

EFL CLASSROOM SPEAKING ANXIETY: A COMPARATIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL AND INDONESIAN FRESHMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study explored and compared EFL classroom speaking anxiety among Indonesian and Thai international freshmen in the same multicultural university classroom. Using a comparative qualitative design, the study involved eight purposively selected first-year students at Universitas Islam Darul ‘Ulum Lamongan, comprising four Indonesian freshmen and four Thai international freshmen. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Both groups reported test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension. Indonesian freshmen reported more immediate anxiety in spontaneous speaking, lecturer questioning, and public exposure, whereas Thai students reported more anticipatory anxiety, formal presentation pressure, and fear of being misunderstood. Low confidence, limited vocabulary, fear of mistakes, lecturer pressure, peer evaluation, task demands and intercultural interaction affected anxiety. Both groups used preparation, emotion regulation, peer support and temporary avoidance, but Indonesian students used more avoidance and Thai students used a wider range of problem-focused strategies. The results suggest the importance of supportive speaking activities and structured peer support in multicultural EFL classrooms.

Keywords: coping strategies; EFL speaking anxiety; Indonesian freshmen; Multicultural classroom; Thai international freshmen

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a key element of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to share ideas, engage in academic interaction, and enhance their communicative competence (Goh, 2017). First-year students must participate in class discussions, answer questions from lecturers, work with fellow students and give oral presentations at the university level in English. Ideally, these activities should be opportunities for freshmen to build confidence and communicative competence. In practice, however, speaking in a foreign language may generate tension, fear, hesitation, and worry, particularly in spontaneous or evaluative situations in which students' performance is observed by lecturers and classmates (Horwitz et al., 2012; Woodrow, 2015). This discrepancy between expected oral participation and students' actual experiences constitutes an important pedagogical issue in university EFL classrooms.

Speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom is defined as the discomfort that learners experience when required to speak English during classroom interaction (Woodrow, 2015). It is usually connected to fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test or performance anxiety (Horwitz et al., 2012). Speaking requires the learner to formulate ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, organise grammatical structures and produce comprehensible messages almost simultaneously. Such demands might impede fluency, limit self-expression, and reduce participation in the classroom (Woodrow, 2015). Research on Indonesian EFL learners has identified several significant sources of speaking anxiety, including limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, peer evaluation, task difficulty, and lecturer-related factors (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Novianti et al., 2025). Fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence were also identified as psychological determinants of English language anxiety by (Huda & Khulel, 2025). Furthermore, relaxation, self-affirmation, peer support and activity-based learning were recognised as coping methods.

Freshmen are potentially more vulnerable in their transition to higher education as they have to adjust to new academic expectations, new classmates and different learning practices (Kift et al., 2010). In EFL classrooms, this shift may require students to speak, answer questions and do oral tasks in front of lecturers and fellow students. The limited vocabulary, lack of fluency, fear of making mistakes, and unfamiliarity with classroom speaking activities may add to the students' uncertainty (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Nuraida, 2025; Novianti et al., 2025). The provision of instructional materials and learning support that align with students' abilities, learning needs, and local educational conditions is very important in research on English freshmen at universities in Lamongan (Tasaufy & Zahro, 2020). However, the study focused on reading materials rather than

speaking anxiety, but it indicates that contextually relevant support is important for freshmen's academic adjustment.

For international students studying in Indonesia, there may be additional linguistic, social and cultural pressures. (Zakiya et al., 2022) found that Thai students of an Indonesian university experienced speaking anxiety due to low self-confidence, fear of errors, classroom formality, cultural differences, and lack of environmental support. (Mulyono et al., 2019) also reported that language barriers and uncertainty in intercultural communication affected interactions of international students in Indonesian university settings. Cultural and linguistic backgrounds may influence how students perceive lecturers' authority, classroom participation, peer interaction, and oral performance. (Paradieshta et al., 2026) showed how classroom communication in Indonesian and Philippine contexts was influenced by language exposure, culturally informed participation norms, and pedagogical practices. Moreover, Khulel (2025) further showed that English learning and teaching in Indonesian multilingual society relates to linguistic identity, educational access, social circumstances, and previous learning experiences. The studies show that a multicultural classroom can be seen as a challenge for communication, but also as a place for intercultural learning and support.

