

## **Anxiety in English Oral Presentations of Thai EFL Engineering Students**

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### **Abstract**

Anxiety in the language classroom affects EFL students, particularly Thai learners. Students become nervous with high tension when performing oral presentations in front of the classroom. Throughout presentations, a significant number of students also worry about the performance evaluation. This study aimed to investigate the overall anxiety level in English oral presentations and anxious situations in two stages: pre-presentation and while-presentation of 72 Thai EFL Engineering Students. The data were collected by the use of two research instruments: a questionnaire adapted from the Personal Report on Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey (1970) and a semi-structured interview about feelings towards before, while, and after the oral presentation, other experienced anxious situations and anxiety coping strategies. The findings revealed that the overall anxiety level of participants was at a moderate level (55.55%). Participants perceived higher anxiety levels while doing the presentation than preparing for the presentation. From the interview, both high and low anxious groups suffered identical problems in a lack of English vocabulary and grammar, including local accents and pronunciations at the preparation stage. During performing, making eye contact with live audiences was the most significant anxiety contributor among high anxiety participants. While low anxiety participants felt uncomfortable answering any unassociated questions from audiences. Only the high anxious group encountered anxiety after delivering the presentation regarding a negative evaluation. Live audiences' reaction was another experienced anxiety mentioned by the high anxious learner. Furthermore, both groups reduced their oral presentation anxiety through various strategies.

**Keywords:** anxiety levels, oral presentations, Thai EFL, engineering students

### **Introduction**

Since 2015 the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area has supported the economy, including investments and the movement of labor freely in all eight fields, comprising Medical Services, Dental Services, Nursing Services, Engineering Services, Architectural Services, Surveying

Qualification, Accountancy Services, and Tourism Services (Joradon, 2019). Consequently, English becomes more necessary among graduates, and those who are proficient in English should have an advantage in both competing in the domestic labor market and finding jobs in other countries with higher pay. Therefore, it is imperative that tertiary students—especially those studying in the eight mentioned subject areas who will enter the competitive labor market—be prepared and develop their English proficiency.

In the context of Thailand, English has driven tremendous potential development for students, the same as in other countries in the ASEAN. However, Thai students never use English as their primary language of communication, causing several problems in learning English, such as a complete lack of confidence and fear of speaking English. This produces speaking or verbal communication anxiety and directly affects learners in the foreign language classroom. According to Krashen (1981), remedial ESL students or bad language learners lack an interest in the target language, are self-conscious, and have high anxiety involves a low aptitude or interest in grammar.

A great deal of research related to fear and anxiety about oral communication of Thai EFL students has been investigated. Ritthirat and Chiramanee's (2014) findings supported that Thai university students were nervous when speaking English due to insufficient English vocabulary and English-speaking practice, unwillingness to study English, and thinking in Thai first. In addition, problems affecting English speaking in presentations and public speaking were that students lacked confidence and were anxious and embarrassed due to inadequate vocabulary knowledge, grammatical structure, and composing presentation ideas. These have resulted in students' inefficient English communication in giving presentations and expressing their opinions in public (Pongpanich, 2011). It is noticeable that English speaking or oral presentation skills are essential to higher education students.

Thai students, especially engineering students and other non-English majors, face considerable issues with English communication. Based on the researcher's teaching experience, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) engineering students have encountered anxiety when studying English and performing oral presentation tasks in front of the class, leading to a relatively low score on English speaking proficiency. This is confirmed by Horwitz (2001), who found that students with high anxiety levels scored lower in their course grades than those with lower anxiety levels. Moreover, L2 learners could experience anxiety in foreign language classrooms (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). It is clear that these engineering students' English-speaking ability is at a level that needs to be improved; for instance, using the wrong grammar structure, speaking in words, not in a sentence, and speaking English mixed with Thai words. In terms of accents and pronunciations, they mispronounce words, from "*problem*" to "*promplem*" and "*teeth*" to "*teed*" and use the word "*single*" referring to a person who makes a singing career instead of the word "*singer*." Taking into account the genuine need for graduates to have diverse skills to adapt to the

context of the new millennium, particularly the excellent English communication skills have an essential effect on university students in this digital era. This is consistent with Soomro et al. (2019), who noted that oral presentation skills in English could help students succeed in a profession. This highlights the importance of improving students' speaking skills for more effective English presentations, developing students' anxiety management strategies, and preparing students to apply speaking skills to the labor market under the international context. Consequently, the researcher believes that Thai students could do oral presentations in English more effectively when reducing anxiety during presentations in front of class and in public. This involves building student confidence and creating a good and worthwhile studying atmosphere in a foreign language classroom.

In the present study, as a teacher of an English course for engineering students, the researcher aimed to investigate the engineering students' overall anxiety levels in English oral presentations and the strategies engineering students with both high and low anxiety levels used to reduce anxiety towards oral presentations. The researcher believes that this study could facilitate language teachers to enhance EFL students' speaking skills and support EFL learners to overcome their speaking anxiety.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the overall anxiety level in English oral presentations of Thai EFL engineering students?
2. What are the anxiety levels of Thai EFL engineering students in the pre-presentation and while-presentation stages?
3. What causes the anxiety before, during, and after performing oral presentations among students with high and low anxiety levels?
4. How to reduce anxiety in performing oral presentations among students with high and low anxiety levels?

