



Investigating Communication Apprehension in English Among Thai High School Students: A Two-Pronged Study on Speaking Anxiety and Attitudes

Kamonchanok Muengnakin ^a, Arthitaya Narathakoon ^{b*}

^a kamonchanok.mueng@gmail.com, Language Institute, Thammasat University, Thailand

^b arthitaya.n@litu.tu.ac.th, Language Institute, Thammasat University, Thailand

* Corresponding author, arthitaya.n@litu.tu.ac.th

APA Citation:

Muengnakin, K., & Narathakoon, A. (2025). Investigating communication apprehension in English among Thai high school students: A two-pronged study on speaking anxiety and attitudes. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 18(1), 268-293. <https://doi.org/10.70730/NSCM3699>

Received
15/06/2024

Received in
revised form
26/08/2024

Accepted
09/09/2024

ABSTRACT

This study explored speaking anxiety and attitudes towards speaking English in the classroom setting. The data collected from 91 Thai EFL grade 11 students, using questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings showed moderate levels of speaking anxiety and attitudes among grade 11 students. The Pearson correlation coefficient reported that there was a statistically significant, moderate negative correlation between speaking anxiety and attitudes. Regarding the study program, English-Japanese students exhibited a strong negative correlation. This suggested that students who experienced lower level of anxiety tended to be more positive attitudes towards speaking English in the classroom. Furthermore, qualitative data identified learner characteristics and classroom environment as two main factors affecting speaking anxiety. To cope with speaking anxiety, grade 11 students employed six strategies: self-practice, maintaining concentration, building confidence, managing

	<p>emotions, positive thinking, and seeking support from friends. Among these, self-practice was the most used strategy.</p> <p>Keywords: speaking skill, anxiety, attitude, Thai EFL students, secondary students</p>
--	---

Introduction

English is widely regarded as the second most important language in Thailand for learning and utilizing in everyday life, given its impact on various aspects, including the economy, education, and international communication. This importance is reflected in its integration into the national curriculum as a required subject from primary to higher education levels. Furthermore, private tutoring institutions commonly provide English courses for Thai people (Wongsothorn et al., 1996, as cited in Baker, 2009). Consequently, English has become the most prominent and essential second language in Thailand, with the majority of Thai students across all levels of education choosing to learn it as their initial foreign language.

To achieve proficiency, Thai students are expected to proficiently master four fundamental language skills in English, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Regardless of having studied English for many years, Thai students still struggle to master the language as a foreign language, with their proficiency often remaining at a basic level, even during higher education (Tantiwich & Sinwongsawat, 2021; Teng & Sinwongsawat, 2015). According to Khamkhien (2010), speaking is the most challenging skill for Thai students. As a productive skill, speaking requires the integration of linguistic and pragmatic knowledge to effectively convey ideas to listeners. When English speaking skills are limited, effective communication may be hindered. For Thai students, they may encounter difficulties related to low self-esteem (Akkakoson, 2016), fear of making mistakes (Santiwatthanasiri, 2018), and inadequate pronunciation (Yuh & Kaewurai, 2021) when speaking English.

There are several contributing factors to the difficulties that prevent Thai students from improving their speaking skills, including teaching approaches, socio-cultural factors, and psychological factors. Among these several factors, psychological factors, such as anxiety and attitude, are particularly influential in language achievement. According to Krashen (1985), these factors can either facilitate or impede students in acquiring a second or a foreign language. It can be inferred that students with a positive attitude and lower levels of anxiety are expected to achieve better learning results. Furthermore, numerous studies have emphasized the influence of affective factors on language learning, noting that motivation, self-

confidence, self-image, anxiety, and attitude are closely related to the success or failure of language acquisition (Chen, 2020; Du, 2009; Krashen, 1981; Xu, 2016).

In addition, various studies have explored language anxiety and language attitude in relation to English speaking skills. Tien (2017) discovered that students tended to experience high levels of anxiety when speaking English, due to the worries about a lack of linguistic knowledge, fear of making mistakes, feeling anxious, and being unable to communicate effectively. Toubot et al. (2018) found that most students experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety, which they attributed to the influence of teaching methods and classroom environments. Regarding language attitude, Bui and Intaraprasert (2013) determined that students with negative attitudes towards speaking English demonstrated lower oral competencies, while those with positive attitudes employed communication strategies more often and with better outcomes. According to Wattanawong (2020), engineering students had positive attitudes towards English speaking skills and recognized its significance alongside engineering skills. In a similar way, Inayah and Lisdawati (2021) noted that the majority of students had a positive attitude and perception towards achieving fluency in speaking English. The students acknowledged the significance of being fluent in English for their future professional success because fluency in English was advantageous for their career prospects. Furthermore, studies by Akkakoson (2016) and Karagöl and Başbay (2018) demonstrated a correlation between speaking anxiety and attitude, indicating that lower anxiety levels lead to more positive attitudes toward English speaking.

