higher SES correlate with better learning outcomes due to resource accessibility. In the Thai vocational context, Laowicharat and Phoyoi (2018) observed mixed results regarding family impact, suggesting that while family background matters, it interacts with other variables.

Educational Environment: The quality of instruction and classroom atmosphere are paramount. Hattie (2009) and Fraser (1998) emphasize that effective teaching strategies and supportive classroom climates directly enhance achievement. This is corroborated by Pukhut (2015) and Thianrungrat (2019),

whose studies on Thai undergraduates revealed that teaching quality and learning management were the most influential factors perceived by students.

Social: Broader societal norms and cultural values also frame the learning experience (Hofstede, 1986). As highlighted by Coleman et al. (1966), economic conditions and societal expectations can either facilitate or constrain educational opportunities, affecting students' exposure to English outside the classroom.

3. Related Researches

Previous studies, both in Thailand and internationally, consistently highlight that English listening and speaking proficiency is influenced by a combination of instructional, environmental, and individual factors.

3.1 Domestic research

Academic success in Thailand is driven by teacher qualifications and instructional quality (Pukhut, 2015; Boonchum, 2020). While high-proficiency learners are characterized by superior self-regulation and metacognition (Phakiti, 2008), demographic factors like gender and income show inconsistent effects. Instead, evidence from vocational contexts suggests that curriculum and assessment methods may be more critical predictors of achievement than student demographics (Laowicharat & Phoyoi, 2018).

3.2 International Context

International studies suggest that communicative competence arises from the intersection of environmental and psychological factors (Harmer, 2007). Central to this is the 'growth mindset,' which fosters intrinsic motivation and a greater willingness to communicate (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Lou & Noels, 2017). Combined with context-specific variables such as prior exposure (Siek et al., 2018), these findings underscore the necessity of addressing both pedagogical strategies and the internal psychological readiness of the learner to ensure EFL success.

Methodology

1. Population

The participants in this study comprised 119 first-year vocational students enrolled in the English Listening and Speaking course at Eamla-or Vocational College during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. Since the population

size was within a practically feasible scope, the study employed a total population sampling method to ensure comprehensive data representation.

2. Research Instrument

The instrument was a structured questionnaire designed based on relevant literature and theoretical frameworks regarding academic achievement in EFL contexts. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

Demographic Information: Items regarding gender, grades, guardian status, and household income.

Factors Affecting Proficiency: A 62-item scale measuring four domains: learner factors, family factors, college environmental factors, and societal factors. The items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale.

To ensure validity and reliability, the instrument underwent expert validation by three specialists, yielding an Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) of ≥ 0.50 for all retained items (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). A pilot study was subsequently conducted with 30 students, and the internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, which exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.84 (Cronbach, 1951)

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection proceeded after obtaining institutional approval and informed consent from all participants. Questionnaires were distributed to the entire population of 119 students, and all responses were retrieved and screened for completeness.

Data were analyzed according to the research objectives. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize demographic profiles and the levels of influencing factors. The interpretation criteria for mean scores were categorized as follows: 4.51–5.00 (Very High), 3.51–4.50 (High), 2.51–3.50 (Moderate), 1.51–2.50 (Low), and 1.00–1.50 (Very Low). Furthermore, Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to determine the predictive relationships between the factor (learner, family, environmental, and societal factors) and the students’ proficiency levels.

Results

Table 1 Factors Affecting English Listening and Speaking Ability of Students.

Factors	μ	σ	Meaning
1. Learners Factors	4.05	0.60	High
2. Family Factors	3.90	0.63	Moderate
3. College Environmental Factors	3.92	0.46	Moderate
4. Social Factors	4.04	0.59	High
Average	3.98	0.57	Moderate

Table 1 presents the factors affecting English listening and speaking ability. The results indicate that the overall averaged mean was 3.98 with a standard deviation of 0.57. The highest mean ($\mu = 4.05$, $\sigma = 0.60$) was recorded for the learner factors. Conversely, the lowest mean ($\mu = 3.90$, $\sigma = 0.63$) was observed for the family factors on English listening and speaking ability.

Table 2 Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Affecting English Listening and Speaking Ability of Students with different proficiency level.

Factors	b	SEB	β	t	Sig.
All groups					
1. Learner factors (X1)	0.167	0.041	0.603**	4.110	0.000
2. Family factors (X2)	0.354	0.026	0.131**	13.447	0.000
3. College environmental factors (X3)	0.277	0.038	0.223**	7.375	0.000
4. Social factors (X4)	0.094	0.034	0.366**	2.754	0.007
High level group					
1. Learner factors (X1)	1.058	0.292	0.397**	3.623	0.001
2. Family factors (X2)	0.572	0.197	0.318**	2.902	0.005
3. College environmental factors (X3)	0.764	0.269	0.307**	2.844	0.006
4. Social factors (X4)	0.122	0.235	0.174*	6.161	0.045
Moderate level group					
1. Learner factors (X1)	0.829	0.096	0.823**	8.615	0.000
2. Family factors (X2)	0.244	0.236	0.115*	6.947	0.038

