

# Motivation and Attitudes towards English Language Learning in Thailand: A Large-Scale Survey of Secondary School Students

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Article Information	Abstract
<b>Article History:</b> Received: 4 May 2020 Accepted: 18 August 2020 Available online: 24 September 2020	<i>Motivation and attitudes are believed to be significant factors in successful language learning. This study aims to investigate Thai EFL secondary school students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English. The participants of this study comprise 640 secondary school students from all over Thailand. Data was collected using a modified 34-item motivational survey adapted from Gardner's (2004) international version of Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and was analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings revealed that Thai EFL students are highly motivated, and they are keen to learn and improve their English. However, most of them said that English language learning in classrooms does not meet their needs, and prevents them from improving English skills that are useful for their real-life situations. Based on the findings, some pedagogical implications are also demonstrated. It is hoped that the findings from this study will benefit English teachers in Thailand as well as helping those in similar EFL contexts to gain insights about how they can support students' motivation and attitudes in learning English.</i>
<b>Keywords:</b> Attitudes Motivation English language learning Thai EFL students	

## INTRODUCTION

The English language is used worldwide. A considerable number of non-native English speakers in many regions use English as a language for communication (Sharifian, 2017). With that in mind, knowing English is inarguably crucial. Importantly, English plays a major role in Thai society, especially in educational and professional aspects. For instance, a growing number of job advertisements in Thailand mention the need for prospective employees with 'a good command of English' (Foley, 2005). Moreover, the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 encouraged ASEAN citizens to improve their English proficiency for better employment opportunities. Accordingly, the importance of English language learning in Thailand has gradually increased. With the increasing demand for high proficiency in English in education and business contexts, the role of English language teaching and learning becomes ever more significant. Since Thailand realizes that a good command of English is a necessity (Foley, 2005), English is a compulsory subject in Thai schools (Ministry of Education,

2008). Therefore, Thai EFL students spend 12 years studying English in primary and secondary schools.

As part of education reform, there has been an emphasis on improving English language skills among Thai students so as to raise their proficiency. However, Kirkpatrick (2012) observed that Thailand has been investing a great deal of money in education, but is still unable to produce sufficient graduates skilled in English. Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017) and Hayes (2016) further illustrate that English proficiency among Thai students is still low in comparison with other countries in Southeast Asia despite the hard efforts made. According to the most recent Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2019), Thailand ranked 74<sup>th</sup> out of 100 countries, having 'very low proficiency'. In addition, the English scores in the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET is the Thai national examination) have been below 50 over the last half-decade (Imsa-ard, 2020). Such failures would seem to contradict the considerable emphasis given on English language learning in Thailand. In fact, it should be noted that the English language in Thailand is considered a foreign language, or EFL; therefore, English is treated as a subject matter rather than as a language for use in daily life. Consequently, the EFL context allows Thai students to have limited opportunities at best to use English in their daily lives; that is to say, English is generally used only in classroom settings. For such reasons, the English proficiency of Thai students is low, and the whole field of English language learning in Thailand has come into question.

Motivation plays a key role in a successful language learning process (Gardner, 2007). To support Gardner's (2007) point, moreover, Fakey (2010) demonstrates that learners' motivation and attitude are among the most significant factors in language learning. Furthermore, students' motivation and attitude are critical for effective English language teaching and learning (Hsu, 2010). Regarding the perceived failures of English language learning in Thailand, many researchers have pointed out several factors contributing to these failures. For example, Wiriyaichitra (2002) revealed that some causes include teachers' heavy teaching loads, the university entrance examination system, teachers' insufficient English language proficiency, and lack of sufficient exposure to the English language. Moreover, Dhanasobhon (2006) presents some additional potential causes of failures such as poorly-motivated students, poorly-trained teachers, and little exposure to the English language. As mentioned earlier, research to date has tended to focus more on teachers' aspects rather than students' aspects. It is clear that more investigations should be conducted on students' aspects which are hoped to help explain the potential causes of the failures of English language learning in Thailand.

Looking at the previous pertinent literature, foreign language learning motivation and attitudes have been investigated and examined in many contexts. Indeed, more investigations on Thai EFL secondary school students' motivation and attitudes should be conducted so as to understand the factors that have impacts on students' language learning experiences. Moreover, results from this study could help EFL teachers in similar contexts to design lessons that match students' learning motivation and attitude in order to achieve the learning goals. It is hoped that the findings from this study will benefit English language teachers in Thailand as well as in similar contexts regarding how to provide the best support to their EFL students towards learning English.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Motivation in language learning

Over the past decades, motivation has gained much attention in the field of language teaching and learning. In language learning, motivation plays a pivotal role. Moreover, Gardner (2007) demonstrates that “students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels” (p. 241). Therefore, it is important that language teachers understand the relationship between motivation and its impacts on language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). On account of its intricate and multifaceted construct, there have been a number of definitions of motivation.

