



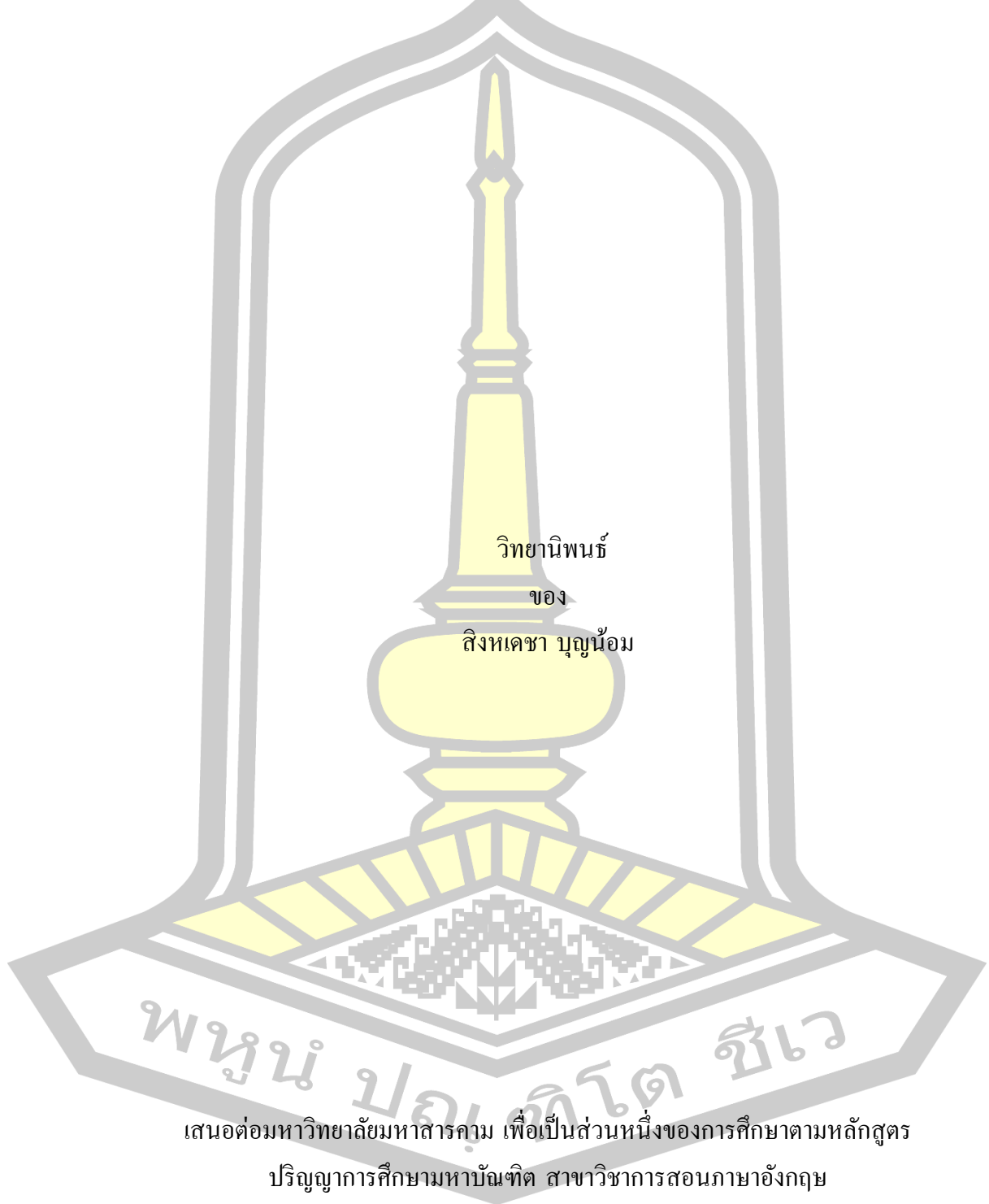
Unwillingness to Communicate in English in Group Discussion among Thai Postgraduate Students: Level, Perceived Reasons and Coping Strategies

Singhadecha Boonorm

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Master of Education in English Language Teaching
May 2025

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เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
ปริญญาการศึกษามหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ

พฤษภาคม 2568

ลิขสิทธิ์เป็นของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม

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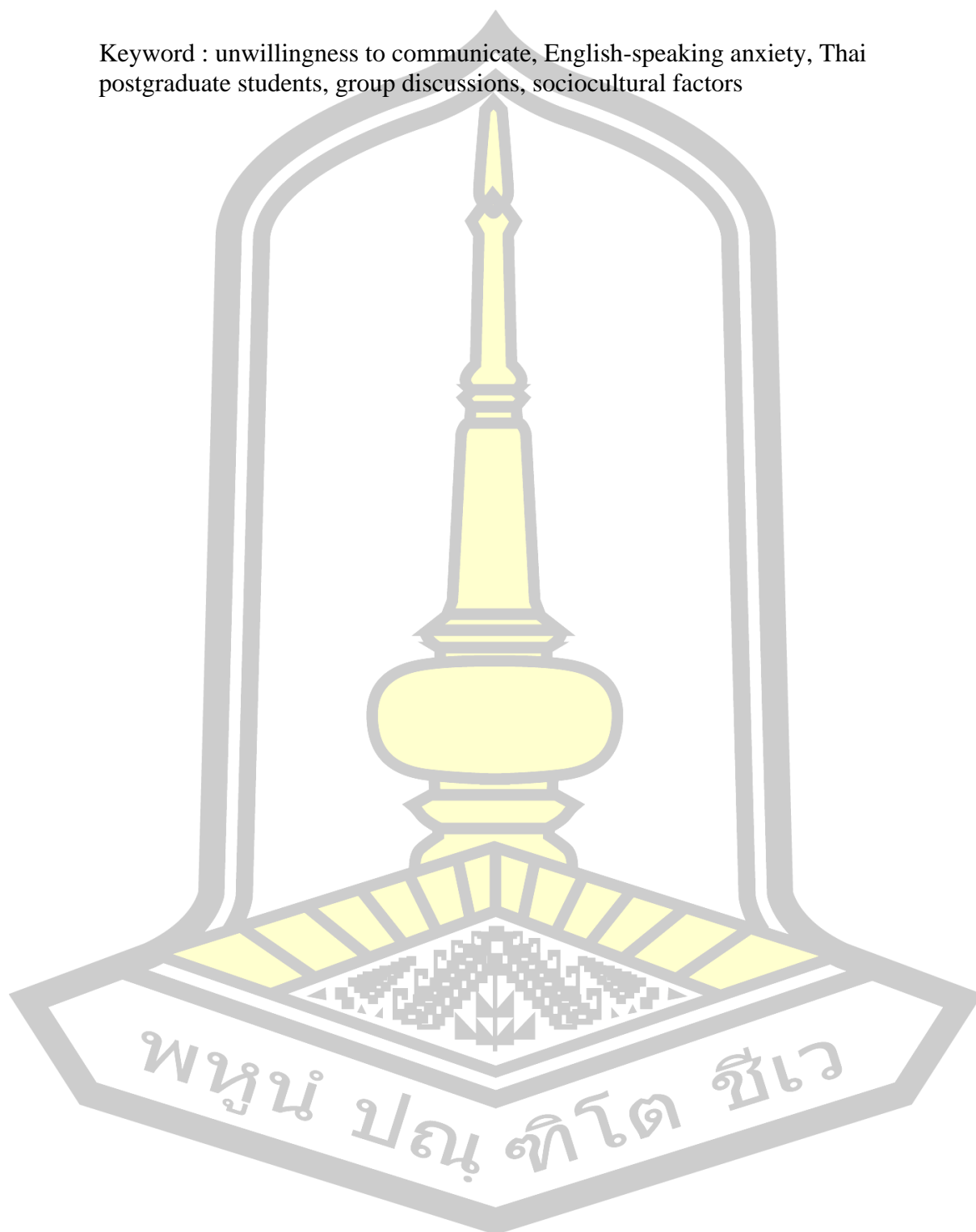
TITLE	Unwillingness to Communicate in English in Group Discussion among Thai Postgraduate Students: Level, Perceived Reasons and Coping Strategies		
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DEGREE	Master of Education	MAJOR	English Language Teaching
UNIVERSITY	Maharakham University	YEAR	2025

ABSTRACT

Effective communication in English is essential for academic success, particularly in postgraduate settings where collaboration and active participation in group discussions are key to learning. However, many Thai postgraduate students exhibit an unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during these discussions. This reluctance not only presents challenges to their academic progress but also limits the development of critical communication skills. While previous studies have explored factors influencing language learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in second languages, there has been limited focus on the specific barriers faced by Thai postgraduate students in group settings. This study aimed to examine the level of UWTC in English among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions, as well as the underlying reasons for their reluctance and the strategies they employed to manage it. Data were collected using Burgoon's (1976) Unwillingness to Communicate Questionnaire, administered to 37 Thai postgraduate students enrolled in the English Language Teaching program at a large public university in northeast Thailand. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, selected based on their questionnaire scores. The results revealed that the majority of participants exhibited a moderate level of UWTC, with 27 out of 37 participants (approximately 73%) scoring between 36 and 55. In contrast, 10 participants (approximately 27%) were classified as having low UWTC, with scores ranging from 56 to 75. Notably, none of the participants fell into the high UWTC category (scores between 15 and 35), which would indicate a strong reluctance to communicate in English. The study identified several reasons for UWTC, including a lack of peer engagement and support, issues with leadership during group discussions, and insufficient teacher guidance. Other reasons included students' limited English proficiency, lack of prior knowledge about the discussion topics, anxiety, and the arrangement of the group (e.g., group size, time allocated for discussions, and balance among group members). To manage their UWTC, participants employed strategies such as preparation, positive self-talk, and collaboration with group peers. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, suggesting that creating supportive, anxiety-free environments can help

enhance students' willingness to communicate in English in academic settings.

Keyword : unwillingness to communicate, English-speaking anxiety, Thai postgraduate students, group discussions, sociocultural factors



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Pilanut Phusawisot, for her invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insightful feedback throughout this research. Her expertise, patience, and dedication to academic excellence have been instrumental in refining my work and fostering my growth as a researcher. I am truly fortunate to have benefited from her mentorship, which has significantly contributed to my academic and professional development.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Master of Education Program in English Language Teaching at Maharakham University and to all the lecturers who have provided academic support and resources. Their commitment to fostering a stimulating learning environment has played a crucial role in shaping my knowledge and skills. Special thanks to my committee members, Assist. Prof. Dr. Apisak Sukying, Dr. Eric A. Ambele, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Denchai Prabjandee, for their constructive feedback and insightful recommendations, which have enhanced the quality and rigor of this thesis.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement throughout this journey. Their love and motivation have given me the strength to persevere despite challenges. I also sincerely appreciate the participants of this study for their cooperation and willingness to share their experiences, which made this research possible.

Furthermore, I am thankful to my classmates for their insightful discussions, encouragement, and shared experiences, which have enriched my learning process. The camaraderie and intellectual exchange within our academic community have been a great source of inspiration.

Lastly, I express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this thesis, whether through encouragement, technical support, or simply offering a listening ear. This achievement would not have been possible without the collective support of all those mentioned above. Thank you.

Singhadecha Boonorm

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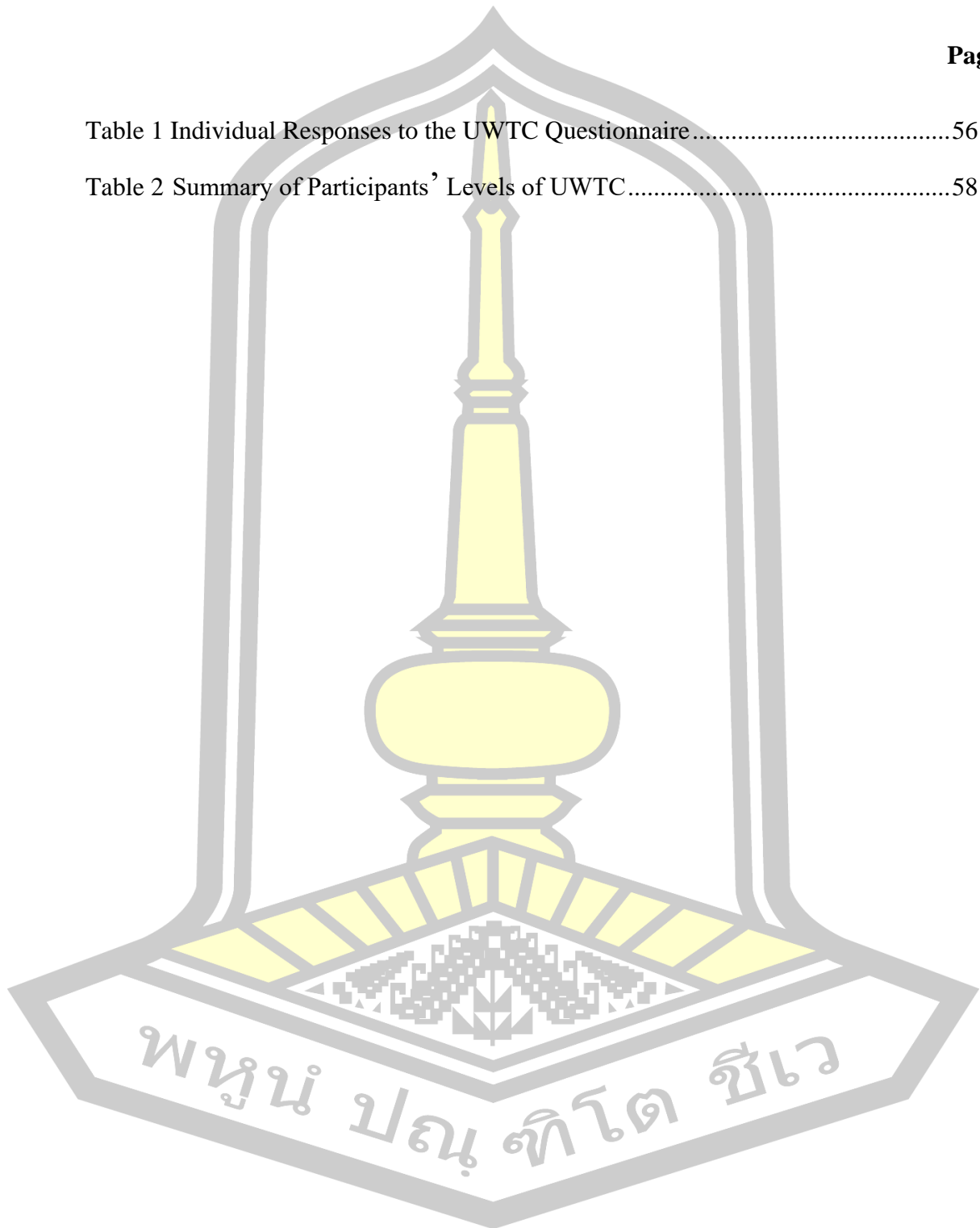
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of this study. The chapter begins with the background of the study, followed by the purposes of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study. Next, the key terms of this study are defined. Finally, an outline of this thesis proposal is provided.

1.1 Background of the Study

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has become a transformative force in global higher education, reshaping how academic content is delivered, particularly in non-English-speaking countries (Barnawi, 2021). This pedagogical shift is driven by the growing demand for internationalization, improved employability, and access to global academic communities (Macaro et al., 2018; Dearden, 2018). While EMI offers substantial benefits such as enhanced language proficiency and broader career prospects, it also introduces complex challenges, especially in Asia where English is typically not used in daily communication (Cui, Gardiner & Wang, 2024).

At the postgraduate level, English Medium Instruction (EMI) plays a crucial role in aligning universities with global academic standards and enhancing research collaboration. EMI refers to the use of English as the language of instruction for subjects unrelated to the study of English itself, particularly in non-English-speaking countries (Dearden, 2015). In postgraduate programs, EMI is often adopted to attract a diverse cohort of international students and to enable local students to engage with global academic discourse (Macaro, 2018). Unlike undergraduate programs, postgraduate EMI places a higher demand on both students' and instructors' language proficiency. Academic research, thesis writing, and participation in scholarly debate require an advanced level of English competency, especially in disciplines where up-to-date knowledge is predominantly disseminated in English (Sudo, 2022). This creates a dual challenge: ensuring that complex theoretical and methodological content is delivered effectively, while also fostering critical academic English skills.

Many postgraduate institutions implement strong EMI models, where 75% or more of instructional and research activities are conducted in English (Sameephet, 2020). This intensive exposure aims to prepare students for international publication and

collaboration. However, this approach necessitates substantial institutional support, including language assistance services, writing centers, and training for supervisors to facilitate thesis guidance in English (Sudo, 2022). Although EMI at the postgraduate level enhances academic mobility and graduate employability, concerns remain about equitable access for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Some researchers argue that without adequate scaffolding, EMI can unintentionally privilege students with higher English proficiency (Macaro, 2018). Therefore, universities must balance their internationalisation efforts with support for language development and academic success.

Group discussion plays a crucial role in postgraduate education, shaping students' learning experiences, communication skills, and academic development. It serves as both an instructional strategy and a research method for understanding postgraduate students' experiences. Postgraduate education requires advanced critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. Group discussions contribute to these aspects by fostering deeper analytical thinking, allowing students to critically evaluate theories and construct new knowledge through interaction with peers (Brookfield & Preskill, 2016). Through discussions, students develop communication skills by articulating their thoughts clearly, engaging in academic discourse, and practicing professional dialogue, which are essential for both academic success and future careers (Mercer, 2019). Additionally, collaborative discussions facilitate knowledge construction, as students learn not only from instructors but also from their peers, reinforcing their understanding of complex topics (Vygotsky, 1978). The exposure to diverse perspectives in discussions enhances students' ability to consider multiple viewpoints, promoting a broader and more inclusive academic outlook (Gorsky & Caspi, 2005).

Moreover, research has shown that low participation in group discussions undermines collaborative learning, critical thinking, and diverse idea exchange (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). Reluctance to contribute leads to superficial understanding and limits the development of argumentation, problem-solving, and teamwork skills essential for academic and professional success (Kerr et al., 2006). Moreover, uneven participation disrupts group dynamics, creating frustration and inefficiency (Dillenbourg, 1999).

For individuals, persistent avoidance can deepen isolation and self-doubt, reinforcing communication apprehension (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). These patterns may extend into professional settings, affecting workplace collaboration and career growth. To counter these issues, educators must foster inclusive environments, clarify expectations, and implement structured support, ensuring equitable participation and maximizing the benefits of group discussions for all learners.

The prevalence of unwillingness to communicate (UTC) in academic settings has been widely observed, particularly in contexts where students are required to engage in group discussions or oral presentations. UTC is often attributed to a combination of psychological, cultural, and situational factors that hinder students' ability or willingness to participate actively in academic communication. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) define unwillingness to communicate as a predisposition to avoid communication when possible, often resulting from communication apprehension, low self-esteem, or fear of negative evaluation. In academic settings, these issues can manifest in students avoiding participation in classroom discussions, hesitating to ask questions, or opting out of collaborative activities. According to research, various factors, including psychological, social, cultural, academic, and environmental challenges, can hinder postgraduate students' participation in group discussions, ultimately affecting their learning outcomes. Psychological factors, such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, and anxiety, can make students hesitant to contribute, especially in high-stakes academic settings (Williams et al., 2023; Cameron & Davies, 2021). Social and cultural factors, including deference to authority and fear of dominating peers, can further discourage participation (Lee & Choi, 2023; Kim & McGregor, 2022). Academic challenges, such as language barriers and uncertainty about the topic, also play a significant role in inhibiting engagement (Liu & Wang, 2022; Harrison & Smith, 2023). Additionally, structural and environmental factors, like rigid classroom settings and the instructor's approach, can affect the overall atmosphere of discussions and discourage active involvement (Chen & Xu, 2021; Tanner & Roberts, 2023). These barriers collectively impact students' willingness to communicate and their academic experiences.

Despite extensive research on UWTC in academic contexts, a significant gap remains in understanding the level of UWTC in English among Thai postgraduate students. While previous studies have explored UWTC among undergraduates and in general educational settings, the unique challenges faced by postgraduate students have not been adequately addressed. Postgraduate education often demanded high levels of engagement in collaborative activities, such as research discussions, seminars, and interdisciplinary projects, where students are expected to contribute their ideas, critique others' work, and engage in complex problem-solving. These activities are crucial not only for academic progress but also for developing essential professional skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and the ability to communicate complex concepts effectively. However, reluctance to communicate in these settings could significantly affect both academic performance and professional development, as students may struggle to express their ideas clearly or may fail to participate in discussions that could enhance their learning and future career prospects. This study examined the level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) as measured by Burgoon's (1976) Unwillingness to Communicate Questionnaire, with a specific focus on Self-Perceived Competence (SPC), which offers a general understanding of the factors that impede communication. The levels of these factors may significantly affect the willingness of Thai postgraduate students to participate in group discussions. Moreover, investigating the reasons behind UWTC in this group and their coping strategies could offer valuable insights for teachers, helping them identify specific student barriers and tailor their teaching approaches accordingly. Addressing these gaps was crucial for developing targeted interventions that created a supportive environment, enhanced communication skills, and empowered Thai postgraduate students to overcome barriers to active participation, thereby improving both their academic experiences and professional trajectories.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

Group discussions are vital in academic settings for promoting collaborative learning, critical thinking, and the exchange of ideas. However, many postgraduate students, especially in second language contexts, experience unwillingness to participate, which can hinder their academic performance and communication opportunities. This research aimed to investigate the level of UWTC in English during group discussions

among Thai postgraduate students. The specific purposes of the study were as follows:

1. To identify the level of unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions.
2. To examine reasons for Thai postgraduate students' UWTC in group discussions.
3. To explore strategies Thai postgraduate students employ to cope with their UWTC in group discussions.

The research questions aligned with these purposes were:

1. What is the level of unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions among Thai postgraduate students?
2. What are Thai postgraduate students' reasons for their UWTC in group discussions?
3. What strategies do Thai postgraduate students use to manage their UWTC in group discussions?

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate UWTC among Thai postgraduate students, focusing specifically on the level of their UWTC in English during group discussions. The study also examined the underlying reasons for their unwillingness to participate in these discussions and explored the coping strategies they used to engage. The research involved thirty-seven Thai postgraduate students from a large public university in northeastern Thailand. Data collection was carried out using Burgoon's (1976) UWTC questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study took place over two months during the second semester of the 2024 academic year. The data collection process consisted of several steps. First, the thirty-seven students completed Burgoon's (1976) UWTC questionnaire online to assess the level of their UWTC in English during group discussions. Based on their responses, six participants were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into the specific reasons for their reluctance and the strategies they employed to manage these challenges. The one-on-one interviews were recorded with participants' consent, transcribed, and analyzed. The quantitative data from the questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the interview

transcripts underwent thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. The findings from this study shed light on the communication challenges faced by Thai postgraduate students and provide valuable implications for educators aiming to create more inclusive and engaging learning environments.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance understanding and improve communication dynamics in both academic and professional contexts. By providing valuable insights into Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English, this study offers a deeper understanding of the levels of UWTC exhibited during group discussions. Such understanding can assist educators and administrators in identifying specific barriers to communication and in developing targeted interventions to address these challenges. Recognizing and addressing the levels of UWTC is crucial not only for improving students' participation in group discussions but also for fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and productive learning environment, ultimately contributing to enhanced academic success.

