

# การศึกษาความวิตกกังวลต่อการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายชาวไทย

## A Study of Thai Secondary-School Students' English Language Speaking Anxiety

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### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มุ่งสำรวจความวิตกกังวลในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนมัธยมศึกษาไทย โดยเฉพาะในการสื่อสารกับครูชาวต่างชาติในโรงเรียนรัฐบาลแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพฯ โดยเก็บข้อมูลจากนักเรียน 110 คนที่เรียนในหลักสูตรภาษาต่างประเทศ ได้แก่ ภาษาจีน ฝรั่งเศส ไทย และญี่ปุ่น โดยใช้แบบสอบถามตามมาตรฐาน Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) และคำถามปลายเปิด

ผลการวิจัยพบปัจจัยหลัก 3 ประการที่ก่อให้เกิดความวิตกกังวล ได้แก่ ความกังวลในการสื่อสาร ความกลัวการถูกประเมินในแง่ลบ และความเครียดจากการสอบ โดยความเครียดจากการสอบเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่สุด นักเรียนมักรู้สึกไม่มั่นใจ กลัวพูดผิด ออกเสียงไม่ถูกต้อง และรู้สึกว่าตนเองมีทักษะด้อยกว่าผู้อื่น ซึ่งส่งผลให้เกิดความวิตกกังวลเพิ่มขึ้น

กลยุทธ์ในการลดความวิตกกังวลที่นักเรียนเสนอ ได้แก่ การสร้างความมั่นใจ ฝึกฝนกับครูต่างชาติ ใช้ภาษากาย และขอความช่วยเหลือจากเพื่อน การศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของการจัดการความวิตกกังวลในห้องเรียนภาษา เพื่อให้นักเรียนรู้สึกสบายใจและกล้าพูดภาษาอังกฤษมากขึ้น

### ABSTRACT

This study explores English speaking anxiety among Thai secondary school students, particularly in interactions with foreign teachers at a public school in Bangkok. Using purposive sampling, data was collected from 110 students across language programs including Chinese,

French, Thai, and Japanese. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and open-ended questions were employed to investigate anxiety factors.

Findings identified three key contributors: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety— with test anxiety emerging as the most significant. Students reported self-doubt, pronunciation struggles, and a fear of making mistakes as major barriers to speaking English. Many students felt their abilities were weaker than peers, heightening anxiety. Strategies to manage anxiety included building confidence, practicing with foreign teachers, using body language, and seeking peer support.

The study highlights the prevalence of speaking anxiety in language classrooms and underscores the need for supportive teaching practices that foster confidence and reduce anxiety in English speaking.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), English Language speaking, Speaking Anxiety

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## INTRODUCTION

English is widely regarded as a global language, spoken by hundreds of millions of people both as their first and second language. It serves as a key medium for international communication, particularly in areas like economics, politics, and education. As a result, English enables individuals from various linguistic backgrounds to interact effectively. According to Kachru's (1992) model of World Englishes, Thailand falls under the expanding circle, where English is used as a foreign language (EFL) and is not commonly spoken in daily life.

In Thailand, English is a compulsory subject across all educational levels, from primary to university (Ministry of Education, 2001). The English curriculum focuses on developing functional literacy in four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ministry of Education, 2008). It emphasizes real-life communication, enabling students to exchange information, express opinions, and interact effectively. Despite these goals, Thai learners continue to face significant challenges, especially in speaking, which is regarded as the most important skill (Ur, 1996).

One major obstacle is the limited opportunity to use English outside the classroom. Students often fear making mistakes and receiving negative feedback, especially when interacting with foreign teachers. This fear contributes to speaking anxiety and avoidance behavior (Khamprated, 2012; Wanich, 2014). Communication anxiety and fear of judgment hinder students' ability to express themselves effectively in English.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three main components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These aspects are assessed through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Their research reiterated that the phenomenon of language anxiety has detrimental effects on the confidence and self-esteem of learners, participation in the classroom, especially in spontaneous speaking activities. Nervous students usually find it particularly difficult to self-correct, to detect language problems, and to stay motivated to learn.

It is vital to understand the causes of speaking anxiety in Thai students, especially EFL. Investigating these problems teachers can find the methods of decreasing anxiety levels, making the learning environment favorable and aiding students to develop confidence in their English-speaking skills. Language anxiety is one of the important issues that require attention in achieving communication skills and improvement of the general language learning experience.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To investigate the number of Thai secondary school students who report their anxiety about English speaking.
2. To find out the ways Thai secondary school students handle their anxiety about English speaking with foreign teachers.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

The questionnaire used in the study was a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz & Cope, 1986), with three additional open-ended questions that were formulated to obtain qualitative data by the researcher. The FLCAS was translated into Thai based on Sae-Tia's (2017) study. It included 33 questions that assessed three dimensions of the foreign language anxiety, communication apprehension (11 questions), fear of negative evaluation (7 questions), and test anxiety (15 questions), based on the framework of Horwitz et al. (1986) on measurement of anxiety in the classroom. Participants' anxiety during classroom language learning was measured using a 5-point likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Moreover, there were three open-ended questions that aimed to discuss the details of the challenges participants encounter and aspects of their speaking anxiety in greater detail, as follows:

1. What problems did you face when speaking English?
2. What makes you feel anxious when you are speaking English in the classroom?

