

# **Attitudes of Thai English Learners towards Online Learning of Speaking**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A recent challenge in the field of education has been met as a shift to online classes from traditional face-to-face classes has been attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, certain issues arise from such a sudden shift to an online learning environment, especially for those who have been mainly (or for others, solely) taught in a face-to-face setting. This paper aimed to determine the attitudes of Thai English learners towards online learning of speaking. The study involved fifty-four fourth year English majors in a university in southern Thailand. A survey questionnaire was developed to collect data. It consisted of a 5-point Likert scale asking for the students' level of agreement with statements and open-ended questions. The results show that the teacher being perceived as supportive and the students having a positive feeling when they had a stable Internet connection were the two areas that had the highest mean scores. On the other hand, being given enough opportunities to interact with classmates and preferring to participate in discussions using video (with microphone and video on) had the lowest mean scores. Moreover, the learners' comments provided insights into their attitudes toward online learning in terms of preferences and challenges. Implications for teaching are then drawn from the results.

**KEYWORDS:** attitudes, online learning, speaking

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A recent challenge in the field of education has been met as a shift to online classes from traditional face-to-face classes has been attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, a number of issues arise from such a sudden shift to an online learning environment, especially for those who have been taught mainly (or for others, solely) in a face-to-face setting. It is therefore deemed significant to explore the attitudes of learners toward online classes as they are faced with challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Online learning involves an electronic learning environment with flexibility in terms of time and space [1]. Online education can be entirely virtual in that physical interaction is absent and can also be blended in which classes are done with a combination of face-to-face and virtual meetings [2]. Interactions that happen in online classes can include synchronous (online meetings between the students and teachers at a time that has been set) and asynchronous (course lessons that can be accessed by the students at any time) [3]. Examples of tools used in synchronous classes include online chat rooms, video conferencing and audio channels, while e-mails or discussion boards are used as tools in asynchronous classes [1, 4]. The learners' perception of social presence and their learning can be influenced positively when such learning tools are used effectively [4].

Certain issues relate to online learning. For example, the readiness for such an abrupt transition to online classes by students and teachers is one of the major issues as everyone needs to adjust to this change of environment due to the disruptions caused by the situation. Specifically, this study focused on the online learning of speaking as a language skill. Herrera Diaz and Gonzalez Miy [5] cited de la Torre (2011) that listening, writing, and readings skills as areas of focus for most online courses. Moreover, Levy and Stockwell (2006) as cited in Herrera Diaz and Gonzalez [5] affirmed that the most challenging for instruction, practice, and evaluation through the use of technology is the oral skill. This paper then aimed to determine the attitudes of Thai English learners towards online learning of speaking.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have explored different factors that come into play in an online learning environment. For instance, Baber's [1] study involved 100 undergraduate students studying in different institutions in India and South Korea. The participants were studying online and were taking various courses. It was found that both interaction and student motivation had a strong influence on the perceived learning of the students. Moreover, student satisfaction was positively influenced by the perceived learning of the students and that the perceived learning outcome of the students was moderately influenced by course structure, as well as instructor facilitation/ knowledge. Another study [3] investigated the students' perceptions on distance education. Involving undergraduate students in three countries, Portugal, UAE, and Ukraine, the study found that factors such as motivation, English language skills, and time management were the main areas of concerns for the learners.

Studies in relation to the students' needs and challenges in line with online learning were also conducted. A qualitative study by Nartiningrum and Nugroho [6] explored the different challenges, suggestions, and needs in online learning perceived by 45 EFL learners from a university in Indonesia. The following were identified as challenges: unstable connection to the Internet, lack of interaction and feedback, and distraction, which affects the students' commitment to learn. Suggestions included using applications that enable videoconferencing, using downloadable materials and assignments, setting deadlines for

tasks, and using fun activities for learning. The study also found that the needed materials suggested by the participants related to grammar, vocabulary, current issues, and job preparation. Rahmawati's [7] study also found various opportunities and challenges perceived by six participants from a private university in Indonesia. Being flexible, providing updated information, providing abundant resources, encouraging learners to read, providing opportunities for students who were less active to participate more in activities, as well as e-learning being deemed simpler and fast were identified as opportunities in e-learning. On the other hand, the drawbacks perceived by the participants included interaction and oral communication being decreased, being costly, requiring skills in technology, requiring access to the Internet, lacking teacher's feedback, and increasing the likelihood of cheating and plagiarism.

