The Effectiveness of Online Speaking Tasks (OST) on English Communication Ability of Thai EFL Undergraduates

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: EFL undergraduates, English communication ability, online speaking task *DOI:* http://dx.doi.org/10.210 93/ijeltal.v8i2.1445	*The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of online speaking tasks (OST) on the English communication ability of Thai EFL undergraduates. The study further examined students' perspectives toward online oral presentation tasks. A questionnaire translated into the participants' native language was utilized and distributed to collect data during the pandemic. The data were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Four hundred and eighty-two students from Prince of Songkla University and Walailak University participated in this study. The study reveals that the use of technology is key to improving students' English communication skills. Discourse analysis further showed that oral presentation tasks helped students improve their English communication skills. Pronunciation activity was the most difficult task students faced. It is strongly recommended that online learning through technology could be incorporated to complement the in-person learning environment.*

1. Introduction

A strong English command has become indispensable for economically emerging countries around the globe. Given the favored strategic geographical location of Thailand amongst ASEAN in terms of tourism, the English communication ability of its citizens, especially the younger generation, has become even more crucial. Even though the Ministry of Education of Thailand is enforcing the integration of English in every school's curriculum and taking initiatives in promoting effective English Language Teaching (ELT) at every educational level (Punthumasen, 2007), the English proficiency of Thai students in general has often been infamously ranked low by most global measures. The Education First English Proficiency

Index (EF EPI) survey, for instance, found that Thai students continue to perform below the global average in the English language. Thai students achieved merely 423 in the 2022 global assessment, placing them in 97th position overall while the average score across all participating nations was 502. To add to the prevailing issue, the situation hit rock bottom with the catastrophic outbreak of the pandemic. Learning at all levels was disrupted. The educational system globally stood still, especially in remote areas. According to estimates from the United Nations (2020, p. 2), the epidemic has had a negligible impact on approximately 1.6 billion students across 190 countries and all continents. Many educational institutions, including those in Thailand, have embraced online learning and teaching to maintain the continuity of the educational process. Due to this, learning has dramatically changed from in-person instruction to the distinctive emergence of online, or e-learning, where instruction is provided through digital or online platforms without the need for in-person interaction. Online learning has become a significant component of education. (Radha et al., 2020).

As discussed by Zhang and Meinel (2018), online speaking tasks can be implemented effectively in an English class using various tools and platforms such as video conferencing for virtual discussion. Conducting group discussions or debates using video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams can facilitate interactive communication among students. Serafini (2018) found that having students share personal stories or narrate events using platforms like Storybird or Storyjumper can enhance their speaking skills while fostering creativity. Similarly, (Zheng et al., 2016) asserted that organizing live webinars or inviting guest speakers through web conferencing can provide students with exposure to real-life English communication. Furthermore, as discussed by Reinder and Wattana (2014), creating podcasts or participating in speaking challenges on platforms like SoundCloud or Anchor can improve students' fluency and pronunciation. At the same time, online speaking tasks can be affected by technical issues like poor internet connection, audio/video lag, and platform glitches, which can hinder effective communication (Dodds and Fletcher (2020)). Similarly, Tuncer and Tekinarslan (2019) stated that the absence or limited availability of nonverbal cues (facial expressions, body language) can make it challenging for speakers to convey emotions and can lead to misinterpretations. Furthermore, as discussed by Li and Wharton (2020) online speaking tasks might involve participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, leading to potential misunderstandings due to different communication norms. Thus, these factors hinder both students and teachers during online classes.

