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Exploring Communication Apprehension among ASEAN Graduate Students in English-Medium Instruction Classrooms at a Thai University

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ABSTRACT
Thailand has developed as one of the preferred study destinations for ASEAN graduate students. Although Thailand is a non-English speaking country, English is widely used as the English-medium instruction (EMI), particularly in graduate-level in international program. In these contexts, ASEAN graduate students are commonly expected to communicate effectively in English despite English not being their first language. This expectation causes significant communication challenges, many students may experience communication apprehension (CA), particularly when they face limited preparation, language barriers, or fear of negative evaluation. To fill in the gaps, this research aims to explore the factors that contribute to communication apprehension within graduate students from ASEAN countries in EMI contexts in Thailand. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to allow an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. The participants were six ASEAN graduate students who were purposively selected from a Thai university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect in-depth perception into the participants' experiences with communication apprehension. Using inductive coding, the findings showed that communication apprehension among ASEAN graduate students was shaped by the lack of preparation, comprehension difficulties, and fear of negative evaluation. Rather than reflecting language difficulties alone, participants' apprehension arisen from the pressure of communicating spontaneously, processing lecturers' English, and managing concerns about how their performance would be identified.

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INTRODUCTION

International student mobility continues to gain in importance in the past few years in Southeast Asian higher education (Ratanawijitrasin, 2015). The global student population in Thailand is on the increase, with a particular focus on international students from China, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, South Africa, and several countries in Europe in the first semester of 2022, while at the school, including as many as 34,000. With regard to the number of foreign students in Thailand, it is expected that in this respect, around 34,000, the number has continued to increase in the region, especially in graduate students from Thailand. With this happening, Thai universities have grown increasingly to be multiethnic universities, with a linguistic diversity.

To keep pace with this increasing internationalization, English has come to play a significant role in the classroom and communication of higher education throughout the country. English medium instruction (EMI), particularly in its graduate degree course and international-course applications, has been adopted by many Thailand universities as part of the internationalization of higher education in Thailand. Typically, EMI refers to employing English to conduct education on subjects within a context in which the majority population does not speak English as their first language (Dearden, 2014). In this context, English serves as a medium for communication, whether between lecturers and students (Kirkpatrick, 2024). As a result, graduate students need to use academic English despite their communication skills and their varying skill levels on the language. However, EMI can create language and learning problems for students (Doiz et al., 2013).

Speaking in English within academic environments, may prove as a major challenge for foreign students as English is not the primary language for most international learners from ASEAN countries. It is a concern for many students and particularly for students that have such a demanding task in expressing their opinions clearly, comprehending academic discussion and contributing to the classroom (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Sivaraman et al., 2014; Tuan, 2024). Such difficulties can be observed in speech-related tasks like oral presentations, classroom discussions or interactions with teachers and schoolteachers. In these cases, students might feel nervous, anxious, or afraid of making errors and possibly being judged negatively by other people (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kudo et al., 2017).

These problems are closely related to communication apprehension (CA). McCroskey (1977) considered communication apprehension to be a sense of fear or anxiety arising during actual or anticipated interaction with another person. In learning a foreign language, communication apprehension is often associated to speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low confidence in communicating in a second or foreign language (Horwitz, 2010). Speaking anxiety can be stronger in evaluative situations, such as presentations examinations, and interviews (Yen, 2026). Classroom silence may also be connected to speaking anxiety and make students more anxious (Maher & King, 2022).

Previous studies have shown that communication apprehension can negatively affect students' classroom participation, speaking performance, and overall academic experience in EMI settings. (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Muftah, 2023). In addition to communication apprehension, students' English proficiency and academic ability can influence students' learning in EMI settings (Lin & Lei, 2021). These challenges may be more difficult for

Students who move from high school to university, as they face more language difficulties when studying in EMI courses (Aizawa & Rose, 2020)

Some studies looked at communication apprehension in English language learning contexts in detail. For example, in Thailand, Rimkeeratikul (2017) which examined communication apprehension among Thai diploma and master's students studying English in Bangkok. The research found that students reported higher levels of apprehension when talking in English than about their native language, Thai. However, the participants in the studies were Thai students learning English rather than international graduate students using English as EMI for their academic studies. Thus, the findings provide useful evidence about English-related CA in Thailand but do not explain how ASEAN students experience CA when English is used to participate in graduate-level academic activities.

