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Anxiety in speaking English: EFL Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School students' perspective

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the factors of anxiety and strategies that may help to reduce the anxiety experienced by EFL students. This study used descriptive qualitative research. The data was taken from semi-structured interview. The result showed that the factors of anxiety that trigger EFL adult students are 1) language barrier factors (grammar, vocabulary and fluency), 2) psychological factor (anxiety), and 3) learning proponents (teachers and peers). Fortunately, there are some efforts done by the EFL students to reduce their feeling of anxiety in speaking English, such as; practicing to speak English frequently and be confident to speak. The study highlights the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel more confident and less anxious to speak English. These findings provide valuable insights for English teachers to develop teaching strategies that reduce anxiety and promote active communication in EFL classrooms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In non-English speaking countries, there has been a spate of interest in speaking English because speaking English can allow the readers to broaden their world such as a job opportunity and ability to relate to people from many countries. Wherever you go in the world you are going to find someone who can speak English.

As mentioned by Nunan (2003) speaking is a useful oral ability that entails making a series of systematic verbal utterances in order to convey information. It is also similar to Chaney (1998) who stated that speaking is the method of creating and exchanging information through the use of both verbal and nonverbal expressions in various ways. Furthermore, Pollard (2008) defined one of the most challenging skills for students to learn is speaking.

When you consider all that goes into speaking: language, what to say, thoughts, how to use grammar and vocabulary, as well as listening to and responding to the person you're talking with, this is a little shocking. Lado (1961) found that making use of words in a normal voice; conveying words; learning and using a language; expressing oneself in words; giving a speech are all examples of speaking. Speaking refers to the use of spoken words to convey meaning in our daily lives. As mentioned by Wardani (2018) two types of anxiety symptoms include observable symptoms and non-observable symptoms. Trembling, being quiet, nervously touching an item, stuttering or stammering, using filler, and being sweaty were all

observed symptoms. Confusion, coldness, nervousness, and a rapid heartbeat were among the non-observable signs. Additionally, Shumin (2012) mentioned that in order to communicate, it was important to talk. This also implies that language competence and appropriateness are used to assess English speaking ability.

In order to learn about anxiety in speaking English, the researcher has found some related topic of study. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) mentioned that the anxiety of students can be as the form of subjective feeling of tension, nervousness, worry, and apprehension. Anxiety, low motivation, and negative attitude are the challanges faced by EFL students to speak English. Furthermore, the previous study conducted by Yusuf (2008) indicating that the lack of practice in speaking English, not knowing the definition of vocabulary, feeling anxious when giving a presentation, and not really understanding the content are all factors that contribute to Thai students' anxiety when speaking English. Since they normally translate the meaning word by word, these factors made learning to talk difficult for the students. Furthermore Hasibuan & Hasibuan & Irzawati (2019) found that speaking anxiety has been linked to poor results. Speaking anxiety causes fear and nervousness, which can impair oral language output. Asysyifa et al., (2019) found that students are nervous about speaking English due to a lack of planning, a fear of falling behind in understanding the content or what the teacher is saying, a fear of making errors, a fear of being laughed at by their peers, and a lack of confidence in their ability to spell, pronounce, and choose the appropriate words in English. Furthermore, the previous study conducted by Weda & Sakti (2018) indicates that there are some factors contributing the anxiety in speaking English, such as students' confidence, lecturers' role, material, and teachers' attitude in the learning process. According to Abrar et al., (2018) speaking anxiety has three factors such as language barriers, psychological, and language proponents. As a result, students' anxiety in speaking English has been exacerbated by a lack of planning and vocabularies (Indrianty & Seftika, 2016). Another study conducted by Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014) that focussed on the speaking anxiety of Turkeys EFL learners found that immediate question, pronunciation, negative evaluation, and fears making mistakes are factors caused anxiety in speaking English. Therefore, the anxiety of speaking will obstruct language acquisition in the classroom activity.

As we know that the case of learning English is becoming stronger day by day, however Thailand still trails from its Southeast Asian peers in terms of learning and using English. Nowadays, for many students, speaking can be a difficult activity because it necessitates interaction. The other four abilities can be practiced independently, but students cannot truly speak alone, therefore they should make every effort to find someone with whom to converse. In line with this point, Nunan (2000:39) states that speaking is one of a key aspect of learning a second or foreign language. Moreover, he further notes that the success of learning the language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language. It may be claimed that being able to communicate fluently in a foreign language is necessary for pupils to communicate both within and outside the classroom.