### **Literature Reviews**

#### **Anxiety**

Anxiety is termed as a feeling of fear, stress, nervousness, and mental pains, which are automatically stimulated by anxious processes (Spielberger, 1983). People become frustrated with apprehension and tension regarding uncertainty expectations, both internally and externally (Kratowill & Morris, 1985). It becomes apparent that anxiety produces uncomfortable feelings when afraid or nervous. Anxiety is classified as a characteristic or condition: trait anxiety and state anxiety. The first category, anxiety traits, are relative to personality or characteristics, while state anxiety refers to situations. Anxious people tend to feel anxious in a variety of conditions, for example, a specific situation that occurs at a particular time. This reflects the recurring nature of a specific situation (Spielberger et al., 1976 as cited in Woodrow, 2006).

### **Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning and Oral Presentations**

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) as “a complicated of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning and built from the characteristic of the language learning process” (p. 128). In addition, FLA is divided into three components which are Communication Apprehension (CA) (fear of having to communicate with other people), test anxiety (fear of performance being assessed through exams, quizzes, and other assignments), and fear of negative evaluation (nervousness regarding how others including teachers and other classmates view the speaker) (Horwitz, 1986; 2017). According to McCroskey and Beatty (1984), CA is termed as “a normal feeling of fear or anxiety related to oral communication.” Anxiety arises, especially when speaking in front of live audiences and the public. Moreover, Hsu (2012) noted that public speaking anxiety is familiar for most people. When individuals become nervous speaking a foreign language, they may have a knee shake, a trembling voice, or speak fast or slowly (Beatty, 1988).

Nevertheless, McCroskey (1982) redefined speaking anxiety involving communication apprehension as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person” (p.137). Similarly, McCroskey and Anderson (1976) explained that a person's level of anxiety towards speaking for communication is tied to both real-world communication and simulation in front of another person. This means that speaking anxiety or feeling fear of communication can arise in different situations, and there is no specific situation or communication pattern when the speaker encounters pressure. Surprisingly, even a high-level language user might perceive anxiety in communication. Many people feel more nervous when they are on stage and are afraid of interacting with the audience, especially when they remain silent. Speakers become more anxious and cannot remember the script (Kenneth & Melvin, 2008; Patil & Karekatti, 2012). Speech anxiety situations may worsen when using a foreign language on this account. Young (1991) separated anxiety in a second language into six aspects: 1) personal and interpersonal discussion, 2) the beliefs about language learning, 3) the beliefs about language teaching, 4) the interactions between instructor and learner, 5) the procedures in the classroom, and 6) the language testing.

All things considered, oral presentations are a significant challenge for students and have several drawbacks. Learners reported having anxiety in a class of foreign language listening and speaking even if they prepared well enough before giving a speech. Because all learners were anxious when speaking a foreign language in front of other classmates, there was a negative correlation between foreign language learning and foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1991; Price, 1991).

Research on second language anxiety has been investigated widely for over five decades. Horwitz et al. (1986) revealed that over 225 students at the University of Texas (from the fundamental language

classes) felt anxious about foreign language learning, namely speaking in the foreign language and in front of class, language input comprehension, and evaluation. Otherwise, many scholars agreed that anxiety could affect oral communication within and outside the language classroom. Woodrow (2006) also noted that the interaction with native speakers was the major anxiety contribution and language learners experienced anxiety through insufficient skills together with distractions. Interestingly, Asian students from China, Korea, and Japan had higher anxiety levels in language learning than other nationalities. Another concerning anxiety contributor is the reactions from audiences. When students were unsure of what to say, they switched to their mother tongue and were anxious when their friends laughed at them, leading to low confidence (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

In the case of English-speaking research in the Asia Pacific, several research papers in which ESL instructors assigned tasks and evaluated learners' performance via English oral presentations have been published. For example, Hsu (2012) examined the speaking of EFL learner with a link to student anxiety in Taiwan. It was found that speaking in front of class throughout the academic year undoubtedly helped reduce some students' pressure of public speaking. However, female students spent longer preparing for speeches and had higher public speaking anxiety than males. This was mainly due to students' concerns about their speaking ability scores and fear of producing poor presentations in front of other students. Besides, Karatas et al. (2016) mentioned that when learners were assigned an English-speaking assignment, they would be anxious, afraid to show their abilities through verbal presentations in English and have a negative feeling towards this assignment, classified as the primary assignment in English classes. Clearly, oral presentation tasks can be extremely stressful for students.

Lacking confidence is another cause of anxiety among EFL learners. King (2002) identified that learners were afraid to make verbal presentations in English because they had no experience speaking in public, and some did not have confidence in their abilities. Therefore, a lack of confidence can make students worried and uncomfortable speaking English. Moreover, a fear of making mistakes contributes to anxiety among Asian undergraduates. In Brunei, students faced problems while delivering presentations in front of class, and oral presentation anxiety level was affected by audiences (Munohsamy et al., 2015).

