



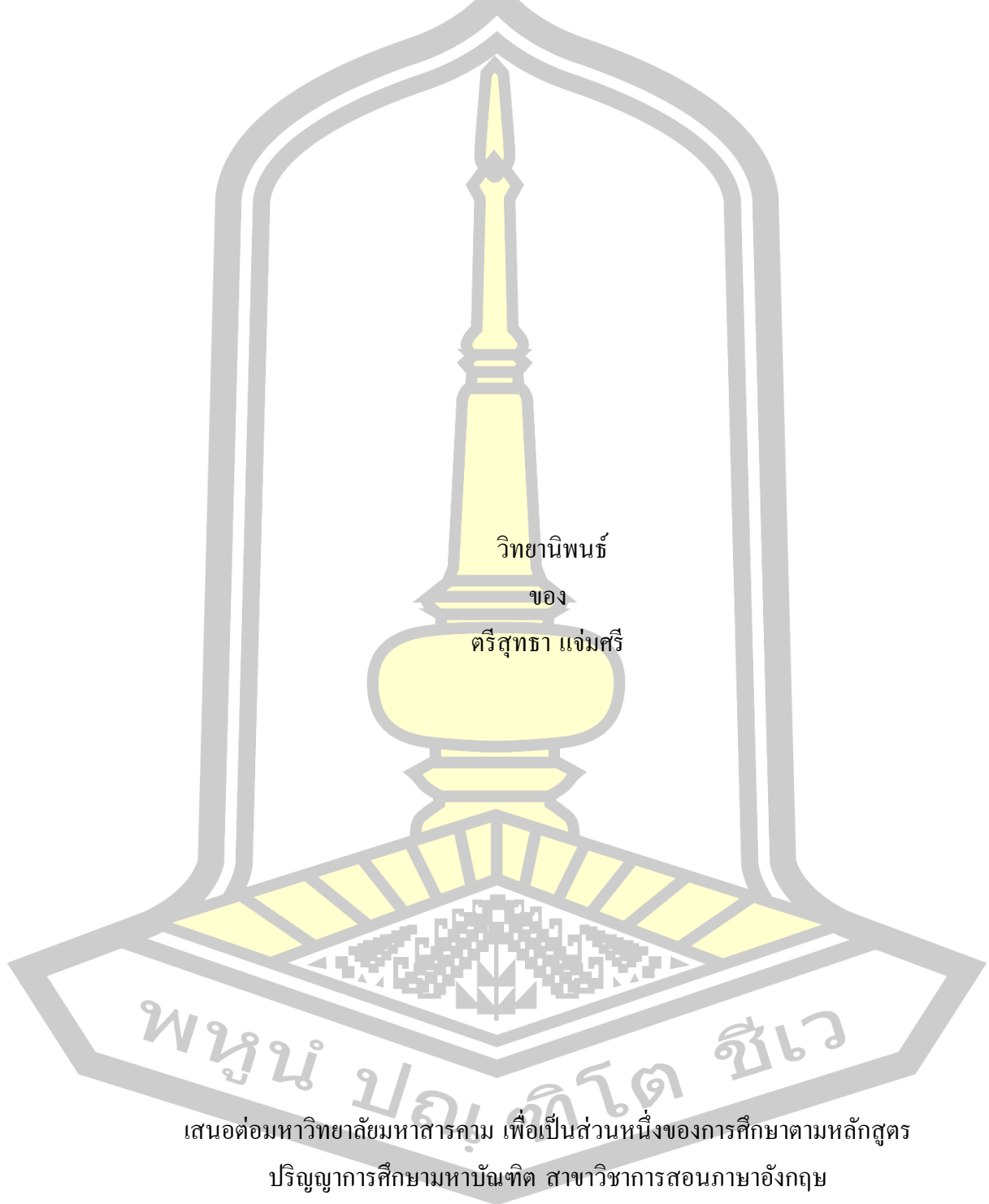
Exploring Speaking Anxiety: Insights from The Master's Students' Engagement
Experiences in Discussion in EMI Settings

Trisutta Jamsri

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

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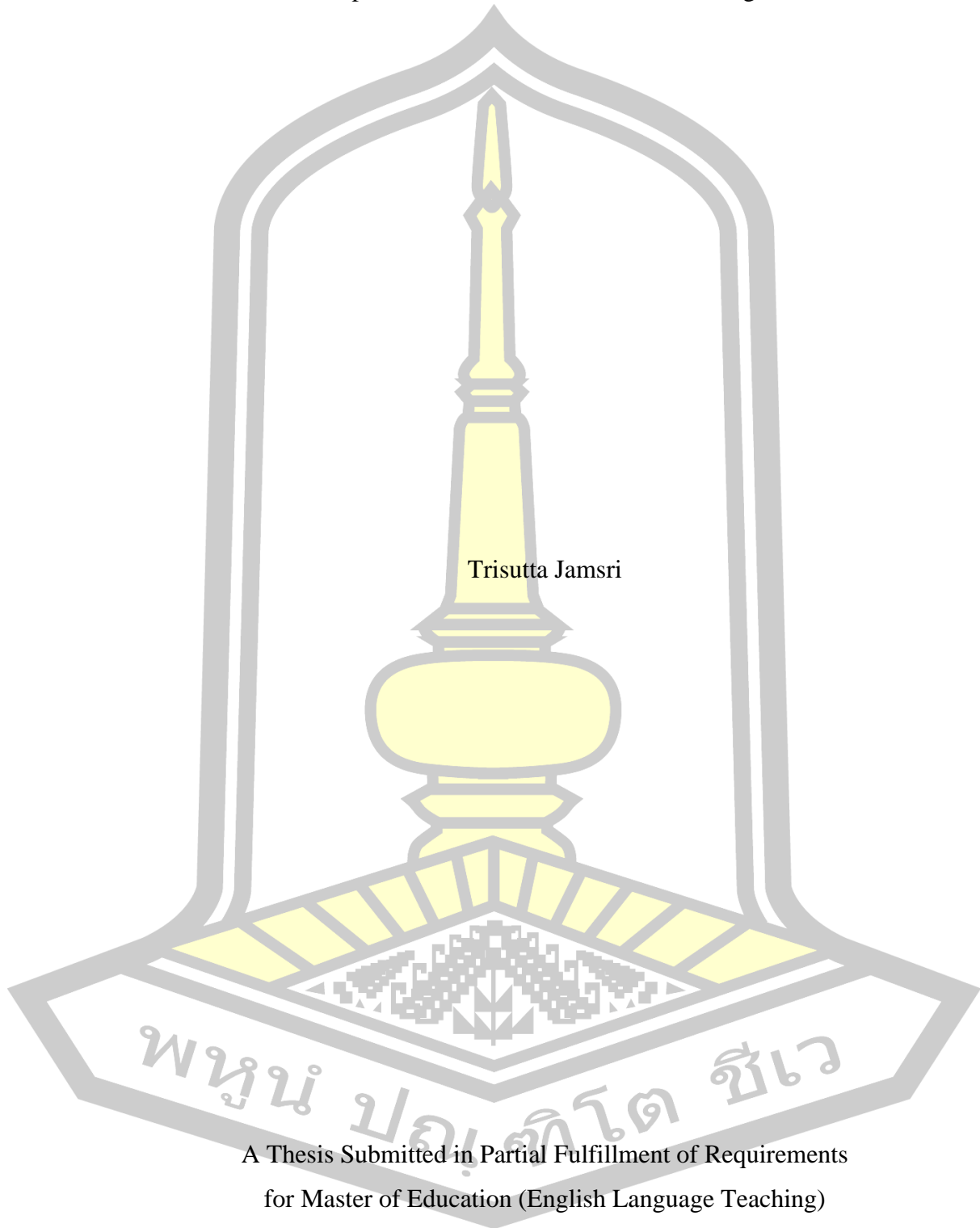


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May 2025

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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Mr. Trisutta Jamsri , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education English Language Teaching at Maharakham University

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ABSTRACT

The increasing implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education has presented both opportunities and challenges for non-native English-speaking students. While EMI promotes language development and global academic engagement, it also poses significant difficulties, particularly in classroom discussions, where students often experience speaking anxiety. This study examines the speaking anxiety experienced by Thai master's students in EMI classrooms, with a focus on the factors that influence their participation, the effects of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on classroom engagement, and the strategies they use to manage anxiety and participate more confidently in academic discussions.

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of discussion anxiety in EMI settings. Data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire completed by 21 Thai master's students from a government university and semi-structured interviews conducted with six purposively selected participants. The quantitative findings indicate that multiple factors affect student engagement in EMI classroom discussions, including English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, peer influence, cultural background, class size, and instructional methods. Among these, teacher support and classroom atmosphere had the most significant positive impact on engagement, while low English proficiency and high foreign language anxiety emerged as key barriers, causing hesitation and reduced participation.

The qualitative findings further reveal that students frequently experience fear of making grammatical errors, pronunciation difficulties, and negative evaluation from peers and instructors, leading to avoidance behaviors. However, students adopted three key strategies to cope with speaking anxiety: thorough preparation and peer support. Over time, consistent practice, structured speaking opportunities, and teacher encouragement were crucial in building confidence and reducing speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms.

This study highlights the critical role of supportive teaching practices, scaffolded classroom activities, and peer collaboration in reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing student participation. The findings offer practical implications for EMI educators, highlighting the importance of creating an inclusive, interactive, and linguistically supportive learning environment to maximize both academic achievement and language proficiency in EMI contexts.

Keyword : Speaking anxiety, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), foreign language anxiety (FLA), student engagement, classroom discussions