Furthermore, as communication skills are integral to personal and professional growth, this study highlights the practical strategies that can be integrated into training programs aimed at boosting students' confidence and competence in group settings. These strategies can empower students to overcome communication barriers and actively contribute to discussions, thus improving their academic performance and future career prospects.

In addition, the study offers critical insights into how teaching strategies and curriculum design can be adapted to promote more supportive environments that encourage student participation and reduce communication anxiety. By incorporating these insights into curriculum development, educators can create an atmosphere in which students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, leading to more dynamic and meaningful interactions within the classroom.

Moreover, this research significantly contributes to the growing body of knowledge on communication apprehension and coping strategies, opening new avenues for future research focused on identifying the most effective interventions and best practices for reducing UTC. The findings can serve as a foundation for further

exploration of how to create environments where students feel empowered to communicate without fear or hesitation, thus facilitating better overall learning experiences.

Taken together, these contributions underscore the potential of this study to improve the quality of group interactions, enhance student engagement, and support the development of well-rounded, effective communicators who are better prepared to navigate both academic and professional settings.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

The Level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in this study refers to the tendency of 37 Thai postgraduate students, studying in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) context, to avoid or hesitate in engaging in verbal communication—particularly during group discussions conducted in English. This tendency was measured using Burgoon’s (1976) Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) scale.

Group Discussions refers to collaborative academic activities in which participants engage in verbal exchanges of ideas, opinions, and knowledge within a small group setting, specifically conducted in English. In the context of this study, group discussions are examined as a key environment in which Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) may manifest, as students’ reluctance to participate in English could significantly impact the dynamics and outcomes of these collaborative academic activities.

Thai Postgraduate Students refers to the 30 Thai individuals enrolled in postgraduate degree programs at a large public university in Thailand. These students are pursuing advanced degrees in English language teaching within an English-medium context, where English is the primary language of instruction. The students in this study represent a diverse group with varying levels of English proficiency and academic backgrounds.

Coping strategies refers to the various methods or techniques that participants of this study used to manage their Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English within group discussion settings. These strategies may include both conscious and unconscious efforts to reduce anxiety, build confidence, and facilitate participation in verbal exchanges.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprised five chapters.

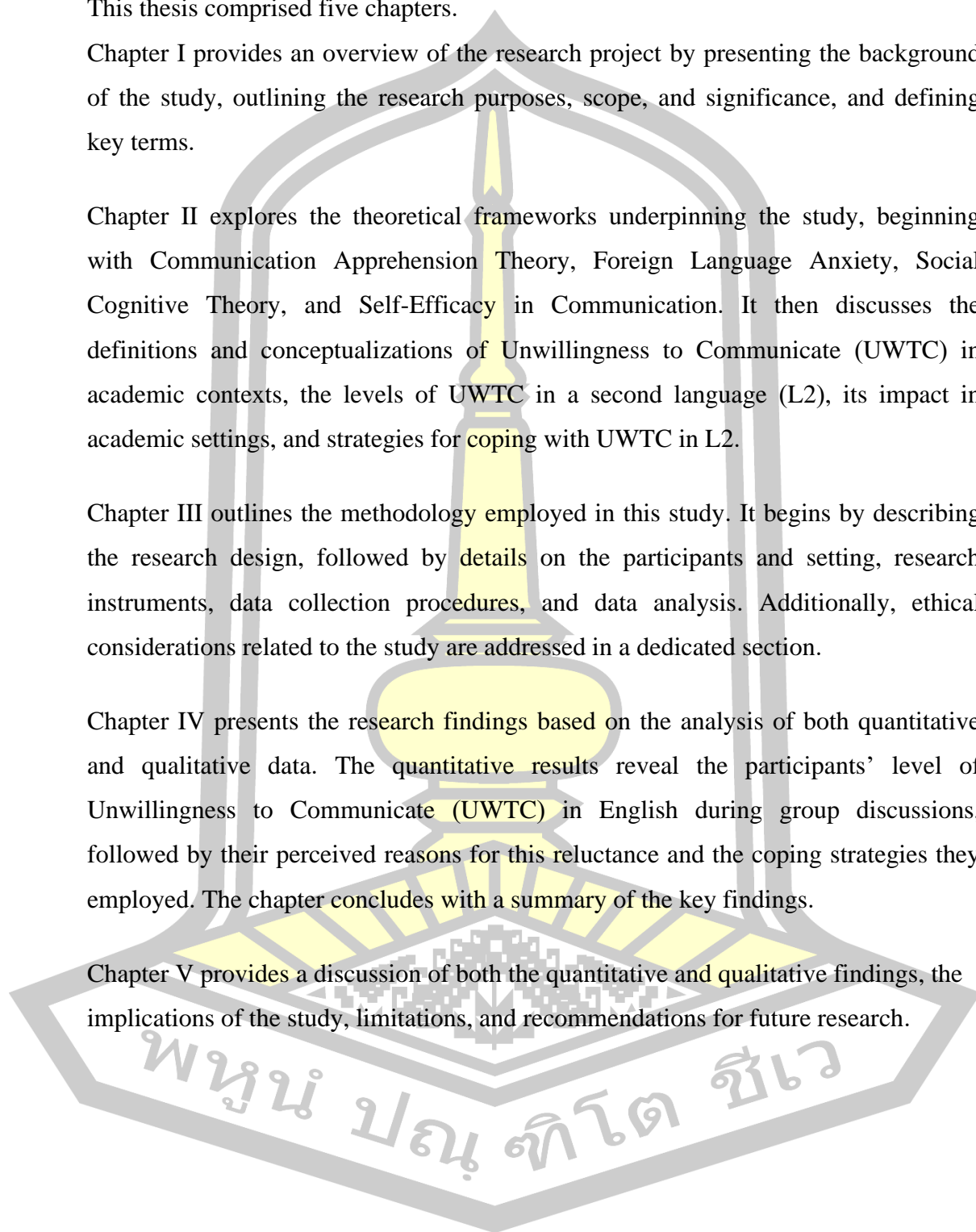
Chapter I provides an overview of the research project by presenting the background of the study, outlining the research purposes, scope, and significance, and defining key terms.

Chapter II explores the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, beginning with Communication Apprehension Theory, Foreign Language Anxiety, Social Cognitive Theory, and Self-Efficacy in Communication. It then discusses the definitions and conceptualizations of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in academic contexts, the levels of UWTC in a second language (L2), its impact in academic settings, and strategies for coping with UWTC in L2.

Chapter III outlines the methodology employed in this study. It begins by describing the research design, followed by details on the participants and setting, research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Additionally, ethical considerations related to the study are addressed in a dedicated section.

Chapter IV presents the research findings based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative results reveal the participants' level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, followed by their perceived reasons for this reluctance and the coping strategies they employed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings.

Chapter V provides a discussion of both the quantitative and qualitative findings, the implications of the study, limitations, and recommendations for future research.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores key theoretical frameworks related to UWTC in academic contexts, including Communication Apprehension Theory, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Social Cognitive Theory. It examines the definitions, significance, and contributing factors of UWTC in L2, such as psychological, linguistic, social, and educational influences. The chapter also discusses its impact on academic performance and language proficiency. Additionally, strategies for mitigating UWTC, including instructional techniques, psychological interventions, and supportive learning environments, are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of theoretical insights, emphasizing key findings and their implications for research and teaching practices in L2 education.

2.1 English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Postgraduate Students

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of the English language to deliver academic content in contexts where English is not the students' first language (Macaro, 2018). Over the past two decades, EMI has gained global traction as a key policy direction in higher education institutions, particularly in non-English-speaking countries. This expansion is largely attributed to the increasing internationalization of education, where universities aim to attract a broader student demographic, raise their global academic profiles, and prepare students for participation in the global knowledge economy (Dearden, 2014). In Asian contexts such as Thailand, EMI has become an educational trend, especially at the postgraduate level, where exposure to international academic literature, conferences, and publications is often in English. The adoption of EMI is seen as part of a broader strategy to align national education systems with international standards and practices.

At the postgraduate level, EMI is commonly promoted as a means of enhancing students' academic English proficiency while simultaneously giving them access to global knowledge networks and research communities (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). It is often assumed that postgraduate students possess sufficient English language competence to cope with the demands of EMI. However, empirical studies reveal a more complex reality. Postgraduate students frequently encounter difficulties with

academic writing, discipline-specific terminology, and oral communication in classroom discussions and presentations (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Pun & Jin, 2021). These challenges are compounded by the abstract and specialized nature of postgraduate study, which demands not only comprehension but also critical engagement with academic content. As a result, students may struggle with constructing knowledge, participating effectively in academic dialogue, and achieving desired academic outcomes.

Moreover, several scholars have noted that EMI can lead to shallow or surface-level engagement with course content due to limitations in students' English proficiency (Airey, 2012). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in technical or theoretical subjects, where students may prioritize language comprehension over conceptual understanding. For postgraduate students who are expected to produce original research and engage in academic debate, such limitations can be detrimental. Furthermore, EMI has been shown to impact students' academic identities. In contexts where students are unable to fully express their ideas or demonstrate their intellectual capacity in English, there is a risk of diminished academic confidence and self-worth (Tange, 2010). This can result in reduced classroom participation and a reluctance to seek clarification or contribute to discussions, reinforcing a cycle of silence and disengagement.

Language-related challenges are often intensified by a lack of institutional support. Many EMI programs assume a high level of English proficiency without providing sufficient scaffolding to support language development. Without targeted interventions, such as academic writing support, discipline-specific language instruction, or oral communication workshops, students may experience heightened anxiety and increased unwillingness to communicate in academic settings (Kang & Park, 2018). This is particularly relevant in postgraduate programs, where students must navigate complex assignments, thesis writing, and research presentations in English.

To address these challenges, scholars emphasize the need for both pedagogical innovation and systemic support. Effective EMI implementation requires intentional

curriculum design that integrates content and language learning, along with professional development for instructors to manage linguistically diverse classrooms (Macaro et al., 2018). Training teachers to recognize and accommodate students' varying English proficiency levels is essential for fostering inclusive classroom environments. Additionally, universities must adopt policies that ensure equitable access to academic resources in English, including textbooks, databases, and research supervision. Instructors should also be encouraged to use culturally responsive teaching strategies that validate students' linguistic backgrounds and academic experiences (Hu & Lei, 2014).

While EMI presents challenges, it also offers opportunities. For some postgraduate students, EMI enhances their confidence, intercultural competence, and ability to engage in global academic networks (Smit & Dafouz, 2012). These students may benefit from improved employability, increased academic mobility, and broader access to international research. However, for others, particularly those from less privileged educational backgrounds, EMI can be a barrier to success. Research has shown that some students feel excluded or "silenced" in EMI classrooms, often withdrawing from participation due to fears of making mistakes or being judged for their language use (Joe & Lee, 2020).

To mitigate these negative effects, several scholars advocate for the use of *translanguaging*—the strategic use of students' first languages alongside English to support learning. This approach can facilitate deeper understanding, foster inclusivity, and encourage student participation. Other suggested practices include interactive and collaborative learning tasks that shift the focus away from linguistic accuracy toward content engagement, as well as formative feedback that helps students improve their academic language gradually. These strategies not only reduce unwillingness to communicate but also promote a more active and confident learner identity within EMI contexts.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks provide insights into why students experience UWTC in academic settings. These frameworks help explain the psychological, emotional, and cognitive processes that influence communication behavior and reluctance. This research investigates UWTC in English during group discussion among Thai postgraduate students through two theories, namely Communication Apprehension Theory and Foreign Language Anxiety.

2.2.1 Communication Apprehension Theory

McCroskey and Betty (1998) identified communication apprehension (CA) as a psychological and internal experience rooted in an individual's fear of engaging in conversations with others. From a cultural standpoint, Triandis (1994) suggested that CA is more pronounced in collectivistic societies than in individualistic ones, as collectivist cultures emphasize maintaining social harmony and prioritizing group objectives over individual goals. Furthermore, socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, and personal background have been associated with CA. Butler et al. (2004) noted that disparities in age, gender, and perceived abilities contribute to the development of CA, a view supported by Alley-Young (2005), who emphasized the role of individual, social, cultural, and socio-economic influences in shaping communication anxiety.

The role of educators in the emergence of CA has also been widely examined. Duta et al. (2015) highlighted the significant influence of teachers on students' communication anxiety, emphasizing that even non-verbal cues, such as body language and gestures, can impact learners' confidence. A teacher's attitude, tone, and responsiveness to students' communication efforts shape the overall classroom atmosphere. Teachers who foster a supportive and encouraging learning environment can help reduce CA among students. Horwitz et al. (1986) further argued that language anxiety, including CA, can hinder students' willingness to communicate. Educators who create an inclusive and positive learning environment empower students to overcome their fears and actively engage in language learning activities. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in mitigating CA by being mindful of their

communication style, promoting student participation, and fostering an encouraging classroom atmosphere (Duta et al., 2015; Horwitz et al., 1986; McCroskey, 2001).

Error-related concerns are another major factor influencing CA in educational settings. The fear of making mistakes or being judged for linguistic errors can significantly deter students from participating in foreign language communication (Horwitz et al., 1986). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, anxiety about grammatical accuracy and pronunciation can create a heightened sense of apprehension among learners. Wongthodsaporn's (2012) research on Thai undergraduate students found that limited grammatical knowledge and anxiety about speaking English were primary reasons students hesitated to engage in English conversations. This finding underscores the substantial impact of error-related anxiety on CA in EFL contexts.

Beyond concerns about errors, self-evaluation and peer evaluations also contribute to CA. The fear of being negatively assessed, whether by oneself or by peers, can significantly elevate anxiety levels in communicative situations. McCroskey (1976) found that individuals with high CA often avoid speech-related activities, such as public speaking and speech courses, due to the fear of negative evaluation. Peer perceptions also play a crucial role in shaping students' anxiety. Research by Yusica (2014) indicated that Thai students frequently refrain from interacting in a foreign language due to concerns about peer judgment. The possibility of being laughed at or criticized for language mistakes intensifies CA, creating a substantial obstacle to language learning. Similarly, Lahtinen (2013) found that students who engaged in negative self-evaluation experienced heightened anxiety, further affecting their overall communication abilities.

Another critical factor in the development of CA is reinforcement—the process by which certain behaviors are strengthened or weakened based on their consequences (Skinner, 1938). In educational settings, reinforcement can either alleviate or exacerbate CA. Positive reinforcement, such as constructive feedback and encouragement, has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase students' willingness to communicate (Horwitz, 2001). In contrast, negative reinforcement, such as

criticism or punishment for mistakes, can intensify CA, discouraging learners from participating in language-related activities.

Modeling, or the process of learning behaviors by observing others (Bandura & Walters, 1963), also influences CA in EFL classrooms. The behavior and communication style of teachers and peers play a significant role in shaping students' anxiety levels. Liu and Jackson (2008) found that students who witnessed their peers being ridiculed for language mistakes exhibited increased CA. This finding highlights the importance of fostering a non-judgmental and supportive classroom environment to prevent the negative effects of modeling on students' confidence. Lahtinen (2013) further emphasized that teachers' communication behaviors significantly impact students' anxiety levels. Teachers who model effective communication skills and create a supportive classroom climate can help reduce students' CA and encourage active participation in language learning.

In summary, various factors contribute to CA, including cultural influences, socio-demographic characteristics, teacher-student interactions, error-related concerns, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, reinforcement, and modeling. While negative reinforcement and unfavorable classroom dynamics can exacerbate CA, positive reinforcement and supportive teacher behaviors can help mitigate its effects. Addressing CA requires a comprehensive approach that includes fostering an encouraging learning environment, providing constructive feedback, and promoting confidence-building activities to support students in overcoming their anxiety and improving their communication skills.

2.2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety has been widely discussed in academic literature, with various scholars offering distinct definitions. Ortega (2009) highlights two influential definitions that have shaped our understanding of language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) define it as a unique set of self-perceptions, emotions, and behaviors linked to the challenges of learning a foreign language in a classroom setting. Similarly, MacIntyre (1999) characterizes language anxiety as a psychological state involving

stress, nervousness, and emotional reactions associated with the process of acquiring a second or foreign language.

To grasp foreign language anxiety more comprehensively, it is necessary to explore the broader concept of anxiety. From a psychological standpoint, anxiety is categorized into three types: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Trait anxiety refers to an individual's enduring tendency to experience anxiety, which remains stable across different contexts (Scovel, 1978). Sieber, O'Neil, and Tobias (1977) describe it as a fundamental personality trait that makes certain individuals more prone to anxiety than others. Eysenck (1979) further suggests that trait anxiety can negatively impact cognitive functions, including memory and information processing.

State anxiety, on the other hand, is a temporary emotional response triggered by a perceived threat. Spielberger (1972) defines it as an emotional reaction that arises when an individual feels personally endangered, regardless of whether an actual threat exists. This type of anxiety fluctuates in intensity and varies depending on the situation (Young, 1998). A common example is test anxiety, where students experience nervousness before an exam, but the intensity of this anxiety may change over time. State anxiety influences emotions, cognition, and behavior, making it a crucial aspect of anxiety research.

Situation-specific anxiety occurs in particular contexts and remains consistent over time within those situations (Spielberger, 1983). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) emphasize that situation-specific anxiety is distinct from trait anxiety because it is tied to specific experiences rather than being a general personality trait. Language anxiety and math anxiety are two well-documented forms of this type of anxiety. Many scholars argue that language anxiety is better understood as a form of situation-specific anxiety rather than trait anxiety since it arises in specific classroom interactions rather than being a constant, pervasive experience (Oxford & Ehrman, 1992). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further suggest that studying foreign language anxiety through the lens of situation-specific anxiety provides valuable insights, as learners may experience varying levels of anxiety in different classroom scenarios.

Foreign language anxiety can be categorized into two distinct forms: debilitating anxiety and facilitating anxiety (Alpert & Haber, 1960). The majority of research focuses on debilitating anxiety, which negatively affects learners by reducing class participation and increasing feelings of fear, frustration, and worry (Brown, 2007; MacIntyre, 1999; Kim, 2000; Horwitz et al., 1986; Jones, 2004; Oxford, 1999). This form of anxiety can directly impact language performance by discouraging engagement in speaking activities or indirectly contribute to a lack of confidence and motivation. Conversely, facilitating anxiety has been recognized by some scholars as a beneficial trait that can enhance learning by motivating students to perform better (Bailey, 1983; Ellis, 1994; Kleinmann, 1977). While the concept of facilitating anxiety is less explored, it suggests that a certain level of anxiety can encourage learners to put forth greater effort in language acquisition.

In conclusion, foreign language anxiety is a complex phenomenon with multiple definitions and classifications. While some scholars view it as a unique psychological response to language learning, others categorize it under broader anxiety frameworks, including trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. Research largely focuses on debilitating anxiety due to its negative impact on language learning, though facilitating anxiety presents an alternative perspective. Understanding the various dimensions of foreign language anxiety can help educators and researchers develop effective strategies to support learners and reduce the challenges associated with language acquisition.

2.3 The Concepts of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in L2

McCroskey and Baer (1985), along with McCroskey and Richmond (1990, 1991), developed the concept of "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) based on Burgoon's (1976) original notion of "Unwillingness to Communicate" (UWTC). Burgoon initially introduced and validated the UWTC construct within the context of one's native language, linking it to factors such as anomia, alienation, introversion, self-esteem, communication apprehension, and reticence. As a result, individuals with high UWTC often avoid or devalue oral communication. The WTC construct was first introduced and explored by McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond (1985) in studies

focusing on communication in one's first language. They defined WTC as a fundamental tendency to engage in conversation, rooted in personality traits. Additionally, they identified communication competence, communication apprehension, self-esteem, and cultural diversity as key factors influencing WTC, emphasizing the need for cultural considerations when making generalizations. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) further examined WTC through path analysis, investigating the relationships among various factors that predict willingness to communicate in one's first language. Their study also explored how WTC influences the frequency of communication in a second language, highlighting the roles of language learning motivation, perceived L2 communicative competence, and opportunities for interaction with L2 speakers. They concluded that both global personality traits and language-related affective variables shape the psychological context for second language communication. Expanding on this concept, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) defined WTC as the learner's readiness to engage in conversation at a specific moment with a particular person or group using the second language.

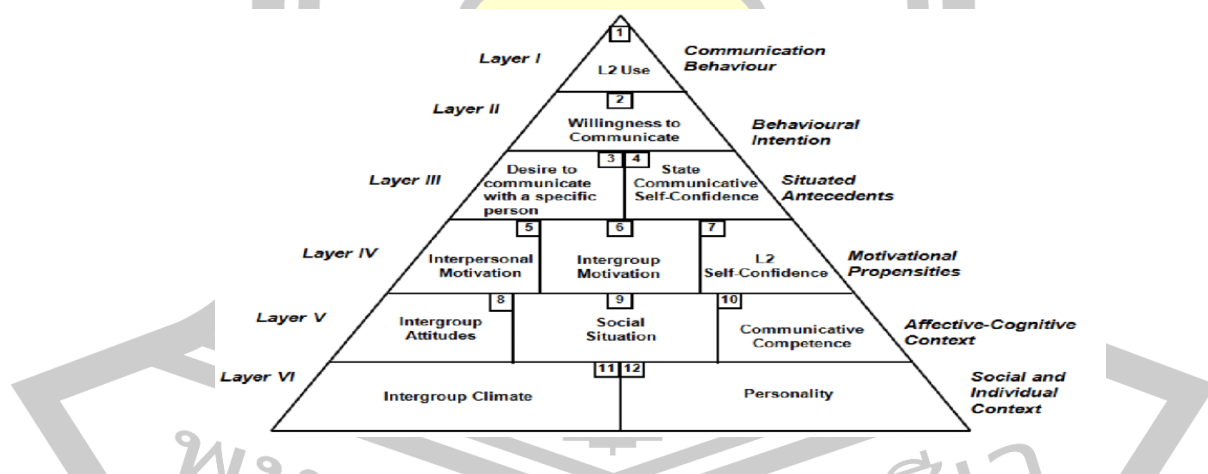


Figure 1 MacIntyre et al., (1998) L2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Heuristic Pyramid Model

Figure 1 illustrates the heuristic model of variables influencing willingness to communicate (WTC), highlighting the impact of social and individual contexts, affective cognitive factors, motivational propensities, situational antecedents, and behavioral intention on L2 learners' communication behaviors. However, Wen and

Clement (2003) argued that this model is primarily applicable within Western contexts. Nevertheless, it is now recognized as a useful reference for both Western and Eastern settings.

