

# ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจผ่านมุมมองของนักศึกษาชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อการเรียนการสอน

## Factors Affecting English Listening Comprehension Perceived by Thai University Students of English Medium Instruction Programs

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### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจของผู้เรียนชาวไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ คือ นักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัย ระดับปริญญาตรี จำนวน 44 คน ที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อหลักในการเรียนการสอน เครื่องมือวิจัยคือ แบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับการรับรู้ปัจจัยการฟังที่ส่งผลต่อภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจ สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลคือสถิติเชิงพรรณนา และนำข้อมูลไปเปรียบเทียบกับงานวิจัยที่ผ่านมา ผลการศึกษาพบว่า นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่เห็นว่าความรู้ด้านคำศัพท์ และความเร็วของการพูดเป็นปัจจัยหลักที่ส่งผลต่อการฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจ นอกจากนี้ นักศึกษาบางส่วนให้ความเห็นว่าสำเนียงของผู้พูด ความรู้ด้านไวยากรณ์ และความรู้ด้านเนื้อหาส่งผล ต่อการฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจ งานวิจัยนี้จะช่วยให้เพิ่มความตระหนักรู้ของผู้สอนในแง่ของ ความเชื่อของผู้เรียนและเป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาสื่อการเรียนรู้อเพื่อเสริมสร้างทักษะการฟังภาษาอังกฤษ ซึ่งเป็นขั้นตอนถัดไปของโครงการวิจัยนี้

**คำสำคัญ:** ปัจจัย การฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจ ผู้เรียนชาวไทย

### Abstract

This research aim to study the factors related to English listening comprehension of Thai students. The sample consisted of 44 Thai undergraduate students studying in a Thai university where English is used as the main medium of instruction. The research instrument was a questionnaire on perceptions of listening factors affecting English listening comprehension, revealing the students' perception of factors affecting their English listening comprehension. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and compared with previous studies. The results showed that most of the students in this study deemed vocabulary and the speed of English

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speakers as the factors that affect their English listening comprehension. Moreover, less than a half of them considered accents of the speakers, grammatical knowledge, and the contents as the factors that affect their comprehension. Thus, this study could help raise teachers' awareness of what learners believe and shed light on directions for developing teaching materials to enhance their listening skills, which is the project's next phase.

**Keywords:** Factors, English listening comprehension, Thai learners

## Introduction

Listening skill in English language learning plays an essential role in communication as it is incorporated into various communication domains. It is challenging for English speakers to carry on effective conversations, in which communication skills are required to increase mutual intelligibility and understanding among users (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015).

For language learners, listening comprehension is a top-down process in which they have to interact with language knowledge, prior knowledge, contexts, and cognitive environment to interpret what the speaker is saying. Nevertheless, sometimes listeners would have a bottom-up process to help them recognize acoustic input for better understanding (Buck, 2001).

Though many studies focus on promoting English listening comprehension, listening difficulties, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complicated grammar structure, speed rate, lack of listening training, or lack of exposure to various listening materials, could still be observed from time to time in English language learning contexts (Anandapong, 2011 ; Cubalit, 2016).

In Thailand, the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 was one of the factors that increased the demand for English proficiency in Thai learners. However, despite the rise of the AEC, most Thai learners are still considered to have low to very low proficiency in English reading and listening skills (EFL English Proficiency Index, 2020). For this reason, it is still a great challenge for all educational institutions to improve Thai learners' English proficiency so that they can be competitive in the job markets in the community.

In order to help Thai learners develop their listening skills, many studies have been conducted to indicate factors or causes that contribute to Thai learners' lack of listening comprehension skills as it can help develop materials or courses that meet the learners' needs. Most studies show results from their aspects or research focuses. For example, some just focused on factors based on the learners themselves, while others emphasized specific external factors such as the speakers' accents. In addition, even though some of the studies focused on Thai learners at the tertiary level, most were conducted in contexts where learners did not use English as a medium of instruction.

Therefore, there seems to be a need for a study regarding what Thai undergraduate students in programs in which English is used as a medium of instruction perceive as factors that affect their listening comprehension.

This study is part of a larger project that aims at developing courses or materials that can effectively enhance the learners' listening skills. In other words, it is believed that the findings of this study can shed light on directions for developing teaching materials to enhance Thai learners' listening skills, which is the next phase of the project.

### **Research Objectives**

This present study aims to 1) identify factors believed to affect Thai learners' English listening comprehension, 2) reveal what Thai undergraduate students in a university where English is used as a medium of instruction believed to be factors that affect their English listening comprehension, and 3) use this study as a guideline for developing learning materials that can help the students enhance their skills in the following research phase.

### **Research Methodology**

The research applied the convenience sampling method as the participants were non-English major students who enrolled in 2 sections of an English course for first-year undergraduate students in the second semester of the academic year 2020. In fact, there were about 30 students in each section, but only 44 students participated in the questionnaires as the participation in this study

was completely optional.

As shown in Table 1, among these 44 participants, 39 were female, 3 were male, and 2 preferred not to tell. Their ages ranged from 18-30, but more than half of them were 19 at the time the data were collected. These students studied in different fields, including Chinese language and culture, law, logistics and supply chain, biotechnology, cosmetic science, and medicine. It was interesting to find that almost all of them had studied English for more than 7 years but most rarely had chances to study English with native English-speaking teachers. However, more than half of them (61.4%) still claimed that they were familiar with American English.

### **Data Collection**

The data-collecting instruments were questionnaires designed to investigate the students' beliefs and experiences in their English listening comprehension. First, the participants had to decide if they believed the factors presented to be factors that affect their listening comprehension or not. The factors presented in the questionnaire were based on previous studies on factors affecting Thai students' comprehensions, which included both internal factors, i.e., the listeners' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and the content of the listening texts, and external factors, i.e., the accents and the speed of the speakers.

