Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 17. Number 2, June 2026 Pp.498-513
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol17no2.31

Do Thai EFL University Students Need Teachers to Alleviate Foreign Language Anxiety? Learners' Perspectives Through the Lens of EFL Learning

Patthaya Punyaporn
Department of English Language for Higher Education,
International College for Sustainability Studies,
Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand
patthaya@g.swu.ac.th

Received: 03/09/2026 Accepted: 06/16/2026 Published:06/25/2026

Abstract

Alleviating language anxiety in English language classrooms is vital. When students feel emotionally comfortable, they are more confident to participate and develop their language skills. This study aims to investigate (1) the levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA) Thai undergraduate students experience in the English language classroom, (2) the main sources of students' foreign language anxiety, (3) the types of learning skills and language learning activities that students perceive as anxiety-provoking regarding the course syllabus, and (4) students' expectations regarding the role of the teacher in helping them alleviate their language anxiety. One hundred seventy students (N=170) participated in this study. This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a closed-ended questionnaire, two open-ended questions, and ten students participated in focus group semi- structured interviews. The findings indicated that students had a moderate degree of anxiety. Students' language anxiety was primarily caused by a lack of vocabulary, writing abilities, speaking proficiency, and understanding of fundamental grammatical principles. Regarding the course syllabus, being asked to answer unexpected questions and taking examinations were seen as stressful events. The interviews and open-ended questions produced consistent results, demonstrating that teachers' personalities are essential in alleviating students' anxiety. Students need their teachers to be kind, calm, and helpful, to give them constructive feedback, and not to put excessive pressure on them. Finally, listening to students' voices is important to lessen students' language anxiety.

Keywords: Course syllabus, English as a foreign language, foreign language anxiety, quality education, students' perspectives, tertiary education, Thai undergraduate students

How to cite: (2026). Do Thai EFL University Students Need Teachers to Alleviate Foreign Language Anxiety? Learners' Perspectives Through the Lens of EFL Learning. *Arab World English Journal, 17*(2): 498-513.https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol17no2.31

Introduction

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a prevalent issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Thailand. This is particularly true for non-English majors, who often face various language-related difficulties at the university level. These challenges may stem from several factors, including peer pressure and language anxiety (Abrar et al., 2018; Tien, 2023), unsupportive classroom environments and rigid teacher–student interactions (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Khajavy et al., 2016), as well as mismatched teaching approaches (Naser Pour et al., 2018). As a result, achieving the goal of fluent English communication remains difficult for many learners. Among these challenges, foreign language anxiety has been widely recognized as a major barrier to successful language learning due to its negative impact on learning outcomes. Consequently, FLA has received increasing attention in academic research since the 1970s. Teachers inevitably play a crucial role in helping students cope with and reduce language anxiety in the classroom. Students who are unable to manage stress, worry, or anxiety may avoid participating in English-related activities or communicating with others. This aligns with Spielberger's (1983) definition of anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 15).

Language anxiety is a real obstacle for students. Students with low proficiency tend to struggle more. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to be aware of students' difficulties in the language classroom. Teachers should pay attention to students' levels of FLA, the main sources of their anxiety, how they cope with it, and what they expect from their instructors by gaining a deeper understanding of students' perspectives. Then, teachers can find the way to adopt more appropriate and supportive teaching practices that accommodate learners of different proficiency levels and ultimately enhance students' learning outcomes.

Focusing on specific course syllabus, there is still a dearth of research in this field, even though earlier studies have sought to analyze how students behave in various circumstances when they have foreign language anxiety (Kondo & Yang, 2004; Tsiplakides and Keramida , 2009). When looking for strategies to foster a low-anxiety classroom environment, teachers should pay attention to what students say and give them enough time to explain. Since the course is specifically and exclusively tailored for this institution, students' language anxiety is considerably worth exploring to improve quality of education which is consistent with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 for the purpose of fostering learners' lifelong proficiency and global communicative competence. Additionally, this course syllabus has not yet been studied in any research before. It is also crucial to examine the function of educators in order to ascertain if students require targeted assistance to alleviate language anxiety.

The current study sought to address the following four research questions to close this gap:

1. What levels of foreign language anxiety do Thai EFL students experience in the English language classroom?
2. What are the main sources of foreign language anxiety in the classroom?
3. What types of learning skills and language learning activities do students perceive as anxiety-provoking in relation to the course syllabus?
4. To what extent do teachers help students alleviate their anxiety, and what do students expect from their teachers in helping them alleviate their language anxiety?

