



English-Speaking Anxiety Among Second- and Fourth-Year

Thai University English Majors

Payung Cedar and Suwimol Jaiyote*

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: suwimolj@nu.ac.th

Received: 8 August 2024; Revised: 18 November 2024; Accepted: 2 December 2024; Available Online: 25 December 2024

Abstract

This comparative study surveyed English speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors at a northern Thai university, examining factors contributing to anxiety and potential differences between the two groups. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire addressing the effects of communication apprehension, fear of assessment, and fear of negative evaluation, along with an open-ended question about other issues contributing to English-speaking anxiety, was administered online to 31 second- and 34 fourth-year students. The results showed that students in both groups experienced moderate levels of anxiety in terms of comprehension apprehension and test anxiety. However, there was a notable difference in the levels of fear of negative evaluation. Specifically, second-year English majors exhibited a high level of fear of negative evaluation while fourth-year English majors experienced it at a moderate level. Despite this, statistical analyses revealed significant differences between the two groups in all three core factors: comprehension apprehension ($t = -3.449$, $p < .05$), test anxiety ($t = 2.920$, $p < .05$), and fear of negative evaluation ($t = 10.711$, $p < .0001$). Interestingly, although previous research suggests that more years of study generally reduce anxiety, this study found that this does not hold true across all factors. Additionally, analyses of anxiety levels across various scenarios revealed specific anxiety-inducing factors. Furthermore, the written responses predominantly highlighted grammar and vocabulary as areas of concern. These findings offer implications for pedagogical strategies and suggest avenues for future research.

Keywords: Anxiety, Speaking, English, Thai Students, University

Introduction

Speaking skills are considered one of the most essential skills as they allow us to communicate with others and express our thoughts and feelings. For those using English as a Foreign Language (EFL) like Thais, the first language inevitably interferes with their EFL learning (Heritage & Montle, 2022), leading to feelings of anxiety, fear of peer ridicule and lack of confidence in using English (Nuypukiaiw, 2018; Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021; Yuh & Kaewurai, 2021). Also, students' beliefs about EFL learning strongly contribute to their anxiety, more than the language itself (Bhattachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023). Factors influencing anxiety also include the fear of criticism (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021), heightened stress levels, nervousness, diminished self-confidence, insufficient speaking opportunities, low English knowledge and communication skills (Kakepoto et al., 2022).

Anxiety can impede effective English communication (Aghajani & Amanzadeh, 2017; Huang, 2022; Inada, 2021; Kakepoto et al., 2022; Sholikh, 2022; Yasmin et al., 2020), cause trouble in learners, hinder their proficiency in spoken English (Rahman & Tomy, 2023) and development of language (Daymiel et al., 2022; Russell, 2020) and learner autonomy (Savaskan, 2017). Moreover, speaking anxiety can impact students' speaking skills in both positive and negative ways, affecting their readiness to engage and articulate their thoughts (Pristiyaputri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the year of study could also affect their levels of anxiety in speaking. Higher-year students tend to experience lower levels of public speaking anxiety compared to lower-year students. This decrease in anxiety is likely due to increased experience and familiarity with speaking tasks over time (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021).



Although research on speaking anxiety has been conducted for several years, the shift to online study during the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the degree of anxiety experienced by students. Specifically, fourth-year students had fewer opportunities to practice their speaking skills in public, as they had to study online. In particular, at a northern Thai university, large class sizes make it challenging for lecturers to observe, encourage, and provide feedback to students, most of whom keep their cameras turned off during online sessions. Additionally, teaching English speaking skills online poses unique challenges compared to onsite learning, particularly in developing public speaking skills. Firstly, online classes often lack the interactive and engaging atmosphere of face-to-face learning, which makes it harder for students to build confidence and practice naturally. Furthermore, technical issues such as poor connectivity can frequently disrupt speaking practice, whereas onsite classes provide a more controlled environment conducive to focused learning. Additionally, in terms of confidence-building, onsite settings are more effective, as students must address a live audience, unlike online environments where they may hide behind screens. Moreover, non-verbal communication—essential in public speaking—is limited online, as students have fewer opportunities to use gestures or make eye contact. Lastly, onsite learning enables instructors to provide immediate, in-depth feedback, closely observing students and offering support that promotes consistent progress in public speaking skills. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how fourth-year students have progressed in their speaking skills following two years of online study.

To investigate speaking-related anxiety among fourth-year students, it is essential to compare their anxiety levels with those of second-year students within the same curriculum, as the initial speaking class is introduced in the first semester of the second year for English majors. Moreover, various factors influence how individuals express themselves in English communication, including their methods of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). By understanding the perceptions that contribute to students' speaking anxiety, educators can better tailor their lessons to support students in overcoming this anxiety, ultimately fostering more effective communication skills.

Literature Review

English-speaking anxiety is a significant issue for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), influencing their language acquisition and academic performance.

Anxiety in Learning and Speaking a Foreign Language

Language learning anxiety refers to the uneasiness or apprehension individuals may feel when using or learning a new language. Anxiety often arises for EFL and ELF learners when they must perform tasks they are not proficient in (Suleimenova, 2013). It is caused by fear and excessive, unrealistic concerns that interfere with daily routines and social interactions. It can manifest in various ways, such as the worry of making pronunciation errors, fear of making mistakes, the fear of potential embarrassment from peers as a result of these mistakes (MacIntyre, 2017; Price, 1991), nervousness about speaking in front of others, anxiety regarding language exams or presentations, the fear of being misunderstood, and cultural adjustment anxiety when interacting with native speakers or adapting to different cultural norms. Additionally, a lack of motivation among learners significantly contributes to diminished speaking skills (Illyin et al., 2021) and consequently contributes to this anxiety.

