

Research Article

DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING ACTIVITIES BASED ON ONLINE EASA INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL TO ENHANCE SPEAKING ABILITY OF THAI EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) explore the effects of the online EASA instructional model on the speaking ability of Thai EFL students and 2) investigate the students' perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model. Thirty eleventh grade students in the first semester of the academic year 2021 at a public school in Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand, were selected as participants for this study by using the convenience sampling method. This study employed a single group pretest and posttest design. The research instruments included 1) English speaking pretest and posttest 2) close-ended questionnaire and 3) interview questions about participants' perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model. The data analysis employed the statistics of paired-sample t-test, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis. The results indicated that 1) students' posttest mean score after learning through the online EASA instructional model was higher than the pretest mean score at a significant level of .001, and the results of the questionnaire and semi-structured interview revealed that 2) students had positive perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model.

Keywords: Online EASA Instructional Model, Speaking Ability, Online Learning

Introduction

Speaking plays an important role in our daily lives especially in terms of communication as English is widely used for communication almost everywhere in the world. Therefore, the requirement for people to use English to communicate clearly and effectively is undeniable in many countries including Thailand. To achieve effective communication, apart from listening skills, it is necessary to have good speaking skills and ability. For better education and employment opportunities, Thai students should have the excellent speaking ability as English language speakers have more opportunities to find/get good education and jobs in various organizations and companies. Many ELT curricula, campaigns, and strategic plans have been revised and developed to be in line with the needs of the ASEAN economic community to achieve the objective of producing graduates with a sufficient command of communicative English (Jindapitak, 2018). Nevertheless,

the English speaking ability of Thais is still low, and most of them cannot speak English fluently and effectively even though they have been studying English for several years, from kindergarten until university.

According to the previous studies, a lack of proficiency in English, psychological factors, ineffective English teaching approaches, lack of opportunity to speak English, and ineffective online instruction can be the main factors that contribute to Thai students' low speaking ability (Ariani & Tawali, 2021; Haidara, 2016; Juhana, 2012; Khamkhien, 2010; Noom-ura, 2013; Rajprasit et al., 2015). Some EFL and Thai students perceive that learning and teaching English Speaking are mainly challenging and problematic for them (Nazara, 2011; Rajprasit et al., 2015; Riadil, 2020). Thus, it is essential to study this phenomenon and investigate the effective way to teach students and deal with these factors to enhance Thai students' speaking ability.

EASA instructional model namely Engage, Activate, Study, and Activate, proposed by Harmer (2007), is one of the effective models that can be used to deal with the factors that contribute to Thai students' low speaking ability. The Engage stage motivates students in learning the topic or language. The first Activate stage provides students an opportunity to activate language features by doing the speaking activity freely as they are capable of. The Study stage enables students to explicitly learn language features causing them difficulties and errors in the speaking activity in the previous stage to improve their speaking skills and ability. The second Activate stage provides students an opportunity to improve their speaking performance by doing the same speaking activity again after they have digested the corrections to the language they used in the previous stage.

Nevertheless, presenting all ESA elements in the teaching sequences of the EASA model in one lesson can be challenging as a teacher may extend the period of study time and decrease the time for activation (Harmer, 2007). If a teacher decreases the time for activation in the language learning process, lack of opportunity to speak English still occurs, and it can impede the development of students' speaking ability.

Consequently, online learning with a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning modes is selected to fill these gaps and be integrated with EASA instructional model to provide students an opportunity to practice speaking at their own time and pace and interact with a teacher and peers simultaneously online. A blend of these two modes provides students a better learning experience than using only one of these modes (Perveen, 2016). Harmer, (2007) also affirms that the missing ESA elements in the teaching sequences of EASA in one lesson can be emerged at some other time, so it means a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online learning can be conducted and integrated with this EASA instructional model.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the effects of the online EASA instructional model on the speaking ability of Thai EFL students.
2. To investigate the students' perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a single-group pretest-posttest research design.

Population and Participants

The population for this study was secondary students at a public school in Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand. Thirty eleventh grade students in the first semester of the academic year 2021 were selected as participants for this study by using the convenience sampling method. All participants and their parents were informed and asked to fill in and sign a consent form to participate in this experiment.