Literature Review

For more than five decades, FLA has been widely examined and remains a key issue in

language learning classrooms (Dewaele et al., 2023; Ismail, 2022; Tsui & Cheng, 2022; Zhao, 2022). Scovel (1978) described it as a state of emotional tension or vague fear. In the context of language learning, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLA as a distinct set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. They identified three main components of FLA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as shown in Figure One below.

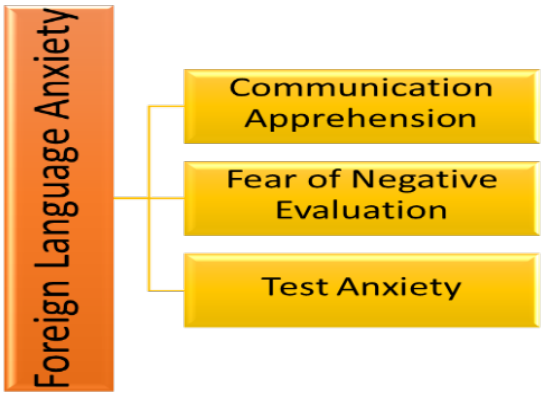


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986)

Researchers have long recognized the role of anxiety in foreign language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) as a tool to assess this specific construct within the classroom environment. Later, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) defined language anxiety as, "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 283). Language anxiety is therefore considered a major barrier to the effectiveness of language instruction. Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that highly anxious learners often struggle with speaking, comprehension, and pronunciation, and tend to avoid participating in oral activities.

Teachers play an essential role in reducing students' language anxiety. Young (1991) identified teacher attitudes as a major source of foreign language anxiety and categorized its origins into several areas, including individual and interpersonal factors, learner and teacher beliefs, classroom interaction, instructional practices, and assessment procedures. Furthermore, both situational factors and individual learner profiles have been identified as key contributors to language anxiety (Young, 1991; Jackson, 2002). Situational factors include course level, classroom activities, learning environment, teacher behavior, and peer interaction, while learner characteristics involve personality, learning style, motivation, beliefs, proficiency, and attitudes (Chou, 2018; Dewaele, 2002; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Yashima, 2002). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) also noted that anxiety is particularly evident in second language contexts such as speaking and testing situations. For learners with low confidence or limited interest in language learning, anxiety may result in frustration, fatigue, or withdrawal from classroom participation. Despite teachers' efforts to encourage interaction, anxious students often remain silent, especially during assessments. Previous studies have consistently shown that such anxiety-inducing conditions can negatively affect language learning outcomes (Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Williams & Andrade, 2008). Given the complex nature of language anxiety, it is important to examine its sources across diverse learning contexts.

Many researchers have examined language anxiety and its relationship with other factors to understand better why students feel anxious when learning a foreign language. A recent study by

Ismail et al. (2022) at a Malaysian public university found that communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation were the main contributors to students' foreign language anxiety. The study also emphasized the important role teachers play in helping to reduce learners' anxiety. Similarly, Chan and Wu (2004) identified five major sources of language anxiety: low language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, competitive classroom activities, anxious personality traits, and pressure from parents and peers. They also highlighted common anxiety-provoking situations such as examinations, public speaking, spelling tasks, unclear instructions, and interactions with native speakers. These findings are consistent with Kondo and Yang's (2003) study in Japan, which linked classroom anxiety to low proficiency, speaking activities, and fear of negative peer evaluation. Cheng (2002) also found a relationship between writing anxiety and academic achievement, while Saito et al. (1999) reported a negative relationship between reading anxiety and academic performance.

In the Thai context, Chanprasert and Wichadee (2015) found no significant relationship between language anxiety, gender, and the use of anxiety-reduction strategies. Similarly, Alshahrani (2016) reported that gender did not significantly influence Saudi university students' anxiety levels or English proficiency. In Indonesia, Manipuspika (2018) found that higher anxiety levels were strongly associated with reduced willingness to communicate. From an instructional perspective, Pakdaman et al. (2022) demonstrated that a negotiated syllabus can effectively reduce anxiety and enhance learners' motivation compared with traditional teacher-centered approaches in the Iranian context.

The goals of this research are to ascertain the level of foreign language anxiety that Thai undergraduate students experience in the English classroom, identify the main sources of this anxiety, identify the language learning activities and learning skills that students find anxiety-provoking regarding the course syllabus, and evaluate students' expectations of the teacher's role in assisting them in overcoming their language anxiety.

