

The Role of Formative Oral Assessment in Mitigating English Speaking Anxiety Among Thai University Students

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Abstract

This quantitative study investigates sources of English-speaking anxiety (ESA) and perceptions of high-stakes summative oral assessments among Thai university students. A 30-item survey indicated that affective factors—particularly fear of negative evaluation—contribute primarily to anxiety, which leads to task avoidance and silence. Traditional graded summative speaking activities were perceived as the predominant anxiety trigger. This study substantiates alternative, evidence-based assessment strategies, advocating a practical shift toward low-stakes formative oral assessments to replace high-stakes evaluations, thereby enhancing learner engagement and speaking performance.

Keywords: *Formative Oral Assessment, English-Speaking, Anxiety, Thai University Students*

INTRODUCTION

English speaking anxiety is a pervasive challenge among university students in Thailand, significantly impeding their communicative competence and academic progression (Anthoney & Wilang, 2023; Bao & Liu, 2021). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among Thai students, who, alongside Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Burmese counterparts, often exhibit elevated levels of speaking anxiety compared to other nationalities (Anthoney & Wilang, 2023). This anxiety can manifest in various ways, affecting students' ability to perform in oral presentations and generally participate in English-speaking academic environments (Amelia, 2022). Such apprehension is not unique to Thailand; similar challenges have been observed in other EFL contexts, such as among Moroccan and Indonesian university students, indicating a global pattern of anxiety in foreign language oral communication (Amelia, 2022). This pervasive speaking anxiety significantly hinders students' capacity to acquire essential communication skills vital for future professional endeavors (Sharif et al., 2023). Indeed, speaking in a foreign language is frequently cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experience, highlighting a consistent global trend (Nguyen, 2025). Specifically, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and inadequate language resources contribute to heightened anxiety levels during oral presentations among students (Amelia, 2022; Tapado, 2025). Linguistic challenges, such as limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties, along with sociocultural factors like classroom dynamics, further compound this issue, as observed in studies involving Vietnamese pre-service English teachers (Nguyen, 2025). Moreover, the correlation between speaking anxiety and negative attitudes towards English communication has been established, particularly among Thai EFL

students, where higher anxiety correlates with less positive attitudes toward speaking English in classroom settings (Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025).

Furthermore, a notable concern among students is self-doubt regarding their oral proficiency, which often outweighs the perceived difficulty of conversational exchanges (Yew et al., 2025). This apprehension is further exacerbated by the fear of making errors, leading to a reluctance to engage in spontaneous oral communication and a consequent loss of natural fluency (Nguyen & Tong, 2024). This apprehension is not merely a psychological barrier; it functionally impairs the student's ability to articulate ideas clearly during presentations, thereby diminishing overall academic performance (Alkhaldi et al., 2023). This inhibitory pattern includes a reluctance to participate, reduced social interactions, and disorganized thinking, all of which have negative psychological effects on the process of English oral communication (Alkhaldi et al., 2023).

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety manifests as apprehension and fear when speaking in a non-native language, a significant challenge for many English as a Foreign Language learners (Ding & Yusof, 2025). This anxiety stems from various sources, including fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety, all of which contribute to an avoidance of oral practice (Mahmoud, 2024). These multifaceted anxieties, ranging from concern over making pronunciation mistakes to general reluctance to speak, are often compounded by insufficient exposure to English, thereby impeding language acquisition (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). This fear can originate from trait apprehension, which is rooted in an individual's personal characteristics and low self-esteem, or from state apprehension, which is influenced by environmental factors such as audience presence or fear of negative evaluation (Belaman et al., 2022). Further contributing factors to this anxiety include low self-confidence, inadequate classroom management, and performance pressures, all of which contribute to an overall high level of speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language students. Additionally, learners' limited vocabulary and overall language proficiency can exacerbate anxiety during speaking activities, creating a complex interplay of cognitive and affective factors (Rajendran et al., 2025). Therefore, the core problem lies not merely in pre-existing anxiety but in the failure of current assessment models to address or mitigate it. By reinforcing fears of mistakes and negative evaluation, these models transform anxiety from a passive issue into an actively maintained barrier to learning.