First, Elliot and Covington (2001) define the term *motivation* as someone’s direction for their behavior. To elaborate, motivation is what causes a person to behave in a certain manner. Moreover, Narayanan (2006) and Broussard and Garrison (2004) assert that motivation is the reason behind someone’s behavior. According to Dörnyei (1998), there are two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the inner drive that makes someone want to engage in or do an activity. To elaborate, intrinsic motivation comes from a learner’s personal needs, referring to their desire to achieve their goal. For instance, intrinsic motivation makes learners enjoy learning English as they would like to accomplish their goal. In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to the external drive that makes someone act in order to achieve an external outcome like earning rewards or compliments. For example, extrinsic motivation makes learners want to reach their goal because they will have a better career.

It is believed that the motivation learners have might determine their success in learning a second language. There are some factors that affect motivation. First, positive attitudes towards language learning make its students more motivated (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Second, the intrinsic joy of learning motivates learners to continue their studies and to participate more in learning activities (Wu, 2003). Finally, external pressures such as parents and rewards can extrinsically motivate and satisfy learners to pursue learning (Liu, 2007).

Concerning relevant theories and concepts about motivation in language learning, there are many concepts proposed. For instance, Gardner’s (2007) motivation includes three main elements: effort to learn the language, desire to achieve a goal, and positive effect in the task of learning the language. In his socio-educational model, two variables (motivation and ability) are strongly linked to learners’ achievement in language learning, and attitudes in learning can drive learners’ motivation.

### Attitudes in language learning

In addition to motivation, attitudes are believed to have an influence on language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) demonstrate that learners with positive attitudes will likely integrate with that language and actively motivate themselves to achieve their goal in language learning. The term *attitude* has various meanings depending on the field and focus. Gardner (1980) explains the term *attitude* as “the sum total of ones’ instincts and feelings [... towards]

any specified topic” (p. 267). Baker (1992) defines *attitude* as “a construct used to explain the direction of human behavior” (p. 10). Gardner (2000) states that attitude refers to learners’ responses to anything associated with the particular setting, such as teachers or subject matter.

In language learning, the factor of *attitude* plays a crucial role, and it is an essential influence in language performance (Ganschow et al., 1994; Visser, 2008). Attitudes can be either positive or negative. To elaborate, positive attitudes towards language learning can strengthen motivation, while negative attitudes can on the other hand weaken motivation. Achievement in language learning may rely on learners’ attitudes towards language learning. Kara (2009) asserts that there are three aspects of attitude: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. The behavioral aspect of attitude deals with the way a learner reacts to particular situations. The cognitive aspect of attitude involves the learner’s beliefs about the language; for example, learners think learning English is important, so they may have a positive attitude towards learning English. The emotional aspect of attitude refers to the learner’s like or dislike of the language they study; for example, if learners hate English, it could imply that these learners have a negative attitude towards learning English. Generally, the attitudes of people are likely to have been shaped by their experience, and can change over the time. Many years ago, Gardner (1985) created and designed a test called the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to measure all factors that affect attitude and motivation in particular issues. In carrying out such a test, Gardner (1985) found that positive attitudes increase motivation.

One of the reasons why motivation and attitudes should be examined in language learning and teaching is that high motivation and a positive attitude towards a second language can be drives to support and improve second language learning (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007). In other words, students who have positive attitudes towards language learning are likely to be successful language learners. To support this claim, Karahan (2007) affirms that positive attitudes lead students to positive orientation in language learning. Therefore, gauging students’ attitudes towards language learning is worthwhile so as to find out whether or not the students view it favorably (Gardner, 2007), with the hope that such an investigation could provide possible ways to improve language learning and teaching.

A review of the motivation and attitudes in language learning – which are the main elements of this study – revealed that motivation and attitudes have a mutual correlation, and they affect one another. Therefore, in this study, motivation and attitudes are treated as one entity.

### **Related studies**

There have been numerous studies that investigate the attitudes and motivation of students towards language learning in various contexts. Most studies have been conducted outside of the Thai context. To begin this section, related studies at the secondary school level in similar contexts will be presented. Finally, related studies conducted in Thailand will be discussed.

At the secondary school level, Long, Ming, and Chen (2013) investigated student motivation in English learning among 45 students at a middle school in China through a questionnaire. Their study revealed that many students had a strong instrumental motivation in their English learning, meaning that they had great desire and commitment to learning English despite the numerous difficulties they faced. However, overall, the students' motivation was not high due to the long-term exam-oriented education system. To elaborate on this phenomenon, the exam plays a crucial role among educational stakeholders; therefore, people tend to keep their eyes on the test scores and to train students to do the test well. Moreover, it can be said that their study is likely similar to the present study, as they investigated middle school students' motivation in English language learning. However, their study was rather small with only 45 students as their participants, meaning that their results might be impossible to generalize in wider contexts.

Additionally, Kim (2006) revealed findings different from those of the aforementioned studies. His study investigated 364 Korean high school students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English, through questionnaires. His findings suggested that EFL students' motivation is rather low due to the negative washback effect of the nationwide high-stakes test of university entrance. Interestingly, students' motivation can be driven by high-stakes exams. Despite its importance in high-stakes tests, his study still revealed that students had little motivation in language learning.