Method

To achieve the purpose of this study, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed as follows:

Participants

A total of 170 first-year Thai EFL university students voluntarily participated in the quantitative phase of this study. The participants comprised mixed-ability students enrolled in two required foundation English courses: SWU193 (Listening and Speaking for Effective Communication) and SWU194 (Reading and Writing for Effective Communication). Together, these courses integrated both receptive and productive language skills. University entrance exam results reflected varying degrees of English competence. Convenience sampling was used in this study. In the qualitative phase, ten students from different faculties were purposively selected. They shared similar characteristics and demonstrated experiences of language anxiety across multiple dimensions.

Instruments

In the first step, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) was employed in this study, along with a unique questionnaire that was modeled after the course syllabi for SWU193 and SWU194. Two open-ended questions were added to the modified FLCAS. Using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), three specialists analyzed

the validity of all questionnaire items. The analysis brought back scores higher than 0.80, confirming that the tool was valid and consistent with expert evaluations. In response to expert feedback, several inconsistent items were excluded from the final version of the questionnaire. Three of the original thirty-three objects in the FLCAS were left out. "I do not understand why some people get so upset over foreign languages," "I would not be nervous speaking a foreign language with native speakers," and "I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language" were those three statements. A pilot study was conducted to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. All research instruments were translated into Thai prior to distribution to accommodate the participants' English proficiency levels and ensure data accuracy. The pilot questionnaire was administered via Google Forms to 38 students who shared similar characteristics with the target demographic. They filled out this form with their teachers' consent and in accordance with ethical norms. The reliability of the 16-item and 30-item questionnaires was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding values of .936 and .946, respectively. These figures demonstrate strong internal consistency. To get qualitative information, two open-ended questions were included to collect qualitative data. For the qualitative phase, ten students were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured focus group interviews. The subjects were told that ethical considerations would ensure complete secrecy of their personal information and answers, as well as no impact on their grades in either class. Furthermore, the use of pseudonyms throughout data analysis and reporting would help to preserve their anonymity. The focus group sessions, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each, were audio-recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. The interview questions were modeled after the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986) and tailored to align with the specific course syllabi for SWU193 and SWU194.

Data Analysis

A total of 170 completed questionnaires were collected via Google Forms. The collected data were then processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Means and standard deviations were analyzed to answer research questions one and three, measuring the levels of FLA that the Thai EFL students experienced in the classroom. For the qualitative phase, the interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to answer research questions two and four. To protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout the data reporting stage.

Results

Results from a Questionnaire

Part One: Students' Levels of FLA

Regarding research question one, "What levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA) do Thai EFL students experience in the English language classroom?", the FLCAS results showed that participants experienced a moderate level of FLA, as presented in Table One.

Table 1. *Mean scores and standard deviations for FLCAS statements*

N=170

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	3.15	1.19
2	I do not worry about making mistakes in language class.	3.09	1.28

3	I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class.	3.05	1.29
4	It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in a foreign language.	2.88	1.22
5	It would not bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	2.24	1.11
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.98	1.08
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than me.	3.74	1.15
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	3.08	1.12
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.83	1.21
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	3.68	1.27
11	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things that I know.	2.98	1.18
12	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.78	1.11
13	I get upset when I do not understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.44	1.26
14	Even if I am well prepared for the language class, I feel anxious about it.	3.61	1.17
15	I often feel like skipping my language class.	2.33	1.24
16	I feel confident when speaking in a foreign language class.	3.03	1.21
17	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.56	1.18
18	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in language class.	3.41	1.29
19	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	2.94	1.26
20	I do not feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.95	1.14
21	I always feel that the other students speak a foreign language better than I do.	3.66	1.16
22	I feel very self-conscious about speaking a foreign language in front of other students.	2.70	1.01
23	Language class moves so quickly, I worry about getting left behind.	3.05	1.19
24	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	2.79	1.30
25	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	3.14	1.32
26	When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.96	1.14
27	I get nervous when I do not understand every word the language teacher says.	3.13	1.16
28	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak a foreign language.	3.17	1.13
29	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language.	2.69	1.32
30	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions that I have not prepared in advance.	3.54	1.32
	FLA levels of all participants in total	3.05	.76

As shown in Table One, the participants' overall FLA levels fell within the moderate range ($\bar{x}$ = 3.05). Among the 30 items on the FLCAS, the three highest mean scores were for Item 9 ($\bar{x}$ =3.83), Item 7 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.74), and Item 10 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.68), respectively. These items were identified as being at a high level of FLA. However, the table also showed that the lowest mean score was for the statement “It would not bother me at all to take more foreign language classes” (Item 5), which had a low level of FLA ($\bar{x}$= 2.24). Another low mean score was observed in Item 15 ($\bar{x}$ = 2.33), which indicates that participants experienced relatively low levels of classroom anxiety in this specific area.

