



# Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety and Anxiety Reduction Techniques in Thai adult EFL Learners

Natthakit Suratin<sup>a\*</sup>, Virasuda Sribayak<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> natthakit.suratin@gmail.com, Language Institute Thammasat University, Thammasat University, Thailand

<sup>b</sup> virasuda.s@litu.tu.ac.th, Language Institute Thammasat University, Thammasat University, Thailand

\* Corresponding author, natthakit.suratin@gmail.com

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to identify the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety in Thai adult EFL learners working in an online media company and enrolled in an English course provided by the company, as well as to discover the anxiety reduction techniques used by these learners. The results showed that significant contributors to speaking anxiety among participants can be categorized into internal and external factors. Internally, a learner’s personality traits, such as self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and their level of proficiency—including lack of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical inaccuracy, improper pronunciation, lack of skill in scriptwriting, and being unable to articulate things concisely—were major sources of anxiety. Externally, classroom activities, such as public speaking and impromptu speech activities, unclear explanations from teachers, and time constraints, also contributed to learners’ anxiety. This study also showed that learners employed various techniques to reduce their anxiety, including preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking and task-focused. This underscores the

	<p>importance for teachers and companies to provide a learning environment appropriate for adult EFL learners and to equip them with tools to create an atmosphere that is less anxiety-inducing.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> speaking anxiety, factors contributing to anxiety, anxiety reduction techniques, adult learners</p>
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## Introduction

In recent years, proficiency in English has become increasingly crucial for Thai individuals, not only in academic settings but also in professional environments. Mastery of English communication skills is now seen as essential alongside technical skills in various fields. This growing emphasis has led Thai people to seek various methods to improve their English proficiency.

Despite the significant efforts of learners, many Thai people face challenges in developing their English-speaking skills, with speaking anxiety being a primary obstacle. Studies indicate that speaking anxiety is prevalent among Thai learners at various educational levels and professional contexts. For instance, Thamnu (2017) found that sixth-grade students experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety due to factors such as the students themselves, their teachers, speaking activities, and assessments. Akkakoson (2016) reported similar levels of anxiety among university students in English conversation courses, with test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and limited vocabulary being major contributors. Moreover, Sonniyom (2021) observed moderate speaking anxiety among Thai financial workers in a commercial bank, particularly when interacting with foreign clients.

To address speaking anxiety, Thai learners employ various techniques to reduce their anxiety and continue learning English. Kondo and Yang (2004) identified five coping strategies: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and resignation. Recent studies within and outside Thailand have adopted these strategies, demonstrating their effectiveness in reducing anxiety in different contexts, including classrooms and workplaces.

Horwitz et al. (1986) significantly advanced the understanding of foreign language anxiety (FLA), proposing that it is a situation-specific anxiety unique to language learning. They introduced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a tool widely used in subsequent research to measure anxiety levels among learners. Studies have continued to explore various aspects of FLA, including factors contributing to anxiety and effective reduction techniques. For example, Fujii (2017) identified four strategies for

reducing anxiety among Japanese undergraduates, involving both student-oriented and teacher-oriented approaches.

In Thailand, research indicates high levels of anxiety among learners across all educational stages, from primary school to university, and in professional training settings. These studies primarily focus on identifying anxiety levels and the contributing factors. However, there is a gap in research specifically addressing anxiety in adult learners undergoing corporate training in English. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the factors contributing to speaking anxiety and the techniques employed by Thai adult EFL learners in a corporate training context.

The objectives of this research are to identify the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai adult EFL learners and to discover the techniques they use to cope with this anxiety. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to enhance the understanding of speaking anxiety in corporate training settings and provide insights for educators and corporate trainers to create more effective and supportive learning environments.

## **Literature Review**

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety has been defined and studied by many scholars and researchers. Horwitz et al. (1986) define it as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the autonomic nervous system's arousal. Morgan (1997) considers anxiety a negative feeling intrinsic to an individual's personality, triggered by a threatening situation. Anxiety manifests in increased sweating, heart rate, and breathing due to sympathetic nervous system arousal (Tasee, 2009). Namsang (2011) relates anxiety to emotional and physical states of self-doubt, worry, tension, nervousness, and frustration. Anxiety is conceptualized into three types: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is embedded in an individual's personality, often causing nervousness and negative attitudes in language learning contexts (Ellis, 1994). State anxiety is a temporary emotional state dependent on the context, such as making an impromptu speech. Situation-specific anxiety occurs in specific situations (MacIntyre, 1999), often in language learning contexts.

