



English Speaking Anxiety Among Northeastern Thai University Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at investigating the anxiety levels affecting the English speaking ability of university students at a public university in the northeast region of Thailand as well as exploring the factors influencing such anxiety levels. The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique for the data collection by distributing 102 questionnaires to Thai first-year students who are studying in the English and Communication major at a public university in the northeast region of Thailand. The questionnaires were based on the anxiety evaluation models of Aida (1994), Horwitz et al. (1986), and Liu and Jackson (2008). Likert's scale was used to measure the levels of anxiety and the results revealed high levels of anxiety among the students with a mean of 3.50. Furthermore, the main component of anxiety was related to the students' beliefs about language learning followed by test anxiety. Moreover, the most significant factor affecting their speaking anxiety was grammar (72.55%), followed by vocabulary (53.94%) and English oral proficiency (53.92%), respectively.

Keywords: anxiety level, English speaking anxiety, factors, university students

Introduction

Based on overall English competency, the speaking skill seems to be the most important skill for effective communication, and it should be encouraged to achieve success in communication (Boonkit, 2010). However, it is challenging for many language learners to master the art of speaking in a foreign language. According to the study by Horwitz et al. (1986), students might be good at learning different skills in a foreign language, but they still claim to have a mental block when it comes to speaking. This is evident as students often express anxiety and nervousness when speaking a foreign language in the classroom (Worde, 1998). Another significant obstacle to speaking among English language learners is the fear of making errors, regardless of how many new words they know or how many examinations they have passed (Trent, 2009; Zhang & Shi, 2008). This clearly shows that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are uncomfortable when they are required to speak English, and it can be said that to master English and other foreign languages, students have to tackle a number of different problems of which speaking anxiety represents one important factor.

Given the aforementioned background, anxiety could be regarded as one of the major challenges among EFL students, especially with regard to speaking. Of previous studies related to English speaking anxiety, the study of Liu and Jackson (2008) showed that more than one-third of the students felt anxious in their English speaking classes, because they were afraid of being negatively evaluated, and they were anxious about speaking English in public. Moreover, Matsuda and Gobel (2004) revealed that students with overseas experience had lower anxiety in speaking English which implies that the more self-confident they are, the lower their anxiety. Based on the Thai context, despite the great emphasis on learning English in Thai universities, there are only a few research studies on the problems of Thai students learning English, especially the factors that hinder their speaking abilities such as learners' speaking anxiety in class or public areas (Plangkham & Porkaew, 2012). One reason behind this anxiety might be their lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes such as mispronunciation and using incorrect grammar as Tantiwich and Sinwongsuwat (2021) who mentioned examples of speaking problems among Thai students such as mispronunciation, misuse of word stress, incorrect intonation, and grammar.

As a result of these problems, the researchers decided to investigate the English speaking anxiety levels and to explore the factors which cause such anxiety among students. The first-year students majoring in English and Communication, Faculty of Liberal Arts, at a public university located in a northeast region of Thailand were considered as the main participants of this

study since the development of stress and anxiety occurs during the adaptation stage from high school level to the beginning of the first year at university (Urani et al., 2003). Moreover, in this study, students majoring in the English and Communication program are required to complete several mandatory English speaking courses which possibly caused them to experience anxiety. Accordingly, two research questions were formed, “What are the levels of English-speaking anxiety of the first-year students?” and “What are the factors influencing the students’ speaking skills?”. In terms of the study’s significance, the results may help English instructors, students, and anyone else interested in learning English to understand the significance of intrinsic factors and the mental barriers (such as feelings of anxiety, fear, and nervousness) so that they can develop successful strategies to overcome these barriers, such as encouraging more small-group activities where EFL students feel comfortable using a target language.

Literature Review

Language Anxiety

Van der Ploeg (1984) stated that anxiety is an unpleasant emotional reaction resulting from the perception of some situations. Moreover, Kratochwill and Morris (1985) further elaborated that anxiety is apprehension, tension, or uneasiness that come from the expectation of danger, either internal or external. Additionally, anxiety could be caused by an object, situation, or activity that is avoided since they are viewed as a phobia. In other words, anxiety is related to feelings of nervousness, worry, stress, and tension among individuals (Horwitz et al., 1986). Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that anxiety is the uneasiness to do or focus on something due to the impact of individuals’ concerns.