Research Instruments

Speaking Pretest and Posttest

The speaking pretest and posttest, sharing the same items, was developed to measure any enhancement in the students' speaking ability by adopting and adapting from a Cambridge Assessment English speaking test for B2 First for Schools (FCE) (Cambridge Assessment English, 2015). The tests consist of two parts: an interview and a collaborative task, and the full marks of each part are 20. The participants were assessed by using a speaking scoring rubric adapted and developed from IELTS and TOEFL speaking rubrics (IELTS Charlie, 2020; Educational Testing Service, 2019). The criteria of the rubric included five criteria: 1) fluency, 2) grammatical range and accuracy, 3) pronunciation, 4) vocabulary, and 5) content. The rubric of this study was a four-Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 to 4. The speaking pretest/posttest and rubric were validated by three experts using IOC (item-objective congruence), yielding 0.74 for the test and 0.66 for the rubric, which indicate validity. In terms of reliability of the rubric, the results of applying the Pearson correlation coefficient of two inter-raters were 0.991 for the pretest and 0.979 for the posttest, indicating that scores marked by two raters were consistent.

Perception Questionnaire

The close-ended with four Likert-scale questionnaire was developed to investigate students' perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model. The questionnaire examined the perceptions in two main components: EASA instructional model and online learning. The EASA instructional model could be divided into four subcomponents: the Engage stage, the first Activate stage, the Study stage, and the second Activate stage. Students were asked to reflect and express their perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model in terms of the effectiveness of the model on enhancing their speaking ability. The questionnaire was provided IOC total score of 0.82 by three experts indicating validity. The questionnaire was translated into Thai to ensure the understanding of participants.

Interview Questions

A semi-structured interview was conducted to gain more in-depth data for a better comprehension of participants' perceptions after learning through the online EASA instructional model. Seven questions related to participants' learning experience, their enhancement of English speaking ability, advantages and/ or challenges encountered by them were asked in the interview. The interview questions were provided IOC total score of 0.7475 by three experts indicating validity. Six participants were selected based on their performance

from the posttest scores, including 2 high-performance, 2 medium-performance, and 2 low-performance participants. The interview was conducted in Thai to ensure the understanding of participants, and it lasted about 15 minutes for each participant.

Instructional Instruments

Instructional instruments in this study included lesson plans, online materials, and technological tools. An example of one lesson plan was provided IOC total score of 0.9547 by three experts indicating that the sequence, learning outcomes, instructional procedures, activities, materials, an online platform, and online tools were appropriate and valid. Online materials used in this study consisted of handouts, worksheets, slides, videos, pictures, and audio sound recording. Technological tools used in this study included Facebook, Messenger, Line, Microsoft PowerPoint, YouTube, Flipgrid, Mentimeter, Padlet, Kahoot, Quizizz, and Zoom. It should be noted not every online platform and tool were all used in one lesson.

Online EASA Instructional Model

EASA instructional model is a model which refers to four teaching stages namely Engage, Activate, Study, and Activate proposed by Harmer (2007) integrating with online learning with a blend of synchronous and asynchronous online learning modes. The figure of teaching procedures of this model is demonstrated in the figure 1 below.

