

Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Skills: A Study of Non-English Major Students in a Thai University Context

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Abstract

English speaking anxiety is a significant barrier to language development among EFL learners, particularly those in non-English programs. This study examined the levels and sources of language anxiety related to speaking skills among non-English major students at a Thai university. Using a questionnaire-based design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data, data were collected from 66 first-year business program students enrolled in English for Everyday Life in the first semester of the 2025 academic year, selected through purposive sampling. The instrument comprised a closed-ended questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986) and an open-ended questionnaire adapted from Paranuwat (2011). The findings revealed that students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety ($M = 3.19$). Among the three FLCAS components, communication apprehension was the most prominent. Qualitatively, the primary sources of anxiety were low self-perception of ability and classroom practices, followed by fear of negative feedback and the role of teachers. These findings highlight the need for anxiety-aware pedagogical approaches in EFL classrooms, particularly for non-English major students.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, Speaking Skills, Non-English Major Students, Sources of Language Anxiety

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1. Introduction

English has become an indispensable tool for career and business success, functioning as a global lingua franca across diverse professional and academic contexts. Among the four language skills, speaking is considered the most challenging (Rao, 2019), and this difficulty often leads learners to struggle with oral performance under stress. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) noted that speaking anxiety caused many students to feel nervous, which negatively impacted their overall language learning.

In language education, this phenomenon is widely referred to as foreign language anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) described it as tension and apprehension specific to foreign language contexts, particularly in speaking, which can hinder students' ability to communicate confidently. More specifically, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined English-speaking anxiety as a negative emotional response triggered during communication in English. This issue is particularly pronounced for learners who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as English is not typically used in their everyday lives (Chaisiri, 2023).

In the Thai context, although speaking skills are important for effective communication, many EFL students continue to struggle with English-speaking anxiety, which negatively affects their speaking performance. Undergraduate students, especially those in non-English programs, face several challenges in English communication, including fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and insufficient English background knowledge (Thomol et al., 2024; Kulwattanapaisarn et al., 2022).

While several studies have examined public speaking and oral presentations (e.g., Kurakan, 2021; Kalra & Siribud, 2020), research specifically targeting English-speaking anxiety among students in business programs remains limited (Kulwattanapaisarn et al., 2022). This study therefore aimed to address this gap by examining the levels and sources of language anxiety related to speaking skills among non-English major students at a Thai university. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the levels of language anxiety on speaking skills among non-English major students at Thai university?
2. What factors contribute to speaking anxiety among non-English major students at a Thai university?

2. Literature review

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been widely recognized as a key affective factor in language acquisition. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualize it as a situation-specific phenomenon arising from the uniqueness of the foreign language learning process, involving self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors that interfere with learning. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) describe it as a complex phenomenon characterized by nervousness and tension related to learning or using a foreign language. As a broad concept, FLA covers anxiety that may occur in various language learning situations, both inside and outside the classroom (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Recent research has also shown that anxiety is not the only emotion learners experience in language learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), in a study of 1,746 FL learners worldwide, found that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) are different but related emotions, meaning that learners can experience both positive and negative feelings during language learning at the same time. Dewaele et al. (2018) further found that among 189 British high school students, higher FLE was linked to positive attitudes toward the language and the teacher, while lower FLCA was linked to positive attitudes and higher relative standing among peers. These findings suggest that to understand FLA, researchers should pay attention not only to anxiety but also to positive emotions that learners experience.

2.2 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

While FLA refers to anxiety in foreign language contexts in general, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) refers more specifically to anxiety that occurs during classroom activities (Horwitz et al., 1986). FLCA focuses on the pressures of performing in a classroom setting, such as speaking in front of peers and being evaluated by teachers (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Building on this foundation, Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three core components of FLCA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to shyness, nervousness, and difficulty expressing ideas in a foreign language. Test anxiety involves stress arising from fear of failure or unsatisfactory academic results. Fear of negative evaluation reflects apprehension about others' judgments and the expectation of being assessed unfavorably.