3. How do you handle your anxiety about speaking English with foreign teachers? Provide some examples.

The validity of the questionnaire was proved according to its content validity before implementation, and the reliability of the questionnaire was also established by determining Cronbach alpha 0.909, showing it as highly reliable.

## **SAMPLE**

The study involved 110 upper secondary Thai students from a public school in Bangkok during the 2024 academic year. Participants were purposively selected based on their enrollment in the English for Communication course. The data collection took place over five days, from May 20 to 24, 2024. These students experienced challenges communicating in English with foreign teachers during their 50-minute weekly English classes.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

In late May 2024, the questionnaires were distributed to 110 participants via an online Google Form sent through their English teachers. Before the survey, the researcher explained the study's purpose and provided clear instructions. To promote honesty, participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of communication apprehension on anxiety measurement in speaking English revealed that many participants exhibited a neutral stance toward communication apprehension in English-speaking situations. The three highest neutral responses were:

“I feel confident when I speak English in the class.” – 45.45% neither agreed nor disagreed

“I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.” – 41.82% neutral

“I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.” – 39.09% neutral

These neutral responses suggest that participants experienced a moderate level of communication apprehension—not strongly anxious but also not fully confident. This aligns with

previous Thai studies (e.g., Akkakoson, 2016; Kurakan, 2021), which found that Thai EFL learners often report moderate anxiety levels due to limited vocabulary, fear of mistakes, and low self-confidence in speaking English.

However, some participants reported significant anxiety in specific contexts:

“I get nervous when I do not understand every word my English teacher says.” – 37.27% agreed

“I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.” – 36.36% agreed

“I panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.” – 35.46% agreed

These results indicate that many learners experience anxiety when faced with unclear communication, peer judgment, or unprepared speaking tasks. This type of anxiety is consistent with findings from Ningsih and Agustin (2022), and Ouamcheep (2012), who noted that fear of mistakes, lack of practice, and limited use of English in daily life contribute to anxiety and low confidence among Thai EFL learners.

In conclusion, while many participants did not report high anxiety overall, they still encounter specific challenges that lead to anxiety in particular speaking situations, reflecting a moderate yet situational level of communication apprehension common among EFL learners.

The results of fear of negative evaluation on anxiety measurement in speaking English highlighted that many participants experience anxiety due to self-comparison and fear of being judged as less competent than their peers. Two key statements reflect this concern:

“I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.” – 40.91% agreed

“I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.” – 40% agreed

These responses indicate that a significant number of participants experience low self-perception and self-doubt, which contributes to speaking anxiety. Constant comparisons with peers lead to fear of negative evaluation, where learners worry about being judged, criticized, or seen as less capable in English.

Additionally, 39.09% of participants responded neutrally to the statement:

“I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.”

This neutrality suggests that while some students may not be overly concerned about making errors, a large group remains uncertain or moderately anxious, hinting at deeper, context-based insecurities.

Moreover, 38.18% of participants agreed with:

“I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions I have not prepared in advance.”

This indicates that spontaneous speaking without preparation is a significant anxiety trigger. It reflects common EFL learner fears—being put on the spot, fear of making mistakes in public, and concern about peers’ perceptions.

These findings align with previous research:

Tanveer (2007) emphasized the impact of peer pressure on language anxiety.

Bailey (1983) and Price (1991) (cited in Young, 1991) identified competition and low self-efficacy as key anxiety sources.

Mohamad & Wahid (2009) also found that students with low confidence often compared themselves unfavorably to peers, which heightened fear of ridicule.

The findings strongly support that fear of negative evaluation, peer comparison, and low self-confidence are key contributors to speaking anxiety. Many students feel less competent than their classmates, which fosters self-consciousness, nervousness, and avoidance behaviors in English-speaking situations—especially when unprepared or speaking in front of others.

The results of test anxiety on anxiety measurement in speaking English showed that while many participants feel generally comfortable in English class, test-related situations still trigger anxiety for a significant portion of students.

48.18% agreed with the statement: “When I go to my English class, I feel very sure and relaxed”

This suggests that nearly half of the participants feel calm during regular class activities, indicating low general classroom anxiety.

However, 47.27% were neutral about: “I am usually at ease during tests in my English class”

This neutrality suggests uncertainty or mild discomfort during tests, even though students may feel relaxed during regular lessons. The contrast between these two responses highlights how testing situations uniquely elevate anxiety.