The compulsory education program in Thailand is no different from other Southeast Asian countries. Thailand's primary education consists of 12 years of study divided into six years of primary school (Prathom 1-6), three years of junior high school (Mattayom 1-3), and three years of senior high school (Mattayom 4-6). Thailand's compulsory education has been extended to nine years since 2003 (6 years of Elementary School and 3 years of Junior High School). The students are expected to complete education until senior high school because school is free of charge to 12 years. All students in Thailand spend more than 10 years learning English. Therefore, they are expected to have a good mastery and be fluent in English especially in speaking.

The aim of speaking English is to promote communicative proficiency. However, we all agree that speaking is the hardest skill because it requires much more in-depth knowledge of grammar, you have to get the pronunciation right which adds another layer of complexity to an already complex task and it requires you to use this knowledge in real time. According to Rivers (2019) found that in our everyday communication, speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing. It means that the most commonly used language skill is speaking. (Torky, 2006). Reflecting on the researcher experiences of the English speaking classroom, she found that speaking English may create the feeling of anxiety. Furthermore Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) mentioned that classroom anxiety can impede students' success and achievement while also reducing their ability to engage in learning activities. As mentioned by Ariyanti (2017), anxiety emerged when the students have pressure and lack of confidence. On the other hand the anxiety of speaking will obstruct the language acquisition in the class. This is also experienced by students of Khusnia (2016) who feel anxiety because they can not perform in English and it might lead to a bad

experience. As stated by Rumiyati and Seftika (2018), her students generally were anxious in speaking English and it affects students in speaking performance. Just as Kusumo (2020) mentioned that the lack of students' self-confidence was found to be their major reason for speaking anxiety. Furthermore Akkakoson (2016) stated that the limited repertoire of students' vocabulary was the major source of speaking anxiety.

The larger number of studies on speaking anxiety is abundant (Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015; Woodrow, 2006; Mukminin et al., 2015). However, there has been little discussion on anxiety in speaking English that experienced by EFL students in South Thailand. This paper is a preliminary attempt to investigate the factors of anxiety and strategies that may help to reduce the anxiety experienced by EFL students in Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School. The study was significantly beneficial for the English educator, especially to gain more information related to the anxiety in speaking which may be applicable in their schools.

2. METHOD

This study was qualitative research involving EFL adult students of a private Sangkhom Islam Wittaya's students in South Thailand. The qualitative research was choosen to describe the anxiety in speaking English experienced by the participants. There were 10 participants as the ideal number of participants (Dörnyei & Griffee, 2010) who participate in the study and all of them are students of Sangkhom Islam Wittaya's School. Approximately 20 to 30 students were selected to respond to the questionnaire, while 6 to 10 students were chosen for semi-structured interviews. This range allowed the researcher to capture both a broad and in-depth perspective on speaking anxiety. The students consisted of 5 males and 5 females. The participants of the current study were (pseudonyms) Bella, Dzaky, Sky, Kenzo, Gabrielle, Chalenee, Kanyavee, Brandon, Sara, and Archie. This study focused on EFL students who had learned English more than ten years.

The interview was employed as the study's instrument. It is utilized to meet the study's objectives. The interview focused on the participants' beliefs, experiences, and feelings in order to better understand their perspectives on speaking English anxiety. The analysis was carried out in order to support the research questions. The procedure for the investigation was as follows: a) the interview segment was taped; b) the interview data was transcribed; and c) the data was evaluated and grouped into different themes. The data was then followed by semi-structured interview to get data more detail.

The data collection procedure consisted of several stages. First, the researcher obtained official permission from the English teachers to conduct the study. Then, the researcher explained the purpose and process of the research to the participants and distributed informed consent forms. Data were collected through three main methods: questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The questionnaire was used to identify the general level and sources of anxiety among students, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore in detail their feelings, experiences, and coping strategies related to speaking anxiety. In addition, classroom observations were carried out to note students' behavioral indicators of anxiety, such as hesitation, nervous gestures, or avoidance of speaking. All interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' permission) and later transcribed for analysis.

The instrument development process involved adapting the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to suit the school context. The themes addressing three main dimensions of speaking anxiety: language barriers, psychological, and learning proponents. Meanwhile, the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions such as "How do you feel when you are asked to speak English in front of the class?" and "What situations make you feel most anxious when speaking English?" Necessary revisions were made before the actual data collection. The researcher ensured that all data were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect participants' identities. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and deleted after the analysis was completed.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section summarizes the findings in relation to the research questions about factors that cause anxiety and factors that may help to reduce anxiety in EFL adult students. Based on the interview, it was discovered that the following elements contribute to the anxiety of speaking: 1) language barriers

factor which includes grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, 2) psychological factor (fear of making mistakes), and 3) learning proponents (teacher and peers). Furthermore, it was found that there are ways to reduce the anxiety of speaking: 1) Practice a lot and 2) improve confidence. The researcher discussed the themes and subthemes connected to EFL students' anxiety in speaking English in this part.