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Trisutta Jamsri

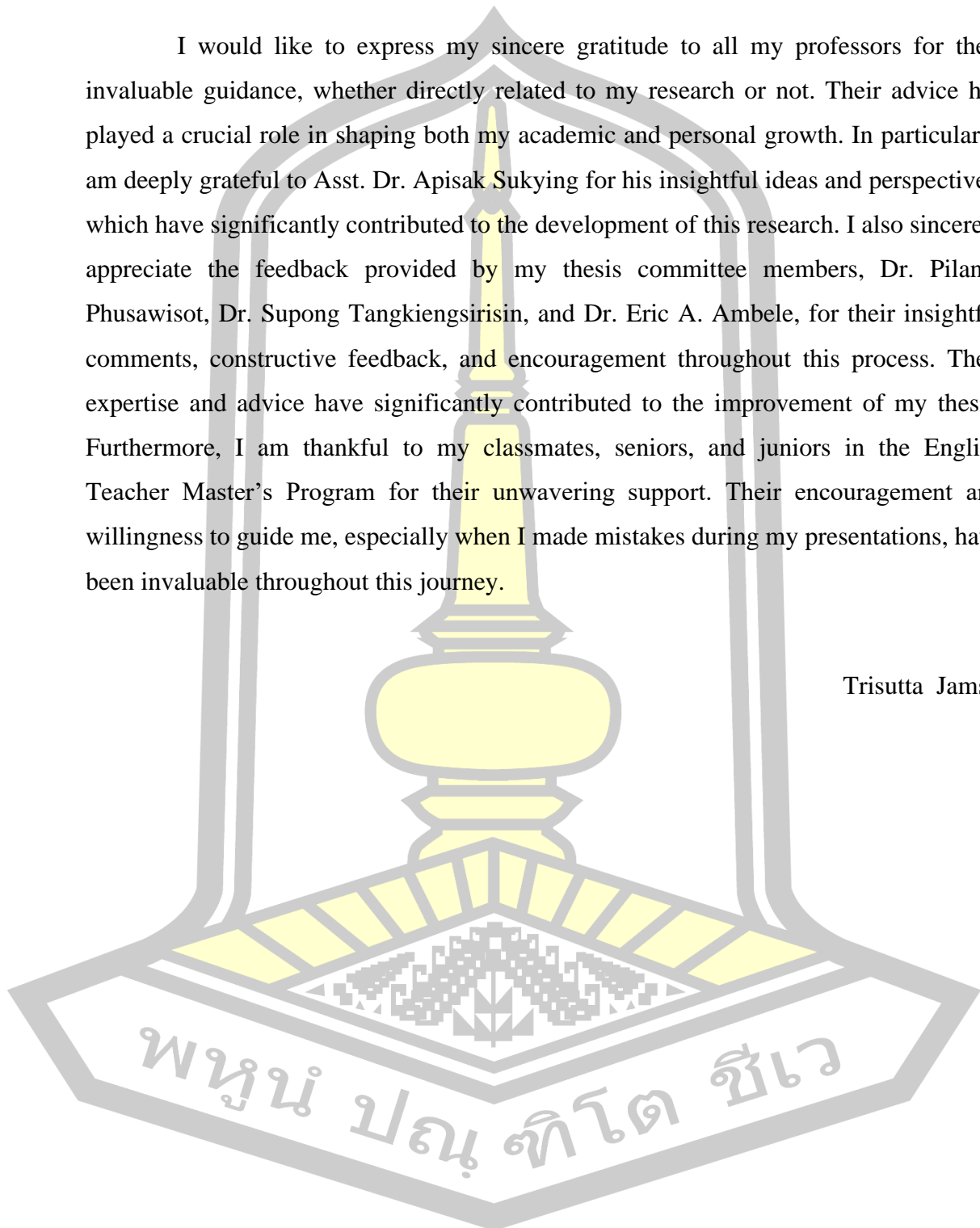


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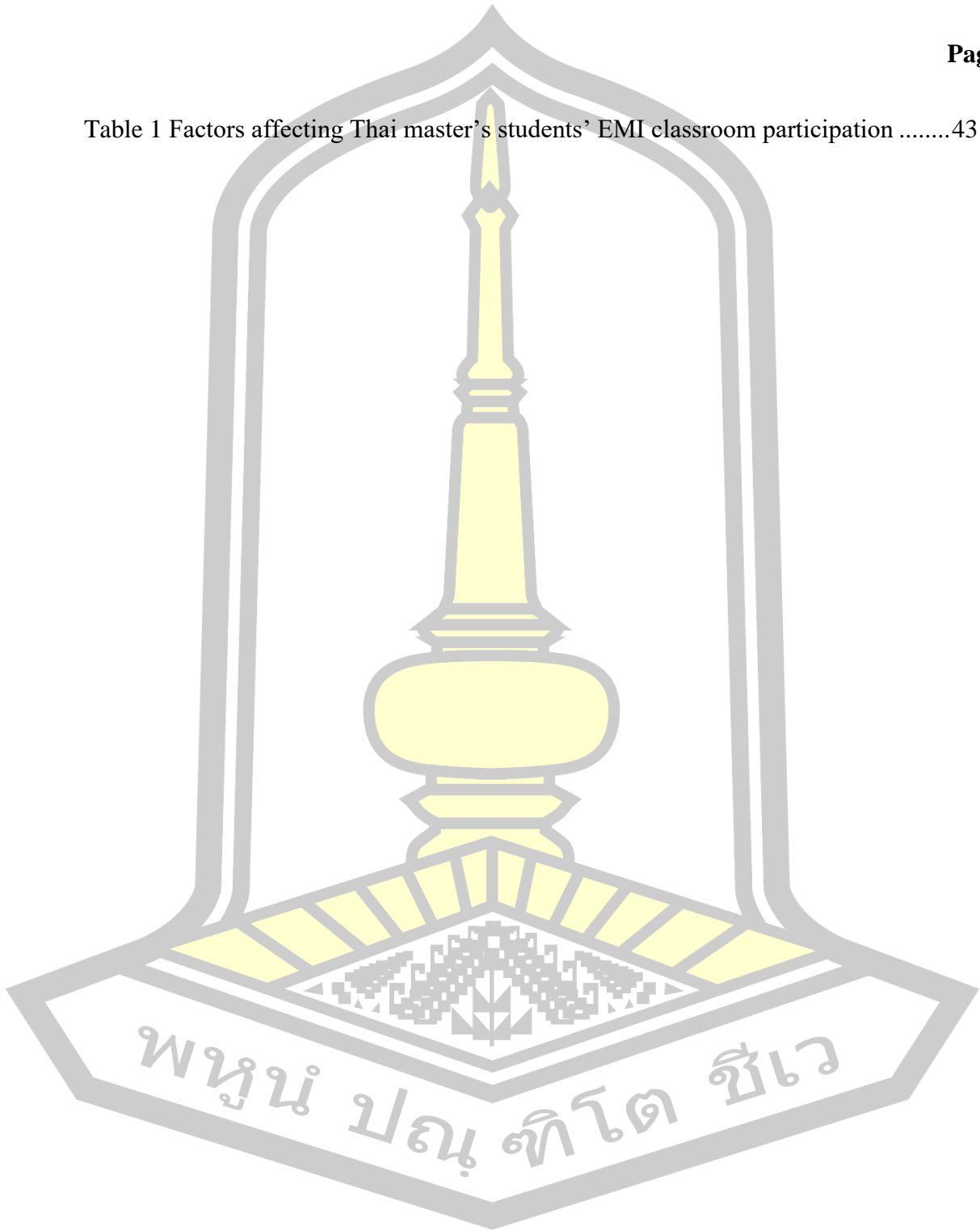
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I provides a comprehensive introduction to the research, beginning with the background of the study to establish context and underscore the importance of the research problem. It clearly articulates the research purposes and questions that drive the inquiry, outlining the specific objectives the study seeks to achieve. The chapter also defines the scope of the study, setting the boundaries within which the research will be conducted. The significance of the study is highlighted, emphasizing its potential contributions to the field and practical implications. Key terms are defined to ensure clarity and a shared understanding of the concepts involved. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline of the research, offering a roadmap for the reader and setting the stage for the detailed exploration in the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Background of the Study

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has transformed higher education worldwide, especially in non-English-speaking nations (Barnawi, 2021). Internationalization, employability, and worldwide academic networks are driving this pedagogical change (Dearden, 2018; Macaro, Curle, Pun, An & Dearden, 2017). EMI improves language skills and employment opportunities, but it also presents difficult obstacles, particularly in Asia, where English is not spoken every day (Cui, Gardiner & Wang, 2024).

Malaysia and the Philippines have excellent English integration in school and public life, making EMI learning settings easier to adapt to (He, Baharom & Abd Razak, 2024). Thailand's EMI adoption is younger, less consistent, and limited by a lack of certified EMI teachers and language exposure at earlier educational levels (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). Thai students sometimes arrive in EMI classes with little English competence and no academic speaking methods. This is especially troublesome in postgraduate classrooms where scholarly conversation drives interest and performance (Curle, Goodman & Yessenbekova, 2024).

To understand these challenges' practical implications, we must examine the psychological factors that hinder students' verbal engagement in EMI settings (Li, Yuana & Zhang, 2023). Empirical evidence shows EMI speaking anxiety is severe.

Wong and Buranapatana (2021) found that over 65% of Thai university students felt uncomfortable speaking English in class. Curle et al. (2021) found that Thai postgraduate students often avoid verbal participation despite having sufficient content knowledge due to fear of negative evaluation and linguistic inaccuracy. These findings reflect ASEAN trends where language-related anxiety hinders classroom engagement (Chou, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). Such evidence highlights the need for pedagogical strategies that address language proficiency and student participation's emotional and psychological aspects (Behbahani, Heydarnejad & Namaziandost, 2024).

Based on this empirical evidence, emotional and cultural factors strongly influence EMI student behavior. Research in Asia shows that many EMI students experience Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) due to fear of negative evaluation, perfectionism, limited vocabulary, and hierarchical classroom cultures. These affective factors significantly reduce oral participation and reduce engagement. Thai cultural norms that value deference, avoid conflict, and discourage classroom risk-taking exacerbate these issues (Kruk, 2022). Thus, EMI students may remain silent despite understanding the material due to anxiety (Jiang, Ma, Reynolds & Yu, 2022).

Much research has examined Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in EMI contexts across Asia, but most have focused on undergraduate learners or general language anxiety rather than academic discussion-specific concerns. Bussu Pulina & Molloy (2024). found that students in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia face similar affective barriers such as low self-confidence and fear of negative judgment. However, sociocultural norms, prior English exposure, and institutional support mechanisms affect these worries' strength and expression (Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Kustati & Kurniawan, 2023). Malaysians, who are more used to multilingual schooling, are more confident in EMI situations than Thai students (Alias & Ismail, 2020). Despite these similar results, little research has studied how ASEAN postgraduate students manage emotional (engagement) and behavioral (participation) speaking fear in EMI classroom discussions (Li, 2024). Thailand's culture is compared to Southeast Asia in this study to close that gap.

This study focuses on classroom-based spoken interaction, including whole-class discussions, small-group tasks, and student-led presentations, as EMI pedagogy increasingly relies on communicative methods. Real-time language creation, active listening, and critical thinking increase anxiety in students who lack linguistic confidence (Abdellatif, Alshehri, Hafez, Gafar, & Lamouchi, 2024). Understanding speaking fear and EMI conversation participation will promote non-native English education (Dai & Wang, 2024).

The researcher's experience in Thai EMI classes, where students were reluctant to speak even when academically competent, inspired this study. The gap between language competence, academic aptitude, and communication created psychological and pedagogical problems (Leeming, Vitta, Hiver, Hicks, McLean & Nicklin, 2024). The research combines mixed methods to examine the reasons for speaking anxiety, the tactics students take to control it, and how these strategies affect participation and deeper involvement in EMI classroom conversations.

In EMI conversations, Thai master's students' speaking anxiety sources, impacts, and coping techniques are examined. Using quantitative and qualitative data, this research aims to help EMI educators in Thailand and other ASEAN countries reduce anxiety, increase student engagement, and create more inclusive learning environments that bridge linguistic and cultural gaps (Meenasantirak, & Chaiyasuk, 2024). This study fills a research vacuum in EMI by providing a culturally sensitive framework for understanding and reducing speaking anxiety in postgraduate classes and supporting evidence-based curriculum changes in Southeast Asia.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although EMI has been extensively researched across various Asian contexts, there remains a lack of attention to the nuanced emotional and interactional experiences of postgraduate students in Thai EMI classrooms (Galloway, Kriukow & Numajiri, 2017). Most studies to date have focused on undergraduate learners or relied heavily on quantitative measures of anxiety, which overlook the complex, lived experiences of learners navigating language and academic pressure simultaneously (Wong & Buranapatana, 2021; Curle et al., 2021).

Speaking anxiety in EMI discussions presents a barrier not only to language development but also to active learning and academic engagement (Dai & Wang, 2024). In postgraduate settings where discussion is central to assessment and knowledge construction the cost of silence is particularly high (Mercer & Howe, 2022). Despite this, little is known about how Thai master's students perceive, experience, and attempt to manage their anxiety (Chinpakdee, 2015; Huiling & Ismail, 2022).

There is also limited insight into the coping strategies students employ to maintain classroom engagement despite psychological discomfort. These gaps limit educators' ability to scaffold EMI discussions effectively and to support anxious learners in non-native English settings.

This research examines the internal and external variables affecting speaking anxiety in EMI discussions, its effects on student involvement, and Thai postgraduate students' coping techniques. It adds to a culturally based, pedagogically relevant knowledge of language-related anxiety in EMI classrooms.

Asian EMI literature is expanding, but few studies examine postgraduate students' emotional experiences during class debates. A purposive sample of 21 Thai master's students was used to examine anxiety-related experiences in a particular academic and cultural environment. This research sheds light on the emotional and behavioral aspects of speaking anxiety in postgraduate EMI classroom conversations, unlike prior studies on general language anxiety or undergraduate learners.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the individual, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai master's students during academic discussions in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms.
2. To examine the influence of speaking anxiety on students' emotional engagement and behavioral participation in EMI discussions.
3. To explore the context-specific coping strategies employed by Thai master's students to regulate speaking anxiety and sustain active engagement in EMI classroom discussions.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the key factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among Thai master's students in EMI classroom discussions?
2. How does speaking anxiety affect students' engagement and participation in EMI discussions?
3. What strategies do students use to cope with speaking anxiety and stay engaged in classroom discussions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Thai EMI classrooms' social and academic environment is illuminated by this research on speaking anxiety. The research uses quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine how worry affects classroom speech and involvement among postgraduate students. EMI pedagogy, curriculum design, and language policy in Thailand and other EFL settings will focus on language anxiety reduction and inclusive, engaging learning environments.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Speaking Anxiety: A specific form of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) that arises when learners are required to speak in English during classroom discussions, presentations, or interactive tasks in English Medium Instruction (EMI) settings. It is characterized by emotional tension, fear of negative evaluation, and hesitation to communicate orally, especially in high-stakes academic contexts (Chou, 2018).

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA): A psychological phenomenon involving worry, nervousness, and apprehension experienced by learners when using a non-native language. This study refers to the anxiety felt by Thai postgraduate students when engaging in spoken English during EMI classes (Tanielian, 2014).

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI): An educational approach in which English is used as the primary language of instruction to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the student's first language. In this study, EMI refers specifically to master 's-level English Language Teaching (ELT) courses in Thai universities (Galloway & Sahan, 2021).

Engagement: A multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of student involvement in the learning process. This study refers to students' willingness to participate in classroom discussions, express ideas, collaborate with peers, and actively process academic content in EMI environments (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Participation: Refers to students' observable involvement in classroom learning activities, including speaking during discussions, answering or asking questions, giving presentations, and collaborating in group tasks. In this study, participation reflects both verbal and non-verbal classroom engagement, particularly in English Medium Instruction (EMI) settings, where speaking anxiety can influence students' willingness to contribute (Tsui & Cheng, 2022).

Discussion: Any classroom-based spoken activity that involves student-student or student-teacher interaction, including whole-class discussions, small group conversations, and student-led presentations. Discussions in EMI settings require real-time language use, academic reasoning, and active listening (Kang, 2021).

Coping Strategies: Deliberate techniques and actions adopted by students to manage their speaking anxiety and maintain classroom engagement. In this study, coping strategies include pre-discussion preparation, peer collaboration, relaxation techniques, and confidence-building practices (Kondo & Yang, 2004).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC): A learner's intentional readiness to initiate communication in a second language, especially in classroom contexts. This concept is crucial in explaining why some students with sufficient language skills still refrain from speaking due to anxiety or cultural factors (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998).

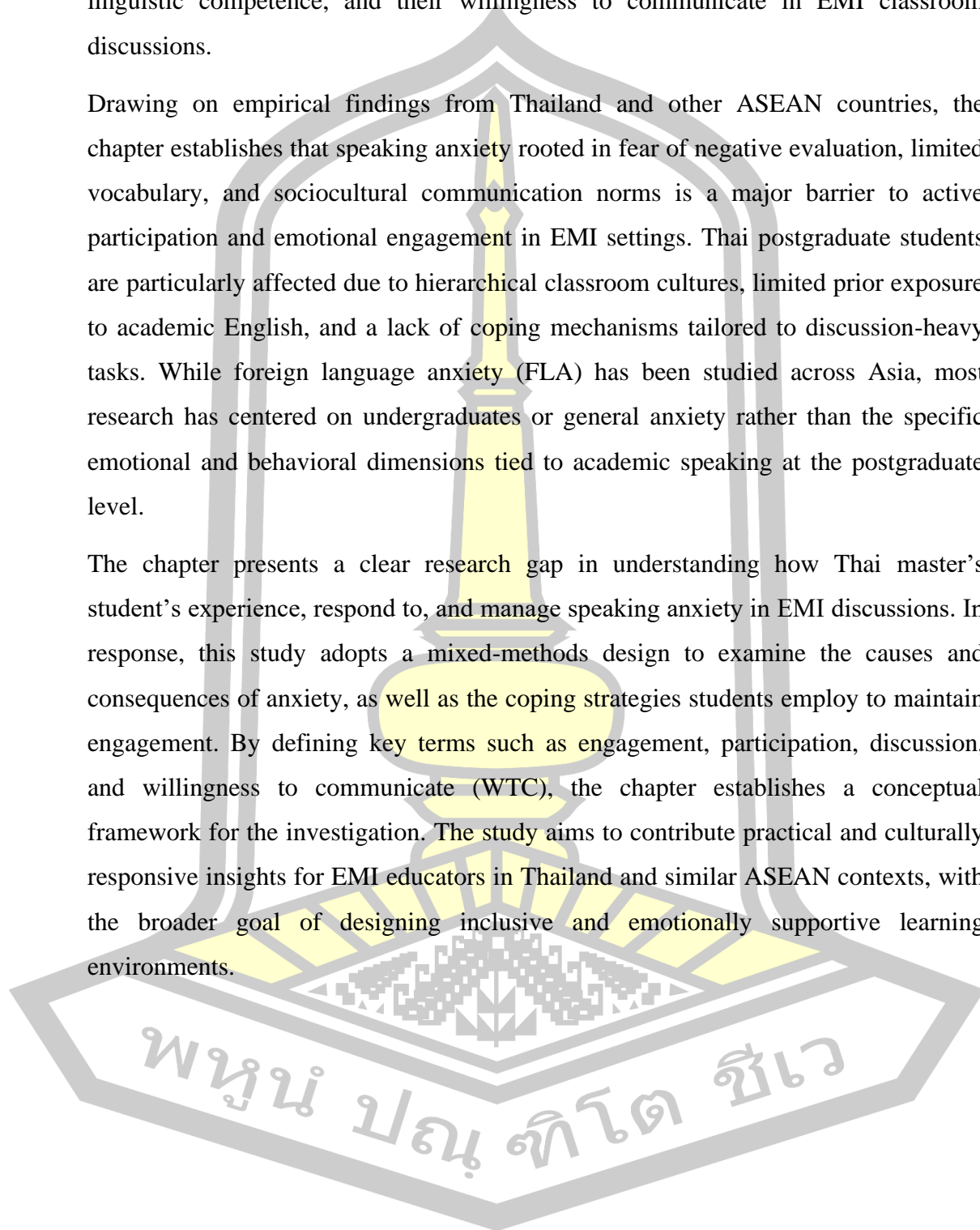
1.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter I introduces the rising significance of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in global and Southeast Asian higher education, with a particular focus on Thailand. Despite EMI's promise to foster internationalization and improve students' employability, the chapter highlights persistent pedagogical and psychological challenges faced by postgraduate students in non-native English contexts.