Speaking anxiety is defined as "fearfulness when speakers speak" (O'Hair et al., 2007). Public speaking anxiety is divided into process anxiety, which occurs during preparation, and performance anxiety, which occurs during the speech. O'Hair et al. (2007) further divide it into pre-preparation anxiety and pre-performance anxiety, highlighting different periods when individuals experience anxiety. Liu and Jackson (2008) defined speaking

anxiety as a fear of communicating in a spoken manner, especially due to fear of negative evaluation and public speaking. Additionally, students with overseas experience had lower anxiety in speaking English, suggesting that greater self-confidence correlates with lower anxiety. In the Thai context, speaking anxiety stems from a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, as well as learners' weak proficiency levels, such as mispronunciation and incorrect grammar usage.

### **Foreign Language Anxiety**

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is anxiety experienced during language learning in the classroom. Zheng (2008) positioned foreign language anxiety within the broader context of related anxiety concepts, identifying it as a situation-specific type of anxiety that is mostly independent of other anxiety forms. In other studies, Foreign Language Anxiety is defined as a complex feeling regarding perceptions of themselves, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to the classroom in a foreign language classroom context. Horwitz et al. (1986) define it as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. This anxiety can lead to behaviors like missing classes, incomplete homework, and fear of speaking. They also developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure anxiety levels. Gardner and Macintyre (1993) describe this anxiety as a stable personality trait causing nervous reactions when speaking a second language. Namsang (2011) defines it as an emotional and physical state of fear, apprehension, worries, frustration, shyness, uneasiness, self-doubt, and tension. The main components of FLCAS are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension arises from a lack of necessary skills to communicate (Namsang, 2011). Test anxiety stems from a fear of failure, often linked to language proficiency (Gordon & Sarason, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986). Fear of negative evaluation involves apprehension about others' evaluations and avoiding evaluative situations (Watson & Friend, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986).

### **Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety**

The factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai adult EFL learners can be categorized into internal and external factors.

#### ***Internal Factors***

Internal factors include learners' personality and proficiency. Personality traits such as self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, unrealistic

high ambitions, and negative attitudes towards English significantly impact learners' confidence and comfort in speaking the language. Additionally, a lack of proficiency, particularly in vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation, contribute to anxiety. Learners experience anxiety when they struggle to find the right words, use correct grammar, or pronounce words accurately, leading to increased anxiety. This is consistent with research by Thamnu (2017), Hutabarat and Simanjuntak (2019), and others who identified these internal factors as significant contributors to speaking anxiety.

**Learners' Personality:** Learners' Personality includes factors such as self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence. Self-inferiority stems from learners feeling inadequate compared to their peers, contributing to increased anxiety from primary to secondary school (Thamnu, 2017; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019). This feeling is exacerbated by the fear of making mistakes, as learners are often afraid of being ridiculed by their peers, which makes them hesitant to speak in class. This fear extends beyond the classroom into adult working environments where there is intense pressure to perform well in English (Thaicharoen, 2017). Furthermore, learners' lack of confidence in their English-speaking abilities, due to concerns about pronunciation and vocabulary, worsens their anxiety (Thamnu, 2017; Sonniyom, 2021). Negative attitudes toward English and a lack of motivation to participate in class also contribute to this lack of confidence (Akkakoson, 2016; Pongpun, 2012). Even when learners are well-prepared, they often continue to experience anxiety about speaking (Sonniyom, 2021). Additionally, learners' personalities can influence speaking anxiety, with many students feeling that their classmates have superior English-speaking skills (Thamnu, 2017).

**Learners' Level of Proficiency:** Speaking anxiety among EFL learners is closely tied to their proficiency in various language skills. A significant factor is insufficient vocabulary, which many learners feel limits their ability to communicate effectively. This perceived lack of vocabulary not only hinders their expression of thoughts but also increases their anxiety when speaking English (Chiu et al., 2016; Kurakan, 2021; Tanveer, 2007). Studies reveal that a considerable percentage of learners struggle with vocabulary, leading to disruptions in conversation and heightened anxiety in classroom settings (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021). Grammatical difficulties also play a crucial role in speaking anxiety. Learners often find it challenging to construct grammatically correct sentences, which can lead to performance anxiety (Akkakoson, 2016; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019). Pronunciation issues further contribute to speaking anxiety. Learners frequently struggle with both segmental elements, such as vowels and consonants, and suprasegmental features like stress and intonation. Mastering pronunciation is essential for

clear communication but requires considerable effort, and frequent errors can lead to misunderstandings and increased anxiety (Sahatsathatsana, 2017). Thai EFL learners, in particular, face significant challenges with pronunciation, affecting their confidence and speaking performance. The curriculum and evaluation methods also impact speaking anxiety. EFL programs often emphasize grammar and writing skills over speaking and listening, leading to underdeveloped speaking abilities and increased anxiety when learners are required to speak (Akkakoson, 2016). Traditional English testing focuses mainly on reading and writing, which further discourages practical language use and exacerbates anxiety in speaking situations.