It is noticeable that engineering undergraduates struggled with oral presentations performance tasks due to several contributing factors. Soomro et al. (2019) studied the causes that affected the oral presentation anxiety of engineering students in Pakistan and revealed that oral presentations became the most challenging skill. A wide range of oral presentation obstacles was found: stress and nervousness, less motivation, poor verbal communication skills, fear and anxiety, and low self-confidence.

### **Oral Presentation Anxiety of Thai EFL students**

Anxiety among EFL learners in the context of Thailand is caused by many factors. Plangkham and Porkeaw (2012) studied anxiety associated with public speaking among Thai students. Their research objectives were to investigate different stages of public speaking anxiety, including pre-preparation, preparation, and during the practice of speaking in front of class of undergraduate students both at private and government universities of Thailand. The results showed that most of the students perceived different anxiety levels. The highest anxiety levels occurred during public speaking in front of class, which is the communication phase in front of other people.

Furthermore, research on verbal anxiety in English by Kalra and Siribud (2020) revealed that anxiety could be both good and bad. It facilitates or undermines morale, and it is a confidence booster or triggers anxiety. The results showed that anxiety caused issues associated with self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to take risks. These ultimately hindered the practice of proficiency in a foreign language so that their personal, social, and academic contexts were negatively affected due to speech anxiety.

The speaking anxiety assessment which involves the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) and Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey (1970), and Speaker Anxiety Scale (SA) by Clevenger and Halvorson (1992) were developed as the preliminary measurement of a Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) to evaluate public speaking anxiety in the Thai EFL context. Communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, including the level of comfort when using English in a public speaking class, were revealed through the PSCAS measurement scale.

One piece of research related to Thai EFL anxiety was Chinpakdee's (2015) study, which investigated Thai EFL learners' foreign language anxiety level, anxiety contributors of foreign language anxiety, and strategies to reduce their English language learning anxiety. The research instrument was the FLCAS and focus group interviews. The results showed that Thai EFL learners had a high level of anxiety both inside and outside language classroom contexts. Anxiety in a foreign language is caused by academic assessments, negative evaluations, comprehension problems, and teachers.

Another consistent study among EFL engineering undergraduates is Chantha et al. (2019). They examined the anxiety level and anxiety factors from the English language learning classroom, comparing two student groups: English major and Computer Engineering major students. This study also adopted the FLCAS and in-depth interview questions. The findings revealed that the participants' English language learning anxiety levels were from anxiety in speaking, fear of negative evaluation, and negative attitudes towards the English study class. Uneasiness when communicating with native speakers, negative self-

evaluation, and fear of failing the class, including results of individual failure, were not involved. Evidently, many studies focused not only on the anxiety level of Thai EFL students but also on factors and coping strategies in order to help students decrease apprehension of achieving language proficiency.

### **Strategies Dealing with Anxiety in Oral Presentations**

Many coping strategies are employed to alleviate students' speaking anxiety, particularly oral presentations by teachers and themselves. In traditional EFL classrooms, teachers can have a lasting impact in broadening students' speaking performance into practical oral presentation skills. As Liu and Chen (2015) noted, teachers may encourage students to mitigate their anxiety. For this reason, the teacher becomes more significant in the role of supporter, facilitator, and tutor when students perform oral presentations. What's more, the classroom atmosphere could bridge students to overcome foreign language speaking anxiety (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). A classroom with a friendly atmosphere can help students feel more relaxed and decrease pressure and tension while performing oral presentations in the foreign language classroom. Other strategies to reduce anxiety in oral presentations would be more presentation practice and good preparation (Chandran et al., 2015).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Approach**

This research used a mixed-method approach and data triangulation, which involves a questionnaire with an open-ended question and an in-depth interview. According to Jogulu and Pansiri (2011), the triangulation of research methods can support the findings and inferences that help the researcher understand more in social circumstances. The researcher focused on collecting data from a questionnaire about participants' overall anxiety levels and anxiety levels in two stages; pre-presentation and while-presentation, including other situations that participants faced when performing oral presentations in an open-ended question. Moreover, students' opinions towards before, during, and after presentations along with coping strategies of high and low anxious participants were examined from the interview. Having collected data through different methods, the researcher perceived in-depth information about participants' thoughts, feelings, tensions and employed solutions to improve their oral presentation skills and decrease their presentations' anxiety.

### **Research Participants**

The participants were 72 first-year engineering students in Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Chiang Mai campus. They were majoring in Industrial Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and

Computer Engineering. They enrolled in English for Teaching Professions in the second semester of the 2020 academic year, from November 2020 to March 2021. The course comprised oral presentation tasks for improving speaking skills. As all participants voluntarily and willingly participated in this study. Before collecting data, this research was approved RMUTL research ethics committee. The participants were asked to answer the questionnaire and an interview after the 15-week course. The questionnaire was pilot tested with 28 Civil Engineering students and revised before being used for the present study. All 72 completed engineering students answered the questionnaire. Then, participants who perceived high and low anxiety levels were put in two focus group interviews; the researcher chose five high and low anxiety participants as research interviewees in this stage. After that, they were given time to answer questions and were also allowed to ask questions and comment.