Previous studies have explored concepts closely related to WTC, such as willingness to talk (Menzel & Carrell, 1999) and willingness to speak (Riasati, 2012; Hsu & Huang, 2017). A key objective of language instruction is to foster effective communication among learners, with teachers playing a crucial role in developing students' WTC (Dörnyei, 2007). Research has consistently emphasized that teachers influence the learning environment and communication patterns in English classrooms (Wen & Clement, 2003, cited in Gol et al., 2014). One of the major challenges for language teachers is encouraging students to actively participate in communication. Asian students, in particular, are often described as passive and reluctant to respond in EFL classrooms (Cheng, 2000; Liu, 2005; Tsui, 1996). Studies have suggested that teachers can enhance students' WTC by addressing factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, and topic selection to align with students' interests (Cheng, 2000; Tsui, 1996; Xie, 2011).

Research has also identified key elements that influence WTC in language learning, including interaction patterns, classroom dynamics, and task types. For example, Cao and Philp (2006) found that factors such as teacher-led discussions, pair work, small group interactions, topic selection, and task type can impact learners' WTC. Similarly, Cao (2011) reported that students are more willing to participate when they have a positive perception of their teachers, a finding consistent with Zarrinabadi (2014), who noted that teacher encouragement—such as providing sufficient response time and allowing students to choose discussion topics—leads to greater engagement in foreign language communication.

Empirical studies have employed various methods to investigate factors affecting WTC in different contexts. In the Korean EFL setting, Kang (2005) conducted a qualitative study using interviews, stimulated recall, and videotaped conversations with four Korean students in a U.S.-based conversation partner program. The study concluded that situational L2 WTC arises from an interaction of three psychological

conditions—responsibility and security, excitement, and topic engagement—along with three situational variables—topics, interlocutors, and conversational contexts. Additionally, Kang found that a sense of security and reduced anxiety were linked to increased willingness to speak in an L2. Interlocutor familiarity, participation, and group size have also been found to affect WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006). Later, Cao (2009) reinforced these findings, emphasizing the importance of topic choice, task type, and teacher influence in classroom communication. Peng (2014) further highlighted that WTC is significantly affected by the nature of tasks, a conclusion supported by Pattapong (2010), who argued that task complexity, difficulty level, and time constraints play a role in shaping students' WTC.

In summary, the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) originated from Burgoon's (1976) notion of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) and was further developed by McCroskey and Baer (1985), along with McCroskey and Richmond (1990, 1991), as a fundamental tendency to engage in conversation, influenced by factors such as communication competence, self-esteem, and cultural diversity. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) expanded on WTC by examining its relationship with second language (L2) communication, highlighting the roles of motivation, perceived competence, and interaction opportunities. MacIntyre et al. (1998) later introduced a heuristic model explaining how social, affective, and cognitive factors influence WTC, though Wen and Clement (2003) questioned its applicability in non-Western contexts. Studies have consistently shown that teacher influence, classroom dynamics, interaction patterns, and task design significantly impact students' WTC, particularly in Asian EFL classrooms where learners tend to be more passive. Empirical research, such as Kang (2005) and Cao & Philp (2006), has identified factors like topic selection, group size, and interlocutor familiarity as crucial for enhancing WTC. the impact of anxiety reduction and engagement on communication willingness.

2.4 Measuring Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in L2

Unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) refers to an individual's tendency to avoid initiating or engaging in communication despite possessing the ability to do so (Burgoon, 1976). While the concept originally emerged from interpersonal communication research in first-language (L1) settings, it has since been adapted and

extended to second language (L2) contexts, where affective, cognitive, and situational factors further influence learners' willingness to use the target language. Measuring UWTC in L2 settings has thus become a critical concern for language educators and researchers aiming to understand learners' communicative behavior and promote meaningful classroom interaction.

Burgoon's (1976) original Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale (UWTC Scale) served as a foundational tool in measuring communication avoidance. The scale assesses trait-like tendencies toward communication avoidance across different contexts and with different interlocutors. While initially designed for native speakers, several researchers have adapted the scale to L2 learners by rewording items and contextualizing them for language learning environments (Zarrinabadi, 2014; MacIntyre et al., 1998). For example, items are often framed around classroom interactions, peer discussions, or public speaking situations in the target language. These adaptations preserve the core dimensions of the original scale, such as communication apprehension, self-perceived communicative competence, and social anxiety.

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, UWTC is frequently examined in relation to the more widely studied construct of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). While WTC captures learners' readiness to initiate communication in L2 under specific conditions, UWTC reflects the underlying hesitation, fear, or disinterest that prevents learners from doing so. Some scholars argue that UWTC should be treated as a distinct construct, not merely the inverse of WTC, due to its unique psychological underpinnings (Peng, 2014). Accordingly, efforts to measure UWTC have increasingly incorporated qualitative data (e.g., interviews and open-ended questionnaires) to capture the complexity of students' reasons for avoiding communication.

Quantitative tools remain central to measuring UWTC, with Likert-scale questionnaires being the most commonly used method. These tools often assess multiple dimensions contributing to UWTC, such as topic familiarity, interlocutor status, perceived language ability, and anxiety levels. For example, Zarrinabadi

(2014) developed a context-sensitive instrument that measures L2 learners' willingness and unwillingness to communicate based on classroom dynamics, teacher support, and peer interaction. This multidimensional approach allows researchers to examine how situational and psychological factors converge to influence L2 communicative behavior.

In recent studies, UWTC has also been explored through contextual and task-based measurements, such as observing participation rates in group discussions, peer collaboration tasks, and language presentations (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). These behavioral measures provide a more dynamic understanding of UWTC in real-time language use, complementing self-report scales that may be affected by social desirability or learners' limited self-awareness. Moreover, combining quantitative and qualitative methods—for instance, using questionnaires alongside stimulated recall interviews or classroom observations—has proven effective in triangulating data and capturing the full range of factors influencing L2 learners' communication choices.

The reasons behind UWTC are also a significant focus of measurement. Researchers have developed open-ended prompts and interview protocols to explore learners' internal experiences, such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, perceived linguistic inadequacy, and previous negative classroom experiences (Kang, 2005; Cao, 2011). These findings suggest that UWTC is deeply rooted in learners' affective and identity-related experiences, which are not always fully captured by quantitative scales alone.

Despite advances in UWTC measurement, some challenges persist. There is ongoing debate over whether UWTC should be measured as a stable trait or a context-sensitive state, with implications for instrument design and data interpretation (MacIntyre, 2007). Furthermore, cross-cultural differences may influence the expression and reporting of UWTC. For instance, learners from collectivist cultures may be more reluctant to speak in class due to concerns about group harmony or face-saving, which may require culturally adapted measurement tools (Peng, 2012).

In conclusion, measuring UWTC in L2 contexts demands a multi-method, multi-dimensional approach. While standardized questionnaires such as the adapted Burgoon scale and WTC/UWTC hybrid instruments offer reliable insights, qualitative data and behavioral observations are crucial for unpacking the nuanced psychological and contextual variables that shape learners' unwillingness to communicate. Continued refinement of measurement tools, alongside attention to cultural and situational variability, will enhance our understanding of UWTC and inform pedagogical strategies to foster more inclusive and communicative language learning environments.

2.5 Levels of Postgraduate Students' UWTC in L2

Unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in a second language (L2) reflects a learner's conscious or subconscious avoidance of speaking in the target language, despite possessing the necessary linguistic skills (Burgoon, 1976). Among postgraduate students, particularly those studying in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts, UWTC can manifest at varying levels and is shaped by both internal and external factors. Identifying and understanding these levels is essential for educators aiming to foster more communicative and participatory academic environments.

The concept of UWTC has evolved from early interpersonal communication models to include second language acquisition contexts. Burgoon's (1976) original framework categorized UWTC into multiple dimensions, including general reticence, communication apprehension, and low self-perceived communication competence. These foundational categories have since been applied and expanded in L2 contexts to better understand learners' varying degrees of avoidance behavior in academic communication.

In postgraduate settings, general UWTC is often observed as a stable trait-like reluctance to participate in oral communication, even in informal or low-stakes interactions (MacIntyre, 1994). This level may reflect a habitual preference for silence or written expression rather than spontaneous verbal exchange. Postgraduate students with high levels of general UWTC often avoid initiating conversations or participating in classroom discussions, regardless of their actual language proficiency.

Another prominent level is communication apprehension, defined as fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication in L2 (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). At the postgraduate level, communication apprehension may be heightened due to the increased complexity of academic discourse, the need for precision in presenting research ideas, and the presence of high-status interlocutors such as professors or international peers. Research shows that students experiencing high communication apprehension are more likely to refrain from contributing in seminars or group discussions (Zarrinabadi, 2014; Liu & Jackson, 2008).

A third dimension commonly reported in the literature is low self-perceived communication competence. This refers to learners' subjective belief that they lack the skills necessary to communicate effectively in L2, even when their objective language ability is sufficient (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Among postgraduate students, this form of UWTC often stems from self-comparisons with more fluent peers or previous negative experiences in using English. Such perceptions can result in selective mutism during classroom interactions or hesitancy to ask questions, present work, or engage in academic debate (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

In EMI contexts, especially in Asian countries like Thailand, these levels of UWTC may be exacerbated by cultural communication norms and educational traditions. For example, students from high power-distance societies may be less inclined to speak in front of instructors, interpreting silence as a sign of respect rather than a lack of engagement (Joe & Lee, 2020). Additionally, limited experience with interactive or discussion-based learning during undergraduate studies can contribute to increased reluctance to communicate in postgraduate programs conducted in English (Pun & Jin, 2021).

Empirical studies have used a combination of quantitative instruments—such as adapted versions of Burgoon's UWTC Scale—and qualitative methods like interviews and classroom observations to assess the levels of UWTC among postgraduate students (Cao, 2011; Zarrinabadi, 2014). These studies often reveal that UWTC is not static but can fluctuate across contexts, topics, interlocutors, and emotional states. For

instance, postgraduate students may show low UWTC when working in small peer groups but high UWTC in formal presentations or instructor-led discussions.

Overall, the literature highlights that postgraduate students' UWTC in L2 exists on a continuum ranging from mild discomfort to extreme avoidance. Recognizing these levels is essential for designing pedagogical interventions that target specific needs. For instance, communication apprehension may be reduced through anxiety-reduction strategies and confidence-building activities, while low perceived competence may be addressed through skills training and formative feedback.

In conclusion, measuring and interpreting the levels of UWTC among postgraduate students provides critical insights into their communicative behavior and challenges in L2 academic settings. A nuanced understanding of these levels enables educators to foster more supportive and inclusive learning environments that encourage active participation and academic engagement in English-medium programs.

2.6 Potential Reasons for Postgraduate Students' UWTC in L2

Effective communication in a second language (L2) can be a daunting challenge for postgraduate students, particularly when it comes to speaking English in academic settings. Several factors contribute to students' reluctance to engage in L2 communication, including psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural barriers. Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective interventions that promote active participation and improve communication skills.

A major psychological barrier is English-speaking anxiety, which is characterized by intense nervousness or apprehension when students are required to speak English. This anxiety often stems from fears of making mistakes, mispronouncing words, or using incorrect grammar (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For Thai postgraduate students, the added pressure of academic performance exacerbates these fears, leading to withdrawal from participation to avoid potential embarrassment (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Another psychological barrier is low self-efficacy, or the belief that one lacks the necessary skills to communicate effectively in English. Bandura (1997) emphasized

that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in how individuals approach challenging tasks. When students doubt their language abilities, they are more likely to avoid speaking in discussions, reinforcing a cycle of inactivity (Pajares, 2018).

Additionally, fear of negative evaluation—concerns about being judged or criticized by peers or instructors—can further inhibit participation in group discussions. Research has shown that anticipating harsh evaluation often leads students to avoid speaking, thereby reducing their engagement in academic settings (Horwitz et al., 1986; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2017).

Linguistic and cognitive factors also contribute to students' unwillingness to communicate in English. Limited vocabulary and grammar proficiency can create significant barriers, as students may feel incapable of expressing their ideas clearly. This lack of confidence in their linguistic abilities can lead to self-censorship, where students opt to remain silent rather than risk miscommunication (Krashen, 1982; Schmidt, 1990; Lee & VanPatten, 2020).

Additionally, pronunciation challenges add another layer of anxiety, as students worry that their accents or pronunciation will make their speech unintelligible. These concerns often distract from the message they are trying to convey, further discouraging active participation (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2019).

Cognitive overload, a condition where the mental demands of understanding, formulating, and producing responses in a second language become overwhelming, also plays a role in reducing participation. Students who struggle with fluency may experience mental fatigue, making it harder for them to contribute to discussions (Sweller, 1988; Chandler & Sweller, 2011).

Sociocultural factors, including cultural norms and communication styles, significantly impact students' willingness to speak in English. Thai cultural values, such as respect for hierarchy, maintaining harmony, and the concept of “kreng jai” (deference and consideration for others), can lead students to adopt a more reserved

approach in group discussions. This cultural tendency to avoid assertive participation may suppress individual expression, even in academic settings where active engagement is encouraged (Hofstede, 2001; Matsumoto & Juang, 2017). Additionally, the Thai preference for indirect communication can conflict with the more direct communication style often expected in academic or professional settings. Students may hesitate to participate, fearing that their indirect contributions will be misunderstood or undervalued (Gudykunst, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 2017).

Prior educational experiences also play a role, as many Thai students come from traditional, teacher-centered environments where interactive practices were limited. This background may make it difficult for students to transition to more participatory learning settings, where speaking English in group discussions is expected (Brown, 2001; Littlewood, 2019).

Furthermore, group dynamics, such as the dominance of more assertive personalities in discussions, can discourage quieter students from contributing. The imbalance in participation can reinforce feelings of inadequacy, making it harder for students to overcome their reluctance to speak (Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan, 2016).

The role of instructors in shaping the classroom environment is crucial. Teachers who facilitate inclusive, supportive discussions and encourage risk-taking can reduce anxiety and promote active participation. However, a primarily corrective or evaluative teaching style can heighten students' self-consciousness and discourage them from speaking (Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Freeman, 2018). The format of group discussions also influences participation levels. Structured formats that provide clear guidelines and defined roles can help build students' confidence in their spoken English (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2018). In contrast, unstructured or overly open-ended formats may increase uncertainty, making it more difficult for students to contribute effectively and worsening existing anxieties.

In conclusion, the unwillingness of postgraduate students to communicate in English is a multifaceted issue, shaped by psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that

includes fostering a supportive classroom environment, enhancing students' language proficiency, and considering the cultural and educational contexts in which they have been socialized. By understanding and addressing these factors, educators can help students overcome their reluctance to speak and improve their ability to engage in academic communication in English.

2.7 Discussion Method

In educational settings, discussion remains one of the most frequently employed teaching methods in adult and higher education. This approach not only promotes student participation but also transforms learners into active participants, collaborators, and co-constructors of knowledge (Seaman & Fellenz, 1989; Legge, 1971). Research has consistently shown that discussion-based strategies enhance engagement and facilitate the development of problem-solving skills (McGonigal, 2005). Moreover, by providing opportunities for students to articulate their ideas, critique viewpoints, and debate issues, discussion significantly contributes to the development of critical thinking (Parker, 1996; King, 1994). Recent studies have further reinforced these findings. For example, the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) emphasizes that well-structured discussions are integral in establishing social, cognitive, and teaching presences, all of which are vital for deep and meaningful learning. Similarly, a comprehensive review by Prince (2004) highlighted that active learning strategies—of which discussion is a key component—are associated with improved academic performance across diverse disciplines in higher education. In the context of adult learning, Brookfield (2012) notes that reflective discussions are particularly effective in fostering self-awareness and critical self-reflection, both essential for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Additionally, Boud (2013) argues that dialogue encourages learners to integrate prior experiences with new information, thereby deepening understanding and promoting lifelong learning.

Despite these advantages, the discussion method has faced criticism. Some educators report resistance from students who may prefer more passive learning approaches (McFarland, 2004; Yon, 2003), while others question the method's efficacy in certain contexts (Kelly, 2009). Seaman and Fellenz (1989) and Legge (1971) have argued

that discussion is less effective in large classes, during short sessions, or when applied to topics that do not naturally lend themselves to debate. More recent research by Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014) suggests that in larger classes, discussions can lead to uneven participation, where more dominant voices overshadow quieter students. Similarly, Ferlazzo and Sileo (2017) warn that without careful moderation, discussions may inadvertently marginalize less confident participants.

Nonetheless, despite these limitations, discussion remains an essential and effective pedagogical tool. It offers learners the chance to move beyond rote memorization, engaging instead in a process that refines their ideas through debate and reflective dialogue. This dynamic process is particularly beneficial in adult and teenage education, where learners' diverse experiences can enrich classroom discussions. The present study, therefore, focuses on face-to-face classroom discussions—a format with which all participants are familiar—to explore how such interactions foster critical thinking and active engagement in learning.

2.7.1 Group Discussion and Its Role in Postgraduate Study

Group discussion is a vital component of postgraduate study for several reasons. In postgraduate programs, students are often required to engage with complex theories and research findings. Group discussions create an environment where students critically analyze and debate ideas, leading to a deeper understanding and innovative problem-solving. This collaborative process encourages learners to challenge assumptions, refine their perspectives, and integrate diverse viewpoints into their analysis (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Postgraduate study typically involves specialized, in-depth exploration of subjects. Group discussions allow students to share their unique experiences and insights, enriching the collective understanding of the topic. This collaborative learning approach not only builds a supportive academic community but also mirrors real-world professional settings where teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential (Brookfield, 2012). Effective communication is crucial for success in both academic and professional settings. Through group discussions, postgraduate students have the opportunity to articulate complex ideas clearly, engage in constructive debates, and provide as well as receive feedback. These interactions help refine their oral and interpersonal skills, preparing

them for future roles as researchers, educators, or industry professionals (Boud, 2013). Engaging in group discussions also encourages students to reflect on their own learning processes and research methodologies. This reflective practice is fundamental for continuous improvement and personal growth. By considering alternative perspectives and critically assessing their own work through peer feedback, students develop a habit of lifelong learning and adaptability (Mezirow, 1997). Furthermore, group discussions often serve as a platform for peer assessment, where students learn to give and receive constructive criticism. This process not only helps them refine their research projects and academic writing but also enables them to gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their work from the perspectives of their peers (Boud, 2013).

In summary, group discussions are integral to postgraduate study as they foster an environment of critical inquiry, collaboration, and continuous learning. They enhance academic performance while equipping students with the essential skills needed to succeed in their future careers.

2.7.2 Impact of UWTC During Group Discussions on Academic Success Among Postgraduate Students

Group discussions are a critical component of postgraduate education, fostering knowledge exchange, problem-solving, and academic collaboration. However, an unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) during these discussions can negatively impact academic success in several ways. One major consequence of UWTC is reduced knowledge acquisition and critical thinking. Group discussions help students develop a deeper understanding of complex topics through peer interactions. When students are unwilling to communicate, they miss opportunities to challenge ideas, refine arguments, and gain diverse perspectives, leading to weaker comprehension and critical thinking skills. Another significant impact is the lower contribution to group assignments and projects. Many postgraduate courses require collaborative assignments. Students who do not engage actively may contribute less, leading to unbalanced workloads among group members and lower-quality outputs, which can negatively impact grades. Additionally, UWTC can result in decreased confidence and hinder professional development. Regular participation in discussions helps

students build confidence in articulating ideas, which is essential for academic presentations, thesis defenses, and professional networking. UWTC can hinder this development, making it difficult for students to present their research effectively. Moreover, students who are unwilling to engage in discussions receive limited feedback, which affects academic improvement. Engaging in discussions allows students to receive immediate feedback on their ideas, improving their understanding and refining their arguments. Those unwilling to communicate may struggle with academic writing, research clarity, and conceptual development due to a lack of constructive input. UWTC can also lead to social and academic isolation. A lack of engagement with peers and faculty can result in decreased academic motivation, making it harder for students to seek support or collaborate on research and professional opportunities. This isolation may further exacerbate the challenges of postgraduate studies. Finally, UWTC can lead to lower assessment performance. Postgraduate students are often assessed based on participation, presentations, and teamwork. Avoiding group discussions can lead to lower scores in these areas, directly affecting overall academic performance.

Addressing UWTC is crucial for enhancing academic success among postgraduate students. Strategies such as creating supportive learning environments, providing communication skills training, and encouraging active participation can help mitigate the negative impacts of UWTC.

2.7.3 Coping Strategies for Enhancing WTC in English Group Discussions

This literature review explores various coping strategies and pedagogical interventions aimed at enhancing the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Thai postgraduate students. A significant challenge faced by many postgraduate students is their reluctance to participate in group discussions, often due to factors like language anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation. The review highlights a multifaceted approach to addressing this issue, encompassing psychological, pedagogical, and technological strategies.

Psychological approaches are central to reducing anxiety and building confidence. Self-regulation techniques, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflective

journaling, have been shown to lower anxiety and enhance communicative confidence by enabling students to plan, assess, and adjust their language use (Zimmerman, 2000; Tseng et al., 2014). Additionally, positive self-talk has proven effective in counteracting negative thoughts and boosting self-efficacy (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2020). Relaxation exercises and visualization methods, when incorporated into language learning, can help students gradually build speaking confidence in a supportive environment (Pajares, 2018; Lee, 2020). Recent studies suggest that combining these strategies with digital platforms can further enhance communication competence and self-regulated learning (Liu & Zhang, 2021; Park & Son, 2022).

Pedagogical interventions also play a crucial role in increasing students' WTC. Role-playing activities simulate real-life scenarios, providing students with a safe space to experiment with language without the fear of judgment (Bygate, 2007; Kim, 2018). Structured speaking activities, such as guided debates and scripted dialogues, offer clear frameworks for students to organize their thoughts, thus reducing anxiety and facilitating smoother transitions into spontaneous communication (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2018). Peer support groups have been identified as effective environments for reducing the fear of negative evaluation, as students provide mutual encouragement and constructive feedback to one another (Yashima, 2002; Mercer, 2020).

Teachers are instrumental in promoting WTC by using scaffolding techniques to break down complex tasks and offering constructive feedback that supports student growth (Vygotsky, 1978; Freeman, 2018). When feedback is delivered in a non-threatening and supportive manner, it encourages students to take risks and engage more actively in discussions (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Instructors who foster a growth mindset, where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, help students feel more comfortable participating (Dörnyei, 2005; Pajares, 2018).

Technological interventions also provide alternative ways to reduce communication anxiety. Digital tools like online discussion forums, video conferencing, and language learning apps create less intimidating spaces for practice (Godwin-Jones, 2018). These platforms allow for asynchronous communication, giving students more time to formulate responses. Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and computer-

mediated communication (CMC) tools simulate authentic communication environments, enhancing speaking confidence and intercultural competence (Warschauer, 2020; Lee, 2020).