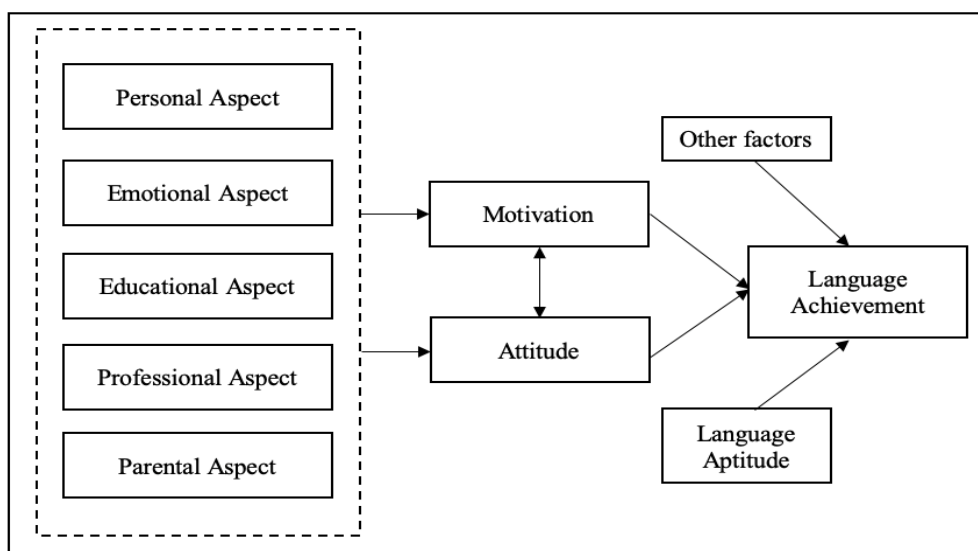
Concerning the study in Thailand, Vibulphol (2016) investigated second language learners' motivation and learning of English, and the ways in which the teachers supported the students' motivation and learning in natural classroom settings. The findings showed that most students possessed a relatively high level of motivation, while a few students showed a lack of motivation in almost every class. However, her study focused on motivation of Thai ninth grade students only, so this study would have been more useful if she had examined a larger sample group of Thai EFL students.

Looking at the attitudinal and motivational studies in the literature, there have been a number of studies investigating students' motivation towards learning English in a specific context from particular institutions, especially at the tertiary level, but there has been no study investigating Thai EFL secondary students' motivation as a whole. It can be said that many studies investigating motivation in English language learning in Thailand have been conducted with undergraduate students; however, studying English in secondary schools and studying English at the tertiary level are dissimilar to a large extent in terms of maturity, learning goals, and learning contexts. Therefore, attitudes and motivation in learning English of undergraduate students cannot be generalized to apply to secondary school students. Moreover, English language learning at the secondary school level is mandatory and important as it can serve as a foundation for higher education; therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate secondary school students' motivation and attitudes towards English language learning so as to provide the empirical results that look into the motivation and attitudes of Thai EFL students at the secondary school level towards learning English.

Hence, motivation and attitude provide people with some directions to follow. In language learning, motivation and attitude are two key elements in guiding and leading learners to its aim. When motivation is lacking and attitudes are negative, it is difficult for learners to achieve the aim of effective language learning. In light of its significance, this study aims at exploring Thai EFL secondary school students' motivation and attitudes towards English language learning at a large scale. To fill the gap, the following research question was formulated to achieve the purpose of this study:

What are the attitudes and levels of motivation of Thai EFL students at the secondary school level towards learning English in Thailand?

### Research framework



**Figure 1:** Research Framework of Motivation and Attitudes adapted from Gardner (2000)

The goal of this study is to explore the motivation and attitudes of Thai EFL secondary students towards learning English in Thailand. As seen in Figure 1, the research framework has been adopted from the language learning–socio–psychological model by Gardner (2000) in which motivation and attitudes, language aptitude, and other factors have an impact on language achievement. Moreover, it is believed that motivation and attitude are viewed separately, but there is a connection between those two, and they affect one another, as Gardner (1985) indicated that “motivation...refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language” (p. 10). In addition, in this study, attitude refers to the learners' reactions to the different aforementioned aspects.

A review of the pertinent literature shows that motivation and attitudes can be affected by both internal and external factors (e.g. personal goals and parents, respectively). In this study, motivation and attitudes are categorized into five main aspects that are associated with students' lives: personal, emotional, educational, professional, and parental aspects. In terms

of the personal aspect, emotional aspect and parental aspect, Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér (2011) assert that motivation can be affected by self-regulated beliefs and parental support. Moreover, their results indicated that motivation can be regulated and shaped by learning goals. Concerning the professional aspect, Cheng and Ho (2001) observe that job and career attitudes have an influence on learning motivation and transfer.

## METHODS

### Participants

The population in this study was Thai EFL students at the secondary school level as shown in Table 1. According to the National Statistical Office (2019), the number of students in the formal school system in the Thai program of public and private schools at the secondary school level is approximately 4,194,355, which is the population of this study. Hence, the recommended sample size for a population of 4,194,355, at a confidence level of 99 percent and a margin of error of 5 percent, would be 640 students in order to represent all Thai EFL secondary school students.