2.3 Speaking Anxiety in EFL Contexts

Speaking anxiety is a type of FLCA that is specifically related to oral performance. While FLCA covers anxiety across various classroom activities, speaking anxiety focuses on the difficulties and negative emotions learners experience when they are required to speak in a foreign language (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). Speaking is considered the most challenging of

the four language skills (Rao, 2019), and anxiety related to oral performance has been extensively documented among EFL learners. Horwitz et al. (1986) describe English-speaking anxiety as a fear and negative emotional response triggered during communication. This anxiety may lead to difficulty expressing ideas, limited classroom interaction, and reduced engagement in academic tasks (Bui, 2025).

In the Thai EFL context, Chaisiri (2023) noted that English instruction tends to prioritize grammar and reading over speaking, which limits students' opportunities to develop oral proficiency. Consequently, non-English major students often experience insecurity about their speaking ability, resulting in hesitation and reduced classroom participation (Ngo et al., 2025).

Research consistently identifies common sources of speaking anxiety across contexts, including fear of making mistakes, insufficient practice, and limited grammatical knowledge (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Faqihi, 2024; Ngo et al., 2025). In Thailand specifically, test anxiety, low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and teacher-related factors have been identified as primary sources (Chinpakdee, 2015; Suwannaprut, 2023). Past negative learning experiences have also been found to increase anxiety and reduce students' willingness to participate in speaking activities (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021; Kalra & Siribud, 2020).

2.4 Sources of Language Anxiety

Luo (2012) proposes a four-dimensional model of foreign language anxiety sources, adapted from Young's (1991) framework, consisting of classroom environment, learner characteristics, target language, and foreign language learning.

The classroom environment encompasses three aspects: the role of teachers, classroom practices, and relationships among students. Teacher behaviors such as constant error correction and evaluation can heighten learner anxiety, while classroom activities such as presentations, random questioning, and role plays often provoke anxiety when students encounter unfamiliar tasks. Peer dynamics also contribute, as students fear negative judgment or mockery from classmates (Mahasin et al., 2025).

Learner characteristics represent another significant source of anxiety. Young (1991) identifies perfectionism, fear of negative feedback, low self-esteem, low self-perception of ability, and embarrassment as key learner-related factors. Perfectionist students tend to set excessively high standards and fear making mistakes, leading to higher anxiety levels compared to non-perfectionists (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Low self-perception of ability reflects learners' doubts about their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar competence, while embarrassment manifests through silence, mispronunciation, and avoidance behaviors in the classroom (Young, 1991).

The target language itself can also be a source of anxiety, as its unfamiliar grammar, structure, and sound system present considerable challenges for learners (Young, 1991).

Finally, foreign language learning as a broader process involves the simultaneous development of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and the demands of this multi-skill acquisition can contribute to anxiety, particularly in speaking performance (Young, 1991).

2.5 The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

The FLCAS, developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), remains the most widely used instrument for measuring language anxiety in classroom settings. Its validity has been tested across multiple contexts: Aida (1994) extended the scale with American learners of Japanese, while Liu and Jackson (2008) applied it to Chinese EFL learners and found that communication apprehension was the dominant anxiety component, followed by fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The FLCAS has also been widely used in Thai studies, including those by Thomol et al. (2024), Kulwattanapaisarn et al. (2022), and Guzman (2022). To address the specific focus on speaking anxiety in this study, items were supplemented from additional scales. Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) developed a public speaking anxiety scale for Thai learners, while Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) and Toubot et al. (2018) designed instruments targeting speaking anxiety specifically. Additional items were drawn from Uttaranakorn (2020) and Paranuwat (2011). Together, these instruments formed the basis of the adapted questionnaire used in this study.

2.6 Previous Studies

Research on speaking anxiety among EFL learners has been conducted across various international contexts. Faqihi (2024) reported moderate anxiety levels among Saudi EFL students, with lack of preparation, limited vocabulary, and teacher-related issues as key obstacles. Nguyen (2023) found that 69% of non-English major students in Vietnam experienced moderate speaking anxiety, primarily linked to low language proficiency. Abrar et al. (2022) identified fear of evaluation and concerns about professional English competency as main anxiety sources among Indonesian pre-service teachers. Naser and Isa (2021) found moderate anxiety among Malaysian undergraduates, noting that presentation skills remained weak despite satisfactory academic results. Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) similarly reported moderate anxiety among Saudi female EFL students, attributing it to fear of mistakes, forced participation, and negative teacher attitudes.