Finally, developing intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness is another key strategy for improving WTC. As academic and professional environments become increasingly globalized, the ability to navigate cultural differences and understand contextual nuances in language use is essential (Byram, 1997; Lustig & Koester, 2018). Training in intercultural competence helps students overcome the anxiety associated with cultural misunderstandings, further contributing to their willingness to engage in communication (Deardorff, 2019).

In conclusion, the literature indicates that a combination of psychological, pedagogical, and technological strategies is essential for enhancing WTC among postgraduate students. These interventions address the challenges of language anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation, promoting active participation and continuous improvement in English communication. As global educational contexts evolve, further research into these strategies will be vital to meet the language learning needs of postgraduate students.

2.8 Previous Research

This section provides an overview of research on the unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners across various contexts, highlighting three main areas of investigation. Some studies focus on assessing the levels of UWTC, while others examine the underlying causes, contributing factors, or reasons behind it. Additionally, a growing body of research explores the strategies EFL learners employ to cope with or overcome their UWTC.

Liu and Jackson (2008) investigated the unwillingness to communicate and anxiety experienced by Chinese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) within English language classrooms. A 70-item survey administered to 547 first-year undergraduate non-English majors revealed several key results: (a) while most students were willing to engage in interpersonal conversations, many were reluctant to take risks by speaking English in class; (b) over one-third of the students reported

experiencing anxiety in their English classes, including fears of negative evaluation and apprehension toward public speaking and tests; (c) unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety were significantly correlated with each other, as well as with students' self-assessed English proficiency and exposure to English; and (d) numerous variables examined in the study served as strong predictors of both unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety, which in turn were powerful predictors of each other.

Guo (2010) examined the relationships between real-life communication anxiety, online unwillingness to communicate, impression management, and self-disclosure across various Internet platforms. Using a convenience sampling method, data were gathered from 406 participants aged 16 to 35. Contrary to initial expectations, findings revealed that individuals with high levels of communication anxiety were also less willing to engage in online communication. Furthermore, the study showed that those who avoided face-to-face communication to prevent becoming tongue-tied often engage in regular impression management online. The results indicated that different aspects of self-disclosure were influenced by communication anxiety, reluctance to communicate, and impression management behaviors. Communication anxiety was notably associated with negative and dishonest self-disclosure. Additionally, users tended to prefer social networking sites (SNS) for impression management. The study also highlighted gender differences, with females deriving more satisfaction from online communication and showing a greater willingness to share personal experiences. Moreover, older and more educated individuals were more likely to express deeper thoughts, emotions, and beliefs online.

In Thailand, Reinders and Wattana (2014) examined the impact of digital gameplay on learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC), defined as an individual's "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). Thirty Thai EFL learners enrolled in a university language course participated in six 90-minute sessions playing *Ragnarok Online*, a popular online role-playing game. The game was hosted on a private server, accessible only to study participants. The

researchers modified the game by incorporating special instructions, or quests—missions assigned to players to complete in order to earn items and advance within the game—specifically designed to promote collaboration and communication. To assess participants' WTC, a series of questionnaires were administered, adapted from MacIntyre et al.'s (2001) WTC scale and prior research on language and communication anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) and perceived competence (Compton, 2004; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). These questionnaires measured participants' self-perceived willingness to use English, confidence, anxiety levels, and perceived communicative competence. The surveys were conducted both at the beginning of the course and after the six gaming sessions. Initial results indicated that students exhibited low confidence, high anxiety, low perceived competence, and low WTC. However, the follow-up assessment demonstrated significant improvements, with participants reporting increased confidence, reduced anxiety, enhanced perceived competence, and greater willingness to communicate.

In 2021, another study in Saudi Arabia was conducted by Alqarni, investigating the relationship between Foreign Language Classroom Enjoyment (FLCE), Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), and demographic factors (age, gender, and academic performance) and their influence on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in both online and traditional face-to-face learning environments. The study involved 106 Saudi undergraduate EFL students who completed an online questionnaire. The data were analyzed using t-tests, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical regression. The findings revealed that: (1) learners exhibited higher levels of WTC in online settings compared to face-to-face environments; (2) FLCE positively influenced WTC, whereas FLSA negatively affected it in both learning contexts; and (3) course grades positively predicted WTC only in the online learning context. These results suggest that online learning can enhance learners' willingness to communicate, particularly in speaking activities.

Alnaeem and Alwasidi (2023) investigated the influence of affective factors in language learning. Building upon this work, the present study aims to examine the

levels of shyness and willingness to communicate (WTC) among EFL learners, as well as the relationship between these two affective variables and their impact on students' in-class communication skills from the learners' perspectives. The study emphasizes the importance of considering the effects of individual personality traits on language learning outcomes. A total of 360 Saudi EFL learners from a public university in Saudi Arabia completed standardized scales measuring shyness and WTC. To gain deeper insights, 27 participants were also interviewed to explore their perceptions regarding how these traits influence their classroom communication. Quantitative findings revealed that most students demonstrated moderate levels of both shyness and WTC. Additionally, a negative correlation was observed between shyness and overall WTC, with the strongest correlations found in the subcategories of communication with strangers, participation in meetings, and public speaking. The qualitative analysis further revealed participants' perceptions, misconceptions, the interplay between the two variables, and factors contributing to their levels of shyness and WTC.

In China, Jiayi and Junhong (2023) examined L2 learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in group settings. This study specifically focused on the WTC of non-English major junior students and aimed to: (1) assess their WTC levels during L2 group work, (2) explore the relationship between L2 proficiency and WTC in group settings, and (3) identify situational variables that influence learners' WTC during group work. The findings revealed that: (1) participants generally demonstrated a relatively high level of WTC in group work (Mean = 32.835); (2) students with higher L2 proficiency exhibited higher WTC levels in group communication; and (3) certain situational factors positively influenced WTC, such as engaging with familiar or personally relevant topics and working in groups. Additionally, students expressed a preference for having some preparation or wait time before beginning discussions with group members.

Alenezi (2024) investigated anxiety and willingness to communicate (WTC) among Saudi undergraduate students in online English classes. The study involved 227 Saudi EFL students (78 males and 149 females) enrolled in the English Language and

Literature program at Northern Border University. Data were collected using a 31-item survey that included two open-ended questions. The results showed that students exhibited moderate levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and WTC. A positive but non-significant relationship was found between FLA and WTC among the participants. Additionally, male and female students reported comparable levels of FLA and WTC in the online learning environment. Qualitative analysis highlighted participants' perspectives on factors that positively and negatively affect their WTC in online English classes. The study concludes with pedagogical implications derived from these findings.

Previous research has extensively explored a range of factors contributing to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in diverse educational and cultural contexts. These studies have examined psychological influences such as anxiety and lack of confidence, linguistic challenges including limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, as well as socio-cultural and classroom-related factors that may inhibit learners from actively engaging in English communication.

Kadi and Madini (2019) investigated the causes of Saudi students' unwillingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. Utilizing an online questionnaire with 126 participants and semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, the research identified factors such as fear of making mistakes, low language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, lack of self-confidence, inefficient school education, and teacher/classmate-related issues as primary contributors to students' reluctance to engage in communication. The study highlighted the complexity of unwillingness to communicate as a multifaceted issue influenced by both psychological and environmental factors, suggesting targeted pedagogical strategies to enhance classroom communication.

In Thailand, Karnchanachari's (2019) study examined the factors influencing Thai learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the EFL classroom. Participants included Thai students from both Thai and International Engineering programs at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand, along with Thai and foreign instructors. The

study was based on the assumption that Thai students' WTC in English within both programs was influenced by factors beyond their English proficiency. Data were collected using Likert-scale WTC questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with a quantitative descriptive approach applied for analysis. Additionally, content analysis was conducted to examine qualitative data and provide deeper insights into the research questions. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in WTC levels between Thai EFL learners in the two programs, as well as variations in the factors influencing their WTC.

In Saudi Arabia, Kadi, Rasha & Madini, Abeer (2019) adopted a mixed methods approach to investigate the causes of Saudi students' unwillingness to communicate in the EFL classroom. A total of 136 Saudi female preparatory year students at the English Language Institute (ELI) in King Abdulaziz University (KAU) participated in this study. Two data collection instruments were utilized: an online questionnaire with 126 participants and semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, and the qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically using NVivo. The findings revealed that the unwillingness to communicate was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that stemmed from multiple causes. The main causes reported by the participants included fear of making mistakes, low language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, lack of self-confidence, inefficient school education, and teacher/classmate-related factors.

In Iran, Amirzadi's (2020) present study aimed to examine the relationships between willingness to communicate (WTC) in English within the classroom context and four trait-like variables: L2 confidence, L2 motivation, L2 anxiety, and grit. The study also aimed to propose a WTC model for the EFL classroom setting in Iran and identify the most significant predictor of WTC in English. The participants were 488 non-English major university students from two public and two private universities in Iran. The research instrument used was an online questionnaire. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with Amos. The key findings are as follows: First, positive relationships were found between WTC in English and L2 confidence,

L2 motivation, and grit, while a negative relationship was observed between WTC in English and L2 anxiety. Second, according to the finalized model, L2 confidence, L2 motivation, and L2 anxiety were identified as predictors of WTC in English in Iranian EFL classroom settings, with grit acting as a mediator through L2 motivation and L2 anxiety. Finally, L2 motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of WTC in English.

In Indonesia, Ramli., Hidayah, Edy and Esmianti (2021) explored the factors influencing English students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in the classroom context. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, involving eighteen students from the English department at the State Islamic Institute of Curup as participants. Nine students were categorized into the WTC group, while the other nine were placed in the UWTC group. This grouping was based on their attitudes toward speaking subjects and the lecturer's consideration. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using an interactive model. The findings revealed that the factors influencing students' WTC included classroom environment, teacher support, personality, and self-confidence. In contrast, the factors contributing to students' UWTC included linguistic issues such as a lack of vocabulary, poor grammatical competence, and inadequate English pronunciation. Additionally, non-linguistic factors such as psychological problems, low self-confidence, and anxiety also played a significant role.

Another study in Indonesia by Ilyas's (2022) examined the factors influencing students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and unwillingness to communicate (Un-WTC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education in Indonesia. A case study was conducted with first-year students at Tanjungpura University from various non-English departments. The students were observed for six weeks, after which 10 participants—representing both WTC and Un-WTC groups—were selected for semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed two main categories of factors contributing to WTC and Un-WTC: individual and external factors. Individual factors included ideal L2 self, confidence, anxiety, and perceived communicative competence, while external factors encompassed the teacher's personality, types of activities and topics, and the classroom atmosphere. Both individual and external

factors were interrelated and had a significant impact on students' WTC and Un-WTC in the EFL classroom.

In Japan, Muroya's (2022) empirical study examined the factors contributing to Japanese learners' reluctance to speak English as a foreign language (EFL), regardless of their learning duration, proficiency level, or communication setting. The study explored self-perception of second language (L2) English abilities, anxiety, and interlocutors as potential causes of their unwillingness to speak L2 English, in comparison to their first language (L1) Japanese. An online questionnaire was administered to 27 Japanese undergraduate students (aged 19–22) from non-English majors at a national university in Tokyo, Japan. The findings indicated that factors affecting self-perception and willingness to speak played a crucial role in managing interpersonal relationships in spoken interactions, with a greater impact in L2 English contexts than in L1 Japanese. The study suggested that Japanese learners' other-directedness stemmed more from "consideration for others" than from "face-saving."

In Turkey, Solhi and Thumvichit (2024) employed Q methodology to examine the subjective perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners regarding the factors influencing their willingness to communicate (WTC). A total of 40 undergraduate students from an English language teaching program at a Turkish university participated in the study. Based on shared perspectives, the participants were categorized into three groups: self-assured communicators, motivated communicators, and nervous communicators. Self-assured communicators demonstrated high levels of confidence, while motivated communicators exhibited strong determination to enhance their speaking skills. In contrast, nervous communicators experienced significant anxiety, which hindered their WTC. The findings suggest that a combination of internal and external factors interacts to shape EFL learners' WTC in the classroom.

Edrees & Stanikzai (2024) investigated the factors contributing to EFL learners' reluctance to engage in English oral communication. Data were gathered using a questionnaire that examined three key dimensions: teacher-related factors, affective factors, and environmental factors. The findings indicated that among these

dimensions, teacher-related factors had the most significant influence on learners' unwillingness to communicate. Regarding affective factors, the study identified a lack of family support and motivation, fear of peer criticism, and poor listening skills as major contributors to students' reluctance to participate in oral communication. Additionally, unfamiliar topics and limited vocabulary further hindered their willingness to speak. Environmental factors, including large class sizes, limited learner autonomy, inadequate use of ICT tools, and noisy classrooms, were also found to negatively impact EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English. The study underscores the crucial role of teachers in fostering a supportive, student-centered learning environment and building positive teacher-student relationships to encourage learners' participation in English-speaking activities.

Another study in Saudi Arabia by Al-Wossabi's (2024) investigated the reasons why Saudi EFL students may face challenges in speaking English, similar to those experienced by students in other EFL contexts. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, examining speaking reluctance in various settings, including the Saudi EFL context. This study adopted an alternative approach to address students' hesitance to speak, moving away from the traditional focus on motivation and anxiety as primary factors contributing to speaking reluctance. Instead, this study explored the underlying conditions that lead to decreased motivation and increased anxiety. The findings from the review highlighted critical factors such as students' unreadiness, lack of relevance, artificial and restricted learning environments, fear, lack of self-confidence, and low proficiency levels, all of which contribute to anxiety, lack of motivation, and diminished interest.

Previous research has explored a range of coping strategies employed by individuals to manage their unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) and enhance their willingness to communicate (WTC). Gao and Zhang (2017) examined the role of cultural adaptation in coping with unwillingness to communicate among international students. The study involved 160 international students in China and assessed their cultural adaptation levels and communication behaviors. Findings indicated that students with higher cultural adaptation experienced lower unwillingness to

communicate. The research suggests that facilitating cultural adaptation can be an effective coping strategy to enhance communication willingness.

Rahimi and Bigdeli (2019) explored the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning in mitigating unwillingness to communicate among EFL learners. The study involved 180 Iranian high school students who participated in peer-assisted learning sessions over a semester. Results showed that collaborative learning environments reduced communication apprehension and increased students' confidence in using the target language. The study suggests that peer-assisted learning can be an effective coping strategy to encourage communication.

Lee and Ng (2020) examined the impact of mindfulness-based interventions on reducing unwillingness to communicate among secondary school students. The study implemented an eight-week mindfulness program with 150 participants and measured changes in their communication behaviors. Findings revealed that mindfulness practices significantly decreased students' communication anxiety and increased their willingness to participate in classroom discussions. The research highlights mindfulness as a viable coping strategy to address communication reluctance.

Martinez and Rivera (2021) examined the role of teacher immediacy behaviors in coping with students' unwillingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. The study surveyed 200 Spanish EFL learners and analyzed how different types of teacher immediacy—both verbal (such as praise, humor, and personalized feedback) and non-verbal (such as eye contact, gestures, and proximity)—influenced students' communication engagement. The findings revealed that students who perceived their instructors as approachable and supportive experienced lower levels of communication apprehension and showed a greater willingness to participate in discussions. The study also highlighted that immediate teachers fostered a more interactive and comfortable learning environment, reducing anxiety and promoting active student engagement. Furthermore, results suggested that sustained use of teacher immediacy behaviors could lead to long-term improvements in students' confidence and motivation to communicate in English.

Miri and Pishghadam (2021) investigated the role of emotion regulation in reducing communication apprehension among EFL learners. The study involved 200 Iranian university students and utilized emotion regulation and communication apprehension questionnaires. Results indicated that students with higher emotion regulation abilities experienced lower levels of communication apprehension. The findings suggest that incorporating emotion regulation training into language education can serve as an effective coping strategy to enhance learners' willingness to communicate.

Kim and Kim (2022) explored the impact of assertiveness training on reducing unwillingness to communicate among Korean EFL learners. The study conducted a 10-week assertiveness training program with 100 university students and measured changes in their communication apprehension. Results demonstrated that assertiveness training significantly decreased unwillingness to communicate and increased students' participation in class. The research supports assertiveness training as a coping strategy to address communication reluctance.

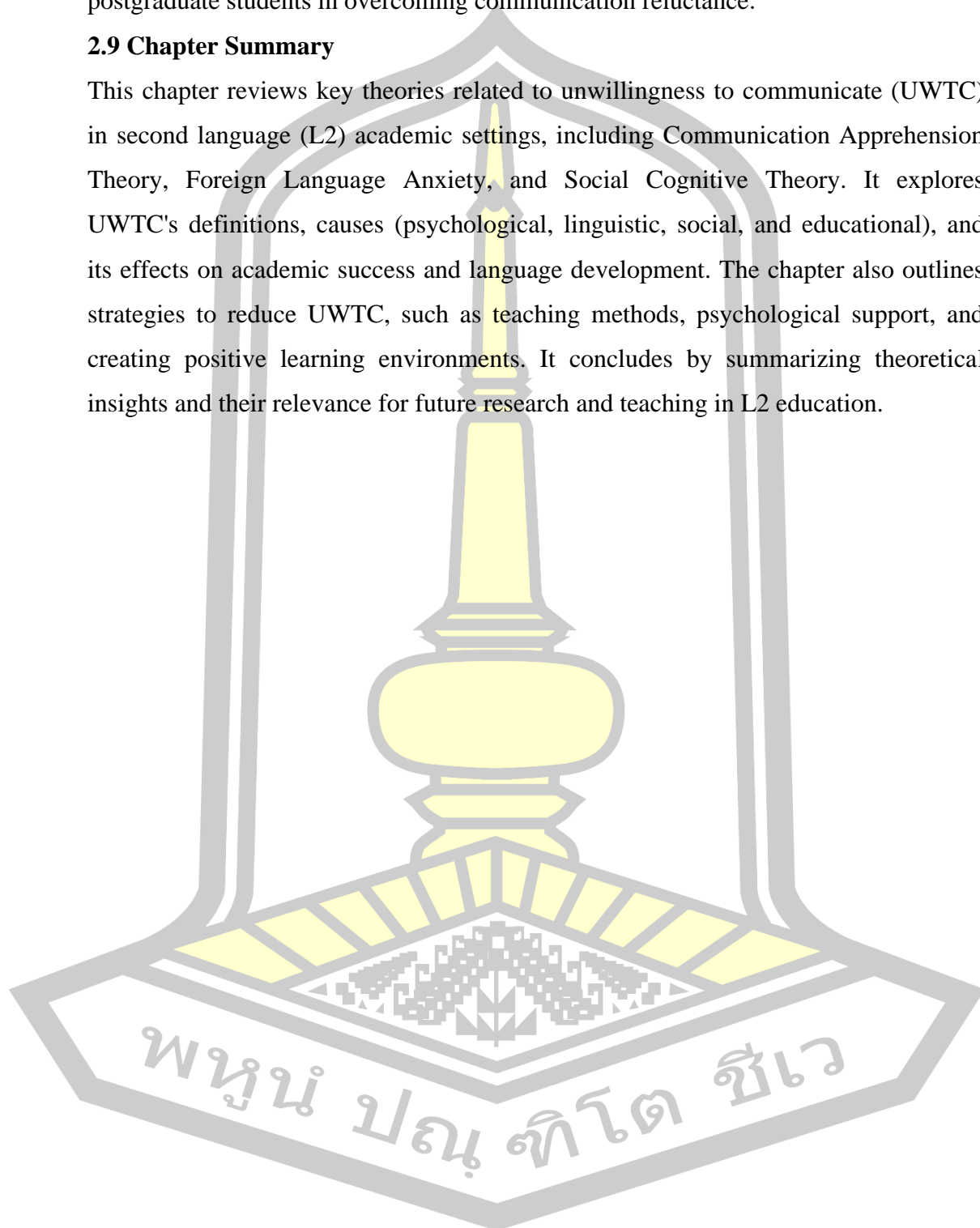
Singh and Raj (2023) investigated the effectiveness of storytelling as a coping strategy to reduce unwillingness to communicate among ESL learners. The study involved 120 Indian high school students who participated in storytelling sessions over three months. Findings revealed that storytelling activities reduced communication anxiety and increased students' willingness to speak in English. The research highlights storytelling as an engaging coping strategy to promote communication.

Despite extensive research on communication apprehension and foreign language anxiety, significant gaps remain in understanding Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC), particularly in postgraduate education. Most UWTC studies have primarily focused on undergraduates or general language learners, leaving the experiences of postgraduate students largely unexplored. Postgraduate education demands higher levels of academic discourse, which may exacerbate communication apprehension, as these students face increased expectations for independent learning and advanced oral communication. Additionally, research on coping strategies for UWTC is limited.

Addressing these gaps will provide valuable insights into how to better support postgraduate students in overcoming communication reluctance.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews key theories related to unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in second language (L2) academic settings, including Communication Apprehension Theory, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Social Cognitive Theory. It explores UWTC's definitions, causes (psychological, linguistic, social, and educational), and its effects on academic success and language development. The chapter also outlines strategies to reduce UWTC, such as teaching methods, psychological support, and creating positive learning environments. It concludes by summarizing theoretical insights and their relevance for future research and teaching in L2 education.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, encompassing the research design, participant selection criteria, research context, instruments used, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. The study aimed to investigate the levels of unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions, identify the underlying reasons for their UWTC, and examine the strategies they employed to manage their UWTC in these discussions.

3.1 Research Design/Paradigm

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which serves as a research methodology with its own philosophical foundations and investigative techniques. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), mixed methods research integrates these philosophical principles to guide the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources within a single study. This approach is particularly beneficial for addressing complex research questions, as it combines elements of post-positivism and interpretivism (Fetters, 2016) to integrate qualitative and quantitative data, thereby generating meaningful insights into the research topic. Furthermore, it offers a strong methodological framework, flexibility in data collection, and a more in-depth understanding of specific cases (Maxwell, 2016). The use of mixed methods enables researchers to examine research questions in a comprehensive and detailed manner (Enosh, Tzafrir, & Stolovy, 2014), supporting the broader applicability of findings. For instance, the inclusion of a quantitative component allows researchers to collect data from a large sample, increasing the potential for generalizing results to a wider population.

In this study, quantitative data were collected using the Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) questionnaire developed by Burgoon (1976) to investigate the level of students' UWTC in English in group discussions. The structured format of the questionnaire facilitated the identification of trends and patterns in students' communication behaviors while ensuring consistency in responses, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the collected data. To complement the quantitative

findings, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six selected participants. These interviews provided deeper insights into the reasons behind students' UWTC during group discussions. Using open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to articulate their experiences, thoughts, and emotions related to their UWTC, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the psychological, social, and contextual factors influencing their UWTC. Additionally, the qualitative data enabled an in-depth analysis of the coping strategies students employed to manage their UWTC, offering valuable perspectives on how they navigated and addressed their UWTC to engage in group discussions. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study provided a comprehensive examination of UWTC, offering a holistic understanding of the factors influencing students' communication behaviors and the strategies they utilized to overcome communication challenges.