### ***External Factors***

External factors encompass classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, and overall learning conditions. Classroom activities that are similar to examinations, such as fill-in-the-blank exercises or public speaking tasks, tend to induce significant anxiety. Immediate teacher responses and unclear explanations can also contribute to learners' stress, as they feel under constant scrutiny and fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, the overall classroom environment, including time constraints and the traditional setup, can create an anxious atmosphere.

**Classroom Activities:** Test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are significant contributors to speaking anxiety. Tests and impromptu speaking tasks often cause anxiety, as learners fear failure and negative evaluations (Gordon & Sarason, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Namsang, 2011; Woodrow, 2006).

**Teachers:** Teaching methods and error correction approaches significantly impact speaking anxiety. Proper teaching techniques and appropriate error correction are crucial in reducing anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Pongpun, 2012).

**Other Classroom Learning Conditions:** Limited English exposure, infrequent oral communication practice, and lack of experience speaking in front of an audience contribute to speaking anxiety. Learners often have limited opportunities to practice speaking English, leading to anxiety (Akkakoson, 2016; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019).

### **Anxiety Reduction Techniques**

According to Horwitz and Young (1991), acknowledging and confronting anxiety is essential for finding effective reduction techniques. Various techniques have been identified to reduce speaking anxiety, categorized into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer thinking.

### ***Preparation***

Preparation involves giving learners enough time and resources to prepare for speaking tasks. Media intervention, such as using online platforms like YouTube, helps learners improve their speaking skills and feel more prepared (Fujii, 2017; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Ikhsaniyah et al., 2022; Kondo & Yang, 2004; Tantiachai, 2016).

### ***Relaxation***

Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation, help learners calm themselves and reduce anxiety. Creating a relaxed environment facilitates learning and reduces somatic anxiety symptoms (Kondo & Yang, 2004; Tantiachai, 2016).

### ***Peer Thinking***

Peer thinking involves cooperative learning strategies that create a supportive and interactive learning environment. Group discussions and collaborative tasks help reduce anxiety and build confidence in speaking English (Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Nagahashi, 2007).

## **Relevant Research**

### ***Research in the Thai context***

Numerous studies in Thailand have explored factors contributing to anxiety and anxiety reduction techniques in EFL classrooms. For instance, Tantiachai (2016) identified sources of anxiety among English International Communication students and suggested coping techniques, such as concentration, practice, relaxation, understanding, and deep breathing. Akkakoson (2016) found moderate levels of speaking anxiety among Thai students, highlighting negative attitudes toward test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as significant contributors. Building on these findings, Tanielian (2014) underlined the need to address student anxiety and improve teacher training and curriculum design to better support ESL programs. Moreover, negative feedback from teachers and classmates in school made Thai adults working in international organizations embarrassed and anxious, affecting their professional lives. They suggested improving teacher training and providing support to ensure teachers are well-qualified to teach English. Thaicharoen (2017) identified personality and knowledge as major factors

contributing to public speaking anxiety among employees, indicating that these factors extend beyond the classroom to the workplace.

Supporting these findings, Kalra and Sribud (2020) reported high anxiety levels among university students, attributing this to a lack of knowledge and negative attitudes toward unprepared speaking tasks. Similarly, Bhattachaiyakorn and Phettakua (2023) also found high anxiety levels among university students, with grammar, vocabulary, and oral proficiency being significant factors. Additionally, Prasansri (2020) emphasized the significance of various studies in managing anxiety and suggested that tailored approaches based on proficiency can improve the effectiveness of anxiety reduction in oral presentations for EFL students. Overall, these studies collectively highlight the various sources of anxiety in Thai EFL contexts and underscore the importance of addressing both psychological and educational factors, including teacher training and curriculum design, to reduce anxiety effectively.

### ***Research in the Non-Thai Context***

Studies outside Thailand have also explored speaking anxiety and reduction techniques in EFL contexts. Elaldi (2016) found moderate anxiety levels among Turkish students, with males being more anxious than females. Tien (2018) reported that Taiwanese students experienced anxiety due to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension concerns, with females being more anxious than males. Tridinanti (2018) found that self-confidence was a stronger predictor of speaking achievement than anxiety among Indonesian students. Pabro-Maquidato (2021) identified fear of losing face and negative feedback as major anxiety factors among Filipino students, who used techniques like reading books and consulting dictionaries to cope. Ikhsaniyah et al. (2022) found that poor English skills, fear of misinterpretation, low self-esteem, fear of mistakes, lack of preparation, and test anxiety contributed to speaking anxiety among Indonesian students, who used preparation, mindset change, and bravery as reduction techniques.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study utilizes a convergent triangulation mixed-methods design (Clark & Cresswell, 2007), in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. This enabled the researcher to assess the extent of factors contributing to speaking anxiety through quantitative data while obtaining detailed insights from qualitative data. According to



Mathison (1988), triangulation helps minimize uncertainty and enhances the validity of the findings.