Hence, this study aims to explore the levels of anxiety and attitude toward English speaking among Thai EFL students in grade 11. This study examines the relationship between speaking anxiety and attitude towards speaking English in the classroom across five different programs: Science-Math, Industrial-Arts, Computer-Business, English-Social Studies, and English-Japanese. Additionally, this study intends to identify factors contributing to students' anxiety when speaking English in classroom settings, as well as the coping strategies employed to mitigate this anxiety. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the anxiety and attitude levels of Thai EFL students in grade 11 regarding speaking English in the English classroom?
2. What is the correlation between anxiety and attitude towards English speaking in the classroom among grade 11 Thai EFL students studying in five different programs?
3. What are the factors contributing to the anxiety experienced by grade 11 Thai EFL students when communicating in English within classroom settings?

4. What are the coping strategies that Thai EFL students in grade 11 used to reduce the speaking anxiety in the English classrooms?

Literature Review

Speaking Skills

In order to elicit various verbal responses from conversation partners, speaking, as described by Bygate (1987), involves systematically combining sounds to form meaningful sentences. Speaking was seen as an act of producing meaning, according to Brown (1994). It starts with generating thoughts in the mind, interpreting them, and then communicating those thoughts clearly to conversation partners. Nunan (2003) further explained that speaking occurs when individuals produce utterances to convey messages.

Bailey and Savage (1994) emphasized that speaking skills were considered the most demanding language skill in second or foreign language learning when it came to essential language skills. In today's world, it is widely accepted that English speaking skills are critical in language learning due to their role in global communication (Crystal, 2003) and their reflection of a student's performance and competence in a second language (Bounzouay, 2020; Nanthaboot, 2013).

Despite its importance, the acquisition of English speaking skills is considered essential in language learning, yet it is also acknowledged as one of the most challenging abilities to master (Cendra & Sulindra, 2022; Pawlak & Waniek-Klimczak, 2014). Furthermore, it is linked to high levels of anxiety, particularly being identified as the most anxiety-inducing skill to learn (Hauck & Hurd, 2005). An examination of EFL students and their English speaking skills through a literature review identified various factors that could hinder their proficiency, such as limited English proficiency (Sasum & Weeks, 2018; Sha'ar et al, 2021), inappropriate teaching methods (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012), and affective filters (Krashen, 1982).

Affective Filters

Krashen (1982) stated that affective filters, such as self-esteem, motivation, anxiety, and attitude, could pose obstacles to students in acquiring speaking skills in a second language. Besides that, these affective filters played a significant role in determining the success or failure of second language acquisition. Some research studies suggested that anxiety, as an affective filter, could assist students in overcoming the challenges of language learning. Scovel (1978) argued that anxiety could serve as a motivator for

students to engage new learning activities. Similarly, Marcos-Llinás and Garau (2009) pointed out that high levels of anxiety did not always negatively impact learning achievement, especially if students had positive attitudes toward the language or a strong motivation for learning. Furthermore, moderate to high levels of anxiety could be beneficial for learning a foreign language as it prompted students to develop coping strategies. Conversely, Scovel (1978) noted that anxiety could also serve as a motivator for students to avoid new learning activities. Regarding language attitude, positive attitudes could reduce the affective filter, making students more receptive to language input (Dulay and Burt, 1977, as cited in Krashen, 1981).

Anxiety

Anxiety has been defined in several ways by researchers. Hilgrad et al. (1971 as cited in Scovel, 1978) defined anxiety as a mental state characterized by a vague fear and apprehension that was indirectly related to a particular event, place or object. According to Brown (1994), anxiety could involve feelings of uneasiness, self-doubt, hopelessness, frustration, and worry. Regarding the definitions described by researchers, these highlighted that anxiety is a common phenomenon, with effects ranging from harmless to harmful that can cause negative impacts on people's lives both physically and mentally.

Language Anxiety

Anxiety has been defined by a number of academics in relation to language learning. For instance, Scovel (1978) described language anxiety as a fear that occurred when students were expected to perform in the second or foreign language. In order to further clarify this, Horwitz et al. (1986) explained anxiety as “a complex set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related specifically to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.” Likewise, Young (1991) characterized language anxiety as the worry and unfavorable emotional response aroused by acquiring or utilizing a second language. Referring to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), anxiety was a result of tension and apprehension related to learning, speaking, and listening to a foreign language.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

According to Howitz et al. (1986), the role of performance evaluation in foreign language anxiety was highlighted, particularly regarding its impact on students' performance in both academic and social contexts. In further

detail, Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three main components of foreign language anxiety as follows.

The first component, communication apprehension, was linked to shyness, which could lead to avoidance of interactions with others and subsequently result in challenges with public speaking, listening, and understanding spoken language (Horwitz et al., 1986, as cited in Bhattachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023).

The second component, test anxiety, was defined as performance anxiety caused by a fear of failure. Horwitz et al. (1986) described this as a psychological state that could occur before, during, or after assessments, in which students were stressed and worried about failing in language evaluations, quizzes, or exams due to their desire for flawless performance.

The final component was fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined this as anxiety related to being evaluated by others, which included avoiding situations where evaluation occurred and having negative expectations about one's self-evaluation. Watson and Friend (1969) also provided an explanation for fear of negative evaluation, defining it as a mix of apprehension about being judged, distress over negative feedback, and expectations of receiving unfavorable evaluations.

Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Several research studies have been identified the possible sources of foreign language anxiety as follows.