In Thailand, comparable findings have emerged. Thomol et al. (2024) found that communication apprehension was the primary source of speaking anxiety among students at Udon Thani Rajabhat University. Suwannaprut (2023) reported high anxiety related to grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and fear of negative evaluation among non-English majors. Guzman (2022) found high speaking anxiety among students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, though academic performance remained strong. Kulwattanapaisarn et al. (2022) identified fear of being less competent than peers and test anxiety as significant sources among business communication students. Akaraphattanawong (2020) further noted

that students with lower proficiency experienced greater anxiety, particularly in communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

Collectively, these studies suggest that EFL speaking anxiety is a persistent and multidimensional challenge. However, most prior research has relied on a single measurement instrument and has focused primarily on quantitative outcomes. This study sought to address this limitation by integrating the FLCAS with items from additional speaking-focused scales and incorporating qualitative data to capture students' own perspectives on their anxiety sources.

3. Methodology

This study investigated the levels and sources of English-speaking anxiety among non-English major students at a Thai university. A questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, with the closed-ended section measuring anxiety levels and the open-ended section capturing students' perspectives on the sources of their anxiety.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 66 first-year undergraduate students majoring in business programs, specifically in marketing and management, at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. They were selected through purposive sampling, as business students were considered particularly relevant given that strong oral communication skills are essential in professional and multinational business environments (Rao, 2019; Bui, 2025). In addition, these students were accessible to the researchers as they were enrolled in the same course, which also made the sampling partly convenience-based. It should be noted that the findings of this study are specific to this particular group of students and may not be directly generalizable to all EFL learners. However, the results may be transferable to similar contexts involving non-English major students with comparable backgrounds. All participants were enrolled in English for Everyday Life (01355101) during the first semester of the 2025 academic year.

3.2 Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection, consisting of three sections. Section 1 gathered background information, including participants' gender, age, major, years of English study, and self-perceived English-speaking ability. Section 2 comprised 30 closed-ended items measuring speaking anxiety levels, adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986) as the main framework, with additional items drawn from Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014), Yaikhong and Usaha (2012), Toubot et al. (2018), and Uttaranakorn (2020). Section 3 consisted of 8 open-ended items exploring students' perspectives on the sources of their speaking anxiety, adapted from Paranuwat (2011). Both sections were administered in Thai using a back-translation technique

adapted from Akaraphattanawong (2020) to ensure comprehension among non-English major participants.

The 30 closed-ended items were distributed across the three FLCAS components as follows: items 1–10 measured communication apprehension, items 11–22 measured test anxiety, and items 23–30 measured fear of negative evaluation. The majority of items were adapted from the original FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986), while additional items from other scales were selected because they addressed speaking-specific anxiety situations that were not fully covered by the original FLCAS. These items were reviewed and placed under the FLCAS component that best matched their content, based on the judgment of the researchers and the expert reviewers who assessed the instrument's content validity through the IOC index. This approach aimed to maintain the coherence of the FLCAS framework while expanding its coverage to include speaking-specific situations relevant to the Thai EFL context.

It should be noted that item 11, “I feel excited when my teacher calls me in the English class,” was placed under the test anxiety component. In the Thai-language version of the questionnaire, the word used was “ตื่นเต้น,” which in Thai carries the meaning of both excitement and nervousness. Therefore, in this context, the item was intended to capture the anxiety that students feel when being called upon by the teacher, rather than positive excitement.

Content validity was established through review by three expert professors at the same institution, using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire underwent significant revision, including refinement of the Thai translation, consolidation of the theoretical framework to a single scale, and replacement of the originally planned semi-structured interview with an open-ended questionnaire due to time constraints. The revised instrument was reviewed twice by the same experts before receiving final approval from the study advisor.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from 18 to 22 September 2025 in classrooms at the LLB building. The researchers obtained permission from the course instructor prior to administration. Participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 20 minutes, and all responses were collected immediately upon completion. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Quantitative data from Section 2 were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean (*M*), and standard deviation (*SD*), calculated using Google Sheets. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), and mean scores were interpreted according to the criteria adapted from Akkakoson (2016): 1.00–1.80 = very low anxiety, 1.81–2.60 = low anxiety, 2.61–3.40 = moderate anxiety, 3.41–4.20 = high anxiety, and 4.21–5.00 = very high anxiety. Qualitative data from Section 3 were analyzed using content analysis to identify and categorize recurring

themes related to sources of speaking anxiety. The responses were read and coded by the researchers, and recurring themes were identified and grouped into categories based on Luo's (2012) framework of learner characteristics and classroom environment. The categories were then reviewed by the research team to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' responses.