The challenge for online teaching and learning curriculum developers is to find ways to adapt and work on improving English communication ability through less ideal means as compared to a normal educational set-up. A study done by Namsaeng (2021) discussed the challenging conditions adversely affecting the ability of a new Thai EFL undergraduate to have the knowledge they need to achieve the learning outcomes of an academic course. By contrast, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) noted that learning and teaching in an online environment is very similar to teaching and learning in any other formal institutional setting where students' needs are considered, content and learning activities are organized, and

learning is assessed. However, the challenges were unprecedented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thailand, on short notice, did not have a proper strategy for the rigorous process of designing and developing online courses (Hodges et al., 2020). However, technology has been an opportunity to access education in a crisis. It has also begun to transform the roles of those within the educational system; the instructors and learners (Ahmadi, 2018). Technology has proven to be a powerful tool that supports and transforms the way we interact with education during and after the pandemic. Technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops are helping make it easier for teachers to design educational material, providing new ways for students to learn and work together with the global reach provided by the Internet and the wide availability of mobile devices that can connect to it. A new age of anytime-anywhere education is upon us. If this opportunity is grasped wisely and uses the available technology to change how we educate, effective education will be increasingly available around the world (Online Purdue, 2020). Ahmadi (2018) stated that with modern technology being used for language acquisition, and also favored by teachers and students alike, the evidence seems to promote the increased use of these advancements even when external influences (COVID-19) do not necessitate them. Kawinkoonlasate (2020) stated that Thai EFL learners have provided compelling evidence that students' use of technology is a significant part of their learning process and boosts the retention of information. Apart from what is being taught in class, instructors can assign online self-study tasks that have to do with individual, peer, or group work. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how well undergraduate Thai EFL students' English communication skills could be improved by employing OST. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of OST and their thoughts thereon with the research questions being outlined below:

1. How can online speaking tasks enhance the English communication skills of Thai EFL undergraduates?
2. What are the opinions of Thai EFL undergraduate students regarding online speaking tasks to enhance their English communication ability?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Students' Speaking Performance

When participating in speaking activities, students' speaking performance could be affected by different factors such as performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance, and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety), listening ability, topical knowledge, and feedback during speaking activities (Afebri et al., 2019). Students experience some stress and are aware that they are the focus of attention, which creates even more pressure. Al Harun et al. (2016) found that during oral presentations, linguistic issues were perceived as the most challenging. In addition, other studies focused on identifying the challenges that students typically have when giving an oral presentation. For instance, anxiety is one of the main challenges for EFL students; preventing students from performing well in oral presentations (Al-Nouh et al., 2014, Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022; Aziz et al., 2022; Alwi & Sidhu, 2013). Also, it was noted that a lack of vocabulary knowledge may be contributing to pupils' anxiousness. Several research studies

offered strategies for overcoming these challenges, such as picking a familiar subject and extensive practice (Al Harun et al., 2016).

A growing number of studies aimed to explore the reasons behind students' low performance in oral presentations (Turner et al., 2012; Akindele & Trennepohl, 2014). These can be categorized into three different groups. The first group is personal traits like shyness and stage fright, self-confidence, and physical appearance. According to Elliott and Chong (2004), students' characteristics were the reason behind their feelings of anxiety during the oral presentation. Second, the audience and the teacher were thought to be the main deterrents to students' unwillingness to present (for example, negative evaluations, hard questions, and humiliating feedback) (Wolfe, 2008). Finally, a lack of presentation skills was observed to have a major influence on students' emotions of fear (for example, researching, planning, organizing, practicing, and presenting) (Leichsenring, 2010).

2.2 Learning Enhancement through Online Learning

Allen and Seaman (2013) pointed out that the use of the Internet around the world, including in Thailand, has rapidly increased as many institutions, schools, colleges, and universities have started online teaching and learning. For example, in the United States, during the fall of 2011 term, nearly 32 percent of higher education enrollments (about 6.7 million students) were taking at least one online course. A learner can join online classes at his or her pace in any place where an Internet connection is available. What can educators do to create a meaningful online learning environment to enhance the learning experience? Dick et al. (2005) claimed that understanding students' needs is the first step to designing appropriate instruction for students. When designed properly, it enhanced the students learning online more effectively and efficiently.