A different context was examined by Wilang and Singhasiri (2017), focusing on communication apprehension among Thai students and international students practicing English as a lingua franca (ELF) while traveling outside the classroom of Thai universities. In this study, the Result was Thais and international students had moderate levels of anxiety in out-of-class communication, and using in-class language which was English from an international perspective. Causes of anxiety included difficulties listening to others, feelings of insecurity in speaking the other, and fears of communication failure. Nevertheless, because the study focused on out-of-class communication, it leaves open the question of how communication apprehension works in the more academically demanding environment of EMI classrooms, where students are expected to demonstrate knowledge while communicating in English. Relatedly, Setiawan et al. (2025) The study examined the self-efficacy of master's students in speaking English in a post-pandemic hybrid learning environment. This study included six master's students in English education from a university in Indonesia.

In this regard speaking anxiety and lack of self-confidence were significant influences on students in self-efficacy to speak. Some respondents were not comfortable making their voice heard in class, concerned about the implications if they were to be criticized. Moreover, lack of self-assurance caused to poor participation of students' speech in the classroom. While these findings show a relationship between students' participation and emotional factors in English communication, the study focuses more on speaking self-efficacy rather than communication apprehension in EMI classrooms. In addition, its Indonesian context of the study is different from the multilingual and multicultural environment experienced by ASEAN students studying at a Thai university.

Taken together, these studies indicate that communication apprehension is influenced not only by students' English skills but also by the context where communication happens. It can also cause students to withdraw from classroom activities, limiting their chances to practice their language skills and potentially increasing their anxiety (Alhasan et al., 2024). At the same time, the studies differ in their settings and participants. They include Thai students learning English (Rimkeeratikul, 2017), to Thai and international students' communication through ELF outside the classroom (Wilang and Singhasiri, 2017), and Indonesian graduate students participating in hybrid learning (Setiawan et al., 2025). These differences propose that CA should not be treated as a same experience in different academic settings.

However, the studies reviewed above do not explicitly explore how cultural differences relate to communication apprehension in Thai EMI classrooms. It provided limited insights into how ASEAN graduate students manage CA while participating in academic communication with lecturers and peers in a diverse Thai university environment. This is an important area to explore because these students use English for academic communication while also dealing with linguistic differences and interactions with peers and lecturers from different backgrounds. Furthermore, only a few studies have focused on ASEAN graduate students in EMI settings in Thailand.

Lastly, academic situations in these settings, such as giving presentations, participating in discussions, and interacting with lecturer and peers can create more pressure for students who are using English as a second language or additional language. This pressure may raise their CA and impact their readiness to take part in academic participation. Therefore, this study aims to explore the personal factors that influence communication apprehension among ASEAN graduate students in EMI classrooms at a Thai university. Based on this discussion, the study focuses on the following research question: ”What personal factors influence communication apprehension among ASEAN graduate students in EMI classrooms at a Thai university?”

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

this current study uses a qualitative design to thoroughly analyze participants’ beliefs and experiences. In focusing on in-depth and subjective experiences, this study seeks to obtain information regarding how participants interpret events in the educational contexts. It is this design that ensures a greater understanding of detailed aspects of the participants’ experiences that allows for a richer and more expanded exploration of the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The aim of this study is to investigate how students in ASEAN experience communication apprehension in English. This involves exploring personal elements of their communication apprehension.

A phenomenological approach was employed because the focus of this study was not to measure the level of communication apprehension in their academic lives but to understand how they experienced and interpreted it. This approach is most appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of the participants as it highlights the subjective nature of such experiences and explores the way in which individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences (Van Manen, 2017). As Creswell and Poth (2018) state, phenomenology aims to describe and construe human experiences, and this aligns directly with the purposes of this study to investigate students’ emotional and cognitive experiences related to communication apprehension in an academic context that was conducted in the English language. The study collected rich and descriptive data through in-depth interviews to give participants the opportunity to share the meaning they imputed to their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2009).