Specifically, it addresses the disconnect between students' academic knowledge, linguistic competence, and their willingness to communicate in EMI classroom discussions.

Drawing on empirical findings from Thailand and other ASEAN countries, the chapter establishes that speaking anxiety rooted in fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, and sociocultural communication norms is a major barrier to active participation and emotional engagement in EMI settings. Thai postgraduate students are particularly affected due to hierarchical classroom cultures, limited prior exposure to academic English, and a lack of coping mechanisms tailored to discussion-heavy tasks. While foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been studied across Asia, most research has centered on undergraduates or general anxiety rather than the specific emotional and behavioral dimensions tied to academic speaking at the postgraduate level.

The chapter presents a clear research gap in understanding how Thai master's student's experience, respond to, and manage speaking anxiety in EMI discussions. In response, this study adopts a mixed-methods design to examine the causes and consequences of anxiety, as well as the coping strategies students employ to maintain engagement. By defining key terms such as engagement, participation, discussion, and willingness to communicate (WTC), the chapter establishes a conceptual framework for the investigation. The study aims to contribute practical and culturally responsive insights for EMI educators in Thailand and similar ASEAN contexts, with the broader goal of designing inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II reviews existing literature and theoretical frameworks underlying the study. It begins with exploring English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), highlighting its significance and challenges in higher education. Conceptual frameworks guiding the study are outlined, providing a theoretical basis for understanding classroom engagement in EMI settings. Related studies offer context and insights into existing findings. A critical review of current studies identifies gaps this research aims to address. The chapter concludes with a summary, synthesizing key points and setting the stage for subsequent chapters, emphasizing the importance of addressing identified gaps to advance understanding of EMI and classroom engagement.

2.1 Situating English as a Medium of Instruction in Thailand

Integrating English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) into Thai educational settings reflects a broader trend driven by globalization and the imperative for English proficiency in the global arena. This strategic shift towards EMI underscores Thailand's ambition to elevate its international standing by bolstering English language skills across its population (Chen, Han & Wright, 2020). While this pivot opens up many opportunities, it concurrently poses challenges that underscore the complexity of navigating a global language within a local educational landscape.

The opportunities presented by EMI are multifaceted. Foremost, EMI aims to enhance the English language competencies of Thai students, preparing them for a competitive edge in the global workforce (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Additionally, adopting EMI facilitates the internationalization of Thai educational institutions, attracting diverse international students and faculty and enriching the educational milieu through various cultural perspectives (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2014). Moreover, EMI grants access to the expansive realm of global knowledge and discourse predominantly conducted in English, fostering a vibrant exchange of ideas and promoting innovation within Thai academia (Jenkins, 2014).

Nevertheless, the transition towards EMI is troubled and challenging. A primary concern is the disparity in English proficiency levels among students and teachers,

which can significantly hinder the teaching and learning process. Students with lower English proficiency may struggle to keep pace with academic demands, affecting their academic performance and motivation (Horta, Jiang & Yuen, 2024). Moreover, the readiness of educators to effectively deliver content in English remains a concern, as not all possess the essential language proficiency or confidence, potentially compromising educational quality (Phan & Vo, 2013). The emphasis on English also raises apprehensions about the potential marginalization of the Thai language and culture, signaling a need to balance global engagement with preserving national identity (Khamkhien, 2010). Furthermore, the nature of EMI implementation, necessitating significant investments in language support, teacher training, and educational materials, presents considerable challenges, particularly for institutions in less affluent or rural areas, thereby risking educational inequalities (Nunan, 2003).

In response, Thai education policymakers and institutions are considering various models and strategies to implement EMI more effectively. These include adopting partial EMI programs where only certain subjects are taught in English, providing intensive English language support for students and teachers, and developing bilingual resources (Galloway, Numajiri & Rees, 2020). There is also an increasing emphasis on teacher training programs focusing on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies, which aim to teach subject content and English language skills concurrently (Puffer, 2007).

The evolution of EMI in Thai education reflects broader global shifts as educational systems adapt to the necessities of globalization. Successfully integrating EMI within Thailand hinges on finding a balance between harnessing the benefits of international language education and addressing the needs of students and educators during this transition. Ensuring the push toward global competitiveness does not compromise educational equity or cultural integrity remains paramount (Hamid, Nguyen & Baldauf, 2014).

Within this broader EMI landscape, classroom discussion emerges as a core academic practice that both showcases and challenges students' communicative competence. In Thai EMI classrooms, discussions including small-group tasks, student-led presentations, and whole-class exchanges require students to process content in real

time and articulate ideas using academic English (Kang, 2021). These tasks place a significant cognitive and linguistic demand on learners, particularly those with limited exposure to English discourse conventions (Kormos & Préfontaine, 2017). For many Thai postgraduate students, such activities are not only intellectually demanding but also emotionally taxing due to speaking anxiety a form of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) triggered by the fear of negative evaluation, grammatical inaccuracy, or pronunciation issues (Mak, 2011). As a result, while EMI promotes language development and global engagement, it also intensifies students' vulnerability in high-stakes academic discussions where oral performance is tied to participation and evaluation (Chou, 2018; Curle et al., 2021; Wong & Buranapatana, 2021). Therefore, addressing speaking anxiety in discussion-based EMI contexts is crucial for ensuring both equitable participation and meaningful learning outcomes.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations for Classroom Engagement in EMI Settings

2.2.1 Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is a foundational concept in educational psychology that emphasizes the critical role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning is inherently a social process, and our interactions with others significantly influence our cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory posits that cognitive development is not an isolated process occurring within an individual but rather a collaborative process that unfolds through social interactions and shared experiences.

In the context of this study, Sociocultural Theory underpins how Thai postgraduate students engage in EMI classrooms, particularly during spoken classroom activities. The emphasis on social interaction aligns with the collaborative nature of EMI tasks, such as group discussions, peer presentations, and teacher-student exchanges. These interactions are essential for co-constructing meaning and developing both language proficiency and academic understanding.

Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of collaborative learning and scaffolding. Collaborative learning involves students working together to solve problems, complete tasks, or understand new concepts. This interaction with peers and teachers provides a rich context for learning, as students are exposed to different

perspectives and ways of thinking. Through these social interactions, students can co-construct knowledge, deepen their understanding, and enhance their problem-solving skills (Vygotsky, 1978).

Scaffolding is another key concept in Vygotsky's theory. It refers to the support provided by teachers or more knowledgeable peers to help students achieve a higher level of understanding or skill than they could achieve independently. This support can take many forms, such as providing hints, asking guiding questions, or modeling a task. The goal of scaffolding is to gradually transfer responsibility to the student as they become more competent, ultimately fostering independent learning (Bruner, Ross, & Wood, 1976).

In EMI classrooms in Thai universities, scaffolding becomes especially important for students experiencing speaking anxiety. For example, teachers may use structured speaking tasks, sentence starters, or small-group discussions before whole-class presentations to support anxious students. The social context of the EMI classroom thus provides not only language input but also emotional support, contributing to students' confidence and participation.

2.2.2 Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is pivotal in understanding how individuals acquire new behaviors, skills, and knowledge through social interactions. According to Albert Bandura, learning occurs through direct experience and observing the actions and outcomes of others' behaviors. This theory highlights the processes of observation, imitation, and modelling as fundamental learning mechanisms (Bandura, 1977).

In Thai EMI classrooms, Bandura's Social Learning Theory helps explain how students develop academic behaviors and communication strategies by observing peers and teachers. These role models demonstrate how to articulate ideas in English, manage academic discourse, and participate effectively in discussions.

Bandura's theory points out the important role that the classroom environment plays in influencing students. Teachers and more proficient peers serve as key linguistic and academic knowledge sources. Students learn by watching these role models engage in various tasks, listening to their use of language, and observing their problem-solving

strategies. This observational learning process enables students to internalize language patterns, academic skills, and effective behaviors without necessarily undergoing the trial-and-error process themselves (Bandura, 1986).

According to social learning theory, observation is the first step in the social learning process. In EMI classrooms, students frequently observe their teachers and peers. They observe how teachers structure their sentences, use vocabulary, and interact with academic content. This observation extends beyond language use to include classroom behaviors, such as participation in discussions, asking questions, and collaboration in group activities. By observing these behaviors, students learn appropriate language use and academic practices (Bandura, 1986).

Indeed, observational learning is not passive; it involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Students must first pay attention to the behavior being modelled. Then, they need to retain the information in their memory. Next, they reproduce the behavior, which requires practice and the ability to translate mental representations into physical actions. Finally, motivation plays a crucial role; students must have a reason to imitate the behavior, which can be influenced by anticipated rewards or the desire to achieve personal goals (Bandura, 1986).

This learning model is especially relevant for Thai postgraduate students coping with speaking anxiety. Observing confident peers manage academic English can help anxious students develop their own strategies, build confidence, and reduce fear of speaking. Over time, imitation and practice lead to improved performance and classroom engagement.

Modelling is another crucial component of Bandura's theory. In EMI settings, teachers and proficient peers are models of successful language use and academic engagement. Effective modelling involves demonstrating clear, achievable, and relevant behaviors to the learners. Teachers can model how to conduct a scientific experiment, solve a math problem, or construct an essay in English. When students see these behaviors modelled successfully, they are more likely to believe they can achieve similar success, increasing their motivation and engagement (Hanson & Schunk, 1987).

The social learning dynamics in EMI classrooms are essential for student engagement. When students see their peers actively participating and succeeding, it creates a positive and encouraging learning environment. This peer influence can be powerful, as students often identify more closely with their peers than their teachers. Positive peer reinforcement, such as praise for correct answers or collaborative success in group tasks, further strengthens the learning process and fosters a supportive classroom community (Bandura, 1997).

2.2.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), emphasizes the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in human behavior. SDT posits that individuals are more likely to be engaged and motivated when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. These needs are essential for fostering an environment where students thrive, particularly in educational settings.

In EMI classrooms, particularly in Thai postgraduate contexts, many students face challenges in achieving a sense of competence and autonomy due to language barriers and fear of negative evaluation. Speaking anxiety often undermines students' intrinsic motivation to participate. By understanding SDT, teachers can intentionally design supportive environments that encourage participation, reduce anxiety, and support emotional well-being.

SDT differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual, driven by interest, enjoyment, and the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is driven by external rewards or pressures. In EMI settings, understanding the balance between these types of motivation is critical. While intrinsic motivation is often more sustainable and leads to deeper engagement, extrinsic motivators, such as grades and praise, can also play a role in encouraging participation (Clement, Noels, Pelletier, & Vallerand, 2000).

Teachers can enhance intrinsic motivation in educational contexts by connecting classroom activities to students' interests and real-world applications, making learning more relevant and engaging. Providing opportunities for students to explore topics

that interest them and offering appropriately challenging tasks can stimulate intrinsic motivation. Additionally, recognizing and celebrating students' efforts and achievements can bolster their extrinsic motivation, particularly in settings where language barriers may initially hinder their intrinsic interest.

In EMI settings, the interplay between language proficiency and classroom practices significantly influences the fulfillment of students' psychological needs. For example, students with higher language proficiency may naturally feel more competent and autonomous, leading to increased engagement. Conversely, students struggling with language barriers may require additional support and targeted interventions to meet their needs for competence and autonomy. To address these challenges, teachers can adopt strategies such as differentiated instruction, peer support systems, and culturally responsive teaching practices (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Creating a classroom environment that meets students' autonomy, competence, and related needs can transform their educational experience. By understanding and applying the principles of SDT, educators in EMI settings can develop teaching strategies that enhance language proficiency and foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment. This holistic approach to student engagement is essential for helping students navigate the complexities of learning a second language and achieving their academic goals.

2.2.4 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, a cornerstone of Stephen Krashen's theories on second language acquisition, suggests that emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence play a crucial role in language learning. According to Krashen (1982), these affective factors can either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of a new language, acting as a filter that can block or allow language input to be processed by the learner. In English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms, understanding and managing these affective factors is essential for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Anxiety, particularly Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), is one of the most significant emotional barriers in EMI classrooms. FLA refers to the apprehension and fear that students may feel when using a foreign language, which can manifest in various

forms, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Zarei, Alibakhshi & Nezakatgoo, (2024). Recent studies continue to affirm that high levels of anxiety can significantly impede students' ability to participate and perform in EMI settings (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Boonsuk & Karakaş, 2024). Anxious students may avoid speaking up in class, hesitate to ask questions, or refrain from engaging in group discussions, thereby missing valuable language practice and learning opportunities. Addressing and mitigating anxiety is crucial for creating an environment conducive to language learning and student engagement (Chan, Fang, Han, & Man, 2024).

