FEAR, APPREHENSION, AND EVALUATION: EXPLORING THE SOURCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THAI GRADUATE STUDENTS

Apirat Akaraphattanawong[i],
Arunee Hongsiriwat,
Pateep Methakunavudhi
Faculty of Education,
Chulalongkorn University,
Thailand

Abstract:

This study qualitatively explores the causes of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Thai graduate students. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with participants from various higher education institutions. Thematic analysis identified three central themes: Linguistic Competence Issues, Social and Relational Factors, and Emotional and Psychological Influences. Linguistic Competence Issues include challenges such as insufficient grammatical knowledge, limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and lack of practice, which undermine students' confidence and communication skills. Social and Relational Factors involve external pressures like teacher expectations, peer perceptions, and the fear of social judgment. Emotional and Psychological Influences encompass internal aspects such as fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and personality traits that exacerbate anxiety. The findings also reveal that students from private universities generally experience higher levels of FLCA compared to those from Rajabhat universities. This disparity is attributed to differences in institutional support systems, the diversity of student populations resulting from more relaxed admission criteria, and the presence of a more competitive academic environment. These findings highlight the complex nature of English language anxiety and underscore the importance of targeted interventions. By addressing these specific concerns, educators can enhance the educational experience for English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Keywords: foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), Thai graduate students, qualitative study, English language learning, higher education, language anxiety

---

[i] Correspondence: email akaraphattanawo_a@silpakorn.edu

1. Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in Thailand's development as the country strives to move toward an innovation-driven and value-based economy under Thailand 4.0. This new economic model emphasizes creativity, innovation, and the application of technology across various sectors, from traditional farming to high-value services (OECD, 2003). However, these expectations place considerable pressure on the higher education system, necessitating substantial investments in resources, faculty, and support staff to facilitate effective learning and foster the development of qualified workers.

The English language, recognized as the global lingua franca, is essential for academic and professional success (Crystal, 1997). It serves as the primary language of communication in international organizations, academic publications, and numerous other domains (Altbach, 1998). For non-native speakers, particularly in academic settings, the dominance of English presents significant challenges, including language anxiety. This anxiety, termed Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), comprises beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with the learning process in a classroom setting (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). FLCA includes components such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, all of which can adversely affect learning outcomes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a).

Basic English competence is not sufficient when undertaking graduate-level reading comprehension, writing, and oracy. This is true not only for non-native English-speaking students but also for native English-speaking ones. According to the English competence standards and assessment criteria of graduate studies, in accordance with the Ministry of Education directive entitled "Method of Graduate Program Standards Management B.E. 2548," all graduate programs must emphasize the English language to ensure the standards and quality of graduate studies at higher education institutions as per the regulations of the Office of the Higher Education Commission. Once students are admitted to a graduate program, it is assumed that they will be able to read, comprehend, and communicate their understanding of advanced professional research and literature, understand lectures, take notes, complete examinations, and complete lab assignments in English. Some graduate students are required to produce a thesis, dissertation, and/or publishable research papers in academic English as a criterion for completing their degrees. Those with teaching assistantships are also expected to prepare classes, materials, or lectures in English. Therefore, to function successfully in a university educational environment, graduate students are required and expected to have a high level of English competence.

Thai students need to submit English proficiency test scores, such as TOEFL and IELTS, which meet the university's minimum language requirements to apply for graduate education. For instance, Chulalongkorn University requires applicants to hold a TOEFL score of 450 or an IELTS score of 4.0 for a master's degree program, and a TOEFL score of 525 or an IELTS score of 5.5 for a doctoral degree program. Mahidol University

requires a TOEFL Paper-Based score of 500 or higher or an IELTS score of 5.5 or higher for all graduate degree programs. If applicants do not meet the criteria through an approved test, they are required to enroll in English language courses, such as Reading and Writing in Academic Context for Graduate Studies, Speaking and Writing in Academic Context for Graduate Studies, Preparatory English for Graduate Students, or Essential English Grammar for Graduate Studies. They must pass these courses before defending their thesis.

English language anxiety among Thai graduate students is exacerbated by several factors, including inadequate preparation during earlier educational stages, the high stakes associated with English proficiency tests, and the pressure to perform academically in a second language. Inadequate preparation during earlier educational stages can leave students feeling unprepared for the rigorous demands of graduate-level English proficiency (Ritchey, 2003). The high stakes associated with English proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS add significant pressure, as these scores are critical for university admission and academic success (Horwitz, 2001). Additionally, the pressure to perform academically in a second language can heighten anxiety, as students must meet the same academic standards as native English speakers (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b). In order to complete their degree programs, many college students are obliged to enroll in foreign language classes. Foreign language lessons, unfortunately, maybe the most anxiety-inducing courses in many students' academic degrees (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). According to the findings of research comparing the anxiety levels of graduate and undergraduate students, graduate students had higher anxiety levels (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Language learning anxiety, according to Woodrow (2006), differed from other types of anxiety and had an impact on students' learning outcomes. The term Foreign Language Anxiety came into existence after the work of Horwitz *et al.* (1986), who defined anxiety as "*the feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with the situation of learning a Foreign Language.*" The type of anxiety experienced by students when learning a second or foreign language is state or situational anxiety, and it is not trait anxiety because students experience this type of anxiety in the classroom. This type of anxiety is transitory, and students can overcome it with the passage of time (Spielberger, 1983; Abu-Rabia, 2004; Ezzi, 2012).

While much research has focused on personal and educational factors contributing to FLCA, there is a paucity of research investigating how the specific characteristics of different types of higher education institutions in Thailand, such as public, Rajabhat, Rajamangala, and private universities, influence these anxiety levels. A recent quantitative study using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) found moderate levels of English language anxiety among Thai graduate students (Akaraphattanawong *et al.*, 2021). Fear of negative evaluation emerged as the most significant source of anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety. Importantly, the study revealed significant differences in anxiety levels across different types of institutions, with students from private universities experiencing notably higher levels of anxiety compared to those from Rajabhat universities. Public universities

typically have larger class sizes and more competitive environments, while Rajabhat universities often focus on teaching and regional development. Rajamangala universities emphasize technical and vocational education, and private universities may offer smaller class sizes and more personalized support but with higher tuition fees. These institutional differences may create distinct learning environments and expectations, which could potentially influence the levels and experiences of FLCA among students. Institutional differences can play a crucial role in students' overall well-being and academic success. Understanding how these differences affect FLCA can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to develop effective strategies to reduce anxiety and improve educational outcomes.

This study aims to build upon previous research by exploring the perceived causes of FLCA among Thai graduate students through semi-structured interviews. This qualitative approach will allow for an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences, contextual influences, and nuances of how different institutional environments shape students' anxieties. We will specifically investigate the underlying causes of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety, as well as the reasons behind the observed differences in FLCA levels among students from public, Rajabhat, Rajamangala, and private universities. By understanding these factors, we aim to inform the development of targeted interventions that can effectively reduce FLCA in diverse institutional settings, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes of Thai graduate students.

2. Research Objectives

1) To understand the underlying causes contributing to different components of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Thai graduate students, specifically focusing on fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety.
2) To explore the reasons behind the significant differences in FLCA levels among students from different types of higher education institutions.

2.1 Research Questions
1) What do Thai graduate students perceive as the causes of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety in the context of learning English?
2) How do students from different types of higher education institutions perceive and experience FLCA differently?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is a specific form of anxiety unique to language learning contexts. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) were pioneers in identifying and defining this type of anxiety. They developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a widely used tool to measure anxiety levels among language learners. According to Horwitz *et al.* (1986), FLCA includes three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) explored the relationship between FLCA and language performance, demonstrating that higher levels of anxiety correlate with poorer performance in language tasks. Their research emphasized that anxiety could lead to avoidance behaviors, such as skipping classes or not participating in activities, which in turn negatively affect language acquisition. The FLCAS developed by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) is a reliable and valid instrument for assessing FLCA. Numerous studies have employed the FLCAS to investigate the prevalence of anxiety among language learners. For example, Horwitz (2001) found that a significant number of students in language classes experience high levels of anxiety, which can hinder their academic performance and overall language proficiency.