**Table 1** Participants' general information

#	Personal	N=44	
		Number	%
1. Gender	Male	3	6.82
	Female	39	88.64
	Prefer not to tell	2	4.55
2. Age	18 years old	2	4.55
	19 years old	24	43.18
	20 years old	9	20.45
	21 years old	7	15.91
	24 years old	1	2.27
	30 years old	1	2.27
3. Field of Study	Chaineese language	20	45.45
	Law	6	13.64
	Management	3	6.82
	Science	3	6.82
	Cosmetic Science	5	11.36
	Medicine	7	15.91

## Data Analysis

To answer the research question, the data from the questionnaire, or the quantitative data, were analyzed using percentages. Then the results were interpreted and compared with previous research with the same focus o, factors that affect Thai students' listening comprehension.

## Results and Discussions

The results that revealed what the students believed to be the factors affecting their English listening comprehension are shown by using descriptive statistics in Table 2.

The factors that were deemed to affect listening comprehension can be categorized into two main groups, internal factors--those regarding listeners' knowledge--and external factors--those regarding speakers (and possibly listening texts). There were two factors that most of the participants in this study considered as factors that affected their understanding. It results in both internal and external factors: the vocabulary knowledge of the listeners (84.1%) and the speed of the speakers (72.7%). It should be noted that these are the only two factors that more than half of the participants considered to be factors that affect their listening comprehension.

**Table 2** Number of students perceiving factors that affect their English listening comprehension

#	Factors	N=44	
		Number	%
1	The accents of the speakers	19	43.2
2	Speed in speaking of the speakers	32	72.7
3	Knowledge of vocabulary used of the listeners	37	84.1
4	Grammatical knowledge of the listeners	17	38.6
5	Knowledge of the content of the listeners	15	34.1

One surprising finding from other studies is that the speaker's accent was most frequently presented as one of the affecting factors in research regarding Thai students' listening skills in the last decade (Chaipuapae, 2019 ; Cubalit, 2014 ; Sukpan, 2017 ; Sunitisarn et al., 2017). However in this study, this was selected by less than a half of the participants (43.2%). This means more than half of the participants believed that the accents of the speakers did not play an important role in their listening comprehension. Similarly, the listener's knowledge of the content, which was also one of the factors found to be most important in previous studies published between 2010-2020 (Cubalit, 2014 ; Sukpan, 2017 ; Tamtani et al., 2019), was selected by the smallest number of the students in this study. However, it cannot be said that these factors are not important as fifteen students, about one-third of the participants, still believed that it played a significant role in their listening comprehension.

This means the present study, in which the participants were Thai students who studied in a university where English is used as a medium of instruction, results differently from recent studies of the factors affecting Thai learners' listening comprehension, in which their participants did not use English to study the contents in their fields. It is because most of the studies were more likely to indicate that the accents of the speakers and the background knowledge about the content of the listeners were the most important factors in listening comprehension.

In terms of the accents of the speakers, it should be noted that English teaching in Thailand has long been under the influence of the paradigm developed in Western countries (Wang & Hill, 2011), and stakeholders in Thailand prefer native speakers as teachers. However, Thai learners nowadays seem to have positive attitudes toward more accents regardless of how close the accents are to those

of the native speakers (Prakaiborisuth & Trakulkasemsuk, 2015). The concepts of English as a lingua franca, Global Englishes, and World Englishes are possibly the underlying reason for this. In addition, the participants in this study were undergraduate students in a university where English is used as a medium of instruction. Thus, they may have experienced a wide variety of accents in courses they had taken before so that they were familiar with various accents—even though they were not English majors.

Similar to accents, the fact that the students studied many courses in English may have led them to the idea that the background knowledge of the content did not affect their understanding. They learned various new concepts in English and succeeded in learning them, so they may have thought that listening can be understood in any case, even when they learn new things without background knowledge.

## Conclusion

Unlike Thai learners in previous research, which indicated that factors affecting Thai learners' listening comprehension involve the speakers' accents, vocabulary used, and the learners' knowledge, in this study, the vocabulary knowledge and the speed of texts were selected by more than a half of the participants who were Thai undergraduate students in a university where English is used as the medium of instruction. Moreover, accents and knowledge were even selected by the lowest number of learners.

This means Thai learners in this context still need both knowledge and skills. For knowledge, they need a wide variety of vocabulary, and for skills, they need more practice or more exposure to speech at different paces.

It is a hope that the findings can raise awareness about what these learners perceive as barriers and shed light for those who plan to develop materials to help to enhance their listening comprehension.

## Limitations of the Study

The results of this study might be able to generalize only certain specific contexts as the participants were Thai undergraduate students who had some experiences in studying where courses in their programs are taught in English, and the number of the participants was small. Thus, the results may not be generalized. For example, the participants may have been familiar with different accents through courses they had taken before, but students in different contexts who are not familiar with various accents may deem speakers' accents as barriers to their listening comprehension. In addition, further studies seem essential for better understanding students in this context.

However, one thing to be kept in mind is that this study aimed at finding what the learners consider to be the factors that affect their comprehension. Thus, what the students answered possibly presented only the students' perception, not the actual

factors, and sometimes what the students believe is not legitimate. In other words, students' attitudes and perceptions towards a specific accent are potentially and merely based on their subconsciousness Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). Furthermore, sometimes students may also think that they can understand speech in the accents they are unfamiliar with better than the one they are used to. For example, as shown in a study by Songnok and Jaturapitakkul (2019), while the Thai undergraduate students believed they were more familiar with the Filipino accent

than the Indian accent, they thought they could understand the Indian accent better.

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