2.3 Technology use in online learning

While technological innovations are rapidly advancing with Internet connections and computer software, there is a need to explore new ideas and procedures on how to deliver the lesson effectively online. Teachers must provide a satisfying and engaging learning experience for each online class to conduct them more successfully and effectively for students. Teachers must consider an effective way of delivering lessons and approachable techniques for online design and development that considers mobile responsiveness. The objective is to establish a setting where students comprehend online lessons more adequately (Cook & Sonnenberg, 2014). They further noted that the World Wide Web (www) is growing in workplaces, schools, colleges, and universities. The presence of the web and online environment has changed the relationship between those who are entrusted to train and teach and students who will benefit from new online experiences. With this change, trainers, teachers, and students can move towards a more active and collaborative learning experience. Mofareh (2019) found that technology has proven to be a powerful and transformative tool for teaching online by ushering in innovative ways and more connected teaching strategies. Learning English communication skills, like other educational goals is much more effective and efficient when combined with appropriate educational technology. The increasing use of modern technology in the learning environment helps to link teachers

to their students, to professional content and resources, and to systems developed to help progress their lessons and autonomous learning.

The use of technology is an integral part of the learning process that boosts accessing data and information that teachers may not be able to contribute to students in a classroom setting. Technology is also making possible learning and teaching online in a group more varied and more effective than before in guiding to improve students' engagement with instructional material during online classes.

2.4 Technological Tools for Online Classes

Many devices are available and have been proven useful for online learning and to further facilitate and assist educational acquisition (Online teaching tools and Resources, 2015). Zoom, MS Team, Line, Skype, Facebook, WeChat, and Google Classroom are all useful tools with different individual applications and features. Some of the most common applications for classroom use are Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Line, Facebook, email, and digital presentation tools. Most students are familiar with these applications and able to use them and access these tools as part of their new educational experience. A study conducted by Lamb (2017) gives evidence for the increased engagement and provides speculation for the leading contributing factors for this increased engagement. If these tools are being used suitably, oral presentation online tasks can be delivered successfully. These educational tools are a driving force for most students to learn more effectively during online classes.

2.5 The Underlying Theories of Online Speaking Tests

The underlying theories of online speaking tests are grounded in established language learning and assessment principles. Vygotsky (1978) pointed out that in the context of online speaking tests, learners engage in meaningful conversations with peers or instructors, simulating real-life language use. By interacting with others, learners have opportunities to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and develop their speaking proficiency. Similarly, Willis (1996) found that task-based language teaching is an approach that focuses on learning through the completion of tasks, where learners use language to achieve specific objectives. In an online speaking test, learners are presented with communicative tasks that require them to use language in a meaningful context. These tasks can include role-plays, problem-solving discussions, or information-gap activities. Furthermore, Chapelle (2001) mentioned that Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) tools like video conferencing platforms, voice recording applications, or virtual environments are used to facilitate language practice and assessment. This aims to create engaging and interactive language learning experiences that leverage the benefits of technology. Chapelle (2014) found that online speaking tasks offer various opportunities for language learners to engage in communicative activities and improve their oral proficiency such as virtual group discussions, role-playing in virtual environments, asynchronous voice recording, online language exchanges, webinars and speaking events, and debates and speeches. The evaluation of online speaking tasks is crucial to assess learners' speaking proficiency, provide feedback, and gauge the effectiveness of language learning activities. Various assessment methods and tools can be utilized to evaluate online speaking tasks. Luoma (2004) stated that developing rubrics with specific