3.2 Participants' Profile

The study's participants comprised 37 Thai postgraduate students enrolled in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program at a Thai university. They ranged in age from 24 to 53 years, representing a diverse group in terms of age, educational background, and life experience. Despite these differences, all participants shared a common academic focus on English language teaching and a commitment to improving their proficiency in both English and teaching methodologies. Most had completed their undergraduate studies in Thai-medium institutions, with varying degrees of prior exposure to English-speaking environments. Notably, none had lived in an English-speaking country, which likely influenced their overall English proficiency. As they studied in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) setting, they encountered significant challenges in group discussions. The fast-paced nature of EMI classrooms, requiring quick thinking and spontaneous responses, further compounded these difficulties, often leaving students struggling to keep up. Consequently, these challenges led to minimal participation, reduced confidence, and missed opportunities for academic and professional development.

The participants' linguistic background, coupled with the educational context of the study, made them particularly relevant for exploring the phenomenon of

unwillingness to communicate (UWTC). Their varying English proficiency and challenges in oral communication provided insight into the level of their reluctance to participate in English in group discussions. Given their shared academic goals and language learning experiences, the participants offered valuable perspectives on how linguistic challenges intersect with social and psychological factors to shape their willingness or unwillingness to communicate in academic settings. Their experiences highlighted the complexity of UWTC and provided a rich context for understanding how Thai postgraduate students navigated communication challenges in group discussions, particularly in the context of English language teaching.

3.3 Research Context

The participants in this study were enrolled in a diverse range of English Language Teaching (ELT)-related courses that were integral to their degree program. These courses were specifically designed to equip students with advanced knowledge and skills in several key areas relevant to the field of ELT. Among the areas covered were Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which provided insights into how individuals acquire and learn additional languages; English Language Teaching Theories, which explored the various theoretical frameworks guiding ELT practices; and Discourse Analysis in ELT, which examined the ways language is used in communication and how it impacts teaching. Other areas included Global Englishes in Language Teaching, focusing on the evolving role of English in a global context, and Research Methods in ELT, which introduced students to methodologies for conducting research in the field. Testing and Assessment in ELT covered the principles and practices of evaluating language learners' proficiency, while the Seminar in ELT offered students the opportunity to critically engage with current issues and trends in language teaching. Lastly, English for Thesis Writing aimed to enhance students' academic writing skills, specifically for producing their thesis or dissertation.

All of these courses were conducted in English, allowing the participants to immerse themselves in the language and apply their skills in an academic setting. The courses were taught by two Thai instructors and one foreign instructor, all of whom held doctoral degrees in areas such as Language Education, TESOL, or Applied Linguistics. These instructors brought a wealth of expertise to the classroom,

enriching the learning experience. In terms of structure, each class typically began with a lecture delivered by the course instructor, followed by small group discussions. These discussions provided students with the opportunity to engage deeply with the course content, exchange ideas, and collaborate with their peers in a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Additionally, every course incorporated group discussions and subsequent class presentations based on the topics explored during these discussions. This structure fostered active participation, critical thinking, and effective communication among students. This combination of lectures, group discussions, and presentations created an ideal environment to study students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) during group discussions. Given that the participants were actively involved in these classroom activities, they were able to provide valuable insights into the challenges they faced and the strategies they employed to manage their UWTC in such settings. Consequently, the classroom environment served as a natural context for investigating the factors influencing UWTC among Thai postgraduate students.

3.4 Research Instruments

To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, this study employed two research instruments: Burgoon's (1976) Willingness to Communicate (WTC) questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. A detailed description of these instruments was provided below:

3.4.1 Unwillingness to Communicative Questionnaire (UWTC)

In this study, the primary data collection tool was the Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) questionnaire, originally developed by Burgoon (1976). This instrument was designed to measure participants' reluctance to communicate in English during group discussions. Although few studies have directly employed Burgoon's original questionnaire, her work has had a lasting impact on the field. Notably, McCroskey and Baer (1985) expanded on her ideas by developing the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) construct, shifting the focus from communication avoidance to a more positive perspective on individuals' readiness to communicate. This shift has since inspired a wide range of studies examining factors influencing WTC, particularly in second language learning and classroom settings. While the direct use of Burgoon's UWTC scale is now uncommon, her conceptual framework remains

foundational in research on communication behaviors, especially in educational contexts where understanding students' communication apprehension is key to developing effective teaching strategies.

The UWTC questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of five items that collected participants' demographic information, including age, gender, years of study, and other relevant background details. The second part contained 25 items aimed at assessing the factors contributing to participants' unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions. These items were designed to explore three important factors, including Self-Perceived Competence (SPC), General Reluctance to Communicate, and Communication Apprehension (CA). This questionnaire was adopted because of its acceptable internal consistency. Many studies have reported Cronbach's alpha values typically above 0.70, indicating good reliability (Burgoon, 1976; Levine & McCroskey, 1990).

The questionnaire employed a 3-point scale, a widely used psychometric tool that enabled participants to express their level of agreement with each statement presented. The scale consisted of three response options: (1) Agree, (2) Uncertain, and (3) Disagree. This simplified response structure was intentionally chosen to minimize respondent fatigue and encourage intuitive decision-making, allowing participants to indicate their stance without excessive cognitive burden. The structured nature of the scale also facilitated ease of analysis, enabling the identification of patterns and trends related to participants' unwillingness to engage in discussions.

3.4.2 A Semi-Structured Interview

These interviews aimed to explore the reasons behind their UWTC and the strategies. The researcher purposively selected six participants for a semi-structured interview based on their unwillingness to communicate. The range of scores and meanings is as follows:

Range of Scores	Meaning
56-75	Low unwillingness to communicate
36-55	Moderate unwillingness to communicate
15-35	High unwillingness to communicate

The interviews aimed to explore participants' opinions on the reasons for their unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, as well as the strategies they employed to manage it in such settings. The qualitative data from the interviews complemented and reinforced the findings obtained from the online UWTC questionnaire. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives in greater detail, providing a richer context for interpreting the questionnaire results.

Each interview was conducted individually and lasted 20 minutes, enabling the researcher to ask open-ended questions while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging areas of interest. Following the interviews, all audio-recorded data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher promptly to ensure the accuracy of the information. The transcriptions were then systematically coded to identify key themes and patterns related to the factors influencing participants' UWTC in English. This coding process involved categorizing responses into meaningful segments, which were subsequently analyzed to further support the findings from the questionnaire. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, the study offered a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to UWTC in group discussions, facilitating a more nuanced interpretation of the research questions. The following are interview questions designed to address RQ2 and RQ3.

Interview Questions for RQ2:

- 1) What do you think about participating in group discussions?
- 2) How do group discussions benefit you as a postgraduate student?
- 3) Have you ever felt unwilling to participate in group discussions in English? If so, can you explain why?
- 4) Can you recall a specific instance when you felt particularly reluctant to speak in English during a group discussion?
- 5) What are the main reasons that make you feel hesitant to speak in English during group discussions?

Interview Questions for RQ3:

- 1) What strategies do you use to overcome your reluctance to speak in English during group discussions?
- 2) When you feel hesitant to participate in group discussions, how do you manage your anxiety or nervousness about speaking in English?
- 3) Are there any techniques you've developed to help you express your ideas more confidently in English during group discussions?
- 4) Have you found any ways to overcome language barriers or misunderstandings in group discussions that help you feel more willing to participate?"

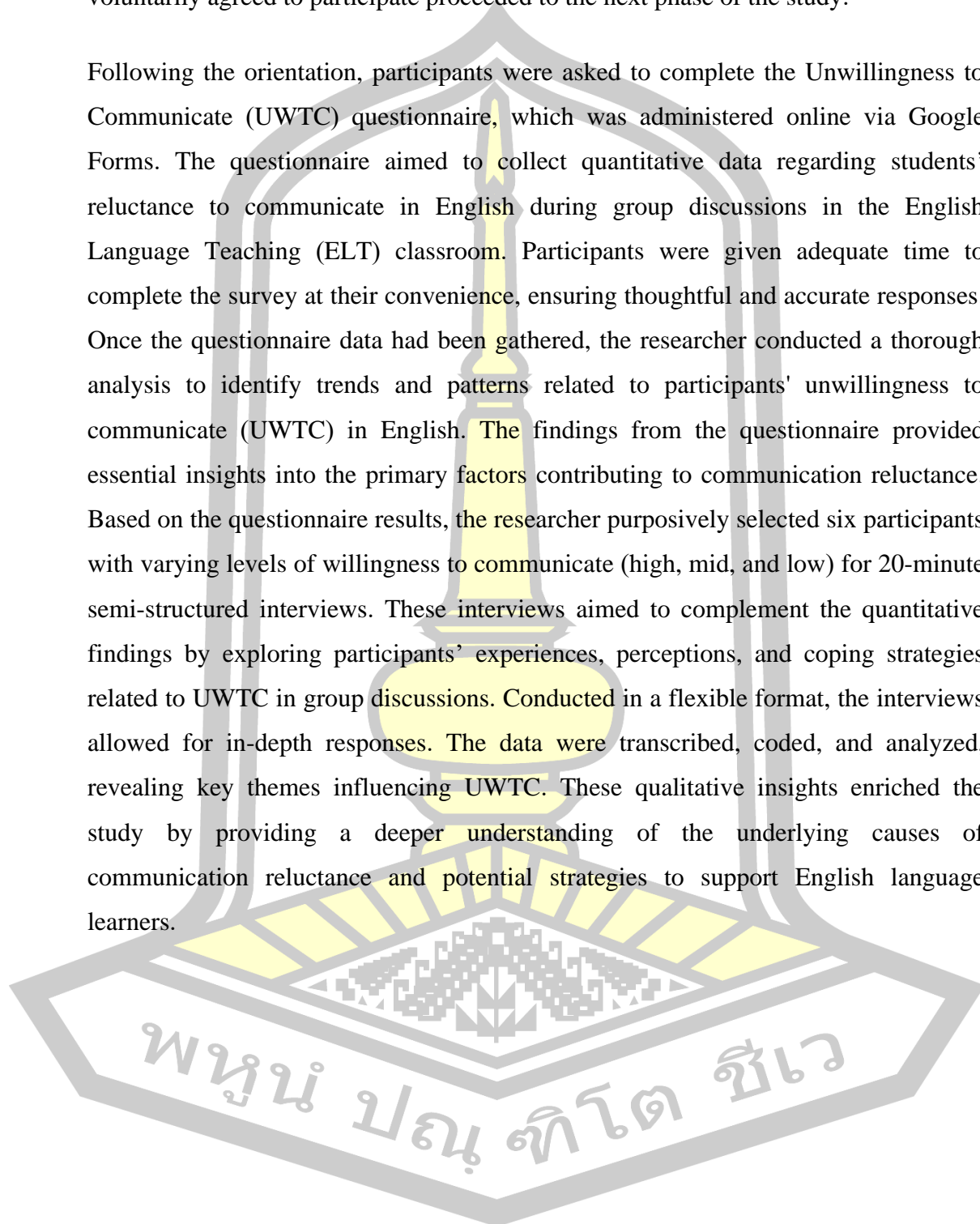
3.5 Data Collection Procedure

To initiate the data collection process, the researcher first contacted the English Language Teaching (ELT) program director to inform them about the study's objectives and to seek permission to access the students' email addresses for participant recruitment. The researcher provided a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, significance, and ethical considerations, ensuring transparency and compliance with institutional guidelines. Upon receiving approval, the researcher proceeded with participant outreach. An invitation email was sent to potential participants, which included comprehensive information about the study. The email clearly outlined the research aims, the scope of the investigation, and the specific requirements for participation. It emphasized the voluntary nature of involvement and assured participants that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. To ensure participants fully understood their role in the study, they were invited to attend an online orientation session via a virtual platform.

During the orientation session, the researcher provided a more in-depth explanation of the research objectives, the expected duration of participation, and the ethical safeguards in place to protect participants' rights. Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification regarding the study. Additionally, a consent form was distributed electronically, allowing participants to review the terms

of their participation before providing informed consent. Only students who voluntarily agreed to participate proceeded to the next phase of the study.

Following the orientation, participants were asked to complete the Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) questionnaire, which was administered online via Google Forms. The questionnaire aimed to collect quantitative data regarding students' reluctance to communicate in English during group discussions in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom. Participants were given adequate time to complete the survey at their convenience, ensuring thoughtful and accurate responses. Once the questionnaire data had been gathered, the researcher conducted a thorough analysis to identify trends and patterns related to participants' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English. The findings from the questionnaire provided essential insights into the primary factors contributing to communication reluctance. Based on the questionnaire results, the researcher purposively selected six participants with varying levels of willingness to communicate (high, mid, and low) for 20-minute semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to complement the quantitative findings by exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies related to UWTC in group discussions. Conducted in a flexible format, the interviews allowed for in-depth responses. The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, revealing key themes influencing UWTC. These qualitative insights enriched the study by providing a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of communication reluctance and potential strategies to support English language learners.



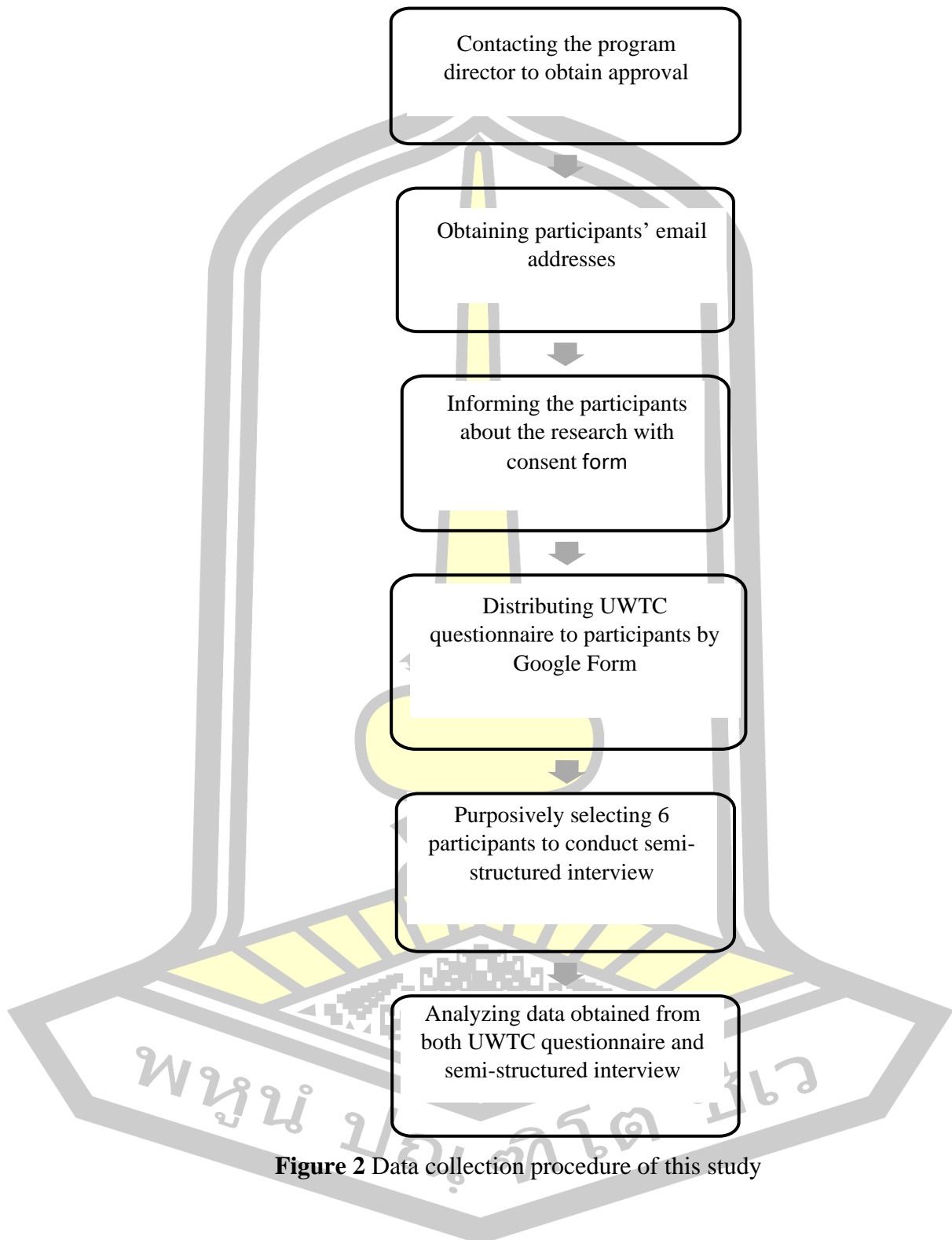


Figure 2 Data collection procedure of this study

3.6 Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the Unwillingness-to-Communicate (UWTC) questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The means and standard deviations of the items were calculated to uncover the participants' perceptions of the level of their unwillingness to communicate in English. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data, allowing for a clear understanding of how participants felt about the various factors influencing their reluctance to engage in group discussions in English.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, thematic analysis was conducted to examine the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The focus of the thematic analysis was on the participants' perspectives regarding the reasons for their unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions, as well as the strategies they employed to cope with their UWTC. The researcher began by transcribing the interview data and organizing the text files for ease of access and analysis. They carefully reviewed the transcriptions to ensure a thorough understanding of the content before initiating the coding process. Next, the researcher defined the unit of analysis, determining the specific segments of data—such as sentences, paragraphs, or themes—that would be coded. This step was essential for maintaining consistency and ensuring alignment with the research questions. The researcher then developed a coding scheme based on the research questions. They created broad categories to reflect general themes in the data, followed by identifying potential subcategories within these larger themes. To ensure the scheme's reliability, the researcher tested it on a sample portion of the data, identifying any issues and making necessary refinements before applying it to the entire dataset. The next phase was open coding, where the researcher labeled relevant segments with descriptive codes that captured key concepts and ideas. This approach was flexible, avoiding rigid categories while identifying significant patterns in the data. Axial coding followed, grouping related codes and identifying relationships between concepts to form more abstract categories. Selective coding was then applied, with the researcher synthesizing the data to identify overarching themes linking the codes and categories to the central research questions. Finally, the researcher reviewed and refined the

codes, assessing their consistency and reliability. This step involved revisiting and adjusting the codes as needed based on emerging patterns, ensuring the accuracy and coherence of the analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

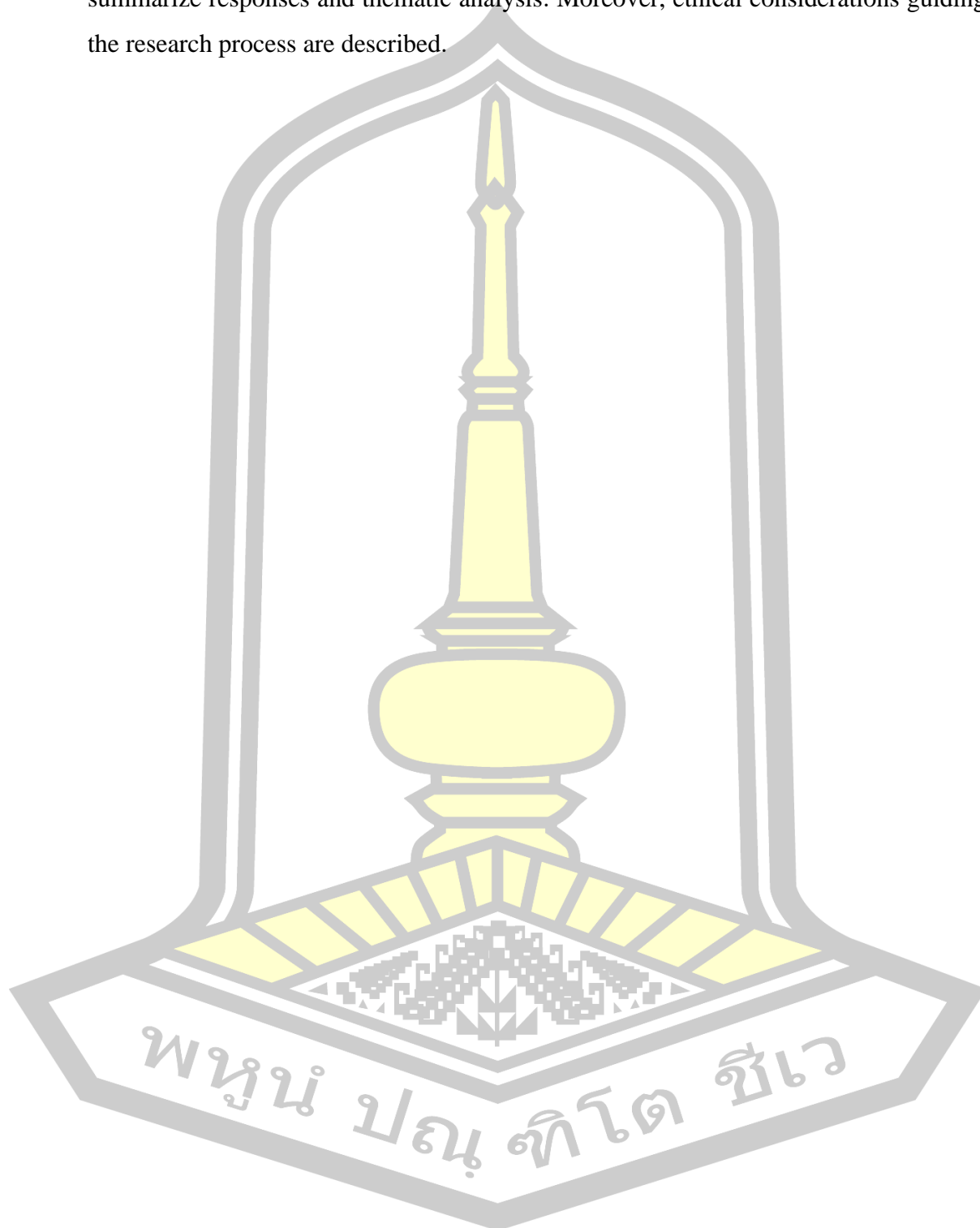
Employing a systematic approach that included obtaining informed consent and conducting thoughtful data collection was crucial for ensuring ethical research practices. By adhering to these ethical standards, researchers could uphold the rights and well-being of the participants involved in the study. Additionally, following ethical guidelines contributed to the credibility and validity of the research findings.