Other related studies on online learning considered social presence which is defined as the 'the degree to which [a communicant] is perceived as a real person' (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976, p. 73, as cited in Kear, Chetwynd, & Jefferis [8]) which relates to 'the degree to which a person is perceived as 'real' in mediated communication' (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997, p. 8 as cited in Kear, Chetwynd, & Jefferis [8]). A study [4] among 81 students in a cyber university in Korea found that learning satisfaction and social presence were not influenced by demographic factors (e.g., work status, gender, experience in online learning). However, quality of teaching and media integration were identified as significant predictors of both social presence and learning satisfaction, while another predictor of social presence was interactivity among the participants. In an exploratory research [5] that involved nine participants from a public university in Mexico who were taking an online English class, it was found that the community of inquiry framework by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, (1999 as cited in Herrera Diaz & Gonzalez Miy [5]) and some indicators of the oral skill (vocabulary, accuracy, grammar) were related. It was the teaching presence that was perceived the most while the social presence was perceived to be low despite the participants' interactions during the course. This indicates that the level of involvement as individuals and as members of the group was deemed to be low by the participants. Such a result may possibly become a hindrance to higher levels of cognitive presence.

In terms of task types, Ko [9] examined how social presence (SP) and task types were related, involving 38 students with high-intermediate level in EFL in a university in Taiwan. The participants were grouped into two: text-chat without webcam and text-chat with webcam. There were two task types considered in the study: jigsaw tasks (JTs) and decision-making tasks (DMTs). The results showed that the students' SP development was influenced by task types with the DMTs as having higher perceived SP. The DMT webcam condition was perceived by the participants to have the highest SP while the JT-non-webcam condition had the lowest SP. Moreover, the benefits of the webcam image did not seem to be recognized by the learners.

With regard to e-learning methods, a study [10] was conducted with students of English language learning of media studies in Slovak Republic. The participants were divided into three groups based on the different modes of teaching: face-to-face, online learning, and blended learning. The results showed that the students who were in the group that experienced blended learning improved the most in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and vocabulary) while both groups that experienced e-learning and face-to-face modes improved the most in vocabulary. Finally, there was an observed improvement in the areas of speaking and listening skills in the online learning group, indicating that communication in such mode provided the learners a simulation of the possible conditions found in their workplace in the future.

There are also studies that investigated online learning among Thai students. One such study is that of Imsa-ard [11] which involved 310 Thai university students. The study

found that the face-to-face setting was more preferred by most of the participants. The majority of them also expressed that they were unwilling to learn in an online setting in the future and that the instructors' support and feedback were found to be sufficient by most of the participants. Another study that explored the Thai's attitudes towards e-learning of English is that of Olivier [12]. There were 320 university students who responded to the survey questionnaire. Based on the results, it was found that generally, 60% of the respondents supported the idea of e-learning. The students' preference for studying in groups, the need for the presence of a teacher in a classroom and the lack of discipline to study online on their own, and learning English online only if there are credits that can be earned were identified as the main challenges in relation to the learners' preferences.

Another study [13] investigated the use of online language learning strategies (OLLS) and affection in online learning. It also aimed to examine the relationships between the use of OLLS affection in online learning and online English learning outcomes. There were 346 Thai university students who participated in the study. They were grouped into successful online language students (SLs) and unsuccessful online language students (ULs). The findings revealed that the OLLS use had significant differences between the two groups, with the metacognitive strategies receiving the highest level of use in both groups of students. The SLs also used the OLLs more significantly than the ULs. Moreover, a low level of correlation was found between the OLLS and online English outcomes and that a significant difference in the perceptions in terms of affection was also found. Furthermore, the findings suggested that ULs may not have yet been ready for an online learning environment. A study by Ngampornchai and Adams [14] study investigated the learners' readiness and acceptance of e-learning. The respondents were 84 undergraduate students who were taking face-to-face to classes in a university in the northeast of Thailand at the time of the study. It was found that there was a slightly positive perception of e-learning among the participants.