Results from Focus Group Interviews

Part Two: Main Sources of FLA

Research question two sought to answer the following: 'What are the main sources of foreign language anxiety in the classroom?'. Concerning the answers to research question two, excerpts were drawn from participants' perspectives regarding the main sources of language anxiety. The findings were analyzed using thematic coding and categorized into four main themes: speaking anxiety, absence of foundational grammatical understanding, lack of confidence in writing skills, and inadequate vocabulary.

Speaking Anxiety

Most students described the reasons for their speaking anxiety, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Blink: "What makes me most nervous during an English lesson is my speaking ability, particularly when the instructor asks me to answer impromptu questions or deliver a presentation without prior preparation."

Pim: "I am especially anxious when speaking in front of the class because I struggle to form English sentences. Limited vocabulary makes me hesitate, stammer, and feel uncomfortable when answering teachers' questions."

Absence of Foundational Grammatical Understanding

Some students expressed concern because of their lack of knowledge of fundamental grammatical principles. As one student put it, this worry affected their speech and writing.

Pam: "I think I am worried about using grammar rules correctly when writing. When I have to write a paragraph, I frequently feel uneasy. Sometimes I am unsure about my use of proper grammar since I cannot recall the fundamental principles while speaking in front of the group."

Moreover, three out of ten students reported that they came from suburban areas where there were with insufficient numbers of qualified English teachers. Therefore, they lacked opportunities to learn English effectively, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Ken: "Due to my limited grammar skills, I find it hard and stressful to learn English. My high school was in a suburban neighborhood with a scarcity of English instructors. I had to learn English with a teacher whose major was Thai and sociology, or sometimes with teachers on television"

Bee: "During COVID-19, I studied English online and television instead of attending in-person classes. This limited my language foundation, and graduating through assignments left me feeling anxious when interacting with English instructors at university."

Lack of Confidence in Writing Skills

As illustrated in Table Three, some students expressed concerns about the challenge of writing in English. One of the students shared the following:

Yong: "I feel worried about my writing skills, especially when taking exams. I am terrified of failing the writing test. I do not have faith in my ability to write the exam, and I cannot write unless I know the subject beforehand."

Inadequate Vocabulary

Regarding vocabulary knowledge, some students reported feeling anxious due to a lack of confidence when using English vocabulary in both speaking and writing, as one student explained:

Perry: "I feel anxious and lack confidence when I have to apply my vocabulary knowledge to speaking and writing in class because I know very little and cannot remember the meanings of words and how to use them. In my opinion, it is hard to grasp and retain."

Part 3: Types of Learning Skills and Language Learning Activities that Students Perceive as Anxiety-provoking in Relation to the Course Syllabus

Regarding research question three: "What types of learning skills and language learning activities do students perceive as anxiety-provoking in relation to the course syllabus?", the following table illustrated means and standard deviations of students' levels of FLA in relation to the course syllabus.

Table 2. *Means and standard deviations of students' levels of FLA in relation to the course syllabus*

N=170

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
	SWU193: Listening and Speaking for Effective English Communication	2.99	1.00
	Activities (Ungraded - In class)	3.31	1.21
1	I felt anxious when speaking English individually in front of the class.	3.26	1.44
2	I felt anxious when the teacher asked me to answer impromptu questions.	3.48	1.31
3	I felt anxious whenever the teacher gave me a specific topic to discuss based on the weekly lesson theme.	3.17	1.24
	Group Work Assignment (Graded - Outside class)	2.70	1.07
4	I felt anxious when I had to create a role-play VDO clip as assigned with my friends.	2.65	1.12
5	I felt anxious knowing that my peers had to give me scores based on my performance within the group (Role-play VDO clip).	2.74	1.26
	Group Work Assignment (Graded - Inside class)	2.96	1.32
6	I felt anxious when I had to work in a group on the theme "Summarizing from listening and presentation."	2.96	1.32
	Quiz (Graded)	2.83	1.15
7	I felt anxious when taking Speaking Quiz 1, paired with my classmate in front of the teacher (Themes: personality/strengths/weaknesses).	2.73	1.30
8	I felt anxious when taking the in-class listening quiz.	2.93	1.32
	SWU194: Reading and Writing for Effective English Communication	3.09	1.07
	In- class activities (Ungraded)	3.01	1.19
9	I felt anxious when I had to write a paragraph assigned in class.	3.08	1.29
10	I felt anxious when I had to read passages and answer questions in class.	2.93	1.27
	Individual writing assignment (Graded - Outside class)	2.55	1.23