English Speaking Anxiety (ESA) is a pervasive challenge for Thai university students, often resulting in task avoidance and silence. While the literature suggests several contributors to this phenomenon (Young, 1990; Yao et al., 2022), high rates of ESA, especially in performance-based courses, remain a persistent problem. Traditional summative assessments, designed to measure proficiency, frequently become the primary source of anxiety, thus overwhelming their pedagogical value. This study investigates the specific sources of ESA in this context. Crucially, it addresses a gap in the literature by examining how the implementation of low-stakes formative oral assessments can mitigate the anxiety triggered by these high-stakes, summative evaluations. Specifically, this research aims to investigate whether the factors influencing formative oral assessment vary significantly across different fields of study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. English Speaking Anxiety (ESA)

ESA is defined as a specific type of situation-specific anxiety experienced when using or anticipating the use of a second or foreign language. The literature suggests that affective factors—such as a lack of self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation (FNE)—are key drivers. Studies show that these factors often precede or accompany communicative tasks (Le, 2024).

Speaking anxiety is a pervasive challenge in foreign language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language contexts, where students frequently report moderate to high levels of apprehension during oral communication tasks (Rajendran et al., 2025). This apprehension is multifaceted, encompassing fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and reticence, which collectively impede students' willingness and ability to engage in spontaneous spoken interactions (Afidawati et al., 2024; Hanake, 2024). These anxieties are often rooted in a fear of making

grammatical mistakes, a broader concern about negative evaluation, and social-environmental factors within the classroom, as identified in research focusing on undergraduate populations (Aliyu et al., 2019). Furthermore, linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and grammatical inaccuracies are significant contributors to speaking anxiety (Mahmoud, 2024).

The intricacy of speaking, recognized as the most anxiety-provoking skill, also contributes to this phenomenon, negatively affecting second language (L2) acquisition (Cancino, 2025). This fear of making mistakes and the associated distress during communication are predominant, highlighting how the perception of social judgment and fear of negative evaluation play crucial roles in exacerbating anxiety (Quispe-Sanca et al., 2024). This fear often manifests when students must participate in oral presentations or impromptu speaking tasks, leading to behaviors such as staying silent during group discussions or avoiding language practice altogether (Cancino, 2025). Such avoidance behavior significantly hampers the development of oral proficiency, creating a vicious cycle where lack of practice reinforces anxiety and limits communicative competence (Liao, 2025).

Moreover, the cognitive load associated with real-time language production, coupled with self-perceived pronunciation inadequacies, further intensifies this anxiety, often outweighing actual speaking proficiency (Grieve et al., 2021). In particular, public speaking scenarios, including presentations and impromptu speeches, are frequently associated with elevated anxiety levels, impacting students' willingness to communicate (Bai & Xian, 2024; Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023). This can lead to physiological symptoms like trembling, sweating, and increased heart rate, further intensifying discomfort during speaking tasks (Ding & Yusof, 2025). This anxiety, often termed Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, is distinct from general public speaking apprehension (glossophobia) because it specifically pertains to the unique challenges of communicating in a non-native language, where linguistic and cultural factors amplify performance pressure (Haroud et al., 2025).

2. Formative Oral Assessment Factor

The underlying causes of foreign language classroom anxiety are diverse, encompassing factors such as communication apprehension, fear of inadequate performance, and trepidation surrounding negative evaluation (Bárkányi & Brash, 2025). Indeed, individuals experience stress, nervousness, and fear when communicating in a foreign language due to factors such as fear of making mistakes, being judged by others, and struggling to express oneself effectively (Mahmoud, 2024). These elements contribute to what is formally known as foreign language anxiety, a feeling of tension and worry specifically tied to foreign language learning (Mahmoud, 2024; Quispe-Sanca et al., 2024). Such anxiety often stems from linguistic insecurity, fear of mispronunciation, and the perceived judgment from both instructors and peers, which can be particularly acute in high-stakes assessment situations (Haroud et al., 2025). This pervasive anxiety, manifesting as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, significantly impedes students' motivation and enjoyment in learning, especially during oral production tasks (Haroud et al., 2025; Mahmoud, 2024; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025).