criteria to assess various aspects of speaking, such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary usage, grammar accuracy, and communication effectiveness. Rubrics provide clear guidelines for both learners and instructors during the assessment. Similarly, Fulcher (2012) noted that it was effective to analyze learners' performance in authentic speaking tasks, such as debates or role-plays, to assess their ability to communicate in real-world scenarios. Furthermore, Topping (2009) found that it was efficacious to involve learners in evaluating each other's speaking performances using predefined criteria. Peer assessment supports active learning and fosters a sense of responsibility and self-regulation in learners. As discussed by Boud and Molloy (2013), providing constructive feedback to learners on their speaking tasks emphasizes strengths and areas for improvement. Encouraging self-reflection allows learners to identify their own language learning goals.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The design of this study was a quantitative approach using quantifiable data for data analysis. It was designed to examine Thai EFL undergraduates' English communication ability during the COVID-19 pandemic by using various statistical analyses; including descriptive statistics, t-test, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which have been considered applicable in applied linguistics research (Fryer et al., 2018). The research design is illustrated in Figure 1.
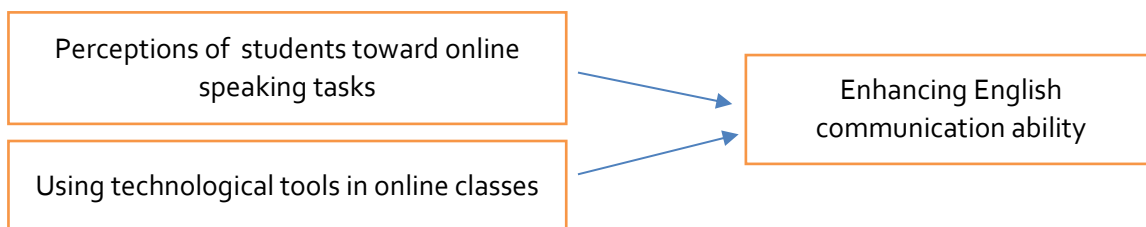

Figure 1. Illustration of the research design

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted at two universities in the south of Thailand, namely Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Hatyai, and Walailak University (WU), Thasala. It involved 482 undergraduate students from both universities (163/33.8% males and 319/66.2% females). The participants from (PSU) were (408/84.6%), and the participants from (WU) were (74/15.4%). The students came from 16 academic majors (Table 1).

Table 1: *Participants' Background Information (N=482)*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	163	33.8
Female	319	66.2
Academic Majors		
Nursing	79	16.4
Law	74	15.4
Engineering	108	22.4
Economics	26	5.4
Pharmacy	28	5.8

Biotechnology	28	5.8
Microbiology	36	7.5
Medical Technology	39	8.1
Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine	36	7.5
Faculty of Management and Accounting	15	3.1
Liberal Arts	5	1.0
Chinese Language	4	0.8
Computer Science	1	0.2
Administration	1	0.2
Agro-Industrial Faculty	1	0.2
English	1	0.2

All participants were studying in several faculties such as Nursing (79/16.4%), Law (74/15.4%), Engineering (108/22.4%), Economics (26/5.4%), Pharmacy (28/5.8%), Biotechnology (28/5.8%), Microbiology (36/7.5%), Medical Technology (39/8.1%), Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine (36/7.5%), Faculty of Management and Accounting (15/3.1%), Liberal Arts (5/1.0%), Chinese Language (4/0.8%), Computer Science (1/0.2%), Administration (1/0.2%), Agro-Industrial Faculty (1/0.2%), and English (1/0.2%). The oral presentation course was taught by four Thai English lecturers and five foreign English lecturers from the university (PSU), one Thai English lecturer, and 23 foreign English lecturers from the university (WU). The graduates from (PSU) needed to complete the courses (890-001, 890-002, 890-003, 890-004, and 890-005) as required, and the graduates from (WU) were required to have their English level to B1 or higher upon graduation. The classes were conducted in both universities online as the COVID-19 pandemic was rapidly increasing in the country. The universities' policy required all lecturers to use either Zoom or Google Classroom as the main platforms for all forms of teaching, students' online speaking tasks, and assessments. The teaching strategies were mainly targeted at active learning and collaborative learning, which includes individual and group presentations, reviewing products, and face-to-face telephonic conversations.