Anxiety in learning a foreign language likely arises because the language acquisition process for learners typically involves complex self-awareness and behaviors (Horwitz, 2001). When EFL and ELF learners use a foreign language they are not fluent in, they often exhibit stress and anxiety (MacIntyre, 2017). Accordingly,



this emotional response can hinder language acquisition and communication skills, as well as proficiency (MacIntyre, 2017; Price, 1991).

Conversely, factors related to anxiety are crucial in creating a positive and effective learning environment. In the realm of education, the presence of affective factors is highly essential. Learners' attitudes toward acquiring speaking skills, their perception of the teacher, the learning environment, and even their lifestyle all play pivotal roles in foreign language acquisition (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). In a foreign language classroom, learners face three main sources of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, which affect their performance and participation in language classes (Horwitz, 2001). Factors contributing to anxiety, i.e., fear of real or anticipated communication with others, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Jindathai, 2015; Savaskan, 2017) can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as reluctance to participate in speaking activities or over-preparation to avoid making mistakes. Hence, understanding these forms of anxiety is essential for developing targeted interventions to help students manage their fears effectively.

Previous Research on Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

English-speaking anxiety remains a prevalent issue among EFL learners, influenced by various psychological, cultural, and technological factors. Many studies highlight the impact of anxiety on learners' speaking abilities, often manifesting as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Aghajani and Amanzadeh (2017) and Akkakoson (2016) both identified that these anxieties disrupt fluency and reduce learners' willingness to communicate, especially in conversational settings where mistakes are more visible.

In the Thai context, Akkakoson (2016) and Jindathai (2015) underscore the significant impact of speaking anxiety on Thai EFL learners, with factors like fear of negative evaluation and limited vocabulary playing crucial roles. These studies highlight the need for targeted interventions to address speaking anxiety and improve communication skills among Thai students. Jindathai (2015) further noted that Thai EFL learners often struggle with fear of making mistakes and hold negative attitudes toward English, hindering their communication development. Additionally, Sunitisarn et al. (2017) observed that Thai students, when faced with English-speaking situations, often rely on body language and translation from Thai to English due to verbal expression difficulties. Similarly, Bhattarachaiyakorn and Phettakua (2023) found that limited exposure to English beyond the classroom and cultural factors can exacerbate anxiety, particularly for Thai university students.

In response to these challenges, technological solutions have emerged as promising tools for reducing anxiety. Chen (2018) demonstrated that interactive holographic systems provide a supportive environment that allows learners to practice without the immediate pressure of live feedback. Rahman and Tomy (2023) similarly found that Intelligent Personal Assistants (IPAs) offer non-judgmental, automated responses, reducing fear of mistakes and enhancing speaking confidence. Hwang and Fu (2019) noted that digital platforms can either alleviate or intensify anxiety depending on interactivity and feedback, emphasizing the need for technology that supports real-time communication skills.

Further research highlights the role of self-perception in speaking anxiety. Tsang (2022) found a strong correlation between learners' self-assessed pronunciation skills and anxiety, suggesting that pronunciation support can alleviate apprehension and boost confidence. Russell (2020) also emphasized that online learning, with its limited immediate feedback, can heighten anxiety for learners already uncertain about their speaking abilities. Additionally, Heritage and Montle (2022) observed that linguistic interference, such as strong first-language



accents and unfamiliar grammar structures, can increase anxiety, especially when learners are highly conscious of their pronunciation.

Educational strategies play a vital role in managing speaking anxiety. Inada (2021) and Kiruthiga and Christopher (2022) highlighted the importance of supportive classroom environments where students feel safe to practice without fear of negative evaluation. Positive reinforcement and confidence-building activities emerged as effective approaches, aligning with findings by Daymiel et al. (2022) that reduced anxiety can improve cognitive processing and speaking proficiency.

To summarize, the literature suggests that speaking anxiety among EFL learners is multifaceted, shaped by personal, contextual, and technological factors that impact communication and proficiency (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 2017). Technological solutions and supportive classroom strategies offer promising avenues for alleviating anxiety, potentially enhancing fluency and confidence (Chen, 2018; Inada, 2021; Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). Although less attention has been given to how speaking anxiety varies by academic level, particularly with recent shifts to online learning due to COVID-19, this study addresses a unique gap by exploring the pandemic's effect on anxiety across different academic years. With second-year English majors having had their first speaking class onsite and fourth-year majors completing courses online, this research highlights how these differing experiences may have influenced their anxiety levels. Previous studies indicate that higher-year students tend to experience lower anxiety than lower-year students (Pristiyaputri et al., 2023; Akkakoson, 2016); however, the shift to online learning may have affected this trend, potentially leading to different outcomes in anxiety levels across academic years. Such findings could provide valuable guidance for targeted interventions, especially as students transition back to face-to-face learning.

Research Objective

This study compared factors influencing English speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors at a northern Thai university.

Research Questions

1. What key factors contribute to differences in English speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year English majors?

1.1 To what extent does communication apprehension affect English speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year English majors?

1.2 To what extent does fear of assessment affect English speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year English majors?

1.3 To what extent does fear of negative evaluation affect English speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year English majors?

2. Are there significant differences in the factors contributing to English speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year English majors?

3. What additional factors contribute to English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors, as expressed by the students themselves?



Methods and Materials

The research methodology of this survey study consisted of four essential components: 1) Participants, 2) Instrumentation, 3) Data Collection, and 4) Data Analysis.