In this study, the cluster sampling method was employed to select the participants. To elaborate, cluster sampling is “where the whole population is divided into groups. Subsequently, a random sample is taken from these groups, all of which are used in the final sample” (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 21). There were four groups as the clusters based on the four administrative regions in Thailand: North, Central, Isaan (Northeastern) and Eastern, and Southern Thailand. Each group contained 160 participants chosen using snowball sampling.

The participants consisted of 510 (79.69%) females, 110 (17.19%) males, and 20 (3.12%) students who preferred not to indicate their gender. In terms of a gender imbalance, the possible reason for this phenomenon is that the total number of female students is higher than male students according to National Statistical Office (2019); therefore, the responses were likely to be received from more female students than male students. Concerning the levels of study, there were 492 (76.87%) students at the lower secondary school level and 148 (23.13%) students at the upper secondary school level.

Table 1: Demographic Information about Participants	
Information	Numbers
<b>Genders</b>	
- Female	510 (79.69%)
- Male	110 (17.19%)
- Prefer not to say	20 (3.12%)
<b>Levels</b>	
- Lower secondary	492 (76.87%)
- Upper secondary	148 (23.13%)

## Research instrument

As this study made use of the quantitative method, the adopted questionnaire was employed as an instrument. In this study, a questionnaire was adopted from Gardner's (2004) international version of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The reason for adopting this framework is that the AMTB has been reported to have good reliability and validity to measure attitude and motivation (Gardner, 2004). In his AMTB, there are five scales: integrativeness, attitudes towards learning, motivation, language anxiety, and instrumental orientation. Moreover, new questions have been introduced and the test has been re-organized in this updated version. In fact, there are 104 items in the international version of AMTB. However, only 34 items were chosen in this study. In this questionnaire, there were 34 items and an additional open-ended question. This 34-item questionnaire was developed with similarity to previous related studies in EFL contexts (e.g. Choomthong and Chaichompoo, 2015; Chumcharoensuk, 2013; Kim, 2016). This questionnaire's items were developed through a system of translation into Thai to avoid ambiguity and mistranslation, piloting and consultation with lecturers in English language teaching. Some items were omitted based on their suitability in a Thai context.

The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms to gain convenience and distributed to a number of schools in each region. When each region reached the expected number of participants, the questionnaire immediately stopped accepting new responses. The participants were asked to answer the questionnaire honestly, as their identities were anonymous.

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: 1) background information including genders, regions and educational level; and 2) attitude and motivation towards learning English. Overall, there were 10 items indicating negative motivation and the other 24 items indicating positive motivation towards learning English. In choosing the items, there are five main themes, or aspects, in the questionnaire: personal, emotional, educational, professional, and parental.

The questionnaire used a 4-point Likert scale where respondents indicated strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The reason for using the 4-point Likert scale is to force the respondents to choose a side. In addition to Likert scale items, there is an optional, open-ended question asking what students think about learning English based on their own experience and opinions. The question is, "Could you please share about your opinions and experience towards learning English?"

## Reliability and validity of research instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire items was measured in a pilot study. In the pilot study, 20 Thai EFL students were randomly chosen from the same target population. The analysis of item reliability was evaluated through the reliability coefficient test with Cronbach Alpha. Concerning reliability of overall questionnaire items, the value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.805, showing acceptable consistency of reliability.

Concerning each theme, they also revealed acceptable consistency of reliability as follows: personal aspect (0.703), emotional aspect (0.825), educational aspect (0.713), professional

aspect (0.931), and parental aspect (0.855). Therefore, it can be said that each item measured the same underlying construct.

Investigating the validity of the questionnaire items, three experts in the field of English language teaching were asked to evaluate the validity and give comments on the items. Moreover, the questionnaire was translated into Thai with help from three experts in Thai-English translation to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Hence, all the experts and translators responded that the questionnaire items were valid to explore the research question.

## Data analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and mean scores. The software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in the data analysis. Concerning the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, content analysis was employed to code the answers into a meaningful set of categories. The mean scores derived from Likert scales can be interpreted based on the following criteria in Table 2. The criteria for interpreting the mean scores have been developed based on class interval calculation (Ruangprapun, 2000). The class interval is calculated by subtracting the maximum score with the minimum score and then dividing them with the number of scales; therefore, the class interval in this case is 0.75.

Range	Interpretation
3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.51 – 3.25	Agree
1.76 – 2.50	Disagree
1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree

## Ethical considerations

The participants were informed of the purpose of this study through the process of consent. All participants understood that participating in this study was voluntary, and they could decide to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, they all understood that no identification of the participants could be made as their identity is anonymous.

## FINDINGS

Based on the research question asking what the attitudes and levels of motivation of Thai EFL students at the secondary level are, the findings were divided into five groups to facilitate the analysis, categorized by the themes of the statements in the questionnaire concerning the aspects of motivation: the personal, the emotional, the educational, the professional, and the parental. The tables include selected statements from the questionnaire.