3.3 Instruments

This study utilized a set of survey questionnaires to measure the English communication ability of Thai EFL Undergraduates with online oral presentation tasks. The survey questionnaire was adopted from Reyna et al., (2020). It consists of 17 items and was distributed using Google Forms and the students did the survey questionnaires voluntarily. The first 15 items included statements, such as "I enjoy using technology for recreational matters" and "I am confident using technology for recreational matters". The items from 1 to 15 were given on a five-preference choice Likert scale, which range from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Item 16 was directly related to the benefits of online speaking tasks and item 17 was related to the challenges that the learners faced during the online speaking tasks. The Cronbach's alpha shown in Table 2 is for all the items (α=.940) which is highly reliable (Hinton et al., 2004). The Cronbach's alpha shown in Table 3 is for each item (1 - 15). The intraclass correlation coefficient is shown in Table 4.

Table 2: *Results of the Cronbach's Alpha*

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized items	No of items
.940	.942	17

Table 3: *Results of the Cronbach's Alpha for Items 1 - 15*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Scale-Flipping learning	.940	15
I enjoy technology for recreational matters	.938	1
I am confident in using technology for personal matters	.939	2
I enjoy using technology for learning	.937	3
I am confident in using technology for learning	.936	4
The OST helped me develop skills in searching and analyzing published material	.935	5
I actively engaged with the topics provided by OST	.935	6
This OST has enhanced my skills in digital presentations techniques	.934	7
This OST helped improve my collaborative skills	.935	8
I worked well together with my group/ partner	.936	9
I enjoyed working with my group/partner	.937	10
The impact of OST on me in terms of Communication ability is higher than that of normal in-class oral assignments	.935	11
The OST method is more comfortable and easier than the normal in-class mode	.935	12
The OST mode would effectively prepare me for communication tasks in my future career	.934	13
In my experience with OST, I found it easy to learn how to speak 16 and it offers scope for higher grades	.935	14
Given the online class situation due to the global Pandemic, I would say effective use of OST by students would greatly enhance their 16 Communication skills	.935	15

Table 4: *Intraclass Correlation Coefficient*

		95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
	Intraclass Correlation [b]	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.510[a]	.476	.545	16.60	481	6734	.000
Average Measures	.940[c]	.932	.947	16.60	481	6734	.000

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Stage 1: Preparation

The researcher prepared the adopted survey questionnaires and placed them all in a Google Form with some specific information to be collected from the selected participants.

Stage 2: Data Collection

The data were collected in September 2022, at the end of Semester 2 in the academic year of 2021-2022 at Prince of Songkla University, Hatyai, and Walailak University, Thasala. A set of research surveys for about 17 items were created and administered. The participants involved were 482 students from both universities and the students were studying in

different major fields. The participants in this study took part voluntarily and were informed about the objectives of the research. Written and verbal agreements were also obtained. The received data were then prepared for data analysis.

Stage 3: Data Analysis
The researcher used SPSS software to analyze the collected data. The normality of the data was examined at the Skewness and Kurtosis between -2 and +2 for all the survey items, which indicated that the items were normally distributed. The analysis continued to answer each research question.

4. Findings

4.1. The effectiveness of OST in enhancing the English communication skills of Thai EFL undergraduates

To answer the first research question, a descriptive analysis was conducted. The results shown in Table 5 displayed that scale 3, "I enjoy using technology for learning", is the highest level of frequency used by students in online speaking tasks (M=4.37; SD=.761) followed by scale 1, "I enjoy using technology for recreational matters", (M=4.36; SD=.778); scale 9, "I worked well together with my group/partner", (M=4.33; SD=.831); scale 4, "I am confident using technology for learning", (M=4.27; SD=.771); scale 8, "This OST helped improve my collaborative skills", (M=4.17; SD=.783); scale 13, "The OST mode would effectively prepare me for communication tasks in a future career", (M=4.11; SD=.785); scale 10, "I enjoyed working with my group/partner", (M=4.10; SD=.942); scales 2 and 5, "I am confident using technology for personal matters, and "The OST helped me develop skills in searching and analyzing published material", (M=4.08; SD=.793), (M=4.08; SD=.791); scale 7, "These OST have enhanced my skills with digital presentation techniques", (M=4.06; SD=.774); scale 14, "In my experience with OST, I found it easy to learn how to speak English and it offers scope for higher grades", (M=4.03; SD=.835); scale 15, "Given the online class situation due to the global pandemic, I would say the effective use of OST by students would greatly enhance their English communication skills", (M=4.01; SD=.859); scale 12, "The OST method is more comfortable and easier than the normal in-class mode", (M=3.98; SD=.869); scale 11, "The impact of OST on me in terms of communication ability is higher than that of normal in-class oral assignments", (M=3.97; SD=.834); and scale 6, "I actively engaged with the topics provided by OST", (M=3.91; SD=.797) was the least used.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics*