Young (1991) identified six potential sources of language anxiety including personal and interpersonal anxieties, student beliefs about language learning, teacher beliefs about language teaching, teacher-student interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. Luo (2012) developed a four-dimensional source model of foreign language anxiety, arguing that the classroom environment, language students' characteristics, the target language, and the foreign language learning process contributed to some degree of foreign language anxiety. Recently, Shazly (2020) discovered that students experienced anxiety in speaking. The researcher mentioned that the high-stakes nature of the academic context likely placed considerable anxiety on students which prioritized avoiding course failure rather than language acquisition.

When concerning to the sources of foreign language anxiety in the speaking skills in Thai context, Santiwatthanasiri (2018) indicated that fear of making mistakes was the biggest problem in speaking English, closely following were anxiety about speaking English, and difficulty finding the right words to express themselves. Furthermore, Bhattachaiyakorna and Phettakuab (2023) noted factors hindering English speaking anxiety such as

grammatical structure, vocabulary, and English oral proficiency. In terms of the cultural perspective, Bhattarachaiyakorna and Phettakuab (2023) also mentioned that face saving was an interesting issue found in the study. This was similar to the study of Hofstede (2011), saying that the concept of saving face has been crucial in Thai culture. This could be said that Thai students might experience anxiety over the possibility of losing face if they made mistakes or failed to perform well in front of other people. According to Durongkaveroj (2023), Thai academic context such as rote learning and high-stakes examinations could also affect students' mindset in developing essential skills. This academic context might particularly impact perfectionist students, who are prone to experiencing heightened anxiety due to the pressure to achieve a flawless speaking performance in the classroom.

Attitudes

Many researchers have offered diverse definitions of attitude. According to Gardner (1985), an attitude represented a person's evaluation in response to a particular referent, or attitude object. This evaluation was deduced from the person's beliefs or viewpoints toward that referent. Regarding Eagly and Chaiken (1998), attitude was a psychological tendency that was conveyed by assigning a certain thing a favorable or unfavorable evaluation. Namely, people had a tendency to respond more positively and to hold more positive evaluations of ideas or items that they found appealing, and vice versa.

Language Attitudes

Du (2009) stated that attitudes were important in second language learning for the following reasons. Firstly, students with a positive attitude were more likely to acquire and develop a foreign language quickly, whereas those with a negative attitude progressed more slowly. Secondly, students who dropped out halfway through had more negative attitudes, lesser commitment, and worse success rates than positive and persistent students. Thirdly, students with a positive learning attitude participated actively and frequently received high grades.

Youssef (2012) categorized two types of attitudes toward language learning consisting of positive and negative attitudes. In general, a positive attitude increased motivation, indicating that students might fully comprehend the target language whereas a negative attitude frequently impeded students' ability to comprehend it. Other than positive and negative attitudes, some students might also have neutral or moderate attitudes that influenced their strategy to language learning, either positively or negatively.

Methodology

Participants and Settings

The participants in this study were 91 Thai EFL students in grade 11 from five different programs: Science-Math, Industrial-Arts, Computer-Business, Arts-Social Studies, and English-Japanese in a high school in Ayutthaya. The age of each participant ranged from 16 to 19. Typically, class sizes ranged between 15 and 30 students. Concerning to the location, these students attended the schools located outside of the city. This might present various difficulties for language learning including a lack of teacher resources and a lack of foreign native teachers.

Data Collection

This study employed a convenience sampling technique to gather data. Three research instruments were utilized in the study including classroom observation, a speaking anxiety-attitude questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. These instruments allowed the researcher to observe students' classroom behavior, assess their anxiety and attitude levels towards speaking English, and gather more information through interviews. The data collection process took place from mid-February to early-March, focusing on five different programs of grade 11 students during the second semester of the academic year.

Phase 1: Classroom Observation

In Phase 1, the researcher conducted two classroom observations for each group of students over a two-week period. During these observations, the researcher focused on the students' voices, gestures, and behaviors while they were engaged in speaking activities. At that time, the researcher recorded videos and took notes on observation sheets.

Phase 2: Questionnaire

After finishing observation in Phase 1, the grade 11 students were asked to complete the speaking anxiety and attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire aimed to investigate the level of speaking anxiety and attitude toward English speaking in the classroom of the grade 11 students. It consisted of closed-ended statements using a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Moreover, the questionnaire was used to investigate factors that contributed to speaking anxiety and

strategies used in foreign language classrooms. Thus, two open-ended questions were involved in this section as well. The questionnaire was translated from English to Thai and was divided into four sections including general information, English speaking anxiety questionnaire, English speaking attitude questionnaire, and two open-ended questions. In addition, the questionnaire was modified to investigate the grade 11 students' speaking anxiety and attitudes by providing specific situations in learning or performing English speaking skills in the classroom.

Phase 3: Interview

After the questionnaires were completed in Phase 2, the students were requested to willingly take part in semi-structured interviews for each study program. In total, there were 10 students who participated in the interview. The interviews took place in the school and each interview lasted 10 to 15 minutes. During the interview, students were allowed to express their opinions in their native language, Thai.