### **Research Instruments**

The quantitative survey was adopted from the Personal Report on Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey (1970) and McCroskey and Richmond (1992). This instrument was carried out to investigate participants' anxiety level and anxiety situations regarding their English oral presentation in front of the class, which consisted of two parts. According to McCroskey & Richmond (1992), the 34 anxiety statements in part one represented a degree of communication apprehension with a Likert-type scale (*strongly agree* = 5), (*agree* = 4), (*undecided* = 3), (*disagree* = 2), and (*strongly disagree* = 1), respectively. For part two, the oral presentation anxiety situations were divided into two stages, namely 12 situations for the pre-presentation stage and 10 situations for the while-presentation stage. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to validate these chosen items by three experts in Teaching English as a Second Language. The items with average IOC scores higher than 0.8 were included in the questionnaire.

Another qualitative research method was a semi-structured interview that the researcher used to collect the data about participants' feelings towards before, during, and after performing the English oral presentation, other experienced anxiety situations aside from the statements in part two and how to reduce anxiety among volunteering learners with high and low levels of anxiety. The purpose of the interviews was to fulfill the blanked answers through the second part of the questionnaire, mainly the anxiety occurring after the speech. Interview questions were as follows:

1. What is your anxiety before performing oral presentations?
2. What is your anxiety while performing oral presentations?
3. What is your anxiety after performing oral presentations?
4. What are other opinions on anxiety when performing oral presentations?
5. What are the ways to reduce your anxiety when performing oral presentations?

### Data Collection and Analysis

After performing the final oral presentation task, the questionnaire was used to collect the data of anxiety levels in English oral presentations, and the participants were categorized into five anxiety level groups. Subsequently, the high and low anxious participants were interviewed for in-depth information.

The quantitative data were analyzed for two conducted data groups. Firstly, the researcher aimed initially to investigate high anxious participants; thus, the overall participants' anxiety degree of communication apprehension level was classified by following the (PRPSA-34) self-report measurement by McCroskey and Richmond (1992) with a Likert-type scale (*strongly agree* = 5), (*agree* = 4), (*undecided* = 3), (*disagree* = 2), and (*strongly disagree* = 1), respectively. Twenty two out of 34 items in the scale represented negative opinions, whereas 12 items referred to positive opinions, and these latter items were reversely coded. Determining the total scores by adding all 22 positive items then, summing the scores of the other 12 reversed items, and lastly subtracting the full scores from 132. The score of this scale was divided into five levels of anxiety (the percentages in parentheses show a standardized population fitting in each category): Scores between 34-84 indicate low anxiety (5%), and 85-92 identify moderately low anxiety (5%), while 93-110 (20%), 111-119 (30%), and 120-170 (40%) scores refer to moderate anxiety, moderately high anxiety, and high anxiety, respectively.

Secondly, the 22 items from the two stages of oral presentation were analyzed by mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) to identify the anxiety levels in each stage with the 5-level anxiety criteria as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Anxiety Level Ranges*

Mean Range	Anxiety Level Interpretation
4.51 – 5.00	Very high anxiety
3.51 – 4.50	High anxiety
2.51 – 3.50	Moderate
1.51 – 2.50	Low anxiety
1.00 – 1.50	Very low anxiety

Apart from that, the qualitative data were analyzed by decoding and grouping (category and coding). The data were answers from the interview about feelings towards before, during, and after the speech, including other experienced anxious situations and anxiety managements of five high and five low anxious learners.

### Findings

Participants in this study involved sixty males and twelve females. The majority of them had studied English for more than nine years. In addition, they could do well in the two receptive skills; reading and listening skills, whereas speaking and writing were ranked at low competency.

#### Findings 1: Overall Anxiety Levels of Engineering Students

Table 2

*The Overall Anxiety levels of Engineering Students*

Level of Anxiety	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
High	8	11
Moderately high	6	8
Moderate	40	56
Moderately low	9	12.5
Low	9	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 2, most of the participants' anxiety was at a moderate level (56%). Meanwhile, the same number of participants had moderately low and low levels of anxiety accounting for approximately one-fifth of the total (12.5%). The rest of the participants experienced high (11.11%) and moderately high (8%) anxiety levels, contributing less than the previous levels.

#### Findings 2: Oral Presentation Anxiety in Pre-presentation and While-presentation Stages

The oral presentation anxiety situations were divided into 12 situations for the pre-presentation stage and 10 for the while-presentation stage. Overall, the majority of participants were more anxious while performing oral presentations ( $\bar{x} = 3.01$ ) than when preparing for the presentation ( $\bar{x} = 2.99$ ).

