

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Background of the Study

The ability to speak English effectively plays an essential role in both educational and professional development. English communication skills are increasingly demanded in the workplace, where employees are expected to interact confidently in multicultural environments (Kaewkunha & Sukying, 2021). Following Thailand's integration into the ASEAN community, English literacy and communication have become core objectives of national language education policies (Choomthong, 2014). In academic contexts, English speaking competence enables students to express opinions, build peer relationships, and participate in class discussions, which fosters collaboration and shared learning experiences (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2024; Shimray, 2023). However, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for Thai EFL learners, who are required to produce language in real-time with limited lexical and grammatical knowledge (Chand, 2021; Kalra & Siribud, 2020; Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021; Aizawa et al., 2023; Chema et al., 2023).

Understanding the development of foreign language speaking skills in Thailand requires attention to the educational structure and systemic constraints learners face. Although English is a compulsory subject in the national curriculum from primary through upper secondary levels (Saengboon, 2017), many Thai students graduate without achieving communicative fluency. According to Education First (2024), Thailand ranks very low in global English proficiency, with learners typically demonstrating only basic communication skills comparable to the CEFR A1 level. While national policy encourages the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), many teachers continue to rely on grammar-translation approaches that prioritize form over fluency (Pechapan-Hammond, 2020; Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021). Lecture-based teaching methods leave students with limited speaking practice, which contributes to a persistent gap between language instruction and oral communication ability. Furthermore, these methods often shape students' beliefs that success in English depends on mastering grammar rules and vocabulary, rather than on developing confidence and communicative competence.

The limited use of English in daily life further exacerbates speaking challenges among Thai learners. As English functions primarily as a foreign language in Thailand,

most students have few opportunities to engage in real-world speaking interactions beyond the classroom (Baker, 2008; Wang & Rajprasit, 2015). As a result, many students express reluctance to speak English, driven by anxiety about making mistakes in pronunciation or grammar (Al-saidat et al., 2023; Bai, 2023; Chantakhat, 2025). These anxieties are particularly pronounced among low-achieving students, who often internalize the belief that they lack the talent required to succeed in speaking tasks. Such beliefs reflect a fixed mindset, in which language ability is seen as an unchangeable trait rather than a skill that can be developed (Yao et al., 2021; Lou et al., 2022; Zarrinabadi et al., 2023). These mindset beliefs may contribute to the persistent challenges students face in developing speaking skills and call for more attention to the psychological aspects of language learning.

Psychological variables, particularly mindset beliefs, have a profound influence on learners' speaking performance. Language learning involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that are shaped by students' attitudes, motivation, and perceived ability (Stevick, 1996; Shumin, 2002; Williams et al., 2015). Past research has highlighted the roles of aptitude, anxiety, and self-belief in language acquisition (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Ellis, 2015; Li, 2019; Zhang, 2019). Although research on mindsets has gained recognition, speaking-specific mindset research in the Thai context remains limited. Nevertheless, global studies increasingly point to the potential of growth mindset to enhance learner engagement and academic performance (Lou & Noels, 2019b). A growth mindset encourages students to view challenges as part of learning and supports the development of confidence and resilience. In contrast, a fixed mindset often leads to avoidance behaviors and higher levels of speaking anxiety.

Distinguishing between mindset and other learner belief systems remains a conceptual challenge in the literature. Seminal works by Horwitz (1988) and Mori (1999) have illustrated the complexity of language learning beliefs. Mercer and Ryan (2010) later proposed that mindset exists along a continuum rather than as a fixed dichotomy. This perspective helps explain how students may demonstrate growth-oriented beliefs in some skill areas but hold fixed views in others. For instance, learners with a growth mindset in listening are more likely to engage with vocabulary development and improve comprehension (Meng & Guo, 2018). Similarly, growth mindset beliefs have been linked to enhanced writing performance and self-regulation in English composition (Bai & Guo, 2021). In speaking, students who embrace growth-oriented beliefs tend to display stronger interpersonal communication, greater fluency, and lower anxiety in public settings (Nordin & Broeckelman-Post, 2019).

Mindset research in Thai language education is still emerging, although recent studies have begun exploring its relevance. Several investigations have examined students' general language mindset (Buathong, 2019; Janudom, 2021; Wilang, 2022, 2024), while others have focused on variables such as learning outcomes (Damrongpanit, 2020), goal setting (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021; Yao & Zhu, 2022), happiness (Sudnawa et al., 2019), and resilience (Wannapayun, 2017; Warunwutthi et al., 2022). Recent study has proposed the support guidelines to promote growth mindset (Inyai & Chusanachoti, 2025). Most of these studies have used quantitative methods and have not directly investigated learners' beliefs in the context of speaking. To date, limited research has examined how learners' speaking mindset develops, how it influences performance, or how it might be shaped through intervention.