## Research Setting and Participants

The study involved seven adult employees from an online media company in Thailand. These participants voluntarily enrolled in an English class offered internally by the company, facilitated by the researcher, who serves as a learning designer providing English Competency Services (ECS). All participants held bachelor's degrees, placing them at the B1-C1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The course aims to enhance speaking skills, focusing on fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation, following the IELTS marking scheme. Participants' job positions, goals, and self-assessments were collected through observations and interviews to gather information on their proficiency and personality, aligning with the literature on internal factors contributing to speaking anxiety and their anxiety reduction techniques. The three English classes included the following three activities: fill-in-the-blank exercises, discussions, and public speaking in which all the classes included all of the activities in this order. Each class addressed specific topics: social issues, workforce trends, and business trends. The course being offered was proposed by the learners and all formats and topics were agreed upon by the learners, the teacher, and the Human Resources department.

## Participants

The participants in this study included the following: Participant #1: A project coordinator who coordinates projects among all stakeholders and aims to improve fluency and lexical resources for professional communication. Participant #2: An employee engagement officer in human resources seeking to communicate more professionally with employees and guests. Participant #3: A creative team leader desiring fluency and natural language use without extensive preparation. Participant #4: A content creator reporting on business trends who seeks to communicate fluently with foreign partners and adapt to the company's global direction. Participant #5: Another content creator reporting on global news who wants to improve vocabulary and pronunciation but feels she lacks adequate English input. Participant #6: A content creator who aims to communicate better with international partners, focusing on pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. Participant #7: A procurement officer aiming to boost confidence, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy, aspiring to become a cabin crew member. Table 1

shows participants' self-evaluation of their English proficiency, and Table 2 shows five participants' experience in taking an English proficiency test.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Self-evaluation of their English Proficiency*

Participants	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
#1	Average	Average	Average	Average
#2	Average	Good	Good	Average
#3	Average	Good	Average	Average
#4	Good	Very Good	Average	Good
#5	Average	Average	Average	Average
#6	Average	Average	Good	Average
#7	Very Good	Good	Very Good	Average

**Table 2**

*Five Participants' Past Experience in Taking an English Proficiency Test*

Participants	Test Taken	Score/Band	CEFR Level Comparison
#2	TOEIC	650	B1
#4	IELTS	7	C1
#5	TOEIC	820	B2
#6	TOEIC	990	C1
#7	TOEIC	625	B1

## Instruments

The study utilized four instruments: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and diaries.

### *Questionnaires*

A 33-item five-point Likert scale questionnaire, adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), was used to determine factors contributing to speaking anxiety. Validated by experts, the data collected were tallied, tabulated, and analyzed.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews, guided by pre-determined questions categorized into internal and external factors, provided qualitative, open-ended data. This approach allowed participants to elaborate on their anxiety factors and reduction techniques. The interview questions were validated by

experts and piloted with Thai adult EFL learners. Interviews were conducted after the final class session.

### ***Observations***

Classroom observations were undertaken using a structured checklist adapted from Wardani (2018). The checklist was validated by experts.

### ***Diaries***

Participants maintained diaries to document their experiences and reflections on factors contributing to anxiety and their reduction techniques. The guiding questions for the diaries were developed based on literature review themes and validated by experts. Diaries provided processual insights that may not emerge from questionnaires or interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis, including frequencies and percentages. This analysis helped identify internal and external factors contributing to speaking anxiety and coping strategies. The researcher analyzed the data from semi-structured interviews, observations, and diaries by utilizing the theory of Cresswell and Clark (2007) following these procedures: (1) The researcher prepared the raw data for analysis. (2) The raw data were categorized based on research data, data sources, and results from interviews, observations, and diaries. (3) The researcher read and coded all of the data, paying attention to words that often appeared through various instruments by key informants. (4) The researcher utilized a coding process and found themes or data to generate the descriptions. (5) The researcher explored the relationships between the themes and data, interpreting the significance of these themes. Table 3 shows how the data from the four research instruments were analyzed.

**Table 3**

*Data collection and analysis to answer research questions*

Research Questions	Instruments	Data Analysis
What are the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety in Thai adult EFL learners?	Questionnaire	Percentage; mean
	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis
	Observations	Frequency; thematic analysis

What are the speaking  
anxiety reduction  
techniques used by  
Thai adult EFL  
learners?

Diaries

Thematic analysis

## Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations included obtaining verbal and written consent from participants and informing them about the study's purpose. Participants' anonymity was ensured by assigning pseudonyms. Permissions were obtained from the participants and the Human Resources department overseeing employee well-being.