## 1. The personal aspect

**Table 3: The results of the personal aspect**

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interpretation
1	Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.	0.63%	0.78%	20.31%	78.28%	3.76	Strongly agree
2	Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.	3.80%	26.30%	46.30%	23.80%	2.90	Agree
3	I wish I were fluent in English.	0.78%	0.94%	20.47%	77.81%	3.75	Strongly agree
4	I wish I could have many native English-speaking friends.	0.78%	4.22%	45.00%	50.00%	3.44	Strongly agree
5	I want to learn other cultures to understand the world better.	-	2.00%	30.16%	67.80%	3.66	Strongly agree
8	I want to get grade "A" in my English class all the time.	0.20%	4.50%	29.70%	65.60%	3.61	Strongly agree
9	If I can speak English, I will use it for travelling abroad.	0.16%	5.20%	30.30%	64.34%	3.58	Strongly agree
10	Knowing English would help me to become a more knowledgeable person.	0.50%	3.30%	40.80%	55.50%	3.51	Strongly agree
12	I learn English because English plays a role as an important language in the world.	0.20%	2.80%	40.20%	56.90%	3.54	Strongly agree
13	I like to learn English because I like to watch films in English.	4.40%	28.00%	40.00%	27.70%	2.91	Agree
14	I like to learn English because I like to listen to songs in English.	2.30%	16.60%	38.10%	43.00%	3.22	Agree
24	Knowing English isn't really an important goal in my life.	49.20%	38.90%	9.50%	2.30%	1.65	Disagree
27	Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	-	0.60%	24.40%	75.00%	3.74	Strongly agree

31	I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me.	-	1.70%	16.60%	81.70%	3.80	Strongly agree
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As seen in Table 3, students were positively motivated in terms of their personal aspect. Most students believed that English played a role as an important language in the world, as it would allow them to meet and converse with more and varied people as well as to be able to travel abroad (items 12, 27 and 9, respectively). Due to the importance of the English language, most respondents (95.00%) wished they could have had many native English-speaking friends, believing that native English-speaking friends could help them better their English proficiency. Most (98.30%) indicated that they wanted to learn English so well that it would become natural to them (item 31). The majority (97.10%) wished that they had been fluent in English (item 3). In this aspect, there are two items (items 24 and 25) showing negative statements. In fact, most students reported that they disagree with both items, implying positivity. Concerning the mean score, item 31 (I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me) has the highest mean score (3.80), indicating 'strongly agree', while the lowest mean score of 2.90 indicating 'agree' is item 2 (Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English).

From the open-ended questions, some students reported on about the significance of English affecting their personal concerns, as follows:

"I believe that English is not only a subject matter but also a tool used to communicate. English makes me able to meet much more people." (Student B)

"English is certainly widening our perspectives. If we know much English, we have a bigger and wider source of knowledge." (Student J)

According to the open-ended question in the questionnaires, it revealed that the students' thoughts and internal drives, as intrinsic motivation, encouraged them to learn English. Since they found learning English significant for them, they were likely to be motivated and have positive attitudes towards learning English.

## 2. The emotional aspect

Table 4: The results of the emotional aspect

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interpretation
17	I get anxious when I have to speak in English to foreigners.	4.86%	19.84%	41.40%	33.90%	3.04	Agree
22	I get anxious when I have to speak in English in class.	10.20%	23.40%	39.40%	27.00%	2.83	Agree

25	I hate English.	47.30%	35.50%	12.70%	4.50%	1.74	Strongly Disagree
29	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class.	25.30%	45.30%	19.70%	9.70%	2.14	Disagree
32	It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.	8.80%	24.40%	41.60%	25.30%	2.83	Agree
34	I am sometimes anxious that the other students in class will laugh at me when I speak English.	13.60%	26.10%	34.70%	25.60%	2.72	Agree

As seen in Table 4, the majority of students got anxious whenever they had to speak English to both foreigners and the class (75.30% and 66.40% of them, respectively). Also, 66.90 percent of them were worried that their classmates seemed to speak English better than they did. Moreover, most of them (60.30%) were sometimes anxious that their classmates would laugh at them when they spoke English. From the latter two results, this could be one factor that made them anxious to speak English to the class as first mentioned. However, 70.90 percent of them indicated that it did not embarrass them to volunteer answers in their English class. Regarding the mean scores in this aspect, item 17 (I get anxious when I have to speak in English to foreigners) has the highest mean score, indicating 'agree', while item 29 (It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class) has the lowest mean score, indicating 'disagree'.

From the open-ended questions, some students reported on the significance of English affecting their emotions as follows:

"My classmates like to laugh at me when speaking English in class. I know there are some mistakes, but foreigners never laugh at me when I speak English with them. This makes me feel really anxious and nervous whenever I have to speak English, especially in front of people." (Student N)

"When we make mistakes, teachers should know how to correct us rather than laugh at us. I feel totally terrible whenever I am being laughed at." (Student G)

When looking at the answers from the open-ended question, it can be seen that the emotional aspect has a profound impact on students' motivation and attitudes. Despite the fact that Thai students seemed to be intrinsically motivated to some extent, most students reported that they were anxious when it came to speaking in front of people, especially in classroom settings in which they were laughed at. These results are in accord with the study by Akkakoson (2016) demonstrating that students' anxiety is present especially in classroom situations.