1. Participants

The participants in this research consisted of two groups of undergraduate students: 31 second-year English majors and 34 fourth-year English majors who volunteered to take part in the study. These students had recently completed their academic year in the English program at the Faculty of Humanities of a university in the north of Thailand.

2. Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of three parts, adapted from Price (1991) and Liu and Jackson (2008). Here are the details:

Part I provided general background information about the participants, including their gender, age, English learning experience, and scores from the Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT). It should be noted that while the CEPT assesses overall proficiency, it does not evaluate speaking or writing skills.

Part II was a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale on English speaking anxiety, comprising 25 closed-ended statements aimed at assessing the factors influencing English speaking anxiety. There were eight items on communication apprehension (anxiety about understanding the spoken language), seven on fear of assessment (anxiety about being evaluated in speaking tasks), and ten on fear of negative evaluation (anxiety about being judged negatively by others).

In addition, the questionnaire adaptation included several key modifications. First, demographic information was added in the initial section of the questionnaire. Additionally, both English and Thai statements were used instead of English only to prevent misunderstandings. Next, contextual references in the original questionnaire were adjusted to suit the participants; for example, “in the workplace” was changed to “in the university”. Lastly, an open-ended question was included to gather participants’ opinions on other issues related to English-speaking anxiety.

Part III featured an open-ended question where participants could provide their opinions on other issues related to English-speaking anxiety, as shown below.

Share Experience on Speaking Anxiety

What causes you the most stress when speaking English? Please provide some examples based on your own experience.

The entire questionnaire was validated for accuracy and reliability by consulting experts and conducting a pilot study. A total of 25 second- and 25 fourth-year English majors, who had obtained mixed grades in English-speaking courses, participated in the pilot study. These students were classmates of the main study participants but were excluded from the actual research. These students were classmates of the participants but were not included in the actual study.

To ensure content validity, the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index was utilized, with three experts evaluating the questionnaire items. The IOC index yielded a value of 0.90, demonstrating strong content validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, which produced a value of 0.92, indicating a high level of internal consistency.



3. Data Collection

This study utilized Google Forms to collect data online. Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and were invited through Facebook groups specific to their study year (i.e., Year 2 and Year 4). Research ethics were adhered to throughout the process.

4. Data Analysis

Based on five-point Likert scale criteria, the data analysis involved evaluating the range of scale values and levels of agreement concerning English-speaking anxiety, as well as interpreting the levels of English-speaking anxiety, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean Score Ranges, Levels of Agreements and Levels of English-speaking Anxiety Used in this Study

Mean Score Range (\bar{X})	Level of Agreement	Level of English-speaking Anxiety
1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Least
1.81 – 2.60	Disagree	Little
2.61 – 3.40	Uncertain	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	Agree	High
4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Highest

In addition to examining the levels of English-speaking anxiety, the statistical analysis of Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) were conducted to assess the extent to which the three factors—communication apprehension, fear of assessment, and fear of negative evaluation—influence English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors, as stated in the first research question. Furthermore, *t*-tests were performed to examine the statistical significance of the observed differences, addressing the second research question. Moreover, thematic analysis was employed to address the third research question, which was open-ended.

Results

The study's findings were categorized into four primary sections: 1) demographic information, 2) the extent of anxiety factors, including communication apprehension, evaluation anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, 3) significant differences in these three factors, and 4) speaking anxiety factors as self-reported by second- and fourth-year students. The last three sections addressed the study's three research questions.

Demographic Information

This section presents the demographic information of the second- and fourth-year students, focusing on their CEPT levels and English learning experience.

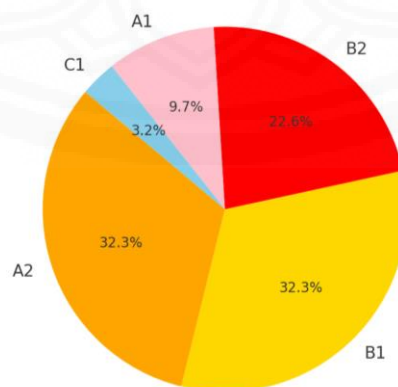


Figure 1 CEPT Levels Among the Second-Year Students.

Figure 1 displays the distribution of online computer-based CEPT (Cambridge English Placement Test) levels among the second-year students, offering insights into their English proficiency levels. Certain CEPT levels make up a larger portion of the chart, indicating that a significant number of students share similar proficiency. Notably, levels such as A2 (32.3%) and B1 (32.3%) are well represented, suggesting a mix of foundational and intermediate proficiency among participants. Conversely, C1 (3.2%) appears in the smallest percentage, indicating that fewer students have achieved advanced proficiency. This distribution highlights a range of English skills within the group, from basic to intermediate, with only a limited number reaching advanced levels.

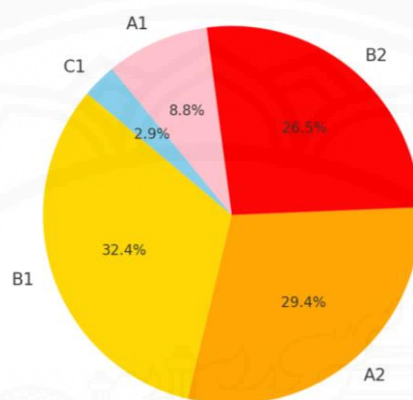


Figure 2 CEPT Levels Among the Fourth-Year Students.