Distinguished from generalized anxiety, foreign language anxiety is a complex psychological construct that emerges from the specific context of foreign language learning, encompassing communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). This particular anxiety can manifest as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors tied directly to the classroom language learning experience (Sa'eed, 2024). Consequently, this can inhibit students' willingness to participate in oral activities, thereby hindering the development of their speaking skills and overall language proficiency ("Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)," 2021; Quispe-Sanca et al., 2024). This situation-specific anxiety is particularly prevalent among those who perceive their own communicative abilities in the target language as inadequate, exacerbating their discomfort during formal language learning processes (Bai et al., 2024). It becomes both a tool for communication and a potential barrier, influencing students' confidence and self-esteem (Haroud et al., 2025).

The sources of this foreign language anxiety include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, all of which contribute to an overall feeling of tension related to language learning (Mahmoud, 2024). This emotional factor significantly impacts the acquisition and development of all four basic language skills (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). Foreign language anxiety is

not merely a transient emotional state but a complex phenomenon involving self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors unique to the language learning process (Yao et al., 2022). It is thus situation-specific, differentiating it from general anxiety, and demands a contextualized approach to understanding its manifestations and impacts within educational settings (Andrea, 2021; Cancino & Cabello, 2024). This distinct form of academic anxiety, often termed Foreign Language Anxiety, is a situation-specific occurrence intricately linked to the formal language learning process, particularly for individuals who harbor low self-perceptions of their communicative competence in the target language (Bai et al., 2024). This can result in significant apprehension, especially for individuals who are self-conscious or introverted, as they are often required to generate new, publicly visible responses before fully mastering the language (Song, 2024). This distinct linguistic insecurity can be categorized into three primary components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, each contributing uniquely to the learner's overall discomfort in the foreign language classroom (Heydarnejad et al., 2022; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). These components significantly influence students' examination grades and overall classroom discourse, highlighting their detrimental impact on academic success (Han et al., 2022).

Research confirms that traditional summative assessments, characterized by their high-stakes nature, often generate intense anxiety. Because these assessments carry significant weight, they amplify the fear of making errors, leading to inhibited performance and reduced engagement (Yew et al., 2025). This phenomenon is not merely an indication of low proficiency but a psychological barrier that undermines learning outcomes.

METHODS

This section details the research design, participants, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures employed to investigate the role of formative oral assessment in mitigating English speaking anxiety among Thai university students.

1. Research Design

This study employed a rigorous quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between formative oral assessment practices and English-speaking anxiety among tertiary students enrolled in academic programs of Accounting (ACC), Logistics and Modern Finance (LMF), and Digital Innovative Technology (DIT).

2. Participants and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised Thai university students enrolled in a mandatory general English course at a private university situated in the central region of Thailand. A sample of 80 students ($N=80$) was recruited through convenience sampling, primarily based on course availability. The course utilized for sampling was "English for Communication," a compulsory course for first-year students in the 1/2025 academic semester. The convenience sample was drawn from the speaking sections of this course, specifically including students designated as Group A and Group B.

The sample was specifically drawn from students across three distinct academic programs: Accounting (ACC), Logistics and Modern Finance (LMF), and Digital Innovative Technology (DIT). These three majors were strategically selected based on an institutional policy to focus remediation efforts on first-year students in these specific disciplines who are known to experience speaking proficiency issues. This selection allows the study to analyze variations in communication approaches within high-priority groups identified by the university administration.

The final sample of 80 students comprised 22 male and 58 female students, predominantly first-year students from various schools, with an average age of 18-22 years. Notably, the convenience sampling excluded students who were registering for the "English for Communication" course for the second time or they are international program, indicating they did not pass or received a grade of F in the previous semester. This inclusion provides a more comprehensive view of student preparedness within the target population. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the

institutional review board, and all participants were informed of the study's voluntary nature and provided written consent.