Data analysis

English Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

The level of speaking anxiety and attitude of 91 Thai EFL grade 11 students were examined using descriptive statistics. SPSS was used to calculate each item. The results were presented for each item as means, standard deviations, scale value ranges, and rankings. Furthermore, the mean score of the level of speaking anxiety was displayed as follows:

Table 1

Five Ranges of Scale Value for the Level of Speaking Anxiety

Interpretation of the score	
4.21 – 5.00	Very high level of anxiety (VHA)
3.41 – 4.20	High level of anxiety (HA)
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate level of anxiety (MA)
1.81 – 2.60	Low level of anxiety (LA)
1.00 – 1.80	Very low level of anxiety (VLA)

English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire

All 26 items of English speaking attitude in the classroom were calculated by the statistical tool, SPSS. Then the data was reported in forms

of means, standard deviations, ranges of scale value, and ranking for each item. Moreover, the mean score of the level of attitude was presented as follows.

Table 2

Five Ranges of Scale Value for the Level of Speaking Attitude

Interpretation of the score	
4.21 – 5.00	High positive attitude (HPA)
3.41 – 4.20	Positive attitude (PA)
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate attitude (MA)
1.81 – 2.60	Negative attitude (NA)
1.00 – 1.80	High negative attitude (HNA)

Classroom Observation, Open-ended Questions and Semi-Structured Interview.

Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data which was obtained from the classroom observation, open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. When data collection was complete, all data were transcribed and methodically arranged into a document. After that, the researcher coded the data by emphasizing important words, phrases, and ideas that were connected to the factors that hindered students being anxious in speaking and the coping strategies that they used to reduce their anxiety. Similar codes were put together into groups throughout the coding process. Lastly, the researcher determined the themes and provided an overview of the results.

Results

Anxiety and Attitude Levels of Thai EFL Students in Grade 11 Regarding Speaking English in The English Classroom

English Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

The results showed that grade 11 students had a moderate level of anxiety when it came to speaking English in the classroom (mean score = 3.26).

Table 3*The Five Highest Results of English Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire*

Statement (N = 91)	Mean	S.D	Level of Anxiety	Ranking
Item 2: During the oral English test, I feel my heart pounding when I am called on to do a role-play or give a presentation, answer questions, or share ideas in English.	3.66	.909	HA	1
Item 8: Even if I have prepared well for doing a role-play and give a presentation, I still feel anxious that I cannot perform well during the oral English test.	3.66	.991	HA	1
Item 4: I never feel confident when I answer questions or share my ideas in English during the English class activities.	3.56	1.087	HA	2
Item 5: I feel anxious when I want to volunteer to answer questions or share my ideas but cannot come up with the right words to say in English class.	3.52	1.058	HA	3
Item 16: During the oral English test, I feel anxious when the English teacher asks questions that I have not prepared to answer in English.	3.52	1.004	HA	3
Item 3: I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on to answer questions or share ideas in English in the English class.	3.49	.970	HA	4
Item 10: I start to panic when I have to do a role-play or give a presentation in English without preparation in the English class.	3.48	.993	HA	5

The results from the English speaking anxiety questionnaire are shown in Table 3. Item 2 “During the oral English test, I feel my heart pounding when I am called on to do a role-play or give a presentation, answer questions, or share ideas in English” and item 8 “Even if I have prepared well for doing a role-play or giving a presentation, I still feel anxious that I cannot perform well during the oral English test” had the highest ranking for English speaking anxiety with a mean score 3.66. Next, item 4, which said, “I never feel confident when I answer questions or share my ideas in English during the English class activities” was next at the second rank. Meanwhile, item 5 “I feel anxious when I want to volunteer to answer questions or share my

ideas but cannot come up with the right words to say in English class” and item 16 “During the oral English test, I feel anxious when the English teacher asks questions that I have not prepared to answer in English” held the third rank.

English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire

With a mean score of 3.32, the results showed that grade 11 students exhibited a moderate level of attitude.

Table 4

The Five Highest Results of English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire

Statement (N = 91)	Mean	S.D	Level of Anxiety	Ranking
Item 19: I wish I could speak English fluently like my classmates, English teachers, and native speakers.	3.70	.983	PA	1
Item 22: If my English teacher uses positive communication, I will develop positive attitude towards speaking English.	3.66	.833	PA	2
Item 5: I like to learn English speaking skill because I want to pass the English speaking test.	3.59	.816	PA	3
Item 18: It is fun to learn new English phrases and conversation in the English class.	3.59	.789	PA	3
Item 26: I always attend an English class, especially when it comes to learning English speaking skills.	3.58	1.165	PA	4
Item 10: Learning how to speak in English helps me communicate with the English teacher and my classmates in English effectively.	3.56	.921	PA	5

Table 4 describes that item 19 “I wish I could speak English fluently like my classmates, English teachers, and native speakers” (mean score = 3.70) had the highest ranking of English speaking attitudes among 91 Thai EFL grade 11 students. Item 22 “If my English teacher uses positive communication, I will develop positive attitude towards speaking English” (mean score = 3.66) was ranked second. Items 5 and 18 had the third-highest

mean scores (3.59), with the respondents saying, “I like to learn English speaking skill because I want to pass the English speaking test” and “It is fun to learn new English phrases and conversation in the English class.”