Figure 2 displays the distribution of CEPT levels among the fourth-year students. The largest percentage is B1 (32.4%), indicating that a significant portion of students have reached an intermediate level of English proficiency. This suggests that many students have a moderate command of English, which is adequate for general communication but may require further development for more advanced language tasks. A2 follows at 29.4%, representing students with an elementary level of proficiency. B2 is next at 26.5%, showing a smaller group with upper-intermediate skills. In contrast, the smallest percentages are A1 (8.8%) and C1 (2.9%), indicating that few students have either foundational or advanced proficiency. This distribution highlights that while most students are at intermediate levels, only a limited number have achieved the higher-level skills required for fluent and nuanced English usage.

The CEPT results reveal that both second- and fourth-year students predominantly fall within intermediate proficiency levels, with B1 and A2 being the most common. Few students reach the advanced C1 level, and a limited number are at A1. Fourth-year students show a modest edge in proficiency, with a higher proportion at the B2 level. However, the overall difference between the years remains minimal, indicating that most students in both years have moderate English skills suitable for general communication but need further development for advanced proficiency.

The English learning experience for second-year students spans approximately 14 to 16 years, while fourth-year students have a slightly extended duration, ranging from 16 to 18 years. This difference suggests that fourth-year students may have accumulated more exposure to English language learning over time.

1. The Extent of Anxiety Factors

To address the first research question regarding the extent of anxiety factors—specifically communication apprehension, evaluation anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—the findings are demonstrated below.



Finding 1 Effects of Communication Apprehension on English-Speaking Anxiety

The findings concerning the impact of communication apprehension on English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year students are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Degree of Communication Apprehension and its Effect on English-speaking Anxiety between Second-Year English Majors and Fourth-Year English Majors

Scenarios	Second-Year Students			Fourth-Year Students		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
1. Lack of English-speaking confidence in college	2.96	1.780	Uncertain	2.88	1.635	Uncertain
2. Panic when speaking English without preparation	3.38	2.069	Uncertain	3.53	1.941	Agree
3. Overwhelmed by rules when speaking English	2.81	1.886	Uncertain	2.88	1.665	Uncertain
4. Anxiety about an upcoming speech	2.73	2.001	Uncertain	3.12	1.759	Uncertain
5. Tension about English-speaking assignments	2.54	1.976	Disagree	3.18	1.819	Uncertain
6. Concern about one's own speaking ability	2.73	1.963	Uncertain	3.06	1.818	Uncertain
7. Anxiety when conversing with a native English speaker	2.58	1.910	Disagree	2.91	1.693	Uncertain
8. Nervousness and uncertainty when speaking English	2.54	1.816	Disagree	2.85	1.724	Uncertain
Total	2.78	0.130	Uncertain	3.05	0.101	Uncertain

The results in Table 2 show no difference in the overall anxiety judgments regarding the factor of communication apprehension between second- and fourth-year English majors. Specifically, both second- and fourth-year students were uncertain that communication apprehension influenced their English-speaking anxiety ($\bar{X} = 2.78$, S.D. = 0.130; $\bar{X} = 3.05$, S.D. = 0.101). Upon closer examination of each scenario, the results reveal four instances where opinions on anxiety differed between second- and fourth-year students (disagreement vs. uncertainty, respectively): tension about English-speaking assignments, anxiety when conversing with a native speaker, and nervousness and uncertainty when speaking English. On the contrary, second-year students were unsure if they panicked when speaking English without preparation, whereas fourth-year students confirmed experiencing panic in such situations.

Finding 2 Effects of Assessment Fear on English-Speaking Anxiety

The results regarding the influence of assessment anxiety on English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year students are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Degree of Assessment Fear and Its Effect on English-speaking Anxiety between Second-Year English Majors and Fourth-Year English Majors

Scenarios	Second-Year Students			Fourth-Year Students		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
1. Visible signs of nervousness before beginning public speaking tests	3.26	1.816	Uncertain	2.44	1.599	Disagree
2. Discomfort during English-speaking activities in a classroom	3.29	1.805	Uncertain	2.76	1.627	Uncertain
3. Apprehension about potential failure during crucial tasks	2.71	1.562	Uncertain	2.56	1.614	Disagree
4. Uncertainty while preparing for presentations	2.42	1.431	Disagree	2.26	1.411	Disagree
5. Increased concentration issues just before presenting in English	3.26	1.861	Uncertain	2.88	1.675	Uncertain

**Table 3** (Cont.)

Scenarios	Second-Year Students			Fourth-Year Students		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
6. Concerns about immediate impact of speaking English on academic performance	3.45	1.946	Agree	2.68	1.667	Uncertain
7. Worries about performance after speaking	3.90	2.117	Agree	3.38	1.898	Uncertain
Total	3.18	0.231	Uncertain	2.71	0.143	Uncertain

Although the overall results in Table 3 indicate that second- and fourth-year students were uncertain about assessment anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.18$, S.D. = 0.231; $\bar{X} = 2.71$, S.D. = 0.143), their responses to specific scenarios varied in terms of agreement. Specifically, second- and fourth-year students differed in their levels of agreement (uncertainty vs. disagreement, respectively) regarding anxiety related to visible signs of nervousness before beginning public speaking tests and apprehension about potential failure during crucial tasks. Additionally, there were differences (agreement vs. uncertainty, respectively) in their perceptions of concerns about immediate impact of speaking English on academic performance and their worries about performance after speaking.