The classroom environment can either facilitate or hinder students' speaking difficulties. Lecturer questioning, corrective feedback, task design, audience reactions and peer relationships may influence students' willingness to communicate. (Irmayani & masruroh, 2023) revealed that supportive teacher talk, particularly questioning and interactional practices, promoted students' responses in an EFL classroom. It demonstrates that instructional discourse shapes opportunities for oral participation, but it does not directly establish a reduction in speaking anxiety. Highly evaluative questions and corrections may increase hesitation, while supportive interaction can create a safer environment for practising spoken English. The issue is quite relevant for Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum Lamongan since internationalisation programmes have led Indonesian freshmen to interact with international students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This leads to a multicultural EFL classroom in which students must communicate across differences in first language, English proficiency, communication style, and previous educational experience.

Despite advancements made in the field of research involving EFL speaking anxiety, some shortcomings can still be pointed out. Firstly, Indonesian and international students have been examined separately, which makes it difficult to determine whether the difference in their anxiety levels lies in linguistic and cultural backgrounds or in the institutional context (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Zakiya et al., 2022). Secondly, some studies used questionnaires or scales to measure

students' anxiety levels and general trends (Nuraida, 2025; Novianti et al., 2025). The fact that these methods can provide researchers with significant insights does not mean that they can tell how students feel, interpret and deal with anxiety in classrooms. Thirdly, quantitative research usually focuses on a single group of respondents, with no comparisons between international students from Indonesia and Thailand who study in the same classroom settings (Huda & Khulel, 2025; Zakiya et al., 2022). Thus, little is known about the commonalities and differences in speaking anxiety, its internal and external influences, and ways to deal with stress in speaking situations from both groups' perspectives in the multicultural EFL environment.

To fill this gap, this study employed a comparative qualitative method to investigate and compare EFL classroom speaking anxiety among Indonesian freshmen and Thai international freshmen at Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum Lamongan. The study explored the experience of speaking anxiety in both groups, the internal and external factors that influenced their anxiety and the coping methods they used to manage their anxiety and compared the two groups. The study aimed to identify common anxiety patterns and experiences shaped by different linguistic, social and cultural positions by studying Indonesian freshmen and Thai international freshmen in the same institutional and classroom context. The findings are expected to contribute to a better contextualised understanding of EFL speaking anxiety and to offer pedagogical implications for designing supportive, inclusive and culturally sensitive speaking activities in multicultural higher education classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL Classroom Speaking Anxiety

EFL classroom speaking anxiety refers to the tension, fear, or nervousness that learners experience when asked to speak English during classroom interactions (Woodrow, 2015). It is common in oral presentations, classroom discussions, spontaneous responses and lecturers' questioning. Speaking is an interactive skill that involves the organisation of ideas, choosing suitable words, using grammatical rules, and communicating instantly, which can make learners feel pressured. Such pressure can cause anxiety that can have negative effects on the learners' fluency, self-expression, and classroom participation. Prior studies have linked speaking anxiety to small vocabulary, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, task difficulty, and concern about evaluation (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Novianti et al., 2025; Nuraida, 2025).

Dimensions and Responses of Speaking Anxiety

(Horwitz et al., 2012) characterise foreign language anxiety in terms of three interrelated dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension is the fear or nervousness of speaking or interacting orally, and fear of negative evaluation is the anxiety of being evaluated negatively by lecturers or peers. Test anxiety occurs when classroom activities are perceived as evaluative. In the present study, test anxiety is interpreted more broadly as test or performance anxiety because anxiety may also occur during oral presentations, lecturer questioning, and assessed classroom participation.

These dimensions are interconnected. Fear of negative evaluation may intensify communication apprehension, while evaluative speaking situations may increase both apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. In classroom contexts, speaking anxiety may be reflected in emotional responses such as fear and embarrassment, cognitive responses such as confusion and overthinking, physical responses such as trembling and rapid heartbeat, and behavioural responses such as silence, hesitation, and avoidance. These manifestations may occur simultaneously or sequentially depending on the speaking situation and the learner's sensitivity to evaluation.

Internal and External Factors

Speaking anxiety is influenced by both learner-related and classroom-related factors. Internal factors include low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, insufficient English proficiency, fear of making mistakes, grammar anxiety, and negative self-perception. These factors may reduce learners' confidence in their ability to communicate accurately and fluently. (Huda & Khulel, 2025) similarly identified fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence as important psychological determinants of English language anxiety.