Factors	b	SEB	β	t	Sig.
3. College environmental factors (X3)	0.117	0.214	0.143*	8.024	0.050
4. Social factors (X4)	0.702	0.192	0.349**	3.657	0.001
Low level group					
1. Learner factors (X1)	0.073	0.158	0.102*	2.876	0.047
2. Family factors (X2)	1.029	0.247	0.568**	4.163	0.000
3. College environmental factors (X3)	0.052	0.098	0.091*	3.173	0.024
4. Social factors (X4)	0.632	0.261	0.330*	2.424	0.022

** Significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$) * Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of students' English listening and speaking abilities. Results indicated that all studied factors—Learner (X1), Family (X2), College Environment (X3), and Social (X4)—exerted a significant positive influence on proficiency.

Overall, all four factors significantly predicted ability ($p \leq 0.01$). Learner factors (X1) emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.603$), followed by social factors (X4) ($\beta = 0.366$).

For the high proficiency group: X1, X2, and X3 were significant at the 0.01 level, with Learner factors ($\beta = 0.397$) being the primary influencer. Social factors (X4) showed the least contribution ($\beta = 0.174$, $p \leq 0.05$).

For the moderate proficiency group: Learner factors (X1) showed the most dominant influence ($\beta = 0.823$, $p \leq 0.01$), followed by social factors (X4). College environmental (X3) and Family (X2) factors were significant at the 0.05 level.

For the low proficiency group: In contrast to other groups, Family factors (X2) were the strongest predictor at the 0.01 level ($\beta = 0.568$). X4, X1, and X3 were also significant, but at the 0.05 level.

Discussion

The study revealed that learner factors—including motivation, self-efficacy, and a growth mindset—are the primary predictors of English proficiency, corroborating the frameworks of Bandura (1997) and Lou and Noels (2017). These internal attributes enable vocational students to overcome communicative anxiety and persist in language acquisition. While individual traits are paramount, family and college environments provide critical reinforcement. Supportive domestic settings and interactive teaching methodologies (CLT) create a 'safe space' for practice, effectively compensating for limited English exposure outside the classroom (Hattie, 2009; Basturkmen, 2010).

Furthermore, social factors, such as career opportunities in the globalized labor market, serve as powerful extrinsic catalysts. This aligns with Hofstede's (1986) view that cultural and professional expectations significantly shape educational behavior. In conclusion, linguistic success in a vocational context is not the result of a single variable but a synergy between the student's internal drive, a supportive learning ecosystem, and clear professional incentives.

Conclusion

This study suggests that English proficiency among vocational students is a product of the dynamic interplay between learner, family, college environmental, and social factors. Sustainable communicative competence requires a holistic approach that prioritizes learner empowerment—through intrinsic motivation and self-regulation—supported by proactive family and institutional environments. Ultimately, a strategic partnership across these domains is essential to cultivate the 21st-century communication skills necessary for learners' diverse professional needs.

Recommendation

1. Educational Implications

1. Given that learner factors exert the most significant influence on language acquisition, educational institutions should prioritize student-centered curricula. Instructional management must strategically foster motivation, self-confidence, and self-regulated learning skills to ensure long-term linguistic competence.

2. Teaching practices should be designed to promote active engagement and authentic communication. There should be a deliberate transition toward fostering learner autonomy, enabling students to navigate English usage with increasing independence.

3. Curriculum planning and instructional delivery must align with the Ministry of Education's benchmarks while being adapted to the vocational context. Integrating learners' practical language requirements into instructional design will significantly enhance pedagogical effectiveness.

4. Based on the comparative findings across proficiency levels, institutions should adopt tailored support:

4.1 High and Moderate Proficiency: Emphasis should be placed on augmenting learner factors through cognitively challenging communicative tasks and feedback mechanisms that bolster self-efficacy.

4.2 Low Proficiency: Greater attention must be directed toward strengthening family-school partnerships and providing a robust emotional and academic support system through the synergy of teachers, parents, and institutional resources.

2. Future Research

1. Subsequent studies should incorporate a broader range of variables to gain a more holistic understanding of language development. Key areas for investigation include learning strategies, Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), and teacher-related factors, such as pedagogical approaches and teacher-student rapport within vocational settings.

2. It is recommended that future research employ longitudinal designs to monitor the evolution of learner, familial, and socio-environmental factors over an extended period. Such an approach would provide deeper insights into the long-term efficacy of instructional interventions and the dynamic interactions between these variables.

3. To complement quantitative findings, future investigations should utilize qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations. This would allow for a more nuanced exploration of learners' lived experiences and subjective perceptions, particularly concerning the specific challenges faced by students across different proficiency levels.

4. Further research is needed to determine how support mechanisms and instructional practices can be specifically optimized to meet the practical linguistic demands and professional requirements of vocational students in a globalized labor market.

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