Scales	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Rank of use	Level of frequency use
1	4.36	.778	-1.370	2.563	2	High
2	4.08	.793	-.827	.995	8	High
3	4.37	.761	-1.341	2.312	1	High
4	4.27	.771	-.988	1.095	4	High
5	4.08	.791	-.824	1.273	8	High
6	3.91	.797	-.483	.311	14	Moderate
7	4.06	.774	-.783	1.220	9	High
8	4.17	.783	-.887	1.089	5	High

9	4.33	.831	-1.509	2.963	3	High
10	4.10	.942	-1.107	1.185	7	High
11	3.97	.834	-.589	.431	13	Moderate
12	3.98	.869	-.920	1.349	12	Moderate
13	4.11	.785	-.773	.840	6	High
14	4.03	.835	-.721	.552	10	High
15	4.01	.859	-.723	.508	11	High

4.2. Students' perceptions of OST

To answer the second research question, two open-ended questions were asked and discourse analysis was conducted. The first open-ended question was "What have you benefited from the online speaking tasks (OST)?" The second open-ended question was "What challenges have you faced in the online speaking tasks (OST)?" The opinions of the students were categorized based on the benefits received from OST and the challenges faced via OST into two columns as shown in Table 6 and Figures 2 and 3.

Table 6: *Benefits received from and challenges faced via OST*

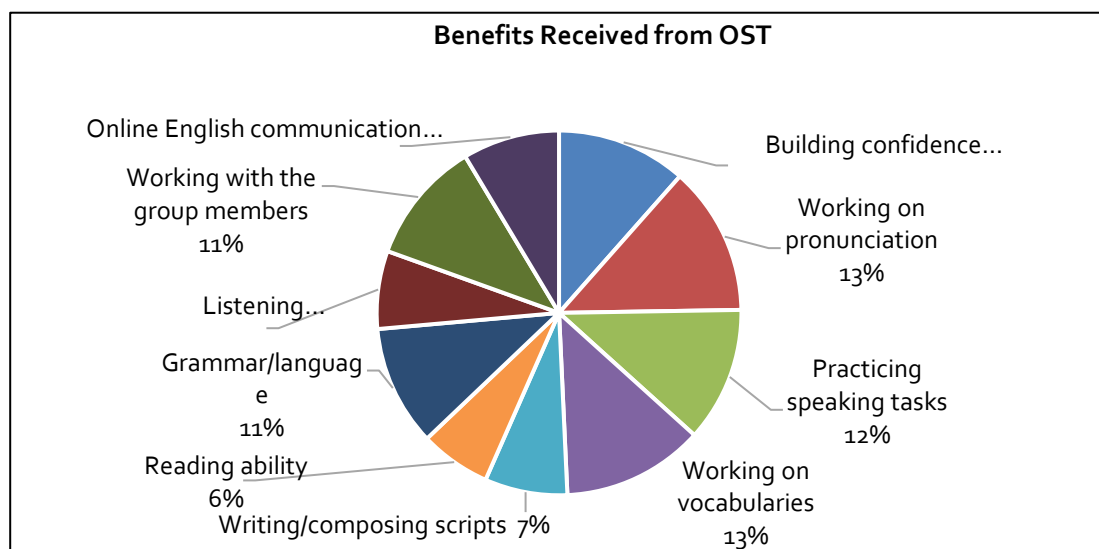| Benefits received from OST	No of students	Challenges faced via OST	No of students
Gained more confidence	64	Building Confidence	55
Improved English communication skills	67	Working on pronunciation	63
Got more English-speaking practice opportunities	51	Practicing speaking tasks	57
		Working on vocabularies	60
Enhanced Grammar/construction of sentences	53	Writing/composing scripts	35
Improved listening ability	20	Reading ability	30
Helped in everyday life English conversation	43	Grammar/language	51
Improved pronunciation	46	Listening ability	33
Gained more vocabulary	41	Working with the group members	52
Improved collaborative/teamwork ethics	33	Online English communication with lecturers	41
Enhanced reading skills	30		
Enhanced writing scripts	31		