However, while the FLCAS is a widely accepted measure, some researchers have critiqued it for its reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to social desirability bias (Dewaele, 2013). Additionally, the scale may not fully capture the complexity of FLCA, as it focuses primarily on general classroom situations and may overlook specific contexts or individual differences.

3.2 Components of FLCA

3.2.1 Communication Apprehension

This involves fear or anxiety about communicating with others, including difficulty speaking in groups, stage fright, and receiver anxiety (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). Learners experiencing communication apprehension might have their minds go blank when listening, losing the essence of listening comprehension.

3.2.2 Test Anxiety

This is the fear of failing in tests, characterized by nervousness over academic evaluations (Aydin, Yilmaz, Memduhoglu, Oğuz, & Güngör, 2008). Test-anxious learners often place unrealistic standards on themselves, feeling that anything less than a perfect test result is a failure, which negatively impacts their performance in foreign language classes (Sarason, 1984). Symptoms include worries, stomachaches, tension headaches, unsteadiness, sweating, and a racing heart.

3.2.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

This occurs when learners feel they are unable to make the appropriate social impression, leading to avoidance of evaluative situations (Aydin *et al.*, 2008). It includes not just the teacher's evaluation but also reactions from peers. This fear can cause students to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities, or cut class to avoid anxiety situations (Aida, 1994).

3.3 Factors Related to Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCA is influenced by a complex interplay of factors. Learners may experience anxiety due to unrealistic or incorrect expectations regarding language acquisition, such as believing they lack the competence to learn a new language or expecting to become proficient within an unrealistic timeframe (Zhang & Zhong, 2012). Incorrect assumptions about language standards, such as comparing themselves to native speakers, also contribute to anxiety (Kitano, 2001). Classroom-related anxiety can be influenced by instructors, classmates, and classroom procedures. A friendlier and more casual classroom setting is less likely to cause anxiety (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013).

3.4 FLCA in the Thai Higher Education Context

Research specific to Thai higher education has shown that graduate students often experience significant anxiety related to English language learning. Factors contributing to this anxiety include inadequate preparation during earlier educational stages, high stakes associated with English proficiency tests, and the pressure to perform academically in a second language (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). These challenges are exacerbated by the necessity to meet high English proficiency standards set by universities, adding to the stress experienced by students (Catterson, 2023).

A recent quantitative study using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) found moderate levels of English language anxiety among Thai graduate students (Akaraphattanawong *et al.*, 2021). The study revealed that fear of negative evaluation was the most significant source of anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety. Furthermore, significant differences in anxiety levels were observed across different types of institutions, with students from private universities experiencing notably higher levels of anxiety compared to those from Rajabhat universities. These findings underscore the impact of institutional context on FLCA, suggesting that students' experiences of anxiety can vary significantly depending on the type of institution they attend.

A study by Na Ayuthaya and Sitthitikul (2016) highlights the impact of pedagogical practices informed by native speaker (NS) ideology in English language teaching (ELT) policy in Thailand. This approach often leads students to aim for unrealistic NS norms, contributing to low self-esteem and fear of speaking English. The study found that incorporating World Englishes (WE) into EFL classroom practice can significantly reduce FLCA and improve language achievement by helping students set more realistic goals and develop greater self-confidence.

Furthermore, a study by Perrodin, Liangruenrom, and Chancharoen (2022) found that FLA, experienced during secondary EFL classes, often persists into adulthood for Thai individuals working in international organizations. The study involved 12 Thai adults who reported experiencing negative or harsh feedback from teachers and classmates, doubting their English proficiency, fear of embarrassment when making mistakes, and feelings of guilt due to limited grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. These findings indicate that FLA, which begins in secondary school, continues to affect individuals in their professional lives. The study recommends implementing sound language policy changes, progressive educational development, and sufficient teacher education and support to produce qualified Thai teachers of English to diminish FLA.

However, these studies often have limitations, such as small sample sizes and potential cultural biases, which may not capture the full diversity of the Thai higher education landscape. Additionally, there is a need for more qualitative research to explore the lived experiences of students and understand how specific institutional factors impact FLCA.

3.5 Current Status of English Language Teaching in Thailand

English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand has evolved significantly, acknowledging English as vital for personal, academic, and occupational growth, as well as national competitiveness (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2002). Despite English being a compulsory subject throughout 12 years of schooling and a significant component of higher education (Nomnian, 2013), many Thai students continue to struggle with English proficiency, particularly in communicative skills (Foley, 2005).

This difficulty stems partly from the historical reliance on the grammar-translation method, which emphasizes rote memorization over practical use (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Efforts by the Ministry of Education to shift towards communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on real-world communication and fluency, have faced challenges. These include a shortage of qualified teachers and insufficient teaching resources, especially in rural areas (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017).

Additionally, assessment methods have not fully aligned with CLT principles, as traditional tests still predominantly measure grammar and reading skills, neglecting communicative competence (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for assessing language proficiency represents a positive step, yet the development of comprehensive CEFR-based assessments covering all language skills remains limited, particularly in higher education (Cheewasukthaworn, 2022). The Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) has initiated policies for standardized English proficiency testing, yet challenges in teacher training and resource allocation persist (Office of Higher Education Commission, n.d.).

These systemic issues in ELT contribute to significant English language classroom anxiety (FLCA) among Thai students. The mismatch between high proficiency expectations and the lack of emphasis on practical language use intensifies this anxiety.

Understanding and addressing these issues is crucial for developing effective interventions to reduce FLCA and improve language learning outcomes. By focusing on these challenges, educators and policymakers can better support Thai students in achieving the necessary English language skills to thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

4. Material and Methods

4.1 Research Objective 1: To understand the underlying causes contributing to different components of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Thai graduate students, specifically focusing on fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety.

4.1.1 Participants
The study involved 32 graduate students randomly selected from a pool of 248 graduate students who participated in a previous quantitative study on FLCA. These participants were recruited from various Thai higher education institutions to ensure adequate representation from the four types of institutions: Public University (n = 8), Private University (n = 8), Rajabhat University (n = 8), and Rajamangala University of Technology (n = 8). The participants were enrolled in credit-bearing and compulsory English courses offered by their universities, such as Preparatory English for Graduate Students or Essential English Grammar for Graduate Studies. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms such as #1, #16.

4.1.2 Instruments
4.1.2.1 Student Semi-Structured Interviews
The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore the causes of English language classroom anxiety experienced by the participants and to capture data that was not directly observable. The interview questions were adapted from Tanveer's (2007) study on language anxiety.

4.1.3 Procedure
4.1.3.1 Data Collection
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 graduate students from the four types of Thai higher education institutions. The interviews aimed to delve deeper into the causes of English language classroom anxiety and to capture qualitative data not directly observable. Each interview lasted approximately 8-15 minutes and was conducted in the participants' mother tongue, Thai, to facilitate communication and promote richness of response. Some questions were reworded to ensure clarity when interviewees did not understand the questions exactly.

4.1.3.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was chosen for its ability to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data, aligning with the study's objectives. The process began with familiarization with the data, where interviews were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial codes were generated by systematically coding interesting features across the entire dataset, focusing on direct statements made by participants that highlighted instances of anxiety, its causes, and its impacts.

These codes were then collated into potential themes, capturing significant patterns related to the study's objectives. Themes included fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and the influence of different institutional contexts. The themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the coded extracts and the overall dataset, ensuring consistency and coherence. The specifics of each theme were refined to clearly define the essence of what each theme represented.

4.2 Research Objective 2: To explore the reasons behind the significant differences in FLCA levels among students from different types of higher education institutions

A prior study (Akaraphattanawong *et al.*, 2021) highlighted varying levels of English language anxiety among Thai graduate students, with private university students experiencing higher anxiety compared to those from Rajabhat universities. To qualitatively investigate these differences, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used for data collection, allowing for a deeper exploration of participants' attitudes and experiences.