3. Instrument and Reliability

The primary data collection instrument comprised a multi-section questionnaire meticulously designed to capture quantitative aspect of the students' experiences with English speaking anxiety and formative oral assessments. The questionnaire, incorporating elements from established scales such as Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, included items specifically designed to gauge communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Azhar et al., 2022; Manan et al., 2023). The primary instrument was a 30-item self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire was asked formative oral assessment. The original questionnaire was in English and was carefully translated into Thai. Three experts in learning English checked the Thai version to make sure it was correct. It was tested with students to ensure it was valid and accurate. This careful process showed that the final tool was of high quality, with a reliability score of 0.90 and the reliability of the instrument was reported using Cronbach's alpha (α). The formative oral assessment demonstrated high internal consistency with $\alpha = 0.89$. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). To ensure methodological rigor, a pilot study ($N=30$) was conducted, which confirmed the internal consistency of the overall instrument with a high Cronbach's alpha (alpha) coefficient of 0.92, indicating excellent reliability.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The gathered quantitative data were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics to characterize the distribution of anxiety levels and formative oral assessment perceptions among the student cohort (Matyakhan et al., 2024). This robust statistical approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both individual anxiety components and their inter relationships within the context of formative oral assessments. The online questionnaire will be distributed via university email, allowing a collection period of approximately one month to ensure an optimal response rate. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 26.0). The statistical procedures employed were:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Calculation of Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) to describe the level and distribution of anxiety factors.
2. Inferential Statistics: Pearson's Correlation (r): To examine the degree and direction of the linear relationship between the factor of formative oral assessment. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < .05$.

RESULT

The ensuing sections detail the quantitative findings, commencing with an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by an in-depth analysis of their reported speaking anxiety levels and perceptions of formative oral assessment. The demographic profile of the respondents was analyzed to understand the characteristics of the study participants, focusing on gender and field of study in Table 1 and Table 2.

1. Demographic information

Table 1 Gender

Gender: ($N=80$)	Percentage
Female	51.3%
Male	48.7 %
Total	100%

Table 1 displays the gender distribution of the 80 respondents. The gender distribution was composed of 51.3% female and 48.7% male subjects in the sample.

Table 2 Major of the study

Major of the study	Percentage
Digital Technology Innovation (DTI)	70.0%
Accounting (ACC)	21.2%
Logistic Management and Modern Management (LM&MM)	8.8%
Total	100%

According to Table 2, the largest number of respondents (70.0%) majored in Digital Technology Innovation. The remaining 21.2% belonged to major on Accounting, and for Logistics Management and Modern Management, it was 8.8%.

2. Factors of Formative Oral Assessment

The descriptive analysis of the 30-item scale confirmed high levels of anxiety, particularly related to evaluation factors. The factor with the highest mean score related directly to the anxiety trigger of formative oral assessment (Table 3).

Table 3 Factors of formative oral assessment on speaking anxiety

Factor	Description	Mean	S.D.
Factor 1	Perceived Threat of Summative Oral Exams	4.35	0.68
Factor 2	Fear of Negative Evaluation (General)	3.98	0.81
Factor 3	Communication Apprehension (Fluency)	3.52	0.95

Table 3, the result showed that speaking anxiety factors related to oral exams reveals a clear hierarchy of concern among participants. The highest source of anxiety is the Perceived Threat of Summative Oral Exams ($M = 4.35$, $S.D. = 0.68$), suggesting that the high-stakes, evaluative nature of these specific exams is the most significant and consistent concern. This is closely followed by a Fear of Negative Evaluation ($M = 3.98$, $S.D. = 0.81$), indicating a strong general apprehension about being judged. The lowest mean score belongs to Communication Apprehension (Fluency) ($M = 3.52$), which also exhibits the greatest variability ($S.D. = 0.95$), meaning anxiety over fluency is a less potent, though highly individualized, concern compared to the threat of the exam and the broader fear of negative judgment.