However, in another study [15], the Thai ESL learners surveyed in the research seemed to be ready for online classes based on their high levels of self-efficacy with regard to online learning. The said study focused on identifying the levels of self-efficacy in online learning as well as determining the relationship between the demographic characteristics and the levels of self-efficacy in online learning among 856 undergraduate ESL learners in a university in Thailand. It was found that there was a significant correlation between the learners' computer skills and their comfort level in Internet use and their overall self-efficacy in online learning as well as the four subscales of self- efficacy: 1) Internet competencies, 2) synchronous interaction, 3) asynchronous interaction I, and 4) asynchronous interaction II. The findings suggested that those who felt more comfortable using the Internet and who were more adept at using computers tended to be more confident that they would perform well in online courses. Moreover, the levels of self-efficacy in online learning were found to be significantly correlated with self-reported English proficiency scores, previous experience in online learning, comfort level when it comes to Internet use, and self-reported computer skills. However, there was no significant correlation between the students' English Proficiency scores and self-efficacy.

The findings from the surveyed literature demonstrate how learning and teaching are impacted in an online learning environment. It is hoped that the present study could contribute to the body of literature that seeks to understand and help pursue ways to enhance learning opportunities in online classes.

### 3 METHOD

The study employed the quantitative research design as it aimed to determine the attitudes of Thai English learners towards online learning of speaking. Comments sought from the participants served as qualitative data to provide support to the results gained from the attitudes survey questionnaire.

The participants in the study included fifty-four fourth year English majors in a university in Southern Thailand. Their ages ranged from 20- 24 years old. They were enrolled in a required speaking course in their program in the first semester of the academic year 2020. The majority of the students had not experienced studying online before. More than half of the participants accessed the Internet from their homes while some used the Internet from their dormitory or from the university. At the time of the study, there were options for classes to be held online or in classrooms while health measures were strictly observed. Online classes were conducted for the most part of the semester for this particular course.

A questionnaire was developed, informed by experience/practice and the literature [1, 9]. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: 1) Language Background Information, 2) a 21-item Attitudes towards Online Learning of Speaking section, which uses a 5-point Likert scale, and 3) Open-ended Questions. The said questionnaire was validated by three experts who are lecturers in the English program in the same university, all of whom had been teaching ESL/EFL for more than 10 years. Two of the validators are Thai lecturers with a Ph.D. degree and one validator is a native speaker completing an MA degree. The questionnaire was revised according to the comments of the experts. It was then pilot tested to thirty-one English majors, and the results were then subjected to reliability analysis. It yielded .930 Cronbach's alpha which means that it is internally consistent.

The nature and purpose of the research were explained to the participants and their consent in participating in the study was sought. It took them about 25 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The mean and SD were then used to determine the participants' attitudes toward online learning of speaking. The mean scores for the items in the questionnaire were interpreted using the interpretation below adapted from [16] for the "perception" construct:

Table 1 Interpretation for the 5-point Likert Scale for the Construct Attitudes

Interpretation	Attitudes	Mean Range
Very low	Strongly Disagree	1.00 to 1.80
Low	Disagree	1.81 to 2.60
Medium	Neutral	2.61 to 3.40
High	Agree	3.41 to 4.20
Very high	Strongly agree	4.21 to 5.00

### 4 RESULTS

#### 3. 1. Participants' Background Information

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the participants. As can be seen, the students' age ranged from 20-24 years old. The majority use Thai language as their first language while a few of the participants use Bahasa Melayu as their first language. Most of them started to learn English at 3-5 years old. More than half of the participants accessed the Internet at home while some of them accessed the Internet in the university or dormitory. Finally, the majority had no prior experience in online learning.

Table 2. Demographic profile

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-21	19	35.19
	22-23	33	61.11
	24	2	3.70
Gender	Female	42	77.78
	Male	12	22.22
First language	Thai	47	87.04
	Bahasa Melayu	7	12.96
Language/s used at home	Thai	44	81.48
	Bahasa Melayu	4	7.41
	Thai & Bahasa Melayu	5	9.26
	Thai & English	1	1.85
Age started learning English	3-5	29	53.70
	6-8	20	37.04
	9- above	5	9.26
Internet access	Home	29	53.70
	university/dormitory	17	31.48
	home & dormitory	4	7.41
	anywhere (mobile phone)	4	7.41
Experience in online learning	No	38	70.37
	Yes	16	29.63