11	I felt anxious when I had to write a one-page journal: Life in One Week.	2.55	1.23
	Midterm and final examination (Graded – In-class exams)	3.24	1.14
12	I felt anxious when taking the midterm exam. (Reading part)	2.92	1.27
13	I felt anxious when taking the midterm exam (Grammar part).	3.57	1.30
14	I felt anxious when taking the midterm exam (Writing part)	3.41	1.30
15	I felt anxious when taking the final exam (Reading part).	2.92	1.29
16	I felt anxious when taking the final exam (Writing part).	3.37	1.34

Table Two shows the students' levels of FLA in relation to the course syllabus for both subjects. The overall FLA level for the speaking and listening course was moderate ($\bar{x}$ = 2.99). Within this course, the highest mean score was for Item 2 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.48). For the reading and writing course, the overall FLA level was also moderate ($\bar{x}$ = 3.09). Among the eight statements, the two highest mean scores were for Item 13 and Item 14 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.57 and 3.41, respectively). Interestingly, Table Two also shows that the lowest mean score was for Item 11 ($\bar{x}$ = 2.55).

Results from an Open-ended Question

To address research question four, a second open-ended question was included to gather deeper insights into the students' perspectives. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data by using frequency and percentage, as shown in Tables Three and Four below.

Table 3. *Additional students' opinions about how teachers help alleviate their language anxiety*

Data	Frequency	Percentage
Responses	164	96.47
Non-responses	6	3.53
Total	170	100.00

Table 4. *Students' expectations for how teachers can help alleviate their language anxiety*

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Students' language anxiety can be alleviated if		
…teachers are helpful and give constructive advice.	46	37.40
…teachers are calm, kind, and they encourage students to learn.	42	34.15
…teachers do not put too much pressure on their students and they are not too strict.	35	28.45
Total	123	100

As shown in Table Three, a total of 164 out of 170 participants (96.47%) answered the open-ended question, while only six students (3.53%) chose not to participate. According to the findings, 37.40% of the students noted that their classroom anxiety would decrease if instructors were supportive and offered constructive guidance as shown in Table Four. This was followed by 34.15% of the participants who believed that teachers should be calm, kind, and encouraging. Additionally, 28.45% emphasized the importance of instructors minimizing classroom pressure and avoiding overly strict teaching styles.

Results from the Semi-structured Focus-group Interviews

To address research question four, a semi-structured focus group interview was conducted with 10 participants. Students discussed teachers' behaviors and their expectations for reducing language anxiety. The interview transcripts showed strong consistency across questions and were

fully validated by the participants. Results revealed that teacher-related factors, particularly teachers' personalities, significantly influenced students' language anxiety. The findings revealed that teachers' empathy and supportive attitudes played a crucial role in reducing classroom stress and anxiety.

Jane: "Personally, my teacher was very kind, helpful, and always showed empathy. Teachers should not be too strict, as this will make students feel less relaxed and increase anxiety. However, I was still quite anxious and panicked whenever my teacher called on me individually and asked me to answer questions in English."

Jinnie: "I loved the way that the teacher walked around and approached us individually. Sometimes, I needed her help when I did not fully understand the lesson. She always gave me good advice about how to pass the exam and focused mainly on what was in the lesson. She did not talk much about other things, which was very good."

Discussion

The first research question focused on the levels of FLA experienced by Thai EFL students in English language classrooms. Based on the closed-ended questionnaire, participants reported moderate levels of foreign language anxiety, consistent with previous studies (Al-Khasawneh, 2016; Chanprasert & Wichadee, 2015). Item 9, "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class," received the highest mean score, indicating that low-proficiency EFL students may lack confidence when speaking spontaneously. This result is consistent with Suratin and Sribayak (2025), who highlights that unscripted oral activities under tight time constraints are major external sources of anxiety for adult EFL learners in Thailand. Accordingly, Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that speaking in a second language often increases tension and apprehension, leading to reduced classroom participation. However, the results contrast with Liu and Huang (2011), who reported no evidence of speaking anxiety, communication apprehension, or fear of negative evaluation among learners.