In the context of examining UWTC among Thai postgraduate students, ethical considerations were of utmost importance. Respecting participants' autonomy and privacy, obtaining voluntary and informed consent, protecting confidentiality, and minimizing any potential harm were essential principles that guided ethical research practices. By incorporating these principles into the research process, researchers could establish trust with participants and promote the ethical conduct of the study. Furthermore, employing a comprehensive and systematic approach to data collection enabled the researcher to gather rich and reliable data that accurately reflected the factors associated with their UWTC. This approach ensured that the research findings were robust and informative, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By integrating ethical considerations into the research process and adopting a systematic approach to data collection, the researchers could conduct this study on UWTC among Thai postgraduate students in a manner that respected the rights and well-being of participants while generating valuable insights for academic and practical purposes.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the research, encompassing details regarding the participants and setting, research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The study aimed to examine the factors contributing to participants' UWTC in English during group discussions. A mixed-methods research design was utilized, including both quantitative data obtained from a UWTC questionnaire developed by Burgoon (1976) and qualitative data obtained from a

semi-structured interview. Data analysis involved descriptive statistical techniques to summarize responses and thematic analysis. Moreover, ethical considerations guiding the research process are described.



CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions among Thai postgraduate students. It focused on three key areas: the levels of UWTC, the specific reasons behind it, and the strategies students used to manage it. Employing both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) methods, the research identified varying levels of UWTC, including general reluctance, communication apprehension, and self-perceived communication competence. It also explored the underlying causes of UWTC and the coping strategies students adopted, providing insights into ways to encourage active participation in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts. The following sections present the findings for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

4.1 Levels of Thai Postgraduate Students' UWTC in English in Group

Discussions

The participants' responses to the UWTC questionnaire were analyzed to assess their level of unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the UWTC questionnaire. As shown, Thai postgraduate students exhibit a moderate level of unwillingness to communicate in English during these discussions. The table also outlines the score ranges for high (15-35), moderate (36-55), and low (56-75) levels of unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions.

Table 1 Individual Responses to the UWTC Questionnaire

Participant Number	Score	UWTC Level
S1	37	Moderate UWTC
S2	50	Moderate UWTC
S3	53	Moderate UWTC
S4	46	Moderate UWTC
S5	49	Moderate UWTC
S6	62	Low UWTC

S7	57	Low UWTC
S8	53	Moderate UWTC
S9	55	Moderate UWTC
S10	50	Moderate UWTC
S11	54	Moderate UWTC
S12	56	Low UWTC
S13	48	Moderate UWTC
S14	49	Moderate UWTC
S15	42	Moderate UWTC
S16	59	Low UWTC
S17	51	Moderate UWTC
S18	46	Moderate UWTC
S19	57	Low UWTC
S20	54	Moderate UWTC
S21	48	Moderate UWTC
S22	49	Moderate UWTC
S23	48	Moderate UWTC
S24	51	Moderate UWTC
S25	56	Low UWTC
S26	55	Moderate UWTC
S27	53	Moderate UWTC
S28	59	Low UWTC
S29	60	Low UWTC
S30	45	Moderate UWTC
S31	55	Moderate UWTC
S32	58	Low UWTC

S33	52	Moderate UWTC
S34	56	Low UWTC
S35	49	Moderate UWTC
S36	58	Low UWTC
S37	56	Low UWTC

Table 1 presents the UWTC scores of 37 participants, categorized into three levels: Low, Moderate, and High Unwillingness to Communicate in English during group discussions. Based on the defined scale (56–75 = Low UWTC, 36–55 = Moderate UWTC, 15–35 = High UWTC), the results show that the majority of participants fall within the Moderate category. Specifically, 27 out of 37 participants (approximately 73%) scored between 36 and 55. In contrast, 10 participants (approximately 27%) were categorized as having Low UWTC, with scores ranging from 56 to 75. Notably, no participants were categorized as having High UWTC (score range 15–35), which would indicate a strong reluctance or fear of communicating in English.

Table 2 Summary of Participants' Levels of UWTC

UWTC Level	Score Range	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Low UWTC	56 – 75	10	27.03%
Moderate UWTC	36 – 55	27	72.97%
High UWTC	15 – 35	0	0.00%
Total		37	100.00%

Table 2 shows the distribution of participants' levels of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, revealing notable trends. Of the 37 participants, the majority—27 individuals (72.97%)—fall within the moderate UWTC category. This suggests that while many students experience occasional hesitation, likely due to factors such as linguistic insecurity, fear of making mistakes, or unfamiliarity with group dynamics, their reluctance is not severe. Most

are still able to participate in discussions, indicating that their UWTC is manageable rather than deeply inhibiting.

In contrast, 10 participants (27.03%) exhibit a low level of UWTC, indicating that they are generally comfortable and willing to communicate in English during group discussions. These individuals are likely to take on leadership roles, actively contribute to conversations, encourage peer interaction, and serve as positive models in collaborative learning environments.

Notably, no participants (0.00%) were categorized as having high UWTC, meaning none of the respondents showed extreme reluctance or avoidance of communication in English within group contexts. This absence could indicate a positive indicator of the students' overall readiness and openness to use English in academic group settings. Overall, the data suggests that while a significant proportion of the participants still experience moderate levels of communication reluctance, the complete lack of high UWTC levels is a positive indicator of the group's general communicative disposition.

4.2 Reasons for Thai postgraduate students' UWTC in English in group discussions

This section examines the reasons for participants' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, the study employed thematic analysis to identify key themes reflecting participants' perspectives. Four primary themes emerged: classmates, the course instructor (teacher), the student, and group arrangement. The classmates theme highlights the impact of group members on participants' UWTC. The teacher theme explores how the instructor's monitoring and guidance during discussions influenced participants' willingness to communicate. The student theme explores how poor English proficiency, lack of prior knowledge about the topic, anxiety, and lack of confidence during discussions influenced participants' willingness to communicate. Finally, the group arrangement theme examines group dynamics and their effects on UWTC in discussions. The following table presents the identified themes and their relevance to participants' UWTC.

Themes	Sub-themes	Salient characteristics
Group members	Peer engagement	sufficient, smooth, in-topic, conversation flow
	Peer support	non-judgmental, encouraging, supportive, engaging
	Leader in group discussion	dominate, guide, summarize, note-taking
	Welcoming atmosphere among group members	supportive, encouraging, engaging
Teacher	Guidance	guide, explain, describe, facilitate
Student	Poor English proficiency	
	Lack of prior knowledge about the topic	insufficient, inadequate, unfamiliar
	Anxiety	anxious, nervous, worry
	Lack of confidence	not confident, doubt, hesitate
Group arrangement	Group size	smaller
	Allocated time for group discussion and preparation	enough, sufficient, preparation
	Group member balance	balanced, familiar, acquainted

4.2.1 Group members

The group members theme was explored through participants' perspectives on their peers, revealing four key subthemes. The first, lack of peer engagement, highlights how participants' perceptions of their group members and their interactions influenced UWTC during discussions. The second, lack of peer support, underscores the role of encouragement and assistance from peers in shaping participants' willingness to communicate. The third, group leadership, emerged as a factor influencing engagement, with some participants feeling more comfortable participating when a clear leader guided the discussion. Finally, a welcoming atmosphere among group members was identified as a crucial element affecting participation, with a lack of inclusivity contributing to students' reluctance to engage. The following section presents these subthemes alongside participants' responses that support them.

Lack of peer engagement

The first subtheme, lack of peer engagement, highlights how participants' perceptions of their group members, including their level of involvement, responsiveness, and

willingness to collaborate, influences their UWTC during discussions. When group members actively participate, share ideas, and encourage open communication, participants feel more inclined to engage. Conversely, if peers appear disinterested, dismissive, or overly dominant, participants are more likely to withdraw from discussions. This dynamic suggests that the overall engagement of group members plays a crucial role in shaping individual willingness to communicate. The following excerpts illustrate this subtheme:

S1: "When my peers are actively engaged in the discussion, it encourages me to participate more. It feels like we're all on the same page, and I'm more motivated to share my thoughts."

S2: "I tend to speak more when my group members are listening attentively and responding to what I say. When they show interest, it boosts my confidence to speak up more."

S3: "If my peers aren't engaged or don't seem interested in what I'm saying, I start to feel discouraged and less willing to contribute. A lack of engagement from others makes me hesitate."

S4: "When my classmates ask questions or build on my ideas, it makes me feel valued and motivates me to share more. Peer engagement helps create a more interactive environment."

S5: "In some group discussions, when others aren't contributing, it's hard for me to stay engaged. But when everyone is actively participating, it makes the conversation flow more naturally, and I'm more likely to join in."

S6: "I feel more comfortable speaking up when my peers are encouraging and supporting one another. Positive peer engagement creates a welcoming environment, and I'm less anxious about sharing my ideas."

These responses demonstrate the significant role of peer engagement in influencing students' WTC or UWTC in group discussion. When peers are actively involved, attentive, and responsive, it creates a supportive and interactive environment that encourages participation. On the other hand, a lack of engagement can lead to feelings of discouragement and hesitation to contribute. Positive peer interaction, such as asking questions, showing interest, and offering support, fosters a sense of value and comfort, motivating students to share their ideas more confidently.

Lack of peer support

Participants expressed concerns about lack of peer support, noting its influence on their UWTC in group discussions. In this context, peer support plays a crucial role in boosting students' confidence and motivation to participate. When group members actively listen, provide constructive feedback, and foster a non-judgmental environment, participants feel more encouraged to engage. Conversely, a lack of support can lead to feelings of insecurity and reluctance to communicate. The following excerpts illustrate participants' perspectives on this aspect:

S1: "Without much encouragement from my peers, I sometimes feel hesitant to speak up in English."

S2: "It would be helpful to have more peer support, as it can boost confidence in speaking."

S3: "When my friends are not as engaged in conversations, I feel less inclined to speak."

S4: "Having supportive peers makes speaking easier, but when that support is missing, I remind myself that making mistakes is part of learning."

S5: "I sometimes hold back from speaking when I don't get much feedback from my classmates."

S6: "Without peer support, I sometimes worry about making mistakes, and that makes me less willing to express myself in English."

These responses highlight that the lack of peer support can make students feel hesitant or less inclined to communicate in English. However, some students recognize the importance of self-motivation and view challenges as opportunities for growth. While peer encouragement can boost confidence, developing a mindset that embraces mistakes and independent learning can help students overcome communication barriers.

Leader in group discussion

Another sub-theme is the group discussion leader, defined as a member who initiates the conversation, guides other participants, and summarizes the discussion. Some participants agree that having a designated leader is beneficial for reducing anxiety and UWTC among the group. They suggest that a leader helps maintain engagement,

prevents silence, and encourages active participation, all of which can reduce UWTC. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on the role of a group discussion leader.

S1: "When the group leader is active and encourages everyone to speak, it makes me feel more comfortable participating. The leader sets the tone for the discussion, and if they make an effort to include everyone, I'm more likely to join in."

S3: "If the group leader dominates the conversation or doesn't give others a chance to speak, I tend to hold back. It feels like my input won't be valued, so I often stay quiet and let the leader take control of the discussion."

S4: "I find it easier to contribute when the leader guides the discussion smoothly and makes sure everyone has a chance to share. When the leader listens to my ideas and gives constructive feedback, I feel more confident in speaking up during the conversation."

The responses above highlight the significant influence of the group leader on students' willingness to participate in discussions. When the leader is active, inclusive, and encourages contributions from all members, students feel more comfortable and motivated to engage. However, if the leader dominates the conversation or fails to manage the discussion effectively, students may feel discouraged and hesitant to speak. Overall, a supportive and well-guided leader can foster a more open and confident atmosphere, making it easier for participants to contribute.

Welcoming atmosphere

A welcoming and supportive classroom atmosphere plays a crucial role in encouraging students to participate actively in group discussions. When learners feel accepted, respected, and free from judgment, they are more likely to take risks in using the target language, even if their proficiency is not perfect. A positive environment reduces anxiety and fear of making mistakes—two common barriers to communication—and instead fosters confidence and motivation. In such settings, students are more open to sharing ideas, asking questions, and collaborating with peers. Teachers who create inclusive and respectful discussion spaces help build a sense of community, where all learners feel their contributions are valued. This sense

of belonging, in turn, enhances students' willingness to communicate and strengthens their overall engagement in the learning process. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on the importance of a welcoming atmosphere in facilitating group discussions.

S1: When the atmosphere is friendly and supportive, I feel more comfortable speaking up. It helps reduce my nervousness, and I'm more willing to share my ideas with the group.

S2: A welcoming environment encourages me to participate because I know my mistakes won't be judged. This makes me feel more confident and open to engaging in discussions.

S3: In a positive and inclusive setting, I feel like my contributions are valued, which motivates me to take part more actively in group discussions. It makes the whole experience feel less intimidating.

The responses above highlight that a welcoming atmosphere plays a key role in increasing participants' willingness to engage in group discussions. A friendly and supportive environment helps reduce nervousness, making students feel more comfortable and confident in sharing their ideas. Moreover, knowing that mistakes will not be judged creates a sense of security, while the feeling that their contributions are valued encourages more active participation in discussions.

4.2.2 Teacher Guidance

Teacher guidance is identified by participants as a reason for their unwillingness to communicate during group discussions. Some students express that a lack of clear guidance or direction from the teacher leave them feeling uncertain about the discussion's focus, leading to hesitation in speaking up. Without sufficient feedback or encouragement from the teacher, participants feel unsupported, which amplifies their anxiety and reluctance to engage. This highlights the importance of a balanced approach to teacher involvement in fostering a supportive environment that encourages active participation while respecting students' autonomy. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on the role of teacher guidance:

S1: "When the teacher provides clear guidance, it helps reduce my anxiety. Clear guidance makes me feel more confident and more willing to contribute during group discussions."

S2: "Consistent feedback and encouragement from the teacher can really motivate me to participate. It fosters a sense of support, making me feel more comfortable and willing to communicate."

S3: "When the teacher effectively monitors group discussions, it prevents me and my classmates from feeling ignored or overlooked. This helps us stay engaged and reduces the chances of them withdrawing due to their unwillingness to communicate."

S4: "When the teacher steps in only when needed but also lets me and my classmates lead the discussion, it helps us feel more independent and less nervous about speaking."

S5: "When clear expectations are set for group discussions, I know what to do, which makes it easier to join in and feel less unsure about how to participate."

S6: "When the teacher creates a positive and inclusive classroom environment, it encourages us to take risks and participate more freely, which helps decrease my unwillingness to communicate. It also strengthens group dynamics."

The responses above highlight the crucial role of teacher guidance in enhancing students' willingness to communicate during group discussions. Clear guidance, consistent feedback, and effective monitoring help reduce students' anxiety and encourage their active participation. When teachers provide structure, set clear expectations, and create a positive, inclusive environment, students feel more confident, supported, and motivated to contribute. Additionally, a balanced approach to teacher intervention fosters student autonomy while ensuring engagement, ultimately strengthening group dynamics and reducing communication barriers.

4.2.3 Student

Students' poor English proficiency, lack of prior knowledge about the topic, and anxiety, during discussions are identified as one of the reasons that influences their willingness to communicate. These factors often lead to feelings of insecurity, fear of making mistakes, and hesitation to participate, ultimately reducing their engagement and active involvement in discussions. The following section presents these subthemes alongside participants' responses that support them.

Poor English proficiency

English proficiency is often identified as a key factor influencing students' unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions, as those with lower proficiency may feel anxious, lack confidence, and find it challenging to express themselves effectively. This can discourage active participation and hinder

their willingness to engage in conversations. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on the role of English proficiency in students' willingness to communicate in English in group discussions:

S1: "When my English isn't strong, I feel nervous about making mistakes, so I tend to stay quiet rather than speak up in discussions."

S2: "I find it hard to express my ideas clearly when my vocabulary or grammar isn't perfect, which makes me reluctant to participate in group discussions."

S3: "When my English skills aren't as good as others, I feel like I won't be understood, so I prefer to stay silent instead of trying to speak."

S4: "I worry that I might say something wrong or not be able to explain myself well, which makes me hesitate to speak in group discussions."

S5: "If my English proficiency is low, I often feel like I'm holding up the conversation or not contributing enough, so I tend to avoid speaking."

S6: "Sometimes, I don't join the discussion because I'm afraid that my lack of fluency will make it difficult for others to follow my points."

In conclusion, students' English proficiency plays a significant role in their willingness to communicate in group discussions. Lower proficiency levels often lead to feelings of insecurity, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about being misunderstood. As a result, students may hesitate to speak, avoid participation, or feel that their contributions are inadequate, ultimately hindering their engagement in discussions.

Lacking prior knowledge about the topic

A lack of prior knowledge about the topic can significantly influence participants' willingness to communicate, as they may feel unprepared, unsure of what to contribute, and hesitant to speak up due to fear of providing incorrect or irrelevant information. This can lead to disengagement and limited participation in discussions. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on how lacking prior

knowledge about the topic can influence students' willingness to communicate in English in group discussions:

S1: "When I don't know much about the topic, I feel unsure about what to say, so I tend to stay quiet rather than risk saying something wrong."

S2: "If I'm not familiar with the topic, I get nervous because I don't have enough information to contribute, which makes me less likely to speak in discussions."

S4: "I feel hesitant to join the conversation when I don't have prior knowledge about the topic, as I worry I won't be able to keep up or make a meaningful contribution."

S6: "Not knowing enough about the topic makes me feel unprepared, and that makes me anxious about speaking up in group discussions."

In conclusion, the responses above highlight how the lack of prior knowledge about a topic can significantly hinder students' willingness to communicate in group discussions. Without sufficient understanding, students feel unsure, unprepared, and anxious, leading to hesitation or avoidance of participation. This lack of confidence in contributing meaningful ideas often results in reduced engagement during discussions.

Anxiety

The participants mentioned anxiety as one of the reasons that influence their willingness to communicate in English during group discussions, as it often leads to a fear of making mistakes, negative self-evaluation, and nervousness, which can cause students to withdraw, hesitate, or avoid speaking altogether. This reduces their active participation and engagement in the discussion. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on how anxiety affects their willingness to communicate in English in group discussions:

S1: "I get really nervous when speaking in English, and that makes me afraid of making mistakes. Because of this, I tend to avoid speaking up in discussions."

S2: "Anxiety makes me overthink everything I want to say, and I often hesitate because I fear I won't be understood or I'll say something wrong."

S3: *"When I feel anxious, I struggle to concentrate on the conversation, and this makes me reluctant to participate in group discussions."*

S4: *"The fear of judgment from others increases my anxiety, so I usually stay quiet instead of sharing my thoughts in group discussions."*

The responses above underscore anxiety as a factor that affects students' willingness to communicate in English during group discussions. It leads to nervousness, overthinking, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about being judged, which result in hesitation, reluctance to participate, and a tendency to avoid speaking altogether. These factors hinder their active involvement in discussions and limit their opportunities for communication.

4.2.4 Group arrangement

Regarding the theme of group arrangement, the participants mentioned it as one of the reasons influencing their unwillingness to communicate in group discussions. Three distinct sub-themes—group size, allocated time for discussion, and group member balance—are identified within this topic. Participants note that larger groups often make it difficult for everyone to contribute equally, leading to feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. Similarly, limited time for discussions causes participants to feel rushed, preventing them from fully articulating their thoughts. Additionally, the balance of group members in terms of skill level and personality plays a role, with some participants feeling overwhelmed or reluctant to speak when paired with more dominant or outspoken individuals.

Group size

Group size is found to impact participants' willingness to communicate during group discussions. In larger groups, they often feel overlooked, which leads to hesitation in speaking up. In contrast, smaller groups make participants feel more comfortable and confident, as there are fewer people competing for attention, providing more opportunities to share their ideas. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on how group size influences their reluctance to communicate in group discussions:

S2: *"In larger groups, it's hard for everyone to get a chance to speak. I often feel like my opinion doesn't matter, so I just stay quiet and let others take the lead."*

S3: *"When the group is too big, I get nervous because I don't want to interrupt anyone. It feels like there are too many people competing for attention, so I just hold back."*

S4: *"I prefer smaller groups because I feel more comfortable sharing my ideas. In bigger groups, I tend to stay silent because I'm afraid my input will be overlooked."*

S5: *"Sometimes in large groups, there's too much going on, and it's hard to follow the conversation. I end up feeling disconnected, which makes me hesitant to join in."*

The responses above emphasize the negative impact of larger group sizes on students' willingness to communicate during discussions. In larger groups, students often feel overshadowed or disconnected, leading to hesitation in speaking up. The competition for attention and the fear of being overlooked contribute to a reluctance to participate. In contrast, smaller groups provide a more comfortable environment where students feel their contributions are valued, encouraging them to engage more actively in the conversation.

Allocated time for group discussion and preparation

The allocated time for group discussion and preparation plays a crucial role in participants' willingness to communicate. When time is limited, participants often feel rushed and unprepared, which leads to hesitation in sharing their thoughts. Conversely, having sufficient time for both preparation and discussion allows participants to gather their ideas, feel more confident, and engage more freely in the conversation. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on how the allocated time for group discussion and preparation influences their reluctance to communicate:

S1: *"When we don't have enough time to prepare or discuss, I feel rushed and unable to express my thoughts properly. I hesitate to speak because I don't want to make mistakes or say something unprepared."*

S2: *"I often find it hard to participate when the time is limited. I need more time to think about what I want to say, and without it, I tend to stay quiet and avoid speaking up in front of the group."*

S3: *"Having limited time makes me feel pressured to say something quickly, and I end up not communicating as clearly as I would like. If there were more time for preparation or discussion, I'd feel more confident and willing to contribute."*

These responses highlight how having little time to prepare and discuss can reduce participants' willingness to communicate. When time is too short, students may feel rushed, unready, and pressured to respond quickly, making them more hesitant and less articulate. However, with adequate time for preparation and discussion, students gain confidence, engage more actively, and contribute more effectively.

Group member balance

Group member balance is found to influence participants' willingness to communicate during group discussions. When there is an imbalance in the group, such as the dominance of more outspoken or skilled members, others often feel intimidated or excluded, leading to reluctance in speaking. However, a well-balanced group, where all members contribute equally, fosters a more inclusive environment that encourages participants to share their ideas with greater confidence. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on how group member balance influences their reluctance to communicate:

S2: *We were seated in a way that made it hard to engage with everyone. Some students were on the opposite side of the room, so when I spoke, I felt like I wasn't being heard. The physical distance between us made the discussion feel disconnected, and I chose not to participate.*

S3: *During the group activity, we were split into smaller sub-groups, and I was left out of a conversation with the more confident members. I didn't feel comfortable approaching them, and because I was excluded from the main discussion, I became more unwilling to speak.*

S4: *There were no specific roles assigned, so the discussion felt chaotic. I felt overwhelmed by the lack of clear structure, and it discouraged me from speaking up because I didn't know when it would be appropriate.*

S5: *In our group, there were a few students who were very dominant, while the rest of us barely got a chance to speak. The imbalance made me feel that my opinions wouldn't be valued, so I stopped trying to share my ideas, knowing that the loudest voices would overshadow me.*

S6: The seating arrangement was uncomfortable, with students sitting in rows facing forward, rather than in a circle or around a table. This made it hard to engage with each other and created a sense of separation. It felt more like a lecture than a discussion, and I felt too shy to speak up in such a formal setting.