## Results

### Questionnaire

The demographic data, factors contributing to speaking anxiety, and anxiety reduction methods were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts: demographic data, factors contributing to speaking anxiety, and anxiety reduction methods. The demographic data collected included gender, age, educational level, reasons for enrolling, frequency of English usage, and English proficiency. Among the seven participants, five (71%) were female and two (29%) were male. Four participants (57%) were aged 20–25 years, while three (43%) were aged 26–30 years. All participants held bachelor's degrees, with four (57%) studying in Thai programs, two (29%) in international programs, and one (14%) in a bilingual program. Six participants (86%) enrolled to develop communication skills, and one (14%) aimed to enhance their career path. Regarding the frequency of English usage, three participants (43%) used English occasionally, three (43%) barely used it, and one (14%) used English almost all the time. In terms of English proficiency, five participants (71.4%) had taken English proficiency tests. Four took the TOEIC with scores ranging from 625 to 990, and one scored band 7 in the IELTS. Participants rated their skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing as average, with listening skills rated between average and good.

### *Factors Contributing to Anxiety*

Factors contributing to anxiety were categorized and ranked from the highest to the lowest. Learner's proficiency was found to be the highest factor contributing to anxiety. Overall, an average score of 2.21 suggests a low level

of anxiety due to language proficiency. The highest average score, 2.43, indicates significant anxiety when learners do not understand what the teacher is saying. Next, the factor of other classroom learning conditions showed an overall average score of 2, also suggesting a low level of anxiety. The highest score, 2.57, indicates a strong feeling that peers speak the foreign language better. Following this, learners' personalities had an overall average score of 1.97, suggesting a low level of anxiety related to learners' personalities. The highest average score, 3.29, indicates a strong understanding of why others get upset over foreign language classes. Subsequently, classroom activities showed an overall average score of 1.86, suggesting low anxiety levels related to classroom activities. The highest score, 3.00, is linked to learners feeling very self-conscious about speaking a foreign language in front of others. Lastly, participants exhibited a low level of anxiety regarding teachers, with an average score of 1.82. The highest average score, 2.29, indicates learners' nervousness about speaking with native speakers. Table 4 displays the average score and the anxiety level for each category of factors contributing to anxiety.

**Table 4**

*Average Score and Anxiety Level for Factors Contributing to Anxiety*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Average Score</b>	<b>Anxiety Level</b>
<b>Internal factors</b>		
#1 Learners' personality	1.97	Low
#2 Learners' proficiency	2.21	Low
<b>External factors</b>		
#3 Classroom activities	1.79	Very Low
#4 Teachers	1.92	Low
#5 Other classroom learning conditions	2	Low
<b>Average Total</b>	<b>1.98</b>	<b>Low</b>

***Anxiety Reduction Techniques***

The results demonstrate that positive thinking techniques are used by Thai adult EFL learners to reduce speaking anxiety, with varying levels of agreement on their effectiveness. The most strongly agreed-upon technique is positive thinking, with an overall average score of 3.33, and thinking positively before and after speaking both received an average rating of 4. This is followed by the technique of preparation with an average score of 3.25, in which participants most agreed upon practicing by imitating native speakers. Next, both relaxation and peer thinking follow, each receiving an average score of 2.88. The techniques most agreed upon were taking a sip of water

before class time and seeking help from teachers. Table 5 displays the average score of level of agreement regarding anxiety reduction techniques.

**Table 5**

*Average Score of Level of Agreement Regarding Anxiety Reduction Techniques*

Anxiety Reduction Techniques	Average Score	Level of Agreement
#1 Preparation	3.25	Neutral
#2 Relaxation	2.88	Neutral
#3 Positive thinking	3.33	Neutral
#4 Peer thinking	2.88	Neutral
<b>Average Total</b>	<b>3.09</b>	<b>Neutral</b>

## Interviews

The interviews revealed internal and external factors contributing to anxiety, as well as effective anxiety reduction techniques.

Internal factors such as the learner's personality, proficiency, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence were significant. Self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence emerged as primary themes affecting learners' emotional states during English language classes. Participants felt anxious comparing themselves to peers and fearing judgment. Anxiety was also linked to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical inaccuracy, improper pronunciation, and lack of script writing skills. Participants struggled with appropriate word usage and grammar, contributing to their anxiety. Below are some examples of what participants say about the internal factors:

"In high school, there were those who laughed when someone spoke incorrectly. This made me feel anxious and hesitant to communicate."

"I feel a bit anxious because, at first, I might not have used English for a long time so when I speak, my confidence isn't at its fullest."

"The fluency of speaking and using vocabulary, including grammar, might not appear professional or smooth. This is what caused me anxiety."

External factors, such as classroom activities and teacher-student interactions, significantly influenced learners' anxiety levels. Activities like

public speaking, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and discussing complex topics heightened anxiety due to the pressure to perform well and the fear of making mistakes. Immediate responses and unclear explanations from teachers were also identified as contributing to learners' anxiety. Participants expressed a need for more structured guidance and a supportive learning environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities rather than failures. Time management and the traditional classroom atmosphere also contributed to anxiety. Participants felt pressure due to limited time for activities and familiar yet intimidating classroom settings. Below are some examples of what participants say about the external factors:

"Speaking in front of the class, sometimes I tend to forget what I want to say because I get anxious."