### 3.2. Attitudes towards Online Learning of Speaking

Table 3 shows the attitudes of Thai English learners towards online learning of speaking. As can be seen, two items were rated as "strongly agree" ("very high"), with the teacher being supportive as having the highest mean score ( $\bar{x}=4.39$ ), followed by feeling positive when the Internet connection is stable ( $\bar{x}=4.37$ ). Ten items were deemed as "high" ("agree"), while the three items that had the lowest mean scores included feeling that they can concentrate on the speaking lessons ( $\bar{x}=2.96$ ), being given enough opportunities to interact with their classmates ( $\bar{x}= 2.89$ ), and preferring to participate in discussions using video (with the microphone and video on) ( $\bar{x}= 2.81$ ) during online classes.

Table 3 Attitudes towards Online Learning of Speaking

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
19. The teacher is supportive when I learn English speaking in online classes.	4.39	0.79	Very high
10. I feel positive when I have a stable Internet connection.	4.37	0.85	Very high
18. I feel comfortable when I am guided by the teacher in online classes.	4.06	0.86	High
11. I feel that I can manage my time when completing tasks for my online classes.	3.81	0.91	High
20. I learned a lot during my online learning of speaking.	3.76	0.89	High
17. When I miss an online class, I can keep up with the lesson because the materials are always made available.	3.69	1.08	High
14. I enjoy English speaking activities during online classes.	3.65	0.99	High
12. I can work on speaking tasks independently.	3.63	0.83	High
13. I can adapt to an online environment when learning speaking.	3.52	0.84	High
9. I feel confident about using technology in making my oral	3.50	1.04	High

presentations.			
21. I am satisfied with my online learning of speaking classes.	3.50	0.86	High
3. I am given enough opportunities to interact with my teacher during online classes.	3.43	0.84	High
8. I feel comfortable delivering oral presentations during online classes.	3.37	1.01	Medium
4. I prefer to participate in class discussions orally (with the microphone on).	3.35	1.05	Medium
6. I prefer to participate in class discussions using chat or text messages.	3.35	1.36	Medium
1. I am given enough opportunities to practice speaking during online classes.	3.33	0.82	Medium
15. I feel motivated to practice speaking in online classes.	3.33	0.99	Medium
16. Online learning for a speaking class is convenient for me.	3.24	1.23	Medium
7. I feel that I can concentrate on the speaking lessons during online classes.	2.96	1.15	Medium
2. I am given enough opportunities to interact with my classmates during online classes.	2.89	1.02	Medium
5. I prefer to participate in class discussions using video (with the microphone and video on).	2.81	0.93	Medium

### 3. 2. Comments from the students

In terms of the open-ended questions which asked about their feelings and suggestions about their online classes, their preferences and the challenges they encountered surfaced.

#### 3.2.1. Necessity

The students recognize the necessity for adjusting to a new set-up such as online classes, as seen in the comments below:

*S37: It's acceptable in quarantine to learn in online.*

*S38: For me, learning to speak in English with online classes is fine. It is necessary sometimes when we can't go to the regular classes. For me it is pretty well.*

#### 3.2.2. Comfort and Convenience

For some students, they find online classes convenient and comfortable since they do not have to spend time preparing to go to the campus and be physically present in the classroom. They can also go online at the time of their class in a place of their choice, as seen in the following remarks:

*S5: Of course, learning online is convenient and I can manage my own space.*

*S23: I'm happy because I can learn the online class everywhere.*

*S27: I feel comfortable to learn English because it is easy to study anywhere. This chance is a new opportunity to learn English online, so I can adjust with technology to improve and challenge myself. Before this, we never learn English through online.*

*S30: In my opinion, I feel comfortable to learn speaking in English via online classes because it is convenient for me to learn...*

For S27, not only is the online class convenient but also finds it as an opportunity to learn technological skills.