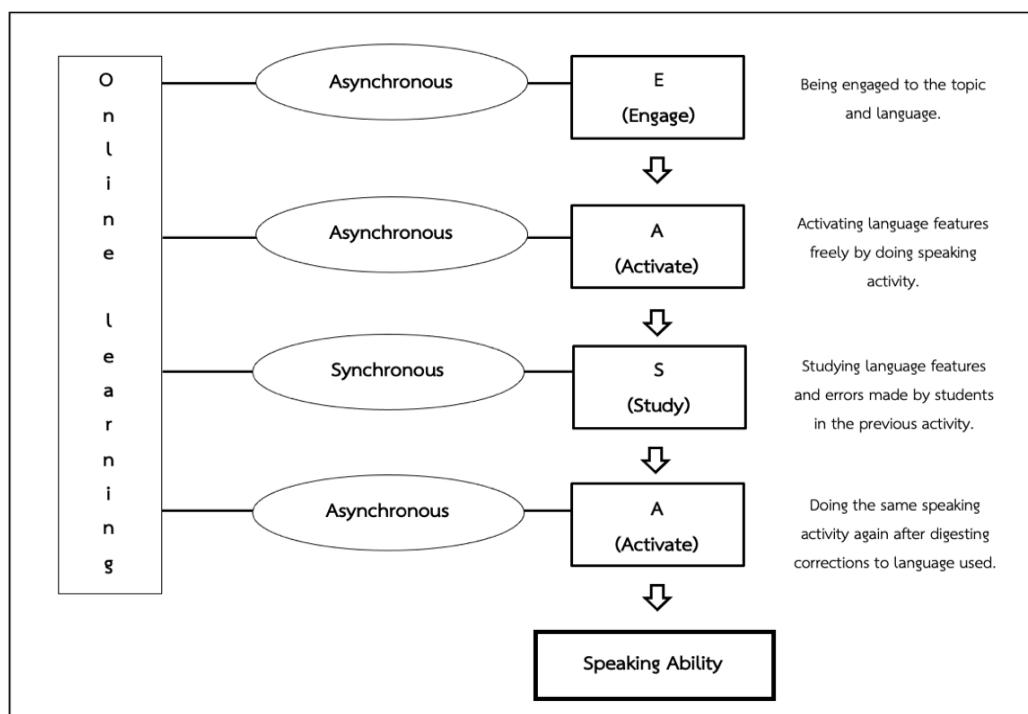


Figure 1: Online EASA Instructional Model (Harmer, 2007)

According to the figure 1 above, the first stage is the Engage stage with asynchronous online learning mode. In this stage, students were asked to respond to questions from the uploaded learning materials such as a video from YouTube on a private Facebook group by discussing or sharing their opinions at any time they chose or were available as long as they met the expected deadlines. Second, in the first Activate stage with asynchronous online learning mode, students were asked to do a speaking activity individually or in pairs at

their own time and pace by recording a video using Flipgrid, uploading the best video, and submitting it on the Flipgrid discussion board. After that, a teacher watched all students' videos, wrote down errors or points for improvement, and provided them online constructive feedback privately via Flipgrid. Third, in the Study stage with synchronous online learning mode, students were explicitly taught language features causing them difficulties and errors in the speaking activity in the previous stage. It should be noted that a teacher obtained the information of student's difficulties and distinct errors from videos they uploaded on the Flipgrid discussion board. Microsoft PowerPoint, Mentimeter, Padlet, Kahoot, and Quizizz were used in this Study stage to provide students innovative, fun, and interactive learning experience. Finally, in the second Activate stage with asynchronous online learning mode, after students had digested the corrections to the language they used in the previous stages, they were asked to do the same speaking activity again at their own time and pace by recording a video using Flipgrid, uploading the best one, and submitting it on the Flipgrid discussion board. After that, a teacher watched all students' videos, wrote down errors or points for improvement, provided them online constructive feedback privately via Flipgrid, and evaluated whether their speaking performance and ability had improved or not. It was expected that after students learnt through all four stages, their speaking ability would enhance.

Data Collection

This study took 12 weeks. In the first week, the pretest was administered to investigate participants' speaking ability before the experiment. After that, the online EASA instructional model was implemented for 10 weeks with 8 units, and each week had three asynchronous online learning activities and a 50-minute synchronous online class once a week. In the final week, the posttest, sharing the same items with the pretest, was conducted. The questionnaire was distributed to all participants online, and a semi-structured interview was conducted online with six participants via Zoom.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS program. The scores from pretest and posttest were analyzed by a paired-sample t-test to investigate the difference of students' speaking enhancement. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. For the qualitative data, the data from the semi-structured interview were analyzed by content analysis.

Results

1. The Effects of Online EASA Instructional Model on Students' Speaking Ability

Research question 1: To what extent does the online EASA instructional model enhance the speaking ability of Thai EFL students?

To answer the first research question, the scores from the pretest and posttest were analyzed by a paired-sample *t*-test to investigate the difference of students' speaking enhancement. The results are demonstrated in the table 1 below.

Table 1 Students' Speaking Pretest and Posttest Scores

Test	N	Min (40)	Max (40)	M	SD	t	Sig.
Pretest	30	19	37	28.63	4.79		
Posttest	30	24	39	34.36	4.00	14.09	0.01

* $p < .05$

The results of paired sample t-test in table 1 demonstrate that students gained a significantly higher speaking posttest mean score than speaking pretest mean score at a level of 0.05 ($t = 14.09$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score of the pretest was 28.63 while the speaking posttest mean score was 34.36. These results imply that students' speaking ability enhanced significantly after learning through the online EASA instructional model.

2. Students' Perceptions towards Learning through Online EASA Instructional

Research Question 2: What are students' perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model?