With a narrower focus of anxiety in language use, Young (1986) defined language anxiety as a complex phenomenon which depended on ethnic origin, previous experience of a language, a personal attitude toward learning as well as the classroom environment. Language anxiety can be defined as a kind of situational anxiety with a sense of tension and fear toward speaking and listening as well as learning in second language environments (MacIntyre, 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Furthermore, Oxford (1999) claims that language anxiety is only a transient sense of apprehension when pupils perform in a second language. More importantly, if the anxiety occurs frequently, pupils correlate it with poor language performance which then becomes a characteristic rather than a mood. It can be said that when pupils transmit muddled messages in a foreign language, display a lack of self-confidence, and forget vocabulary or grammar that they previously mastered,

it is apparent that they have foreign language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) added that language anxiety is developed under three main components which are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by others, and test anxiety.

Communication Apprehension is defined as shyness influenced by fear of communicating with others, difficulties in public speaking, or in listening to spoken words. Students with communication apprehension are prone to be more nervous when speaking and being monitored in class. This type of student believes that they will have difficulty in understanding others and producing a clear message. Thus, these perceptions affect their foreign language competence, especially in their communication and speaking skills. According to McCroskey (1984), the behavioral patterns of apprehensive people can be observed through the avoidance and withdrawal of communication.

Fear of Negative Evaluation includes the fear of being evaluated by others, avoidance of evaluative situations, and expecting to be evaluated negatively, in other words, the fear of negative evaluation makes them worry about what others may think about them (Ganesh et al., 2015; Watson & Friend, 1969). Moreover, fear of negative evaluation is not only limited to test-taking but also occurs in any other social situations, such as job interviews or speaking in class. In the context of foreign language learning, students with a fear of negative evaluation are likely to sit passively in the classroom and to withdraw from activities which will result in a low level of participation and language development (Aida, 1994). The last component is **Test Anxiety** which originates from a fear of failure. When students face challenging exams or quizzes, they may experience difficulties, and they typically experience unrealistic demands and view anything less than their own set of standards as a failure.

Horwitz et al. (1986) believed that these three components drew a picture of conceptual building blocks until Aida (1994) and Liu and Jackson (2008) tested the construct of Horwitz et al. (1986) which described foreign language anxiety by validating an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) for Japanese and Chinese EFL classes, respectively. A factor analysis was performed to detect underlying components of the FLCAS in those two studies. Aida (1994) proposed labels of speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, fear of failing in class and uncomfortableness in speaking, and negative attitudes toward the class. Moreover, Liu and Jackson (2008) showed that a high level of anxiety was caused by communication apprehension or fear of speaking in class (37.93%), followed by the fear of negative evaluation (24.37%), and test anxiety (4.47%).

Beliefs about language learning should also be considered since they could possibly contribute to English speaking anxiety. Putra (2018)

summarized the concepts developed by Horwitz (1985) regarding erroneous beliefs toward foreign language learning such as 1) the belief that accuracy must be sought before saying anything in the foreign language, 2) value of speaking with a good native or first language like accent, 3) unacceptance of guessing a word in a foreign language, 4) the idea that learning a language typically involves translating from English or another second or foreign language, 5) being fluent in a target language within two years, and 6) learning a language is a rare talent that not everyone possesses. It seems that these erroneous beliefs tend to increase the unrealistic goals and standards of fluency in another language which finally lead to the development of language anxiety and greater frustration if learners do not reach such unrealistic standards such as correct pronunciation and being able to guess the meaning of new words quickly. A summary of the aforesaid components of foreign language anxiety is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Components of Foreign Language Anxiety

| Horwitz et al. (1986) | Aida (1994) | Liu and Jackson (2008) |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Communication apprehension | 1. Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation | 1. Communication apprehension |
| 2. Fear of negative evaluation | 2. Fear of failing the class | 2. Fear of negative evaluation |
| 3. Test anxiety | 3. Comfortableness in speaking | 3. Test anxiety |
| 4. Beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1985) | 5. Negative attitudes toward the class | |

