

Study of Phetchabun Rajabhat University Second and Third Year Students' Listening and Speaking Difficulties in English Language

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Received: August 8, 2024 **Revised:** August 26, 2024 **Accepted:** August 27, 2024

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the English listening and speaking problems and the origins of these problems among PCRU second and third year English major students. A mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research, with the data being calculated using SPSS, was conducted to anonymously investigate 35 student participants from the second- and third-year students studying in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 at PCRU, Phetchabun, Thailand. The research questions ask: (a) Which listening comprehension problems arise while students are learning English? (b) Difficult problems with PCRU second- and third-year English major students' listening comprehension of English. (c) The main causes of the English listening and speaking problems that students encountered.

The findings indicated that 1). PCRU second- and third-year students' difficulties in listening to English. There were 17 items, all consisting of negative output. There were 4 items regarding English listening problems that the students rated as high levels of problems: (a) a limited amount of vocabulary; (b) a limited meaning of vocabulary; (c) speed of speech; and (d) accent of speech. 2). Speaking of issues among PCRU second- and third-year English major students, there were 15 items, all consisting of negative output. There were 4 items regarding English speaking problems that the students rated as high levels of problems: (a) limited meaning of vocabulary, (b) limited amount of vocabulary, (c) being too shy, and (d) pronunciation of words.

Keywords: Difficulties; Foreign Language (EFL); task-based language teaching (TBLT)

Introduction

The spread of the English language has had a world-changing effect, not least on the world of education. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face considerable challenges in listening and speaking skills. These skills are essential for effective communication and academic success. The difficulties with listening and speaking for Phetchabun Rajabhat University (PCRU) EFL students will be researched, and the problems will be established, which will help create a better understanding of the difficulties facing PCRU EFL students in listening and speaking, which will promote the development of a new curriculum to minimize the established problems. To accurately comprehend the problems of EFL students, one must identify the problems. In terms of listening, according to Huang & Loranc (2022), the lack of an authentic language environment has EFL students or learners struggling due to limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments. This lack of immersion hinders their ability to understand native speakers, especially when it comes to different accents and colloquial expressions. PCRU students are further hindered by comprehension of what is being said; understanding spoken English is challenging due to the lack of regular practice and exposure to diverse accents and speaking speeds (Kenza Tacarraoucht et al., 2022). Moreover, listening skills are often less emphasized in curricula, further hindering students' proficiency (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022). A fundamental skill for communication is speaking. As set forth above in listening, the limited interaction opportunities for meaningful English conversations are often limited, both inside and outside the classroom. This restricts students' ability to practice and improve their speaking skills (Jabber & Mahmood, 2020). Other factors for EFL students in speaking are pronunciation and accent. These difficulties are major barriers for EFL students. These issues can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns (Li & Chan, 2024).

Despite the wealth of research and evolving academic strategies, deficiencies persist in understanding problems. Liu (2023) evaluated task-based language teaching (TBLT) and found it beneficial for enhancing speaking skills in controlled environments. However, the study emphasized that more research is needed on varied cultural contexts and their impact on listening skills (Liu, 2023). Additionally, Garcia (2024) highlighted the deficiency in understanding how different teaching methods influence the development of listening and speaking skills concurrently, suggesting a more integrated approach to education (Garcia, 2024). Furthermore, Kim (2023) focused on the emotional aspects, such as anxiety and motivation, affecting EFL students' speaking abilities. The study revealed that while there are numerous interventions to reduce anxiety, their effectiveness varies significantly across different age groups and proficiency levels (Kim, 2023). Similarly, the motivational factors influencing listening skills have been underexplored, with recent

studies calling for more meticulous research in this area (Nguyen, 2024). The purpose of the research is to identify the specific difficulties of PCRU's second- and third-year's students dealing with listening and speaking the English language, which has been less extensively explored in past studies. The following research questions were specifically addressed:

- 1) What are the problematic issues with learning English and listening for PCRU second- and third-year English major students?
- 2) What are the problematic issues with learning English and speaking for English major PCRU second and third year students?
- 3) Where were the main causes within English listening and speaking that PCRU second- and third-year English major students encountered?