The responses above highlight how group dynamics and seating arrangements can significantly affect students' willingness to communicate. Physical distance, lack of clear roles, and dominant voices within the group can lead to feelings of exclusion or discomfort, making it harder for some students to participate. The chaotic nature of discussions without clear structure or the formality of seating arrangements also contributed to a sense of disconnect, discouraging students from speaking. These factors combined created an environment where students felt their input would not be valued, reducing their motivation to contribute to the conversation.

4.3 Coping strategies for Thai postgraduate students' UWTC in English in group discussions

This section presents the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with six participants, purposively selected from a pool of 37, to address Research Question 3, which explores students' coping strategies for managing their unwillingness to communicate (UWTC). The results, derived from a thematic analysis of the interview data, are outlined, followed by a summary of the key findings related to coping strategies, including preparation, positive self-talk, and breathing techniques. Each of these strategies plays a crucial role in helping participants manage their UWTC during group discussions. The following section presents these subthemes alongside participants' responses that support them.

4.3.1 Preparation

Students often use preparation as a strategy to cope with their unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions. By researching the topic, organizing their thoughts, and practicing speaking beforehand, they feel more confident and less anxious. Preparation helps them overcome language barriers, reduces fear of making mistakes, and increases their willingness to actively participate in the conversation. The following responses illustrate participants' perspectives on the use of preparation as a strategy to manage their UWTC in English in group discussions:

S1: *"I always make sure to prepare by reading about the topic beforehand. This way, I feel more confident and ready to contribute during the discussion. Preparation helps me organize my thoughts and reduces my anxiety about speaking in English."*

S2: *"Before the group discussion, I write down key points I want to mention. Having notes gives me something to refer to, so I don't feel lost or unsure when it's my turn to speak. It makes me feel more in control and less worried about making mistakes."*

S3: *"I practice speaking out loud before the discussion to get used to saying my ideas in English. This preparation boosts my confidence and helps me avoid the nervousness that usually comes with speaking in front of others."*

S4: *"I like to rehearse what I want to say in my head or even talk to myself about the topic before the discussion starts. Knowing that I've prepared helps reduce my fear of speaking and makes me more willing to contribute to the conversation."*

In conclusion, students commonly use preparation strategies to reduce their unwillingness to communicate in English during group discussions. Whether through reading about the topic, taking notes, practicing speaking, or rehearsing their ideas, these methods help increase confidence and reduce anxiety. Preparation allows students to feel more in control, organized, and ready to contribute, ultimately encouraging active participation in the discussion.

4.3.2 Self-talk

Self-talk can be a powerful tool in encouraging students to participate in group discussions. By engaging in positive, internal dialogue, students can boost their confidence and reduce feelings of anxiety before speaking. For example, reminding themselves that their ideas are valuable, or reassuring themselves that making mistakes is a normal part of the learning process, helps diminish self-doubt. This type of self-encouragement creates a more supportive internal environment, enabling students to take risks in communication. Self-talk also allows students to mentally prepare for group discussions, organizing their thoughts and framing their contributions in a clearer, more confident manner. As a result, students are more likely to engage actively in conversations, share their perspectives, and contribute to the overall flow of the discussion. The following responses illustrate participants'

perspectives on using self-talk to manage their UWTC in English during group discussions:

S1: "Before speaking, I remind myself that it's okay to make mistakes and that everyone in the group is there to learn. I often use positive self-talk, telling myself that my ideas are valuable, which helps calm my nerves and makes me more willing to contribute."

S4: "I often tell myself that I have something worth saying, and I remind myself that it's normal to feel nervous. Using self-talk helps me focus on the conversation rather than the fear of speaking in front of others."

S6: "I regulate my emotions by telling myself that it's okay to feel anxious but that I can still participate. I use self-talk to stay focused and remind myself that the goal is communication, not perfection."

In managing their communication reluctance, students often employ self-talk to help reduce anxiety and feel more confident in group discussions. For instance, self-talk, where students remind themselves that making mistakes is part of learning, and that their ideas are valuable, calms nerves and boosts their willingness to contribute.

4.3.3 Breathing techniques

Breathing techniques is an effective strategy for students to manage their unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) during group discussions. Deep, controlled breathing helps to calm the nervous system, reduce anxiety, and promote relaxation, which is particularly beneficial for students who experience nervousness or fear when speaking in front of others. By focusing on their breath, students can center themselves, regain composure, and reduce physical symptoms of stress, such as a racing heart or shallow breathing. Regular practice of deep breathing before or during a discussion enables students to maintain a sense of control over their emotions, making it easier to engage in the conversation without being overwhelmed by fear or hesitation. As a result, students feel more confident and are better equipped to participate actively, communicate clearly, and express their ideas with greater ease.

S3: *"Whenever I feel anxious, I take a few deep breaths to help relax. I also try to shift my mindset by focusing on the message I want to share rather than worrying about how I sound. This makes it easier for me to engage in the discussion."*

S5: *"When I feel hesitant to speak, I consciously take a deep breath and calm myself down. I also try to reframe the situation by thinking of the discussion as a collaborative process rather than a test. This mindset shift makes me feel more comfortable joining in."*

Both participants emphasize the importance of breathing techniques and mindset shifts in managing anxiety and overcoming hesitation in group discussions. By taking deep breaths to calm themselves, they are able to regain composure and reduce the physical symptoms of nervousness. Additionally, reframing the discussion as a collaborative process rather than a test helps them shift their focus away from self-doubt and towards contributing meaningfully to the conversation. These strategies not only help ease their anxiety but also foster a more confident and active participation in group discussions.

4.3.4 Collaboration with group peers

Collaboration with group peers is essential in managing students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions. These strategies focus on fostering a supportive and collaborative environment, encouraging interaction, and promoting a sense of belonging among students. By engaging with peers who offer encouragement and constructive feedback, students are more likely to feel confident and motivated to participate. These strategies also help create an inclusive atmosphere where students feel safe to share their ideas without fear of judgment. The following examples illustrate how collaboration with group peers can help manage UWTC in group discussions:

S1: *"I feel more comfortable speaking when my classmates encourage me. When someone in the group praises my ideas or offers positive feedback, it makes me less nervous and more willing to share my thoughts in English."*

S2: *"If I'm unsure about something, I try to ask my classmates for help or clarification. Their support gives me more confidence, and knowing that I'm not alone makes me more eager to participate in the discussion."*

S3: *"When we work in small groups, it's easier for me to express my ideas because I know the pressure is lower. I can talk more freely with just a few people, and this helps me feel less anxious about speaking English."*

S4: *"I've noticed that when the group atmosphere is positive and everyone feels comfortable, I'm more willing to speak. We listen to each other without judgment, and that makes me feel safe enough to contribute to the conversation."*

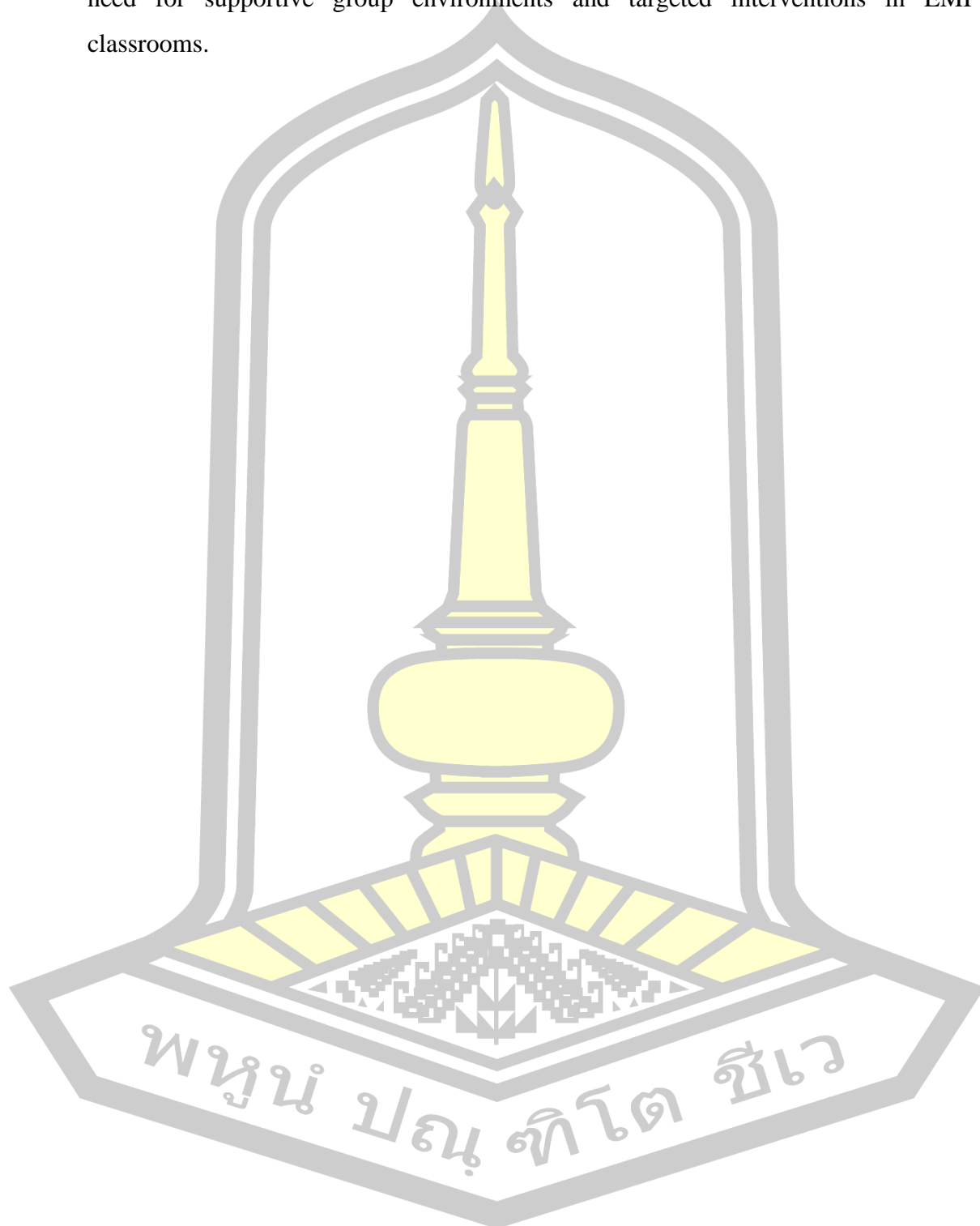
S5: *"When I listen actively to my peers and they respond thoughtfully to what I say, I feel more motivated to continue participating. The back-and-forth interaction in the group helps me stay engaged and less hesitant to speak in English."*

In conclusion, students' willingness to communicate in English during group discussions is significantly influenced by collaboration with group peers. Peer encouragement, such as praise and positive feedback, boosts students' confidence and reduces their anxiety about speaking. Seeking support from classmates for clarification also fosters a sense of solidarity, making students feel more comfortable participating. Collaborative group work, especially in smaller groups, reduces pressure and allows students to express their ideas more freely. Positive group dynamics, where members listen without judgment, create a safe environment that encourages participation. Additionally, active listening and thoughtful responses from peers promote continued engagement and further reduce reluctance to speak.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents findings from a mixed-methods study on Thai postgraduate students' Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) setting. It addresses three research questions: the extent of UWTC, its causes, and students' coping strategies. Quantitative data showed most students had a moderate level of UWTC, suggesting that despite adequate English skills, they hesitated to speak due to discomfort and fear. Qualitative interviews revealed key contributing factors such as fear of negative evaluation, low confidence, limited vocabulary, and anxiety—often rooted in past educational and sociocultural experiences. To manage these challenges, students used strategies like preparation, positive self-talk, reframing discussions as collaborative, and relying on peer support. The chapter emphasizes the complex

interplay of psychological and contextual influences on UWTC and highlights the need for supportive group environments and targeted interventions in EMI classrooms.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter builds on the quantitative and qualitative findings presented in the previous chapter by contextualizing them within the broader body of existing literature. It offers a critical discussion of how the results align with, diverge from, or extend prior research. Notably, the findings contribute to addressing significant gaps in our understanding of the levels of Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, the underlying reasons for this reluctance, and their coping strategies. By synthesizing these insights, this chapter aims to offer a nuanced perspective on the implications of the findings, emphasizing strategies that can enhance students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English group discussions.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The study aimed to examine the levels of UWTC in English during group discussions among Th. A mixed-methods research design was utilized, including both quantitative data obtained from a UWTC questionnaire developed by Burgoon (1976) and qualitative data obtained from a semi-structured interview. Participants consisted of 37 Thai postgraduate students studying in the English Language program at a Thai university. The participants were asked to complete an online UWTC questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, with a data collection span of one month. Data analysis involved descriptive statistical techniques to summarize responses and thematic analysis. The following sections provide an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions addressed, shedding light on the implications for creating a more supportive and effective learning environment that promotes students' well-being.

5.1.1 Level of UWTC in English in Group Discussions

The finding that Thai postgraduate students exhibited a moderate level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions aligns partially with previous research while also highlighting contextual distinctions. Compared to Liu and Jackson's (2008) study on Chinese university students, which reported high levels of communication apprehension and avoidance of speaking tasks,

the present results suggest relatively more willingness among Thai students to engage in group interaction. This may reflect increased exposure to English and greater familiarity with collaborative academic activities at the postgraduate level. However, the moderate UWTC still indicates persistent barriers, consistent with Kang and Park's (2018) findings among Korean graduate students in EMI programs, where linguistic insecurity and fear of negative evaluation suppressed oral participation. The current study thus supports the notion that while postgraduate students may possess sufficient English proficiency, affective and cognitive factors continue to influence their communication behaviors, particularly in interactive group settings. These results underscore the need for targeted strategies—such as peer support, instructor scaffolding, and anxiety-reducing techniques—to lower UWTC levels and foster more confident participation in English-medium academic discourse.

The moderate level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English observed among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of Communication Apprehension (CA) theory. According to McCroskey (1977), CA refers to an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others. In the context of this study, the students' moderate UWTC suggests a balance between their linguistic ability and anxiety levels—where they possess sufficient English proficiency to participate but still experience psychological discomfort when expected to speak in group settings. This aligns with CA theory, which posits that individuals may avoid communication not necessarily due to lack of competence but because of perceived risks such as negative evaluation, loss of face, or unfamiliarity with the audience. Group discussions, in particular, may intensify these feelings, as students are required to respond spontaneously and navigate peer dynamics. Thus, the findings highlight the need to address not only linguistic readiness but also affective factors such as anxiety management, confidence-building, and positive reinforcement to reduce CA and consequently lower UWTC in group-based academic interactions.

The moderate level of Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions can be understood through the

framework of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). As defined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), FLA is a distinct form of anxiety specific to foreign language contexts, often stemming from fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. In the current study, students' moderate UWTC may reflect an internal conflict between their cognitive readiness to participate and the emotional barriers triggered by speaking in English. Group discussions—characterized by spontaneous exchanges and peer observation—can heighten FLA, making students more cautious, hesitant, or even silent despite having the ability to contribute. This pattern is consistent with prior research indicating that FLA can undermine learners' willingness to speak, particularly in settings where they feel judged or uncertain about their language accuracy (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Joe & Lee, 2020). Therefore, the moderate UWTC reported in this study signals a need for supportive classroom environments that actively reduce language anxiety through strategies such as peer collaboration, scaffolded speaking tasks, and reassurance from instructors. Addressing FLA is essential for creating conditions that encourage more confident and sustained participation in English-medium academic interactions.

5.1.2 Reasons for UWTC in English in Group Discussions

This study identifies several reasons influencing Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions. Key reasons for UWTC include lack of peer engagement, insufficient peer support, group leadership dynamics, and the overall atmosphere within the group. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the importance of interactive and supportive group environments for fostering communication.

One significant reason identified in the study is the lack of active participation from peers, which discouraged students from engaging in discussions. When group members were passive or disengaged, it led to reduced motivation and hesitation to speak. This finding aligns with MacIntyre's (1999) research, which emphasizes the importance of engaging group environments in promoting active participation. Peer support also emerged as a crucial element. The absence of encouragement and constructive feedback from peers contributed to students' anxiety and reluctance to speak, which resonates with studies by Goh & Burns (2012) that emphasize the role

of peer collaboration in reducing communication apprehension and increasing participation.

In addition, group leadership dynamics were found to have a significant impact on student participation. Dominant group leaders who controlled discussions or dismissed others' ideas created an environment that discouraged contributions. Conversely, inclusive and supportive leaders who facilitated discussions allowed for a more comfortable setting for students to express their thoughts. This supports the work of Dörnyei (2001), who highlights the importance of equitable turn-taking and leadership in promoting participation. The overall group atmosphere also played a critical role in shaping students' willingness to communicate. Students felt more confident in groups characterized by a friendly, open, and non-judgmental environment, while tense or competitive atmospheres led to increased reluctance to engage. This is in line with Tsui's (2009) research, which underscores the significance of positive group dynamics in fostering communication.

Moreover, the study also contributes to the literature on language learning and group dynamics by confirming that teacher guidance, with clear instructions and structured facilitation were found to increase student engagement, which supports Dörnyei's (2001) and Tsui's (2009) findings on the value of teacher guidance in reducing communication apprehension.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that poor English proficiency significantly contributes to students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in group discussions, aligning with previous research that highlights the relationship between language proficiency and communication apprehension. Students with lower proficiency levels expressed heightened anxiety about making mistakes, fearing negative judgment, and struggling to express their ideas clearly. This resonates with MacIntyre's (1999) and Goh & Burns' (2012) studies, which emphasize that lower proficiency often exacerbates communication anxiety, leading students to avoid speaking. As students with limited language skills may feel less confident in their ability to articulate ideas fluently, they are more likely to withdraw from discussions, further reinforcing their reluctance to participate.

The study's findings reveal that a lack of prior knowledge about the discussion topic significantly contributes to Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, which aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of topic familiarity in language learning. Students who were unfamiliar with the subject matter often felt uncertain and anxious, which inhibited their willingness to participate. This finding supports Swain's (2000) and Baker and Westrup's (2003) studies, which highlight that students' confidence and engagement in discussions are closely linked to their prior knowledge of the topic. When students lacked knowledge, they were more likely to feel inadequate or fear making mistakes, which resulted in their reluctance to speak. Additionally, the present study reinforces the importance of preparation in boosting students' confidence, as those who had the opportunity to review or research the topic beforehand exhibited greater participation and less anxiety.

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of anxiety on Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English during group discussions, reinforcing previous research on the central role of anxiety in language learning. Students reported high levels of anxiety, particularly speaking anxiety, due to the fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers. This aligns with the work of Horwitz (2001) and MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), who noted that anxiety often leads to avoidance behaviors and reluctance to participate in language-based activities. The study's participants indicated that anxiety not only hindered their verbal participation but also contributed to cognitive overload, making it difficult for them to organize and express their thoughts effectively. This finding supports the notion that communication apprehension impedes fluent speech and active engagement (MacIntyre, 1999). Furthermore, the study suggests that providing a supportive, non-judgmental group environment, as well as strategies to manage anxiety, can help mitigate its impact, echoing Goh & Burns (2012), who emphasize the importance of reducing anxiety through peer support and collaborative learning. Thus, addressing anxiety through clear expectations, teacher guidance, and positive group dynamics is crucial for enhancing students' willingness to communicate in English.

The study also echoed previous research on the impact of topic familiarity. Students expressed reluctance to speak when they were unfamiliar with the discussion topic. This finding supports Swain (2000) and Baker & Westrup (2003), who highlighted the importance of preparation in boosting students' confidence and engagement. Anxiety, particularly speaking anxiety, was another key reason, with students fearing judgment and mistakes, which echoes the findings of Horwitz (2001) and MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) on the role of anxiety in language learners' avoidance of speaking.

Finally, the study identified group size, preparation time, and group composition as important reasons influencing participation. Smaller groups, adequate preparation time, and balanced group compositions promoted more active involvement, aligning with Johnson & Johnson (1994) and Swain's (2000) research on the importance of group dynamics in facilitating engagement. In conclusion, fostering a collaborative and supportive group environment, along with addressing reasons such as peer engagement, leadership, anxiety, and topic familiarity, is essential for reducing UWTC and enhancing students' participation in English discussions.

This study identifies key reasons influencing Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) in English, including lack of peer engagement, insufficient support, group leadership dynamics, and the group atmosphere. It emphasizes the importance of a collaborative and supportive environment in fostering participation. Peer encouragement, inclusive leadership, and a non-judgmental atmosphere were found to reduce anxiety and enhance engagement. The study also highlights the role of teacher guidance, language proficiency, and topic familiarity in promoting participation. Addressing these findings can help educators create supportive environments that encourage students to overcome reluctance and engage actively in English discussions.

5.1.3 Coping Strategies for Managing UWTC in English in Group Discussions

This study explores the coping strategies employed by Thai postgraduate students to manage their unwillingness to communicate (WTC) in English during group discussions. The strategies identified—preparation, cognitive, and social—are aimed at reducing anxiety, enhancing confidence, and increasing participation. The findings

highlight the interplay between these strategies and their effectiveness in promoting active engagement, and they are compared with relevant previous research.

This study aligns with and expands on previous research regarding the coping strategies used to manage unwillingness to communicate (WTC) in second language contexts. Thai postgraduate students employed three main strategies—preparation, cognitive, and social—to overcome communication barriers, which is consistent with findings in existing literature that highlight the role of these strategies in enhancing students' willingness to participate in discussions.

Preparation was identified as a central coping mechanism, echoing the work of MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), who found that structured preparation can reduce cognitive load, allowing learners to focus on fluency and coherence in their speech. In this study, students who prepared vocabulary, sentence structures, and potential responses in advance were able to reduce anxiety and feel more in control, which aligns with earlier studies emphasizing that preparation can alleviate linguistic uncertainty and mitigate communication apprehension (Swain, 2000; Horwitz, 2001). Furthermore, students' willingness to take risks in speaking, as noted in this study, resonates with Dörnyei's (2001) assertion that perceived competence encourages participation.