Factors Affecting English Speaking Anxiety

According to Shumin (2002), speaking a foreign language requires a knowledge of grammatical and semantic rules as well as the use of language for interpersonal exchanges. Moreover, the communication factors among EFL learners include age or maturational constraints, sociocultural, affective, personality factors, foreign language proficiency factors, fear, stress, nervousness, and negative feelings towards speaking English.

Age or Maturational Constraints

Krashen et al. (1979) claimed that learners who started to learn a second language in adulthood possessed a lower proficiency than those beginning in early childhood via natural processes. It is evident that adult learners learning a second language were less likely to reach the stage of native-like language proficiency (Oyama, 1976). Speakers' ages seemed to be one factor limiting the ability to acquire native-like pronunciation. Additionally, Shumin (2002) revealed some language obstacles in the language learning process, such as speech fleetingness, unorganized syntax, incomplete sentences and forms, false starts, and filter use.

Sociocultural Factors

Apart from the linguistic dimensions, learning a foreign language (FL) is influenced by various cultural characteristics (Shumin, 2002). For instance, Dimitracopoulou (1990) mentioned that language is considered a part of social activities. Communication occurs in a linguistically structured interpersonal exchange under social regulation. Therefore, it is difficult for FL speakers to opt for a suitable form in specific situations because of the impact of different social standards. Moreover, unfamiliarity with the nonverbal communication system of a target language also affected FL learners because it was difficult for them to understand and use nonverbal cues (Shumin, 2002).

Affective Factors

It might be true that the practical side of the learner is probably one of the most critical influences on language learning success or failure, however, the other important influences are emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation which are compelling factors related to foreign language learning (Shumin, 2002). According to Bao and Liu (2021), the significant roles of such affective factors were, for example, that learners with stronger self-esteem are more confident, less anxious, and more motivated to learn a foreign language. Thus, they will participate in classroom activities allowing them to learn and apply knowledge of a target language in a real context. Another example is motivation, especially intrinsic motivation which encourages language learners to pay more attention to learning the target language. As a result, understanding the affective factors may be beneficial for foreign language teachers to design a more relaxed classroom in a diversifying way, enhance students' interest, alleviate their tension, and boost their enthusiasm to learn a foreign language.

Personality Factors

According to Brown (1987), there are two types of personal factors, which are extroversion and introversion, which influence second language learning. The former refers to the extent to which a person has a strong desire to obtain the betterment of ego, self-esteem, and a sense of integrity from others instead of receiving that affirmation within oneself. The latter derives from a sense of wholeness and fulfillment which reflects on their sense of self. It is also stated that being an extrovert shows some positive outcomes in language improvement, especially in speaking that requires face-to-face communication. Besides, extroversion is significantly related to less anxiety in public speaking since extroverted speakers are more willing to speak in front of audiences (McIntyre & Thivierge, 1995).

Foreign Language Proficiency

Kondo (2006) posits that there is a close relationship between language anxiety and proficiency. Moreover, the main factors that hinder learners from acquiring a foreign language proficiency can be divided into three aspects which include grammar, vocabulary, and English oral proficiency. With regard to grammar, Tanveer (2007) found that L2 learners face difficulty in using correct grammar when they are required to speak a second or foreign language. Examples of grammar issues are learners wasting time in choosing the correct verb tenses and parts of speech. Additionally, the differences in grammar use from a learners' first language also leads to language difficulties which result in an increased level of speaking anxiety. Regarding vocabulary, Liu (2007) claimed that one of the significant sources of English speaking anxiety is the lack of vocabulary which blocks the flow of communication. Lastly, English oral proficiency (e.g., pronunciation) increases language anxiety as Tanveer (2007) mentions because pronunciation is the source of learners' stress and decreases their level of speaking confidence, specifically when there is the possibility of immediate negative feedback from an audience.