To answer the second research question, both quantitative and qualitative were collected. The quantitative data from the questionnaire with four Likert-scale were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The scores from the questionnaire were interpreted into 4 levels: 1.00-1.49 means strongly disagree, 1.50-2.49 means disagree, 2.50-3.49 means agree, and 3.50-4.00 means strongly agree. The qualitative data from a semi structured interview were analyzed by using content analysis. The perceptions were assessed in 2 main areas, see the table 2 below, which are EASA instructional model (item 1-14) and online learning (item 15-24).

Table 2 Students' Perceptions towards Learning through Online EASA Instructional Model

Areas of perception	Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
1. EASA instructional model	1-14	3.45	0.291
2. Online learning	15-24	3.11	0.344
Total mean score	1-24	3.33	0.261

The results from table 2 indicate that students mostly had positive perceptions towards learning through the online EASA instructional model with a total mean score of 3.33 which can be interpreted that student agreed this online instructional model was beneficial for them in enhancing their speaking ability.

For the qualitative data, all six students reported that they had positive perceptions and feelings toward learning through the online EASA instructional model. They revealed that this model was flexible and suitable to the Covid-19 situation in Thailand. Furthermore, students revealed that this model could encourage their discovery, provide them an opportunity to speak English, enhance their speaking ability, and deal with their psychological factors affecting their speaking performance. The example excerpts were "*In the Covid-19 situation, this instructional model is quite convenient, flexible, and very suitable. This instructional model encourages my discovery and knowledge search. I think my speaking ability improves because I have more opportunities to speak English. Learning through this model makes me feel more confident in speaking English.*"

The detailed quantitative and qualitative data could be analyzed and reported based on five components, and each component is demonstrated in the following tables below.

Table 3 Students' Perceptions towards Learning through the Engage Stage

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
1. I can learn English speaking better and more successful if I am engaged in what I am learning.	3.50	0.508
2. When I am engaged properly in learning English speaking, my participation in a speaking activity in the Activate and my participation in learning English speaking in the Study stage are increased.	3.43	0.504
3. My English speaking performance and learning English speaking will not be effective and productive if I am not emotionally engaged with what is occurring in the learning process.	3.23	0.626
Total mean score	3.38	0.411

The results from table 3 indicate that students had positive perceptions towards learning through the Engage stage with a total mean score of 3.38. The first item which received the highest score can be interpreted that students strongly agreed they could learn English speaking better and more successful if they were engaged in what they were learning. Most students from the interview reported they were engaged with the language and the topic in each task, and one of them emphasized that "*The more the topic is interesting, the more I want to share my ideas*"

Table 4 Students' Perceptions towards Learning through the First Activate Stage

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
4. I have an opportunity to practice English speaking and try out authentic language use with little or no restriction	3.43	0.504
5. I have an opportunity to use English language in a free and communicative way in doing exercises and activities as I am capable of.	3.66	0.479
6. I become more autonomous with my use of features of English language when I have chances to activate the various features of English language I have in my brain.	3.53	0.507
7. I become an autonomous English language learner and user as I can use words and phrases to speak systematically and fluently without thinking too much	3.20	0.550
Total mean score	3.45	0.360

The results from table 4 above indicate that students had positive perceptions towards learning through the first Activate stage with a total mean score of 3.45. The item 5 which received the highest score can be interpreted that students strongly agreed they had an opportunity to use English language to speak in a free and communicative way in doing exercises and activities as they were capable of the qualitative data, some students revealed they could activate language features freely by doing a speaking activity, and some students reported that the feedback delivered by the researcher after they submitted videos was useful as the feedback contributed to the improvement of speaking ability and speaking confidence. "*I felt free in*

speaking. I think the comments were useful because they made me speak more correctly and felt confident when speaking English."