Table 3

*Anxiety in Pre-Presentation Stage*

<b>Situations of Anxiety</b>	<i>Average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Level</i>
<i>I feel anxious, ...</i>			
1. if I forget what I have prepared to say.	3.65	0.62	High
2. while preparing for giving an oral presentation.	3.18	0.96	Moderate
3. when thinking about an upcoming oral presentation.	3.15	0.99	Moderate
4. then, breathe faster before giving an oral presentation.	3.13	0.23	Moderate
5. when I see the word “oral presentation” on a course outline.	3.13	1.03	Moderate
6. my heart beats fast when I just start an oral presentation.	3.11	0.99	Moderate
7. while waiting to give my oral presentation.	3.08	1.05	Moderate
8. while sitting in the room just before starting an oral presentation.	2.97	0.91	Moderate
9. when the teacher assigns an oral presentation task.	2.90	0.95	Moderate
10. when the teacher announces the date of an oral presentation.	2.72	1.12	Moderate
11. then, sweat just before starting an oral presentation.	2.61	1.29	Moderate
12. and falling asleep difficultly the night before an oral presentation.	2.29	1.05	Low
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

In the pre-presentation, the findings revealed that most participants had anxiety at a moderate level ( $\bar{x} = 2.99$ ). They felt highly anxious when they were in awe of probably forgetting what they prepared to say ( $\bar{x} = 3.65$ ). However, they encountered merely a bit of trouble in falling asleep the night before delivering the presentation ( $\bar{x} = 2.29$ ), shown in Table 3.

Table 4

*Anxiety in While-Presentation Stage*

<b>Situations of Anxiety</b>	<i>Average</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Level</i>
<i>I feel anxious, ...</i>			
1. when someone asks me about a topic I don't know.	3.62	1.06	High
2. if I forget facts while giving an oral presentation.	3.31	0.97	Moderate
3. when I make a mistake while giving an oral presentation. I find it hard to concentrate on the following parts.	3.07	1.11	Moderate
4. and confused when giving an oral presentation.	3.04	0.87	Moderate
5. so I perform poorer on an oral presentation.	3.00	1.12	Moderate
6. when only a little time remains in the presentation.	2.89	0.95	Moderate
7. so my heart beats very fast while doing an oral presentation.	2.88	1.08	Moderate
8. and powerless to speak during an effective oral presentation.	2.86	0.94	Moderate
9. so my hands shake when I am giving an oral presentation.	2.69	1.06	Moderate
10. so my body parts tense up while giving an oral presentation.	2.68	1.03	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

As shown in Table 4, a large number of participants had a moderate anxiety level while performing the oral presentation ( $\bar{x} = 3.01$ ). They became highly anxious when someone asked them something about their presentation topic that they didn't know ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ). In contrast, the other anxious situations could cause a moderate anxiety level while performing the speech.

### **Findings 3: Interviews of High and Low Anxious Participants**

In this part, the researcher collected the data by interviewing ten participants who had high and low anxiety levels before, during, and after the speech, including other opinions on the anxiety when performing oral presentations and ways to reduce their anxiety. Participants in the study were categorized and coded by gender, section, and number. For example, the letter M stands for male students; F stands for female students, followed by the number of sections from 1-4, and students' number. Responses from both high and low anxious participants are presented in five main categories with examples as follows:

#### **Oral presentations' anxiety among high anxious participants**

##### *a) Anxiety before performing oral presentations*

Most of the high anxious participants were very nervous and reluctant to perform the oral presentation in front of class. Other responses were associated with their insufficient background knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. Besides, many participants were worried about local English accents and pronunciations, which were different from the native speakers'. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*I was afraid of pronouncing wrong sounds, speaking sentences incorrectly, and inaccuracy. I was sweated a lot with my anxiety while waiting to do oral presentations in front of the classroom. (M114)*

*Due to my local accent (northern Thailand), I was embarrassed to pronounce English vocabulary correctly. I was a shy person, which hindered me from delivering speeches in front of people. (M128)*

***b) Anxiety while performing oral presentations***

The most significant factor that led to the anxiety during the oral presentation was making eye contact with live audiences. Even though the audiences were their classmates, they still became anxious about speaking when the audiences stared at them in front of the classroom. Some participants could not control their anxiety symptoms such as sweating, handshaking, mouth trembling, and an upset stomach. In addition, they were worried about answering any unrelated or unexpected questions from audiences and their teacher while presenting. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*I had butterflies in my stomach, so I could not speak clearly. I was not too fond of the sight of audiences. (M112)*

*My speaking apprehension was constantly increased when my classmate looked at me while speaking in front of them. (M121)*

*I tried hard to avoid making eye contact with my friends while presenting in front of the class. This situation made me lose control of myself, and I could not focus on my presentation. (M420)*

***c) Anxiety after performing oral presentations***

From adapting the Personal Report on Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey & Richmond (1992) questionnaire to collect the data about anxious situations, there were no statements related

to the anxiety after performing the oral presentation. The researcher was interested in studying other anxious situations by interviewing participants' feelings after the speeches. It was shown that only the negative evaluation from the teacher was the most disturbing matter for the high anxious participants. Examples of this response were as follows:

*I compared my speaking performance to my classmates who have done better than me, and my speaking grade might be lower than theirs. (M114)*

*I had a high expectation of my oral presentation score, and I was worried that I might get few scores because I could not perform as far as I should due to my anxiety. (M128)*

*Having a low score assessment was made me feel anxious. I thought that I had done an excellent oral presentation; however, I was worried that the teacher could evaluate a low score. (M420)*

***d) Other opinions on the anxiety when performing oral presentations***

Regardless of anxious situations found in PRPSA-34, other factors that caused participants' anxiety in oral presentations were examined. One of the participants could respond to this question about the reaction of live audiences. This response was as follows:

*An enormous pressure that occurred to me while performing oral presentations was my friends' reaction. I was worried that they might laugh, not enjoy, and feel bored with my presentation. (M114)*

***e) Ways to reduce the anxiety when performing oral presentations***

All high anxious participants reduced their oral presentation anxiety by practicing the oral presentation in front of their friends or a mirror. In addition, some participants typed the speaking script into Google Translate then practiced pronouncing every single sentence correctly, being aware of the pronunciation. One of them recorded the speech while practicing to improve for a more effective speech. Another coping strategy was avoiding making eye contact with audiences by looking at the wall or the floor of the presentation room. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*When I felt nervous about doing oral presentations in front of the classroom, I kept smiling and looked at my co-presenters to alleviate my anxiety. (M112)*

*I had to concentrate on my presentation and avoided making eye contact with my friends because this could decrease my confidence. (M114)*

*I always practiced speaking from the script with my friends, tried to remember it, and listened to the feedback for revising. (M121)*

*Using a smartphone to record my speech before performing the actual oral presentation could help me figure out my weakness and improve my speaking. (M128)*

### **Oral presentations' anxiety among low anxious participants**

#### ***a) Anxiety before performing the oral presentation***

Low anxious participants had similar apprehensions as to the high anxious group in the preparation stage for the speech. English accents, vocabulary, and grammar were the participants' primary determinants. Moreover, one of the interviewees was worried about the unclear communication that could bring an unpleasant oral presentation. Another anxiety source was that the participant became more anxious unless they followed the prepared presentation script. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*I was afraid that my speech might not be clear enough and my friends would not be interested in the presentation. (M104)*

*My English vocabulary background knowledge was inadequate, so I was worried when preparing a script for the oral presentation. (F124)*

#### ***b) Anxiety while performing the oral presentation***

The most anxious situation during presenting was answering unassociated questions from audiences. Many low anxious participants started sweating when their classmates were asking some questions. Participants could not deal with technical problems while delivering oral presentations was also a concern. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*Nobody expected that the visual aids would not work when presenting in front of the class. This caused me to worry and want to end the speech as soon as possible. (M104)*

*I had no idea how to stop my classmates from asking me any questions because if any questions were out of my scope, I could not handle them. (M119)*

***c) Anxiety after performing the oral presentation***

None of the low anxious participants were stressed after doing oral presentations. Most of them realized that they had done their best. They were well-organized and well-prepared before performing the presentation; thus, they had nothing to worry about. An example of these responses was as follows:

*I had done many oral presentations. I always practiced and prepared before presenting. So, I had no anxiety. (M408)*

***d) Other opinions on the anxiety when performing oral presentations***

There was no response to this question because the participants had not experienced any further tensions. This response was as follows:

*There were no factors except the situations from the survey that could lead me to be anxious about oral presentations. (M119)*

***e) Ways to reduce anxiety when performing oral presentations.***

The most frequent anxiety management of low anxiety learners was practicing and reviewing the script twice. Some participants practiced in front of their friends or a mirror while one of them tried to get familiar with the oral presentation topic. Examples of these responses were as follows:

*I usually practiced speaking and recited vocabulary with my friends before delivering oral presentations; this could increase me more confidence. (F124)*

*I spent a lot of time preparing for the speech. I sometimes practiced alone speaking in front of the mirror. (M115)*

*Making myself familiar with the presentation topic could help me do the oral presentation fluently. (M408)*

## Discussion

### **RQ1: What is the overall anxiety level in English oral presentations of Thai EFL engineering students?**

The first question in the study aimed to investigate the overall level of anxiety in English oral presentations of Thai EFL Engineering students. The findings of this question refer to the PRPSA-34 by McCroskey and Richmond (1992), who classified speaking anxiety into five levels: high anxiety, moderately high anxiety, moderate anxiety, moderately low anxiety, and low anxiety, respectively. It can be seen that the overall anxiety of Thai EFL engineering students in oral presentations was at a moderate level. Similarly, the study of Techapunratanakul et al. (2020) found that students from three faculties involving the Engineering School in Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna who enrolled in English for the Everyday Communication perceived anxiety in speaking skills at a moderate level. However, the research findings differ from the previous studies investigating the oral presentation anxiety level for EFL students in other Thai and international contexts. Most Thai undergraduates had a high anxiety level when doing an oral presentation or public speaking. According to Plangkham and Porkeaw (2012), Thai EFL university learners agreed that they felt anxious while they performed public speaking. This result corresponds to Hadi et al. (2020), who found the speaking anxiety of Thai students from the Faculty of Education in TSAI (Thailand Students Association in Indonesia) at high levels during an English oral presentation. In addition, most Thai ESL undergraduates experienced a high anxiety level in English public speaking (Kalra & Siribud, 2020). Another remarkable research result regarding Thai EFL learners' anxiety in different fields of study was a case study of tourism students' oral presentation anxiety. A large number of Thai EFL tourism students had the highest anxiety level in English speaking (Kakandee & Al-Shaibani, 2018).