4.2.1 Participants

Graduate students from private and Rajabhat universities were purposively selected based on prior quantitative findings indicating distinct FLCA levels. The purposive sampling ensured participants had relevant experience with English courses and exposure to different institutional environments. Each FGD comprised 6-8 students, resulting in two groups—one per institution type—to capture diverse perspectives.

4.2.2 Data Collection

Two separate FGDs were conducted, one with students from private universities and the other with students from Rajabhat universities, each lasting 60-90 minutes. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview guide, developed based on both quantitative findings and qualitative insights from the preliminary study and Objective 1 of this research. Key areas explored included sources of FLCA, perceptions of institutional support, and the influence of cultural and social dynamics on the learning environment. The FGDs were held in a neutral setting to encourage open dialogue, facilitated by a moderator. Sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the transcribed data, focusing on understanding how institutional contexts influenced students' perceptions and experiences of FLCA. Special attention was given to the differences between private and Rajabhat University students. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to highlight these differences, providing a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to varying anxiety levels across different types of institutions.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Objective 1: Exploring the Sources of FLCA Among Thai Graduate Students
5.1.1 Generating Initial Codes

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were meticulously transcribed and then translated from Thai to English. This process was essential to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data for thematic analysis. The analysis adhered to the method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing for the systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data, aligning seamlessly with the study's objectives.

The researchers analyzed the data by reading and rereading the transcripts multiple times, searching for common themes and categorizing them across the text, whether similar or contrasting. This process of familiarization was crucial to gaining a profound understanding of the content. Initial codes were generated by systematically coding interesting features across the entire dataset, with a particular focus on direct statements made by participants that highlighted instances of anxiety, its causes, and its impacts.

The codes were then organized into related clusters to form major themes. Table 1 provides the 14 codes the researchers generated from the data, indicating the anxiety-provoking causes among the participants. This analysis gave the opportunity to uncover new themes by taking into account all of the rich and varied information obtained from the interviews. According to the findings, there are 14 possible causes of English language anxiety among the participants.

Fear of social judgment and fear of making mistakes emerged as predominant concerns. Participants expressed significant anxiety about being negatively evaluated by peers or teachers, as well as the potential consequences of errors on their academic performance. These findings underscore the social and emotional dimensions of language anxiety.

Table 1: Outline of Coding Scheme

Code Label	Description	Total Times Referred
Fear of Social Judgment	Anxiety about being judged or negatively evaluated by peers or teachers, including fears of ridicule or harsh criticism.	8
Fear of Making Mistakes	Anxiety about making errors and the impact of these mistakes on participation and performance in English learning contexts.	8
Overall Language Proficiency Issues	General lack of language skills, including fluency and the ability to perform at expected levels, and difficulty conveying thoughts, ideas, and emotions effectively in English.	6
Lack of Confidence	Low self-esteem and self-assurance in using English, often feeling inferior compared to peers and doubting one's language abilities.	5
Teacher-Related Stress	Anxiety stemming from interactions with teachers, including fear of harsh feedback, criticism, and concerns about maintaining dignity and respect (losing face).	5
Limited Vocabulary Knowledge	Highlights the challenges related to having a restricted vocabulary, making it hard to express complex thoughts and ideas effectively.	5
Inadequate Grammatical Knowledge	Focuses on the difficulties faced in understanding and applying grammatical rules, which can lead to incorrect sentence formation and reduced confidence.	4
Situational Factors	Anxiety that varies depending on the context, such as increased stress in formal settings (e.g., presentations, exams) versus informal settings (e.g., conversations with friends).	4
Perception of Peers	Comparisons with peers affecting self-esteem, including feeling inadequate or anxious when peers perform better or are perceived as more proficient.	4
Lack of Practice	Insufficient opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, impacting language proficiency and confidence in using the language.	3
Poor/Bad Pronunciation	Challenges with pronouncing words correctly, leading to misunderstandings and fear of being judged or not understood by others.	2
Attitude to EFL Learning	Mixed feelings about learning English, influenced by past experiences, motivation, and perceived relevance of learning the language.	2
Age-Related Concerns	Perceived impact of age on language learning, including beliefs about declining learning abilities and differences in learning pace and confidence compared to younger learners.	2
Personality-Related Traits	Shyness, introversion, and other personality traits that affect willingness to participate and engage in English learning activities.	1

Additionally, participants reported challenges related to overall language proficiency, including fluency and effective communication. Lack of confidence in English language abilities further exacerbated their anxiety. Furthermore, difficulties with vocabulary and teacher-related stress contributed to the overall language anxiety experienced by participants.

These results provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of English language anxiety among Thai graduate students. Understanding these specific concerns is essential for developing targeted interventions to support students' language learning and overall well-being.

5.1.2 Searching for Themes

After generating the initial codes and developing the coding scheme, the next step was to search for overarching themes that capture the essence of the data. The 14 codes were then systematically examined as some of them clearly fitted together into a theme. This involved collating codes into potential themes and reviewing them to ensure they accurately reflected the coded extracts and the overall dataset. The coded data was reviewed to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). Consequently, the 14 codes were aggregated into 3 themes. Figure 1 shows the emerging themes from the thematic analysis. As can be seen in the figure, the themes were about the aspects of causes attributed to English language classroom anxiety.

The identified themes included:

1) **Linguistic Competence Issues:** This theme encompasses the internal cognitive and linguistic challenges faced by participants, such as Inadequate Grammatical Knowledge, Limited Vocabulary Knowledge, Overall Language Proficiency Issues, Poor/Bad Pronunciation, and Lack of Practice. These factors significantly impacted their confidence and ability to effectively communicate in English. Participants often struggled with constructing sentences, choosing appropriate words, and maintaining fluency, which exacerbated their anxiety.

2) **Social and Relational Factors**: This theme covers the external influences and social context affecting participants' anxiety and performance. It includes codes such as Teacher-Related Stress, Perception of Peers, Fear of Social Judgment (which includes Fear of Being Laughed At and Fear of Negative Evaluation), and Situational Factors. These factors reflect the social dynamics, cultural expectations, and the specific context in which English is used, all of which shape learners' experiences and perceptions.

3) **Emotional and Psychological Influences**: This theme captures the emotional and psychological dimensions of learning anxiety. It includes Fear of Making Mistakes, Lack of Confidence, Personality-Related Traits, Age-Related Concerns, and Attitude to EFL Learning. These elements highlight the internal emotional states and personality traits that influence learners' anxiety levels. Emotional responses, personal traits, and attitudes toward learning English play a crucial role in how participants approach and experience language learning, affecting their engagement and performance.
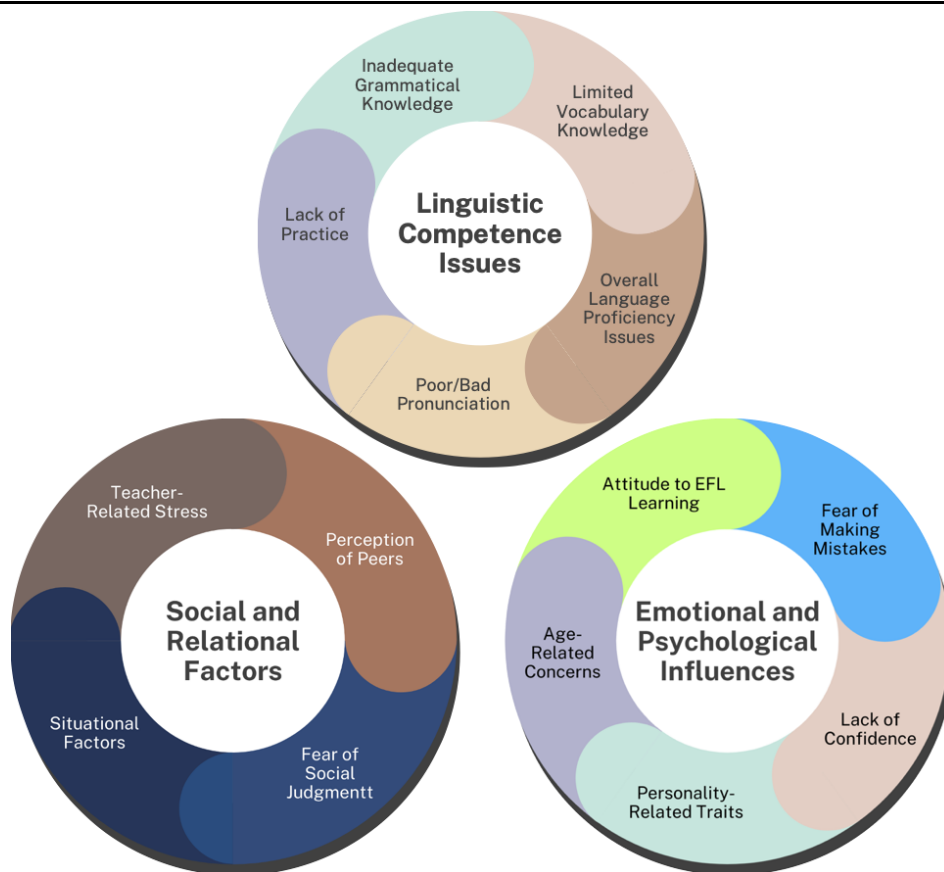
Figure 1: The Emerging Themes from the Thematic Analysis