Figure 2. Benefits received from OST
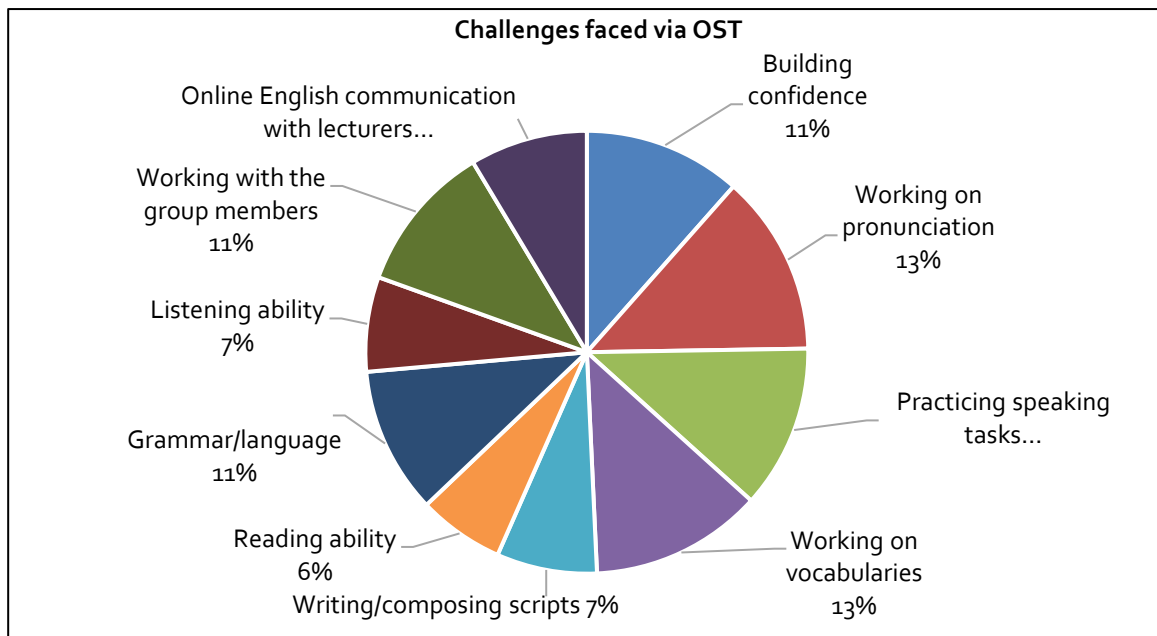
Figure 3. Challenges faced via OST

5. Discussion

This study aimed to answer two research questions related to online speaking tasks used exclusively to teach oral English communication skills, at two universities in Southern Thailand, out of necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first question addressed the effectiveness of OST in enhancing speaking skills of Thai EFL undergraduates, gaged by student feedback. Descriptive analysis showed that "I enjoy using technology for learning" was the highest level of frequency (scale 3) used by all students in oral presentation tasks. This aligns with the findings of Mofareh (2019) that technology is a powerful and transformative tool for teaching online by creating innovative ways for teachers to connect with their students, including professional content and resources and systems designed to enhance learning and autonomous learning. This is not surprising given that Thai university students have essentially grown up with digital technology and therefore presumably are very comfortable using it. A study by Tangmunkongvorakul et. al. (2020) comparing smartphone use by Thai and Japanese high school students found that nearly half of Thai students (45.3%) used smartphones more than five hours a day with far fewer Japanese students doing so (12.8%). This also supports the finding that "I enjoy using technology for recreational matters" had the second highest frequency in students' feedback (scale 1).