4. Findings

4.1 Research Question 1: Levels of Language Anxiety on Speaking Skills

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for all 30 items of the speaking anxiety questionnaire. The overall mean score was 3.19 ($SD = 1.20$), indicating a moderate level of speaking anxiety among the participants (Akkakoson, 2016). Across all items, mean scores ranged from 2.20 to 4.05, with the majority falling within the moderate anxiety range (2.61–3.40).

Within the Communication Apprehension component, the highest-scoring item was item 3: "I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation" ($M = 3.91$), suggesting that unplanned speaking situations were a particular source of stress. Item 6: "I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students" ($M = 3.64$) also scored notably high, indicating that performing in front of peers contributed substantially to apprehension. The lowest-scoring item in this component was item 9: "I get upset when I do not understand what the teacher is correcting" ($M = 2.48$), though it still reflected low-to-moderate anxiety.

Within the Test Anxiety component, item 11: "I feel excited when my teacher calls me in the English class" ($M = 3.98$) and item 15: "Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about the English speaking test" ($M = 3.58$) were among the highest-scoring items, reflecting persistent anxiety surrounding teacher-initiated interactions and formal assessments regardless of preparation. The lowest-scoring item in this component was item 17: "The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get" ($M = 2.23$).

Within the Fear of Negative Evaluation component, item 25: "I get nervous when the teacher asks questions that I have not prepared in advance" yielded the highest mean score across all 30 items ($M = 4.05$), highlighting unprepared questioning as the single greatest anxiety trigger. Item 27: "I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English" ($M = 3.53$) also scored relatively high, suggesting anticipatory anxiety as a notable concern. The lowest-scoring item in this component was item 29: "I have trouble coordinating my movements while I am speaking English" ($M = 2.20$), indicating that physical symptoms of anxiety were less pronounced among participants.

Overall, the items with the highest anxiety scores across all three components — items 25 ($M = 4.05$), 11 ($M = 3.98$), and 3 ($M = 3.91$) — share a common pattern: they all involve

situations where students are required to speak without adequate preparation time. This pattern may reflect the teacher-fronted nature of many Thai EFL classrooms, where students are often expected to respond to teacher-initiated questions on the spot (Chinpakdee, 2015). In such a setting, unprepared speaking may feel particularly threatening because students have limited time to plan their responses or check their vocabulary and grammar before speaking. In contrast, the lowest-scoring items across all components — items 29 ($M = 2.20$), 17 ($M = 2.23$), and 9 ($M = 2.48$) — suggest that physical symptoms and confusion from studying were less common sources of anxiety among these participants.

Table 1 Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of English-speaking Anxiety Questionnaire Items

No.	Item	M	SD
Communication Apprehension			
1	I get nervous when I do not understand every word my English teacher says.	3.41	0.93
2	I feel overwhelmed by the number of words I have to learn to speak English.	3.24	1.05
3	I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation.	3.91	1.17
4	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.	3.23	1.02
5	I get nervous when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English.	3.26	1.21
6	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	3.64	1.17
7	I am never quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English.	3.23	1.20
8	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	3.21	1.18
9	I get upset when I do not understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.48	1.18
10	I feel confident when I speak in English class. (R)	3.24	1.11
Test Anxiety			
11	I feel excited when my teacher calls me in the English class.	3.98	1.07
12	In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.42	1.14
13	I feel more tense and nervous in my English-speaking test than in other courses.	3.08	1.38
14	When I am on my way to do my English-speaking test, I feel very sure and relaxed. (R)	3.36	1.29
15	Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about the English-speaking test.	3.58	1.12
16	I worry about the consequences of failing in my English class.	3.55	1.30
17	The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get.	2.23	1.15
18	I do not feel stressed about preparing very well for the English-speaking test. (R)	2.97	1.33
19	English lessons move so quickly that I often worry that I will not be able to keep up with my friends.	2.86	1.24
20	I am usually at ease during tests in my English class. (R)	3.32	1.39
21	It would not bother me at all to take more English language classes. (R)	2.91	1.27
22	I often feel like not going to my English-speaking test.	2.64	1.40
Fear of Negative Evaluation			
23	It embarrasses me to volunteer and answer in my English class.	3.23	1.21