Motivation is another crucial component of the Affective Filter Hypothesis and is critical in determining the extent and success of language acquisition. Krashen (1982) emphasizes that motivated students are more likely to seek out and engage with language input, practice regularly, and persevere through challenges. In EMI classrooms, motivation can be influenced by various factors, including personal interest in the subject matter, the perceived relevance of English proficiency to future goals, and the learning environment created by the teacher. Recent research by Levy, Luria, & Shalom (2020) highlights that intrinsic motivation, where students are driven by internal rewards such as personal satisfaction and interest, is particularly effective in promoting long-term language learning. Extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards such as grades and approval, also plays a role but may not sustain student engagement in the long run (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers can foster motivation by making learning activities relevant and engaging, providing positive feedback, and creating opportunities for students to experience success.

Self-confidence is the third affective factor highlighted by Krashen's hypothesis. Students with high self-confidence are more likely to take risks using the language, such as speaking in front of the class or engaging in complex discussions. This willingness to take risks is crucial for practicing and improving language skills. Conversely, students with low self-confidence may be reluctant to use the language, limiting their growth opportunities. In EMI classrooms, building self-confidence can involve creating a supportive and non-threatening learning environment where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process rather than failures (Dörnyei, 2001).

Teachers can help build students' confidence by setting achievable goals, celebrating progress, and providing constructive and encouraging feedback.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how Thai postgraduate students engage in EMI classrooms. By integrating Sociocultural Theory, Social Learning Theory, SDT, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, this study offers a multifaceted lens through which to analyze speaking anxiety and student engagement, ultimately aiming to inform pedagogical practices that support learners in navigating English-mediated academic environments.

2.3 Discussion Method in EMI Contexts

Classroom discussion has been widely recognized as a powerful instructional method that promotes active learning, critical thinking, and academic language development. In English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings, discussion not only provides opportunities for students to engage with academic content but also requires them to produce real-time spoken English, negotiate meaning, and demonstrate comprehension in front of peers and instructors (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Swain, 2005). For many students, particularly in EFL contexts like Thailand, this method represents both a pedagogical opportunity and a source of anxiety.

Research suggests that discussion-based instruction fosters deeper cognitive engagement, as students must articulate arguments, ask questions, and respond to diverse perspectives (Gibbons, Miller, & Spangler, 2023; Turner, 2023). These cognitive demands are consistent with sociocultural perspectives on learning, which emphasize that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and language use (Vygotsky, 1978). In EMI classrooms, discussion also plays a key role in “pushed output” (Swain, 2005), where learners are challenged to use their second language beyond receptive skills, thereby enhancing fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

However, the implementation of discussion methods in EMI settings is not without difficulty. Students often encounter linguistic, psychological, and cultural barriers that limit their verbal participation. For instance, real-time speaking tasks can induce high levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), especially among learners who fear making grammatical mistakes, being misunderstood, or facing negative evaluation

from peers (Chou, 2018; Liu & Jackson, 2008). In collectivist cultures like Thailand, where face-saving and deference to authority are highly valued, these fears may be intensified, leading to verbal avoidance or strategic silence during group or class-wide discussions (Tsui, 1996; Kruk, 2022).

In postgraduate EMI programs where discussion often forms the basis of assessment and academic identity, the pressure to perform orally is particularly high. Mercer and Howe (2022) argue that while discussion fosters collaborative reasoning, it may inadvertently privilege more confident or proficient speakers, leaving anxious students marginalized. Furthermore, Zhang (2023) highlights that discussion-based methods may not automatically generate meaningful engagement unless students are provided with appropriate scaffolding, modeling, and emotional support factors particularly critical in EMI contexts.

Despite its importance, few studies have systematically explored how discussion operates as both a learning method and an anxiety-inducing activity among postgraduate students in EMI programs. Much of the existing literature focuses on undergraduate learners or general language learning contexts, without attending to the nuanced dynamics of graduate-level discourse in linguistically and culturally complex classrooms (Li, 2024; Puspitasari, 2024).

This study seeks to address that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of Thai master's students participating in discussion-based EMI classrooms. By examining the emotional, linguistic, and instructional challenges embedded in discussion, the study offers a culturally grounded perspective on how discussion methods interact with speaking anxiety and engagement, thereby providing pedagogical insights for EMI educators across Southeast Asia.

2.4 Student Engagement and Participation

Student engagement and participation in learning activities are multifaceted concepts categorized into three main dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Behavioral engagement refers to students' observable actions and participation in learning activities. This includes attendance, attention, effort, and participation in

class discussions and activities. Behavioral engagement is crucial in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings as it directly impacts the learning process. Several factors influence behavioral engagement, such as instructional methods, classroom management, and student-teacher interactions. Effective classroom management and interactive teaching methods can foster active participation, while strong student-teacher relationships can encourage students to engage more fully in class activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve, 2013). Recent studies also highlight the role of technology in promoting behavioral engagement, showing that digital tools and online platforms can enhance student interaction and participation (Long, Lui, Lui, Ouyang & Tang, 2024).

Emotional engagement encompasses students' affective reactions in the classroom, including interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging. This dimension of engagement is essential for sustaining motivation and reducing anxiety, both of which are critical in EMI settings where language barriers can increase stress. Teachers' support, a positive classroom atmosphere, and healthy peer relationships significantly impact emotional engagement. When students feel supported and valued, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward learning and participate actively in class (HadaviBavili & İlçioğlu, 2023). Building a classroom environment where students feel safe and included can enhance their emotional engagement, leading to better learning outcomes.

Cognitive engagement involves investing in learning and using strategies to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. In EMI settings, cognitive engagement is influenced by students' English proficiency, the complexity of the academic content, and the instructional strategies used to facilitate understanding. High levels of cognitive engagement are characterized by students' willingness to understand challenging material and use deep learning strategies. Teachers can enhance cognitive engagement by employing instructional strategies that promote critical thinking and problem-solving, providing clear explanations, and using scaffolding techniques to support students' understanding (De Groot & Pintrich, 1990). Recent research suggests incorporating active learning strategies, such as

problem-based learning and collaborative projects, can significantly boost cognitive engagement (Freeman, 2015).

2.5 Coping Strategies in EMI Contexts: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives

Addressing speaking fear in EMI classes, especially postgraduate ones, requires addressing psychological and behavioral issues as well as language competency. As academic debates become high-stakes evaluation and knowledge production forums, student anxiety management becomes crucial to learning outcomes and equality in participation (Dai & Wang, 2024). In EMI and second language learning research, coping strategies the conscious methods students use to modulate emotional reactions and stay engaged have become important.

The transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) divides stress reactions into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping techniques. Educational and psychological research has used this approach to describe how students handle academic stress, especially in foreign languages (Skinner et al., 2003; Resnik & Dewaele, 2021). Problem-focused EMI strategies include pre-task preparation, vocabulary rehearsal, and discussion prompts, while emotion-focused strategies include relaxation, reframing fear of judgment, and positive self-talk.

However, these taxonomies often fall short of capturing the sociocultural nuances embedded in Asian EMI settings, where collectivist norms, hierarchical classroom dynamics, and face-saving values strongly influence how students perceive and respond to anxiety-inducing situations (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Kruk, 2022; King & Ng, 2023). As such, coping in these contexts must be understood not solely as an internal psychological act but also as socially and culturally negotiated behavior (Mercer & Ryan, 2020).

Recent empirical work has expanded this conceptual terrain by introducing more context-sensitive classifications. For instance, Namaziandost et al. (2024) found that peer support, mindset training, and self-reflection practices contributed significantly to both anxiety reduction and increased engagement in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Behbahani, Namaziandost, and Naserpour (2024) emphasized the interdependence between coping strategies and learner engagement, arguing that students who employed integrated emotional-regulation strategies not only spoke more frequently but also reported higher intrinsic motivation and cognitive investment. These findings

align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that coping mechanisms fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness can facilitate more sustained classroom engagement under stress.

Importantly, the role of socially mediated coping, such as seeking reassurance from peers or collaborative preparation has gained increasing attention, particularly in Asian contexts where student silence is often culturally constructed rather than purely anxiety-driven (Chou, 2020; Zhang, 2023). Puspitasari (2024), in her study of high-stakes EMI classrooms in Indonesia, highlighted how relational strategies such as aligning with peers or selectively participating in smaller groups were often more effective than individual cognitive tactics in reducing anxiety. These culturally grounded behaviors support the view that coping strategies are deeply embedded in learners' socio-academic environments.

In Thailand, where classroom dynamics are shaped by hierarchy, deference to authority, and limited prior training in academic oral communication, coping strategies often operate at the intersection of linguistic, emotional, and cultural challenges (Curle et al., 2021; Wong & Buranapatana, 2021). Thai postgraduate students, despite possessing substantial content knowledge, may abstain from discussion due to anxiety tied to perceived judgment or linguistic inadequacy. Studies such as Mai, Ngoc, & Thao (2024) underscore that verbal silence in EMI classes does not necessarily reflect disengagement, but often a lack of context-appropriate coping mechanisms that facilitate safe participation.

Despite growing recognition of coping strategies in EMI research, few studies have systematically examined how such strategies function at the postgraduate level, particularly in discussion-driven learning environments. Most existing literature is oriented toward undergraduates or general language learning contexts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how advanced learners in high-pressure academic settings actively navigate anxiety. Furthermore, the interplay between coping, participation, and deeper forms of engagement both emotional and cognitive remains underexplored (King & Ng, 2023; Mercer & Ryan, 2020).

This study addresses this lacuna by examining how Thai master's students in EMI classrooms adopt coping strategies to manage speaking anxiety and sustain engagement during academic discussions. By drawing from culturally situated

experiences and using a mixed-methods approach, it aims to offer a nuanced, contextually grounded understanding that advances both theory and practice in EMI pedagogy.

2.6 Factors Influencing Student Engagement and Participation

Understanding the factors influencing student engagement and participation in EMI classrooms is crucial for creating effective learning environments. These factors encompass a wide range of elements, from language proficiency to instructional methods, each playing a significant role in how students interact with their learning environment.

2.6.1 Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is a critical factor influencing student engagement in EMI settings. Higher levels of English proficiency enable students to comprehend and participate more effectively in classroom activities and discussions. Conversely, lower-proficiency students often struggle to understand course material and express their ideas, decreasing participation and engagement. Ibrahim & Souzandehfar, (2023) highlights that language proficiency affects academic performance and influences students' confidence and willingness to engage in classroom interactions.

2.6.2 Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is another significant barrier to student engagement. FLA encompasses students' apprehension and nervousness when required to use a foreign language, particularly in speaking and listening activities. High levels of anxiety can deter students from participating in discussions and negatively impact their learning experience. Studies showed that students experiencing high FLA are less likely to participate actively in classroom activities, which can hinder their language acquisition and overall academic performance (Chiu, Chow & Wong, 2018).

2.6.3 Teacher Support

Teacher support is pivotal in fostering a supportive and engaging classroom environment. Positive teacher-student relationships, characterized by encouragement and constructive feedback, can significantly enhance student confidence and participation. Roorda et al. (2017) emphasize that teacher support can mitigate the

effects of anxiety and promote a more inclusive classroom atmosphere, thereby increasing student engagement (Nyborg, Mjelve, Crozier, Arnesen, Coplan & Edwards, 2023).

2.6.4 Motivation

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are vital drivers of student engagement. Intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and a desire to improve skills, leads to higher levels of active participation. Extrinsic motivation, such as grades and recognition, also influences student engagement. Dörnyei (2014) argues that motivation is a fundamental factor influencing student behavior and engagement in learning activities. Understanding the balance between these motivational factors can help educators design strategies that foster deeper engagement (Aseery, 2023).

2.6.5 Peer Dynamics

Peer dynamics, including interactions and support, significantly impact student participation. Positive peer interactions encourage students to engage more in class activities, while negative dynamics, such as competitiveness or exclusion, can deter participation. Cacciamani, Perrucci, Khanlari & Balboni, (2024). highlights the importance of cooperative learning environments where peer support fosters a sense of community and shared goals, enhancing overall engagement.

2.6.6 Cultural Background

Students' cultural backgrounds influence their communication styles, attitudes toward authority, and comfort levels when participating in discussions. Cultural differences can affect students' willingness to speak up and engage in classroom activities. Liu and Jackson (2008) suggest that understanding and accommodating these cultural differences is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment that encourages participation from all students.

2.6.7 Class Size and Structure

Class size and structure are important determinants of student engagement. Smaller classes provide more opportunities for individual attention and interaction, which can enhance student participation. In contrast, larger classes may limit these opportunities, requiring innovative instructional strategies to maintain engagement. Researchers found that smaller class sizes contribute to better student outcomes by allowing for

more personalized instruction and interaction (Shoab, Sayed, Singh, Shafi, Khan & Ali, 2024).

2.6.8 Instructional Methods

Interactive and participatory teaching methods are crucial for engaging students in learning. Methods such as group discussions, problem-based learning, and the use of multimedia can make learning more engaging and effective. Kanchon, Khan, Nabila, Sadman & Tarannum, (2024) demonstrated that active learning strategies significantly improve student engagement and understanding, highlighting the importance of employing diverse instructional methods to cater to different learning styles.

2.7 Relationship between Speaking Anxiety and Classroom Engagement

In English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms, students often face challenges related to speaking anxiety and participation. This anxiety, which is the fear of speaking in front of others, is even more intense in EMI settings because students worry about making mistakes in English. They might be afraid of saying the wrong thing or not being able to express their thoughts clearly in English, a language they are still learning (Airey, 2011; Fenyvesi, 2021). This fear can make students less likely to join in class discussions, which can hurt their overall learning and grades in EMI courses (Tai & Wei, 2021).

How much students engage in EMI classrooms closely relates to their confidence in English. Active participation (i.e., asking questions, sharing ideas, and participating in discussions) is crucial for understanding and learning, especially when the language is challenging (Al-Hoorie, Hiver & Joe, 2017). When students feel confident and engaged, the classroom becomes a better place to learn, and students help each other, which can reduce their fear of making mistakes (Heydarnejad & Li, 2024).

However, the pressure of learning both the subject and the language at the same time can increase anxiety and cause some students to disengage. To help with this, teachers can use strategies that support both language learning and student participation. For example, teachers can review essential vocabulary before discussions, use pictures or diagrams to help explain ideas, and encourage group work. These methods have been shown to reduce anxiety and help students feel more comfortable participating (Airey, 2011; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). It also helps if teachers create a classroom culture

where making mistakes is seen as a regular part of learning, which can encourage students to participate more (Ceccon, Hölscher, Juang, Moscardino, Pastore & Schachner, 2024).