By identifying and analyzing these themes, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of language learning anxiety and the various factors that contribute to it. This thematic analysis provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by learners and can inform strategies for improving language education practices.

5.1.2.1 Theme 1: Linguistic Competence Issues

The theme of **Linguistic Competence Issues** emerged as a significant contributor to English language classroom anxiety, encompassing learners' self-perceived inadequacies in various aspects of their language skills. Participants frequently expressed concerns about their overall language proficiency, often feeling their skills were insufficient for the academic rigor of graduate-level studies. They struggled to keep up with the demanding coursework and felt a sense of inadequacy when comparing their abilities to their previous success in undergraduate courses. This perceived gap often led to frustration and anxiety, as learners worried about their ability to understand complex texts and express themselves articulately.

5.1.2.1.1 Inadequate Grammatical Knowledge

Inadequate grammatical knowledge was a pervasive issue for many participants, causing significant stress and hesitation in both spoken and written communication. The difficulty in forming correct sentences and adhering to grammatical rules led to overthinking and reluctance to engage in classroom activities. One participant (S#3) highlighted this stress, stating,

> *"What makes me very tense is that I always have to think it over what I want to say before saying it, and concentrate hard on making sentences grammatically correct or making use of words as accurate as possible…If I didn't do this, my sentences would be grammatically incorrect."*

Similarly, another participant (S#8) expressed frustration over making errors in sentence construction:

> *"When I try to speak or write in English, I often make errors in my sentence construction. For instance, last week, I wrote an essay, and my instructor pointed out that my sentences were fragmented and lacked coherence. This makes me feel very frustrated."*

In academic settings, the challenge of conveying complex content due to limited grammatical knowledge can be particularly daunting. One participant (S#10) highlighted this issue, especially in a doctoral seminar context:

> *" I struggle to use English to express my thoughts and ideas…I found it hard to discuss the themes of a research paper because my limited grammatical knowledge made it hard to convey my thoughts."*

Another participant (S#17) highlighted the impact of grammatical errors on their confidence and grades:

> *"I frequently make errors in sentences, grammar when speaking or writing in English…During a recent essay assignment, my teacher marked many of my sentences as incorrect, which affected my overall grade and confidence."*

5.1.2.1.2 Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

Limited vocabulary knowledge further exacerbated the challenges faced by learners, impeding their ability to express complex ideas and emotions. This limitation often led to the overuse of basic vocabulary, which participants felt was inadequate for academic settings. One participant (S#1) shared their anxiety related to this issue:

> *"I feel anxious because I don't have enough vocabulary and grammar. I think if I knew more vocabulary or how to make a correct sentence, I wouldn't be nervous."*

Another participant (S#2) commented,

"I think that the main reasons or cause for my anxiety are lack of English vocabulary and grammar."

The struggle to use academic language was highlighted by a participant (S#9), who noted,

"I find myself using very basic vocabulary. For example, during a class discussion and in my assignment papers and essays, my friends said that I repeatedly used too many simple words like 'big' instead of more appropriate or academic terms like 'significant' or 'substantial'."

A similar concern was expressed by another participant (S#18), who explained:

"My limited vocabulary is a big problem. I often overuse simple words because I don't know more advanced ones, and I'm not aware of proper collocational usage. This became clear during a class discussion when I repeatedly used the word 'good' to describe various things."

5.1.2.1.3 Overall Language Proficiency Issues

The broader issue of overall language proficiency encapsulated several interconnected challenges, including the difficulty of meeting academic expectations and the anxiety associated with perceived inadequacies. Participants felt particularly anxious about their ability to perform at the graduate level. One participant (S#1) noted:

"Learning English at the graduate level is all different from learning at the undergraduate level, because I did well in English and always got good grades. But here and now, it's harder and more academic. I feel very anxious about learning English here."

This anxiety extended beyond academic performance to affect self-perception and confidence. Another participant (S#3) expressed uncertainty about their English skills:

"I can feel very anxious even if the teacher is very nice. I am not so sure about my English language skills, especially when it comes to exams like writing or grammar rules."

The challenge of articulating thoughts clearly in English was a common concern. A participant (S#4) described the difficulty of organizing and expressing ideas:

"I don't know how to organise my thoughts and put the English words together. Sometimes I don't really know what words I can use to express. What I say is very often different from what I'd like to say…In the end, I don't know what I wanted to say haha, you understand?"

The lack of fluency, particularly among those who had not been exposed to English in immersive environments, further compounded these issues. A participant (S#10) highlighted their struggle during a debate:

"English is not my native language, so I'm not fluent. I've never been to any English program school or international school in my entire life. This lack of fluency was evident when I tried to participate in a debate. I struggled to find the right words, and my arguments came out disjointed, which made me feel self-conscious."

Additionally, another participant (S#19) felt marginalized due to their language proficiency:

"I'm not fluent in English, and this lack of fluency makes me feel small and quiet in class like I'm nobody. It's especially hard because English is not my native language."

The language barrier's impact on expressing complex concepts was similarly noted by another participant (S#20):

"The language barrier makes it difficult for me to convey complex concepts. I expect people to think my English is not good, which makes me dread speaking or sometimes writing in the language."

5.1.2.1.4 Poor/Bad Pronunciation

Poor pronunciation was another significant concern that added to the learners' anxiety. Many participants feared being misunderstood or judged based on their pronunciation, which often led to embarrassment and reluctance to speak.

"Also, I am not good at reading, and I don't like reading in front of class, especially when I encounter difficult words or technical terms, I don't know how to pronounce them." (S#3)

"I tend to mispronounce some pronunciation. And I also feel nervous that the audience like friends and teachers do you not understand what I talk about or I want to communicate." (S#7)

A similar concern was expressed by another participant (S#15):

"During a class, I was asked to read a passage, and I was concerned that I might mispronounce words, which made me extremely nervous."

An additional participant (S#9) reflected on a past experience, stating,

"One time, I mispronounced several words during a class discussion, and even though my friends were supportive, I felt a bit humiliated."

5.1.2.1.5 Lack of Practice

The lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom further exacerbated these linguistic challenges. Participants expressed frustration with the limited exposure to English in their daily lives, which they felt hindered their ability to improve. One participant (S#2) explained:

"I think, first, the lack of practice, we didn't speak English in our daily life. Some teachers don't even speak English in English class, if they teach us how to speak English at school, we wouldn't struggle like that at university."