Literature Review

1. Listening Problems

The hindrances that students of EFL face can range from psychological to semantic. This is pointed out by Seli Siti Sa'diyah (2016), who claims that there are, from her perspective, ten distinct issues. These hindrances are: students' general listening proficiency; students' perception of the importance of listening; using different means to enhance listening; listening problems related to the content of the listening; listening problems related to linguistics; problems caused by a lack of concentration; students' perceptions of listening problems related to psychological characteristics; students' factors relating to the individual; speakers' factors relating to the individual; and students' problems related to the physical setting. These problems that she has highlighted are genuine problems relating to most EFL students. The factors relating to psychology and concentration are fundamental to learning a language.

Furthermore, Seli Siti Sa'diyah (2016) contends that the largest concern in listening is the context and content of the language. Listening is difficult for EFL students because it is not their first language. The direction that most teachers take within the English class is that they emphasize more grammar, reading, and vocabulary. This means that students who learn EFL tend to have more problems with listening comprehension. Furthermore, the structured learning from teachers who have the same language as the EFL students leads to sounds that the students may be unfamiliar with and that are in the English language but not in their native language. This problem will be the principal cause of comprehension difficulties. Listening comprehension is a critical component of language acquisition, yet many EFL students often struggle with it due to several key issues. One issue students have is a limited vocabulary, which hampers their ability to understand spoken English, especially when native speakers use idiomatic expressions or

speak quickly (Cubalit, 2023). This often-limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments hinders their ability to understand native speakers, especially when it comes to different accents and colloquial expressions (Huang & Loranc, 2022). Additionally, unfamiliar pronunciation patterns add to the difficulty (Helgesen, 2023). PCRU students often have limited exposure to different English accents, which can be problematic given the global nature of the language. This lack of exposure makes it difficult for them to understand speakers with non-native accents (Boonmoh & Kamsaard, 2023). This leads to traditional teaching methods in the university that prioritize reading and writing over listening and speaking, leading to insufficient practice in these areas (Tai et al., 2023) and may not emphasize interactive listening practices. Consequently, students miss out on engaging, real-world listening opportunities that could enhance their comprehension skills (Ansari, 2023). Therefore, this exposure to real-world opportunities can lead to listening anxiety in EFL students. High levels of stress and anxiety can negatively impact their ability to concentrate and comprehend spoken English (Derakhshan et al., 2023). Kittima Tantihachai (2016) conducted a study to examine the anxiety of listening and speaking English in a Thai EFL classroom. The researchers analyzed data using qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques, with a questionnaire used in the study of a self-completion form and a semi-structured interview. This research was conducted at a college in the southern part of Thailand, with a total target population of 42 students. The research found that the majority of students fall into the medium anxiety group, with a low percentage falling into the high anxiety group.

2. Speaking Problems

Speaking as an EFL student can be somewhat of a challenge in which pronunciation and communication collide. Many teachers focus on the proper use of grammar while speaking, and this is not completely wrong, but being understood while speaking should be at the forefront of teaching EFL. This in itself is not speaking for speaking purposes only; no, it's for building skills within the EFL language to become more fluent in the English language.

Another hindrance to students of EFL is the use of commercially produced textbooks and scripted dialogues, which will not produce a student rich in everyday communication skills (Parrish, 2006). This is not the only flaw in the use of structured learning; the time used within the classroom has made it very difficult for students to engage in listening and speaking. Nunan (1999) states that students spend more than 50% of their time listening, so effective comprehension skills should go into developing a better curriculum. Teaching skills that focus strictly on language points will not make an effective spontaneous speaker. This has been pointed out by Parrish (2006), who states that students need to be prepared for the communication demands of interactions

outside of the classroom. Limited practice opportunities in the classroom environment often provide limited opportunities for students to practice speaking. Classroom activities may not be sufficient to develop fluency, and students may not have access to English-speaking environments outside the classroom (Pruksaseat, 2022). These limited opportunities for meaningful interaction in English are both inside and outside the classroom. This restricts EFL students' ability to practice and improve their speaking skills (Jabber & Mahmood, 2020).