Table 1.Themes and subthemes of speaking anxiety

Themes	Subthemes
Language barriers factor	Lack of Grammar Lack of Vocabulary Fluency
Psychological factor	Fear of making mistakes
Learning proponents factor	Teacher Peers

3.1 Language barrier factors

Lack of vocabulary. The interview's most interesting discovery was that all of the interviewees admitted to have studied English for more than ten years. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that individuals feel apprehensive about speaking English. Grammar, vocabulary, and fluency were found to be a barrier for the participants. The biggest cause of speaking anxiety, according to the participants, is a lack of grammar and vocabulary.

> *"I think the first is vocabulary, second one is grammatical. I have limited vocabulary, and it makes me nervous. When we nervous we can't speak clearly" (Bella)*

> *"I think the lack of vocabulary is the most important on speaking. It's hard sometimes to speak because the limit of vocabularies" (Archie)*

One of the elements in speaking anxiety, according to the participants, is a lack of vocabulary. It indicates that they were unable to be active and proficient in English due to a lack of vocabulary.

Lack of grammar. Lack of grammar is another language barrier concern mentioned in this section. Grammar, according to the participants, is the most crucial aspect of English, particularly in speaking. A participant remarked that knowing how to use grammar correctly will enable him to communicate comfortably to anyone. The other participant also noted that while she is speaking, establishing grammar will be more challenging.

> *"I think grammar will be the first cause of speaking anxiety, someone will be confident to speak to everyone if they use the correct grammar" (Sky)*

> *"I believe that lack of grammar will be the speaking anxiety. It is hard to construct the grammar rules when we speaking" (Bella)*

Fluent in English. Fluency was another interesting conclusion from the interview. All of the participants stated that speaking in English was a challenge for them. Fluency is linked to earlier grammatical and vocabulary discoveries. According to one participant, fluency in English speaking is significant since it may be used to assess English competence.

> *"The most important skill that have to be mastered in English depart is speaking because no one will ask you how good your grammar is, how good your reading is, but they will ask you how your fluency of speaking is" (Dzaky)*

It indicates that English fluency has become one of the language barriers to speaking anxiety. The participants stated that knowing English fluently would increase their confidence in speaking.

3.2 Psychological factor

In addition to the language barrier considerations, the researcher discovered a psychological element, which is relevant to the prior study. The researcher discovered that there is only one psychological aspect in speaking English, which is anxiety, in this theme. Many actions, according to the participants, could be the source of speaking anxiety in the classroom. They became hesitant to actively talk in English as a result of these exercises.

> *"I have anxiety when I speak wrong they will correct me rudely, it makes me embarrassed" (Archie)*

> *"I will be afraid if someone don't understand about what I'm saying because of my nervous when I'm speak to them" (Bella)*

This indicates that the participants were concerned about their capacity to communicate. When they spoke to others, they doubted their capacity to communicate.

3.4 Learning proponent factors

The learning proponents, which include the teacher/lecturer and peers, are the final theme developed in this research.

Teacher. All of the participants agreed that their teacher had an impact on their ability to talk. The participants expressed their concern that if the professor paid more attention to them and addressed their faults, they would be more nervous. This will make them less confidence in their ability to communicate in English in the future.

> *"The situations, the most important is the situations. when you are very intimidated by your participants for example in examination, and also the lecture really pay attention to your speaking skill, so it makes me nervous" (Bella)*

> *"I have many experiences, my lecture always corrects my pronunciation, i am shy and it makes me uncomfortable to speak in front of the class" (Sky)*

> *"Sometimes my lecture corrects my sentence, and then i just forgot about what i want to say, it really make me somehow embarrassed" (Archie)*

Peers. Another crucial aspect discovered in this study is the classmates. Participants agreed that their classmates played a vital impact in their capacity to talk. The individuals thought their classmates made them nervous. They were bashful and nervous when they made blunders in front of their classmates in class.

> *"When I was speaking in front of the class, sometimes my friends' eyes (classmates) seem like give more attention to my speaking, it really annoy me and of course make me nervous" (Sky)*

> *"Some of them (her classmates) don't realize my mistakes, but some of them revise it, it makes me shy" (Archie)*

> *"As long as my friend understand my idea, its fine, but sometime they correct my sentence. it makes me nervous sometimes" (Bella)*

3.5 Reducing the speaking anxiety

The research's ultimate focus is reducing the speaking anxiety. During the interview, it was revealed that each person had their own styles for reducing speaking fear.