Another participant (S#16) noted how this lack of practice affected their confidence and preparedness:

"I don't have enough opportunities to use English outside the classroom. This lack of practice makes me feel less confident in my abilities. I am quite busy with my work and studies, and when it comes to English lessons or work, I always feel unprepared."

The cumulative effect of these linguistic competence issues created significant barriers to learners' confidence and participation in the English language classroom. They often felt isolated and frustrated as they struggled to meet academic demands and express themselves effectively. These challenges not only affected their academic performance but also had broader implications for their overall well-being and motivation to engage in language learning activities.

5.1.2.2 Theme 2: Social and Relational Factors

The second theme, "Social and Relational Factors," highlights the significant impact of social interactions and the classroom environment on English language learners' anxiety. Participants' experiences reveal that anxiety is not solely an individual struggle but is intricately linked to their interactions with teachers, perceptions of peers, fears of social judgment, and the situational context in which language learning occurs. These factors often interplay, creating a complex landscape that can either exacerbate or alleviate anxiety depending on the specific social context and relationships. Understanding these dynamics is crucial as they contribute to shaping learners' confidence, participation, and overall attitude towards learning English.

5.1.2.2.1 Teacher-Related Stress

The dynamics between teachers and students can significantly contribute to learners' anxiety levels. Participants expressed concerns about receiving harsh feedback or being corrected publicly, particularly by traditional teachers who may have stricter

expectations. These experiences often led to feelings of embarrassment and a fear of losing face, highlighting the importance of constructive and sensitive feedback practices.

"It's very embarrassing if a teacher, especially a traditional teacher, complains about my error, both writing and speaking. Especially when she corrected me in front of the class or when my friends were around." (S#4); "I am reluctant to speak in English. I speak softly, and when I do, the teacher seems annoyed and asks me to speak up louder. I don't really like this situation." (S#15)

Learners expressed that supportive teachers can significantly reduce anxiety and make the classroom a more comfortable space for learning. However, the opposite is true when teachers are strict or unsupportive.

"I think the way teachers interact with students and conduct the class affects my anxiety levels. A supportive and understanding teacher helps reduce my stress, while a strict or critical teacher makes me more anxious and not want to study, especially traditional teachers." (S#22)

5.1.2.2.2 Perception of Peers

The perception of peers' abilities and comparisons with them can greatly influence learners' self-esteem and anxiety levels. Many participants reported feeling inadequate when they perceived their peers as more proficient in English. This social comparison could lead to self-doubt and a reluctance to participate in class activities.

"When I talk or speak to a person who is smarter than me I feel a little bit worried…" (S#7)

"I spend more time worrying about what others are doing and how they are performing rather than focusing on my own learning and abilities. During group work, I often compare myself to my peers and think, 'Oh, her English is really good, a lot better than mine.'" (S#12)

Similarly, another participant expressed feeling demotivated by the high marks of peers who were more proficient:

"In my current class this semester, I feel that my peers do better than me in English; maybe they learned English a lot before or some graduated from international programs. I feel a bit down after seeing their high marks on assignments compared to mine." (S#13)

5.1.2.2.3 Fear of Social Judgment

Fear of social judgment, including concerns about negative evaluation from peers and teachers, emerged as a significant anxiety trigger among participants. This fear encompassed various anxieties, such as being laughed at for making mistakes, being

interrupted or corrected, and being judged for their imperfect English. Such fears often led to avoidance behaviors, with learners hesitating to take risks or actively participate in class. The anticipation of social judgment could severely hinder their willingness to engage in language practice and improve their skills, thus becoming a substantial barrier to their learning process.

"I don't want people to laugh at me when I pronounce the words incorrectly. That makes me have little confidence." (S#2); "I don't like the way Thai people look down on the others who don't speak perfect English." (S#7)

Additional reflections on this fear included the anticipation of negative reactions from both peers and teachers:

"…I also worry that my friends or teachers will interrupt me when I speak English. I don't know. I feel embarrassed because like I don't know how to say words like most other people do. Because I don't speak it well and if I say something wrong and they know it, they might laugh at me. I don't want to be laughed at." (S#6)

Finally, the experience of being corrected publicly by a teacher can leave a lasting impact, influencing attitudes towards learning English:

"My attitude towards learning English is somewhat negative because I don't want to engage with the language, especially after a teacher corrected me in front of the class." (S#21)

5.1.2.2.4 Situational Factors

The context in which English is used significantly influences learners' anxiety levels. Formal settings, such as classroom presentations or exams, often trigger heightened anxiety due to their evaluative nature and perceived high stakes. In contrast, learners reported feeling more comfortable and relaxed in informal settings, such as conversations with friends or family, highlighting the impact of the learning environment on their emotional state and performance.

"I get very anxious when I have to perform or speak publicly in English. During a recent class presentation, I was so nervous that I could hardly focus on what I wanted to say, and I ended up forgetting key points." (S#8)

"The formal learning context, such as a classroom, makes me more uncomfortable compared to informal settings. The formal environment adds pressure and increases my anxiety." (S#17)

This contrast was further highlighted by another participant who felt more at ease in casual interactions:

"I feel comfortable speaking English in informal situations such as with my children, my colleague, or my friends, but I feel stressed when I need to speak English in a formal situation such as giving a presentation in front of the class." (S#6)

In conclusion, this theme underscores the profound impact of social and relational dynamics on learners' anxiety and engagement in English language classrooms. The interplay of teacher behaviors, peer interactions, fear of social judgment, and the situational context of learning experiences creates a complex emotional landscape. This environment can either empower or inhibit language learning, depending on whether it fosters supportive relationships and minimizes negative social pressures. Cultivating an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere is essential for enhancing learners' confidence, encouraging active participation, and ultimately facilitating successful language acquisition.

5.1.2.3 Theme 3: Emotional and Psychological Influences

The theme "Emotional and Psychological Influences" delves into the internal and deeply personal aspects of English language learners' anxiety. Unlike more observable social and relational factors, these influences are often intertwined with learners' self-perception, past experiences, and inherent personality traits. This theme examines how internal emotional states, beliefs, and personality characteristics can significantly impact motivation, confidence, and overall engagement in the language learning process. It encompasses various elements, including the fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, personality-related traits, age-related concerns, and attitudes toward English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. These factors collectively shape the emotional landscape of learners, profoundly affecting their willingness to participate in language activities and their overall learning experience.

5.1.2.3.1 Fear of Making Mistakes

Fear of making mistakes emerged as a prominent concern, significantly inhibiting learners' willingness to participate in class. Many participants expressed an acute anxiety about being wrong or saying something incorrectly, leading to avoidance behaviors such as refraining from answering questions or participating in discussions. This anxiety was deeply rooted in concerns about being judged or ridiculed for their errors, often resulting in a reluctance to participate actively in class. One participant (S#11) shared,

"Sometimes I sit still and avoid answering questions even when I know the answers because I'm afraid I might be wrong." (S#11)

Another echoed this sentiment, highlighting a reluctance to make mistakes in unfamiliar social settings:

"…I am a shy person; I don't like to make mistakes, especially in front of people that I don't know." (S#2)

The constant concern about speaking correctly was evident in another participant's reflection:

"I worry about not being able to say what I want correctly. The bad thing is I always have to be very careful not to make mistakes." (S#6)

The fear of making mistakes can also cause mental blocks, as described by a participant:

"…I'm afraid of making mistakes or saying anything badly because I don't know what to say. It's like my brain is temporarily blank." (S#3)

Another participant noted the heightened anxiety within the classroom setting:

"…here in class, it's different, I don't dare to do the same, 'cos I'm afraid that everybody will hear I said something wrong, made a mistake." (S#5)

5.1.2.3.2 Lack of Confidence

A lack of confidence was a recurring theme, often manifesting as nervousness during public speaking or presentations. This lack of self-assurance can be attributed to various factors, including the fear of negative judgment and past experiences of failure.

