



## English Speaking Anxiety Among Undergraduate Students at Rangsit University

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### Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate levels and causes of anxiety in speaking English. The population was undergraduate students at Rangsit University who enrolled in ENL 112: Intermediate English Listening and Speaking course in the second semester of the academic year 2017 and summer semester of the academic year 2018. The sample group consists of 241 students selected using a simple random sampling method. The quantitative research instrument used to collect the data was a questionnaire from Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) which was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The collected data were analyzed by arithmetic mean, percentage, and standard deviation. Regarding the four main factors of English public speaking anxiety, overall, it was found that undergraduate students had a moderate level of English speaking anxiety with a mean score of 3.36. The results revealed that the highest level was found in factor two "Test anxiety" ( $\bar{x} = 3.72$ ). In terms of the test anxiety, students were agreed with item 1, "I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English." and item 7, "I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance". Second to that was factor one "Communication apprehension" ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ), factor three "Fear of negative evaluation" ( $\bar{x} = 3.43$ ), and factor four "Comfort in using English" ( $\bar{x} = 3.18$ ) which were found the highest causes with item 2, "I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation in advance.", item 9, "I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on.", and item 10, "I feel relaxed while I am speaking English" being the highest rated item for each factor, respectively.

**Keywords:** *Speaking anxiety, Factor of anxieties, Anxiety level, English speaking*

### 1. Introduction

According to the international rankings by the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) (2018), the current English learning in Thailand does not come up to what many scholars have expected. Thailand's English proficiency is in a low position when compared to neighboring countries. In 2018, EF EPI ranked Thailand in 64th place out of 88 countries, and with an average score of 48.54. Thailand was categorized in the "low proficiency" band (Education First English Proficiency Index, 2018).

Anxiety is one of the main reasons why Thai people avoid communicating with foreigners. Most Thai people get frustrated to communicate with foreigners, especially via a foreign language. They feel embarrassed by their foreign language skills and become afraid when they are seen as being less competent than others. It can be said that anxiety affects foreign language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, (1986) stated that anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

Psychologists distinguished several categories of anxiety. Typically, anxiety as a personality trait is differentiated from a transient anxiety state (Horwitz, 2001). Anxiety can be divided into three categories: trait anxiety, situational anxiety, and state anxiety. Language anxiety is recognized as a construct of situation-specific anxiety, mainly independent of the other types of anxiety (Levitt, 1980 cited in Yaikhong, & Usaha, 2012). Thirty-three items of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) have always been used to determine English language anxiety. Three main components of language anxiety were communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Even though Thai students have spent approximately 9 to 20 years studying English in basic education, many of them have not achieved a high level of English competency. Shabani (2012) found that the main sources of language anxiety were fear of failing class, unpreparedness of teachers' questions, and fear of forgetting vocabulary and structures. According to Yiamsawat (2016), it is also said that English language teachers should enhance their students' performance and reduce language classroom anxiety by creating a friendly and relaxing classroom atmosphere, encouraging students' involvement in pair and



group work activities and providing appropriate and useful activities for their students. A study by Plangkham (2011) revealed that most students had different levels of anxiety in English public speaking courses. Students expressed a high level of anxiety at pre-preparation and performance stages while they showed a moderately high level of anxiety at preparation and pre-performance stages. As concluded by Mohamad and Wahid (2009), the respondents' English language anxiety levels vary depending on the situation.

Undergraduate students at Rangsit University have to take up at least 2 units from a selection of the English foundation courses. All English foundation classes were mixed-ability classes. Most of the students were from different faculties. Some of them had a high-level English language background while the others had a little English background knowledge.

ENL 112: Intermediate English Listening and Speaking course is a subject under general education required courses. All of the undergraduate students at Rangsit University have to take this course because it is a required subject on their curriculum. The researcher was interested in studying the causes of English speaking anxiety of Rangsit University students. It is hoped that the findings of the study can help students become aware of the causes and reduce their fear in speaking English. Students can find ways to overcome their anxiety problems. Moreover, pedagogical implications are offered to help English teachers find ways to reduce students' anxiety as well as design the courses suitable for students' abilities.