Several statements indicate test-specific anxiety:

“English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind” – 40.91% agreed

“Even if I am well prepared for my English class, I still feel anxious” – 25.46% agreed

“The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get” – 39.09% agreed

These responses reveal that many students: feel pressure from the fast pace of the class, experience anticipatory anxiety even when prepared and suffer from increased confusion the more they study—reflecting a paradox of test anxiety where over-preparation leads to stress and reduced clarity.

These findings align with previous research as follow: Basilio and Wongrak (2017) identified test anxiety as a primary factor in students' English language anxiety.

Sarason (1984) emphasized that past negative experiences and fear of poor performance intensify test-related stress.

While students may feel relaxed during regular lessons, tests and fast-paced learning environments create anxiety, particularly due to fear of falling behind, fear of failure, and performance pressure. This confirms that test anxiety remains a significant factor contributing to foreign language anxiety among Thai EFL learners.



### **Summary of Highest Frequencies Across the Three FLCAS Factors**

The study found that Thai secondary students enrolled in foreign language study programs experience speaking anxiety, with at least some level of anxiety reflected in 17 out of 33 FLCAS items (5.61%). This indicates that experiencing anxiety is common among students in foreign language classrooms.

Among the three key factors measured: Test Anxiety was the most prominent source of anxiety, followed by Communication Apprehension, and Fear of Negative Evaluation.

These results align with Muengnakin (2023), who also found that test anxiety was the primary challenge for Thai EFL learners, especially during speaking assessments, where pressure to perform heightened their anxiety.

The findings suggest that test-related stress is the most significant contributor to speaking anxiety among Thai students, with communication apprehension and fear of peer judgment also playing important roles.

### **Additional opinions about ways participants handle their anxiety**

#### **Q1: What problems did you face when speaking English?**

The participants experienced some problems when speaking English such as a lack of confidence, pronunciation, ambiguous expression, and language adjustment to contexts. A lot of them were tense with sentence structure and concerned about pronunciation and vocabulary. The expression of low self-esteem was obvious, among the students being afraid of speaking with an imperfect accent and being avoided by others was a reason to have more anxiety and not speak up. Approximately 41.81 percent of the participants were severely challenged by not being confident due to the fear of errors and pronunciation problems, as well as negativity. This lack of confidence resulted in intimidation in communication because of fear of not being understood or even mocked. Such results correspond with the findings in the literature (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Zhang, 2011; Muengnakin, 2023), which documents a close relationship between anxiety and low self-esteem in language learning. The confidence of Thai students tended to be low compared to that of other

nations, accounting to fear and shyness. It is critical to note that teachers are a key factor; it is essential to create nonjudgmental but supportive surroundings that will help decrease anxiety and allow students to speak more willingly.

**Q2: What makes you feel anxious when you are speaking English in the classroom?**

This study identified key factors contributing to Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among Thai secondary students, particularly when speaking English in the classroom. Major sources of anxiety included fear of making mistakes, mispronunciation, incorrect grammar, and pressure from peers and teachers. Many students felt nervous about being judged, laughed at, or scolded, especially when called on unexpectedly or speaking in front of others. A lack of confidence in language proficiency and the belief that peers were more fluent further intensified these fears.

Among participants, 45.45% reported fear of speaking, 31.82% cited grammar and language usage concerns, while 7.27% and 5.45% referred to peer pressure and shyness, respectively. These findings align with previous research (Chen, 2023; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pan & Lou, 2023), highlighting FLA as a complex issue influenced by individual traits and classroom dynamics. As suggested by Wu (2024), and Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), reducing FLA requires supportive environments, personalized instruction, and gradual speaking exposure to build learner confidence.

**Q3: How do you handle your anxiety about speaking English with foreign teachers?**

**Give some examples.**

In response to the third open-ended question, Thai secondary students shared various strategies for managing anxiety when speaking English with foreign teachers. Many emphasized the importance of confidence, frequent practice, and regular interaction inside and outside the classroom. Students suggested preparing vocabulary and grammar in advance, using sign language or gestures when stuck, and utilizing language-learning apps or online resources to improve skills. Some also recommended breathing techniques and peer support to ease anxiety.

These insights align with previous research (Ellis, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986; Krashen, 1982), highlighting that authentic communication and consistent exposure help reduce anxiety and

build fluency. Mistakes were viewed as a natural part of the learning process (Dörnyei, 2009). Techniques such as reading aloud, speaking practice, and focusing on understanding rather than perfect grammar support confidence-building (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Overall, students highlighted the value of positive mindset, practical strategies, and regular engagement to manage speaking anxiety effectively.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The study is limited by participant group of 110 foreign languages study programs, whose familiarity with English and native speakers may lead to a narrow, language-focused perspective that does not represent students from other academic backgrounds.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Future research should include students from diverse majors and educational levels to gain a broader understanding of English-speaking anxiety. Comprehensive experimental methods, interviews, and exploration of anxiety in other English skills (listening, reading, writing) are recommended to identify specific factors and track anxiety development across educational stages.

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