Audience Familiarity

Beatty (1988) mentions that the familiarity of an audience with the target language affects the assessment of an individual which can cause speaker anxiety. Furthermore, speakers are concerned that their speech is not clear and that their skills do not meet the audience's expectations. On the other hand, speakers will feel less anxious when the audience is more familiar to the speaker and they can engage in spoken communication, and they can

be more satisfied with their speaking. In these circumstances, speakers would be more willing to speak (MacIntyre & Thivierge, 1995).

Preparedness

One of the significant sources of anxiety in English oral presentations is preparedness, and this anxiety is mainly caused by a lack of practice and preparation (Chen, 2009; Mak, 2011; Whai & Mei, 2016). Moreover, in a foreign language learning environment, students consider speaking in front of the class without preparation as the major cause of anxiety. To solve this problem, it is advisable for students to practice their speaking or prepare their presentations since this helps boost their confidence in public speaking and reduces their level of anxiety. Moreover, effective ways to prepare an oral presentation include preparing PowerPoint slides in advance, editing the content to ensure that it conveys the intended meaning, and finally practicing the presentation, which is the most important step to enhance smoothness and a speaker's confidence (Plangkhom & Porkaew, 2012).

Topic Familiarity

Kazemi and Zarei (2015) revealed that learners' oral presentations were affected by their familiarity with the speaking topics, particularly when it involved an impromptu speech. It was also stated that the less familiar a topic, the more anxious students become in speaking (Kazemi & Zarei, 2015; Lederman, 1983). Further, Daly et al. (1989) affirmed that those with high anxiety tend to have a negative self-image of their speech performance and speakers must spend significantly more time on preparing for unfamiliar topics before giving speeches. Unfortunately, the performances of such anxious speakers are less likely to be successful.

Research Methodology

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the English speaking anxiety level of first-year students majoring in English and Communication at a public university in the northeast region of Thailand as well as any potential contributing factors.

Participants

With the implementation of a purposive sampling technique, the participants consisted of 102 first-year undergraduate students majoring in English and Communication in the Faculty of Liberal Arts at a public university in the northeast region of Thailand. The demographics of the participants are presented in the tables below.

Table 2

Gender of Participants

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Male | 27 | 26.5 |
| Female | 73 | 71.5 |
| Others | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 |

Most of the participants were female students, consisting of 73 females (71.6%), with only 27 males (26.5%) and 2 participants (2.0%) who identified their gender as other.

Table 3

Age of Participants

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 18 Years old | 35 | 34.3 |
| 19 Years old | 62 | 60.8 |
| 20 Years old | 5 | 4.9 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 |

Out of 102 students, the majority were students aged 19 (60.8%), followed by those aged 18 (34.3%), and those aged 20 (4.9%).

Research Instruments

A questionnaire, adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), was employed to measure the levels of English speaking anxiety and the influential factors. The questionnaires were divided into 3 parts: the first section requiring general information about the participants (e.g., sex, age, and personality); the second section with 31 items adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Aida (1994), Horwitz et al. (1986), and Liu and Jackson (2008) which covered six aspects of students' anxiety (e.g., Communication

Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Test Anxiety, Fear of Being Less Proficient Than Others, Negative Attitudes Towards English Speaking Class, and Beliefs about English Learning), and the final section included the factors affecting anxiety when speaking English. Moreover, the translation of a questionnaire (English to Thai) was approved by three English-Thai experts to ensure the validity of all items, and the 30 questionnaires were tested to measure reliability according to Cronbach's Alpha resulting in .866 which is considered a good level of internal consistency.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

The 102 questionnaires were distributed and later collected through an online "Google Form" with the assistance of the head of freshmen majoring in the English and Communication program. This procedure took place from 24th – 27th December 2021. The data from the questionnaire were collected and calculated based on the Likert scale ranging from 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly disagree. The range of the 5-point Likert type scale was calculated by the highest score (5) minus the lowest (1) and then divided by the highest score (5). Thus, the details determining the maximum and minimum amounts on the Likert scale are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The Range of the 5-point Likert Scale

| Means | Interpretation |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 1.00-1.80 | No anxiety or very little anxiety |
| 1.81-2.60 | Little anxiety |
| 2.61-3.40 | Moderate anxiety |
| 3.41-4.20 | High anxiety |
| 4.21-5.00 | Very high anxiety |

Furthermore, the data regarding the factors that affect English speaking anxiety were gathered by means of a checklist in the questionnaire's final section.