Finding 3 Effects of Negative Evaluation Fear on English-Speaking Anxiety

The outcomes related to how fear of negative evaluation affects English-speaking anxiety in both second-year and fourth-year students can be found in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Degree of Negative Evaluation Fear and its Effect on the English-speaking Anxiety of Second-Year English Majors and Fourth-Year English Majors

Scenarios	Second-Year Students			Fourth-Year Students		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
1. Anxiety when responding to spontaneous questions in English	4.06	2.136	Agree	3.59	2.016	Agree
2. Nervousness when prompted to join an activity or answer a question	3.77	2.035	Agree	3.47	1.914	Agree
3. Worry about making mistakes in public	4.23	2.220	Strongly Agree	3.85	2.065	Agree
4. Less confidence in English speaking than classmates	4.23	2.220	Strongly Agree	3.58	2.105	Agree
5. Lack of confidence when speaking English in front of others	3.71	2.050	Agree	3.06	1.809	Uncertain
6. Fear of being ridiculed when speaking English in public	3.35	2.036	Uncertain	2.68	1.647	Uncertain
7. Fear of being corrected for every mistake	3.23	1.817	Uncertain	2.85	1.636	Uncertain
8. Agitation when speaking English in front of classmates	3.65	2.064	Agree	2.91	1.732	Uncertain
9. Tension and nervousness while using English in group discussions	3.52	1.944	Agree	2.91	1.722	Uncertain
10. Distress and discomfort while using English in a group discussion with unfamiliar individuals	4.06	2.167	Agree	3.29	1.863	Uncertain
Total	3.78	0.125	Agree	3.25	0.171	Uncertain

The overall mean scores in Table 4 suggest that second-year students generally agreed that fear of negative evaluation affected their English-speaking anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.78$, S.D. = 0.125), while fourth-year students were uncertain about this effect ($\bar{X} = 3.25$, S.D. = 0.171). The differences in agreement levels for each scenario



included: worry about making mistakes in public (strong agreement vs. agreement), less confidence in English speaking than classmates (strong agreement vs. agreement), lack of confidence when speaking in front of others (agreement vs. uncertainty), agitation when speaking in front of classmates (agreement vs. uncertainty), tension and nervousness while using English in group discussions (agreement vs. uncertainty), and distress and discomfort while using English in a group discussion with unfamiliar individuals (agreement vs. uncertainty). These findings indicate that second-year students generally experienced higher levels of negative evaluation anxiety compared to fourth-year students, who showed more uncertainty in their responses.

2. Statistically Significant Differences of Anxiety Factors

In addition to the descriptive statistical analysis, *t*-tests were utilized to address the second research question and assess the statistical significance of observed differences. The results of the statistical differences in factors contributing to anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors are shown in Figure 3.

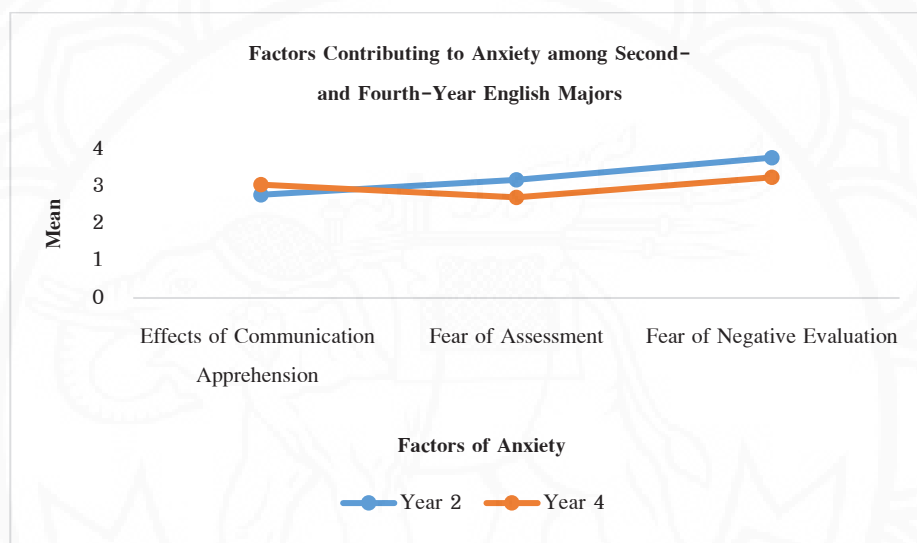


Figure 3 Comparison of Mean Values of Factors Contributing to Anxiety Among Second- and Fourth-Year English Majors.

The results revealed significant differences between second- and fourth-year students in terms of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation impacting their English-speaking anxiety. Specifically, there was a significant difference in communication apprehension affecting English-speaking anxiety ($t = -3.449$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the *t*-test results showed a statistically significant difference in the impact of evaluation anxiety on English-speaking anxiety between the two groups ($t = 2.920$, $p < 0.05$). Regarding the effects of negative evaluation on English-speaking anxiety, the findings demonstrated a highly significant difference between the judgments of second- and fourth-year students ($t = 10.711$, $p < 0.0001$). These results suggest that second- and fourth-year students experience English-speaking anxiety differently in response to negative evaluation.

3. Speaking Anxiety Factors as Self-reported by Second- and Fourth-Year Students

The thematic analysis of participants' responses to the open-ended question was conducted to identify key categories of anxiety-inducing factors. Responses were systematically categorized into four overarching themes: internal factors, situational factors, social factors, and language-specific factors. The results of this thematic analysis are detailed below.

The thematic scheme reveals distinct yet overlapping stress factors experienced by second- and fourth-year English major students when speaking English. Among second-year students, internal factors, such as fear of



mistakes, low self-confidence, and cognitive overload, were prominent, with significant challenges tied to situational factors like formal presentations and impromptu speaking tasks. Social factors, including comparisons with peers and fear of judgment, also contributed to their anxiety. Additionally, language-specific factors, such as vocabulary challenges and grammar anxiety, emerged as notable stressors.