Positive self-talk emerged as a key cognitive strategy that Thai postgraduate students used to manage their Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) during English group discussions. Students reported that by engaging in internal dialogues such as reassuring themselves that making mistakes is a natural part of learning or affirming that their ideas are worthwhile, they could reduce their anxiety and boost their confidence before speaking. This self-affirmation technique enabled them to shift their focus from fear of judgment to the purpose of communication. The study's findings align with research by Dewaele and Alfawzan (2020), which underscores the effectiveness of positive self-talk in enhancing learners' self-efficacy and mitigating language-related anxiety. In practice, this internal coping mechanism allowed students to mentally prepare, organize their thoughts, and participate more actively, thus serving as a bridge between linguistic competence and communicative willingness

Another prominent coping strategy reported by participants was the use of breathing techniques to regulate anxiety and physiological responses associated with speaking in English. Several students indicated that taking deep, controlled breaths before or during discussions helped calm their nerves, stabilize their heart rate, and restore emotional balance. These techniques enabled them to regain composure and reduce the disruptive effects of stress, such as shallow breathing or trembling, thereby improving their capacity to express themselves clearly and confidently. This approach resonates with psychological literature emphasizing the role of somatic regulation in managing anxiety (e.g., Pajares, 2018). Moreover, participants often paired breathing techniques with cognitive reframing—viewing group discussions as collaborative rather than evaluative tasks—to further reduce performance pressure. These findings affirm previous work by MacIntyre (1999), which highlights the interplay between emotional regulation and second language performance

Collaboration with group peers were also crucial in mitigating students' UWTC. Many participants noted that a supportive group atmosphere, characterized by peer encouragement, active listening, and constructive feedback, significantly reduced their fear of negative evaluation and increased their willingness to contribute. When students felt included and valued by their peers, they reported a stronger sense of belonging and confidence, which fostered more meaningful engagement in discussions. This aligns with the social cognitive perspective, which asserts that interpersonal support enhances motivation and performance in communicative tasks (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, the study draws on the findings of Baker and Westrup (2003), who emphasize the importance of cooperative learning environments in promoting communicative competence. By facilitating an inclusive atmosphere, group collaboration served not only as a buffer against anxiety but also as a catalyst for sustained verbal participation

In summary, the study emphasizes that preparation, positive self-talk, breathing techniques, and collaboration with group peers are essential for overcoming unwillingness to communicate among Thai postgraduate students. These strategies not only reduce anxiety but also promote greater confidence and engagement in group

discussions. Previous research aligns with these findings, underscoring the importance of preparation in reducing linguistic uncertainty (Swain, 2000), cognitive strategies in enhancing fluency and reducing apprehension (MacIntyre, 1999), and social strategies in fostering a supportive communication environment (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

5.2 Implications

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into strategies that can enhance students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English group discussions. First of all, the study suggests enhancement of group dynamics for improved communication. The study highlights that peer engagement, group leadership, and overall group atmosphere significantly influence students' WTC. Educators should foster collaborative and inclusive group discussions by promoting active participation, equitable turn-taking, and supportive leadership. Implementing structured peer interactions and group roles could encourage engagement and reduce communication apprehension.

Secondly, the finding underscores reducing communication anxiety through a supportive environment. Anxiety was found to be a major barrier to WTC. Educators should implement strategies to create a non-judgmental and encouraging environment, such as offering positive reinforcement, reducing competitiveness, and using anxiety-reducing techniques like mindfulness or gradual exposure to speaking tasks. These approaches align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of emotional support in language learning.

Thirdly, providing targeted support for lower-proficiency students is another implication. Since low English proficiency contributes to UWTC, language scaffolding, additional practice opportunities, and personalized feedback should be incorporated into instruction. Peer-assisted learning and differentiated instruction could help lower-proficiency students gain confidence in their speaking abilities.

Fourthly, addressing topic familiarity to boost confidence and engagement is also crucial. The study found that unfamiliarity with discussion topics led to hesitation in speaking. Educators should provide pre-discussion preparation, such as reading

materials, guided questions, and brainstorming activities, to ensure that students feel prepared and confident before engaging in discussions.

Finally, integrating effective coping strategies into instruction is also vital. The study identified preparation, cognitive, and social strategies as key coping mechanisms for managing UWTC. Teachers should encourage students to use mental rehearsal, self-monitoring, and structured preparation to enhance fluency and reduce apprehension. Additionally, social strategies like peer modeling and cooperative learning can be integrated to foster a more communicative classroom environment. The study recommends providing teacher guidance as a critical factor in encouraging participation. Clear instructions, structured facilitation, and explicit guidance were found to increase student engagement. Teachers should actively structure group discussions, ensure equitable participation, and provide constructive feedback to mitigate communication barriers. Optimizing group composition and size for maximum engagement is another strategy. The study suggests that smaller, balanced groups with well-planned compositions promote more active involvement. Educators should carefully design discussion groups to include diverse proficiency levels and ensure a supportive and interactive learning environment.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing Thai postgraduate students' willingness to communicate in English, it is not without its limitations. One key limitation is the small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Due to the limited number of participants, the findings may not accurately represent the broader population of Thai postgraduate students, and individual differences, such as personality, language proficiency, and prior experiences, may have disproportionately impacted the results. This small sample size may also reduce the statistical power of the study, making it more difficult to detect subtle trends or variations in students' willingness to communicate in English during group discussions. Future research with a larger, more diverse sample would help strengthen the validity of the conclusions drawn from this study. Another limitation is the lack of consideration for the influence of age, gender, language proficiency levels, and diverse experiences on Thai postgraduate students' unwillingness to communicate

in English during group discussions. The participants' age range and gender distribution were not controlled for, meaning these factors may have influenced their attitudes and behaviors in group settings. Additionally, variations in language proficiency levels were not fully accounted for, which could have impacted students' confidence and willingness to engage in discussions. Moreover, individual experiences, such as previous exposure to English-speaking environments or academic backgrounds, may have shaped their communication behaviors differently. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings to all Thai postgraduate students. Future studies should consider these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' willingness to communicate in English.

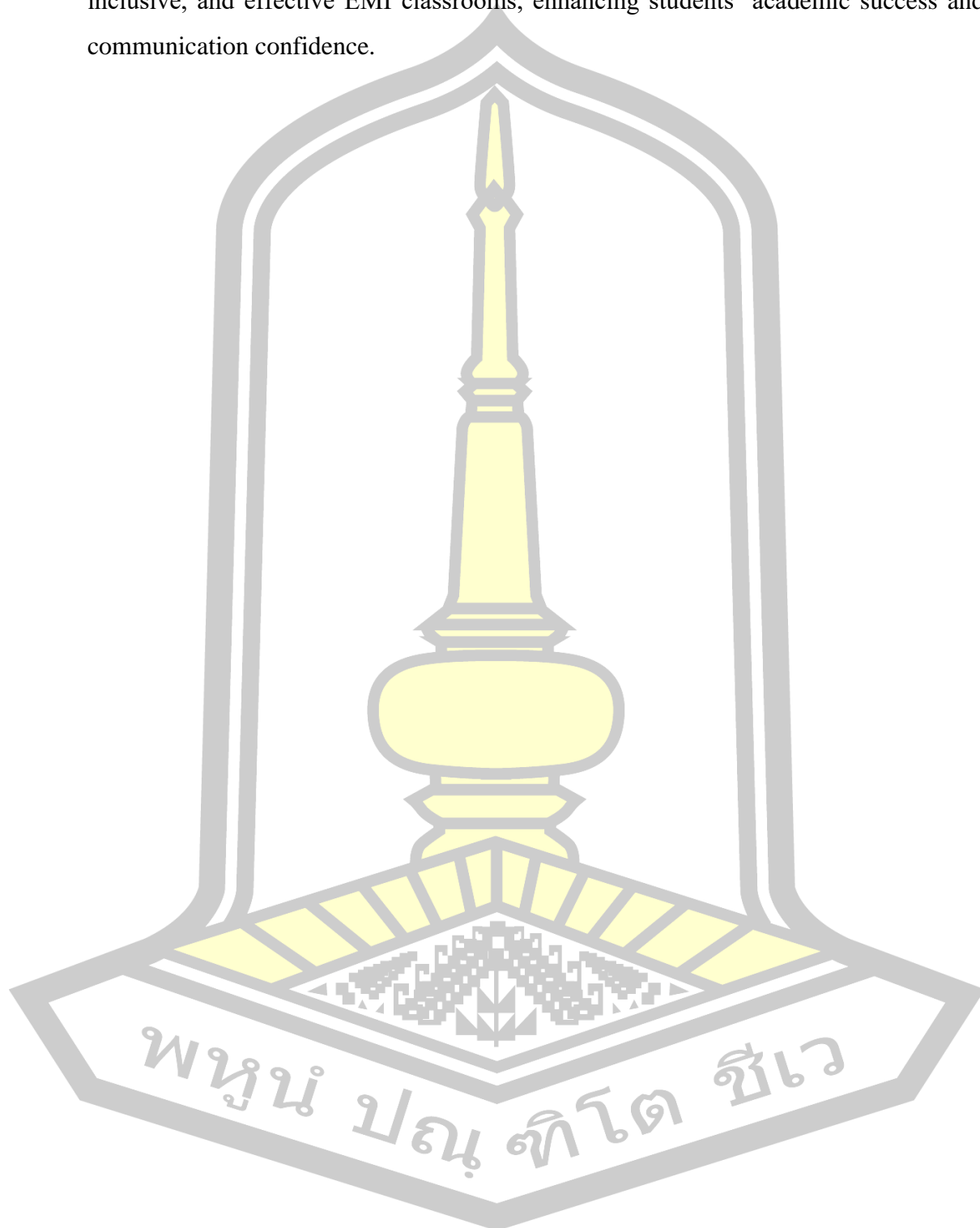
5.4 Conclusion

This study explored Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in English among Thai postgraduate students during group discussions in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) context. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combined quantitative data from Burgoon's UWTC questionnaire with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that most students exhibited a moderate level of UWTC, indicating that despite having sufficient English proficiency, they experienced hesitation and discomfort in speaking. Key factors contributing to this reluctance included fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, anxiety about making mistakes, and issues related to group dynamics such as unequal participation and lack of peer encouragement.

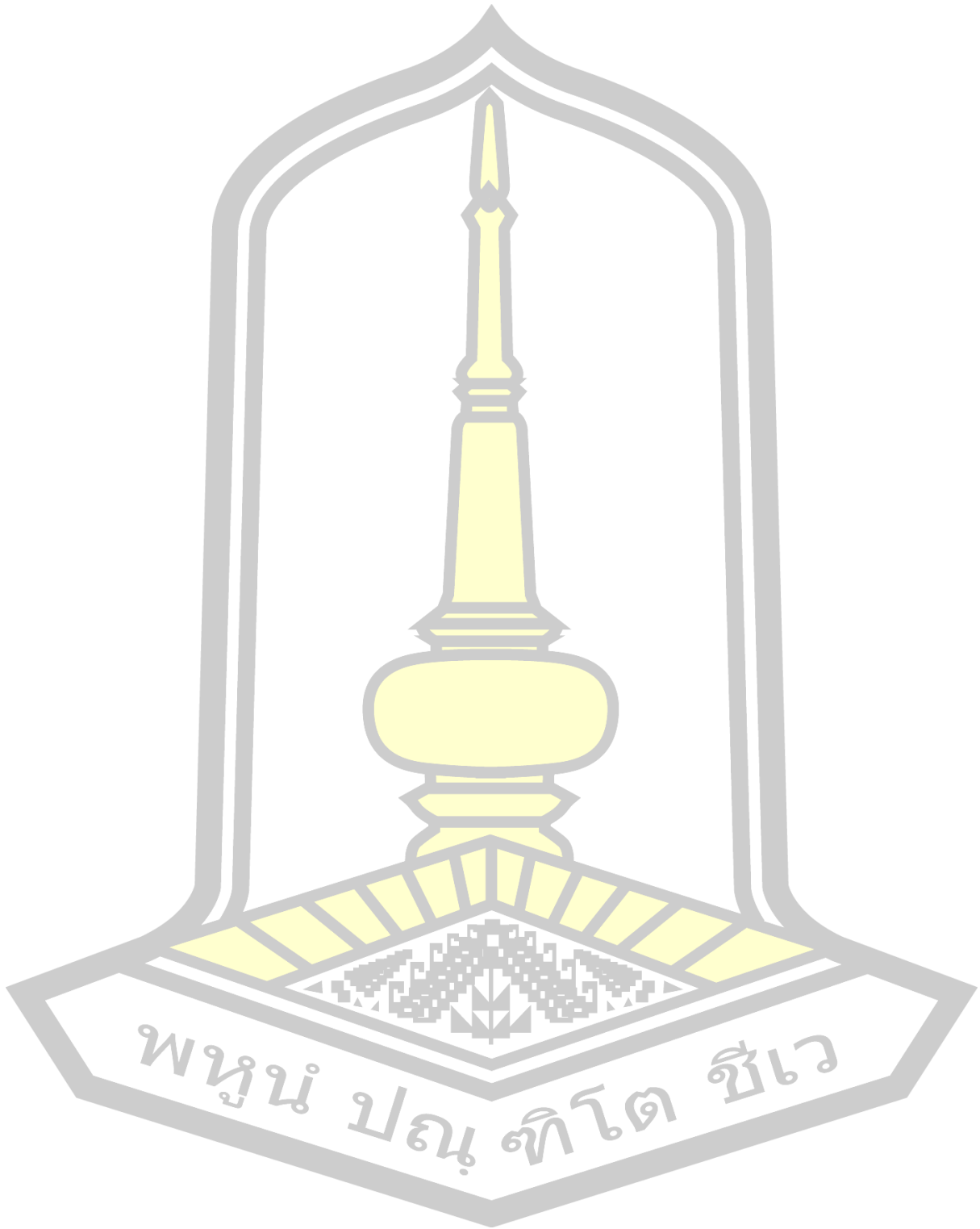
To manage their communication anxiety, students reported using several coping strategies. These included positive self-talk, breathing exercises, preparation before discussions, and seeking support from group members. These strategies helped reduce anxiety and fostered greater confidence and engagement. The study confirms that emotional regulation, peer collaboration, and cognitive reframing are vital for improving communication in second language environments.

Ultimately, this research offers valuable implications for educators and curriculum designers. By understanding the psychological and contextual barriers to

communication, targeted interventions can be developed to create more supportive, inclusive, and effective EMI classrooms, enhancing students' academic success and communication confidence.



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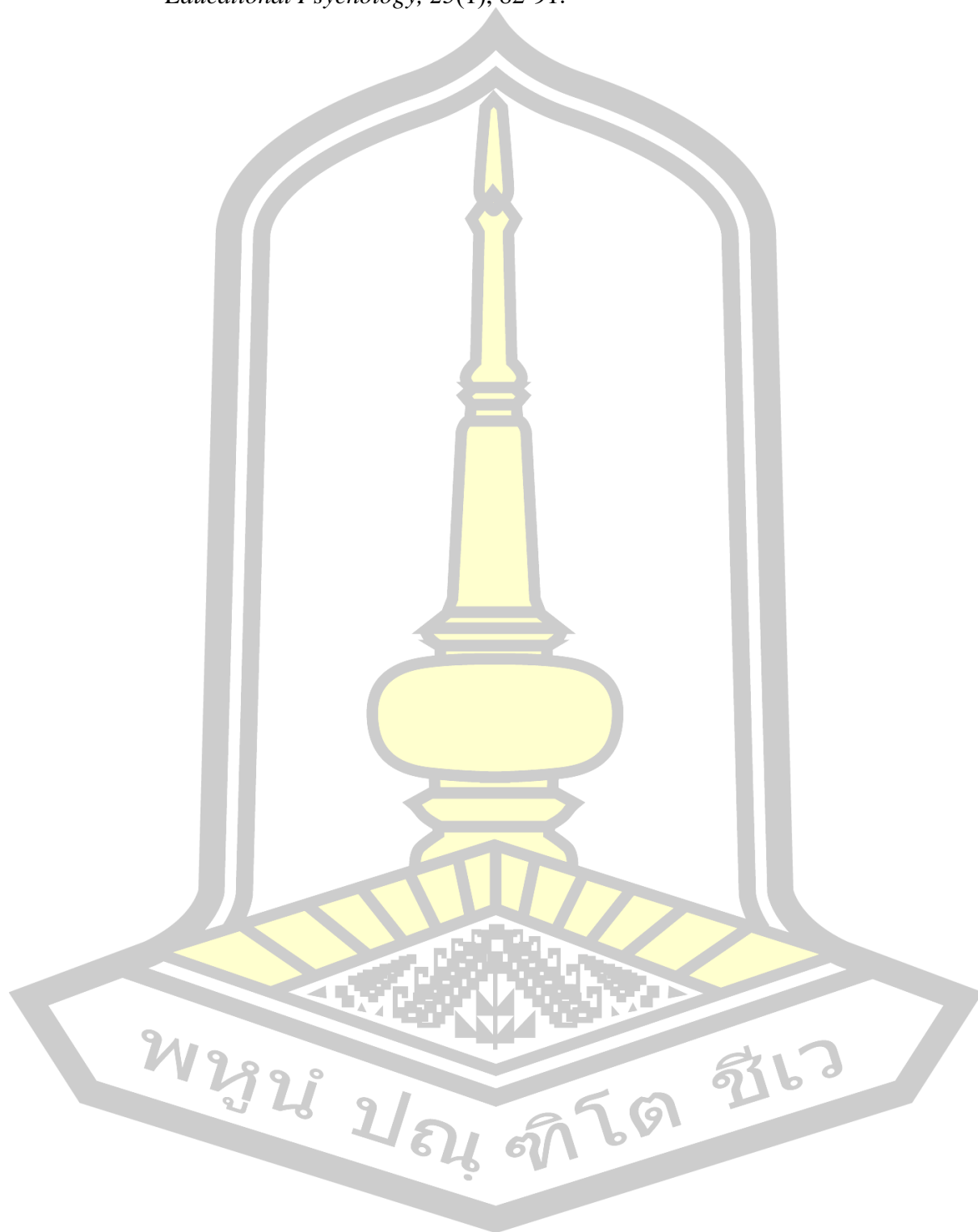
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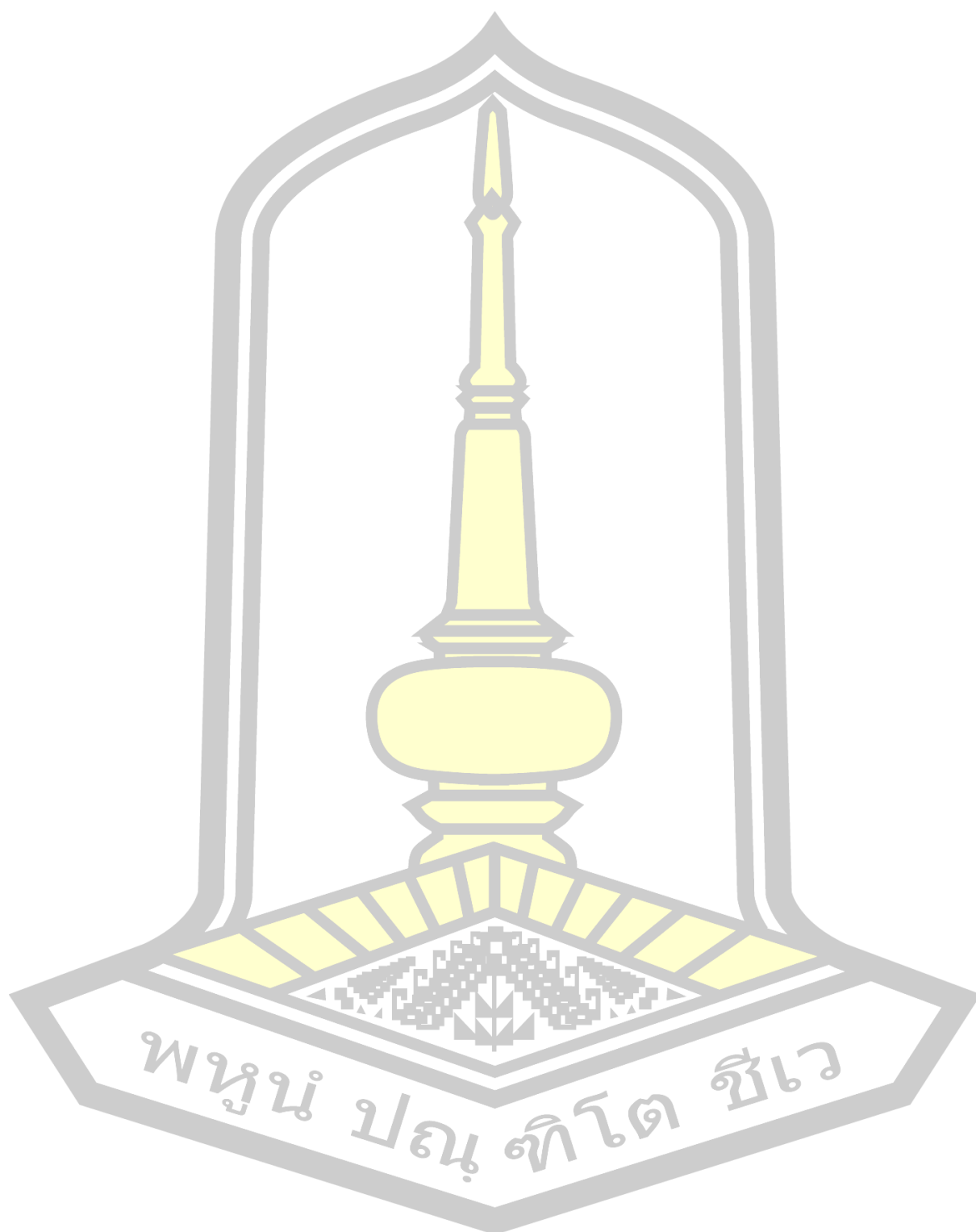
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APPENDICES



Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire in English

Name :

Sex :

Age :

Program :

Semester :

Course :

Questionnaire

(Adapted from Burgoon, 1976)

Below is a series of statements concerning your perception on Unwillingness to Communicate. There are no right or wrong answers. Please write the number which corresponds to your answer into the space provided at the end of each sentence.

1 = agree

2 = uncertain

3 = disagree

Please put the number corresponding to your answers in the blank before the statement.

..... I'm afraid to speak up in classroom discussions.

..... I don't talk in classroom presentation because I'm shy.

..... I talk a lot because I am not shy.

..... I don't like to get involved in group discussions.

..... In group discussions, I prefer to listen rather than talk.

..... I feel nervous when I have to express ideas to others.

- I have some fears about expressing myself in a group discussion.
- I am afraid to express myself in a group.
- I like group discussions.
- During a group discussion, I prefer to talk rather than listen.
- I find it difficult to make conversation with my mates.
- I am not afraid to talk in a classroom discussion.
- I find it easy to make conversation with mates.
- I don't feel nervous when I have express ideas to others.
- I don't think my friends are honest in their communication with me.
- My friends don't listen to my ideas and suggestions in classroom discussions.
- I don't ask for advice from friends when I have to make decisions.
- I believe my friends understand my feelings.
- My friends don't enjoy discussing my interests and activities with me.
- My friends listen to my ideas and suggestions.
- My friends seek my opinions and advice.
- My friends are friendly to maintain communication only because they want something out of me.
- Talking to friends is just a waste of time.
- My friends just pretend to be listening when I talk.
- If I got into some kind of trouble, I couldn't talk to anyone about it.

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