The other part of speaking that has been mentioned is pronunciation. This is where most students struggle. Parrish (2006) states that the teaching of pronunciation has been debated, and the argument is that the communication approach is the more valuable of the two, arguing that communication and the understanding of the information being spoken are more important than the pronunciation of the language. This is one that hinders the students' ability to build confidence in speaking the English language. Pronunciation and intonation are things EFL students struggle with, which can make their speech difficult to understand. Issues such as incorrect stress patterns and mispronunciation of sounds not present in the Thai language are common (Bhattarachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023). Furthermore, the accent difficulties and heavy pronunciation of local areas are major barriers for EFL students. These issues can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns (Li & Chan, 2024). Pronunciation and accent are aspects of language that are neither focused on nor practiced enough within the classroom. Teachers can use a learner-centered teaching approach to enable students to grasp the pronunciation skills needed to succeed in the English language. Many approaches can be used in many forms. Incorporating pronunciation and intonation training into the curriculum can help students become more intelligent. Techniques such as shadowing, where students mimic native speakers, can be particularly effective (Helgesen, 2023). In most Asian countries, we must be content with the mispronunciation of the letters "r" and "l." With this being said, a teacher can use a form of word search approach. This can be implemented in class by having one student call out words using these letters and having a second student find the word within the search. Exposure to varied English accents can provide students with listening materials featuring a range of accents and can help them become more adept at understanding spoken English in different contexts (Boonmoh & Kamsa-ard, 2023). These problems in speaking can be perplexing for EFL students, influenced by psychological factors. One psychological factor is speaking Anxiety: this experience of anxiety when speaking English manifests low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. This anxiety is exacerbated in formal settings such as oral exams or public speaking (Kalra & Siribud, 2023; Hidayati et al., 2023). Many EFL students experience significant speaking anxiety, which stems from fear of making

mistakes, negative evaluation, and cultural tendencies towards modesty and reservation (Gan, 2012; Ervin, 2023).

Based on previous and associated research, it can be determined that English listening and speaking skills are key components for EFL students in comprehending and using the English language in contexts of communication. Even though most students entering an academic-level learning environment have had many years of learning the English language, they still face many problems in listening and speaking. Some issues discovered in related research suggested that grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary were the most concerning problems. Some research concludes that being shy and making mistakes were forces that hindered students from listening and speaking. Another problem that was found is the use of the mother tongue and the limited exposure of the English language within the classroom. As a consequence, the students were unable to comprehend the listening and speaking aspects of the English language. Furthermore, these issues had an effect on the use of the English language in communication. The researchers are engaged in finding the problems that PCRU EFL students have with listening to and speaking the English language and understanding whether or not the students experienced some of the problems that have been mentioned in past studies.

Methodology

The research encompasses a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative procedures in order to produce common problems surrounding the difficulties of learning, listening, and speaking the English language.

1. Research Design

A research design is a strategy for answering the research question using empirical data, according to Shona McCombes (2023). This research design is developed to present the process and methods the researchers use in their work, which are directly related to the objective of the study. The design of this study is mixed-methods, with both qualitative and quantitative experimental research. It was designed to gain information regarding the existing problems and difficulties that the second and third-year PCRU English major students have in learning to listen to and speak the English language. This research determined the situation, which was the problems and difficulties at the time of the study. The data is collected in the form of questionnaires, interviews, and listening and speaking tests. The investigation is focused on problems in learning, listening, and speaking faced by students of the English major department at Phetchabun Rajabhat University in the 2023–2024 academic year.

The mixed sequential chart design of Van Wezemael et al. (2013) was used. It is a two-stage approach, referring to a qualitative analysis followed by a quantitative analysis.

The use of exploratory sequential design, qualitative data collection, and analysis occurs first, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. This design can first explore initial questions and develop hypotheses. Then it can be used in the quantitative data to test or confirm your qualitative findings.