"I actively engaged with the topics provided by OSTs" was least frequently identified (scale 6). This finding may be explained by the research of Dick et al. (2005) who claimed that understanding students' needs is the first step to designing appropriate instruction for students. When designed for students' benefit, it enhanced students learning online more effectively and efficiently. The online speaking topics should be engaging for students and aligned with their interests. After all, the goal of online oral English communication tasks is to

have students speak and not necessarily to teach topic content. So, providing topics that are interesting for students is vital.

The second research question addressed students' perceptions of OST and expressed in terms of benefits and challenges for students. Oral presentation tasks helped students the most to improve their English communication skills and pronunciation activity was the most challenging task.

With respect to online speaking tasks, teachers' and students' evaluation and assessment of these tasks need to be effective to meet outcomes. Luoma (2004) found that rubrics developed to assess specific criteria of communication (pronunciation, fluency, lexical range, and accuracy) were effective because they provide clear guidelines for teachers and learners. Fulcher (2012) emphasized the importance of authentic speaking tasks to assess learners' performance. These may include unscripted role-plays, group presentations on topics of interest to students, and video logs (vlogs). Topping (2009) proposed the value of peer assessment of OST's because it supports active learning, students' responsibility, and self-regulation. Boud and Molloy (2013) advocated constructive feedback to learners on their speaking tasks by emphasizing strengths and areas where they need to improve and students' self-reflection to identify their own language learning goals.

Regarding 'working on pronunciation' being the most challenging task according to students' perception of OST's, there are numerous online resources to teach English pronunciation: The emphasis should be on syllabus stress, voice and voiceless consonants, silent letters, silent final E (Nair et al., 2017).

5.1 OST instructors

OST can be effectively used during online classes to enhance the English communication ability of Thai EFL undergraduates. (Barbera et al., 2013) identified learning content and course design as two elements that have a significant impact on students' satisfaction with online education (similar to in-person learning) when OST is used effectively. Students can work independently or in groups through technology with effective instruction on speaking assignments. This would include research, review, composition, summarization, practice, editing, and presentation to develop skills to learn English communication, pronunciation, to a lesser degree, grammar, and to enhance their confidence level.

5.2 Online – Online learner's perspectives

 Students will be challenged to utilize the required technology for online speaking tasks. The availability of power and a good Wi-Fi connection are essential. Overall, the study found that students benefited from OST to improve their oral English proficiency.

More substantial research is needed on the use of technology to enhance students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Given the uncertainty of future pandemics and the probability of encouraging homeschooling, more research with a focus on improving vocabulary and linguistic skills is necessary. For example, research on how far online learning can impact students 'academic performance would be of value considering integrating both

onsite and online (or hybrid) methods by use of technology. This would mean students who are unable to access in-person learning or prefer online learning may continue with the online program. Further research can benefit from this study's findings that "I enjoy using technology for learning" was most helpful to students and "I actively engaged with the topics provided by OST" was least frequently used.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of online teaching tasks given in English oral communication courses at two universities in Southern Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on feedback and perspectives of the students who participated in the study. The findings were that the majority of students enjoyed using technology for learning and recreational purposes. "I actively engaged with the topics provided by OSTs" was least frequently identified by the participants. In terms of benefits and challenges of OST from the students' perspectives, oral presentation tasks helped students the most to improve their English communication skills and pronunciation activity was the most challenging task for them. Overall, student feedback on the effectiveness of OST was at the high or moderate level.

Research recommendations
Online speaking tasks will be a permanent feature of education. Therefore, the use of technology must be integrated into students' linguistic development. There needs to be guidance from stakeholders on incorporating a digital – techno-friendly curriculum to enhance the English communication ability of students.

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