The Correlation Among Thai EFL Students in Grade 11 Regarding Their Anxiety and Attitude Toward Speaking of Five Different Programs

According to Pearson, the correlation between speaking anxiety and attitude toward speaking in English in the classroom settings was found to be $r = -.340$ at the significance level of $p < .001$ among 91 Thai EFL grade 11 students.

Table 5

Correlation Between Speaking Anxiety and Speaking Attitude of Grade 11 Students

Correlation	Speaking Anxiety	Speaking Attitude
Speaking Anxiety		
Pearson correlation	1	-.340
Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
n	91	91
Speaking Attitude		
Pearson correlation	-.340	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
n	91	91

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study found a moderate negative correlation between speaking anxiety and positive attitudes towards speaking English among Thai EFL students in grade 11. This suggested that students with a low level of speaking anxiety tended to have more positive speaking attitudes towards speaking English in the classroom

Regarding different study programs, the statistical analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking attitude among English-Japanese students ($r = -.553$, $p = .021$). In contrast, the statistical analysis of other study programs reported that there was not statistically significance between these two affective filters.

The Factors That Contribute to The Anxiety Experienced by Grade 11 Thai EFL Students When Communicating in English Within Classroom Settings

The findings indicated that there were two main factors influencing Thai EFL students in grade 11 being anxious when speaking English in the English classroom: learner characteristics and classroom environment.

Learner Characteristics

Low Self-Esteem in English Speaking. 27 students answered open-ended questions on their thoughts and experiences speaking English language in the classroom. A common theme in their answers was low self-esteem in English speaking, implying that they lacked confidence when speaking in English in the classroom.

Low Proficiency in English Speaking Skills. As a result of their poor language skills, poor English speaking abilities, inaccurate pronunciation, and inability to recall words in English, seven students in grade 11 felt that their English competence was low. When they had to use English in the classroom, these issues made them more anxious and worried. A student, labeled as S4, was questioned on how speaking English in class made S4 feel that way, as demonstrated in the excerpt.

S4: “I am worried because I am not very good at English speaking...Before I am going to speak English in front of the classroom, I always think about words I want to say. I try to arrange my words because I am not good at speaking.”

This can be seen that S4 had an attempt to prepare his vocabulary before he spoke in front of the class.

Shyness. Due to their shyness, over 30 students said that speaking in English in class caused them to feel afraid and anxious. This may be because shy students prefer to avoid communicating with other individuals while speaking English with teachers or classmates. As can be seen in this excerpt, it also included difficulties speaking in front of the class, in groups, and when listening to spoken English messages in the classroom.

S8: “I do not really like to speak English because I am a shy person. I cannot speak English in front of the classroom. I am afraid of using the wrong words or something like that.”

Regarding S8, the excerpt emphasized how shy students' fear of communication limited their willingness to engage in English-speaking activities. Furthermore, shyness might increase students' fears of making errors when speaking in English in class and therefore restrict their engagement in the classroom.

Fear of Making Mistakes. It was found that 10 students worried about pronouncing words incorrectly, using the wrong dialogue, or having their own accents during the role-plays. As can be seen in the excerpts, several students also experienced anxiety and fear while responding to questions in English when they were unsure of the right answers.

S6: “Because I am just afraid that...I make mistakes by speaking English incorrectly. So, I am worried about it.”

S5: “Same with S6, I make mistakes. Because I make a lot of errors when I speak English in front of the classroom. Sometimes I do not know how to handle it like what to say next and how to proceed next.”

S10: “I feel anxious sometimes. It is like I am afraid of saying the wrong thing. I am afraid of changing the sentence structure when speaking English.”

The apprehension that grade 11 students shared when they were scared or anxious about making errors was revealed by these excerpts. An obstacle to communication and learning might be the fear of pronouncing words incorrectly, selecting the wrong words, or altering sentence patterns. Consequently, students might be reluctant to engage in English speaking activities, potentially hindering their language learning progress.

Fear of Many People in the Classroom. In open-ended questions, three students responded that speaking in front of a large group of students and being the center of the teacher's attention caused them the greatest fear. As the excerpt below illustrates, S9 explained details on the scenario that caused the greatest amount of anxiety.

S9: “When I go to speak English in front of the classroom, I feel anxious sometimes. But I am not

anxious that much because I like to speak English. For me, the situation that make me anxious that is when people are looking at me. I feel like it may be the way they look at me. All eyes were on me.”

The findings indicated that the presence of a large number of classmates could intensify students’ anxiety. The pressure of being the focus of attention might contribute to increased anxiety during classroom English speaking activities.

Classroom Environment

Relationship between Teacher and Students. Seven students in the present study stated that they were worried about receiving criticism from their English teacher if they used improper grammar. Furthermore, as the excerpts demonstrate, they were fearful of being asked to respond to the questions.

S4: “The situation that makes me anxious and stressed when speaking English in the classroom is when the teacher asks me questions. I am very afraid of losing focus.”

S5: “I do not worry much except when the teacher asks me questions. If the teacher asks me, I cannot answer anything.”

These excerpts suggested that teacher-student interaction could significantly influence students’ anxiety towards speaking in the classroom. The fear of being criticized for language mistakes and the pressure of being asked to respond to the questions could create a stressful learning environment for some students. This teacher-induced speaking anxiety could hinder students’ participation in English speaking activities and intensify their anxiety in speaking in the English classroom setting.