External factors include lecturer questioning and feedback, peer evaluation, audience pressure, classroom climate, task difficulty, and intercultural interaction. Supportive teacher talk and interactional practices fostered student responses in the EFL classrooms (Irmayani & masrurroh, 2023). Although their study did not directly examine speaking anxiety, it indicates that lecturer discourse can shape students' opportunities and willingness to participate. Internal and external factors may also interact. Limited vocabulary, for example, may lower students' confidence, while public questioning may intensify their concern that linguistic weaknesses will become visible. This interaction suggests that understanding of speaking anxiety needs to be sensitive to both learners' linguistic development and the classroom environment in which they are to speak.

Coping Strategies

Anxiety, according to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, is a result of the interaction between people and situations they perceive as demanding

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students first perceive a speaking task as either a threat or a challenge and then appraise whether they have adequate resources to cope with it. Their responses could be problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidance or reappraisal.

Problem-focused coping consists of preparation, rehearsal, vocabulary enhancement, material organisation, and seeking clarification. Emotion-focused coping includes relaxation, positive self-talk, prayer, acceptance of mistakes, and peer support. (Huda & Khulel, 2025) identify preparation, relaxation, self-affirmation, and social support as strategies for managing language anxiety. Avoidance may be shown by silence, withdrawal from participation or lack of eye contact. In the short term, avoidance can temporarily relieve anxiety, but ongoing avoidance can cut off opportunities for speaking growth. Students may also come to view speaking situations as less threatening after they have experienced, received support, or successfully completed speaking tasks.

Multicultural and Multilingual EFL Classroom

Multicultural classrooms experience speaking influences from the level of English education, students' language backgrounds and cultural expectations, and communication controls. (Paradieshta et al., 2026) claimed that exposure to and participation in communication, as well as teaching approaches, influenced communicative practices in English-language classes in Indonesia and the Philippines. Furthermore, Khulel (2025) revealed that the process of English learning in the Indonesian multilingual settings was connected with language identity, the possibilities for education, social situation, and prior learning experience.

International students may face additional challenges in adjusting to a new language for academic purposes and patterns of interaction. Language barriers and the uncertainty of interculturality have been found to affect international students' communication in Indonesian universities (Mulyono et al., 2019), while speaking anxiety among Thai students is associated with cultural differences, classroom formality, low confidence, and environmental support (Zakiya et al., 2022). However, in multicultural classrooms, there may also be opportunities for peer support, collaborative learning, and intercultural adaptation. Tasaufy and Zahro (2020), in their study on reading materials, emphasise the importance of instructional support, which is in line with the proficiency, learning needs, and local conditions of English freshmen.

Analytical Framework

This study combines the theory of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test or performance anxiety, and their emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioural manifestations are understood

within the framework proposed by (Horwitz et al., 2012). The model put forward by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is employed to examine students' appraisals of speaking situations and the use of problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidance and reappraisal strategies.

These perspectives guide the comparison of Indonesian and international freshmen in terms of their speaking anxiety experiences, internal and external influencing factors, coping strategies, and multicultural classroom conditions. The framework therefore provides a basis for addressing the study's three research questions while allowing a systematic comparison between the two participant groups.

METHOD

This study employed a comparative qualitative design to explore and compare EFL classroom speaking anxiety among Indonesian and international freshmen. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings within their educational context rather than measure anxiety statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The comparative design enabled the researcher to identify shared and group-specific patterns among participants studying in the same multicultural EFL classroom.

The research was carried out at Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia, in the academic year 2025/2026. The participants were eight first-year undergraduate students in EFL courses, four Indonesian freshmen and four Thai international freshmen. All the international participants were Thai nationals studying at Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum Lamongan. Participants were purposively selected for their relevance to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were: being a first-year student; experience of taking part in classroom speaking activities; willingness to take part in an individual interview and to be audio recorded; and giving informed consent. The equal number of participants in both groups facilitated a systematic comparison, while the study prioritised the depth, relevance, and contextual richness of participants' accounts rather than statistical representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The primary research instrument was the researcher and was supported by a semi-structured interview guide. The guide was prepared based on the research questions, theoretical framework, and relevant previous studies. The questions about speaking-anxiety experiences drew on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety theory, particularly communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test or performance anxiety (Horwitz et al., 2012). The factors of influence that were studied were self-confidence, speaking ability, limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, classroom atmosphere, lecturer feedback,

peer responses, task difficulty and intercultural interaction. Questions regarding coping methods were based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and included appraisal, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidance, and reappraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Probing questions were used to supplement main questions to obtain clarification, examples and rich descriptions of the participants' experiences.