Data Analysis

The frequencies and percentages were used to represent the data regarding the participants' personal information and the factors affecting their English speaking anxiety. The three most significant factors were further analyzed in this study. Moreover, for the main data regarding the students' speaking anxiety levels, the scores from the questionnaires were calculated via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program and were interpreted in the forms of the mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD). The mean scores of each questionnaire component and its total mean scores were used to determine the students' perceptions of their speaking English anxiety. Then, the collected data was presented through tables and was also critically discussed based on the theoretical framework to discover the levels and factors of speaking anxiety among the participants.

Results

Anxiety Levels in Speaking English

Table 5

Levels of Agreement Toward Anxiety in Speaking English

| Questions | Mean | SD | Rank |
|---|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Q1: I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in public. | 3.70 | .939 | 10 |
| Q3: It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English. | 3.89 | .889 | 4 |
| Q6: I keep thinking that the other students speak English better than I do. | 3.90 | .980 | 3 |
| Q8: I worry about the consequences of failing my English speaking class. | 4.10 | .900 | 1 |
| Q15: I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in the English speaking class. | 3.75 | 1.009 | 8 |
| Q17: I usually feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 3.73 | .932 | 9 |
| Q18: I start panicking when I have to speak without preparation in the English class. | 3.89 | .994 | 4 |
| Q21: Even if I am well-prepared for the English speaking test, I feel anxious about it. | 3.81 | 1.021 | 6 |
| Q24: I feel nervous when I do not understand every word the English teacher says. | 3.80 | .784 | 7 |
| Q27: I get nervous when the English teachers ask questions which I have not prepared in advance. | 3.86 | .890 | 5 |

| | | | |
|--|------|------|---|
| Q29: I am often afraid that my English speaking score will be less than I expect. | 3.92 | .897 | 2 |
|--|------|------|---|

Ten examples of the responses to questions in the questionnaire are shown above. It was found that most of the participants were anxious about the consequences of failing the English speaking class which were categorized under the test anxiety domain with the mean score of 4.10. Furthermore, they were afraid that their English speaking score would be less than they expected resulting in a mean of 3.92. Conversely, the response to the question representing negative attitudes toward English class e.g. “I usually feel like not going to my English speaking class” was the level at which most of the students disagreed resulting in the mean of 2.39. The complete results of the anxiety levels of the students are shown in the Appendix.

Table 6

Components of English Speaking Anxiety

| No. | Component | Means | Indication |
|--------------|--|-------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Fear of being less competent | 3.58 | High anxiety |
| 2 | Communication apprehension | 3.38 | Moderate |
| 3 | Test anxiety | 3.60 | High anxiety |
| 4 | Beliefs about language learning | 3.81 | High anxiety |
| 5 | Fear of negative evaluation | 3.16 | Moderate |
| 6 | Negative attitudes toward language class | 3.54 | High anxiety |
| Total | | 3.50 | High anxiety |

As presented in Table 6, the total mean scores were 3.50 showing that the students experienced a high anxiety level in speaking English. The findings revealed that the students tend to be more concerned with beliefs about language learning (3.81) than the other components. Furthermore, the students were worried about the test at a high level of anxiety with a mean of 3.60. It is therefore clear that the anxiety components are a combination of internal and external elements (i.e., the students’ beliefs about language learning and English assessments).