2. Stage 1: Qualitative Research

The purpose of qualitative research is to create open-ended interview questions and questionnaires for the stated research study, which will be used as instruments as follows: 1) To survey the target population for individual data such as age, gender, and semester year attended at the time of the survey. 2) To survey in-depth using an interview and questionnaire about what problems or difficulties may exist with listening and speaking the English language for the second and third-year PCRU students. The target population was English major university students with ages ranging between 19 and 25. The target population of participants for this research were 35 English Bachelor degree students of the second and third years from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science.

2.1 Research Instruments

The research instruments for this study have two main themes, which are as follows:

- 1) The open-ended questionnaire is to survey the problems or difficulties in listening and speaking pertaining to the target population.
- 2) To survey open-ended individual interview questions about problems or difficulties in listening and speaking surrounding the target population in the research.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from the total population of participants, which consisted of 35 students in their second and third years enrolled at PCRU in the English major within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. These participants are in the academic year 2023-2024 and are prompted to complete an open-ended questionnaire to identify their problems related to listening and speaking the English language. Additionally, they were selected for a face-to-face interview, where their answers and comments were also collected for the qualitative data.

2.3 Data Analysis Methods

All data obtained from the qualitative research that was collected from the questionnaire and interview is calculated using the exploratory method of qualitative research, beginning with an open-ended approach to allow for the discovery of new insights and patterns. The research involves an in-depth examination of a single individual,

group, or specific context. The researcher accumulates the sources of data, such as interviews and questionnaires, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems and to gain insight into their broader implications. Interviews were used to collect the data in this research. This qualitative interview occurred as the researcher asked students open-ended questions and recorded their answers. This is a process of collecting the data by asking questions, participating, and recording the statements. This research was a face-to-face interview, where the question was only asked once. The procedure consists of the following steps: 1) total impression—from chaos to themes; 2) identifying and sorting meaning units—from themes to codes; 3) condensation—from code to meaning; 4) synthesizing—from condensation to descriptions and concepts (Kirsti Malterud, 2012)."

3. Stage 2: Quantitative Research

The quantitative researchers utilized the grades obtained from the final listening and speaking TOEFL design exams. The students' results in listening and speaking exams were analyzed to determine the level of both skills, the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability, and the problems they experienced.

The sample, which consisted of the results obtained by 35 PCRU students in their second and third years of attending university programs, was analyzed via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) using descriptive statistics.

3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study was conducted at PCRU, Thailand, among English major university students with ages ranging between 19 and 25. The sampling size for this research was 35 English Bachelor degree students of the second and third years from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science. The study used the total population of the chosen PCRU students from English major. The 35 students of the second and third years were chosen to participate from a total population of 35 students with an English major who have been studying English courses at PCRU.

3.2 Research Instruments

Students' listening and speaking skills were analyzed by establishing the level of understanding and students' listening comprehension and speaking ability using the TOEFL design exams. In collecting the data, researchers used the TOEFL design exams based on exams created by Pamela J. Sharpe, Ph.D. (2016). The TOEFL design exams consisted of 2 listening situations with a total of 10 questions and 2 speaking situations where the response was scored on a 5-point scale based on vocabulary, pronunciation and accent, grammar, ideas and information, fluency, and confidence.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from the total population of participants, which consisted of 35 second- and third-year PCRU students in English majors within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. These participants are in the academic year 2023-2024 and were selected to take the Listening TOEFL Design exam. The listening exam was given in a 15-minute time frame, while the speaking exam was given in a 10-minute time frame. The listening exam was scored from 1 to 5, with the highest score being 5 points. These points are as follows: 1 pts 1 to 2 questions correct, 2 pts. 3 to 4 questions correct, 3 pts 5 to 6 questions correct, 4 pts. 7 to 8 questions correct, and 5 pts 9 to 10 questions correct.

The speaking exam consisted of two prompted situations in which the students must speak about the prompted situation for 45 seconds with a 15-second preparation time. The speaking exam was scored from 1 to 5, with the highest score being 5 points. These points are rated by five professional experienced instructors in EFL/ESL, then scores were added together and divided, then rounded to the nearest whole number to create the average score. It is scored based on vocabulary, pronunciation and accent, grammar, ideas and information, fluency, and confidence. The points are as follows: 1 beginner, 2 low intermediate, 3 high intermediate, 4 advanced, and 5 high advanced. The scores were analyzed via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), using descriptive statistics.