No.	Item	M	SD
24	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	3.05	1.32
25	I get nervous when the teacher asks questions that I have not prepared in advance.	4.05	0.92
26	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	3.11	1.46
27	I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English.	3.53	1.11
28	Some parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am speaking English.	2.73	1.20
29	I have trouble coordinating my movements while I am speaking English.	2.20	1.19
30	I do not worry about making mistakes in speaking English. (R)	3.21	1.23
Total		3.19	1.20

(R) = Reverse-scored item. Source: Adapted from Horwitz et al., 1986

Among the three FLCAS components, communication apprehension yielded the highest mean score ($M = 3.26$), followed by test anxiety ($M = 3.18$) and fear of negative evaluation ($M = 3.14$), all falling within the moderate range, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean Scores by FLCAS Component

Component	M	Anxiety Level
Communication apprehension	3.26	Moderate
Test anxiety	3.18	Moderate
Fear of negative evaluation	3.14	Moderate
Total	3.19	Moderate

Source: Adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986); calculations by the authors

When participants were classified by individual anxiety level, the majority reported moderate anxiety (48.48%), followed by high anxiety (31.82%) and low anxiety (19.70%), as shown in Table 3. It is worth noting that nearly one-third of the participants experienced high anxiety, which suggests that although the overall group mean falls in the moderate range, a considerable number of students may need additional support in managing their speaking anxiety.

Table 3 Distribution of Participants by Anxiety Level

Anxiety Level	n	%
High	21	31.82
Moderate	32	48.48
Low	13	19.70
Total	66	100

These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting moderate speaking anxiety among EFL learners, including Nguyen (2023), Suwannaprut (2023), Guzman (2022), and Faqihi (2024), whose participants similarly identified unprepared questioning, fear of mistakes, and negative evaluation as prominent anxiety triggers.

4.2 Research Question 2: Sources of Language Anxiety on Speaking Skills

Content analysis of the open-ended responses revealed two primary sources of speaking anxiety among the participants: learner characteristics and classroom environment. These two categories align with the theoretical framework proposed by Luo (2012), which identifies learner-related and contextual factors as key dimensions of foreign language anxiety. Within each category, multiple themes emerged from students' responses, reflecting the diverse and overlapping nature of anxiety sources in the EFL classroom. Table 4 summarizes the frequency and percentage of each identified theme across the participant group ($N = 66$).

Table 4 *Summary of Content Analysis on Sources of Speaking Anxiety*

Source	Theme	n	%
Learner Characteristics	Low self-perception of ability	46	69.70
	Fear of negative feedback	31	46.97
	Low self-esteem	11	16.67
	Embarrassment	6	9.09
	Perfectionism	4	6.06
Classroom Environment	Classroom practices	45	68.18
	Role of teachers	31	46.97
	Relationships among students	9	13.64

As shown in Table 4, learner characteristics accounted for the most frequently reported sources of anxiety overall, with low self-perception of ability (69.70%) and fear of negative feedback (46.97%) emerging as the two dominant themes. Classroom environment was equally prominent, with classroom practices (68.18%) and the role of teachers (46.97%) cited at comparable rates.

It should be noted that some of the learner characteristic themes — particularly low self-perception of ability, fear of negative feedback, low self-esteem, and embarrassment — are closely related and may overlap in some cases. In this study, these themes were distinguished as follows: low self-perception of ability refers to students' doubts about their own language skills, such as limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and difficulty making sentences. Fear of negative feedback refers to the worry about being judged, criticized, or

laughed at by others. Low self-esteem refers to a general lack of confidence and discomfort when being observed by others in the classroom. Embarrassment refers specifically to the feeling of shame when making public mistakes. Although these themes are related, they were treated as separate categories because they reflect different aspects of students' anxiety experiences, as described in their own responses.

The following sections describe each theme in detail, supported by representative quotes from participants.