#### 3.2.3. Self-confidence

For some students, the level of confidence and comfort stem from the nature of online classes where the physical presence of others may contribute to their anxiety if the classes

were done in a face-to-face environment. They may feel more comfortable communicating in an online setting, as seen in the following comments:

*S2: I feel confident when I take online classes to learn in English. This is because I can be myself and interact with people.*

*S10: I feel comfortable when we [are] taking online class with the teacher, and I don't feel pressure when I have to speak in English.*

*S16: It helps somebody who lack of self-confident. Online study makes them speak more because it is not in front of a lot of people.*

*S22: I think online classes is a good choice for learning speaking in English because it can reduce my anxiety when I speak English and the teacher always support and help when I have a mistake with speaking skills.*

*S31: I feel comfortable because studying online means we have to be alone and not watched by those around me. It makes me more comfortable. But studying in the classroom feels more warm.*

*S46: I feel comfortable because I can speak out loud and I don't worry about classmates how they think about my speaking skill.*

*S54: It's very well. Because online class make me more communicate with teacher.*

### **3.2.4. Motivation**

As seen in the comments below, motivation is one of the challenges that students experience in online classes as well as a point for consideration by the teachers.

*S39: When it comes to the online class, I almost feeling lazy all the time because of lacking of interacting with others.*

*S41: At first, I feel happy that I don't have to go to university, but after I studied for 3 months, I think sometimes I feel lonely and I feel no motivation.*

### **3.2.5. Internet connection**

While some students experience convenience in being able to access online classes anywhere, a stable internet connection seems to be a source of anxiety for some students as reflected in the following comments:

*S5: Sometimes I find my Internet connection bad. It affects the scores when having quizzes and doing some activities. Sometimes, my devices have problems: camera or microphone doesn't work...*

*S18: I feel a bit moody when the connection is unstable.*

*S20: I feel nervous because there are several things that I concern such as internet connection, my microphone, my video and where I can study.*

*S30: ...sometimes I feel nervous because I have some problems about Internet connection, it make me lack of the content that the teacher teaches.*

*S38: If it has a problem with online classes, I think it will be an Internet connection.*

*S45: I think I cannot catch up much as I want because I always have problem about my internet connection. I[t] made me missed some topic.*

There is a worry that they might miss important information or activities during the class due to a weak connection with the Internet.

### **3.2.6. Concentration**

Another challenge that students encounter in an online learning environment is the amount of concentration needed to engage in class with distraction or physical discomfort, as seen in the following remarks:

*S1: I feel good when I have online classes but sometimes I feel annoyed because there are some sounds of environment around my house.*

*S6: In my opinion, learning speaking should study in the class more [than] learning online because I can't concentrate when I study online.*

*S7: ...Moreover, it's hard to concentrate the whole class because of eye pain.*

### **3.2.7. Naturalness of the environment**

The students also commented about the realness or “natural” environment for speaking or learning as seen in their comments below:

*S5: ...Most importantly, I feel awkward when speaking to the camera and not to real people.*

*S9: I think comfortable delivering oral presentation, but it is not like in the real classroom. I'm appreciated to learning in the class more than online classes. We can touch facial expressing and accent better [than in] online classes.*

*S12: ...And don't open the microphone when it is not necessary.*

*S30: I prefer to learn regular classes because when I study the speaking course. I like to see face to face to the teacher. I can interact with each other. It is natural more than studying via online classes.*

*S34: I feel that online class make me least opportunity to interact with the teacher. I feel more motivated to ask the teacher a question in regular class.*

*S36: In my opinion, learn speaking in English through an online class is not effective. When speaking, gesture is important too.*

*S48: I feel good because I still can speak even it is online, but it is the speaking class, so I need the audience to listen what I'm speak, so I think that it will be better if I can speaking in face-to-face class.*

The comment from S12 was practical as unnecessary sounds interfere with communication. However, turning the microphone off can also add to the feeling of “unnaturalness” since in an authentic speaking environment, noise is a common occurrence.

### **3.2.8. Preference for face-to-face setting**

Another point that was raised in some of the students' responses is the preference for face-to-face classes as reflected in the comments below:

*S3: I think I feel comfortable when I study. However, I still want to learn in the class more than online class.*

*S31: ...It [studying online] makes me more comfortable. But studying in the classroom feels more warm.*

*S52: I feel good when I have to speak English in taking online classes, but not much because I would love to talk face to face with my teacher more.*

### **3.2.9. Instruction**

The manner in which the lessons are delivered also plays a crucial factor in conducting classes. This is where the role of the teacher comes especially in designing activities. For example, some students expressed some satisfaction with the activities:

*S1: I think now it's good because the teacher has more activities always and it makes me wake up all the time.*

*S12: At the first class I felt nervous, but next time I felt comfortable when I learn online class because the teacher made me relax.*