### 3. The educational aspect

**Table 5: The results of the educational aspect**

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interpretation
11	I expend much effort in learning English.	0.20%	8.90%	51.40%	39.50%	3.30	Strongly Agree
16	I pay much attention to feedback I receive in my English class.	0.50%	10.50%	54.50%	34.50%	3.23	Agree
18	I look forward to going to English classes because my English teacher is so good.	8.00%	19.80%	44.10%	28.1%	2.92	Agree
19	Learning English is really great.	8.50%	37.70%	43.80%	13.00%	2.61	Agree
20	I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	0.80%	6.70%	41.10%	51.40%	3.43	Strongly Agree
21	My English class at school is really a waste of time.	26.10%	39.40%	22.00%	12.50%	2.21	Disagree
23	Studying English is not enjoyable.	36.3%	44.10%	13.80%	5.90%	1.89	Disagree
28	I think my English class at school is boring.	15.50%	32.20%	32.30%	20.00%	2.57	Agree
30	My English teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style.	13.40%	30.90%	36.70%	18.90%	2.61	Agree
33	My English teachers are a great source of inspiration for me.	15.20%	33.80%	37.20%	13.90%	2.50	Disagree

As seen in Table 5, the majority of students had a strong desire to know all aspects of English and expended much effort in learning English (92.50% and 90.90% of them, respectively). In terms of their teachers, up to 79.00 percent of them indicated that they paid much attention to feedback provided from their teachers. Moreover, 62.90 percent of them looked forward to going to their English classes because their teachers were so good. In addition, 55.60 percent of them believed that their English teachers had a dynamic and interesting teaching style. This could be interpreted as asserting that teachers are one key factor that affects learning motivation. Although 52.30 percent of them thought that their English class at school was boring, 64.50 percent of them did not think that their English class at school was a waste of time. Concerning the mean scores in this aspect, item 20 (I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English) has the highest mean score, indicating 'strongly agree', while item 23 (Studying English is not enjoyable) has the lowest mean score, indicating 'disagree'.

From the open-ended questions, many students reported on their English language learning as follows:

"Most teachers usually talk off the topic. I would like them to be more motivating and make their lessons more enjoying. Students want to gain much knowledge from school. Not every student is financially supported to go to cram schools or tutorial schools." (Student A)

"Learning English in Thailand should begin with listening skills rather than rote-memorization." (Student C)

"I wish to learn English emphasizing four main skills, rather than focusing on only writing." (Student D)

"I think learning English to communicate is better than to memorize grammar rules. I do not want to learn English just to memorize something for the exams. I want to be able to communicate in English." (Student E)

"In Thailand, I think the goal of learning English is to be able to do well on the exam. Thai students are taught to do the exam, so we are not able to communicate in English well enough despite considerable years of learning English." (Student F)

"English language teacher should make their lesson enjoying and interesting. Moreover, students should have more opportunities to converse and communicate in English." (Student G)

"Thai students who have the low ability of English proficiency should not be left behind, especially in classrooms. I do not understand why some teachers ignore them and pay more attention to those who have high or higher ability of English proficiency." (Students I)

"I think most students want a teacher who understands their students. Instead of blaming our mistakes or failures, they should encourage and motivate us. This could make us more open-minded to English." (Student K)

"It is important for English language teachers to emphasize active learning. Instead of giving a one-way lecture, teachers should have more activities that allow students to be involved in. I think we learn much more from participating in some learning activities." (Student L)

"Teachers should be impartial or neutral for every student. If a teacher pays more attention to those smart students, the other students will surely be left out and less motivated." (Students P)

To sum up, most students reported that they put much effort in and paid much attention to learning English in class as they found it useful. Moreover, students believed that teachers were one of the key factors that affect their motivation and attitudes towards learning English.

Teachers' behavior in classrooms should be considered. For example, students indicated that it is significant for teachers to understand and take interest in students regardless of their level of proficiency. When some students are ignored and left out, they often report having low motivation and negative attitudes towards learning English too. Moreover, the nature of learning English in many schools in Thailand is still exam-oriented. When the exam (e.g. national examination) is the focus, grammar rules, rote memorization and teaching to the test become the main purpose of teaching English instead of focusing on developing the four skills of English and communicative competence.

#### 4. The professional aspect

**Table 6: The results of the professional aspect**

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interpretation
6	Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.	-	0.50%	14.40%	85.20%	3.85	Strongly Agree
7	Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.	-	2.70%	23.60%	73.80%	3.71	Strongly Agree

As seen in Table 6, most respondents (99.60%) believed that studying English was important because they would need it for their future career. Moreover, 97.40 percent of them thought that studying English was also useful in getting a good job. To interpret these two items, it can be concluded that career attitude in this professional aspect can affect learning motivation. Concerning the mean scores in this aspect, item 6 (Studying English is important because I will need it for my career) has the highest mean score, indicating 'strongly agree', while item 7 (Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job) has the lowest mean score, also indicating 'strongly agree'.