Learner Characteristics

The most frequently cited learner-related source was low self-perception of ability (69.70%), with 46 students reporting that limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and difficulty constructing sentences caused anxiety during speaking tasks. Representative responses included:

"I am not good at making sentences. I can read, but I cannot translate and write some words, and sometimes I might pronounce words wrong." (Respondent 3)

"I am afraid of answering the wrong questions. Consequently, I cannot arrange the answer in my head, and I do not know what I have to say." (Respondent 43)

Fear of negative feedback was the second most common source (46.97%), reported by 31 students who expressed anxiety about being judged, criticized, or mocked by peers and teachers:

"I feel fear because I remember my previous experiences of being insulted or laughed at when speaking English." (Respondent 54)

"I am afraid of answering incorrectly, and I am afraid of speaking in front of the class because I understand the teacher's question, but I do not know how to arrange the structure." (Respondent 18)

Low self-esteem was identified by 11 students (16.67%), who reported a lack of confidence and discomfort under classroom observation:

"I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking because it makes me lose confidence." (Respondent 8)

"I feel pressured by the teacher's gaze and the silence of the classroom atmosphere where all eyes are on me." (Respondent 39)

Embarrassment was reported by 6 students (9.09%), linked to the fear of public mistakes and direct criticism:

"When I pronounce English words, I am afraid that I will be scolded by the teacher, which makes me feel embarrassed." (Respondent 35)

"I do not like answering questions in front of the class, because there are many people looking at me, which makes me feel embarrassed when I speak incorrectly." (Respondent 45)

Perfectionism was the least frequently cited learner characteristic (6.06%), reported by 4 students who held high personal standards and feared that any mistake would reflect poorly on their ability:

"I feel both excited and anxious because my speaking skills are not as good as they should be." (Respondent 42)

"I feel nervous about giving the wrong answer because I do not like the moment when the correct answer is revealed. Moreover, I worry that my answer might not match the question, which could make me seem unintelligent or lazy." (Respondent 53)

Classroom Environment

Classroom practices were the most frequently cited environmental source (68.18%), with 45 students reporting anxiety when required to speak in front of the class, respond to questions, or perform during assessments:

"Listening comprehension tests make me anxious because I worry that there might be some words I don't understand, and those words might carry the key meaning of the sentence." (Respondent 8)

"I feel anxious when I have to go in front of the class to answer a question or perform a dialogue while holding a microphone." (Respondent 61)

The role of teachers was identified by 31 students (46.97%) as a significant source of anxiety, with teacher behaviors such as sarcasm, excessive pressure, and critical feedback contributing to reluctance to participate:

"The teacher often uses too much sarcasm with students. Some of the words might discourage a student so much that they no longer want to learn English." (Respondent 52)

"I do not like when teachers put too much pressure on students because teachers are the main factor influencing whether students want to come to class." (Respondent 39)

Relationships among students were cited by 9 participants (13.64%), reflecting anxiety stemming from fear of peer judgment and mockery:

"I feel uncomfortable when my classmates' eyes are on me because it makes me nervous." (Respondent 44)

"When I make a mistake while speaking, I feel anxious that my classmates will laugh at me." (Respondent 63)

5. Discussion

5.1 Levels of Speaking Anxiety Among Non-English Major Students

The quantitative results revealed that non-English major students at a Thai university experienced a moderate level of English-speaking anxiety, with an overall mean score of 3.19 ($SD = 1.20$). Among the three FLCAS components, communication apprehension was the highest ($M = 3.26$), followed by test anxiety ($M = 3.18$) and fear of negative evaluation ($M = 3.14$), all falling within the moderate range (Akkakoson, 2016). This pattern is consistent with Liu and Jackson (2008), who found that communication apprehension was the dominant anxiety component among EFL learners, suggesting that students continue to experience insecurity when speaking English in front of others regardless of context. The predominance of communication apprehension in this study further supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) model, which emphasized that oral performance has a direct impact on foreign language learning.

However, it is worth noting that the mean scores of all three components were very close to one another (ranging from 3.14 to 3.26), with a difference of only 0.12 between the highest and lowest component. This suggests that for the participants in this study, speaking anxiety was not driven by one single component but rather by a combination of all three factors. This finding is somewhat different from studies such as Thomol et al. (2024), where communication apprehension was clearly the most dominant component. The relatively even distribution of anxiety across all three components in this study may reflect the particular characteristics of non-English major business students, who face not only classroom speaking tasks but also the pressure of future professional English use in business settings.