Participants

The research participants comprised six graduate students of ASEAN graduate study in a Thai university, with two masters in Myanmar, one master in Cambodia, one doctoral student

in Vietnam, and two doctoral students in Indonesia. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling because they fulfilled particular criteria related to the research questions; they were international graduate students from ASEAN countries, enrolled in an EMI environment at a Thai university, and non-native English speakers who usually used English in academic settings. The participants were deemed appropriate for study as they have used English for academic communication that they use regularly in class discussions, presentations, and interaction among multicultural institutions.

Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study involved participants who had direct experience of the phenomenon being explored. Instead of seeking a statically generalizable sample, the study selected participants who experienced communication apprehension in EMI classrooms. The sample size was considered appropriate for the qualitative and phenomenological nature of the study because the purpose was to explore participants' lived experiences closely rather than to generalize the findings to the larger population of ASEAN graduate students. The selections of participants from four ASEAN countries also provided diversity in the linguistic and cultural background. However, the small sample is a limitation of the study, as no participants from other ASEAN countries were available at a Thai university. Therefore, the finding may not capture the experiences of all ASEAN graduate students or other EMI contexts in Thailand.

Regarding the privacy and confidentiality. All subjects were identified as a pseudonymous individual in the order in which they participated (e.g.,"P1"), have pseudonyms assigned to them, and so on. These pseudonyms were applied throughout the search results and discussion to guarantee anonymity, yet ensuring clarity in the data reporting (Table 1). A total of six graduate students (two masters from Myanmar, one masters from Cambodia, one doctoral from Vietnam, and two doctoral from Indonesia) were included as researchers.

These have been purposefully selected using a purposive sample ensuring that the collected data is relevant and reflective of the research question. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, it was noted that their identities were pseudonymized. They were pseudonymised based on the order which participants took part in the study: they were simply called "P1," "P2" etc. This consistent naming convention was applied throughout the study, particularly in the findings and discussion sections, both to maintain the anonymity of participants while making data reporting clear, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Country	Major	Graduate Level
P1	Myanmar	Cooperative Education	Master's
P2	Myanmar	Transportation Engineering	Master's
P3	Indonesia	Physics	PhD
P4	Cambodia	Food Technology	Master's
P5	Indonesia	Geoinformatics	PhD
P6	Vietnam	Biotechnology for Aquaculture	PhD

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experience and perceptions of communication apprehension. This method is chosen to provide insights into the challenges and resources presented to communication apprehension that ASEAN graduates at a Thai university have to overcome or manage within their educational context through communication apprehension. Creswell and Creswell (2017) describe semi-structured interviews as valuable for achieving deeper understanding regarding participants perspectives and experiences in more qualitative topics and complex subjects to be explored further when more structured interview formats such as questionnaires might not yield full reflection.

Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2017), we note that semi structured interviews are advantageous by combining a given structured structure with the freedom to explore in detail the individual answers participants provide to the questions, making it easier to capture detailed, rich and meaningful data. Semi-structured interviews can be justified for the ability to access dimensions of human experience that are not easily observable, like emotional states, cognitive processes, and personal beliefs.

This is particularly worth of note for probing the subjective aspect of communication apprehension. And semi-structured interviews are useful for focusing information (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), that focus on a particular question and open to exploring other possible answers. This method is important for identifying the affective and cognitive influences affecting students' English in classroom communication in the classroom. The interview questions were adapted from the selected items of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which was initially designed to measure anxiety in foreign language classroom. Selected items focusing on nervousness, fear, confidence, and communication difficulties were developed into some open-ended questions and adapted to participants' experiences in EMI classrooms, especially about comprehension difficulties, speaking without preparation, and responding to unexpected questions. This adaptation gave participants to describe their experiences and perception of communication apprehension instead of simply rate their level of anxiety. In this study, content validity was checked by two experience university professors with expertise in research methodology, who assessed the questions for clarity and alignment with the study objectives, and the questions were then revised based on their feedback.