Table 5 Students' Perceptions towards Learning through the Study Stage

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
8. I am taught what I lack and/or need to learn more in order to improve my English speaking ability and performance.	3.60	0.498
9. The link between what I need to learn and what I am taught is more obvious in comparison to the conventional teaching approach.	3.43	0.504
10. The Study stage is beneficial as it provides me an opportunity to work on language features that cause me difficulties and distinct errors in the speaking activity in the previous stage "Activate".	3.50	0.508
11. The Study stage provides me an opportunity to work on the English language features, consolidate my learning, and improve my English speaking skills in order to improve my English speaking ability and performance.	3.53	0.507
Total mean score	3.51	0.414

The results from table 5 indicate that students had very positive perceptions towards learning through the first Activate stage with a total mean score of 3.51. The item 8 which received the highest score suggested that students strongly agreed they were taught what they lacked and/or needed to learn more in order to improve their speaking ability and performance. The qualitative data were consistent with the quantitative data as students reported that language features, points for improvement, and learning content in the Study stage were advantageous because they contributed to the students' enhancement of speaking ability. *"Learning points for improvement in the Study stage improved my speaking ability as I thought people learned from their mistakes."*

Table 6 Students' Perceptions towards Learning through the Second Activate Stage

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
12. I can repeat doing the same speaking activity well in the second time after I have digested the corrections to the English language I used in the first speaking activity in the first time.	3.36.	0.490
13. This Activate stage is beneficial as it offers me an opportunity to improve my speaking performance by trying to complete the speaking activity again after I learned English language features and how to deal with mistakes I made before in the previous stage.	3.43	0.504
14. My English speaking ability and performance are enhanced.	3.43	0.504
Total mean score	3.41	0.388

The results from table 6 indicate that students had positive perceptions toward learning through the first Activate stage with a total mean score of 3.41. The mean scores of the item 13 and item 14 were equivalent which mean students agreed that this stage offered them an opportunity to improve their speaking performance by trying to complete the speaking activity again after they learned language features and how to deal with mistakes they made before in the previous stage, and their speaking ability and performance were enhanced after completing all stages. For the qualitative data, students reported that after receiving and learning points for improvement, their speaking ability enhanced, and their confidence when speaking increased as they perceived what they should improve.

Table 7 Students' Perceptions towards Online Learning

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
15. Online learning allows me to practice speaking at my own time and pace.	3.10	0.547
16. Online learning can overcome time constraints in English speaking practice.	3.30	0.595
17. Online learning is more learner-centered as I can control my own learning at my own pace and time.	3.30	0.595
18. Online learning decreases the fear and anxiety of making mistakes and looking foolish while speaking English.	2.90	0.547
19. Online learning helps me to be more confident in speaking English.	2.93	0.583
20. Online learning can give me rich interactive multimedia input such as authentic video, audio, texts, and visuals/graphics with meaningful content related to my needs and interests.	3.26	0.639
21. Online learning responds more appropriately to my learning styles in comparison to conventional learning.	2.63	0.668
22. The use of technology in online learning can give me just-in-time support by providing immediate feedback within the online material, handout, or email messages, by having a video conference, and by putting various learning tools at my disposal.	3.36	0.490
23. Online learning encourages my discovery and fosters me to become an autonomous learner	3.23	0.626
24. In comparison to conventional learning, my needs and distinct errors are taken more closely into account by a teacher in online learning.	3.10	0.661
Total mean score	3.11	0.344

The results from table 7 above indicate that most students had positive perceptions towards online learning with a total mean score of 3.11. The item 22 which received the highest score suggested that students agreed the use of technology in online learning could give them just-in-time support by providing immediate feedback within the online material, handout, or email messages, by having a video conference, and by putting various learning tools. Students reported from the interview that synchronous online learning enabled them to have interaction in real-time and receive immediate and direct feedback. In terms of

asynchronous online learning, students revealed that psychological factors such as a fear of making mistakes, a lack of confidence in speaking, and speaking anxiety were dealt with as they had sufficient time to do the speaking activity and had a safe speaking environment without peers' judgment. "*I did not have to worry if other people would judge my speech. Therefore, I was not anxious and afraid of making mistakes when speaking.*"

Discussion

The discussion based on the results will be discussed in two aspects as follows.

1. The Effects of Online EASA Instructional Model on Students' Speaking Ability

The significant effects of the online EASA instructional model on students' speaking ability are explained in three main aspects as follows.

First, students' speaking ability development is the result of learning engagement. As Harmer (2007) describes that students can learn things better and more successful if they are engaged in what they are learning. The quantitative and qualitative results proved that the statement of Harmer (2007) is justifiable as when students were engaged properly in learning speaking in the Engage stage, their participation in learning and doing speaking activities would increase, and their speaking performance would be effective and productive because they would put more effort in completing speaking activities, and they would be willing to speak and express their ideas more in the topic they were engaged with. The findings of this study are consistent with Khoshima and Shokri (2016) who found that the students in the experimental group are more engaged in learning and doing speaking tasks than the control group after implementing Engage stage in teaching speaking tasks, and students in the experimental group gain significantly higher speaking scores than those in the control group. Similarly, in terms of increasing learning engagement and motivation in speaking, Fithria and Ratmanida (2019) and Khoshima and Shokri (2017) reported that implementing ESA elements in teaching can significantly engage students in learning and motivate them to speak. Ilinawati (2018) also revealed students feel motivated in speaking English in the speaking activity when applying ESA strategy to the instruction, and their speaking ability significantly improve.