Individual semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, audio recording and informed consent. Interviews were conducted in English or Indonesian, depending on the participants' linguistic backgrounds and preferences. Follow-up questions were asked when participants' responses required clarification or further explanation. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed in the language used during the interviews. Indonesian-language excerpts selected for publication were translated into English. The translated excerpts were then checked against the original transcripts to ensure that the participants' intended meanings were accurately preserved. Participants' real names were replaced with the codes IS1–IS4 for Indonesian freshmen and INT1–INT4 for Thai international freshmen to protect their identities.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, development of potential themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the research report. The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' accounts. Relevant statements were then assigned initial codes relating to speaking-anxiety experiences, internal and external factors, and coping strategies. The coding combined theory-driven categories derived from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping with data-driven codes emerging from the interview data.

In the first stage, we conducted within-group analysis on data from Indonesian freshmen and Thai international freshmen separately. The themes identified by both groups were then compared to identify similarities and differences in their experience of anxiety, factors influencing it and ways of coping. The themes were defined and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and previous studies, and were reviewed against the coded extracts and full interview transcripts. This process allowed the researcher to preserve the unique experiences of each group while generating a systematic comparison across groups.

Member checking was conducted to enhance the credibility of the findings. The participants were given the chance to verify the accuracy of their

interview responses and the researcher's interpretations. An audit trail was maintained throughout the processes of transcription, coding, theme development and cross-group comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. Participants' identities were protected by using participant codes.

FINDING

The thematic analysis resulted in three main themes: comparative experiences of EFL classroom speaking anxiety, internal and external factors contributing to anxiety, and coping methods employed by Indonesian and Thai international freshmen. Both groups reported anxiety about speaking, but the predominant triggers, manifestations and management were different.

Comparative Experiences of EFL Classroom Speaking Anxiety

International freshmen from both Indonesia and Thailand reported communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test or performance anxiety. Their anxiety was demonstrated by emotional reactions including fear, nervousness, embarrassment, and tension; cognitive reactions such as confusion, overthinking, and difficulty articulating ideas; physical reactions such as trembling, sweating, dizziness, and rapid heartbeat; and behavioural reactions such as silence, hesitation, brief speech, and avoidance of eye contact.

Indonesian freshmen tended to experience more immediate anxiety when they had to speak spontaneously, answer lecturers' questions, or speak while being observed by classmates. IS2 described the intensity of spontaneous speaking by stating, "I panicked during spontaneous speaking." Lecturer questioning also created direct evaluative pressure, as IS1 reported, "I felt nervous when answering the lecturer's question." Audience attention increased this pressure because several Indonesian participants felt that their mistakes and limited speaking ability were visible to others. Their anxiety was therefore more reactive and closely associated with public exposure, immediate responses, and social evaluation.

Thai international freshmen more frequently reported anticipatory anxiety before beginning to speak. Their concerns were closely connected to limited fluency, formal presentations and the danger of communicative breakdown. INT1 explained, "I felt afraid, especially because I was not fluent yet in speaking English. The fear usually appeared before I started speaking." Formal presentations were particularly demanding because they required individual performance with limited assistance. INT4 stated, "I feel more afraid during presentations because I have to speak by myself. In discussion, I can still speak together with my friends, so it feels easier." Thai participants were also concerned that listeners might misunderstand or mishear what they intended to communicate.

The multicultural classroom shaped these experiences differently. Indonesian freshmen often felt nervous when communicating with Thai

classmates due to language differences and uncertainty about cross-group interactions. Thai international freshmen were more concerned about adjusting to unfamiliar classroom language and being understood by Indonesian lecturers and peers. Nevertheless, peer discussion was generally perceived by Thai participants as less threatening than formal individual performance because it provided social and linguistic support. Thus, within this group of participants, speaking anxiety was shared by both groups but was expressed through different evaluative, linguistic, and communicative concerns.

Internal and External Factors Influencing Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety was influenced by both internal and external factors. The internal factors found in both groups were low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, insufficient English proficiency, fear of making mistakes, grammar anxiety, and negative perceptions of speaking ability. These factors influenced the participants' preparedness and ability to speak English when required.