Students' responses to Item 7, "I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than me," indicated low self-evaluation and awareness of weaker linguistic proficiency. Consequently, these negative self-perceptions may diminish classroom participation and reduce students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. This outcome aligns with findings by MacIntyre et al. (2002) and Vo (2021), which demonstrate that poor self-assessment actively hinders target language communication. Regarding test anxiety, students expressed significant concern about academic failure, as reflected in Item 10: 'I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class'. This result aligns with previous literature emphasizing that fear of academic failure and its negative consequences are major drivers of language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Although overall anxiety levels were moderate, Items 5, "It would not bother me at all to take more foreign language classes," and 15, "I often feel like skipping my language class," received relatively low mean scores. These findings suggest that despite experiencing anxiety, students generally remained motivated and willing to attend and participate in English classes.

The second research question examined the main sources of foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Focus group interviews revealed that students' anxiety largely stemmed from limited speaking ability, weak grammar knowledge, writing skills, and vocabulary. These findings were consistent with questionnaire results, particularly Item 9, "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class," which showed the highest anxiety level. This suggests that fear of losing face and low language proficiency strongly influences students' willingness to speak,

supporting earlier studies (Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre et al., 2002). Furthermore, recent research from Frontiers in Education (2026) agrees with this result. It shows that language anxiety comes from a lack of basic language tools, leaving lower-level students feeling unprepared for classroom activities. Students' self-evaluation also emerged as another important source of anxiety. Many students reported frequently comparing themselves with their peers and believing that others were more proficient. This perception often reduced their confidence and willingness to communicate in English. These findings align with Tran (2022) and Hashemi (2011), who emphasized that language anxiety is closely connected to learners' self-perceptions, self-related thoughts, and fear of losing face in the classroom.

The third research question examined learning skills and activities that students perceived as anxiety-provoking. In SWU193, which emphasized listening and speaking, the highest mean score was for anxiety caused by answering impromptu questions. Focus group data confirmed that this activity significantly increased students' in-class anxiety, especially among low-proficiency learners. Being called on without preparation was reported as intimidating and contributed to higher levels of foreign language anxiety, supporting findings from previous research (Horwitz et al., 1986; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Young, 1991).

For SWU194, Table Two indicates that participants experienced a moderate level of foreign language anxiety. Higher mean scores were found for anxiety related to the midterm grammar and writing exams, suggesting that students felt considerable stress during these assessments. This result supports previous research identifying test anxiety as a key factor that negatively affects language learning outcomes (Horwitz et al., 1986; Ismail et al., 2022; Young, 1991). In contrast, the lowest anxiety level was reported for the one-page journal task, *Life in One Week*. This may be due to the nature of the assignment, which allowed students to freely share their personal experiences and submit their work via Google Classroom without time constraints. Regular diary writing at home and flexible submission likely helped students feel more confident in their writing. Additionally, the use of supportive tools such as ChatGPT or other AI applications may have further reduced writing anxiety. Overall, this task created a low-stress learning environment that helped students feel more at ease with writing.

The final research question examined the extent to which instructors help reduce students' language anxiety and what students expect from their teachers. Data from open-ended questions and focus group discussions were consistent, highlighting the important role of teachers' personalities and behaviors in lowering anxiety. This finding supports earlier studies showing that instructor behavior significantly influences students' emotional well-being in the classroom (Wörde, 2003). As shown in Table Four, students reported that teachers could reduce anxiety by being supportive, offering clear guidance, and maintaining a calm, kind, and encouraging attitude. Students also asserted that teachers should avoid being overly strict or demanding. These results align with previous research (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Thao & Nguyet, 2019), which pinpointed that a supportive learning environment helps students overcome shyness and anxiety. Moreover, prior studies highlighted the importance of teacher empathy, particularly toward lower-proficiency learners. Similarly, Punyaporn (2024) suggested that using a more capable–less capable peer support approach can encourage collaboration, allowing students to use English with greater confidence and reduced anxiety.

Conclusion

To summarize, Thai EFL university students experienced a moderate level of foreign language anxiety. Many students reported low confidence in speaking English due to limited vocabulary, grammar knowledge, writing ability, and overall language proficiency. Interview findings indicated that answering questions without preparation and taking exams were especially stressful, suggesting that teachers should be cautious when requiring spontaneous speaking and allow students time to organize their thoughts.

The results also highlighted the crucial role teachers play in reducing students' language anxiety. Most students expressed a preference for supportive, kind, and approachable teachers who provide clear, practical guidance and avoid placing excessive pressure on learners. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing language anxiety in the EFL classroom. In response to the research question, the results suggest that Thai EFL university students do need teachers' support to manage their anxiety. Teachers help create a positive learning environment that reduces tension and encourages participation.