Relationship between Students and Students. In the present study, it was found that 15 students indicated that they were worried and anxious to speak English in the classroom since they were afraid that other students could mock them through teasing and smiling if they were playing a role in front of the classroom.

S6 mentioned the situation that close friends looked and smiled teasingly. This might cause S6 to be afraid of losing focus in speaking and perhaps making mistakes, as shown in the excerpt.

S6: “It is a situation where there are my close friends. We are in different groups, and they sit in the front row. Then I have to give a presentation in front of the classroom, and they smile at me.”

Classroom Practice. Regarding the responses from the open-ended questionnaire, 10 students shared their feelings that they were fearful, worried, and uncomfortable when required to speak English in front of the classroom.

The Coping Strategies that Thai EFL Students in Grade 11 Used to Reduce the Speaking Anxiety in the English Classrooms

Self-Practice. Self-practice was cited by 40 students as being beneficial in reducing their anxiety when speaking English in the classroom. According to the open-ended questions, some students mentioned the benefits of self-practice that made them more relaxed and helped them make fewer mistakes. Furthermore, some students reported that the feedback from teachers after speaking activities motivated them to improve and put in more practice, as can be seen in this excerpt.

S6: “After receiving feedback from my teacher, I feel worried about it sometimes. But I try to think which part I make mistakes, and I try to improve it. I do review my mistakes.”

Managing Emotions. It was found that eight students managed their emotions in order to minimize their anxiety and stay concentrated on the current or upcoming English speaking activities. For instance, S2 and S6 made an effort to disregard the negative emotions that could lead to anxiety.

S2: “For me, I stop thinking about the things I am worried about and keep my mind clear. After that I say it out loud, be confident or think of myself as a shameless person (laughs).”

S6: “I try not to care about that; the thing that makes me anxious. And I think the way I present that is correct enough. Try not to care about anything else.”

Building Confidence. Based on the interviews, students could overcome their anxiety of speaking English in the classroom by gaining confidence in their English speaking abilities as evidenced in the excerpt.

S9: “I have to control my feelings first. If I say I can do it, I can do it. Otherwise, if I am not confident and then I go out in front of the classroom with my low self-confidence, it will show that I lack confidence.”

S9 demonstrated that these efforts not only worked on building her confidence but also made an effort to manage her emotions in order to foster the belief that she could perform well in English-speaking activities in the classroom.

Keeping Concentration. It was found that 20 students attempted to keep concentration before speaking English in class. One student, S3, mentioned that practicing meditation by standing quietly and concentrating before speaking helped reduce anxiety and cope with challenging situations.

S3: “When I am anxious about speaking English in the classroom, I just stand still for a while.”

Additionally, other students, including S4, S5, and S10, effectively utilized this strategy to alleviate their speaking anxiety before engaging in classroom activities as shown in the excerpts.

S4: “I just take a deep breath and keep concentrating before going out to speak English in front of the classroom.”

S5: “I am a bit worried. I am afraid I cannot remember conversations. So, I try to stay still and focus on songs.”

S10: "I meditate quietly by myself. Because I have to calm my mind when I am excited."

Positive Thinking. Two students expressed dissatisfaction and concern regarding their speaking performance and scores after participating in English activities in the classroom. Rather than dwelling on past mistakes, students looked forward to future opportunities to perform better than before.

S9: "I feel dissatisfied and worried sometimes. If it is over, I will move on. And if there are new speaking activities, I will do it again and I will do it better."

S10: "Same as S9. If this time it is not good enough, I will try again next time."

Friend Support. It was found that 10 students utilized this strategy. Some students highlighted the significance of receiving encouragement from their friends in helping them to confront their anxiety about speaking in the classroom. In the excerpt, S5 used his friends as a way to cope with and reduce anxiety.

S5: "I have friends who encourage and cheer me on to overcome the hard times in speaking English."

Conclusion and Discussion

The results indicated students in grade 11 showed moderate levels of speaking anxiety as well as attitudes regarding speaking English in the classroom. This study shared similarities with previous research conducted by Akkakoson (2016) and Toubot et al. (2018). According to Akkakoson (2016), students in Thailand might perceive speaking English as both necessary and unnecessary for specific opportunities, resulting in a moderate level of anxiety when speaking English. In this study, 91 Thai EFL grade 11 students participated in an English course during the second semester, which was taught by a Thai teacher. Furthermore, most students felt more comfortable using their native language, Thai, rather than English in the classroom. As a result, students were not required to use English all the time, except during speaking activities related to the English course. This limited exposure to English in the language classroom setting might contribute to the moderate level of speaking anxiety experienced by grade 11 students. Secondly, the

method of evaluation was identified as a potential factor contributing to the moderate level of anxiety experienced by grade 11 students. Regarding Toubot et al. (2018), the students' speaking anxiety was influenced by teaching methods and the classroom atmosphere. Most students in the present study agreed that the subject teacher provided beneficial feedback instead of blaming them after finishing the English speaking activities. The teacher's positive feedback likely reduced their anxiety. As a result, the method of evaluation that does not create excessive pressure or a serious classroom atmosphere can help students relieve their anxiety towards speaking English in the classroom.