When participants were classified by anxiety level, 48.48% fell in the moderate category, followed by high anxiety (31.82%) and low anxiety (19.70%). These findings are consistent with Nguyen (2023), who reported that 69% of non-English major students at a Vietnamese university experienced moderate speaking anxiety, primarily linked to low language proficiency. Similarly, Kulwattanapaisarn et al. (2022) found that Thai university students reported moderate anxiety stemming from fear of negative feedback, being called upon to speak, and lack of preparation. Taken together, these results suggest that moderate speaking anxiety is a common and persistent challenge among non-English major EFL learners across different institutional contexts.

An important finding in this study is that the items with the highest anxiety scores (items 25, 11, and 3) all involve situations where students must speak without preparation. This pattern is particularly relevant to the Thai EFL context, where classroom instruction has traditionally been teacher-fronted, with teachers controlling the flow of interaction through direct questioning and calling on individual students (Chinpakdee, 2015; Chaisiri, 2023). In such classrooms, students have limited control over when and how they are required to speak, which may increase their sense of vulnerability. Furthermore, Thai cultural values such as

kreng jai (being considerate of others and avoiding confrontation) and concern for *face* (avoiding public embarrassment) may make students particularly sensitive to situations where they might make mistakes in front of peers and teachers (Kalra & Siribud, 2020). These cultural factors may help explain why unprepared, teacher-initiated speaking tasks produce especially high anxiety levels among Thai students, compared to contexts where classroom interaction is more student-centered and collaborative.

5.2 Sources of Speaking Anxiety Among Non-English Major Students

The qualitative findings identified two primary sources of speaking anxiety: learner characteristics and classroom environment, consistent with Luo's (2012) four-dimensional model of foreign language anxiety sources.

Within learner characteristics, low self-perception of ability was the most frequently cited source (69.70%), indicating that students' doubts about their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation were central contributors to anxiety. Students appeared highly focused on accuracy and reported mental blocks that made it difficult to speak effectively. These findings align with Nguyen (2023) and Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020), who similarly identified low language ability as a primary source of foreign language anxiety. The high frequency of this source in the present study may be related to the fact that non-English major students in Thailand typically have fewer English course hours and less exposure to English communication compared to English major students, which may lead them to feel less confident about their language ability (Chaisiri, 2023).

Fear of negative feedback was the second most prominent learner characteristic (46.97%). Students who had experienced past mockery or criticism reported greater hesitation to engage in speaking tasks. This is consistent with Chinpakdee (2015), who found that fear of negative evaluation was a common and persistent source of anxiety among Thai EFL learners. Several students in this study specifically mentioned past experiences of being laughed at or insulted when speaking English, suggesting that negative experiences in earlier learning contexts can have a lasting impact on students' willingness to speak. This finding supports Sugiyati and Indriani (2021), who argued that past negative learning experiences can shape learners' anxiety responses in future speaking situations.

Low self-esteem was reported by 16.67% of participants, who described how the fear of making mistakes and the discomfort of being observed by peers and teachers diminished their confidence. This finding aligns with Kalra and Siribud (2020), who found that speaking anxiety reduced self-esteem and confidence among Thai EFL students.

Embarrassment was cited by 9.09% of participants, who reported that the classroom setting heightened the risk of public failure and negative attention. This corresponds with Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), who noted that embarrassment could lead students to withdraw from participation in order to protect themselves from shame.

Perfectionism, while the least frequently cited source (6.06%), reflected a pattern in which students perceived any mistake as a significant failure. This aligns with Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), who found that perfectionist learners tend to experience higher anxiety levels than their non-perfectionist peers.

Within classroom environment, classroom practices were the most frequently cited source (68.18%). Students reported anxiety linked to activities such as speaking in front of the class, role-plays, and listening tests. These findings reinforce Horwitz et al. (1986), who identified classroom activities as key anxiety triggers, particularly during unfamiliar or unprepared tasks. It is notable that the frequency of this source (68.18%) was almost as high as low self-perception of ability (69.70%), suggesting that for these students, the classroom environment played an equally important role in creating anxiety as their own self-perceived language limitations. This finding highlights the importance of how speaking tasks are designed and implemented in the classroom, as the format and delivery of activities may be just as influential as students' actual language ability in shaping their anxiety levels.