This study seeks to investigate foreign language speaking mindset from a domain-specific perspective and contribute to theory, methodology, and pedagogy. It aims to expand the understanding of how Thai university students construct beliefs about their speaking ability and how these beliefs are influenced by classroom experiences and broader social contexts. The study also incorporates a mindset intervention using a mixed-methods design that includes surveys, mindset intervention, Q-methodology, and semi-structured interviews. Through this approach, the study explores how students' speaking mindset evolves, what factors shape it, and how growth mindset practices may enhance learners' confidence, persistence, and performance.

Finally, this research addresses a contextual and pedagogical gap by considering the influence of Thai educational culture on student mindset. Cultural values such as effort belief, face, and emphasis on correctness may affect how students internalize feedback and develop beliefs about their capabilities (Limeri et al., 2020). This study contributes to a better understanding of how mindsets are socialized in the Thai context and provides evidence for culturally relevant teaching strategies. By identifying the conditions that foster a growth-oriented speaking mindset, the study offers practical guidance for educators aiming to promote learner autonomy and communicative competence in Thai EFL classrooms.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to develop a thorough comprehension of the beliefs associated with language mindset and foreign language speaking mindset and conceptualize the foreign language speaking mindset among undergraduate students in Thailand. Furthermore, this research aims to investigate potential

correlations between the language mindsets of these students, their foreign language speaking mindset, and their speaking performance. To better understand the relationship between various learning variables and the foreign language speaking mindset, the study also explores the dynamic nature of the foreign language speaking mindset among undergraduate students. Accordingly, the research purposes of this study can be summarized as follows.

1. To investigate Thai undergraduate students' language mindset and foreign language speaking mindset.
2. To know the factors associated with foreign language speaking mindset of Thai undergraduate students.
3. To determine the relationship between and among language mindset, foreign language speaking mindset, and speaking performance of Thai undergraduate students.
4. To understand the dynamic nature of foreign language speaking mindset of Thai undergraduate students over time.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, the following research questions will be examined.

1. What are the language mindset and foreign language speaking mindset of Thai undergraduate students?
2. What are the factors related to foreign language speaking mindset among Thai undergraduate students?
3. What are the relationships among language mindset, foreign language speaking mindset, and speaking performance of Thai undergraduate students?
4. Does foreign language speaking mindset among Thai undergraduate students change over time, and if so, what is the nature of this change?

By answering these questions, the study seeks to generate a deeper understanding of the mindset systems that influence students' development of speaking ability. It aims to identify the key psychological constructs associated with foreign language speaking mindset, examine how these constructs relate to learners' observable performance, and uncover patterns of change in learners' mindset beliefs. The findings are expected to contribute to theory by refining the concept of domain-specific mindset in language learning, to pedagogy by offering practical insights for designing mindset-supportive instruction tailored to the speaking skill, to context by deepening understanding of mindset development within Thai EFL settings, and to methodology

by demonstrating the value of mixed-methods, Q-methodology, and mindset intervention in capturing dynamic learner beliefs.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study focuses on examining the mindset of undergraduate students in relation to their second language (L2) speaking abilities. Its primary objectives are to investigate the students' perceptions and construction of meaning surrounding their language learning capacities, and to explore the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects associated with their beliefs. The inclusion of psychological perspectives is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of language learning, as it offers insights into learners' cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and behavioral responses (Williams, Mercer, & Ryan, 2015). This research makes significant contributions in several areas within the existing body of knowledge of mindset studies.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance of the Study

From a theoretical standpoint, the majority of previous studies have primarily focused on factors such as attitudes, motivation, second language aptitude, and foreign language anxiety in the context of language learning (Ellis, 2015). However, there is a noticeable dearth of research specifically exploring the concept of domain-specific language mindset. This study effectively addresses this gap in the literature by thoroughly examining the domain-specific language mindset, with a particular emphasis on the speaking skill. As a result, this research enhances our understanding of the role of mindset in language learning, shedding light on a crucial yet underexplored dimension of learners' language-related beliefs and attitudes.

1.4.2 Methodological Significance of the Study

In terms of methodological significance, this study endeavors to investigate foreign language speaking mindset through the application of qualitative investigation and mindset intervention, enabling an exploration of the dynamic nature of mindset. By employing a combination of qualitative and experimental methods, this research offers methodological insights that are invaluable in cautionary considerations and recommendations for fostering students' language mindset. The utilization of diverse methodological approaches allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between language mindset and language learning outcomes, thereby enriching the methodological toolkit available for future research endeavors in this domain. Additionally, the insights gained from this study hold the potential to inform educators and policymakers seeking to design effective language education strategies that cultivate a growth language mindset among students.