Data Collection Procedures

This study uses several steps in data collection procedures. First, the researcher carefully selected participants via purposive sampling. This was followed by casual conversation from the researcher to potential participants with short definitions of the subjects of this study. Second, participants in this study were permitted to arrange their interview on Line at a time based on their own schedule. Third, an environment of ease had been established for open discussion in the interviews and each interview was expected to be in duration between 30 and 60 minutes. Lastly, the researcher carefully transcribed the audio records of the interviews in an effort to preserve the data's authenticity and accuracy by transcribing, verbatim, the participants' words as spoken.

Data Analysis Methods

The data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. According to Naeem et al. (2023), inductive coding involves finding words or ideas specific to the data that are helpful in a process that can lead to a defined set of codes. In the present study, codes are drawn up directly on data and patterns and themes arise from participant responses. Inductive coding was applied as the objective of the study was to investigate the participants experiences without being constrained by predetermined categories or theories and to obtain more insight into the participants' thoughts on communication apprehension. The researcher remained receptive to inductive coding - which allowed for responses from participants to reveal unexpected themes. This coding approach was chosen for the present research as it allows researchers to accommodate new insights and themes that result in their analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), as this is an exploratory and data-driven method. Insights from Horwitz's (1986) research on foreign language anxiety informed the analysis.

Thus, through building interview questions incorporating components of her questionnaires, the study examined how the classroom environment, unplanned speaking assignment and preparation impediments influenced students' apprehension on communication tasks in an academic context. Drawing on Braun and Clark (2006), and Creswell and Poth (2018), inductive thematic analysis was followed to analyze the interview transcripts of this study. This approach is a way to develop an interview with the participants in which all the transcripts are transcribed from interview (video-recorded) to ensure that the qualitative interviews are based on a comprehensive analysis of the participants' individual communication processes. Second, transcribing interview data from the transcripts was performed by the researcher multiple times to familiarize the researcher with the participants' narratives and insight into the data. Third, in the initial coding process, the transcripts were systematically divided and analyzed into small segments, and initial codes were constructed directly from the participants' responses in terms of key ideas, experiences and recurring themes that emerged from the responses.

Fourth, similar codes were organized in larger categories to clarify patterns, relationships, and meaning across participants' experiences. Fifth, the categories were re-examined to test meaningful relationships between the emerging patterns. Sixth, themes that were broader were used from the clearer categories to reflect the central meaning of the participants' experiences. In the seventh section, the themes were consolidated and linked to the research questions, producing a narrative description of the participants experiences of communication apprehension in the academic context of EMI.

In the eighth part of the analysis, member checking was performed to increase trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the presented synthesized findings were presented to the participants to validate the findings and their feedback was synthesized into the final analysis. Finally, the researcher read the already established findings in the light of the research question, the theories, and the previous studies in order to derive conclusions of different aspects of the investigation. We summarise these data analyses in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Analysis Procedures

Step	Procedure	Description	Example
Step 1	Transcription	Transcribed interview coding	Participants interview transcribed verbatim
Step 2	Familiarization	Reviewed the transcript repeatedly	Revisited responses about communicating difficulties
Step 3	Initial Coding	Generated initial codes from the data	"I felt worried" was coded as worry and self-doubt
Step 4	Categorization	Grouped similar codes into categories	Worry, nervousness, and low confidence were grouped into the category "Fear of Speaking and Being Unprepared"
Step 5	Theme Refinement	Reviewed categories and patterns	Preparation-related categories were connected and refined
Step 6	Theme development	Developed broader themes	"Lack of Preparation in English-Mediated Communication" emerged as a theme
Step 7	Data synthesis	Synthesized the themes into findings	The themes highlighted the factors influencing communication apprehension
Step 8	Member checking	Shared findings with participants	Participants confirmed the interpretations
Step 9	Interpretation	Interpreted findings using theories	Findings were linked to Horwitz's theory