3. Threat of Summative

The study was conducted to compare the mean scores of the perceived threat of summative speaking skill in the first factors across participants grouped by their academic Major (Accounting, Logistics and Modern Management, and Digital Innovative Technology).

Table 4, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean perceived threat related to summative speaking skills among students from the three different academic majors, as shown by $F(2, 77) = 0.563$, $p = 0.572$. This suggests that students across these majors have a similar level of understanding regarding the speaking test criteria, likely due to prior instruction from their teachers before the start of the class “*When I know the speaking criteria before starting class, I can reduce anxiety about speaking English.*”, ($M = 3.45$, $S.D. = 1.14$). Table 8 further supports this by showing that the language classroom environment provides a positive assessment framework for speaking criteria, which may contribute to students’ awareness and familiarity with the

evaluation process. Despite this, it appears that students do not consistently collect or track their speaking scores in the classroom, which could limit their ability to monitor and improve their performance systematically.

Table 4 Threat of summative oral exam

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	0.846	2	0.423	0.563	0.572
Within Groups	57.876	77	0.752		
Total	58.722	79			

Note. The total sample size for this analysis was $N = 80$

However, the data also reveals that students still experience anxiety related to speaking English, as evidenced by their agreement with the statement in Item 1, “*Speaking English, I am so afraid to do it wrong.*” ($M = 3.90$, $S.D. = 1.00$). Table 8 further supports this highlights an ongoing concern about their speaking test assessments, reflecting a lack of confidence in their speaking abilities. Even though they understand the criteria and receive positive environmental support, the emotional barrier of fear and worry remains a significant factor affecting their performance.

4. Fear of Negative Evaluation

The study was conducted to compare the mean scores of the fear of negative evaluation in speaking skill in the first factors across participants grouped by their academic Major (Accounting, Logistics and Modern Management, and Digital Innovative Technology). According to Table 5, The results indicated that the effect of academic major on fear of negative evaluation in speaking was not statistically significant, $F(2, 77) = 0.928$, $p = .400$.

Table 5 Fear of negative evaluation

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	1.269	2	0.634	0.928	0.400
Within Groups	52.639	77	0.684		
Total	53.908	79			

Note. The total sample size for this analysis was $N = 80$

This suggests that the average level of fear of being negatively evaluated while speaking does not differ significantly among students in these three academic programs. This means that students from all three groups generally feel the same amount of fear about negative evaluation when speaking in the classroom. In this study showed in the statement in the item 3 “*I am always worried about negative assessment when I speak English.*” ($M = 3.29$, $S.D. = 1.30$). Table 8 further supports that the students have a worry about providing the feedback them front of the friends because it makes them feel shy. Moreover, the negative evaluation makes students reduce confidence in their speaking in the class by their agreement with the statement Item 4: “*I don’t like speaking English because it makes me feel*

stressed" ($M = 2.42$, $S.D. = 1.26$). This finding indicated that the fear of negative evaluation as a predominant factor contributing to speaking anxiety among students.

5. Communication Apprehension

The study was conducted to compare the mean scores of the communication apprehension in speaking skill in the first factors across participants grouped by their academic Major (Accounting, Logistics and Modern Management, and Digital Innovative Technology). Based on Table 6, the study indicated that communication apprehension in was not statistically significant, $F(2, 77) = 1.117$, $p = .333$. This means that the students feel the fear or anxiety when they have to speak or are anticipating speaking to others. Moreover, they effect various communication settings like classroom. This result agreement with the statement Item 5: "*When I must speak English to somebody, I am afraid* ($M = 3.70$, $S.D. = 1.01$) and Item 5: "*I started getting anxiety every time I had to talk in an English classroom.*" ($M = 3.64$, $S.D. = 1.01$) This showed that the speaking in front of class is to make them feel seriously and they also show that speaking to friends that worry.