3.5.1. Be confident

When it came to speaking English, self-assurance was crucial. All of the participants believed that the most effective strategy to reduce speaking anxiety is to practice speaking with more confidence. Worried, apprehensive, bashful, and humiliated were among the people who stated that confidence prevented negativity in communicating.

> *"We have to be more confident first, then we can improve (our speaking) by improving vocab and get more experiences to speak not only in the classroom" (Bella)*

> *"Just try to be confident first, then try to speak to everyone. I believed there will be no more nervous" (Archie)*

3.5.2. Practice a lot

Last but not least, a lot of practice might help you overcome your fear of speaking English. The participants were of the opinion that learning English, particularly speaking, is a matter of practice. The participants agreed that the more practice they got, the more fluent their speech became.

> *"It needs time and a lot of practices, we have to speak a lot" (Sky)*

> *"We have to practice a lot. We can try it by speaking in front of the mirror, then always try to speak with your friend and family" (Archie)*

> *"If we are always speaking English everyday, we will be fluent in English and no worried about mistakes, because it's not our language, make mistakes is forgiveness" (Bella)*

The purpose of this research is to investigate the factors of anxiety and strategies that may help to reduce the anxiety experienced by EFL students in Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School. This research is under the following research questions: 1) What is the trigger of the speaking anxiety? and 2) How to reduce the speaking anxiety experienced by EFL adult students. Furthermore, the researcher has four themes and subthemes in regards to the research findings, they are: 1) language barrier factors, 2) psychological factor, 3) learning proponents, and 4) reducing the speaking anxiety.

Lack of grammar, vocabulary, and fluency are the initial issues that cause speaking anxiety in English. Those are the reasons that are thought to have contributed to the adult EFL students' speaking fear. The findings of this study are consistent with those of other EFL/ESL studies (Abrar et al., 2018; Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2013; Al Hosni, 2014; Arju, 2013; Gan, 2012; Mukminin et al., 2015; Wang & Roopchund, 2015), indicating that EFL students lack linguistic competence, resulting in difficulty speaking English. It can be said that in the current research, EFL students' poor stock of grammar, vocabulary, and fluency issues became the primary barrier to speaking English.

The psychological factor was the second factor that made it difficult for EFL adult students to speak English. In this study, the researcher only discovered anxiety as a psychological element affecting EFL adult students' ability to communicate in English. The participants in the interview expressed their apprehension about speaking English. This research finding is consistent with earlier findings (Juhana, 2012; Mukminin et al., 2015; ztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Sukadi, 2013; Zhiping & paramasivam, 2013), which show that anxiety affects EFL/ESL students' oral communication skills.

The language proponents were the final component that made it difficult for the participants to speak English. The participants in this study stated that they were apprehensive of receiving direct corrective feedback or comments from the lecturer. Other research (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Sheen, 2006; Weda & Sakti, 2018) have found that direct corrective feedback is ineffective in commenting on students' work. Another language proponent discovered is peers/classmates, in addition to the lecturer's opinion. Participants stated that their classmates had an impact on their ability to talk. Furthermore,

the participants stated that they are willing to be corrected as long as their classmates understand what they have said.

Finally, in order to deal with the difficulties of speaking, the participants have made various measures to lessen their anxiousness when speaking English. All of the participants felt that practicing speaking on a daily basis can help them feel less anxious. Furthermore, students must increase their self- assurance in order to speak English fluently. The participants believed that practicing the language with their family, friends, or even themselves in front of the mirror on a daily basis would assist them to overcome their fear of speaking. Garcia and Skehan (1999) confirm this by stating that the only way to get fluency is to practice regularly. The participants also mentioned that their vocabularies would improve as a result of this.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has been accomplished. This study investigates the factors of anxiety and strategies that may help to reduce the anxiety experienced by EFL students. In addition, the study is also focused on finding out the source of anxiety. The researcher came to some conclusions about EFL adult students' speaking anxiety in English based on the research findings and discussion above. Language barrier issues (lack of vocabulary, grammar, and fluency), psychological factors (anxiety), and language proponents' factors are among the challenges experienced by students. Following the completion of the research, certain recommendations have been made. The first crucial issue to remember is that nervousness in speaking English can be caused by a variety of factors, including a lack of vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. The psychological component is also important in helping learners gain confidence and overcome their fear of making mistakes when speaking in front of others. The researcher advises the next researcher who is interested in conducting the same case study to obtain additional data from more persons as the study's subject. Due to a shortage of time and resources, the researcher was only able to include 10 EFL adult English education students from Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School in this study. Furthermore, in order to inspire students' motivation to speak up boldly and clearly in English speaking class, the teacher should be more aware of their concern. This shows that it is critical for teachers to be more creative in order to create better ways of teaching scenarios that will inspire pupils to speak.

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We support GPELTL in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.

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