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LACK OF PREPARATION FOR COMMUNICATION IN EMI CLASSROOMS

A total of six participants voiced difficulties in unscripted speaking situations with apprehension, self-doubt, as well as perceptions of inability to keep pace, as the main issues. Such findings emphasize the relationship between limited preparation time and CA in EMI classroom. Respondents reported that unexpected speaking tasks made it difficult to prepare expressing their thoughts, find suitable vocabulary, and keep confidence when communication in English. P2, for instance, in this interview, Participant 2 (P2) linked not being well prepared to lower confidence when speaking English.

> "I didn't have the time together with my classmates to submit the project we had to present. So we were not self-confident and we felt nervous about speaking in class in that scenario, since I am from Myanmar and English is not the language of our people, and we were not completely sure about ourselves" (Interview - P2).

The finding indicates that speaking without preparation contributed to participants' English-language anxiety. This result corresponds with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS item concerning anxiety about speaking English without preparation. P2's interview illustrates this anxiety in

practice, which related to the time available to complete the group project left the participant feeling unprepared and nervous about their English performance. Participant 4 (P4) also describe about the pressure of speaking without ample time (not until at least the last minute with a question-and-answer session with the teacher).

> "It makes me feel rushed, and I can't process it all without some time to process it. I feel a lot of pressure to speak without preparation because I need to think about what vocabulary that I need to say it." (Interview – P4).

P4's case illustrates the stress caused by having to think about the ideas and the English in a short time. In these two cases, the participants' lack of preparation for language task reflects the worries and fear associated with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) concept of test anxiety. The pressure to be "perfect" speakers, as reported by Horwitz et al. (1986), can increase anxiety and lead to unwillingness to participate in communication activities. Eventually, one participant (P6) shared the experience of nervousness of presenting unprepared.

> "Yeah, in our major I think we also have a similar problem with which we are called upon to present before a class, and then sometimes we tend to have anxiety and be a little worried to do something that involves speaking English." (Interview - P6).

This statement by Participant 6 highlights one characteristic of international students, showing that both language skills and the unexpected spoken task cause apprehension in the classroom environment. Thus, the participants' experiences of unexpected speaking tasks not only increase apprehension, but it also impacted students' self-efficacy that further detracts them from being able to attend in academic spaces, such as classroom. Overall, these results are in accordance with Kudo et al.'s (2017) observation that EMI students experienced increased apprehension when the students required to speak English spontaneously during academic discussions.

COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES IN EMI

Interview data revealed two participants with comprehension difficulties that contributed to their communication apprehension. In the present study, comprehension difficulties were not actually limited to unfamiliar vocabulary. Participants described difficulty in understanding lecturers when they spoke quickly. They also had experienced problem following every word when talking with highly fluent or native speakers. These experiences show that pronunciation or accent, speaking speed, and differences in the way English is used could affect students' ability to follow spoken English.

This finding is consistent with previous research showing that limited English proficiency can impede students' participation in classroom discussions in EMI context (Aizawa & Rose, 2020; Doiz et al., 2012; Lin & Lei. 2021). Such comprehension difficulties might have contributed to communication apprehension because the participants could have felt less confident about understanding others and responding appropriately.

As stated in (P1) and (P3), communication apprehension for Participant 1 and 3 stemmed from not having the confidence to speak up with the teacher in class, simply

because they felt unable to communicate in the teacher's English. P1 described feeling insecure about their ability to grasp the content.

> "Yeah, in the situation when my teacher speaks English in class, I feel a little less confident for myself, I don't really understand what he's saying because my teacher is speaking so quickly, and in my mind I feel that maybe I'm not really qualified enough to communicate in English." (Interview - P1).

The statement made by P1 expresses how in case participant don't understand what was being said in class, it might lead to the feeling of fear, especially after a perceived expectation of not having understood the speech taken by the teacher. This finding is echoed by Horwitz et al. (1986), who found that anxious learners can have difficulty understanding the content of messages in the target language. They also noted that some learners have little or even no understanding of what the teacher is saying when speaking in the target language.