One participant shared their experience of nervousness during a presentation:

"I need a lot of time to practice my presentation. But you know, when I stood up in front of my classmates, I forgot everything haha. I was very nervous actually; I felt my heartbeat so fast…" (S#4)

Another participant linked their anxiety directly to a lack of confidence:

"It's all about my confidence. If I have high confidence, I will not be scared or nervous. But you know I am still afraid to speak English to my friends and teachers… I think I lack of confidence." (S#7)

5.1.2.3.3 Personality-Related Traits

Certain personality traits, such as introversion and shyness, were identified as significant barriers to active participation in language learning. These traits can make it challenging

for learners to engage fully in classroom activities, particularly those that require speaking up or interacting with peers.

One participant succinctly described their reticence, stating,

"I think it's all about my personality. Basically, I don't really speak much, even in Thai. I just stay quiet. If it's possible, I keep silent and don't speak up." (S#5)

5.1.2.3.3 Age-Related Concerns

Age-related concerns also played a role in learners' anxiety, with older participants expressing a belief that younger learners have an advantage in acquiring new language skills. This perception often led to self-doubt and a reduced sense of efficacy in language learning.

As one participant expressed,

"As I get older, I feel that learning English becomes more challenging. It's like I can learn a lot slower than before, unlike younger people; they learn more quickly." (S#16)

Another participant humorously reflected on their hesitation to participate:

"I know I could speak about simple things or some topic, I've got the sentences in my mind, but when the teacher asked for a volunteer, I just can't….Maybe I'm too old now HAHA." (S#5)

5.1.2.3.4 Attitude to EFL Learning

Attitudes towards learning English varied among participants, often influenced by past experiences and the perceived relevance of English in their lives. These attitudes could significantly affect their motivation and engagement with the language.

One participant expressed a negative attitude towards learning English, influenced by a past negative experience:

"My attitude towards learning English is somewhat negative because I don't want to engage with the language, especially after a teacher corrected me in front of the class." (S#21)

Another participant described their fluctuating motivation, saying,

"Sometimes, it makes me not want to learn or practise the language. My attitude towards learning English is sometimes good, sometimes not. I think it is influenced by my feelings and experiences. Sometimes, it makes me not want to learn or practise the language." (S#11)

This theme emphasizes the importance of addressing emotional and psychological barriers in language learning. Understanding these internal factors is crucial for educators to create supportive learning environments that cater to the emotional needs of students, thereby enhancing their confidence and willingness to engage in language activities.

5.2 Objective 2: Comparative Analysis of FLCA Across Different Types of Higher Education Institutions

5.2.1 Findings from FGDs

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) shed light on the varying levels of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) experienced by students from private and Rajabhat universities. These differences are explored through three main themes: sources of FLCA, perceptions of institutional support, and cultural and social dynamics.

5.2.2 Sources of FLCA

Students from private universities reported heightened anxiety, primarily because their universities did not adequately assess English language proficiency during the admissions process. This oversight resulted in a mismatch between students' actual English skills and the demands of their graduate programs, leaving many unprepared for the academic challenges they faced.

> *"I got into my program easily, even though my English wasn't that great. They didn't really check our language skills. Now, I'm panicking about presentations and seminars in English. It's like they assumed we were already fluent."*

This lack of preparedness was particularly evident in the academic writing courses, where many students struggled to meet the course expectations. The challenge was exacerbated by the fact that instruction, even when delivered in Thai, did not seem to accommodate their proficiency levels. As one student expressed,

> *"The academic writing class is the worst. It's taught in Thai, and I'm just so lost. It's like learning how to swim without ever getting in the water! How am I supposed to write academic papers in English if I can't even understand the instructions?"*

This highlights the complexity and difficulty of the material, which remains challenging despite being taught in the students' first language.

At Rajabhat universities, while high English proficiency is not required for admission, the emphasis is on ensuring students develop adequate language skills by graduation. This is achieved through mandatory exit exams or supplementary courses designed to ensure competence. However, students often find a gap between their current English abilities and the expectations of their graduate programs, especially as they near these final assessments.

"We don't have to worry about English to get in, but we need to pass an exit exam to graduate. It's stressful because I feel like I'm not improving fast enough. It's a lot of pressure."

"We know we need to improve our English to pass the exam, so we're taking extra classes outside of school. It's expensive and time-consuming, but we don't have a choice."

5.2.3 Perceptions of Institutional Support

The level of support provided by institutions was a significant factor influencing students' experiences of FLCA. Students from private universities expressed a desire for more comprehensive support services, particularly in terms of advanced English courses and opportunities to interact with native speakers. They felt that while existing resources were helpful, they were not sufficient to meet their needs.

"We have English teachers and the library, which is fine, but I wish there were more advanced courses or opportunities to practice with native speakers. It feels like the university could do more to help us improve our speaking or conversation skills."

Despite acknowledging financial and logistical constraints due to the small size of their programs, students felt that additional resources, such as online workshops or specialized courses, could greatly benefit their language development.

"I get that we're a small program with not many students, so it might not be financially feasible, but more support would be really helpful. Maybe they could offer some online resources or workshops to help us with our English."

In contrast, Rajabhat University students reported greater satisfaction with institutional support. Access to online resources like Speexx and the perceived supportive attitude of faculty members contributed to a less anxiety-inducing learning environment.

"I really like that we have access to Speexx. It's great for practicing on my own. I can practice my listening and speaking skills whenever I have time, and it helps me feel more confident."

"Our teachers are really supportive and always willing to help us. They know we're not all English majors, so our English is not good. and they try to make the classes less stressful. They make us feel like we can improve, even if we're struggling."

5.2.4 Cultural and Social Dynamics

The cultural and social dynamics within private universities also contributed to students' FLCA. The competitive atmosphere, coupled with the presence of highly proficient English speakers, fostered feelings of inadequacy and a heightened fear of judgment.

> *"It's really discouraging when you see other students giving presentations in perfect English, and you can barely string a sentence together. It feels like I'll never be that good. You know, when we're in a seminar with students from other majors, and they're all speaking English so fluently. It makes me think about my abilities a lot. Why??"*

Moreover, the uneven exposure to English across different programs, particularly the advantage enjoyed by those with foreign instructors, made some students feel at a disadvantage.

> *"Some programs have foreign instructors, so those students get so much more exposure to English, and their English is better than us. It's not fair for us, especially since we all pay the same tuition fees."*

In contrast, the atmosphere at Rajabhat universities was described as more supportive, collaborative, and less judgmental. Students highlighted the encouragement and mutual assistance provided by their peers. This supportive dynamic helped ease their anxiety and made the process of learning English feel less intimidating.

> *"We have a really good support system in our class. We study together and help each other out. It makes learning English less scary. We're all in the same boat, so we help each other out a lot. We study together and want to graduate together!"*

This collaborative environment extended to collective efforts in exam preparation.

> *"We even got together and hired a tutor to help us prepare for the English exam. It was a bit expensive, but it was worth it because we all passed! HAHA"*

The findings illustrate that the sources and experiences of FLCA vary significantly between students at private and Rajabhat universities, influenced by differences in institutional practices, available support, and social dynamics. These distinct experiences highlight the complexity of FLCA and the need for a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to anxiety in different educational contexts.

6. Discussion

6.1 Exploring Sources of FLCA Among Thai Graduate Students

The qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews strongly align with the quantitative findings from previous studies, confirming that Thai graduate students experience moderate levels of English language anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation emerged as the most pronounced concern, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety. This coherence between qualitative and quantitative data underscores the robustness of these phenomena and suggests that the sources of FLCA are deeply ingrained across different educational and cultural contexts. The frequent references to fear of negative evaluation in the qualitative data align with the high scores for this factor in the quantitative findings.