Teacher support is vital in EMI settings. Teachers who understand their students' language difficulties and use teaching methods that include everyone can make a big difference in how confident and engaged students feel (Csizér & Dörnyei, 1998; Al-Shehri, 2014). Teachers can help by giving clear instructions, offering helpful feedback, and creating low-pressure opportunities for students to practice speaking (Zhang, 2024).

To effectively address the challenges of speaking anxiety and engagement in EMI classrooms, teachers need to understand the language and cultural barriers their students face. Teachers can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment by using strategies that support language development and reduce the fear of making mistakes. This helps students improve their language and academic skills and prepares them to participate actively in a global academic community.

Research has shown that speaking anxiety can have a major impact on student participation in the classroom, especially in language learning. Early studies by Hu, McGeown & Zhang (2024) showed how fear of speaking can negatively affect academic performance. Later, Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) introduced the idea of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which showed how anxiety about using a second language in class can make it harder for students to learn and participate. Other studies have continued to emphasize that speaking anxiety is a major challenge in language learning that needs to be addressed (Hejazi & Sadoughi, 2023).

These studies suggest that speaking anxiety plays a crucial role in how students engage in the classroom, especially in language-learning settings. They call for teaching strategies focusing on language skills and addressing students' emotional and psychological challenges. By helping students overcome their fear of speaking, teachers can significantly improve their participation and overall learning experience.

2.8 Factors Influencing Student Engagement and Classroom Participation

Classroom participation is a multifaceted construct that significantly influences students' academic success, emotional investment, and learning engagement. Extensive research across educational psychology, pedagogy, and sociocultural studies has identified a range of psychological, social, cultural, and pedagogical factors that shape learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve, Basarkod, Jang, Gargurevich, Jang & Cheon, 2025); Wang, 2024). Participation becomes even more complex in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings, where language barriers intersect with sociocultural expectations, particularly for postgraduate students operating in high-stakes academic environments.

In EMI classrooms, particularly in Southeast Asia, student participation is not solely determined by language ability but is also profoundly affected by foreign language anxiety (FLA), fear of negative evaluation, and the hierarchical nature of classroom discourse (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kruk, 2022; Liu & Jackson, 2008). These issues are especially salient in Thai higher education, where students often demonstrate high levels of academic competence but remain reluctant to speak due to affective barriers rooted in linguistic insecurity and cultural norms that discourage overt self-expression (Wong & Buranapatana, 2021; Curle et al., 2021).

This study positions itself within that complex intersection by examining how various factors influence student engagement and classroom participation in EMI settings at the postgraduate level. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from 21 Thai master's students, the study explores how English proficiency, speaking anxiety, peer dynamics, teacher support, and cultural expectations jointly affect verbal engagement during classroom discussions. The findings confirm that participation is not merely a behavioral outcome, but a multidimensional construct mediated by internal affective states and external contextual cues.

Moreover, this study contributes to the broader literature by emphasizing the emotional and behavioral dimensions of engagement, particularly in discussion-based EMI tasks. In doing so, it responds to recent calls in EMI and second language acquisition (SLA) research to move beyond surface-level participation metrics and

instead examine the psychological processes underlying student silence, hesitation, and coping (Mercer & Ryan, 2020; Behbahani, Namaziandost & Naserpour, 2024).

By contextualizing classroom participation within the Thai postgraduate EMI environment, this research provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding student engagement, highlighting the urgent need for pedagogical approaches that reduce speaking anxiety and scaffold inclusive classroom interaction. These insights not only extend existing engagement models but also offer actionable implications for EMI educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers aiming to foster equitable and emotionally supportive learning environments.

2.8.1 Psychological Factors

One of the most significant factors influencing classroom participation is students' psychological disposition, including self-confidence, anxiety levels, and intrinsic . Studies by Solhi (2024) emphasize that students with higher self-esteem and motivation are more likely to engage in class discussions and activities. On the contrary, students with high levels of anxiety may avoid participating due to fear of negative evaluation (Fang, Li & Wan, 2024). Additionally, students' self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to perform tasks, directly impacts their willingness to participate (Shi & Sun, 2024). Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to be more proactive in classroom activities and view participation as an opportunity for learning rather than a potential failure.

2.8.2 Social Factors

Social dynamics within the classroom, including peer relationships, social acceptance, and group cohesion, also play a crucial role in students' participation. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, interaction and collaboration with peers are essential for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Research by Wang (2024) shows that students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to engage actively in class. Conversely, negative social dynamics, such as bullying or exclusion, can inhibit participation, as students may fear judgment or ridicule from their peers (Camodeca, Caravita, Gelati, Iannello & Papotti, 2024).

2.8.3 Pedagogical Factors

Pedagogical strategies employed by teachers greatly impact classroom participation. For instance, creating an inclusive and supportive environment encourages students to engage without fear of failure (Chen & Lin, 2024). Teachers who employ a variety of interactive teaching methods, such as group discussions, role-playing, and collaborative activities, tend to have higher participation levels in their classes (Chen, 2024). Furthermore, feedback and encouragement from teachers can motivate students to participate more frequently. Research suggests that when teachers actively listen and respond positively to student contributions, students are more inclined to share their thoughts in the future (Dere, Dölek & Sari, 2024).

2.8.4 Cultural Factors

Culture also shapes classroom participation, as students from different cultural backgrounds may have varying expectations and comfort levels regarding participation. For instance, students from collectivist cultures may experience discomfort standing out in a classroom setting and might prefer to listen rather than speak (Erss, 2023). In contrast, students from individualist cultures are often encouraged to express their thoughts openly. Teachers who acknowledge and adapt to these cultural differences can create a more inclusive classroom, allowing students from all backgrounds to participate meaningfully.

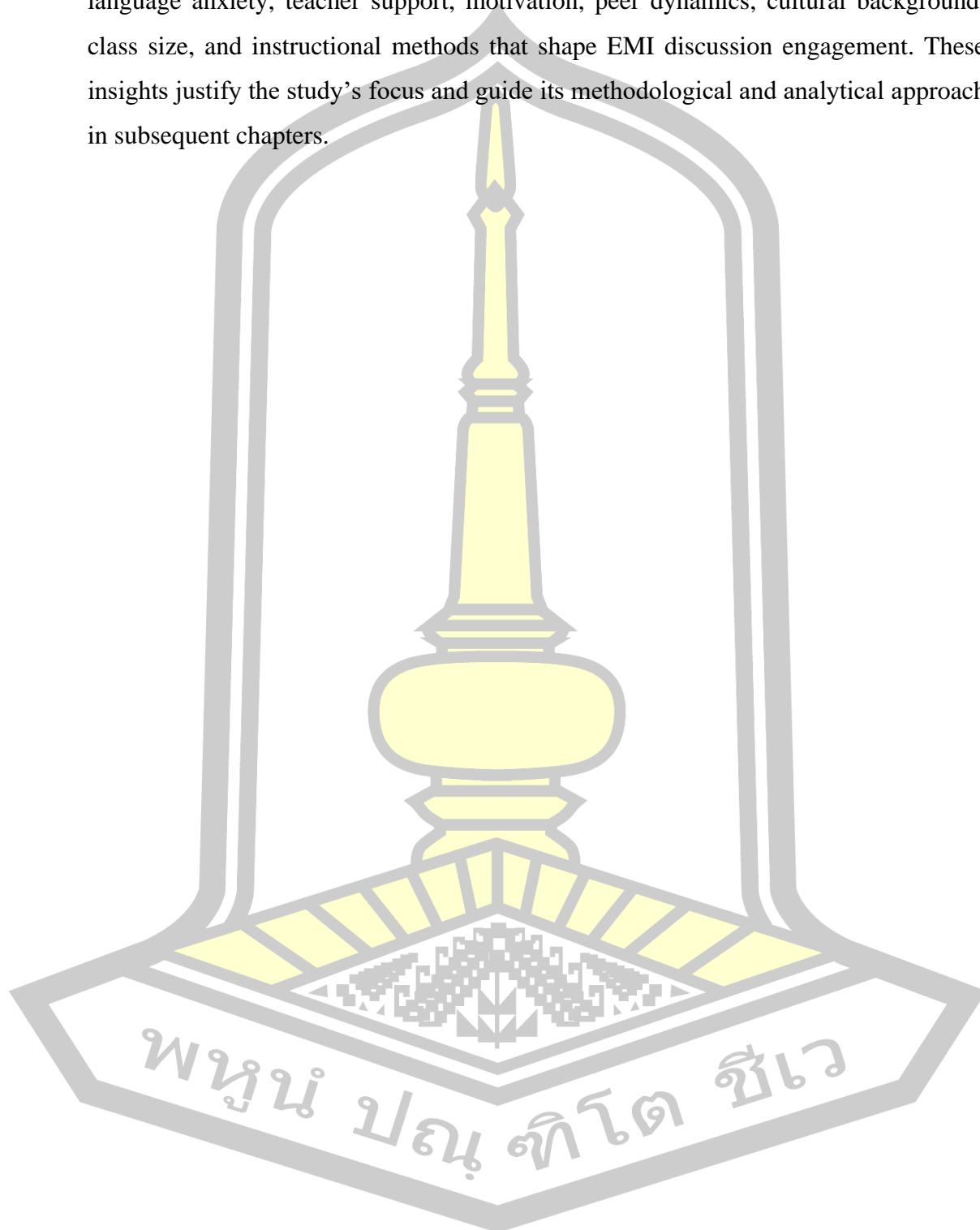
2.8.5 Environmental Factors

The classroom environment, including its physical layout, size, and atmosphere, also influences participation. Smaller class sizes have been shown to foster more participation because they allow for closer teacher-student interactions and more individualized attention (Blatchford & Bruhwiler, 2011). The arrangement of seating can also affect interaction levels; for example, a circular seating arrangement encourages a more collaborative environment compared to traditional rows (Cliff, Kariippanon, Lancaster, Okely & Parrish, 2018).

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and empirical foundations of the study, clarifying the constructions of EMI, speaking anxiety, and classroom engagement. It highlighted Sociocultural Theory, SDT, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis as key

frameworks. The review identified eight key factors English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, peer dynamics, cultural background, class size, and instructional methods that shape EMI discussion engagement. These insights justify the study's focus and guide its methodological and analytical approach in subsequent chapters.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter details the research methods used in the study and provides justifications for each choice. It begins with an overview of the research paradigm and design, followed by a description of the participants and context. The chapter then outlines the research instruments and their justifications and development procedures. Additionally, it explains the procedures for data collection, analysis, and presentation. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methods discussed.

3.1 Research Paradigm and Design

This study employs a mixed-methods design to explore the causes, impacts, and coping strategies related to speaking anxiety in EMI discussions among Thai master's students. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by combining statistical trends with detailed personal experiences. By employing triangulation, this study enhances the validity and reliability of the findings, capturing both generalized patterns and individual narratives (Denzin, 1978; Creswell & Plano, 2011).

The quantitative phase involved administering structured surveys to measure key variables influencing discussion anxiety. The survey design was informed by established theoretical frameworks and focused on four key dimensions: English proficiency levels, foreign language anxiety (FLA), teacher support and classroom atmosphere, and motivation and goal orientation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991).

In addition, student engagement was assessed based on active participation in discussions, responsiveness to teacher prompts, and interaction with peers (Dammert et al., 2024). Engagement serves as both a moderator and mediator, influencing how discussion anxiety manifests. High engagement is often linked to lower anxiety levels, as it fosters confidence and a sense of belonging, whereas low engagement can exacerbate anxiety, reinforcing feelings of self-doubt and social isolation (Rezaei & Samadieh, 2024; Xie & Wang, 2024).

The survey also collected demographic information such as age, gender, and academic specialization, providing further insights into how individual differences impact discussion anxiety. The statistical analysis of survey responses helped identify patterns, correlations, and trends, offering a broad, data-driven perspective.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected subset of students to complement the quantitative data. These interviews provided in-depth insights into students' personal experiences, emotional responses, and coping mechanisms related to discussion anxiety in EMI settings. Unlike surveys, which offer generalized findings, interviews allow for exploring individual perspectives, shedding light on the psychological and social dimensions of discussion anxiety (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Integrating quantitative analysis and qualitative exploration, this study offers a holistic understanding of discussion anxiety in EMI classrooms. The use of triangulation ensures that findings are robust, reliable, and applicable to broader EMI learning contexts. The insights gained will serve as valuable contributions to the field of EMI research, informing educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers on best practices for reducing discussion anxiety and fostering active student engagement.

3.2 Participants and Setting

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were Thai master's students enrolled in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program at a government university in northeastern Thailand. All participants were actively engaged in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) courses during the data collection period.

For the quantitative phase, 21 students participated in the questionnaire, including 15 first-year students and 6 second-year students, with an average age of 26–27 years. All participants were in-service teachers currently teaching at the primary or secondary level. The data collection took place over four weeks during the final month of the second semester, shortly before the end-of-term break for the first-year cohort. This timing allowed students to reflect on their experiences throughout the semester.

For the qualitative phase, six first-year students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on their willingness to share and their self-reported confidence levels in EMI classroom participation. These interviews were conducted within the same four-week timeframe. The inclusion of participants from diverse confidence levels and teaching contexts enriched the findings with a range of insights into speaking anxiety and engagement strategies.

The course “Discourse Analysis in English Language Teaching” was taught by a foreign lecturer who emphasized student-led group presentations. Students were regularly assigned to present selected content in groups, followed by peer-led question-and-answer sessions. This interactive and communicative approach encouraged active involvement but also created performance pressure for students with high levels of speaking anxiety.

The course “English Language Teaching Theories” was instructed by a Thai lecturer who required students to read the assigned materials beforehand and be ready to answer questions during class or consult the teacher if clarification was needed. Additionally, the instructor often arranged small-group brainstorming activities, allowing students to collaboratively exchange ideas before responding to the teacher’s questions in open class discussions. This balanced approach supported both preparation and peer collaboration.

In the “Second Language Acquisition” course, the instructor adopted a question-driven approach, encouraging students to read the materials in advance and actively respond to the teacher’s questions or share ideas with classmates during classroom interactions. This method promoted both independent reading and in-class dialogue, fostering opportunities for spontaneous language use and deeper engagement.