Due to numerous factors such as frequently speaking practice and rehearsal, good atmosphere, and non-threatening classroom environment could lead to less tension. Menzel and Carell (1994 as cited in Plangkham and Porkeaw, 2012) noted that oral rehearsal promotes confidence and success to students when performing factual oral presentations. In accordance with building a friendly classroom atmosphere regardless of language errors and overcorrection, it could alleviate students' anxiety, including the perception of low ability and fear of negative evaluation (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009). In the same way, Wörde (2003) suggested, a relaxed classroom atmosphere or environment plays a vital role in decreasing apprehension.

**RQ2: What are the anxiety levels of Thai EFL engineering students in the pre-presentation and while-presentation stages?**

Two separate stages from 12 situations in pre-presentation and 10 situations in while-presentation were investigated. In the pre-presentation stage, most participants had a moderate level of anxiety in general. Many of them felt high pressure about forgetting what they had prepared to say. Correspondingly, even though the participants practiced a lot of oral presentations, they still feared failing because of the information they had prepared to say. This kind of anxiety was from a fear of failure and was consistent with that of academic evaluation (Horwitz & Young, 1991).

Additionally, the participant had a high anxiety level in the pre-performance stage for public speaking; remarkably, they worried that they might forget what they prepared to say (Plangkham & Porkeaw, 2012). The finding was supported by Kalra and Siribud's (2020) study result, which revealed that most participants felt unsure when speaking English. Interestingly, one of the Thai EFL anxiety studies showed a similar effect: students performed a poor oral presentation because they could not remember all the prepared content in front of their classmates (Kakandee & Al-Shaibani, 2018). Similarly, Djumingin et al. (2019) found that when Indonesian students felt more anxious in the classroom presentation, they encountered the failure to recognize the content they had prepared before. However, the present study participants discovered a bit of trouble falling asleep the night before delivering the presentation. For this reason, they applied the presentation techniques and prepared with not much worry before the authentic presentation. The preparation strategy could help reduce their anxiety in oral presentations. In agreement with Raja (2017), well-prepared speakers rarely face anxiety in public speaking.

During the oral presentation performance in the present study, it is notable that all in all, most participants experienced anxiety at a moderate level. They became anxious when someone asked something about their presentation topic that they didn't know. Similarly, English speaking anxiety occurred when Thai EFL learners had insufficient knowledge on their speech topic (Kalra & Siribud, 2020). This is in line with the study result of Djumingin et al. (2019) that non-native undergraduates became nervous when asked questions that seemed difficult to them, including while presenting the discussion topic.

**RQ 3: What causes the anxiety before, during, and after performing oral presentations among students with high and low anxiety levels?**

Based on the interviews, responses from ten participants who had high and low anxiety levels about feelings towards before, during, and after the speech, including other experienced anxious situations and anxiety managements are discussed as follows:

**a) Anxiety before performing oral presentations**

Regarding pre-presentation, high and low anxiety level participants admitted similar apprehensions with deficient English vocabulary and grammar background knowledge. They speak English in local accents and pronunciations, unlike the native speakers'. These barriers have been found in many Thai EFL studies. Ritthirat and Chiramanee (2014) revealed that most university students from five fields worried about using English and grammar inaccurately when preparing to do an oral presentation in front of the class. Insufficient vocabulary was a significant factor that affected speaking anxiety, resulting in incapability to perform oral presentations (Hadi et al., 2020). Moreover, the study results of Tanveer (2008) showed that ESL and EFL students encountered trouble in using grammar correctly when they were asked to speak the non-native language.

Another anxiety contributor found in the present study was the accuracy of accent and pronunciation. There is no specific anxiety statement about accents and articulations in the PRSA-34 questionnaire. From the interview, both high and low anxiety level participants exposed their concerns not being able to find a way to change their accented English. Obviously, second language learners speak a target language in different ways. Sometimes their speaking is partly and seriously distinct from native speakers' (Avery & Ehrlich, 1987). Thus, participants were self-conscious and could not form words confidently, causing more apprehension. This is associated with Kakandee and Al-Shaibani's (2018) study, which showed that proper and correct pronunciation led to Thai EFL learners' anxiety when preparing the speech.

### **b) Anxiety while performing oral presentations**

During the oral presentation performance, the underlying anxious feelings were making eye contact and physiological reactions: sweating, handshaking, trembling mouth, and upset stomach. In addition, low anxious participants noted that they started sweating when their classmates asked some questions. It is similar to the study result of Hadi et al. (2020) that Thai EFL students lacked confidence in making eye contact in English oral class due to internal anxiety factors. Additionally, anxiety reactions notably, body responses such as sweating, were reported as the highest reaction of speaking performance (Woodrow, 2006). Furthermore, it was clearly seen that the presentation anxiety in the classroom was from the most general symptoms, for example, shaking and sweating (Anggita & Suwartono, 2020).

### **c) Anxiety after performing oral presentations**

Concerning the Personal Report on Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey and Richmond (1992) questionnaire, there were no statements about anxiety after performing the oral presentation. Thus, anxious situations regarding after the speeches were conducted in the interview. Only the high anxiety level group participants mentioned an unfavorable evaluation from the teacher as the

highlighted cause of anxiety. In contrast, low anxiety level participants have no apprehension after giving oral presentations because they had a good preparation; they felt no tension. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), fear of negative evaluation is categorized as common anxiety that foreign language students could encounter, along with communicative apprehension and test anxiety. This corresponds to Chantha et al.'s (2019) findings, which revealed that Computer Engineering students' anxiety towards fear of negative evaluation was higher than English major students.