The role of speech rate is especially related to EMI classroom because students need to understand what the participant was learning while also processing English. When lecturers speak quickly, the student had less time to understand the meaning and prepare a response. This can increase pressure and make student less willing to participate in academic discussion because of the inability to understand the lecturer's word correctly. In P1's case, this difficulty caused self-doubt and increased apprehension when speaking English.

Likewise, P3 felt "stupid" as he did not comprehend every word of the Ajarn (lecturer) when it was done in front of lecturers who spoke native English.

> "I feel stupid, let's say, this situation happened when it comes to my Ajarn as a native speaker, is speaking. I don't understand every single word he says, and then I feel so stupid because I feel that my English is not good enough as English is not a first language in Indonesia." (Interview - P3).

This quote shows that language barriers can make students feel apprehension and ashamed, especially when they speak with native speakers. P3 felt "stupid" because the participant cannot understand every word. This is similar to other studies that found students understand lecturers better when the lecturer has a familiar accent, and have more problems with foreign lecturers in EMI settings (Tuan, 2024). P3's experience also shows a link between difficulty in understanding English and communication apprehension. The participant also felt embarrassed when speaking with the lecturer. This experience is consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986), who explain that limited English ability can shape how students see themselves. They may feel cannot express themselves in a foreign language.

In P3's case, not understanding the lecturer, made the participant feel that his English was not good enough. These findings show that difficulty understanding English can increase communication apprehension, when students cannot understand spoken English, they can think that their English is not good enough. Therefore, the lecturer's speaking speed and difficulty understanding English can impact students' communication apprehension in EMI classrooms.

FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION IN EMI CLASSROOMS

Results from interviews with interviewers show that two participants, such as participant P4, and P5, fear negative evaluation during communication. In this study, fear of judgment means a condition where graduate students worry when they feel being judged by other people, primarily in class. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that students can feel worried about how instructors and classmates judge their language performance.

They also explain that speaking in foreign language can be difficult because students may not know how others will judge their English. In this study, the lecturer is the main source of this fear, which aligns with Maher and King's (2022) argument that interpersonal relationship and classroom dynamics strongly shape on how anxious learners participate in speaking activities.

For P4, this fear manifested in the participant's unwillingness to ask or seek clarification to the extent of being unsure if his work would be of worth in discussion. P4 stated the need to be prepared if the lecturer might wonder why one concept was not grasped.

> "Most of the time, I don't feel comfortable asking my teacher because I worry that the instructor might think, 'why don't you understand this one question?' Especially since my English isn't really good, I fear that they might think I should already know the answer." (Interview – P4).

In addition, P4's limited English proficiency also made the participant more afraid of being judged. Consequently, instead of asking questions to clarify the matter, the participant avoided asking questions and solved the problem alone. This scenario underscores how fear of being interpreted negatively impacts communication apprehension. This finding reflects Horwitz et al.'s (1986) view that fear of negative evaluation can make students feel worried about their language performance. In P4's case, this fear reduced participant's willingness to ask for clarification.

It also supports Liu and Jackson (2008), who found that apprehension in second language classrooms decreases students' willingness to communicate. For P4, the desire to ask questions and the feat of judgement created a "communication freeze," where silence felt safer than the risk of embarrassment.

P5 also avoided speaking because of fear of judgement, especially with lecturers seen as more authorative:

> "As an ASEAN student, I'm afraid I might offend my Ajarn or be judged during class. Because of this, I don't dare to speak freely. However, I don't feel this way with an easygoing Ajarn." (Interview – P5).

P5's statement shows that fear of judgement influenced P5's willingness to speak. This experience is related to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) view of fear of negative evaluation, which describes how speaking in a foreign language can feel risky because students might worry about how their English is judged. P5's also felt more comfortable with an easygoing Ajarn. This statement shows that the lecturer's attitude can influence CA in EMI classroom. A

friendly lecturer can make student feel more comfortable speaking in class. In contrast, a more formal relationship can increase FNE.