Second, having an opportunity to practice speaking with little or no restriction at their own time and pace in the first Activate stage influences the enhancement of students' speaking ability. The quantitative data indicated that students became more autonomous with their use of language features when they had chances to activate them. The qualitative data also proved that students could activate language features freely by doing the speaking activity in the first Activate stage. It appeared that if students could have an opportunity to speak freely and become autonomous with their use of English language features, they would be able to speak English more systematically, fluently, and confidently. The findings are consistent with the study Khoshima and Shokri (2016) in that students in the experimental group had more chances to orally express their ideas and feelings more freely and fluently compared to the students in the control group who preferred to use a set of memorized words and phrases to speak.

Third, having a chance to improve their speaking performance by trying to complete the same speaking activity again in the second Activate stage can contribute to the enhancement of students' speaking ability. It appeared that after students had received online feedback from the researcher in the first Activate stage and learned explicitly what they lacked/needed to improve in the Study stage, they were equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to improve their speaking performance and avoid making the same mistakes. The quantitative and qualitative results confirmed that students did the same speaking activity in the second Activate stage better by following the feedback and points they should improve. The findings correlated with Alkan and Bumen (2020) in that written feedback in asynchronous online learning mode can help improve students' speaking performance.

2. Students' Perceptions towards Learning through Online EASA Instructional Model

The results of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview indicated positive perceptions of students towards learning through the online EASA instructional model. Nevertheless, some challenges were also reported by students from the interview. Consequently, both positive and negative students' perceptions towards learning through the instruction will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In regard to online feedback provided by the teacher in the first and second Activate stages, students reported from the interview that online feedback sounded encouraging and positive, and it could contribute to the enhancement of their speaking ability and confidence as students could speak English more correctly and felt confident when speaking. Therefore, it can be assumed that positive, supportive, and constructive online feedback from a teacher is essential for students as it can make students feel more confident in speaking English and enhance their speaking ability. The findings of this current study are in line with a study conducted by Amirulloh et al. (2020) that students feel their speaking ability has improved as a result of online feedback from teachers and friends in Flipgrid.

In terms of psychological factors, both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that students perceived that online learning especially asynchronous online learning mode in the first and second Activate stages could deal with their psychological factors affecting speaking performance such as a fear of making mistakes, a lack of confidence in speaking English, and speaking anxiety because it provided them sufficient time to do the speaking activity and record a video several times at their own time and pace. Unlike the synchronous online learning class in the Study stage, it seemed that students were sometimes anxious to speak English on Zoom because they were afraid to speak incorrectly in front of a teacher and friends. The findings with regards to speaking anxiety correlated with the study by Nurwahyuni (2020) in that the level of students' speaking anxiety in asynchronous online learning mode using video recorder is less than the level of students' speaking anxiety in synchronous online learning mode using Zoom.

However, the flexibility of asynchronous online learning could be challenging as few students from the interview reported that they may forget to complete the work at their own time and pace or felt lazy and unenthusiastic to complete the speaking activity. If students do not activate their language features by doing speaking activities in both Activate stages, they will not receive the teacher's feedback, and their speaking ability may not improve as the way it should have been. The results correlated with the study conducted by

Nurwahyuni (2020) in that an absence of a teacher and peers can cause students to lack of motivation to complete a given task as they feel isolated to complete the task or study alone. Furthermore, Alkan and Bumen (2020) indicate that motivation is an essential factor that drives students to participate in the activities, and if students lack motivation and do not participate in the activities, students may not be able to develop their English speaking ability. Therefore, for this current study, it can be said that self-discipline, learning engagement, and motivation in learning and doing the speaking activity are essential for both Activate stages in the asynchronous online learning mode. A teacher should ensure that students are properly engaged with the topic or language in the Engage stage, so their participation in learning and doing speaking activities in the first Activate stage and others can increase.

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