Regarding the relationship between anxiety and attitude towards speaking English in the classroom, it was shown that among grade 11 students, there was a statistically significant moderate negative correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking attitude which were consistent with Akkakoson (2016), and Karagöl and Başbay (2018). The students in the English-Japanese program showed a noteworthy negative correlation, meaning that lower anxiety levels corresponded to significantly more positive attitudes. According to observation and interview, teaching methods played a crucial role in reducing speaking anxiety and fostering positive attitudes. During the observation, the teacher took a role as a facilitator by employing supportive teaching methods, providing meaningful compliments, and creating a relaxing atmosphere. Moreover, most students who participated in the interview expressed their appreciation towards teacher's methods when the teacher provided feedback to them with kind manners.

In the present study, the findings revealed two main factors including learner characteristics and classroom environment. Compared to the study of and Luo (2012), Toubot at al., (2018), Santiwatthanasiri (2018), and Young (1991), the findings from the present study and related studies demonstrated the varied nature of speaking anxiety among EFL students, identifying common factors including shyness, low self-confidence, low self-perception on their ability in learning, fear of making mistakes, and classroom environment. To deal with these issues, grade 11 students employed six coping strategies such as self-practice, keeping concentration, building confidence, managing emotion, positive thinking, and friend support. These coping strategies were similar to Kondo and Yin-Ling (2004) and Putri at el. (2020) that the participants in their study used to reduce anxiety. However, this present study found that students often preferred to rely on themselves or their friends for help with English rather than turning to their teacher. This preference might be attributed to a significant age gap between the teacher and students, which could make some students feel intimidated and less likely to seek assistance from their teacher.

However, the present study were inconsistent with Inayah and Lisdawati (2021) and Wattanawong (2020). Both previous studies revealed that students generally held positive attitudes towards English speaking or learning English because they were aware of the importance of English speaking skills for future careers. In the present study, many students prioritized exam performance over communicative competence. This focus on testing could lead to superficial learning and difficulties in applying English in real-world contexts. Moreover, many students in the study were uncertain about the future relevance of English speaking skills. This lack of perceived need could negatively impact their motivation, increase anxiety, and lead to a less positive attitude towards speaking in English.

Implications

The findings of the present study showed that grade 11 students experienced moderate levels of anxiety and attitudes towards speaking English in the classroom. These findings can be employed as a starting point for teachers, curriculum developers, and other researchers aiming to enhance the learning experience among high school students, particularly in rural areas.

Firstly, the moderate levels of speaking anxiety and attitude towards speaking English in the classroom highlight the need for curriculum design. These levels of anxiety and attitude could be influenced, positively or negatively, by the language learning environment. Teachers or curriculum developers should consider creating an authentic English-speaking environment. It is important to immerse students in real-life situations which are related to their study programs. Thus, need analysis may be useful for teachers to survey the students' need on English and their areas of interests. Another way, teachers may assign students to start from a low-stakes and move towards high-stakes activities to help students more comfortable with speaking English.

Secondly, it is important to provide teachers with professional development to improve their effectiveness in teaching English speaking. Training programs should focus on equipping teachers with the skills necessary to create a more supportive and encouraging classroom environment. Moreover, teachers should be encouraged to use a variety of innovative teaching strategies such as AI chatbots and other AI-driven tools that meet the needs of students enrolled in different academic programs.

Thirdly, future research could further explore the long-term effects of the six coping strategies identified in this study. The further researchers should investigate how these strategies impact students' speaking anxiety and

attitudes over time, providing insights into their effectiveness and potential for broader applications in educational settings.

About the Authors

Kamonchanok Muengnakin: A Master of Arts student in English Language Teaching Program, Language Institute, Thammasat University, Thailand. Her current research interests are in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and linguistics.

Arthitaya Narathakoon: An English lecturer at the Language Institute Thammasat University. Her research interests include Teacher Development, Teacher Training, Teacher Literacy, and Teacher Assessment Literacy.