6.1.1 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of Negative Evaluation emerged as a predominant factor contributing to anxiety, echoing findings from various studies (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; Von Wörde, 2003; Ohata, 2005). This fear is particularly salient in the Thai educational context, where students worry about being judged by their peers and instructors, especially during speaking activities. The anxiety is heightened by concerns about making mistakes in front of classmates, which may lead to a negative perception of their language proficiency. Moreover, the potential for public correction by teachers exacerbates this fear, as it could result in feelings of humiliation. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which suggest that students are often reluctant to perform in class due to the fear of negative feedback (Watson & Friends, 1969; Price, 1991). Even in smaller group settings, students may feel uncomfortable, fearing judgment from peers, thus avoiding participation (Ohata, 2005). The tendency to avoid situations that might result in error corrections contributes to heightened anxiety, as interruptions can disrupt their thought process and concentration (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b).

6.1.2 Communication Apprehension

Communication Apprehension was another significant concern, rooted in linguistic challenges such as limited vocabulary and inadequate grammatical knowledge. This finding aligns with prior research (Young, 1991; Rattanavich, 2013), which highlights similar issues among Thai EFL learners. The apprehension is particularly acute when students are required to speak without prior preparation, leading to panic and anxiety, as noted by Pornthanomwong, Tipyasuprat, and Kanokwattanameta (2019). The inability to express themselves adequately in English exacerbates their fear of being misunderstood, which further discourages participation. This phenomenon is not unique to Thai students; similar trends have been observed in other EFL contexts, such as Turkey and China, where communication apprehension is a critical issue (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). The cultural expectation of perfection and fear of losing face

in public settings often intensifies this form of anxiety, as noted in studies from Korea and Japan (Kim & Kim, 2004; Liu & Jackson, 2008).

6.1.3 Test Anxiety

Test Anxiety, although the least prevalent among the three components, remains a notable factor. Students expressed concerns over the pressure to perform well in exams, particularly those requiring advanced English skills. The fear of failing these assessments, despite thorough preparation, exacerbates their anxiety. This is especially relevant given the stringent English proficiency requirements for graduation, such as achieving a 79 TOEFL-iBT or 5.5 IELTS for doctoral programs, equivalent to a CEFR B2 level. This finding aligns with Salehi and Marefat's (2014) study, which identified the fear of failing foreign language classes as a significant anxiety-provoking factor. The pressure of high-stakes testing environments, common in Asian educational systems, further compounds this anxiety (Cheng, 2004).

6.2 Comparative Analysis of FLCA Experiences Across Institutional Types

The study's findings reveal significant differences in FLCA experiences among students from private and Rajabhat universities, with private university students generally reporting higher anxiety levels. Both types of institutions have relaxed admission criteria due to a decrease in graduate student numbers. As Singh (2024) highlights, private universities, in particular, accept a broader range of qualifications, fostering a diverse student body. However, this diversity can lead to challenges, as students with lower language proficiency often struggle with the academic demands of their programs.

Klaewthanong & Phayrkkasirimwin (2010) noted that the domino effect of basic education standards directly impact graduate quality, increasing the burden on university lecturers to enhance teaching and learning experiences. This situation is reflected in students' struggles with academic writing tasks, such as research papers and assignments, often due to inadequate grammatical knowledge and limited vocabulary. Speaking tasks, like oral presentations and class discussions, also contribute to anxiety due to concerns about pronunciation, sentence structure, and fluency. These challenges align with the findings of Pinyosunun, Jivaketu, and Sittiprapaporn (2006), which highlight common issues in writing and speaking that affect students' academic performance and success.

The lack of comprehensive support systems further intensifies anxiety levels among private university students, who often expressed a desire for more comprehensive support. This reflects the broader institutional challenges faced by private universities, which may lack the financial resources to provide extensive support. This financial strain, exacerbated by demographic shifts, as noted by Professor Dr. Suchatvee Suwansawat (2019) that students at some private universities fell by 70% (Mala, 2018), putting financial pressure on private institutions, leading to more relaxed admission criteria, allowing a more diverse student body with varying language proficiencies.

In contrast, Rajabhat universities, with more structured support systems, benefit from larger sizes and substantial government funding. This advantage allows them to implement comprehensive support measures, such as mandatory exit exams and supplementary courses like online resources (e.g., Speexx). Such systems not only ensure language competence by graduation but also foster a more supportive learning environment. This is consistent with Kezar (2006) and Pike and Kuh (2005), who suggest that larger institutions are better equipped to meet students' educational demands and engage them effectively, compared to smaller institutions.

Cultural and social dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping students' FLCA experiences. Private university students often encounter a competitive environment, intensified by highly proficient peers, leading to increased anxiety and fear of judgment. Conversely, Rajabhat universities cultivate a more supportive and collaborative atmosphere, where mutual assistance and faculty support help mitigate anxiety. This supportive environment aligns with findings by Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2007), which indicate that institutional environments significantly impact students' social and personal competencies, thereby influencing their overall engagement and anxiety levels. In summary, this study reveals the complex interplay of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety as key components of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Thai graduate students. The findings align with global trends in FLCA while also highlighting unique cultural and systemic factors specific to the Thai educational context. The comparative analysis between private and Rajabhat universities underscores the significant influence of institutional contexts on students' experiences of FLCA. This analysis provides a nuanced understanding, acknowledging both universal and unique aspects of language learning anxiety across different educational settings. These insights underscore the critical need for tailored interventions that cater to the specific needs of students in diverse institutional environments, emphasizing the importance of institutional support in mitigating FLCA and enhancing the overall educational experience for EFL learners

7. Recommendations

This study offers several theoretical and practical recommendations, along with suggestions for further research and new approaches to mitigate the effects of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Thai graduate students. Theoretically, future studies should explore the distinct components of FLCA—fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety—across different cultural contexts. Cross-cultural comparisons could provide valuable insights into the influence of cultural factors on language anxiety, contributing to a more comprehensive theoretical framework.

Practically, institutions should enhance their support systems by providing advanced English courses, workshops on academic writing and presentations, and opportunities for students to interact with native speakers. There should be a continued

emphasis on comprehensive support measures, such as mandatory exit exams and online resources like Speexx, to ensure that students develop adequate language skills. This will help students manage their anxiety and improve their overall academic performance.

Further research could include longitudinal studies to observe changes in students' anxiety levels over time and assess the long-term impact of these interventions. Additionally, exploring the role of digital learning environments, especially with the increasing shift towards online education, could offer innovative ways to mitigate FLCA. Implementing technology-based solutions, such as language learning apps and virtual reality, can provide students with immersive, low-pressure practice opportunities.

Finally, promoting culturally responsive teaching practices is crucial to creating an inclusive learning environment. Such practices can help reduce the stigma associated with lower English proficiency, encourage a supportive atmosphere, and foster a culture where mistakes are seen as valuable learning opportunities.

Acknowledgements

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Apirat Akaraphattanawong, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of International Language Teaching, Faculty of Education, Silpakorn University, Thailand. He holds a PhD in Higher Education from Chulalongkorn University. His research focuses on English Language Teaching (ELT), with particular emphasis on curriculum and instruction, psychological factors influencing language learning, and ELT policy, management, and administration.

Arunee Hongsiriwat, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Policy, Management, and Leadership, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. She currently serves as the Associate Dean for Planning, Budget & Quality Assurance, Finance & Accounting, and Inventory at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. Her research interests include educational policy analysis, management practices in education, and leadership development within educational institutions.

Pateep Methakunavudhi, PhD, is a Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. She is renowned for her extensive contributions to educational policy and curriculum development in Thailand. Her work

has significantly influenced the direction of educational reforms and the professional development of educators across the country.

References

Aida, Y. (1994). Examination of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students of Japanese. *The Modern Language Journal, 78*(2), 155–168. https://doi.org/10.2307/329005

Akaraphattanawong, A., Hongsiriwat, A., & Methakunavudhi, P. (2021). The study of English language classroom anxiety and its relationship with English language proficiency among graduate students in Thai higher education institutions. *Rajapark Journal, 15*(42), 39–55. Retrieved from https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/RJPJ/article/view/253187

Altbach, P. G., & Peterson, P. M. (1998). Internationalize higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 30*(4), 36–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091389809602630

Aydin, N., Yilmaz, K., Memduhoglu, H. B., Oğuz, E., & Güngör, S. (2008). Academic and non- academic staff's psychological contract in Turkey. *Higher Education Quarterly, 62*(3), 252-272. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00394.x

Ayuthaya, J. R. N., & Sitthitikul, P. (2016). *The incorporation of World Englishes into EFL classroom practice: Effects on anxiety in English language learning of Thai tertiary students* (Doctoral dissertation, Language Institute, Thammasat University).