Factors Affecting English Speaking Anxiety

There was a total of eight factors affecting English speaking anxiety and the details of these factors are presented as follows:

Table 7*Factors Affecting English Speaking Anxiety*

| Rank | Factor | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Grammar | 74 | 72.55 |
| 2 | Vocabulary | 55 | 53.94 |
| 3 | English Oral Proficiency | 54 | 53.92 |
| 4 | Pronunciation | 37 | 36.27 |
| 5 | Unfamiliar Speaking Topics | 37 | 36.27 |
| 6 | Personality | 23 | 22.55 |
| 7 | Preparedness | 18 | 17.65 |
| 8 | Classmates' Response | 8 | 7.84 |

Table 7 shows the ranks of the factors affecting English speaking anxiety among the participants. It is apparent that 72.55% of them believed that English grammar was the most significant factor influencing their English speaking anxiety followed by vocabulary (53.94%), and English oral proficiency (53.92%), respectively. On the other hand, their classmates' responses seemed to be the least significant factor with 7.84%.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Research Question 1: "What are the English-speaking anxiety levels of the first-year students?"

From the study, the participants had a high level of anxiety when speaking English. The key components of their anxiety were beliefs about language learning, test anxiety, fear of being less competent, and negative attitudes toward language class. When looking at the second and third highest level components of anxiety (i.e., test anxiety and fear of being less competent), the results were similar to a number of established studies by Liu (2007), MacIntyre (1999), Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015) revealing that speaking tests and speaking in front of a large audience significantly contribute to a high level of student anxiety. Furthermore, it was also stated that the fear of being less competent in speaking than the other students was another significant component of anxiety among students (Aoibumrung, 2016; Paranuwat, 2011).

However, when considering the students' beliefs about language learning, which was the component at the highest level of anxiety, it can be assumed that a sense of perfectionism may foster the idea of "not making

mistakes” in their minds. Additionally, the students’ instructors, peers, and the social and cultural contexts to which they belong, also played a significant role in enhancing such beliefs. Sha’ar and Boonsuk (2021) also found that Thai EFL students tend to avoid speaking English as they fear losing face and being laughed at by their classmates. Moreover, Basilio and Wongrak (2017) and Tien (2018) state that foreign language anxiety varies across specific cultures and societies. Thus, to deal with students’ speaking anxiety in the classroom, language teachers should take both cultural issues and individuals into consideration.

From the cultural perspective, one of the interesting issues to be considered is indicated by the key phrases “not making mistakes” and “fear losing face” mentioned earlier. These notions can be categorized under the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance which greatly influences the way students behave in classroom settings. Understanding this will lead to a more insightful view regarding the causes of problems in language learning and the nature of Thai EFL students. Hofstede et al. (2010) defined uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and this extreme feeling of ambiguity tends to develop into intolerable “anxiety”. Moreover, Thai society has been ranked at the mid-level of uncertainty avoidance because most Thais feel threatened by ambiguous situations and try to avoid challenging experiences (Gunawan, 2016). From Thai educational contexts and perspectives, Thongprasert (2009) studied the cultural values which affect the ways Thai students in both Thailand and Australia access and share knowledge in a virtual classroom and the results showed a high level of uncertainty avoidance among Thai students in Thai universities when compared to those in Australian universities.

As a result of being influenced by uncertainty avoidance, the majority of Thai EFL students strive for perfection and avoid making mistakes when speaking English out of a fear of being labeled foolish. Furthermore, Thai social contexts and schooling may serve to reinforce individuals’ self-perceptions rather than their need for human connection by using language. More crucially, it appears that some Thai EFL students set themselves unrealistically high standards for their English speaking (e.g., being correct and speaking with native like accents) and when they fall short of those standards, a sense of anxiety gradually builds up and ultimately becomes a major impediment to their progress in speaking English.

Research Question 2: “What are the factors influencing the students’ speaking skills?”.