From the open-ended questions, some students reported on how the English language affects their professions as follows:

"If we know and are able to use English, this can allow us to get a better job and a higher salary. Many companies nowadays want prospective employees with a good command of English."  
(Student B)

"English is difficult for me, but I have to learn it intensively. English can be a door to better jobs and better working positions." (Student A)

Another aspect affecting students' motivation and attitudes is their professional path. In the questionnaire, most students believed that English would help them in getting a good career. This result seems to be in accord with the answers from the open-ended questions indicating

that many companies that offer higher salary and better working positions are likely to require employees with good English. Hence, it can be concluded that the professional aspect can affect students' motivation and attitudes to some extent.

## 5. The parental aspect

**Table 7: The results of the parental aspect**

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interpretation
15	My parents try to help me to learn English.	2.50%	13.40%	52.00%	32.00%	3.14	Agree
26	My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.	2.20%	3.40%	37.50%	56.90%	3.49	Strongly Agree

In this study, the parental aspect has been included as the extrinsic motivation which is believed to build students' control over how they learn. As seen in Table 7, most of them (94.40%) believed that their parents felt that it was very important for them to learn English. Additionally, 84.00 percent of them thought that their parents tried to help them to learn English. Concerning the mean scores in this aspect, item 26 (My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English) has the highest mean score, indicating 'strongly agree', while item 15 (My parents try to help me to learn English) has the lowest mean score, also indicating 'agree'.

From the open-ended questions, some students reported on how their parents support their English language learning as follows:

"My parents are true supporters. They have been supporting me to learn English since I was very young. I am so grateful that they have done that, because I think knowing English really makes my world even bigger and wider." (Student O)

"Since primary school, my parents have always told me to study English hard. They always say that English is crucial for me in the future. Looking back, what they have told is absolutely true. If I had not paid attention to English classes, I would not have been at this point today." (Student J)

According to the interview excerpts, the parents' attitudes can serve as extrinsic motivation which drives students to learn English. Most students reported that their parents believed that it is important to learn English, and supported them in learning English.

## DISCUSSION

From the overall findings, it revealed that students are highly motivated towards learning English. In this section, a discussion on the findings from this study and the previous research studies is presented.

To start with, based on the research question, this study focuses on two main factors: motivation and attitude. Concerning the motivation, the overall results revealed that most of the Thai EFL students were highly motivated in learning English. Some reasons for such results are that the students found English an important tool for their educational and professional aims. Nevertheless, a few students showed that they were demotivated due to emotional and educational aspects. A possible explanation is that students might find English out of their reach and unrelated to their lives when they lack adequate opportunity to use the language. Also, support from parents and teachers may have a profound influence on students' motivation. These results are in line with Trang and Baldauf's (2007) study indicating that teachers affect students' motivation, and students tend to be more motivated if their teachers provide constructive feedback.

Concerning the attitudes of Thai EFL secondary school students towards learning English, the results revealed mostly positive attitudes towards learning English. They believed that learning English is essential for them, and they showed a keen interest in learning English; however, they still felt anxious when it came to using English, especially speaking. The possible explanation for this phenomenon is that Thai EFL students do not have adequate opportunities to be exposed to and use English in their everyday life (Hengsadekul, Hengsadekul, Koul, & Kaewkuekool, 2010). When they are not used to using English typically, it is possible that they feel anxious when speaking English. Also, Akkakoson's (2016) findings further support the aforementioned study by demonstrating that test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and a limited vocabulary could also cause students' anxiety.

In terms of the personal aspect, most students thought that English played a role as an important language in the world, and it would allow them to meet and converse with more and varied people as well as to be able to travel abroad, and they wished that they could have many native English-speaking friends. These results may be explained by the fact that having native English-speaking friends would allow them to get more exposed to using English in their daily life. Also, there are similarities between the attitudes expressed by such findings in this study and those described by Long, Ming and Chen's (2013) study examining student motivation in English learning in Geiju, China. Their findings revealed that students expressed a keen interest in learning English because they realized the importance of learning English, and they thought that it could improve their own quality of life. Moreover, Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) demonstrate that most students possess personal motivation or intrinsic motivation, including students' interests such as movies and music, which can lead to effective language learning.

Concerning the emotional aspect, most students in this study reported that they felt anxious when they had to speak English. This outcome is contrary to that of Lamb (2012), who studied about a self-system perspective on young adolescents' motivation to learn English in urban and rural settings. His findings revealed that the Indonesians did not appear to be anxious about using English. The reason for this contrast is not clear, but it may have something to do with the fact that in this study, the students' classmates or even teachers usually laughed at them when they spoke English, which made them unconfident about speaking English in front of people.