Similarly, negative evaluation, such as being judged by other people (teachers and classmates) as being an unskillful speaker, brought about foreign language anxiety (Chinpakdee, 2015). In addition, negative feedback from teachers caused anxiety to learners and could lead to a decrease in motivation and attention (Ehrman et al., 2003 as cited in Chinpakdee, 2015). Correspondingly, Tian (2019) revealed that negative feedback from peers and classmates' comparisons generated anxiety in classroom presentations in Korean students. Similarly, many Indonesian students worried that making mistakes while presenting resulted in a bad score in their presentation given by the teacher (Anggita & Suwartono, 2020).

#### **d) Other opinions on the anxiety when performing oral presentations**

From the interview, other anxious situations in oral presentations were investigated, and only one high anxious participant indicated the reaction of live audiences. For instance, the other students in the classroom presentation would laugh, not enjoy it, and feel bored with the presentation. This finding is similar to the result of a study by Soomro et al. (2019), Pakistani EFL learners experienced anxiety when classmates ridiculed and laughed at them, affecting their oral presentation performance.

#### **RQ 4: How to reduce anxiety in performing oral presentations among students with high and low anxiety levels?**

High and low anxious participants reduced their presentation anxiety by using several coping strategies: practicing in front of their friends or a mirror, reviewing the script to get familiar with the oral presentation topic, and avoiding eye contact with audiences. This finding is supported by the previous studies that have already examined the oral presentation anxiety level and the way to manage oral presentation anxiety. One remarkable result of the Thai EFL anxiety study by Kakandee and Al-Shaibani (2018) found that practicing speaking in front of a mirror to gain confidence helped students eliminate anxiety when giving oral presentations, especially their excitement. This relates to Munohsamy et al.'s (2015) finding that students had low anxiety after practicing oral presentation skills for seven weeks. Additionally, the study of Raja (2017) also proved that practicing and rehearsing before presentations or speeches could control the fear of public speaking. It is evident that practicing speaking in a virtual

presentation with friends or small groups of peers and later delivering to live audiences helps overcome and bring down oral presentation anxiety levels.

Moreover, another non-verbal reaction found in the present study that can lessen anxiety is avoiding eye contact with audiences. Akkakoson's (2016) study shows that Thai EFL learners applied one compensatory strategy: avoiding making eye contact to handle speaking anxiety in an EFL classroom. Correspondingly, students could look directly at the teacher at the end of the speaking course, which they could do better than when the class had just commenced (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Since avoiding making eye contact with both teachers and classmates becomes a tool of anxiety management, for this reason, EFL students achieve more confidence when presenting in front of the class.

### **Conclusion**

The main finding concerning Thai EFL engineering students' oral presentation anxiety appears to be that they perceived overall anxiety at a moderate level. In the two presentation stages, the pre-presentation and the while-presentation, students experienced different anxiety levels: high, moderate, and low. It is explicit that participants experienced higher anxiety levels while performing the oral presentation than preparing for the presentation. In the pre-presentation stage, most of them experienced feeling highly anxious about forgetting what they prepared to say; meanwhile, they did not find it difficult to fall asleep the night before doing an oral presentation. Apart from that, when audiences asked something about the presentation topic they didn't know, they were nervous and anxious during the presentation.

Based on the interview, the evident feelings towards an oral presentation of high and low anxious participants when preparing for the presentation were anxiety relating to a lack of English vocabulary and grammar together with different English accents and pronunciations to the native speaker. During the presentation, students seemed to become stressed with making eye contact and having physiological reactions such as sweating, handshaking, trembling mouth, and upset stomach. Mainly, when classmates asked some questions, low anxious participants started sweating. After the presentation, only high anxious students worried about negative evaluation and feedback. While other experienced anxiety situations aside from the research questionnaire (PRPSA-34) by McCroskey and Richmond (1992) was the reaction of live audiences, which involved laughing and showing unpleasant feelings towards the presenter. Furthermore, high and low anxious participants reduced their presentation anxiety by similar coping strategies: practicing in front of their friends or a mirror and reviewing the script to become more familiar with the presentation topic, including avoiding eye contact with audiences.

### Limitation of the Study and Recommendation

The present study is limited by time, with only one semester (four months) available in the research setting. One semester is enough merely to survey the oral presentation anxiety from Thai EFL engineering students. In consequence of this reason, anxiety management and coping strategies require more time to investigate. In the case of future study, further research should probably study and focus on more in-depth detail. Moreover, there should be more factors that affect second language learning anxiety in other comprehensions: listening, reading, and writing skills involving different valuable ways to cope with anxiety for EFL students.

The researcher expects future research to have more advanced features such as online classroom presentations, social media networking, and public speaking contests. Finally, other Thai EFL majoring students should be examined: Medical, Art and Architecture, Social Sciences, Business, or Hospitality Services undergraduates.

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