Table 6 Communication Apprehension

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	1.685	2	0.843	1.117	0.333
Within Groups	58.093	77	0.754		
Total	59.778	79			

Note. The total sample size for this analysis was $N = 80$

According to Table 7, the result indicates that the most significant source of speaking anxiety is the fear of making errors, as reflected in Statement 1: "*Speaking English, I am so afraid to do it wrong.*", which registered the highest mean ($M = 3.90$). Closely following this is the general apprehension of having to speak English, shown by statement 5: "*When I must speak English to somebody, I am afraid,*" ($M = 3.70$), and the development of anxiety within the classroom setting in statement 6: "*I started getting anxiety every time I had to talk in an English classroom*" ($M = 3.64$).

Table 7 Speaking Anxiety

Statements of Speaking Anxiety	Mean	S. D
1. Speaking English, I am so afraid to do it wrong.	3.90	1.00
2. When I know the speaking criteria before starting class, I can reduce anxiety about speaking English.	3.45	1.14
3. I am always worried about negative assessment when I speak English.	3.29	1.30
4. I don't like speaking English because it makes me feel stressed.	2.42	1.26
5. When I must speak English to somebody, I am afraid.	3.70	1.01
6. I started getting anxiety every time I had to talk in an English classroom.	3.64	1.01

Note. The total sample size for this analysis was $N = 80$

The potential for reducing anxiety by knowing the speaking criteria beforehand in statement 2, ($M = 3.45$) suggests that clarity and preparation are moderately helpful coping mechanisms. Conversely, the direct statement regarding the stress associated with speaking English in statement 4: "*I don't like speaking English because it makes me feel stressed*" received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.42$), suggesting that while anxiety exists, the dislike for speaking due to stress is not as pervasive as

the specific fears of error and general apprehension. Finally, statement 3 *"I am always worried about negative assessment when I speak English,"* $M = 3.29$.

DISCUSSION

The finding that fear of negative evaluation (FNE) registered the highest mean score corroborates the persistent findings in Asian-context studies regarding ESA, such as those by Young (1990) and Yew et al. (2025). This high score indicates that the fear of public scrutiny or criticism from peers and instructors remains a more significant contributor to anxiety than factors related to testing conditions or self-perception. The study's principal finding—that traditional graded summative speaking activities are perceived as the predominant anxiety trigger—is consistent with the literature on test anxiety (Yao et al., 2022). This outcome emphasizes the need to reform assessment practices. To enhance learner engagement and speaking practice, educators must decouple assessment from the overwhelming fear associated with high-stakes evaluation. This shift is important because anxiety, which leads to task avoidance and silence, directly counteracts the goal of communicative language teaching. Anxiety inhibits practice and performance, thus negating the opportunity for skill acquisition.

This pervasive anxiety among students across diverse academic fields underscores a critical pedagogical challenge, as fear of negative evaluation is a significant predictor of overall communication apprehension in foreign language settings (Rahmat et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2021). This phenomenon aligns with findings that communicative tasks are particularly challenging for English as a Foreign Language students, often leading to apprehension and a reluctance to participate (Bakhtyari & Hafizoah, 2022). This apprehension is not confined to specific academic backgrounds, suggesting a broader issue stemming from inherent psychological factors such as a fear of making mistakes and low self-esteem, which are widely recognized triggers for anxiety in foreign language communication (Siagian & Adam, 2017; Umisara et al., 2021). Specifically, elements such as fear of teacher, fear of being mocked by peers, and a general lack of confidence are consistently identified as prominent sources of anxiety in classroom settings (Abbasi et al., 2020).