## 2. Objectives

The study aimed to identify the levels of anxiety in speaking English of undergraduate students at Rangsit University. The causes of anxiety in speaking English among students were also investigated.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 Subjects

The population of this study was 608 undergraduate students at Rangsit University who enrolled in ENL 112: Intermediate English Listening and Speaking course in the second semester of the academic year 2017 and summer semester of the academic year 2018. All of them were from the group of faculties in these areas: (1) Science and Health, (2) Humanities and Social Science, (3) Art and Design, (4) Engineering and Technology, and (5) Economics and Business. A simple random sampling technique was employed to cull a sample group of 241 students to participate in this study. According to Yamane's (1973) formula, 241 participants were established as a suitable sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

$n$  = sample size  $N$  = population  $e$  = error of sampling method = 0.05

$$241 = 608 / (1 + (608 \times 0.0025))$$

### 3.2 Instrument

In this research, a questionnaire was used to gather information relating to students' anxiety in speaking English. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part dealt with the respondents' background information whereas the second part contained a set of 17 questions from Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) (Yaikhong, & Usaha 2012) which was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986). The questionnaire was created using a five-point Likert rating scale which included four factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and comfort in using English.

### 3.3 Data collection

The data were collected from 241 subjects during the second semester of the academic year 2017 and the summer semester of the academic year 2018. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires by using a Google Form.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The raw data were analyzed through descriptive statistic: arithmetic mean, percentage, and standard deviation. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the students' anxiety. Weighted scores were used for question 10 in the first section: types of instructional media always used in daily life.



## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Results

**Table 1** General Background information of the respondents

General Background	Mostly found item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	152	63.00
Age	21-23 years old	181	75.10
Year levels of the respondents	4th Year	107	44.50
Faculty	Humanity-Social Science	130	54.09
English learning experience	18-20 years	89	37.11
English speaking competence level	Average	104	43.00
English use in daily life	Rarely	108	44.90
English language ability of the respondents	Listening Skill	128	52.60
Preference toward English language of the respondents	Like	146	60.58
types of instructional media always use in daily life	YouTube	204	84.65

Out of 241 respondents, there were more female students compared to male students. Most of them were between 21-23 years old from fourth-year students. The group of Humanity-Social Science faculties was the majority of respondents. The average number of years that the respondents had learned English was 18-20 years. Most of them rarely used English in daily life. However, their English language ability was at a moderate level. 146 students said that they liked the English language because they thought that the English language is important for communication between people, especially between foreigners. Also, it was found that “YouTube” was the instructional media they used most frequently in daily life.

**Table 2** Level of English speaking anxiety of undergraduate students at Rangsit University

Anxiety measurement in speaking English	Item/ Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Interpretation
Factor One: Communication apprehension	2. I start to panic when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance.	3.91	0.74	High
	3. In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.74	0.77	High
	5. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English.	3.70	0.73	High
	15. I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English.	3.00	0.81	Moderate
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
Factor Two: Test anxiety	1. I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English.	3.80	0.83	High
	7. I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance.	3.80	0.79	High
	17. Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about speaking English.	3.56	0.82	Moderate
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>High</b>
Factor Three: Fear of negative evaluation	6. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English.	3.22	1.10	Moderate
	9. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on.	3.71	0.85	High
	11. It embarrasses me to volunteer to go out first to speak English.	3.69	0.82	High



Anxiety measurement in speaking English	Item/ Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Interpretation
	13. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am speaking English.	3.32	0.86	Moderate
	14. I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English.	3.70	0.76	High
	16. I have trouble to coordinate my movements while I am speaking English.	3.22	0.77	Moderate
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
Factor Four: Comfort in using English	4. I feel confident while I am speaking English.	3.24	0.78	Moderate
	8. I have no fear of speaking English.	3.20	0.90	Moderate
	10. I feel relaxed while I am speaking English.	3.35	0.80	Moderate
	12. I face the prospect of speaking English with confidence.	2.92	0.67	Moderate
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

A Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) included four factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and comfort in speaking. The results demonstrated that the overall anxiety in speaking English in the classroom of undergraduate students at Rangsit University was at a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.36. The highest level was found in factor two “Test anxiety” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.72). Thus, it can be said that test anxiety was the biggest problem of undergraduate students. In addition, factor one “Communication apprehension” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.59), factor three “Fear of negative evaluation” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.43) and factor four “Comfort in using English” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.18) were all found at a moderate level.

#### The causes of anxiety in speaking English of undergraduate students at Rangsit University

The participants gave the highest response ( $\bar{x}$  =3.91) to item 2 “I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation in advance”. This item was the major cause of anxiety in speaking English. It was under factor “Communication apprehension”. It can be suggested that most of the undergraduate students could not speak English without preparation. Some of them ( $\bar{x}$  =3.80) agreed with item 1 and item 7, the cause from factor “Test anxiety”. For item 1 “I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English”, it was found that some of the undergraduate students had a low level of self-confidence in speaking English. As for item 7, “I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance”, the results indicated that they would likely forget what they need to speak in their class. In addition, for the factor “fear of negative evaluation”, they agreed with item 9 ( $\bar{x}$  =3.71), “I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on”, which means that most of the respondents were excited if they were going to be called on in the language classroom. Moreover, the factor “Comfort in using English” showed that the cause of anxiety in speaking English is item 10, “I feel relaxed while I am speaking English” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.35).