References

- Akkakoson, S. (2016). Speaking anxiety in English conversation classrooms among Thai students. *Malaysian Journal of Learning & Instruction/Malaysian Journal of Learning & Instruction*, 13(1), 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2016.13.1.4>
- Bailey, K.M., & Savage, L. (1994). *New ways in teaching speaking*. Illinois: Pantagraph Printing.
- Baker, W. (2009). The cultures of English as a lingua franca. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(4), 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00187.x>
- Bhattachaiyakorn, S., & Phettakua, S. (2023). English speaking anxiety among northeastern Thai university students. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 16(1), 384–407.
- Bounzouay, A. (2020). A study of English speaking skills of grade eleventh students at Pakthongchaiprachaniramit school. *Journal of MCU Humanities Review*, 6(1), 211–221.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Bui, T. T. Q., & Intaraprasert, C. (2013). The effects of attitude towards speaking English and exposure to oral communication in English on use of communication strategies by English majors in Vietnam. *International Journal of Science and Research Publications*, 3(2), 1-9.
- Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Cendra, A.N., & Sulindra, E. (2022). Speaking accuracy, fluency, and beyond: Indonesian vocational students' voices. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 25(2), 379-394. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i2.4579>
- Chen, C. (2020). The application of affective filter hypothesis theory in English grammar teaching. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 4(6), 71-74. <https://doi.org/10.26689/jcer.v4i6.1294>
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Du, X. (2009). The affective filter in second language teaching. *Asian Social Science*, 5(8). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v5n8p162>
- Durongkaverroj, W. (2023). Recent developments in basic education in Thailand: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Southeast Asian Economies*, 39, S20–S33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4204181>
- Eagly, A., & Chaiken, S. (1998). Attitude structure and function. In D.T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 269–322.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hauck, M., & Hurd, S. (2005). Exploring the link between language anxiety and learner self-management in open language learning contexts. *European Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 2005.
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1), 8-10. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
- Inayah, R., & Lisdawati, I. (2021). Exploring students' difficulties in speaking English and their attitude in speaking English. *Acuity: Journal of English Language Pedagogy, Literature and Culture*, 2(1), 12-23. <https://doi.org/10.35974/acuity.v2i1.585>
- Karagöl, İ., & Başbay, A. (2018). The relationship among attitude, anxiety and English speaking performance. *Kuramsal Eğitimbilim Dergisi Journal of Theoretical Educational Science*, 11(4), 809-821. <https://doi.org/10.30831/akukeg.394769>
- Khamkhien, A. (2010). Teaching English speaking and English speaking tests in the Thai context: A reflection from Thai perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 3(1), 184–190. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n>

1p184

- Kondo, D.S. & Yang, Y. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal*, 58(3), 258–265. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258>
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practices in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Pergamon Press.
- Luo, H. (2012). Sources of foreign language anxiety: Towards a four-dimensional Model. *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, 12, 49–61.
- MacIntyre, P.D., & Gardner, R.C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learn*, 44(2), 283-305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x>
- Marcos-Llinás, M., & Garau, M.J. (2009). Effects of language anxiety on three proficiency-level courses of Spanish as a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 42, 94-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01010.x>
- Nanthaboot, P. (2014). *Using communicative activities to develop English speaking ability of Matthayomsuksa three students* [Unpublished master’s thesis], Srinakharinwirot University.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. McGraw Hill.
- Pawlak, M., & Waniek-Klimczak, E. (Eds.) (2014). *Issues in teaching, learning and testing: Speaking in a second language*. Springer.
- Putri, A. R., Zulida, E., Rahmiati, R., Asra. S., & Fadlia, F. (2020). A study of students’ anxiety in speaking. *Journal of Education, Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching*, 3(1), 35-47. <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2024.1.201.212>
- Santiwatthanasiri, T. (2018). *Factors affecting the English speaking ability of Thai university students*. Thammasat University.
- Sasum, S., & Weeks, B. (2018). Why some Thai students cannot speak English fluently. In *Proceedings of RSU International Research Conference*. 361-367.
- Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, 28(1), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00309.x>

- Sha'ar, M. Y. M. A., & Boonsuk, Y. (2021). What hinders English speaking in Thai EFL learners? Investigating factors that affect the development of their English speaking skills. *Mextesol Journal*, 45(3).
- Shazly, R. E. (2021). Effects of artificial intelligence on English speaking anxiety and speaking performance: A case study. *Expert Systems*, 38(3).
- Soureshjani, K.H., & Riahipour, P. (2012). Demotivating factors on English speaking skill: A study of EFL language learners and teachers' attitudes. *World Applied Sciences Journal* 17(3). 327-339.
- Tantiwich, K. & Sinwongsuwat, K. (2021). 'Thai university students' problems of language use in English conversation. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(2), 598- 626.
- Teng, B., & Sinwongsuwat, K. (2015). Improving English conversation skill through explicit CA-informed instruction: A study of Thai university students. *PASAA Paritat Journal*, 30(15), 65-104.
- Tien, C. (2017). Factors of foreign language reading anxiety in a Taiwan EFL higher education context. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 4(8), 48-58.
- Toubot, A. M., Seng, G. H., & Abdullah, A. B. A. (2018). Examining levels and factors of speaking anxiety among EFL Libyan English undergraduate students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(5), 47-56. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.5p.47>
- Wattanawong, S. (2020). *Attitudes towards English speaking skills among Thai pre-engineering students*. Thammasat University.
- Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969). Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 33(4), 448–457. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027806>
- Wongsothorn, A., Sukamolsun, S., Chinthammit, P., Ratanothayanonth, P., & Noparumpa, P. (1996). National profiles of language education: Thailand. *PASAA*, 26(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.58837/CHULA.PASAA.26.1.11>
- Xu, M. (2016). The application of input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis in colleges English listening teaching. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Education Technology, Management and Humanities Science*, 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.2991/etmhs-16.2016.17>

- Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426–439. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329492>
- Youssef, A. M. S. (2012). Role of motivation and attitude in introduction and learning of English as a foreign language in Libyan high schools. *International Journal of Linguistic*, 4(2), 366-375. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i2.1855>
- Yuh, A. H., & Kaewurai, W. (2021). An investigation of Thai students' English-speaking problems and needs and the implementation collaborative and communicative approaches to enhance students' English-speaking skills. *The Golden Teak: Humanity and Social Science Journal*, 27(2), 91-107.