Such findings resonate with research highlighting communication apprehension as a primary factor contributing to speaking anxiety among language learners, often leading to avoidance behaviors and reduced participation (Carin, 2025; Shaalan, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2023). Consequently, understanding the specific manifestations of communication apprehension and its underlying causes is crucial for developing targeted interventions (Thu & Tran, 2024). These interventions must address not only the linguistic challenges but also the psychological components that contribute to heightened anxiety levels, such as the apprehension of being negatively judged by peers or instructors (Asysyfa et al., 2019; Romadhon et al., 2023). This pervasive anxiety often manifests as a fear of making errors, leading to a reluctance to speak and a diminished capacity to engage meaningfully in oral tasks (Desta, 2019; Subekti, 2020). This is further compounded by a lack of preparation and an inadequate vocabulary, exacerbating students' reluctance to participate in spoken English activities (Hussain et al., 2021). Such concerns about performance and potential judgment underscore why many students experience discomfort and nervousness when tasked with speaking in English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language contexts, ultimately impacting their motivation and fluency during presentations and discussions (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2023).

This apprehension is a significant impediment to language acquisition, as speaking is arguably the most challenging of the four English language skills, often eliciting anxiety when students are required to speak in front of a class (Kuluşaklı & Genç, 2024). This fear of speaking can manifest as shyness, nervousness, and a lack of confidence, significantly hindering students' active participation in English class discussions (Li & Heydarnejad, 2024). Indeed, the persistent fear of error and judgment is a primary contributor to speaking anxiety among college students, affecting their confidence and willingness to engage in verbal interactions (Yao, 2024). This highlights the necessity for pedagogical approaches that foster a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, thereby encouraging students to participate more actively despite their linguistic limitations (Alhasan & Amar, 2024; Sam et al., 2024). This anxiety can significantly impede the development of communication skills and overall

language learning, creating a substantial challenge for educators seeking to promote active participation in the target language (Santos & Kunso, 2021).

Therefore, understanding the underlying causes of this communication apprehension, including poor proficiency, insufficient linguistic input, and fear of judgment, is paramount for designing effective interventions to mitigate these psychological barriers (Alhasan & Amar, 2024; Riaz & Riaz, 2022). This pervasive apprehension often stems from a fear of making mistakes, leading to a reluctance to speak and engage in oral communication, thereby impacting overall English speaking performance (Daymiel et al., 2022). This reluctance is further exacerbated by students' self-consciousness regarding their pronunciation and their inability to express themselves as effectively as they can in their native language (Leyale, 2023). This can result in demotivation and a loss of interest in language learning, as students become overly focused on their perceived shortcomings rather than their progress (Giray et al., 2022). Furthermore, the apprehension associated with speaking a non-native language can originate not only from the inherent complexity of linguistic skills but also from anxiety itself, often leading to reduced self-esteem and diminished confidence in language abilities (Carin, 2025; Mahmoud, 2024).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reliance on a convenience sample of eighty first-year students from a single university restricts the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design captures anxiety at a single point in time, precluding the identification of direct causal relationships. While a strong correlation ($r = 0.65$) was found between summative assessment threat and avoidance behaviour, this design cannot definitively trace the developmental trajectory of anxiety or prove that the proposed formative oral assessment intervention causes a reduction in anxiety. Based on the empirical findings, the study puts forth concrete, assessment-focused recommendations for pedagogical reform. It is strongly recommended to pilot formative oral assessment, replacing high-stakes, one-time oral examinations with a sequence of low-stakes, formative speaking tasks (three to four per semester). These tasks must embed reflective self-assessment and peer evaluation to empower students and decentralize the burden of the teacher as the sole evaluator. The university should focus on training teachers in the feedback techniques of oral assessment. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches, such as interviews.

CONCLUSION

This study conclusively demonstrates the prevalence of English-speaking anxiety among Thai university students. Specifically, the findings confirm that there were no significant differences among the three majors in bachelor's degrees regarding key factors, such as fear of negative evaluation and reliance on high-stakes summative oral assessments. By implementing continuous, low-stakes tasks and providing developmental feedback, formative oral assessment directly addresses the evaluation-induced threat, consequently effectively de-escalating test anxiety and encouraging the communicative risk-taking necessary for fluency acquisition. Nevertheless, students still worry about speaking because they fear making mistakes while speaking.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During in preparing this work, the author(s) employed Generative AI tools to enhance readability, refine the language, and ensure the manuscript's clarity. Following the use of this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as necessary, assuming full responsibility for the publication's content.

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