#### 4.2 Discussions

To address the research questions, the two main aspects of findings including levels and causes of English speaking anxiety were discussed in this section.

Research question 1: What level is English speaking anxiety of undergraduate students at Rangsit University?

##### 4.2.1 Levels of English speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Rangsit University

Based on the PSCAS score, it was found that undergraduate students experienced a high level of test anxiety with a mean score of 3.72. There might be several reasons to explain such a high level of language test anxiety among undergraduate students. Firstly, the participants in this study were non-English major students who had to take English foundation courses only because they were required for graduation.



Secondly, most of the participants in this study were the fourth-year students who were going to graduate. Thus, if they failed, they would not be deemed to a degree. Moreover, it is shown that most of them had got nervous before they took an important test, while some of them experienced strong fear during their test. As Wang (2005) revealed that the higher levels of foreign language anxiety reported in his study by Chinese EFL students suggested that culture and learner backgrounds might significantly affect the variable.

In addition to being non-English major students, most of them appeared to have low self-esteem and lack confidence in their English abilities. According to Young (1991), low self-esteem is one kind of learner's characteristics which is considered a significant source of their anxiety. A study by Namsang (2011) showed that students who have a higher level of self-esteem tended to have more success in second language learning. Mendi and Eldeleklioglu (2016) stated that in the psychological term, individuals with high self-esteem have higher self-respect. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem are dissatisfied overall with themselves. They have low self-respect and also hold a negative self-image.

Research question 2: What are the possible causes of English speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Rangsit University?

#### 4.2.2 The causes of anxiety in speaking English of undergraduate students at Rangsit University

The major causes of English speaking anxiety of undergraduate students are as follows:

##### Factor One: Communication Apprehension

The results showed that most undergraduate students started to panic when they had to speak English without preparation in advance. For this study, the participants took ENL 112: Intermediate English Listening and Speaking course - the course specifically focusing on English listening and speaking. The objectives of this course are designed to develop the strategies and abilities to listen and participate in an everyday conversation in English with accuracy. In class, students, therefore, need to practice English communication on a variety of topics such as making small talk, talking about holidays, shopping, making social arrangements, and describing job responsibilities. Students are also required to perform individual work, pair work and group work for speaking activities. These activities include both short and long conversations. Since students were expected to deal with the tasks during class time, most of them found that they did not have enough time to prepare their work. Thus, it was the major cause of English speaking anxiety in class. According to Young (1990), some classroom procedures may create foreign language learning anxiety. For example, students could be asked to do a role play or discussion in front of the class. Also, Tanveer (2007) found that different activities in the classroom procedure, particularly of which that demand students to speak in front of the whole class, have been found to be the most anxiety provoking.

In addition, Makchuay et al., (2018) found that students felt nervous and were not ready to speak or do some English activities because they thought they did not have basic English background knowledge. Moreover, they have not engaged much in a learning-supportive environment to speak English and have not lived in an English speaking environment.

##### Factor Two: Test anxiety

The finding from this study showed that test anxiety was the most serious problem of undergraduate students at Rangsit University. Most of the participants in this study agreed with these causes, "I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English." and "I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance." Many times students reported that they knew certain vocabulary items and sentence structures but they could not convey their ideas when they needed to use them in any communicative situation. It was found that these caused students to get high pressure in test anxiety. Thus, it can be said that they feared taking tests because test-taking situations would make them anxious about the negative outcome of getting a bad grade. According to Wang (2005), test anxiety directly affects test results, and test results may create learners' self-confidence and self-esteem. Similarly, Gao (2003, cited in Namsang, 2011) pointed out that self-esteem could result in different anxiety levels of the students. The subjects with high self-esteem might control their anxiety better and their language performance was better than those with low self-esteem.



Students with test anxiety might be afraid of tests because of previous experiences of failure. It can be concluded that most of the students who took ENL 112: Intermediate English Listening and Speaking in both semesters (semester 2/2017 and summer/2018) had a low self-esteem. Actually, some of them knew that they had low ability in English speaking because they were non-English major students. This, therefore, led to testing anxiety even they were well prepared. Moreover, since they were the fourth-year students who were going to graduate and needed to pass from this course, it makes them feel worried when they had to take the test. Namsang, (2011) found that students were afraid of taking an English test and experienced high levels of anxiety regarding exams and tests of different kinds. This suggests that it might be necessary to reduce the number of tests.