For fourth-year students, internal factors were even more pronounced, with fear of mistakes, cognitive overload, and self-doubt stemming from past experiences being key contributors. Situational factors, such as unfamiliar settings and public presentations, were consistent with second-year students but carried greater weight due to higher performance expectations. Fourth-year students also exhibited heightened sensitivity to social factors, particularly the fear of judgment from instructors and peers, as well as the pressure to perform competitively. Language-specific factors, including vocabulary and grammar challenges, remained consistent across both groups.

The findings highlight a developmental progression in the nature of stress factors between second- and fourth-year students. Second-year students face foundational challenges, such as acquiring vocabulary and grammar proficiency, building confidence, and managing their fear of mistakes. These reflect the early stages of adapting to academic English-speaking contexts. In contrast, fourth-year students encounter more complex stressors tied to their advanced status and higher expectations, such as performing in professional or formal scenarios and managing the social pressures of judgment and comparison. Their stress is exacerbated by prior negative experiences, suggesting that cumulative academic pressures influence their confidence.

Both groups share common stress triggers, such as unfamiliar environments and fear of public mistakes, yet fourth-year students' heightened concerns about social judgment and internalized expectations underscore the transition from basic competency to professional-level communication. This indicates a need for tailored interventions, focusing on foundational skills for second-year students and addressing confidence and advanced speaking strategies for fourth-year students.

The study on English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors provides a comprehensive view when merging the thematic and statistical analyses. Statistically, second-year students demonstrated higher levels of fear of negative evaluation ($t = 10.711, p < .0001$), communication apprehension ($t = -3.449, p < 0.05$), and test anxiety ($t = 2.920, p < 0.05$) compared to fourth-year students. This aligns with thematic findings where second-year students reported significant stress from social factors like peer comparisons and fear of judgment, as well as situational factors such as impromptu speaking and formal presentations. These students are likely in the early stages of adapting to English-speaking academic environments, explaining their heightened anxiety levels across these dimensions.

Conversely, while fourth-year students exhibited lower overall anxiety levels statistically, thematic analysis revealed more nuanced stress triggers. For instance, internal factors like negative past experiences, fear of mistakes, and cognitive overload were more prominent in this group. These findings complement the statistical results, which showed that fourth-year students are less inclined toward generalized anxiety but still experience heightened stress in specific contexts, such as public speaking or formal presentations. Additionally, their sensitivity to social factors, particularly judgment from instructors and peers, corresponds with the statistical reduction in test anxiety but a sustained concern for fear of negative evaluation ($\bar{X} = 3.78$ for second years, $\bar{X} = 3.25$ for fourth years).

Interpretation of Combined Results

Second-year students' higher anxiety levels across all statistical dimensions underscore their struggles with foundational speaking challenges, such as vocabulary recall, grammar usage, and confidence-building. These factors



are reflected both thematically and quantitatively, highlighting a need for targeted interventions focusing on skill development and confidence enhancement. On the other hand, fourth-year students demonstrate more advanced coping mechanisms and lower generalized anxiety statistically, but thematic analysis reveals persistent stress in advanced and socially intensive speaking scenarios, such as formal presentations and interactions with strangers.

The integration of thematic and statistical findings suggests that interventions should be tailored to the developmental stage of each group. For second-year students, strategies should focus on building core competencies, reducing fear of mistakes, and fostering a supportive environment. For fourth-year students, emphasis should shift toward addressing performance-related pressures, enhancing advanced speaking strategies, and mitigating social judgment concerns. This dual approach ensures that both groups receive the support they need to reduce anxiety and improve English-speaking proficiency.

Conclusion

The current study on English-speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English majors reveals statistically significant differences across three primary factors: communication apprehension ($\bar{X} = 2.78$, S.D. = 0.130; $\bar{X} = 3.05$, S.D. = 0.101 – Uncertainty level), test anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.18$, S.D. = 0.231; $\bar{X} = 2.71$, S.D. = 0.143 – Uncertainty level), and fear of negative evaluation ($\bar{X} = 3.78$, S.D. = 0.125; $\bar{X} = 3.25$, S.D. = 0.171 – Agreement vs. Uncertainty levels). Among these, fear of negative evaluation emerged as the most significant factor, distinguishing anxiety levels between the two groups. T-test results further indicated that second-year students exhibited higher levels of fear of negative evaluation ($t = 10.711$, $p < .0001$), communication apprehension ($t = -3.449$, $p < 0.05$), and test anxiety ($t = 2.920$, $p < 0.05$) compared to fourth-year students, who were less inclined to align with anxiety-related scenarios in these areas.

The findings reveal nuanced differences in English-speaking anxiety between second- and fourth-year students. While fourth-year students experienced higher anxiety in specific contexts, they reported similar or lower levels in others compared to second-year students. Open-ended responses further uncovered additional sources of anxiety, categorized into four key themes through thematic analysis: internal factors, situational factors, social factors, and language-specific factors. For second-year students, anxiety was driven by internal factors such as fear of mistakes, low self-confidence, and cognitive overload, coupled with situational challenges like formal presentations and impromptu speaking tasks. Social factors, including peer comparisons and fear of judgment, and language-specific issues, such as vocabulary and grammar challenges, also heightened their stress. Among fourth-year students, internal factors, including fear of mistakes, cognitive overload, and self-doubt from past experiences, were more pronounced. Situational factors like unfamiliar settings and public presentations created additional anxiety due to higher performance expectations, while social factors, particularly fear of judgment and competitive pressure, played a significant role. Language-specific challenges, such as vocabulary and grammar, were common across both groups, underscoring shared and distinct sources of speaking anxiety based on academic level.