Among Indonesian freshmen, internal factors were commonly expressed as general insecurity, confusion, and difficulty organising or communicating ideas. IS2 directly stated, "I felt not confident," while other participants described hesitation, limited vocabulary, and fear of being unable to answer correctly. In some cases, these perceptions contributed to overthinking and reduced participation. Indonesian participants therefore tended to focus on their perceived inability to perform successfully when placed under immediate classroom pressure.

Thai international freshmen also reported limited confidence and proficiency, but they connected confidence more specifically with fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility. INT2 explained, "I feel more confident if I can speak correctly. On the contrary, I become less confident when I feel that my pronunciation or sentence is not accurate." Their anxiety was therefore closely related to whether they could construct appropriate sentences and communicate meanings clearly to listeners.

External factors were lecturer questioning and feedback, peer assessment, audience attention, task difficulty, classroom atmosphere and intercultural interaction. Indonesian freshmen experienced stronger effects from spontaneous speaking, direct questioning, public attention, and communication with Thai classmates. Such situations revealed their felt linguistic limitations and made them more anxious about being assessed.

The Thai international freshmen were more affected by the formal presentation, the lecturer's authority, the advanced language used in the classroom and the fear of being misunderstood. INT1 said she had difficulty interacting with the lecturers because the sentences in class were more advanced, which made her worry about answering in English. Thai participants also described classmates as

important sources of support. Peer assistance helped them understand the learning materials, communicate more easily, and adapt to the multicultural environment.

The results indicated that internal and external factors did not work separately. Reduced vocabulary or proficiency might reduce confidence, or questioning from the lecturer, attention from the audience, or formal presentation tasks might make the perceived limitations more visible. The two groups reported similar types of influence. However, in this sample, Indonesian freshmen seemed more sensitive to instant evaluation and social exposure, whereas Thai international freshmen paid more attention to language adjustment, formal task demands, and communicative clarity.

Comparative Coping Strategies

Both groups tried to deal with speaking anxiety by preparing themselves, regulating their emotions, seeking support, temporarily avoiding the issue, and gradually adapting. But the strategies differed in emphasis and variety.

The most common methods of preparation used by Indonesian freshmen were practice, reviewing the material, deep breathing, self-calming, positive thinking, reassurance and distraction. These strategies were frequently utilised to handle immediate nervousness before or during speaking events. Peer support also helped some participants feel more prepared. Avoidance was, however, more apparent among Indonesian freshmen. Some participants reacted to anxiety by silence, short answers, avoiding eye contact or by diminishing their participation. These behaviours gave them short-term relief, but also restricted their participation in speaking activities.

Thai international freshmen employed a broader range of problem-focused strategies. They prepared sentences, checked materials, practised before speaking, asked for clarification, and sought help from their classmates. To deal with their emotions, they took time out, prayed and used self-soothing before continuing. INT3 described the process as: "I calm my mind, pray and recite basmalah first. Rather than long-term withdrawal, silence among Thai participants was usually a temporary respite when they felt afraid or unprepared.

Both groups also demonstrated reappraisal and adaptation with repetition in the classroom. For some participants, the gradual familiarity with speaking activities, successful performance, feedback, and peer support helped them see speaking as more manageable. This process was most evident among Thai international freshmen, for whom difficulty was often viewed as part of the ongoing language development. I still feel it's difficult because I'm not fluent yet, but we still try, said INT4. Indonesian freshmen also showed gradual adjustment, but some participants still exhibited more persistent nervousness and avoidance.

Overall, Indonesian freshmen relied more heavily on immediate emotional regulation and temporary avoidance, whereas Thai international freshmen used

more varied preparation, clarification, peer-supported, and persistence-oriented strategies. Coping in both groups was therefore a dynamic process shaped by personal readiness, task demands, repeated exposure, and the availability of social support in the multicultural classroom.

DISCUSSION

Shared Anxiety with Group-Specific Expressions

The results indicated that the Indonesian and Thai international freshmen experienced EFL classroom speaking anxiety, which confirmed the fact that foreign-language anxiety is a context-specific reaction that includes communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test or performance anxiety (Horwitz et al., 2012). In both groups, responses to emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural manifestations were found. This supports the idea that speaking anxiety is more than a temporary state of nervousness and it can interfere with oral production and participation in class (Woodrow, 2015). Yet the most common ways of showing anxiety were different in the two groups.