"When the teacher asks a question and I can't answer, it feels bad because not knowing means not knowing and I get anxious from it."

"I got anxious because each task has a short time limit."

### ***Anxiety Reduction Techniques***

Various anxiety reduction techniques were identified, including preparation, relaxation methods, positive thinking, self-acceptance, and seeking help from peers. Participants used bullet points and past experiences to prepare for speaking tasks, reducing anxiety by organizing thoughts clearly. Techniques like listing words, deep breathing, and slowing down actions helped manage anxiety. Self-motivation and acceptance of mistakes were effective. Participants encouraged themselves with positive affirmations and accepted the possibility of errors. Emotional support from classmates and asking for help during activities were beneficial. Participants felt less anxious in supportive and collaborative classroom environments.

By combining quantitative and qualitative data, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the demographic factors, anxiety-inducing elements, and effective anxiety reduction techniques for Thai adult EFL learners. This understanding can help educators tailor their teaching methods to create a more supportive and effective learning environment, ultimately reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing language proficiency. Below are some examples of techniques being employed to reduce anxiety.

"The other day, I attended a class and participated in a game show activity that helped me feel less anxious because I got to review some English words."

"Taking deep breaths helps me to feel less anxious because I personally tend to panic. Excitement or anxiety easily occurs for me to some extent."

"I think to myself that I can do this (the task), and I tell myself that in the moment. When I speak, I feel like the show must go on, so I think it will be fine and I'm less anxious."

"I felt better when I received emotional support through the looks and emotions of my friends. I felt that there was support within the classroom"

## **Observations**

### ***Factors Contributing to Anxiety***

Observations revealed various physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms of anxiety among participants. Common physical symptoms included squirming, biting lips, and swallowing saliva, with behaviors like rubbing the palms and blushing serving as clear indicators of nervous energy, in which this behavior was displayed on numerous occasions while the participants were preparing for the public-speaking anxiety, indicating that the participants experience anxiousness regarding the classroom activity. Furthermore, during this classroom activity, participants also exhibited self-soothing actions such as hugging themselves, massaging temples, and grasping objects tightly, all aimed at reducing anxiety.

Facial expressions and gestures, such as forced smiles, trembling lips, and sullen faces, significantly indicated anxiety. Participants displayed a struggle to maintain composure, with behaviors like scratching their heads and rubbing their lips while doing the public speaking activity.

Cognitive disruptions were evident through issues like time management and zoning out, which impacted participants' focus and composure while doing all of the classroom activities. Moreover, emotional reactions were immediate and intense, with exclamations like "Oh my god" when hearing the instructions from the teachers regarding the school activities, indicating anxiousness among the participants.

### ***Anxiety Reduction Techniques***

To manage and reduce their anxiety, the researcher observed that learners employed various relaxation techniques, such as massaging temples and deep breathing, especially under time pressure during public speaking tasks. These physical relaxation methods were frequently observed, indicating



that learners were aware of their anxiety and actively sought to reduce it. Overall, the report highlighted that classroom activities, teaching methods, and learning conditions contributed to anxiety, and learners effectively managed this anxiety through these relaxation techniques.

## **Diary Entries**

All participants were asked to write a diary entry regarding their throughout the class at the end of each lesson. The data was compiled and categorized into factors contributing to anxiety and anxiety reduction techniques.

### ***Factors Contributing to Anxiety***

The diary entries reveal different emotions experienced by Thai learners when speaking English. Some participants expressed significant anxiousness, especially when selecting appropriate words after not using the language for a long time. Some participants mentioned feeling anxious before entering the class for the first time after not using the language for a long time and also felt anxious and nervous throughout the entire class. On the other hand, some other participants reported excitement and a positive attitude toward speaking English. However, they also experienced nervousness and anxiety in the classroom. One participant mentioned that the class was fun but also felt a bit anxious. Another enjoys speaking English but feels nervous when communicating with others in the classroom. One participant indicated initial feelings of anxiety but showed a noticeable improvement in confidence and reduced anxiety over time. Another participant similarly felt less anxious with each speaking activity. However, one participant highlighted a struggle with making mistakes and tended to avoid speaking.

Moreover, some participants felt nervous due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, hindering their ability to complete fill-in-the-blank and public-speaking exercises. Others were particularly anxious about telling a story concisely, fearing their inability to articulate thoughts clearly. Overall, a lack of vocabulary knowledge and the inability to communicate concisely are significant contributors to anxiety within the diary entries. These insights emphasize the need for more supportive and flexible teaching methods to alleviate stress and foster a more conducive learning environment.