In EMI classrooms, students were encouraged to actively participate in discussions by asking and answering questions, engaging in peer interactions, and brainstorming ideas in small groups. This interactive approach aligns with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (1978), which underscores the role of social interaction in cognitive development. By fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment, classroom discussions provided students valuable opportunities to develop their English proficiency and enhance their teaching competencies.

To gain a deeper understanding of speaking anxiety, six participants were intentionally chosen from the larger group for individual interviews. They were divided into two subgroups based on their self-assessed confidence in classroom discussions: confident and less confident speakers. Confident students actively engaged in conversations and showed little hesitation when expressing their thoughts. In contrast, less confident students experienced heightened anxiety, were reluctant to participate, and feared making mistakes or being negatively evaluated.

This classification allowed for a comparative analysis of how speaking anxiety affects participation in EMI discussions. Interestingly, despite their varying confidence levels, both groups reported facing similar challenges and adopting overlapping strategies to cope with their anxiety. This finding suggests that speaking anxiety is a common issue among students in EMI classrooms, regardless of their confidence level.

Participants for the interviews were selected based on three key criteria. First, willingness to share; students who were open to discussing their experiences provided valuable perspectives on varying levels of speaking anxiety in EMI settings. Second, there are diverse academic backgrounds; the study included students with different English learning experiences and proficiency levels to ensure a well-rounded understanding of discussion anxiety. Finally, engagement in EMI classrooms, that is, participants were chosen based on their consistent participation in EMI discussions, enabling a more detailed analysis of how anxiety affects student engagement.

By carefully selecting participants who met these criteria, the study ensured a broad representation of student experiences. Insights from confident and less confident speakers contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of discussion anxiety, helping identify effective strategies for enhancing student engagement in EMI classrooms.

3.3 Research Instruments

In this study, two primary research instruments were employed to investigate the factors contributing to discussion-related anxiety and to identify the strategies students adopt to cope with such anxiety in EMI classrooms. The first instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising multiple-choice items aimed at examining the

potential variables influencing Thai postgraduate students' participation in EMI-based classroom discussions. The closed-ended format allowed participants to select predetermined options, thereby generating quantifiable insights into key factors shaping their perceptions and engagement during academic interactions.

The second tool was a semi-structured, one-on-one interview between the researcher and each participant. These interviews aimed to capture the students' experiences, perceptions, and strategies for learning how to deal with or manage their discussion anxiety in EMI classrooms. By allowing open-ended responses within a structured framework, the interviews enabled participants to share their perspectives, elaborate on their unique challenges, and identify strategies students use to manage discussion anxiety in EMI classrooms.

In subsequent research methodology sections, each instrument was described in more detail, outlining its design, structure, and intended use. The questionnaire provided quantitative data that highlighted patterns and correlations in student participation. At the same time, the semi-structured interviews yielded qualitative insights, offering depth and context to understand the participating students' responses and their overall learning environment. This combination of instruments provided a comprehensive view of the influences on Thai graduate students' participation and engagement in EMI classrooms.

3.3.1 A Five-Point Likert Scale Questionnaire

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed drawing on Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to investigate Thai master's students' perspectives on factors influencing their participation or engagement in discussions within EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) classrooms. At the conclusion of the academic semester, 21 postgraduate students provided quantitative data using this tool. Students were requested to score the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about classroom engagement elements including English competence, anxiety, teacher support, peer collaboration, and cultural standards. Roughly 10 to 15 minutes long, the questionnaire was self-administered in person. Descriptive statistics means and standard deviations then helped to highlight the most important factors influencing discussion anxiety and participation in EMI environments.

The findings of the survey gave a macro-level picture of students' perceived obstacles and enablers, which helped to shape the design of follow-up interview questions and let a more in-depth analysis of the qualitative data. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections (see Appendix 1). The first section focused on demographic information, collecting details such as participants' gender, age, prior English learning experiences, academic discipline, and level of study (first-year or second-year master's students). This information provided a contextual background for understanding students' engagement levels and discussion anxiety.

The second section explored the factors influencing EMI classroom engagement. It comprised eight key areas, each containing six items to measure students' perceptions of different variables affecting their participation. These eight areas were: (1) English language proficiency, (2) foreign language anxiety, (3) teacher support, (4) peer support and collaboration, (5) cultural expectations, (6) confidence in expressing opinions, (7) classroom participation structure, and (8) prior English learning experiences. These areas were selected based on their relevance to Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction, mediated learning, cultural norms, and the role of more capable peers in shaping learner engagement.

A multi-step validation process was conducted to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. First, the content validity of the instrument was assessed by three experts in English Language Teaching (ELT). These experts reviewed the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the instrument, refining the phrasing and structure of items to better capture the factors influencing discussion anxiety and engagement.

Next, a pilot study was conducted with a group of Thai master's students who shared similar demographic characteristics with the main study participants. This pilot phase aimed to test the reliability of the questionnaire, identify any ambiguities, and assess response patterns. Insights from the pilot study ensured that the final instrument was clear, well-structured, and capable of producing consistent and meaningful data for analysis.

By integrating expert validation and pilot testing, this questionnaire was developed as a rigorous and reliable instrument for assessing factors influencing discussion engagement in EMI classrooms. The combination of demographic insights and detailed examination of engagement-related variables allows for a comprehensive analysis of speaking anxiety and participation barriers among Thai master's students. The findings generated from this instrument will contribute to evidence-based pedagogical strategies, informing educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers on ways to create more inclusive and supportive EMI learning environments.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview served as the primary method for qualitative data collection, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, challenges, and strategies that Thai master's students employed in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms. This approach aimed to yield rich, contextually grounded insights into speaking anxiety and classroom participation.

The interview was designed based on the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs that influence motivation and engagement. Specifically, the questions explored: (1) students' sense of agency in initiating or avoiding participation (autonomy), (2) their confidence in using English for academic discussions (competence), and (3) their perceptions of social acceptance and connection in classroom interactions (relatedness).

The questions were developed through a comprehensive review of EMI and language anxiety literature (e.g., Liu & Jackson, 2008; Curle et al., 2021; Mercer & Howe, 2022), and consisted of 12 open-ended items divided into three thematic categories corresponding to SDT constructs. For example, students were asked:

- *How do you feel when participating in discussions or presentations in your EMI classroom?*
- *What specific situations make you feel most anxious when speaking in English?*
- *How do peer interactions and teacher support influence your willingness to speak?*

- *To what extent does your English proficiency impact your engagement in discussions?*
- *What strategies or techniques do you use to cope with speaking anxiety in class?*
- *How do you prepare yourself to participate in discussions more confidently?*

These open-ended questions allowed participants to share their unique experiences and perspectives while also enabling the interviewer to probe deeper into emerging themes during the discussions.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure for this study was systematically designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of discussion anxiety among Thai master's students in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms. By integrating survey responses and semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to triangulate findings, enhancing the credibility, validity, and depth of the research.

To capture students' experiences in EMI discussions, the questionnaire was administered at the end of the academic semester when participants had substantial exposure to EMI discussions. This timing allowed students to reflect on their overall experiences and provide informed responses regarding the factors influencing their engagement in classroom discussions. The survey consisted of demographic questions and eight key sections covering aspects such as English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, peer influence, cultural background, class size, and instructional methods. Each section comprised carefully structured items to ensure the collected data provided a broad yet detailed perspective on discussion anxiety in EMI settings. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, ensuring accurate, thoughtful, and unbiased responses.

Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into students' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms related to discussion anxiety in EMI classrooms. An interview guide was developed based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and an extensive review of

relevant literature, ensuring that the questions captured key psychological, linguistic, and social factors affecting students' engagement in EMI discussions.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes, depending on participant availability and the natural flow of the conversation. To create a comfortable and open environment, participants were encouraged to express their thoughts freely without fear of judgment. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to protect participants' identities. This qualitative approach allowed for a deeper exploration of individual experiences, complementing the broader trends identified in the survey data.

To uphold ethical research standards and protect participant confidentiality, all participants provided written and verbal consent before participating in the survey and interviews. They were fully informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. To ensure confidentiality, all collected data, including survey responses, interview transcripts, and audio recordings, were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in reporting findings to safeguard participant identities. Additionally, all research materials were securely stored in password-protected files, accessible only to authorized researchers, ensuring data protection, compliance with ethical guidelines, and preventing unauthorized access or disclosure.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, this study provided a holistic understanding of the factors influencing Thai master's students' participation in EMI discussions. The survey data offered broad statistical insights, while the interviews provided rich, contextualized narratives, helping to explore both the prevalence and depth of discussion anxiety in EMI settings. The triangulation of these methods ensured that findings were valid, reliable, and reflective of students' actual experiences, offering valuable implications for educators, EMI program developers, and policymakers aiming to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

3.5 Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, SPSS software (Version 29) was utilized. Descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and standard deviations (SD), were employed to summarize and present the findings, providing a clear overview of factors influencing discussion anxiety and engagement in EMI classrooms.

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the Likert-scale questionnaire. This approach was chosen to identify general trends and patterns regarding students' speaking anxiety, classroom engagement, and the influence of key factors on their participation in EMI classrooms. Specifically, the analysis focused on eight core variables: (1) English proficiency levels, (2) foreign language anxiety, (3) teacher support and classroom atmosphere, (4) motivation and goal orientation, (5) peer influence and classroom dynamics, (6) cultural background, (7) class size, and (8) instructional methods.

The use of descriptive measures, including mean scores and standard deviations, enabled the researcher to effectively summarize and interpret students' overall experiences and perceptions related to these factors. For instance, teacher support and classroom atmosphere emerged as the strongest enabler of engagement, while foreign language anxiety was identified as a key barrier to participation. These quantitative findings not only revealed students' perceived challenges but also offered a foundational understanding that informed the subsequent qualitative phase. By identifying high-impact factors through descriptive statistics, the study ensured a data-driven and credible exploration of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of EMI classroom engagement.

A thematic analysis was conducted to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive interpretation of students' experiences regarding speaking anxiety in EMI classroom discussions. The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were first transcribed verbatim. An iterative process was then followed, consisting of data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, and interpretation. Both the researcher and a fellow master's student from the same English Language Teaching

(ELT) program collaboratively conducted the coding process to enhance the reliability and credibility of the findings.

To begin, each coder independently read and re-read the interview transcripts multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. During the open coding phase, both coders individually highlighted key phrases and segments related to students' anxiety triggers, engagement challenges, and coping strategies. This step aimed to capture rich and nuanced insights from the participants lived experiences.

Next, a coding consensus meeting was held, during which both coders compared their initial codes. Any discrepancies were discussed openly and resolved through mutual agreement to ensure consistency in interpretation. This process led to the development of a shared codebook, which included operational definitions of each code along with representative excerpts from the data to ensure clarity and consistency in application.

The finalized codebook was then applied independently by both coders across all transcripts. Intercoder agreement was assessed manually by comparing coded segments, and a high level of alignment was observed. Minor inconsistencies were resolved through further discussion, which contributed to the overall inter-rater reliability of the analysis.

The resulting codes were then clustered into broader categories, leading to the identification of major themes. These themes were refined and reviewed in relation to the study's research questions and grounded in theoretical frameworks including Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). This triangulated and collaborative analytical approach significantly enhanced the validity, trustworthiness, and transparency of the findings, offering a well-substantiated interpretation of how Thai master's students experience and manage speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms.

Multiple validation strategies were implemented to strengthen the reliability and credibility of the qualitative findings. Pilot testing involved administering the interview protocol to a small group of participants to refine question clarity, structure, and flow, ensuring the content was relevant and comprehensible. Member checking was conducted by providing participants with summaries of their responses, allowing

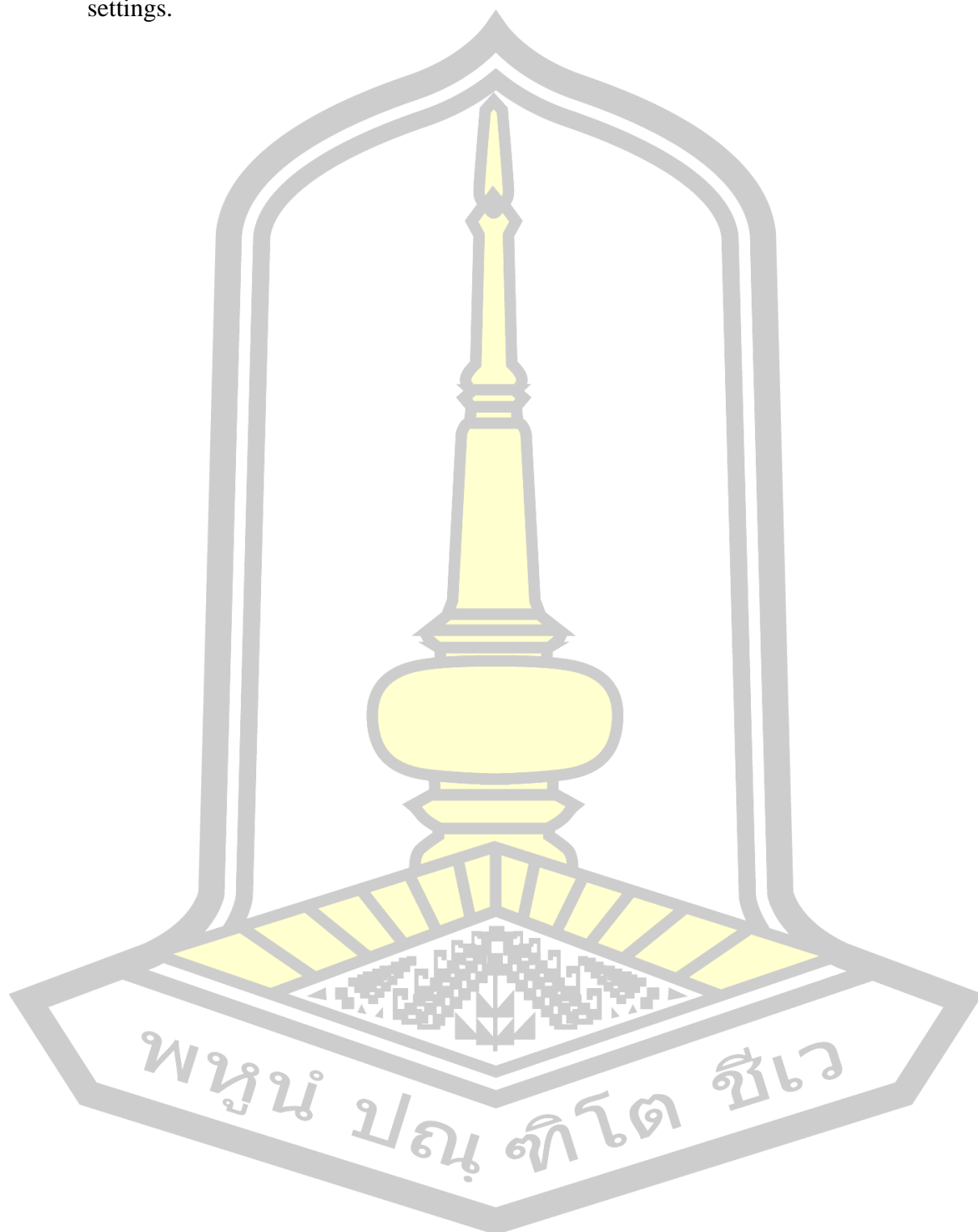
them to confirm accuracy, clarify their viewpoints, and offer additional insights. To maintain consistency in thematic analysis, an additional researcher (a master's ELT student) independently coded the transcripts. Any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved to reach a consensus on emerging themes and patterns. Finally, thematic patterns were systematically examined across participants' responses to identify common triggers of speaking anxiety, EMI-specific challenges, and effective strategies for fostering engagement.