#### Factor Three: Fear of negative evaluation

These findings demonstrated a high level of speaking anxiety among students at Rangsit University. As expected, students could feel the heart pounding when they were going to be called on to speak English in the classroom.

Most of the participants in this study appeared to lack self-confidence and self-perception to speak English in front of others. As such, they avoided expressing their opinions in English class because they felt shy and nervous. In accordance with Tanveer's (2007), findings students got overexcited and become more anxious when called upon to respond individually, rather than if they are given choice to respond voluntarily. Also, students were found to be more relaxed to speak the target language when paired with a classmate or put into small groups of 3 to 6 than into larger groups of 7 to 15 students.

In an English class, the anxious students would rather sit in the back row to avoid being humiliated or embarrassed from being called on to speak. Some of them had to skip class because they feared to speak English in front of others. The study of Mohamad and Wahid (2009) revealed that the perception of others is a cause of anxiety when students speak English, as they are concerned about others' evaluation. Thus, speaking in front of many people is a cause of English speaking anxiety. Young (1991), cited in Krashen, (1980) suggested "The more I think about self-esteem, the more impressed I am about its impact. This is what causes anxiety in a lot of people. People with low self-esteem worry about what their peers think; they are concerned with pleasing others. And that I think has to do a great degree with anxiety". Individuals who have high self-esteem are less likely to be anxious than those with low self-esteem (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In addition, the results of the study found that some students who were over the fourth-year students experienced failure several times and needed to retake the subject. Bailay (1983, cited in Young, 1991) pointed out that competition is another cause of anxiety. Poor students with low self-efficacy often compared their own abilities to other students. Also, Price (1991, cited in Young, 1991) found that most of the students in the classroom believed that their English abilities were lower than those of their friends. Hence, they were afraid that their friends would laugh at them if they made mistakes.

#### Factor Four: Comfort in using English

Students said that "I feel relaxed while I am speaking English." This aspect was the positive item but it yielded a negative result. It has been shown that many students showed discomfort and were uneasy to speak English in the class. There was a large class size of 40-45 students who enrolled in each section. In each class, they studied with friends who were not from the same faculty. Some of them did not have good background knowledge in English speaking. Hence, it was hard to speak with people they did not know well. Sometimes, students were uncomfortable in speaking English and this would make them dare not risk or unwilling to speak English in the class. Similarly, Somin (1998, cited in Chaipan, Promkaew and Srinark, 2013) stated that learners with the best learning style must dare to show themselves to speak another language and not be afraid when people say how stupid they are. They should not care what other people think about them. This concept is effective to internal factor on English speaking ability in the part of the characteristic of students who dare to speak and express ideas in other languages. They might be students who can speak English very well. Horwitz and Cope (1991) noted that it was educators' responsibility to help anxious students find ways to deal with situations where anxiety provocations existed and create a less stressful learning context for them. Perhaps this problem might be solved by allowing students to use their first language in class. Moreover, Akkason (2016) stated that the learning-teaching



atmosphere in class will become friendly, once students were on familiar terms with their classmates and the instructor. This may lead to the students' confidence and build up the fear of speaking English in class. Like one student said, "it's fun although being shy at first". Furthermore, to make the students feel relaxed or comfortable in class, teachers should understand their students and support them. If teachers understand students, it will be a lot easier for students to talk and ask questions. Pisarik, Rowell and Thompson, (2017) found that absence of career guidance such experiences may be indicative of personality characteristics and problematic views of one's self such as low career decision-making, self-efficacy, and external locus of control.

## 6. Conclusion

This research study has presented findings of undergraduate students' anxiety in English speaking class. The results revealed that undergraduate students experienced a high level of test anxiety. It reported that non-English major students had low self-esteem and basic knowledge of English. Some of them needed to pass the course because most of them were the fourth year students who were going to graduate.

To reduce test anxiety and build up their self-esteem, the teacher should be aware of the nature of students' anxiety and try to create a relaxing atmosphere, which can make students feel comfortable to speak or express their opinions. Negative evaluation of students in classroom should be avoided and moral support should be provided. Moreover, the teachers should create more effective class activities which can increase students' confidence in foreign language learning abilities. Also, the classroom environments should be safe and bring some comfort to the students.

Lastly, further studies should be conducted with students from English major by using a Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale generated by Kriangkrai PSCAS (2012). This research study only measured students' anxiety with a small group at Rangsit University. Thus, further studies should be done using a larger group of other populations such as undergraduate students from several private universities. It might be getting various opinions from other students. In addition, the causes of speaking English anxiety were shown in this study but the results did not illustrate the way how to reduce students' anxiety. Thus, anxiety reduction techniques in speaking English should be conducted in further research to offer an effective way to help relieve anxiety in speaking English.

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