1.4.3 Contextual Significance of the Study

The study holds significant contextual implications, particularly within the Asian and Thai educational contexts, where there is a notable scarcity of research on language mindset and domain-specific language mindset. Additionally, the existing studies associated with language mindset and domain-specific speaking mindset have not comprehensively explored the various factors that may be interrelated with language mindset. Thus, the current study seeks to fill this research gap by offering a comprehensive examination of the factors that are closely related to the domain-specific mindset sub-system. By delving into these contextual aspects, this research aims to provide a more nuanced and contextually-relevant understanding of language mindset and its specific manifestations in the domain of speaking.

1.4.4 Pedagogical Significance of the Study

The study bears significant pedagogical implications, providing practical guidelines for cultivating a growth L2 speaking mindset within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In light of the inconclusive effects observed in previous mindset interventions targeting participants, this research aims to bridge the gaps in the literature and offer evidence-based strategies for fostering a growth mindset in EFL language learning. Through the identification of effective interventions, this study seeks to empower educators to create a supportive and nurturing learning environment that nurtures learners' language mindset, ultimately enhancing their resilience and promoting success as Thai undergraduate students in their language learning journey. By equipping learners with a positive and adaptive mindset, this research strives to optimize language learning experiences and outcomes, thereby contributing to the enhancement of language education in the EFL context.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Given the specific focus of the present study on the foreign language speaking mindset of undergraduate students within the Thai context, it is important to provide clear definitions of the technical terms that will be used throughout the research.

1.5.1 Language Mindset

Ryan and Mercer (2012b) proposed a definition of the language learning mindset grounded in Dweck's theory of implicit beliefs. To tailor this concept more specifically to the domain of second language acquisition, Lou and Noels (2019a) extended the definition to encompass three key dimensions (as discussed in Chapter 2). Within this framework, a growth language mindset reflects the belief that language

learning abilities can be developed through sustained effort and practice, regardless of one's innate cognitive ability, natural aptitude for language, or age. This perspective emphasizes that language learning potential is not predetermined but can be enhanced through perseverance and effective strategies. In contrast, a fixed language mindset represents the belief that language learning ability is limited by inherent factors, such as limited general language intelligence, constrained language aptitude, and a restricted period during which language learning is deemed achievable. By incorporating these dimensions, the definition of language mindset becomes more specific to the context of language learning, explaining the beliefs individuals hold about the malleability or fixedness of their language learning abilities.

1.5.2 Foreign Language Speaking Mindset

The concept of implicit theories has found extensive application, particularly within the education field. Ryan and Mercer (2012b) provided a comprehensive definition of language learning mindset based on Dweck's theory. According to their proposal, a growth language learning mindset reflects the belief that language learning abilities can be enhanced through hard work, while a fixed language learning mindset characterizes learners who perceive their language learning abilities as unchangeable. Recent research suggests that language mindset is domain-specific (Anderson, 2018; Bai, Wang, & Nie, 2020; Khajavy, Pourtahmasb, & Li, 2021; Yao and Zhu, 2024). This study focuses specifically on the foreign language speaking mindset, which reflects learners' beliefs about their ability to develop speaking skills in a foreign language. To conceptualize this construct, the current study draws on the language mindset meaning-making system framework proposed by Lou and Noels (2019a, as discussed further in Chapter 2). Within this framework, a growth foreign language speaking mindset involves the belief that speaking ability can be improved through effort and persistence. Learners with this mindset tend to attribute their progress to hard work, set mastery-oriented goals, view failure as a learning opportunity, actively seek feedback, and apply effective learning strategies. As a result, they often experience lower anxiety and more positive emotions during speaking activities. Conversely, a fixed foreign language speaking mindset is based on the belief that speaking ability is innate and resistant to change. Learners with this mindset attribute their speaking performance to talent or natural aptitude, underestimate the role of effort, and tend to set performance-oriented goals focused on avoiding failure. They are more likely to avoid challenging speaking tasks, interpret failure as evidence of low ability, and experience heightened anxiety and negative emotions during speaking activities.

1.5.3 Mindset Meaning System

To understand how mindset beliefs function within a broader psychological framework, the concept of the mindset meaning system is introduced. The concept of mindsets as meaning systems was introduced by Dweck and colleagues to explain how beliefs serve as organizing principles that guide thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Rather than viewing mindsets as isolated beliefs, this perspective considers them as part of an interconnected system that integrates cognitive, affective, and motivational components. A mindset meaning system includes an individual's beliefs about ability, their goals, emotional responses, and behavioral tendencies. This systems-based perspective highlights the complexity of mindset as a psychological construct. It emphasizes that mindsets operate within broader frameworks that influence how individuals interpret experiences and guide their responses in specific domains, such as language learning or speaking.