The diary entries highlight specific activities within English classes that elicit feelings of anxiety or discomfort. Some participants feel nervous when completing fill-in-the-blank exercises, reminding them of exams and inducing anxiety. One participant specified that exercises requiring fill-in-the-blank reminded her of a test environment, making her feel bad if she couldn't

give the correct response to the teacher. Another participant mentioned difficulties in providing appropriate answers to fill-in-the-blank activities. One participant also feels anxious about monologue presentations, fearing her inability to articulate thoughts clearly and accurately under pressure. Some participants felt anxious during public-speaking activities, with one clearly specifying that public-speaking activities made her the most anxious. Another participant feels uneasy in activities requiring them to select words or phrases in various scenarios and use them in a sentence, worrying about the appropriateness and accuracy of their choices.

### ***Anxiety Reduction Techniques***

The data from the diary entries revealed anxiety reduction techniques for this particular group of participants, categorized into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and task-focused approaches. Participants practiced speaking between classes to reduce anxiety in the next lesson. They employed various relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and allowing for pauses during speech, to help cope with anxiety. Positive thinking strategies included letting go of pressure, not overthinking, and accepting mistakes as part of the learning process. Peer thinking involves seeking help from classmates and teachers, and seeking reassurance in seeing peers make mistakes. Task-focused approaches emphasize concentrating on the task at hand, making speeches concisely, and organizing thoughts to reduce anxiety. The diary entries from the participants provide an overview of the factors contributing to anxiety and the techniques used to reduce it. Anxiety among Thai learners in English classes can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Internally, learners' personalities and proficiency levels play significant roles. Externally, classroom activities and teaching methods contribute to anxiety. To reduce anxiety, participants employed various techniques categorized into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and task-focused approaches.

## **Discussion**

### **Factors Contributing to Anxiety**

The study categorized factors contributing to speaking anxiety into internal and external factors. Internal factors included learners' personality traits and proficiency levels, while external factors included classroom activities, teachers' roles, and other classroom learning conditions.

The findings from interview and diary entries indicated that self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence were significant

contributors to speaking anxiety among participants, consistent with Thamnu (2017), who highlighted that learners often feel inferior and anxious when they perceive their peers to be more proficient. Participants' reflections on past negative experiences, such as being laughed at for making mistakes, further reinforce the impact of these internal factors on speaking anxiety. Additionally, the study found that a lack of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical inaccuracy, and improper pronunciation were major sources of anxiety, aligning with Akkakoson (2016) and Chiu et al. (2016), who identified vocabulary and grammar issues as significant contributors to speaking anxiety. Moreover, the research revealed that participants were not as proficient in skills such as scriptwriting and articulating thoughts concisely, which emerged in this classroom context due to the specific activities conducted.

In terms of external factors, interviews and observation provided insight into how classroom activities induce anxiety. Public speaking and impromptu speech activities were identified as major sources of anxiety, consistent with findings by Woodrow (2006). The study also revealed that activities resembling exams, such as fill-in-the-blank exercises, induced anxiety. Additionally, the diary entries revealed that unclear explanations and immediate responses from teachers contributed to learners' anxiety, consistent with Chiang (2009) and Pongpun (2012), who emphasized the importance of effective teaching methods and appropriate error correction in reducing anxiety. The interview and diary entries revealed that time constraints were also identified as factors contributing to anxiety. Participants expressed a need for more class time and a supportive environment, aligning with Akkakoson (2016) and Hutabarat and Simanjuntak (2019), who highlighted the importance of adequate practice time and a positive learning atmosphere.

The study found that time constraints significantly contribute to anxiety in language learners, as shown by interviews, observations, and diary entries. Time limits create urgency, leading to stress as learners feel pressured to perform tasks quickly, impacting their ability to plan and organize. This can lead to a fear of failure, as the pressure to meet deadlines might result in a perceived threat of not achieving desired outcomes, reducing self-efficacy and increasing anxiety. The awareness of time constraints can help teachers improve lesson planning and manage expectations by setting realistic deadlines. It can also aid learners in developing prioritization skills and self-regulation, and help companies design more effective training programs by recognizing the limited time adult learners have.

Moreover, the questionnaire data showed that participants generally experience low anxiety about classroom activities. However, they rated the statement, "I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in

front of other learners," as a cause of some anxiety. Interviews and diary entries further confirmed this anxiety, as learners expressed feelings of "self-inferiority" when speaking a foreign language in front of more proficient peers, particularly during public-speaking tasks where they had to speak English in front of listeners and learners with higher proficiency levels.