Furthermore, students highly valued teachers who demonstrated empathy, patience, and a deep understanding of the challenges inherent in learning English. Teachers are encouraged to view language learning as a gradual process, listen to students' concerns, and continuously reflect on ways to improve their teaching practices. Since speaking anxiety is particularly common among lower-proficiency learners, creating a welcoming and non-threatening classroom atmosphere is essential. Providing constructive and encouraging feedback can further support students in overcoming challenges in learning English. Overall, this study aims to raise teachers' awareness of language anxiety and highlight the importance of listening to students' voices in developing effective strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance academic success.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

There were some limitations in this study. For instance, the participants were limited to a small size from a single university, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider including a larger number of participants from different universities to enhance the breadth and applicability of the results. Furthermore, a wider range of research instruments, such as classroom observation, should be employed to provide more comprehensive insights. An investigation into the relationship between foreign language anxiety and other variables help deepen our understanding of students' learning challenges.

Funding: This research project was funded by International College of Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University.
Acknowledgments: The author would like to express heartfelt thanks to Dean for granting permission to conduct this study. Special thanks go to administrative team, colleagues for their invaluable cooperation, and students who took part in this study.
Conflicts of Interest: The author hereby declares that there are no conflicts of interest.
Authenticity: I hereby declare that this research is my original work and has been conducted with honesty and integrity.
Artificial Intelligence Statement: During the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilized ChatGPT and Gemini to improve language clarity and flow. Following this process, the author critically reviewed and refined the AI-generated suggestions and remains fully accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the final content.

About the author:
Patthaya Punyaporn is a full-time lecturer at the Department of English Language for Higher Education, International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. She holds a doctoral degree in English Language Teaching at Thammasat University, Thailand. Her areas of interest are English for specific purposes, English language teaching, and related fields. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2824-1688

References

Abrar, M., Ali, R. M., & Syafti, O. (2018). "If we don't speak, how can we improve?": A qualitative study on English speaking difficulties of non-English major university students. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, 7*(4), 286–292. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v7i4.14812

Al-Khasawneh, F. M. (2016). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety: A case of Saudi undergraduate EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 12*(1), 137–148. https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/426

Amoah, S., & Yeboah, J. (2021). The speaking difficulties of Chinese EFL learners and their motivation towards speaking the English language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17*(1), 56–69. https://doi.org/10.52462/jlls.4

Chan, D. Y., & Wu, G. (2004). A study of foreign language anxiety of EFL elementary school students in Taipei County. *Journal of National Taipei Teachers College, 17*(2), 287–320. https://jepr.ntue.edu.tw/var/file/63/1063/img/1145/17-2-12.pdf

Chanprasert, C., & Wichadee, S. (2015). Exploring language learning anxiety and anxiety reducing strategies of the first-year students taking a foreign language course. *Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, 15*(1), 131–156. https://doi.org/10.14456/jssha.2015.6

Cheng, Y. (2002). Factors associated with foreign language writing anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals, 35*(6), 647–656. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2002.tb03112.x

Chou, M.-H. (2018). Predicting self-efficacy in test preparation: Gender, value, anxiety, test performance, and strategies. *Journal of Educational Research*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2018.1437530

Dewaele, J.-M. (2002). Psychological and socio-demographic correlates of communicative anxiety L2 and L3 production. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 6*(1), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069020060010201

Dewaele, J.-M., Botes, E., & Meftah, R. (2023). A three-body problem: The effects of foreign language anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom on academic achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190523000016

Frontiers in Education. (2026). Foreign language anxiety among university students: Sources, gender variation, and perceived proficiency. *Frontiers in Education, 11*, Article 1797618. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2026.1797618

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(4), 562–570. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00161

Hashemi, M. (2011). Language anxiety and fear of speaking in foreign language classrooms. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 1811–1816. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.007

Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of a foreign language anxiety scale. *TESOL Quarterly*, *20*(3), 559–562. https://doi.org/10.2307/3586302

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x

Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *21*, 112–126. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719050100007X

Ismail, S., Isa, H. M., Zakaria, N. N. N., Rahmat, N. H., Idris, N., & Taib, N. A. M. (2022). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS): What causes foreign language anxiety? *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *12*(8), 1359–1372. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i8/14605

Jackson, J. (2002). Reticence in second language case discussions: Anxiety and aspirations. *System*, *30*(1), 65–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(01)00051-3

Jiang, Y., & Dewaele, J. M. (2019). How unique is the foreign language classroom anxiety and enjoyment of Chinese EFL learners?. *System*, *82*, 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.02.017

Khajavy, G. H., Ghonsooly, B., Hosseini Fatemi, A., & Choi, C. W. (2016). Willingness to communicate in English: The role of classroom environment, anxiety, and self-confidence. *Current Psychology*, *35*(4), 615–624. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-015-9330-x