Discussion

This study identified three primary sources of speaking anxiety among second- and fourth-year English major students: comprehension apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These factors affected the two groups differently, with significant variations in their anxiety levels. This research aligns with Pristiyaputri et al.'s



(2023) study, which found a clear link between academic level and speaking anxiety in EFL learners. This study further strengthens the findings of Sugiyati and Indriani (2021), who observed lower anxiety levels in senior students compared to juniors. This suggests that consistent practice and experience can play a significant role in reducing speaking anxiety. In addition, this study goes beyond identifying the three anxiety factors. By analyzing overall anxiety levels and specifically fear of negative evaluation, the research reveals a significant difference in how anxiety impacts speaking participation between the two student groups. These findings support several previous studies (e.g., Akkakoson, 2016; Jindathai, 2015; Savaskan, 2017), highlighting how fear of negative judgment and making mistakes discourages students from actively engaging in speaking activities.

The thematic analysis reinforces these findings by identifying key factors contributing to students' anxiety. Second-year students experienced heightened stress due to situational factors such as public presentations and impromptu speaking, as well as social factors like peer comparison and fear of judgment. These align with their higher levels of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety as observed in the statistical analysis ($t = 10.711$, $p < .0001$; $t = -3.449$, $p < .05$; $t = 2.920$, $p < .05$, respectively). In contrast, fourth-year students' anxiety stemmed more from internal factors, such as fear of making mistakes, cognitive overload, and negative past experiences, coupled with specific situational stressors like formal interactions and unfamiliar environments. These findings correspond with their lower statistical anxiety levels overall but heightened concerns in specific scenarios, as highlighted by their fear of judgment ($\bar{X} = 3.25$).

Additionally, this study expands on prior research by showing how fear of negative evaluation plays a critical role in deterring students from active participation in speaking tasks. This aligns with studies by Akkakoson (2016); Jindathai (2015) and Savaskan (2017), which emphasize the negative impact of judgment anxiety on EFL learners. Furthermore, the results mirror Bhattarachaiyakorn and Phettakua's (2023) findings, where Thai university students reported high anxiety due to fear of negative judgment, though this study found that lack of confidence played a more moderate role overall. Interestingly, the statistical and thematic findings indicate that second-year students perceive confidence as a stronger influence on their anxiety compared to fourth-year students, who view it as moderately impactful.

The t-test results provide further nuance. Second-year students reported significantly higher fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety but lower comprehension apprehension than fourth-year students. This may be due to second-year students having limited face-to-face communication experience, reducing their concern over comprehension but heightening their stress about judgment and performance. In contrast, fourth-year students, with more experience but less in-person practice due to online learning, displayed heightened anxiety in real-life communication scenarios. This suggests that while two additional years of coursework enhance familiarity with English, they may not sufficiently improve confidence or reduce speaking anxiety, particularly for in-person interactions.

In summary, while senior students show lower generalized anxiety levels, nuanced stressors remain, particularly around social and internal pressures. The findings suggest a need for targeted interventions: building foundational speaking skills and confidence for second-year students while focusing on advanced communication strategies and addressing social judgment concerns for fourth-year students. These approaches would help bridge the gap between experience and performance, ultimately fostering greater fluency and reducing speaking anxiety across both groups.



Research Limitations and Recommendations

Research Limitations

The current study has some limitations due to the small sample size, and it was confined to students within the same curriculum. Additionally, it was mainly quantitative with an open-ended question, which might not provide enough in-depth information.

Recommendations for Pedagogical Implications

Speaking anxiety, often seen as an obstacle, can have both positive and negative effects. While high levels of anxiety can hinder fluency, classroom participation, and self-esteem (Savaskan, 2017), moderate anxiety can motivate students to prepare more thoroughly and aim for better performance (Bhattachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023). This suggests that while managing high anxiety is essential, some level of anxiety can be beneficial for learning. Three strategies to reduce anxiety are suggested:

1. **Increased Exposure:** Familiarity with the language can alleviate anxiety (Jindathai, 2015; Savaskan, 2017; Tsang, 2022).
2. **Virtual Learning Environments:** Tools like mobile-assisted language learning and AI-powered personalized feedback can reduce anxiety by allowing students to practice at their own pace (Chen, 2018; Hwang & Fu, 2019).
3. **Positive Attitude:** Students with a positive outlook on English speaking classes, despite their anxiety, showed better speaking improvement (Akkakoson, 2016).

Recommendations for Future Research

Studies on the impact of various teaching approaches, learning strategies, and the use of mobile-assisted or AI-assisted language learning tools to reduce anxiety and enhance EFL/ELF learning are highly recommended. These studies can provide insights into the effectiveness of different pedagogical techniques and technological tools in mitigating speaking anxiety and improving English communication skills among learners. As stated earlier in the limitation section, this study had a small sample size, and the students were from the same curriculum. Future research could benefit from a need analysis alongside in-depth interviews and a longitudinal study to gain a better understanding of the development of stress reduction strategies over time. Additionally, conducting in-depth interviews with students could provide insights into how to shorten the stress reduction period. This could involve examining the role of the curriculum, activities, instructors, and learners.

Further research could study with a larger sample size and include students from various majors as well as different class years: first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of English speaking anxiety levels among them. These approaches may yield valuable information for improving educational practices and reducing anxiety effectively.

References

- Aghajani, M., & Amanzadeh, H. (2017). The Effect of Anxiety on Speaking Ability: An Experimental Study on EFL Learners. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 4(7), 154–164. Retrieved from <https://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/view/690>
- Akkakoson, S. (2016). Speaking Anxiety in English Conversation Classrooms Among Thai Students. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 13(1), 63–82.