The findings of this study were consistent with those found by Chiu et al. (2016), Kurakan (2021), Tanveer (2007), and Tien (2018) which reported

that students were nervous to speak in front of a class and felt most anxious about a lack of background knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. These findings could also be linked to the results produced by Kammungkun et al. (2020) indicating that Thai pupils' communication is ineffective because of their excessive reliance on grammar and the fact that not all of them have a firm grasp of English grammar owing to the differences in syntactic rules, morphological rules, tenses, and even the influence of a native tongue (Chaiyasit et al., 2019). Moreover, insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary can be seen through the inappropriate use of word choices in particular situations. To clarify, the flow of pupils' conversations is impeded by their restricted vocabulary since they are unable to discuss certain topics, and this can encourage them to use body language or code switching (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021).

Accordingly, the emphasis on grammar accuracy may have been encouraged by the way Thai EFL students were evaluated. In other words, according to Jaturapitakkul (2013), conventional English testing still exists in the form of paper-and-pencil exams that are regularly used to gauge students' linguistic knowledge (i.e., grammar, vocabulary), as well as other receptive abilities (e.g., listening and reading comprehension). It might be argued that the nature of school exams tends to influence how Thai EFL students study English, with an emphasis on what will be on the test and what will be required of them. As a result, students may prioritize passing the exam rather than applying their grammatical knowledge to producing the target language, which may be the root of a grammar issue that prevents them from speaking English in class or in general conversation.

The third most prevalent factor causing English speaking anxiety in this study is "English oral proficiency", which includes intonation, emphasis, and pronunciation. This is in contrast with the findings of Plangkham and Porkaew (2012), who found that English oral proficiency had the greatest influence on undergraduate students' English anxiety. Sahatsathatsana (2017) noted that if the speakers' pronunciation is poor, listeners will not be able to understand what they are saying, which will make it difficult for them to communicate effectively. In addition, the word "pronunciation" describes how pupils produce sounds that include segmental (i.e., distinct vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental elements (e.g., stress and intonation). Some English and Thai sounds are not produced in the same way, which may be the reason why this factor prevents pupils from speaking English confidently and ultimately results in speaking anxiety. Moreover, there are some English sounds which do not occur in Thai phonology which causes difficulties for Thai students to utter such as the consonant sounds /θ/, /ð/ as in 'thin' and 'brother', respectively (Kanokpermpoon, 2007; Nuemaihom et al., 2018). Furthermore, several pronunciation problems at the suprasegmental level

seem to be a considerable problem for Thai EFL students, for example, the way in which the last sound of one word is followed by the first sound of the next word (Sahatsathatsana, 2017).

Conclusion and Implications of the Study

The findings of this study support the following conclusions on English speaking anxiety and its related factors. First, a holistic perspective of the six components of anxiety revealed that the first-year English major students at UBU showed a high level of anxiety and the components were connected to the students' beliefs about language learning and their concern over their test results. Second, it was found that most participants agreed that they worry about failing their English speaking class. Third, "grammar", "vocabulary", and "oral English proficiency" were the key factors influencing speaking anxiety.

The implications of this study are that two groups in particular might benefit from the findings: 1) instructors of English as a foreign language in Thailand, particularly in the northeast region of Thailand where participants in this study were based; and 2) university students as well as other English learners. It is crucial for the first group to consider speaking anxiety, especially in the light of the root cause of students' misconceptions about language learning and their concern about test results. Moreover, EFL teachers should encourage students to use English for the purpose of communication rather than perfection, so that they are less concerned about making mistakes and being criticized. Also, it is suggested that activities of setting up scenarios can motivate students to engage in oral English communication and these speaking activities should be started with small groups to help reduce anxiety (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016; Yang, 2014).

The findings of this study may help students and English language learners to understand how speaking anxiety affects speaking ability, especially the three internal factors such as grammar, vocabulary, and proficiency. It follows that if EFL students would like to feel more relaxed about speaking English, they must have a certain amount of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, but more significantly, they will also need many hours of practice to obtain English fluency and accuracy. According to various research studies, such as Syifa et al. (2019) and Kurakan (2021), students can reduce their nervousness by working on their pronunciation, talking in front of a mirror or with friends, studying speaking scripts and developing a positive attitude toward speaking English.