*S21: I felt asleep during online classes sometimes, but the way teacher teaches me can make me fun.*

*S23: I think it's perfect now because teacher has a lot of activities before start learning that it help students alert and boost energy.*

*S43: Online classes are like classes at the university because the teacher has a plan for teaching that makes me understand about the lessons easily.*

However, online classes can also pose additional issues in designing more engaging and interactive activities that would support, as well as challenge learners. This further challenges the teachers to hold students' attention, especially for those who may be distracted or feel discomfort in the duration of classes. Below are some comments and suggestions of the participants:

*S5: Teachers might have interesting and fun activities for students in case sometimes students may feel asleep and disturbed by their surroundings.*

*S7: I want some games in the class to wake me up from [being] sleepy.*

*S26: Should have more games or activities to convince the students' attention.*

Another suggestion is to make everyone visible on video during class.

*S24: I will suggest both students and teacher should stay in a quiet place, and they [students] should open their camera during studying.*

*S27: I would like to suggest that we have to open the video camera during studying.*

*S35: I would suggest that student should [be] force[d] to open their monitor, not only the teacher. i think that many students are doing other things besides learning.*

*S50: Everyone should turn on video.*

However, this option may not be for everybody; for instance, as seen in the previous section on "self-confidence", some students may feel more comfortable that they do not feel judged by their peers during classes. Another student expressed a personal concern about being on video call or on the phone:

*S40: I feel uncomfortable and less confident because I have a personal problem that I always nervous and panic when I'm during the video call or on the phone.*

Moreover, as seen in the survey results of the students' attitudes toward online learning, preference to participate in discussions while the microphone and video are turned on received the lowest mean score.

## 5 DISCUSSION

While the students recognize the necessity of online classes especially at the time of pandemic, the preference for face-to-face classes of some students are understandable especially considering the sudden shift to online classes. Readiness for such shifts should be considered more closely. As Baber [1] puts it, the satisfaction of the learners may be affected by their perceived learning.

Moreover, their perceived learning may also have been influenced by various factors such as access to technology or resources, for example, having devices that could further enhance their learning such as microphone and stable Internet connection. Having slow connection and having many people using the computer were found to be factors related to

limited access to the internet as identified by Chomphuchart [17] in her study. As Imsa-ard [11] cites from Saengpassa (2013) and Ngampornchai and Adams [14], the Internet services are established and made available for all schools educational institutions in the country; however, concerns about the digital divide may arise since not everyone has access to online resources and has the necessary equipment for learning at home [11]. The findings from the present study also relate to that of Imsa-ard [11] who found that the majority of the students encountered technical and internet-access related problems. This particular finding is also similar to that of other studies [6, 7] in which the participants also identified unstable connection as one of the challenges they encountered.

As pointed out in the results, some students may find online classes suitable for them as they feel comfortable in that particular environment. While there are benefits of having the videos turned on the whole time of the class, there are a number of reasons that this could be an optional set-up. For example, Moses [18] identifies challenges that students may encounter in online classes such as increased anxiety and stress, “Zoom” fatigue, obligations that may result in multitasking, right to privacy, as well as financial resources or limitations in access. On a practical note, there may also be concerns about the bandwidth needed to have videos turned on most of the time. Additionally, the results of this study showed that the preference to participate in discussions in online classes with the microphone and video turned on had the lowest mean score. This suggests that most of the participants may not feel comfortable with this format.

On the other hand, the medium by which participants interact plays a role in social presence. For instance, when comparing a videoconference and a discussion forum, the former is more likely to render higher social presence than the latter since a videoconference enables the participants to hear and be visible to each other [8]. Therefore, a balance in the use of different modes of communication in an online environment should be taken into consideration. This provides the learners a variety of ways to communicate in an online set-up. Furthermore, this can help in making the students feel more confident in an environment that they prefer while also providing them opportunities to deal with different settings that they may encounter such as in their future workplace.

Moreover, one finding in this study is the perceived convenience and comfort that an online learning environment provides them. Such finding is also in line with Rahmawati's [7] study that the participants deemed flexibility as the primary opportunity provided by e-learning, as it refers to “the ease of access to which students could access at any time and from anywhere” (p. 6). For some students, they find online classes convenient and comfortable since they do not have to spend time preparing to go to the campus and be physically present in the classroom. They can also go online at the time of their class in a place of their choice. However, the place for learning is another point to consider as certain distractions in the environment can hinder them from maximizing the opportunities to learn.