- 1) Beginner (EF Education, 2023).
- 2) Lower intermediate (EF Education, 2023).
- 3) High intermediate (EF Education, 2023).
- 4) Advance (EF Education, 2023).
- 5) High advance (EF Education, 2023).

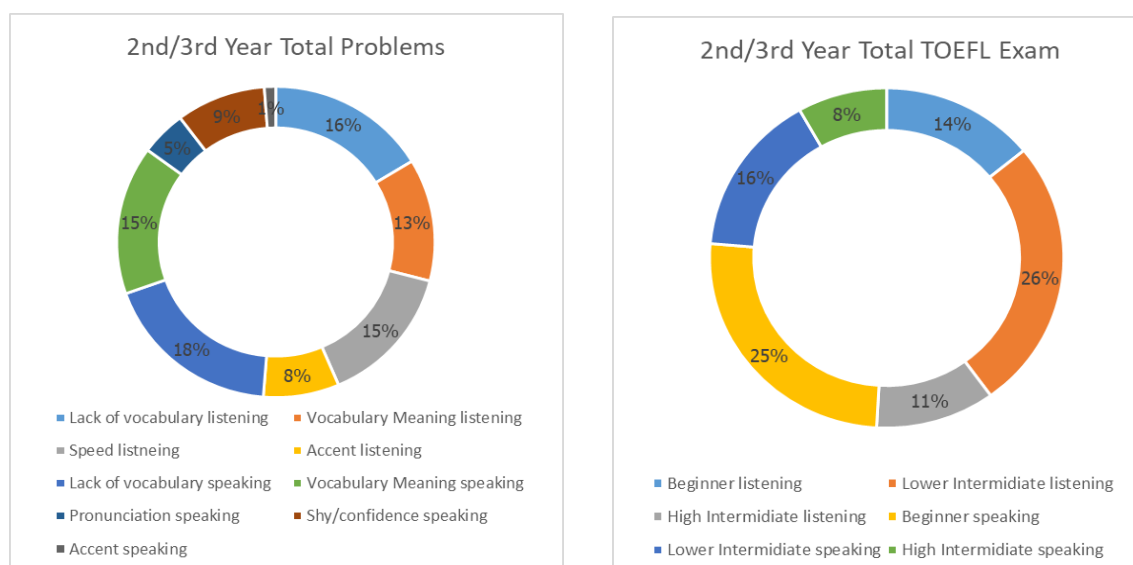
3.4 Data Analysis Methods

All data obtained from the quantitative research, which was collected from TOEFL design exams, is calculated using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This program is used to analyze, transform, and produce a characteristic pattern between the data variables. In addition, the output can be obtained through graphical representation so that it can be easily transferred to the result.

Results and Discussion

As stated in the previous section, the objectives of the research were to examine the problems of second- and third-year English major students at PCRU with listening to and speaking the English language. In this section, the results of the research work and discussions are presented from the data analysis of the Listening and Speaking

Questionnaire, along with listening and speaking TOEFL design exams. The results of the data analysis are presented as follows:



Conclusion

The study reveals that second- and third-year English major students at PCRU face problems with listening and speaking skills. The research provides a researcher's perspective on these issues and highlights the challenges they face in learning the English language. The problems are consistent across both students, with some stating their English language understanding in context is ineffective. Vocabulary lack is a significant factor in their comprehension of listening and speaking. Many students wish they could have learned more vocabulary before entering university. The data from quantitative and qualitative analyses provides a clear picture of the difficulties and ineffectiveness students face in learning the English language, both in and outside the classroom.

Recommendations for future studies

The study focuses on English listening and speaking problems among second and third-year students at Phetchabun Rajabhat University. To better understand these issues, researchers should replicate the study with a wider range of participants and compare results. This could help organizations evaluate students' issues and develop effective teaching methods.

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