The role of teachers was cited by 46.97% of participants, who described how excessive pressure, sarcasm, and critical feedback created an anxiety-inducing rather than supportive classroom atmosphere. This is consistent with Faqihi (2024), who found that harsh teacher evaluation and lack of support significantly increased students' anxiety and reduced classroom participation. In the Thai educational context, where teachers are traditionally viewed as authority figures and students are expected to show respect and obedience, negative teacher behaviors may have a stronger impact on students' willingness to speak than in more egalitarian classroom cultures. Dewaele et al. (2018) found that teacher-related variables significantly influenced learners' emotional experiences in the classroom, which supports the importance of teacher behavior as a factor in language anxiety.

Relationships among students, cited by 13.64% of participants, reflected anxiety arising from fear of peer judgment and mockery during speaking activities. These findings are supported by Mahasin et al. (2025), who found that negative peer dynamics led students to avoid interaction in the language classroom.

Overall, the primary sources of speaking anxiety in this study were low self-perception of ability (69.70%) and classroom practices (68.18%), closely followed by fear of negative feedback and the role of teachers (both 46.97%). These findings are broadly consistent with prior research conducted in Thailand and internationally, confirming that speaking anxiety among non-English major EFL students is shaped by both internal learner factors and external classroom conditions.

While these findings are largely consistent with previous research, the present study contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, by combining the FLCAS with open-ended questions, this study was able to show that the quantitative anxiety levels reported by

students were closely connected to specific classroom experiences and learner concerns identified through their own words. For example, the high anxiety scores on items related to unprepared speaking were directly reflected in qualitative responses about classroom practices and teacher behavior. Second, while most previous studies in Thailand have focused on English major students or students in English programs (e.g., Thomol et al., 2024; Guzman, 2022), this study provides evidence that non-English major business students experience similar patterns of speaking anxiety, suggesting that anxiety-aware teaching practices should be extended to all EFL courses, not only those in English programs.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the levels and sources of English-speaking anxiety among first-year non-English major students at a Thai university. The findings revealed that students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety ($M = 3.19$), with all three FLCAS components — communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation — falling within the moderate range. Qualitative analysis further identified two primary sources of anxiety: learner characteristics, particularly low self-perception of ability and fear of negative feedback, and classroom environment, particularly classroom practices and the role of teachers.

These findings have practical implications for EFL instruction. Instructors teaching non-English major students should be mindful of the anxiety-inducing potential of unprepared speaking tasks and critical feedback styles. Creating a low-pressure classroom environment, providing adequate preparation time before speaking activities, and offering constructive rather than evaluative feedback may help reduce students' speaking anxiety and encourage greater participation.

Based on the findings, several specific recommendations are proposed for EFL instructors working with non-English major students. First, instructors should reduce the use of cold-calling or random questioning without notice and instead provide preparation time before speaking tasks, such as using think-pair-share activities or small group discussions. Second, instructors should avoid correcting every mistake during speaking, especially in front of the whole class, and instead use selective error correction that focuses on errors affecting meaning. Third, since nearly one-third of the participants experienced high anxiety, instructors should consider offering gradual exposure to speaking tasks — starting from pair work, then small groups, before moving to whole-class presentations. Finally, instructors should build a supportive classroom culture where mistakes are treated as a normal part of learning, as peer relationships and fear of being laughed at were also cited as sources of anxiety.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 66 participants was relatively small and drawn from a single course at one university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond this specific context. Second, data collection was confined to a limited timeframe, which may not fully capture the range of anxiety experiences among non-English major students more broadly. Third, the study relied solely on questionnaire data, without supplementary observations or interviews, which may have restricted the depth of insight into students' psychological and emotional responses during speaking activities. Fourth, reliability statistics such as Cronbach's alpha were not computed for the adapted questionnaire, which means that the internal consistency of the instrument in the present context has not been confirmed.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. The scope of investigation should be broadened to include students from diverse majors and academic years at multiple institutions to enable more representative findings. Employing additional qualitative methods, such as interviews or classroom observations, would provide richer and more nuanced accounts of students' anxiety experiences. Future studies using adapted instruments should also report reliability evidence to strengthen the validity of the findings. Further studies examining the influence of teaching styles, online learning environments, and emotional intervention strategies on speaking anxiety would also contribute meaningfully to this area. In addition, future research could explore the relationship between speaking anxiety and positive emotions such as foreign language enjoyment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), as understanding both negative and positive emotions may lead to more effective strategies for supporting EFL learners in the classroom.

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