Another factor that needs to be considered is the learners’ motivation, as it drives the person towards a particular goal. Hence, in an online learning environment, as Baber [1] cited from the literature (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Hsu, Wang, & Levesque-Bristol, 2019; Nelson, Oden, & Williams, 2019 as cited in Baber [1]), it will be the learners who have high motivation that will succeed more than those whose motivations are low. It is therefore necessary to devise ways that would increase the students’ motivation and engagement in learning in an online environment by employing varied teaching strategies and considering student’s interests and preferences. Olivier [12] also noted that “a positive student-attitude is paramount to satisfactory learning goals” (p. 5).

Enhancing interaction is also another point that needs further examination. For some students, the authenticity and realness of interaction and different ways of communicating and their preferences for a particular mode are highlighted. This is similar to the finding from

another study [6] in which some of the participants identified insufficient interactions between the learners and the teacher as one of the challenges they had in an online learning environment. Insufficient personal interaction between and among the learners, as well as between the learners and the instructors seem to be the focal issue [19]. Student satisfaction can be raised when there are helpful and frequent interactions between the teachers and the students [19]. Add to these is the sense of immediacy where in an online learning environment, there are limitations in communicating through nonverbal behaviors and that verbal behaviors are mainly communicated through texts [4].

As a way to address such challenges, continuous and consistent teacher trainings should be conducted to further help educators become more ready in the shift to online classes. Such trainings can further equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge that relate to instruction and technology. Teachers could regularly check the students' attention and learning from time to time by asking questions, getting and giving feedback, and designing lessons that increase engagement. Varied and appropriate activities and forms of assessment should be explored in order to ensure that learning takes place. Moreover, balancing the use of synchronous and asynchronous tools is also necessary in ensuring that the delivery of instruction is efficient and effective. As noted in the students' responses in this study, a stable Internet connection is one of the challenges they encounter, and yet this connection is crucial in conducting synchronous classes.

Giving students opportunities to choose ways to communicate (e.g., chats, videoconference, discussion forums) and activities is another way to address the challenge as individual differences, just like in traditional classrooms, should be considered. Such practices, however, need to be in line with the purpose and nature of the course, activities, and forms of assessment. The teachers then should be flexible in setting the guidelines or rules in conducting online classes. Ways that permit students to collaborate and opportunities that give them room for interaction, sharing of opinions and knowledge production are essential for online educators to develop [2]. Being flexible when it comes to interaction and pacing in an online set-up stimulates a student-centered learning environment [15] since such a learning environment is important in an online setup [6]. In online learning, to reduce the possibility of dropping out or disengagement of the students, monitoring their progress and determining the challenges and following up on them are deemed as crucial responsibilities of the teachers [20]. Moreover, based on the findings of this study, the students perceived the teacher as being supportive, suggesting that they felt guided and helped by the instructor. Thus, training teachers in conducting online classes can be beneficial in providing further support to their students' needs.

There is also need to provide students with trainings that will help them ease the challenges that online learning may pose for them. As Baum and McPherson [19] noted, self-directed learners who are academically prepared and have more access to technology tend to adapt better to the online learning environment. Having self-discipline and managing time effectively are needed more in online learning as compared to the face-to-face learning environment [19]. In addition, learners who have been used to the traditional mode of learning may find developing self-regulation skills demanding [15]. Finally, not all learners have developed the knowledge or skills in using technology. After all, "Not every student is computerate" [11, p. 43].

## [6] CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the attitudes of Thai English learners towards the online learning of speaking. The results show that the teacher being perceived as supportive and the students having a positive feeling when they had a stable Internet connection were the two areas that had the highest mean scores. However, being given enough opportunities to interact with classmates and preferring to participate in discussions using video (with microphone and video on) had the lowest mean scores. Moreover, the learners' comments provided insights into their attitudes toward online learning in terms of preferences and challenges. The areas of concern identified in their responses included necessity, comfort and convenience, self-confidence, motivation, internet connection, concentration, naturalness of the environment, preference for face-to-face setting, and instruction. Trainings for both teachers and students would be beneficial for them to handle the challenges that an online learning environment may pose.

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