Bhattachaiyakorn, S., & Phettakua, S. (2023). English Speaking Anxiety Among Northeastern Thai University Students. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 16(1), 384–407. Retrieved from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/263448>

Chen, Y. (2018). Reducing Language Speaking Anxiety Among Adult EFL Learners with Interactive Holographic Learning Support System. In T.-T. Wu, Y.-M. Huang, R. Shadiev, L. Lin, & A. I. Starčič (Eds.), *Innovative Technologies and Learning, First International Conference, ICITL 2018, Portoroz, Slovenia, August 27–30, 2018* (pp. 101–110). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99737-7_10

Daymiel, R. J., Cantina, J. M., Alipoyo, V. R. I., Comecilla, M. O., Patay, A. S., & Recamara, J. T. (2022). Anxiety in Second Language in Relation to Students' Speaking Performance. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(8), 396–410. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i08.41>

Heritage, M., & Montle, M. E. (2022). Examining the Influence of the First Language on Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language (L2): A Linguistic Interference Perspective. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 4(4), 289–299. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v4i4.1092>

Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language Anxiety and Achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000071>

Huang, R. (2022). Coping Strategies of English Listening Anxiety in Senior High School Students. *Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(9), 194–199.

Hwang, G.-J., & Fu, Q.-K. (2019). Trends in the Research Design and Application of Mobile Language Learning: A Review of 2007–2016 Publications in Selected SSCI Journals. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 27(4), 567–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2018.1486861>

Illyin, I., Hanifah, G. N., & Yuniarti, S. (2021). The Affective Factors Influencing Students' Speaking Ability. In *Proceeding of the 5th UAD TEFL International Conference (UTIC)* (pp. 146–151). <https://doi.org/10.12928/utic.v2.5749.2019>

Inada, T. (2021). Teachers' Strategies for Decreasing Students' Anxiety Levels to Improve Their Communicative Skills. *English Language Teaching*, 14(3), 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n3p32>

Jindathai, S. (2015). Factors Affecting English Speaking Problems Among Engineering Students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. *Journal of Business Administration and Languages (JBAL)*, 3(2), 26–30. Retrieved from <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/TNIJournalBA/article/view/164492>

Takepoto, T., Akhter, M. S., & Talpur, Q. (2022). Reflections on English Speaking Anxiety of Engineering Students: Pilot Project. *Global Language Review*, 7(2), 85–95. [http://doi.org/10.31703/blr.2022\(VII-II\).08](http://doi.org/10.31703/blr.2022(VII-II).08)

Kiruthiga, E., & Christopher, G. (2022). The Impact of Affective Factors in English Speaking Skills. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(12), 2478–2485. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpsl.1212.02>



- Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An Exploration of Chinese EFL Learners' Unwillingness to Communicate and Foreign Language Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x>
- MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An Overview of Language Anxiety Research and Trends in Its Development. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 11–30). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-003>
- Nuypukiaw, S. (2018). Factors Effecting English Language Learning Anxiety of First Year Students: A Case Study of Phranakorn Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University. *Journal of Thonburi University*, 12(28), 231–243. Retrieved from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/trujournal/article/view/124148>
- Price, M. L. (1991). The Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interview with Highly Anxious Students. In E. K. Horwitz, & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language Anxiety: From Theory and Research to Classroom Implications* (pp. 101–108). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Pristiyaputri, A. E., Afiqoh, M., Jauhari, M. A., Afghani, M. J. A., & Kurniasih, K. (2023). The Differences of Speaking Anxiety Across Academic Levels and Gender. *The Journal of English Literacy Education*, 10(1), 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.36706/jele.v10i1.20292>
- Rahman, A., & Tomy, P. (2023). Intelligent Personal Assistant–An Interlocutor to Mollify Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 31, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2023.2204324>
- Russell, V. (2020). Language Anxiety and the Online Learner. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 338–352. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12461>
- Savaskan, I. (2017). Does Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Mitigate Learner Autonomy Development? *Psychology Research*, 7(8), 436–444.
- Sholikh, F. (2022). Communication Students' Anxiety in Speaking Skill Practice. *ELT Forum: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11(1), 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v11i1.49533>
- Sugiyati, K., & Indriani, L. (2021). Exploring the Level and Primary Causes of Public Speaking Anxiety Among English Department Students. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 2(1), 57–66.
- Suleimenova, Z. (2013). Speaking Anxiety in a Foreign Language Classroom in Kazakhstan. *Procedia–Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 1860–1868. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.131>
- Sunitisarn, R., Sa-Ngiamsak, P., Kochaphom, D., & Chayjarung, W. (2017). A Study of English Speaking and Listening Communication Problems of Third Years Students in Business English Class at Ratchathani University. In *Abstract Book & Proceedings, RTUNC 2017, The 2nd National Conference, July 26–27, 2017* (pp. 855–865). Ubonratchathani, Thailand: Ratchathani University.



Tsang, A. (2022). The Relationships between EFL Learners' Anxiety in Oral Presentations, Self-perceived Pronunciation, and Speaking Proficiency. *Language Teaching Research*, 26, 249801622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221102522>

Yasmin, T., Nadeem, M., Siddique, G. K., & Ali, M. S. Z. (2020). The Effect of Teachers' Language Speaking Anxiety on Their Performance in English. *Review of Education, Administration and Law*, 3(2), 285–291. <https://doi.org/10.47067/real.v3i2.63>

Yuh, A. H., & Kaewurai, W. (2021). An Investigation of Thai Students' English-speaking Problems and Needs and the Implementation Collaborative and Communicative Approaches to Enhance Students' English-speaking skills. *The Golden Teak: Humanity and Social Science Journal*, 27(2), 91–107. Retrieved from <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/tgt/article/view/252425>