Kondo, S., & Yang, Y.-L. (2003). The English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: Test construction, reliability, and validity. *JALT Journal*, *25*(2), 23–40. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJ25.2-2

Kondo, D. S., & Yang, Y.-L. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal*, *58*(3), 258–265. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258

Leong, L., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skills. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2(1), 34-41. https://doi.org/10.18869/acadpub.ijree.2.1.34

Liu, M. H., & 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

Liu, M., & Huang, W. (2011). An Exploration of Foreign Language Anxiety and English Motivation. *Education Research International*, 1-8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2011/493167

MacIntyre, P. D. (2002). Motivation, anxiety and emotion in second language acquisition. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Individual differences and instructed language learning* (pp. 45–68). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.2.05mac

MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clément, R., & Donovan, L. A. (2003). Talking in order to learn: Willingness to communicate and intensive language programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *59*(4), 589–607. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.59.4.589

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The stable effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283- 305. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Affect: The role of language anxiety and other emotions in language learning. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan, & M. Williams (Eds.), *Psychology*

for language learning: Insights from research, theory and practice (pp. 103–118). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032829_8

Manipuspika, Y.S. (2018). Correlation between Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate in the Indonesian EFL Context. *Arab World English Journal, 9* (2). DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no2.14

Naser Pour, A., Ghani, M., & Elahi Shirvan, M. (2018). Rigid versus flexible teaching approaches: English speaking skills development in an EFL context. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *14*(3), 211–228. https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.484832

Pakdaman, A., Alibakhshi, G., & Baradaran, A. (2022). The impact of negotiated syllabus on foreign language learners' language anxiety and learning motivation. *Teaching English Language*, *16*(1), 35–63. https://doi.org/10.22034/tel.2022.155702

Punyaporn, P. (2024). Thai EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teacher and teacher's voice: Strengths, weaknesses, and cultural perspectives. *Asian Journal of University Education*, *20*(2), 465–477. https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v20i2.26462

Saito, Y., Horwitz, E. K., & Garza, T. J. (1999). Foreign language reading anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *83*(2), 202–218. https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00016

Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, 28(1), 129-142. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00309.x

Spielberger, C. D. (1983). *Manual for the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory*. Mind Garden.

Suratin, P., & Sribayak, P. (2025). Investigating foreign language anxiety in Thai adult English as a foreign language learners. *THAI TESOL Journal*, *38*(1), 45–62.

Thao, T. Q., & Nguyet, D. T. N. (2019). Four aspects of English speaking difficulties encountered by tertiary English-majored students. *Ho Chi Minh City Open University Journal of Science-social Science*, 9(2), 53-64. https://doi.org/10.46223/HCMCOUJS.soci.en.9.2.261.2019

Tien, C. Y. (2023). English speaking anxiety in EFL university classrooms in Taiwan. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, *8*(2), 22–38. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v8i2.4771

Tran, T. T. L. (2022). An investigation into the causes of students' anxiety in learning English speaking skills. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, *2*(3), 183–196. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.222312

Tsiplakides, I., & Keramida, A. (2009). Helping anxious learners to speak English with confidence: A case study. *TESOL Quarterly*, *43*(1), 141–144. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00232.x

Tsui, A., & Cheng, Y. (2022). Foreign language anxiety and English medium instruction classrooms: An introduction. *English Teaching & Learning*, *46*(3), 203–212. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-022-00122-8

Vo, N. D. T. (2021). The impacts of motivation and task types on L2 oral fluency development in higher education in Vietnam. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, *1*(3), 88–104. https://i-jte.org/index.php/journal/article/view/85

Williams, K. E., & Andrade, M. R. (2008). Foreign language learning anxiety in Japanese EFL university classes: Causes, coping, and locus of control. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *5*(2), 181–191. http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/v5n22008/williams.pdf

Wörde, R. (2003). Students' Perception on Foreign Language Anxiety. Inquiry 8(1). [Online URL: https://www.vccaedu.org/inquiry/inquiry-spring2003/i-81-Wörde.html] accessed on October 1, 2014.

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal*, *86*(1), 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does the language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, *75*(4), 426–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1991.tb05378.x

Zhao, Z., Wang, X., Ismail, S. M., Hasan, M. K., & Hashemi Fardnia, A. (2022). Social media and academic success: Impacts of using Telegram on foreign language motivation, foreign language anxiety, and attitude toward learning among EFL learners. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, Article 996577. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.996577