1.5.4 Language Mindset Meaning System

Building on the general meaning system framework, Lou and Noels (2019) introduced the concept of the language mindset meaning system, which applies specifically to language learning. This system illustrates how beliefs about language learning ability interact with effort, attribution, achievement goals, failures and mistakes, self-regulatory tendencies, and competence-based emotional tendencies to shape learners' experiences. Within the language mindset meaning system, two subsystems are identified: the growth-oriented subsystem and the fixed-oriented subsystem. The growth-oriented subsystem reflects the belief that language ability can be developed through sustained effort. Learners aligned with this subsystem tend to set mastery goals, respond positively to challenges, seek feedback, and employ new strategies to overcome language learning obstacles. They also perceive failures as opportunities for growth and tend to experience more positive emotions during the learning process. In contrast, the fixed-oriented subsystem reflects the belief that language ability is innate. Learners who subscribe to this view are more likely to set performance-oriented goals, avoid feedback, and feel helpless when facing challenges. They interpret failure as a sign of low ability and experience more anxiety and negative emotions, which can hinder their language development. In the present study, the language mindset meaning system provides a conceptual foundation for examining Thai undergraduate students' belief about foreign language speaking ability and how it influences their speaking performance.



1.5.5 Emotional Outcomes of Attribution

The term “Emotional Outcomes of Attribution” refers to the first factor extracted from the exploratory factor analysis in the present study. This factor is derived from constructs related to competence-based emotional tendencies and attribution. It reflects the emotional responses that arise from students’ self-attributions regarding their language ability.

1.5.6 Motivational Process-Oriented Goals

The term “Motivational Process-Oriented Goals” refers to the second factor extracted from the exploratory factor analysis in the current study. This factor is composed of constructs including achievement goals, self-regulatory tendencies, effort, and attribution. It represents the types of goals students set based on their beliefs about the role of effort and the causes of their language learning outcomes.

1.5.7 Proactive Responses in Failure Situations

The term “Proactive Responses in Failure Situations” refers to the third factor extracted from the exploratory factor analysis in this study. This factor is based on constructs such as beliefs about failure and mistakes, effort, self-regulatory tendencies, and achievement goals. It describes the strategies students are likely to adopt when responding to setbacks and errors in language learning.

1.5.8 Speaking Performance

In the present study, “speaking performance” refers to the English language output of Thai undergraduate students during a group conversation task. It is operationally defined as students’ performance in a seven-minute group conversation test, consisting of four participants per group, conducted both before and after the language mindset intervention. Speaking performance is assessed using a standardized rubric developed by the School of Foreign Languages at Suranaree University of Technology. The rubric evaluates two key dimensions: fluency and accuracy. It uses a five-level scale ranging from 0 (no attempt) to 20 (quite fluent and accurate), with descriptors reflecting students’ ability to maintain exchanges, control grammatical structures, and use appropriate vocabulary. To ensure scoring reliability, two raters independently evaluated each student’s performance. The scores are analyzed to explore the relationships between mindsets and speaking performance.

1.5.9 Thai Undergraduate Students

The term “Thai undergraduate students” refers to individuals who have completed their schooling within the formal education system in Thailand and subsequently enrolled in a university within the country.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The present study explores the language mindset and foreign language speaking mindset of Thai undergraduate students, along with the associated variables, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the foreign language speaking mindset and its dynamic nature. The target population for this investigation comprises undergraduate students enrolled at Suranaree University of Technology. The selection of this university as the research site was based on considerations of participant accessibility, limited financial resources, and time constraints, which necessitated a careful allocation of research resources.

1.7 Expected Benefits

The present study aims to contribute to the following benefits. Firstly, the participants will directly benefit from the mind set intervention by gaining a deeper understanding of the psychological factors that can impact their language learning. The intervention is designed to facilitate participants' awareness of their language learning process and empower them to become more adaptive and resilient learners. Secondly, the research findings will contribute to the existing knowledge base on language mindset, thus providing valuable insights for the advancement of language learning and teaching in the Thai and related contexts.

1.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research study, including its rationale, objectives, research questions, methodology, key definitions, and significance. Additionally, it outlines the structure of the thesis and highlights the content of subsequent chapters. The chapter begins by discussing the rationale behind the study, explaining the justifications for conducting the research. It then proceeds to outline the specific purposes and research questions that will guide the investigation. Furthermore, a brief overview of the research methodology to be employed is provided, encompassing the chosen methods, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.