This finding is consistent with Khuman (2024), whose research on non-verbal communication found that teachers who stayed more approachable and maintained less physical distance from students created a less intimidating environment in the classroom.

Taken together, these experiences connect with research showing that low confidence in speaking English and fear of making mistakes make students join class discussions less (Lin & Lei, 2021; Sivaraman et al., 2014; Yen, 2026). For P4 and P5, the language barriers is not only about understanding words, but also about feeling not good enough, which make them avoid speaking in class. Overall, P4 and P5 felt more comfortable communicating with lecturers who were relaxed and supportive. This suggests that creating a friendly atmosphere can help lower fear of negative evaluation and encourage students to speak more.

CONCLUSION

Building on insights from Horwitz (1986) on foreign language anxiety, this study explored how factors such as classroom language barriers, unexpected speaking tasks, and preparation challenges influence students' communication apprehension in EMI classroom contexts. In this study, findings indicate that communication apprehension was shaped by the interaction of linguistic and academic factors, especially comprehension difficulties, unexpected speaking tasks, lack of preparation, and fear of negative evaluation. Further, it suggests that communication apprehension is not only related to English proficiency but is also influenced by demands of academic communication and students' concerns about negative evaluation.

The Study has pedagogical implication for EMI teaching in Thai university and other similar contexts. First, teachers should create a classroom environment where students can feel supported and less afraid of negative judgement. Teachers can do this approach by giving students practice before presentations and speaking activities. Small group discussions and group activities can also help students feel more confident before speaking in front of the whole class.

Such practices can also help students feel less nervous when speaking English. In multilingual classrooms, professors also need to acknowledge that communication apprehension may also be influenced by cultural background, previous knowledge (acquisition), and the students' confidence to use English as a second language. Thus, teaching styles are more inclusive where lecturers must promote participation of the students in class without pressing so much that they cannot afford an impromptu statement from students. Student comfort communicating in English can be improved through small group conversation and collaborative learning activities. Universities can also consider giving academic and support services to help student to using English in academic communication.

Although this analysis informs on determinants of communication apprehension, some limitations occur. Firstly, this study is confined to ASEAN graduate students at a single Thai university, which complicates the generalization of the results to other cultural and educational systems. Since communication apprehension is very individual and influenced by

personal, linguistic and educational factors, the results may not fully reflect students' experiences in other EMI contexts.

Second, the sample was self-reported and may depend on personal bias or social desirability. The small sample size also restricts the range of insights reflected in the study. Also, while the qualitative method yields detailed, contextual findings, it may limit comparisons among contexts that mixed-methods research could achieve. Future studies might examine communication apprehension in different linguistic and cultural backgrounds among students from various EMI universities, or compare experiences over master's and PhD degrees. It should even further focus on the success of targeted teaching strategies such as translanguaging strategies and scaffolded speaking activity to mitigate communication apprehension in multilingual classrooms.

Furthermore, it is recommended for future research to investigate communication apprehension in different cultural backgrounds among students from different EMI universities, or compare experiences over master's and PhD degrees. Further studies could also examine the effectiveness of targeted teaching strategies, such as scaffolded and translanguaging speaking activities in lessening communication apprehension in multilingual classrooms.

In addition, the extent to which communication apprehension affects classroom participation and academic success in EMI contexts could be examined. Mixed-methods, correlational design, and longitudinal study could also be used to examine the relationship between communication apprehension and academic performance overtime.

On the whole, this findings study provides significant understanding of communication apprehension among ASEAN graduate students in the EMI classroom. For a more inclusive and linguistically sensitive teaching environment, it is essential to know what causes communicative apprehension. Educators and universities can plan more appropriate teaching strategies that will help them to encourage engagement in multilingual English learning environments. Identifying language barriers, unexpected speaking challengers, and preparation difficulties can help educators develop more supportive teaching strategies and promote greater student participation in multilingual EMI environments.

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