Baker, W., & Jarunthawatchai, W. (2017). English language policy in Thailand. *European Journal of Language Policy, 9*(1), 27–44. Retrieved from https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/410776/1/English_Langauge_Policy_revisions_clean.pdf

Belcher, D., & Braine, G. (Eds.). (1995). *Academic writing in a second language: Essays on research and pedagogy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/academic-writing-in-a-second-language-9781567501155/

Campbell, C. M., & Ortiz, J. (1991). Helping students overcome foreign language anxiety: A foreign language anxiety workshop. In E. K. Horwitz & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications* (pp. 153–168). Prentice Hall. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Language_Anxiety.html?id=qVBiAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

Catterson, J. (2023). English language proficiency: Effects on stress and well-being. *Academic Festival, Sacred Heart University*. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/acadfest/2023/all/94/

Cheewasukthaworn, K. (2022). Developing a standardized English proficiency test in alignment with the CEFR. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand, 63*, 66–92. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1348264.pdf

Cheng, L. (2004). Washback: The effect of testing on teaching and learning. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 3–17). Routledge. Retrieved from https://www.routledge.com/Washback-in-Language-Testing-Research-Contexts-and-Methods/Cheng-Watanabe-Curtis/p/book/9780805839876

Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(2), 185–209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587717

Crystal, D. (1997). *The Cambridge factfinder*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000106413

Dewaele, J. M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237– 274. http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5

Dewaele, J.-M. (2013). The link between foreign language classroom anxiety and psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism among adult bi- and multilinguals. *Modern Language Journal, 97*(3), 670–684. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12036.x

Ezzi, N. A. (2012). The impact of gender on the foreign language anxiety of Yemeni university students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, 1*(2), 65–75. https://doi.org/10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.2p.65

Hashemi, M., & Abbasi, M. (2013). The role of the teacher in alleviating anxiety in language classes. *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences, 4*(3), 640–646. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312145987_The_role_of_the_teacher_in_alleviating_anxiety_in_language_classes

Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112–126. Retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/annual-review-of-applied-linguistics/article/abs/language-anxiety-and-achievement/4DBB97FCB69BD1632CBBDAD96C81884E

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.15404781.1986.tb05256.x

Kaur, A., Young, D., & Kirkpatrick, R. (2016). English education policy in Thailand: Why the poor results? In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 345–361). Springer. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-22464-0

Kaur, A., Young, D., & Kirkpatrick, R. (2016). English education policy in Thailand: Why the poor results? In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia*

(pp. 345–361). Springer. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-22464-0

Kezar, A. J. (2006). The impact of institutional size on student engagement. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 43*(1), 87–114. https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1573

Kim, S. Y., & Kim, J. H. (2004). When the learner becomes a teacher: Foreign language anxiety as an occupational hazard. *English Teaching, 59*, 165–186. Retrieved from http://kate.bada.cc/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/kate_59_1_9.pdf

Kitano, K. (2001). Anxiety in the college Japanese language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 85*(4), 549–566. https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00125

Klaewthanong, T., & Phayrkkasirimwin, N. (2010). Is knowledge management performance in Thailand's educational institutions really the path to success. *Parichart Journal, 23*(1), 71–81.

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. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/25172993

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991a). Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature. *Language Learning, 41*(1), 85–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00677.x

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991b). Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning, 41*(4), 513–534. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00691.x

Mala, D. (2018, August 12). *University challenge: Falling enrolment stemming from low birthrate is hitting where it hurts*. Bangkok Post. https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/1520214/university-challenge

Nomnian, S. (2013). Review of English language basic education core curriculum: Pedagogical implications for Thai primary level teachers of English. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences, 34*(3), 583–589. Retrieved from https://www.thaiscience.info/journals/Article/TKJS/10897892.pdf

Office of The Higher Education Commission. (n.d.). *Higher education statistics: Academic year 2018*. Retrieved August 16, 2018, from http://www.info.mua.go.th/info/

Ohata, K. (2005). Potential sources of anxiety for Japanese learners of English: Preliminary case interviews with five Japanese college students in the U.S. *TESL-EJ, 9*(3). Retrieved from https://www.tesl-ej.org

Perrodin, D. D., Liangruenrom, N., & Chancharoen, S. (2022). Lasting effects of foreign language anxiety with adults working in international organizations. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand, 63*, 254–278. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1348273

Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First- and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(3), 276–300. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0021

Pinyosunun, A., Jivaketu, T., & Sittiprapaporn, W. (2006). Problems in using English of international graduate students of private universities in Thailand. *Huachiew Chalermprakiet University Journal, 18*, 21–30. Retrieved from https://scholar.utcc.ac.th/entities/publication/622bb1f6-11bf-4c24-95fc-ceee5bee1a62

Pornthanomwong, K., Tipyasuprat, N., & Kanokwattanameta, N. (2019, April 26). *English speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Rangsit University*. Paper presented at the RSU International Research Conference 2019, Pathum Thani, Thailand. Retrieved from https://rsucon.rsu.ac.th/files/proceedings/inter2019/IN19-189.pdf

Poyrazli, S., & Kavanaugh, P. R. (2006). Marital status, ethnicity, academic achievement, and adjustment strains. *College Student Journal, 40*(4), 767–780. Retrieved from https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-23101-005

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). Prentice Hall. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Language_Anxiety.html?id=qVBiAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

Rattanavich, S. (2013). Comparison of effects of teaching English to Thai undergraduate teacher-students through cross-curricular thematic instruction program based on multiple intelligence theory and conventional instruction. *English Language Teaching, 6*(9), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n9p1

Reason, R. D., Terenzini, P. T., & Domingo, R. J. (2007). Developing social and personal competence in the first year of college. *The Review of Higher Education, 30*(3), 271-299. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0012

Ritchey, D. B. (2003). *International graduate students coping with inadequate preparation in English* (Master's thesis). Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Salehi, M., & Marefat, F. (2014). The effects of foreign language anxiety and test anxiety on foreign language test performance. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies, 4*(5), 927-935. http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.5.931-940

Sarason, I. G. (1984). Stress, anxiety, and cognitive interference: Reactions to tests. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 46*(4), 929-938. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.929

Singh, K. (2024, April 16). *Public vs private: Deciding on Thailand's universities*. The Thaiger. https://thethaiger.com/guides/education/public-vs-private-deciding-on-thailands-universities

Spielberger, C. D. (1983). *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults*. PsycTESTS Dataset. https://doi.org/10.1037/t06496-000

Tanveer, M. (2007). *Investigation of the factors that cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners in learning speaking skills and the influence it casts on communication in the target language* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Glasgow. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.1995.1129

Von Wörde, R. (2003). Students' perspectives on foreign language anxiety. *Inquiry, 8*(1), 1-15. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ876838.pdf

Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969). Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 33*(4), 448–451. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0027806

Wongsothorn, A., Hiranburana, K., & Chinnawongs, S. (2002). English language teaching in Thailand today. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 22*(2), 107–116. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/0218879020220210

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal, 37*(3), 308–328. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315

Yan, J. X., & Horwitz, E. K. (2008). Learners' perceptions of how anxiety interacts with personal and instructional factors to influence their achievement in English: A qualitative analysis of EFL learners in China. *Language Learning, 58*(1), 151–183. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2007.00437.x

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 426–439. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1991.tb05378.x

Zhang, R., & Zhong, J. (2012). The hindrance of doubt: Causes of language anxiety. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 2*(3), 27. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v2n3p27