## Anxiety Reduction Techniques

Participants employed various techniques to reduce anxiety, categorized into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer thinking. These techniques, which the participants revealed in their questionnaire and interview, are consistent with Kondo and Yang (2004) and Fujii (2017), who identified similar strategies in their research. Regarding preparation, participants prepared scripts and practiced speaking between classes to reduce anxiety. This aligns with Hutabarat and Simanjuntak (2019) and Ikhsaniyah et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of preparation in building confidence and reducing anxiety. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation were commonly used to reduce anxiety, consistent with Tantiachai (2016), who identified relaxation techniques as effective in managing anxiety. Participants also employed positive thinking strategies, such as self-motivation and accepting mistakes, to reduce anxiety. This aligns with Fujii (2017) and Ikhsaniyah et al. (2022), who highlighted the importance of positive thinking in reducing anxiety. Seeking help from classmates and teachers and seeking reassurance in peer support were also effective strategies, consistent with Nagahashi (2007), who emphasized the importance of cooperative learning strategies in reducing anxiety. An emerging theme was being task-focused to reduce anxiety. Participants found that concentrating on the task at hand helped them ignore feelings and emotions that could cause anxiety.

A notable anxiety reduction technique that emerged during the diary entries was being "task-focused" as a way to ignore feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and stress. Concentrating on tasks can divert attention from anxious thoughts. According to the diary entries, when learners immerse themselves in a specific activity, they become absorbed in the task at hand, which leaves less room for anxiety and reduces nervousness. Additionally, achieving specific, manageable goals can enhance confidence, thereby counteracting the anxiety that might arise if they aren't engaged in these tasks.

To conclude, the study found both similarities and differences in the results from the four instruments: questionnaires, interviews, observations, and diaries. All four methods identified low levels of anxiety among students, with internal factors such as personality and proficiency contributing less to anxiety compared to external factors like classroom activities and teacher

interactions. However, the instruments revealed nuanced differences; questionnaires indicated neutral agreement on the effectiveness of anxiety reduction techniques, while interviews provided deeper insights into specific internal and external factors like self-inferiority and fear of mistakes. Observations highlighted physical symptoms of anxiety during specific activities, such as public speaking and fill-in-the-blank exercises, which were corroborated by diary entries that reflected on the effectiveness of techniques like positive reinforcement and self-reflection. While all instruments underscored the significance of preparation and peer support, interviews and diaries offered more personal accounts of how these strategies impacted individual anxiety levels. This comprehensive approach revealed that despite the generally low anxiety levels, tailored strategies are essential to address specific anxiety triggers and enhance learning experiences.

### Implications

Speaking anxiety is a major issue that can significantly affect the learning experience of Thai adult EFL learners. This study has implications for teachers and companies. Understanding the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai adult EFL learners is crucial for creating a more supportive and effective learning environment. Teachers should recognize that learners' personality traits, including self-inferiority, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence, significantly impact speaking anxiety. Creating a positive classroom atmosphere where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities rather than failures can help reduce anxiety. Teachers should also provide constructive feedback and avoid immediate corrections that might increase learners' anxiety. Additionally, teachers should consider the impact of external factors, such as classroom activities and instructional methods. Avoiding activities resembling exams and employing activities that allow learners to practice speaking without the pressure of immediate evaluation can reduce anxiety. Extending class time or offering additional practice sessions can also help.

Companies that send their employees to attend English courses should understand the factors contributing to speaking anxiety. Selecting courses that focus on language proficiency and provide a non-anxiety-inducing environment is essential. Ensuring that the courses offer a supportive learning environment with sufficient practice time can help employees feel more comfortable and less anxious about their language skills. Companies might also consider providing additional support, such as peer learning groups or access to language learning resources.

## Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small, consisting of only seven participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused exclusively on Thai adult EFL learners, which may restrict the applicability of the results to learners from other backgrounds. Third, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases. Lastly, the study was conducted within a specific timeframe and did not include continuous or repeated measures to track individual progress over time.

## Recommendations for Further Studies

Future research should explore speaking anxiety in a larger and more diverse sample. Investigating the long-term effectiveness of anxiety reduction techniques is also important. Exploring the impact of different teaching methods on speaking anxiety and integrating anxiety reduction techniques into regular teaching practices could provide valuable insights.

## Conclusion

This study analyzed factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai adult EFL learners and the techniques they use to reduce it. Various factors contributed to anxiety, and participants employed various anxiety reduction techniques. These findings have significant implications for educators and companies. Future research should explore these factors and techniques in a larger and more diverse sample, examine the long-term effectiveness of anxiety reduction strategies, and study the impact of different teaching methods on speaking anxiety.

## About the Author

**Natthakit Suratin:** A high school English teacher based in Thailand. With a passion for teaching spoken English, Natthakit focuses on developing effective communication skills among students. His expertise lies in working with adult learners, helping them to gain confidence and proficiency in English.

**Virasuda Sribayak:** A full-time lecturer at Thammasat University Language Institute (LITU), Bangkok, Thailand. She holds a PhD in English Language Teaching from the Language Institute of Thammasat University, Bangkok,

Thailand. Her research interests include Teacher Professional Development, Language Testing, and Materials Development.

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