This analytical approach provided rich, nuanced insights into how Thai master's students navigate speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms, offering valuable implications for developing supportive teaching practices and classroom interventions tailored to diverse learner needs. Integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study presents a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of discussion anxiety and engagement strategies in EMI settings.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the comprehensive mixed-methods approach to investigate discussion anxiety among Thai graduate students in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms. It integrated quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a holistic understanding of discussion anxiety, ensuring a balanced analysis of statistical patterns and personal experiences. The quantitative component utilized structured surveys to gather data on English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, and demographics, analyzed using statistical methods to identify significant patterns and correlations. Complementing this, in-depth semi-structured interviews explored personal experiences and coping strategies, analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes. The study focused on Thai master's students from a university in northeast Thailand, ensuring diverse academic backgrounds and English proficiency levels. Data collection procedures included a detailed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, emphasizing ethical considerations, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data through triangulation enhanced the study's credibility and validity. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the chapter provided a detailed plan for data collection and analysis, aiming to offer

actionable insights for educators and policymakers to support Thai students in EMI settings.



CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data collected during the study, structured according to the research objectives and methods. It begins with an analysis of the receptive test results by Factors Affecting Thai Master's Students' EMI Classroom Discussion Engagement (4.1), Strategies used by Thai master's students for managing anxiety and engagement during classroom discussion (4.2), Summary of this chapter (4.3). These findings are integrated with qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of discussion anxiety and its contributing factors in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms.

4.1 Factors Affecting Thai Master's Students' EMI Classroom Discussion

Engagement

This study examines the key factors that influence Thai master's students' engagement in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms. The findings showed that student engagement was shaped by various elements, including English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, peer influence, cultural background, class size, and instructional methods. These factors impact students' willingness to contribute to discussions and actively engage in learning activities.

One of the most significant factors affecting engagement is English proficiency, which recorded a mean score of 3.68 (73.6%) and a standard deviation of 1.08. The findings suggest that students with higher confidence in using English are more likely to participate, while those with lower proficiency may hesitate due to the fear of making mistakes. Closely linked to this is foreign language anxiety, which had the lowest mean score of 2.50 (50%), with a standard deviation of 0.71. Many students experience anxiety when speaking English, which can lead to avoidance of discussions and reduced classroom engagement.

Among all factors, teacher support and classroom atmosphere emerged as the strongest enabler of participation, with a mean score of 4.33 (86.6%) and a standard deviation of 0.49. This finding underscores the importance of a supportive learning environment where teachers encourage constructive feedback and clear explanations.

Likewise, motivation and goal orientation were identified as key contributors, with a mean score of 3.83 (76.6%) and a standard deviation of 0.84. Students with clear academic goals were found to engage more actively in discussions and classroom tasks.

Additionally, peer influence and classroom dynamics played a crucial role in shaping participation, with a mean score of 4.00 (80%) and a standard deviation of 0.58. Positive peer interactions and group activities fostered confidence, whereas unsupportive peers or a competitive classroom atmosphere could discourage participation. The findings also indicate that cultural background influences students' willingness to engage, as reflected in a mean score of 3.75 (75%) and a standard deviation of 0.46. This suggests that students' previous educational experiences and cultural norms shape their behavior and comfort levels in EMI classrooms.

Furthermore, class size had a mean score of 3.87 (77.4%) and a standard deviation of 0.44, indicating that smaller class sizes tend to encourage more student participation. In contrast, larger classes may limit students' opportunities to engage due to reduced individual attention from instructors. Similarly, instructional methods, with a mean score of 3.81 (76.2%) and a standard deviation of 0.45, influenced participation. The way lessons are structured and the teaching approaches used can significantly impact students' confidence and engagement in learning activities.

Table 1 Factors affecting Thai master's students' EMI classroom participation

Factors	Mean (%)	S.D.
Teacher support and classroom atmosphere	4.33 (86.6 %)	0.49
Peer influence and classroom dynamics	4.00 (80 %)	0.58
Class size	3.87 (77.4 %)	0.44
Motivation and goal orientation	3.83 (76.6 %)	0.84
Instructional methods	3.81 (76.2 %)	0.45
Cultural background	3.75 (75 %)	0.46
English proficiency levels	3.68 (73.6%)	1.08
Foreign language anxiety	2.50 (50 %)	0.71
Total	3.72 (74.4 %)	0.63

N= 21

Overall, the total mean score across all factors was 3.72 (74.4%), with a standard deviation of 0.63. This suggests that while Thai master's students generally engage in EMI classrooms, they still face challenges such as language proficiency issues and anxiety. A lack of teacher support, particularly in helping students understand complex lesson content, can further heighten anxiety and hesitation to participate. Similarly, insufficient peer support can increase speaking anxiety, making it more difficult for students to contribute to classroom discussions.

4.2 Challenges and Factors Affecting Thai Master's Students' Engagement in EMI Classrooms

This section presents findings from semi-structured interviews with six Thai master's students enrolled in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) program. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common challenges, anxiety triggers, and participation barriers that impact students' engagement in EMI classroom discussions. The findings highlight students' emotional experiences, key factors influencing their speaking anxiety, and both internal and external barriers to participation.

4.2.1 Experiences with Speaking Anxiety

Students shared diverse emotional responses regarding their participation in EMI classrooms. While some students felt confident and comfortable, others struggled with varying levels of anxiety, mainly due to preparation issues, language proficiency concerns, and fear of making mistakes.

Confidence Levels and Classroom Comfort

Some participants described speaking English in class as a natural and comfortable experience, seeing discussions as an integral part of their academic learning:

S1: *"I feel normal. It's just part of my life. Not excited, not scared—just natural."*

S2: *"Actually, when it comes to discussions or presentations, I'd say I'm quite okay. I can speak English fluently and confidently."*

S5: *"When I present or discuss in the classroom, I feel good because I can share my ideas with my friends and my professor."*

Other students viewed classroom discussions as opportunities for intellectual growth, appreciating how they helped them expand their perspectives:

S3: *“Sometimes, I feel like it’s a way to challenge myself. I might read a book and have one perspective, but when I meet friends, they have their own ideas. It makes me feel like we can share ideas and try discussing them. I might gain new ideas and expand my knowledge even further.”*

S4: *“I think discussions help me organize my thoughts better. Even though I sometimes feel anxious, I see it as a chance to practice thinking critically.”*

In contrast, some students reported experiencing anxiety and hesitation when speaking in EMI classrooms, mainly due to preparation concerns, credibility of sources, and language barriers:

S4: *“I feel a bit anxious about preparing information for presentations, but every time I present, I feel that I do well. The main concern is finding credible sources for the information.”*

S6: *“I feel okay with it because it forces us to use the language. Since we’ve enrolled in an English-taught course, we have to try to use the target language for communication.”*

S3: *“Even though I like learning, sometimes I feel like my answers aren’t structured well, so I hesitate before speaking up.”*

These responses suggest that while some students embrace speaking in EMI settings with confidence, others struggle with anxiety stemming from preparation difficulties, credibility concerns, and language proficiency limitations. Classroom discussions provide learning opportunities, yet some students hesitate to participate due to self-doubt and external pressures.

4.2.2 Factors Influencing Speaking Anxiety

Several key themes emerged regarding the causes of speaking anxiety, including lack of preparation, language proficiency concerns, fear of making mistakes, and classroom environment. These factors directly affect students’ confidence and willingness to engage in EMI discussions.

Lack of Preparation and Technical Vocabulary

A significant number of students reported feeling unprepared for discussions, which heightened their anxiety. The inability to grasp technical vocabulary often led to hesitation and difficulty in expressing ideas clearly:

S1: *“The main reason for my anxiety is the lack of preparation.”*

S3: *“The fact that I’m not very familiar with technical terms makes it difficult for me to speak comprehensively about the subject or delve into the details of what I’m studying. I might end up speaking in more general terms instead of using specific technical terms.”*

S6: *“If we don’t read enough books and lack knowledge in our minds, we won’t be able to use the language effectively.”*

S4: *“There are times when I don’t understand the reading materials well, so I feel nervous about contributing to the discussion.”*

This highlights the importance of pre-class reading, understanding key subject-related vocabulary, and preparing responses beforehand to enhance confidence and reduce hesitation.

Fear of Making Mistakes and Language Proficiency

Many students expressed concerns about making mistakes, struggling with grammar, and being judged by peers or instructors. These worries often resulted in hesitation or avoidance of speaking opportunities:

S2: *“It might sometimes cause me to struggle a little due to my nervousness and occasionally a lack of language proficiency.”*

S4: *“Mistakes—I’m afraid of making them. I’m also worried about misunderstandings and that I might not understand things the same way as others do.”*

S5: *“I am concerned about grammar.”*

S3: *“Sometimes I feel like my pronunciation isn’t good enough, and I worry that people won’t understand me.”*

S6: *“I know what I want to say, but I get stuck when I try to say it in English. I feel like my vocabulary is too limited.”*

These responses indicate that grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and fear of misunderstanding contribute to speaking anxiety in EMI discussions.

Classroom Environment and Peer Influence

The classroom atmosphere, teacher expectations, and peer competitiveness also played a role in shaping students’ confidence. Strict teachers, complex discussion topics, and the fear of looking incompetent were common anxiety triggers:

S4: *“Sometimes I feel like my understanding is different from others, and I worry if I’m getting the concept wrong.”*

S6: *“If a teacher is very strict and does not explain things well, it makes me feel nervous about answering incorrectly.”*

S5: *“Some classmates speak so well, and I feel like my English isn’t good enough, so I stay quiet.”*

S2: *“Sometimes I want to answer, but I hesitate because I feel like my answer won’t be good enough compared to others.”*

S3: *“I prefer when discussions are in small groups because I don’t feel as much pressure as when speaking in front of the whole class.”*

These findings suggest that students are influenced not only by their own language proficiency but also by external classroom dynamics, such as instructor teaching style and peer interactions.

4.2.3 Challenges Affecting EMI Classroom Engagement

The challenges impacting student participation in EMI classrooms can be categorized into internal and external factors, each influencing students’ confidence and willingness to engage in discussions. Internal factors include language proficiency, fears of making mistakes, and preparation issues. External factors involve classroom environment, peer influence, and discussion topics. The following section highlights these factors, supported by student excerpts that illustrate their experiences.

Language Proficiency

Many students reported that limited fluency and a lack of technical vocabulary hindered their ability to express ideas clearly, making them hesitant to participate. Several interviewees mentioned that their struggles with academic or technical terms affected their confidence during discussions.

S3: *“The fact that I’m not very familiar with technical terms makes it difficult for me to speak comprehensively about the subject or delve into details. I might end up speaking in more general terms instead of using specific technical words.”*

S6: *“If we don’t read enough books and lack knowledge in our minds, we won’t be able to use the language effectively.”*

S2: *“I sometimes find myself searching for the right words to explain my ideas, but if I can’t find them, I tend to stay quiet.”*

This difficulty in retrieving and using appropriate vocabulary led to hesitation and reduced engagement, particularly when discussing complex topics.

Fear of Making Mistakes

Many students expressed concerns about grammar, pronunciation, and potential misunderstandings, which discouraged them from speaking up. They feared being judged by both their peers and instructors, which led to anxiety and avoidance behaviors.

S4: *“Mistakes—I’m afraid of making them. I’m also worried about misunderstandings and that I might not understand things the same way as others do.”*

S5: *“I am concerned about grammar. If I say something incorrectly, I worry that my classmates or teacher might judge me.”*

S3: *“Sometimes I feel like my pronunciation isn’t good enough, and I worry that people won’t understand me.”*

This anxiety resulted in students withdrawing from class discussions, even when they had valuable insights to share.

Preparation Issues

Students who did not engage in pre-class preparation felt significantly less confident in contributing to discussions. Lack of preparation, particularly regarding reading and research, made it difficult for them to generate ideas and respond effectively.

S1: *“The main reason for my anxiety is the lack of preparation.”*

S4: *“There are times when I don’t understand the reading materials well, so I feel nervous about contributing to the discussion.”*

S5: *“I need to read a lot before class; otherwise, I feel lost in the discussion and prefer to stay quiet.”*

This highlights the importance of pre-class reading and familiarization with key subject-related vocabulary to enhance confidence and reduce hesitation.

Classroom Environment

The teaching style and classroom atmosphere significantly impacted students’ confidence levels. Students noted that strict instructors, high expectations, and unclear explanations increased their anxiety, making them more reluctant to participate.

S6: *“If a teacher is very strict and does not explain things well, it makes me feel nervous about answering incorrectly.”*

S2: *“Sometimes I feel like my answer won’t be good enough, so I hesitate before speaking up.”*

S4: *“It depends on the teacher. If they encourage discussions and make the class interactive, I feel more comfortable. But if they are strict and don’t provide clear instructions, I feel anxious about speaking.”*

This suggests that a supportive and interactive classroom environment can help students feel more at ease, whereas a rigid or highly demanding atmosphere may increase anxiety.