Regarding the educational aspect, most of the students paid attention to feedback given by teachers, had a strong desire to know all aspects of English, and expended much effort in learning English. However, some wished they could learn English through communicative activities rather than rote memorization, which was the main focus in English language teaching in this context. The possible explanation for this practice could come from Imsa-ard's (2020) study investigating Thai EFL teachers' perceptions and choice of practices towards the national examination. His findings indicated that teachers tended to focus on rote memorization because students needed to memorize grammar rules and vocabulary in order to do well on the exam, since there has been a long-term exam-oriented education system. This aforementioned finding about teaching preference is not in line with Ahmed's (2015) study examining the attitudes and motivation of undergraduate EFL students at a public university in Malaysia towards learning English. His findings asserted that students were in favor of the grammar-translation method and vocabulary.

Concerning the professional aspect, most students want to learn English in order to open more job opportunities to themselves. This finding is in accord with Ahmed's (2015) study. His findings revealed that a large number of students needed to develop English skills for their jobs. This finding is also in line with Al-Tamimi and Shuib's (2009) and Kyriacou and Zhu's (2008) studies revealing that students wanted to improve their English skills to increase their job opportunities. This result may be explained by Wongs'a's (2018) study revealing that English language proficiency in Thailand plays a significant role in current business settings as well as in the workplace environment, and many companies require scores from English proficiency tests such as TOEIC.

In terms of the parental aspect, the finding indicating that most of the students received support from parents is in line with Chalak and Kassaian's (2010) study investigating motivation and attitudes of Iranian EFL students towards learning English. Their study revealed that most parents try to help their children to learn English. Moreover, the finding from this present study is also consistent with Lamb's (2012) study on a self-system perspective on young adolescents' motivation to learn English in urban and rural settings. His study revealed that there was some level of parental encouragement students got towards learning English.

Despite the fact that most of the Thai EFL students in this study had positive attitudes towards learning English and were highly motivated in learning English, previous reports indicated that the English proficiency of Thai EFL students has been relatively low, as shown in the mean scores of the English test in the national examination. This inconsistency may be due to the quality of the English test in the national examination and the test-curriculum alignment. To support such a claim, Nipakornkitti and Adunyarittigun (2018) demonstrate that "the O-NET test items were partially aligned with the national curriculum" and the level of test difficulty is higher than what is taught in the class" (p. 56). The results in this study are contrary to the evidence of English proficiency of Thai EFL students due to some internal and external factors and confounding variables. Therefore, the English proficiency of Thai EFL students based on scores of the national examination and the findings in this study must be compared and interpreted with caution.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Teachers have the responsibilities to control the whole class and to encourage students' active participation in classrooms. There are some possible pedagogical implications for EFL teachers to support students' learning.

First of all, it is important to build a positive teacher-student relationship among all students (Newberry, 2010). Building a positive and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom allows students to engage in the learning activities more. Teachers should establish a cooperative atmosphere and offer some encouragement to relieve students' anxiety.

As students have different attention spans, moreover, teachers should try using various teaching activities to attract students' attention (Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2012) rather than some methods that solely emphasize vocabulary and grammatical structures. If a teacher keeps using the same technique or activity over and over, some students can easily get bored and demotivated. Activities in the classroom should capture and arouse students' interest so that they can get engaged in learning activities. In addition, using interesting media or a variety of teaching techniques to stimulate students' attention and interests can promote students' intrinsic motivation.

Importantly, teachers should provide students with more opportunities and communicative activities to expose them to the English language (Gao, 2008). One reason that Thai students, as well as some students in EFL contexts, tend to have low English proficiency is their limited exposure to English itself (Foley, 2005). To resolve this problem, teachers should provide opportunities for students to gain experience in using English. Also, teachers should encourage students to continue learning English and improve their English language skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

Students' motivation and attitude are two of the most significant factors that have a profound impact on language learning; therefore, teachers should understand the relationship between motivation and its effects on language learning to find effective ways to foster English language proficiency and boost their students' actual performance. In light of its significance, this study aimed to examine Thai EFL secondary school students' motivation towards learning English in a large-scale survey. This study employed a quantitative method to explore the research question. A total of 640 students were the participants in this study. The modified 34-item questionnaire adopted from Gardner's (2004) AMTB was used to obtain data about students' motivation. The findings revealed that most students are highly motivated towards learning English because they believe English to be necessary for them in both educational and professional purposes. However, some students indicated that they felt anxious and nervous when using English. This is because their classmates and teachers sometimes laugh at them when speaking English or when they make mistakes.

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge some limitations of this study. Firstly, the imbalance

in gender and levels of study should be of concern, since different genders and levels can yield different motivations. Secondly, this study conducted data collection only via questionnaire, which may encounter the following issue: A self-report method could cause a social desirability bias in which the respondents tend to inaccurately report. To fill such gaps, alternative methods of data collection, such as classroom observation and document analysis, should be considered. Thirdly, the participants' backgrounds and schools can be an unintentionally extraneous variable in the study, as participants from different backgrounds may have different kinds of support. It is hoped that readers will be able to relate the findings to their own contexts.

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