The findings of this study might, in short, help instructors and students in a variety of settings to grasp the importance of realizing that speaking anxiety, its origins, and other relevant factors should be tailored to

solutions to reduce their anxiety, tension, and other frustrations. Krashen (1985) proposed the term “affective filter”, to describe the anxiety or lack of confidence that blocks EFL learners from acquiring comprehensible input. In other words, for successful language learning, the learner’s affective filter must be reduced, otherwise, a stressed, nervous, or bored learner may “filter out” input, reducing their potential for language acquisition.

With regard to the limitations of this study, further studies should examine the problem of students’ anxiety on a broader scale, for example, by using a larger sampling size with a greater variety of participants (e.g., different student levels, students majoring in other subjects, language teachers, and other EFL learners). Moreover, further studies should consider possible techniques for reducing anxiety and different methods to suit both instructors and students. Additionally, as this study was quantitative in nature, future researchers might use in-depth interviews to elicit possible topics and internal factors relating to EFL learners’ speaking anxiety.

About the Authors

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Appendix A

Table 8

Level of Agreement for English Speaking Anxiety

| Questions | Mean | SD | Rank |
|--|------|-------|------|
| Q1: I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in public. | 3.70 | .939 | 10 |
| Q2: I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in the speaking class. | 3.55 | .862 | 14 |
| Q3: It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English. | 3.89 | .889 | 4 |
| Q4: I feel very self-conscious to speak English in front of other students. | 3.54 | 1.001 | 15 |
| Q5: The English speaking class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind. | 3.57 | .927 | 12 |
| Q6: I keep thinking that the other students speak English better than I do. | 3.90 | .980 | 3 |
| Q7: I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English. | 3.56 | 1.057 | 13 |
| Q8: I worry about the consequences of failing my English speaking class. | 4.10 | .900 | 1 |
| Q9: It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English speaking class. | 3.34 | .990 | 19 |
| Q10: I feel worried about the differences between what I have prepared for a speaking test. | 3.64 | .816 | 11 |
| Q11: The more I study for an English speaking test, the more confused I get. | 3.30 | 1.132 | 20 |
| Q12: I usually feel like not going to my English speaking class. | 2.39 | 1.219 | 27 |
| Q13: I am confident when I speak English in class. | 3.14 | .775 | 23 |
| Q14: I am usually at ease during English speaking tests in my class. | 2.81 | .982 | 26 |
| Q15: I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in the English speaking class. | 3.75 | 1.009 | 8 |
| Q16: I do not feel worried over learning to speak English. | 3.00 | .985 | 24 |
| Q17: I usually feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 3.73 | .932 | 9 |
| Q18: I start panicking when I have to speak without preparation in the English class. | 3.89 | .994 | 4 |
| Q19: I feel more strained and nervous in my English speaking class than in my other classes. | 3.26 | 1.042 | 21 |
| Q20: I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English. | 2.89 | 1.124 | 25 |
| Q21: Even if I am well-prepared for the English speaking test, I feel anxious about it. | 3.81 | 1.021 | 6 |

| | | | |
|---|------|-------|----|
| Q22: I probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English. | 3.30 | .972 | 20 |
| Q23: I get nervous when I am speaking English in class. | 3.41 | .904 | 18 |
| Q24: I feel nervous when I do not understand every word the English teacher says. | 3.80 | .784 | 7 |
| Q25: I do not feel stressed when I am well prepared for the English speaking class. | 3.22 | .984 | 22 |
| Q26: I feel overwhelmed by the number of pronunciation rules I have to learn in order to speak English. | 3.54 | .981 | 15 |
| Q27: I get nervous when the English teachers ask a question which I have not prepared in advance. | 3.86 | .890 | 5 |
| Q28: I feel happy when I am on my way to the English speaking class. | 3.64 | .961 | 11 |
| Q29: I am often afraid that my English speaking score will be less than what I expect. | 3.92 | .897 | 2 |
| Q30: I feel overwhelmed by the many words I have to learn to speak in English. | 3.51 | .972 | 16 |
| Q31: It would not bother me at all to take more English classes. | 3.44 | 1.000 | 17 |