Indonesian freshmen tended to experience more immediate anxiety during spontaneous speaking, lecturer questioning, and situations involving audience attention. This pattern is consistent with previous studies that identify limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, peer evaluation, and classroom tasks as major sources of anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Novianti et al., 2025; Nuraida, 2025). In contrast, Thai international freshmen more frequently experienced anticipatory anxiety before speaking, pressure during individual presentations, and concern about being misunderstood. Similar challenges have been reported among Thai international students in Indonesia, whose language anxiety was associated with fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, formal classroom situations, and the academic intercultural environment (Zakiya et al., 2022). Thus, speaking anxiety was shared across the groups but expressed through different social, linguistic, and performance-related concerns.

Internal and External Factors as Interconnected Sources

The results also showed that internal and external factors were not independent. Participants rated their speaking ability as negatively affected by low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, lack of proficiency, fear of making mistakes, and negative self-perception. These internal conditions could be further exacerbated when students had to face public questioning, formal presentation, audience attention, or communication with classmates from different language backgrounds. This is consistent with (Huda & Khulel, 2025), who stated that fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence are the main psychological driving factors of anxiety in learning English.

The interaction between internal and external factors was expressed differently across the groups. Indonesian freshmen often interpreted limited linguistic ability as evidence that they might fail when required to respond immediately. Lecturer questioning and audience visibility therefore made their perceived weaknesses more noticeable. Thai international freshmen were also concerned about their proficiency, but their anxiety centred more specifically on fluency, sentence accuracy, and whether listeners could understand their intended meaning. These differences indicate that similar linguistic limitations may be interpreted differently depending on students' social and cultural positions in the classroom.

The participants' communication behaviour is also influenced by the lecturer's teaching practices. The participants felt anxious when the teacher asked evaluative questions, but they experienced less stress when the teacher interacted with them constructively, employing easily understandable language. Based on their findings, (Irmayani & Masruroh, 2023) point out that the teacher's supportive communication behaviour encourages students to respond in English in the classroom. Although their study does not directly analyse students' anxiety levels, it supports the present result, confirming that the lecturer's speech can determine whether classroom speaking is stressful or easily manageable.

Multicultural Classroom as Challenge and Resource

The multicultural classroom had a dual role in the participants' speaking experiences. For Indonesian freshmen, interaction with Thai classmates sometimes increased nervousness because students became more conscious of language differences and their ability to communicate across groups. For Thai international freshmen, the classroom required adjustment to unfamiliar academic language, lecturer authority, and local communication practices. Their concern about being misunderstood suggests that speaking anxiety involved not only language production but also the negotiation of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

In line with the findings of (Paradieshta et al., 2026), it was demonstrated that exposure to language, cultural participation tendencies, and educational practices influenced the communication process within English classes in the Indonesian and Philippine contexts. The present analysis contributes to this view by suggesting that even when students are in the same class, they may perceive the same speaking requirements differently because of their varying social and linguistic positions in this situation.

But the multicultural classroom was not just a source of pressure. Thai participants often reported classmates as a source of clarification, emotional support and assistance during discussions. Peer interaction made collaborative speaking less threatening than individual presentations and supported gradual

classroom adjustment. This finding suggests that linguistic diversity may increase communicative uncertainty while simultaneously creating opportunities for peer-supported learning. The effect of the multicultural classroom therefore depended on how interaction, task structure, and social support were organised.

Coping as a Dynamic Process

The coping strategies align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which posits that individuals' perceptions of threatening situations depend on how they evaluate the challenges and resources available to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Participants were likely to interpret talking as threatening when they lacked adequate preparedness, vocabulary, or self-assurance. On the contrary, being well prepared on the material at hand and having enough practice with peers means speaking is not perceived as a threatening task.

Both groups used problem- and emotion-focused strategies, but with different emphasis. Indonesian freshmen generally used preparation, breathing, self-calming, positive thinking, reassurance, and distraction. They also displayed more avoidance behaviour, such as remaining silent, giving short answers and making less eye contact. The Thai international freshmen employed a wider range of direct strategies, such as sentence preparation, understanding the material, asking for clarification, asking for peer help, and persisting through difficulties. Emotional pressure was managed by prayer and short breaks. These strategies align with previous findings indicating that learners can cope with language anxiety through preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, self-affirmation, and social support (Huda & Khulel, 2025; Thi et al., 2023).

Avoidance appeared in both groups but served different functions. Among several Indonesian participants, it reflected stronger withdrawal from anxiety-producing situations. Among Thai participants, silence was more often temporary and occurred while they prepared themselves to continue speaking. It may help to step back for a moment to reduce the emotional intensity you may feel right now. But if you do that repeatedly, you reduce your chances to gain fluency and confidence. Conversely, repeated exposure, successful performance, peer support, and constructive criticism helped students reappraise speaking and see it as less threatening. Thus, coping was not static but evolved through the continual interaction between personal resources and classroom experiences.

Comparative Contribution of the Study

The primary contribution of the research is that it contrasts Indonesian and Thai international first-year students in the same multicultural and institutional classroom context. Previous studies have focused either on Indonesian or on international students separately. That has made it impossible to identify the cultural and linguistic influences of differences in learning environments. The

study focused on the comparison between the two groups within the same classroom conditions and established common anxiety dimensions, while also prescribing diverse ways of anxiety faced and managed.

Indonesian freshmen in this sample demonstrated higher levels of reactive and socially evaluative anxiety, especially in spontaneous speaking, when being questioned by the lecturer and being exposed to the audience. International freshmen from Thailand presented higher levels of anticipatory anxiety and communication-oriented anxiety in formal presentations, language adjustment, and fear of being misunderstood. Indonesian participants also reported more visible avoidance. Thai participants reported a wider variety of problem-focused strategies and more explicitly conceptualised speaking difficulty as part of an ongoing adaptation process. These findings indicate that EFL speaking anxiety may not be experienced similarly even among freshmen learning in the same classroom.

Pedagogical Implications

The results suggest that speaking activities in multicultural EFL classrooms should be gradually structured. Preparation time, speaking prompts, known vocabulary or short rehearsal opportunities can be provided by lecturers before spontaneous or individual speaking tasks. Small group and pair discussions prior to whole-class performance may benefit students. Collaborative interaction reduces the pressure of speaking alone and gives students the opportunity to receive assistance from peers.

Moreover, teachers should use appropriate questioning strategies and provide feedback that promotes active participation without making students feel embarrassed about speaking in the presence of others. This recommendation is in line with what (Irmayani & masruroh, 2023) stated about teacher talk. Errors need to be corrected judiciously and politely, with a focus on comprehension rather than language. Additionally, students are to be exposed to various coping strategies.

Freshmen come in with varying levels of proficiency and adjustment needs, and require differentiated instructional support that is responsive to their linguistic and educational backgrounds. Tasaufy and Zahro (2020) also stressed the significance of providing learning support that is relevant to the needs and local conditions of English freshmen. In multicultural classrooms, lecturers can gradually build up mixed group activities, establish peer-support systems, and create repeated low-risk opportunities for intercultural communication. Such practices may help Indonesian and Thai international freshmen build confidence, participation, and communicative competence while reducing unnecessary evaluative pressure.

CONCLUSION

The present study showed that Indonesian and Thai international freshmen had EFL classroom speaking anxiety, i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test or performance anxiety. But the prevailing patterns were different between the two. Indonesian freshmen tended to experience more immediate and socially evaluative anxiety in spontaneous speaking, lecturer questioning and situations with audience attention. Thai international freshmen experienced greater anticipatory anxiety, pressure during formal presentations, language adjustment difficulties, and concerns about being misunderstood by lecturers or classmates.

Internal and external factors were interwoven and affected speaking anxiety in both groups. The participants' low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and low English proficiency, as well as fear of making mistakes, lecturer-related pressure, peer evaluation, task difficulty, and intercultural interaction, affected their responses to the demands of classroom speaking. Both groups reported using preparation, emotional regulation, peer support, temporary avoidance and gradual adaptation to manage their anxiety. However, in this sample, Indonesian freshmen relied more on immediate emotional regulation and avoidance, whereas Thai international freshmen used a wider range of strategies, including preparation, clarification, support-seeking, and persistence-oriented strategies.

These findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety should not be treated as a uniform experience, even among freshmen studying in the same multicultural EFL classroom. Lecturers should therefore provide gradual speaking activities, sufficient preparation time, supportive questioning, constructive feedback, and structured peer assistance that address students' diverse linguistic and cultural needs. Because the study involved eight participants from one institution and all international participants were Thai nationals, the findings are context-bound and should be interpreted in relation to this specific institutional and multicultural classroom setting rather than generalised to all Indonesian or international freshmen. Further research may involve participants from more institutions and national backgrounds to examine whether similar comparative patterns emerge in other multicultural EFL settings.

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