Peer Influence

Fear of being judged by classmates or sounding incompetent discouraged participation, especially in settings where students felt others were more proficient in English.

S5: *“Some classmates speak so well, and I feel like my English isn’t good enough, so I stay quiet.”*

S3: *“I prefer when discussions are in small groups because I don’t feel as much pressure as when speaking in front of the whole class.”*

S2: *“Sometimes I want to answer, but I feel like others will judge my pronunciation or grammar.”*

These responses suggest that peer competitiveness and self-comparison negatively impact on students’ willingness to engage, particularly for those who perceive themselves as less fluent than their classmates.

Discussion Topics

Students also struggled with unfamiliar or highly technical discussion topics, which increased hesitation, especially when they lacked prior knowledge or understanding of the subject.

S4: *“Some topics are too complicated, and I don’t feel confident discussing them.”*

S6: *“If I don’t understand the topic well, I feel nervous because I don’t know how to express my thoughts in English.”*

S1: *“I think discussions are easier when I already know something about the topic. But if it’s something completely new, I find it harder to speak.”*

This suggests that students perform better in discussions when they have prior exposure to the topic and feel more prepared to contribute.

Student participation in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms is influenced by various challenges that can be categorized into internal and external

factors. These challenges shape students' confidence, willingness to contribute to discussions, and overall engagement in the learning process.

Internal challenges primarily stem from students' language proficiency, fear of mistakes, and level of preparation. Many students reported that limited fluency and a lack of technical vocabulary hindered their ability to express ideas clearly, making them hesitant to participate. Students struggled to articulate their thoughts without adequate language skills, particularly when discussing academic and technical topics.

Fear of making mistakes was another significant barrier to active participation. Many students worried about their grammar, pronunciation, or misunderstandings, which discouraged them from speaking in front of their classmates and instructors. The anxiety of being judged or misinterpreted led to hesitation and, in some cases, complete avoidance of discussions.

Additionally, preparation issues played a crucial role in student engagement. Those who did not engage in pre-class reading or research felt less confident and unprepared to contribute meaningfully to discussions. Without prior exposure to the topics, students often found it difficult to follow the flow of discussions, further reinforcing their reluctance to speak.

Beyond internal struggles, external factors, such as classroom environment, peer influence, and discussion topics, significantly affected students' engagement. Strict teaching styles, unclear explanations, and high expectations heightened anxiety, making students feel pressured to perform flawlessly rather than focusing on the learning process. In classrooms where instructors provided minimal support or scaffolding, students were more likely to struggle with comprehension and participation.

Peer influence was another external factor that impacted engagement. Students often compared themselves to their more fluent classmates, which made them feel inadequate. Fear of judgment or embarrassment discouraged them from expressing their thoughts, especially in competitive or fast-paced discussions.

The complexity of discussion topics also played a role in limiting participation. Unfamiliar or highly technical subjects left students feeling overwhelmed and unprepared to contribute. Those who lacked subject-specific knowledge or vocabulary hesitated to speak, fearing that their responses would be incorrect or inadequate.

These findings highlight the importance of teacher support, structured participation opportunities, and student-centered strategies in reducing speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms. By fostering an inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment, educators can help students build confidence, overcome language-related anxieties, and participate more actively in discussions.

Encouraging collaborative learning, providing clear guidance, and creating low-pressure speaking opportunities can significantly improve students' experiences in EMI settings. When teachers implement scaffolding techniques, interactive discussion formats, and personalized feedback, students gain the necessary tools to develop their language skills and academic confidence. Through these approaches, EMI classrooms can become more effective in enhancing student engagement, promoting language development, and ensuring academic success.

4.3 Strategies Used by Thai Master's Students for Managing Anxiety in EMI Classroom Engagement

This section presents insights from semi-structured interviews conducted with six Thai master's students enrolled in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) program. Key coping strategies emerged through thematic analysis, providing a deeper understanding of how students navigate speaking anxiety and enhance classroom engagement.

The results indicate that students employ academic strategies, peer collaboration, and stress-reducing techniques to manage anxiety and improve participation. These strategies can be categorized into four main themes: thorough preparation, peer support and cooperation, relaxation techniques, and reflections on confidence-building practices.

4.3.1 Thorough Preparation

Many participants emphasized the importance of reading and preparing in advance, as thorough preparation helps them feel more confident and well-equipped to engage in classroom discussions.

S1: *“My technique is to read a lot and try to understand the context. If you read enough, you gain knowledge. If you have knowledge, you have something to say.”*

S4: *“For each class, I need to prepare information and make sure it aligns with the questions the teacher might ask. Is this information important? If the teacher asks about this topic, what kind of answers should I have ready? Preparing ahead of time helps me answer more smoothly.”*

S6: *“Reading more books and spending time alone reviewing the content helps me feel more confident before class.”*

S2: *“Before class, I take notes and highlight key points from the readings. This makes it easier for me to form my responses during discussions.”*

S3: *“If I don’t prepare well, I feel nervous. But if I already have some ideas in mind, it’s much easier to speak up.”*

These responses indicate that students who engage in pre-class preparation feel significantly more confident and less anxious when speaking in EMI discussions.

4.3.2 Peer Support and Collaboration

Another practical strategy students used to reduce anxiety and enhance participation was seeking support from classmates. Interacting with peers helped students clarify concepts, organize their thoughts, and feel more comfortable speaking in front of others.

S2: *“I try my best to participate with my friends as much as possible and consult them on things I don’t understand.”*

S3: *“I try to talk with the friends sitting next to me, asking for their thoughts and sharing ideas about what I’m concerned about. If my friends help by discussing and narrowing down the scope of ideas, it helps me feel more relaxed and understand things better.”*

S5: *“If I am not sure what to say, I talk with my friends first and share my ideas.”*

S6: *“Sometimes, I feel anxious about speaking in front of the whole class, so I practice discussing topics with my friends first. It helps me feel more confident when I finally speak.”*

S4: *“Group discussions are very helpful because when I hear my friends' ideas, I realize that we are all learning and making mistakes together. It reduces my fear of being wrong.”*

These findings suggest collaborative learning environments, where students exchange ideas and support each other, can significantly reduce speaking anxiety in EMI settings.

4.3.3 Relaxation Techniques

Several students used relaxation strategies **to** calm their nerves and reduce anxiety before speaking in class. These strategies ranged from listening to music and deep breathing to stepping away from studies before revisiting them later.

S6: *“Listen to your favorite music, step away from studying, and do something else until you feel okay, then come back to review the material again.”*

S5: *“I take a deep breath before speaking to calm myself down.”*

S3: *“Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed by discussions, so I pause for a few seconds, take a breath, and organize my thoughts before speaking.”*

S1: *“When I get too nervous, I take short breaks, drink water, or walk around for a few minutes before going back to studying.”*

S2: *“If I feel anxious, I remind myself that I don't need to be perfect. The goal is to communicate, not to speak flawlessly.”*

These findings highlight that relaxation techniques help students regulate their anxiety, allowing them to participate in discussions more effectively.

4.3.4 Reflections and Suggestions for Overcoming Anxiety

Over time, many participants reported gaining confidence through consistent practice, peer encouragement, and increased exposure to English discussions.

Increased Confidence Through Practice

S1: *“I think you just get used to it. If you practice enough and spend time reading, your anxiety will go away.”*

S2: *“At first, I was discouraged, wondering if I could speak or not. But as time goes by, I feel more confident. Friends also encourage and cheer each other on, which helps.”*

S4: *“The more I practice, the less stressed I feel. Repeating vocabulary, I’m unsure about helps me reduce stress and speak confidently.”*

S5: *“At first, I was afraid of speaking, but I pushed myself to answer even short questions. The more I did it, the easier it became.”*

S6: *“I realized that speaking in class gets easier with time. I used to avoid it, but now I see it as part of the learning process.”*

These responses show that consistent participation and gradual exposure to discussions help students overcome anxiety and build confidence over time.

4.3.5 Suggestions for Improvement

Participants suggested several practical strategies for reducing speaking anxiety and improving classroom participation in EMI settings.

S3: *“I search for information online, organize my thoughts, and then discuss them with friends before class.”*

S5: *“Practicing speaking frequently and using mind maps to structure my thoughts helps me stay focused.”*

S6: *“We also use our mother tongue to help understand content before trying to explain it in English.”*

S2: *“Having discussion questions in advance helps me prepare better. If I know what to expect, I feel more comfortable speaking.”*

S4: *“Teachers should encourage small group discussions before moving to whole-class discussions. It’s less intimidating and helps students feel more confident.”*

These suggestions emphasize the role of preparation, structured participation formats, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks in helping students manage anxiety effectively.

Thai master's students in EMI classrooms experience varying levels of speaking anxiety, influenced by factors such as preparation, language proficiency, and classroom environment. To cope with this anxiety, students employ three main strategies: thorough preparation, peer collaboration, and relaxation techniques. Over time, consistent exposure to discussions and supportive peer interactions contribute to increased confidence and engagement.

This study underscores the importance of teacher support, structured speaking activities, and peer engagement in helping students overcome anxiety. Educators can promote interactive learning strategies, provide pre-discussion guidance, and create a low-pressure environment to encourage students to participate more actively. EMI classrooms can effectively support students' language development and academic success by fostering an inclusive and confidence-building classroom atmosphere.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the factors influencing Thai master's students' participation in EMI classrooms and the strategies they used to manage speaking anxiety. The results showed that teacher support and a positive classroom environment were the most significant contributors to student engagement, peer interactions, class size, and instructional methods. Although English proficiency and foreign language anxiety also played a role, their impact was comparatively lower. To cope with anxiety, students adopted various strategies, including thorough preparation, seeking support from peers, using relaxation techniques, and practicing consistently. Engaging in discussions with friends, extensive reading, and applying breathing exercises helped them build confidence and participate more effectively. Additionally, participants reflected that regular exposure to English-speaking settings and continuous practice gradually reduced their anxiety. Lastly, the findings emphasize the need for a supportive learning atmosphere and practical strategies to enhance Thai master students' confidence and participation in EMI discussions.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the study's findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It begins by interpreting and discussing the results for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. Following this, the chapter outlines the implications of the study, highlights its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's key findings.

5.1 Factors Affecting Thai Master's Students' EMI Classroom Engagement and Their Impact on Participation

This study investigated the factors that influence Thai master's students' engagement in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classroom discussions. The findings revealed that participation is shaped by internal and external factors that either facilitate or hinder student engagement. The most influential internal factors include English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, and motivation. In contrast, external factors such as teacher support, peer influence, classroom environment, and instructional methods significantly shape student participation. These findings align with previous research on EMI classroom engagement and foreign language learning but highlight Thai students' unique challenges in this context.

One of the most significant internal factors affecting participation is English proficiency. Students with higher English proficiency tend to engage more actively in discussions, while those with limited proficiency hesitate due to the fear of making mistakes. Several participants highlighted that their lack of technical vocabulary made it difficult to express ideas fluently, which led to reduced participation. This argument could be supported by S3's statement, noting that *"The fact that I'm not very familiar with technical terms makes it difficult for me to speak comprehensively about the subject. I might end up speaking in more general terms instead of using specific technical terms. Another piece of evidence from S6 expresses that "If we don't read enough books and lack knowledge in our minds, we won't be able to use the language effectively."* These responses suggest that enhancing students' academic vocabulary and language confidence could significantly improve their engagement in EMI discussions.

This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of language proficiency in classroom participation (Dörnyei, 2005; Evans & Morrison, 2011). For example, Evans and Morrison (2011) found that EMI students in Hong Kong faced significant challenges due to their lack of technical vocabulary, leading to low confidence and reduced participation. Similarly, Joe, Hiver, and Al-Hoorie (2017) argue that students with higher language proficiency are more willing to communicate, increasing participation in class discussions.

Closely related to language proficiency is foreign language anxiety (FLA), indicating that many students experience significant anxiety when speaking in English. This anxiety manifests in different ways, including fear of making grammatical errors, concerns about pronunciation, and hesitation due to the possibility of misunderstandings. This argument can be supported by S4's statement, indicating, *"Mistakes—I'm afraid of making them. I'm also worried about misunderstandings and that I might not understand things the same way as others do."*

This aligns with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which highlights that students who fear making mistakes are less likely to participate in classroom discussions. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further confirm that language anxiety negatively impacts second language communication and academic performance. However, in contrast to studies in Western contexts (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), where students sometimes view anxiety as a motivator, the Thai students in this study predominantly perceived it as a barrier.

Motivation and goal orientation also play a crucial role in influencing student engagement. Students who are motivated by academic or career aspirations tend to participate more actively in discussions, as evidenced by S2 and S4 excerpts. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), which suggests that intrinsic motivation, driven by interest and self-improvement, enhances student engagement. Previous studies by Noels et al. (2000) and Ushioda (2013) found that students with strong intrinsic motivation tend to take more initiative in language learning. However, the present study also found that extrinsic motivators,

such as peer encouragement and academic requirements, played a crucial role in pushing students to participate, reinforcing findings by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011).

Among external factors, teacher support and classroom atmosphere emerged as the most significant enabler of participation. A supportive and well-structured learning environment can alleviate student anxiety and encourage more active engagement. Students noted that teachers who provide clear instructions, constructive feedback, and engaging discussion formats help reduce speaking anxiety. However, when teachers are overly strict or fail to offer sufficient guidance, students may hesitate to participate, as evidenced by S6's and S4's statements. These findings are consistent with Walsh (2013), who argues that teacher interaction strategies are crucial for student engagement in EMI classrooms. Likewise, Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) found that students engage more actively in discussions when teachers provide structured participation opportunities and scaffolding techniques.

Peer influence and classroom dynamics also played a significant role in shaping participation. Supportive peer interactions can boost confidence, while fear of judgment from more fluent classmates may discourage participation. Some students reported feeling intimidated when their peers spoke English more fluently (S5). On the other hand, students who engaged in small-group discussions or pre-discussion peer collaboration found that these strategies helped ease their anxiety.

This aligns with Zhang and Head (2010), who found that in EMI settings, students who received positive reinforcement from peers were more likely to engage in discussions. However, the current study also found that competitive classroom environments sometimes discouraged participation, a factor not always emphasized in Western EMI research.

Additionally, class size and instructional methods significantly impacted participation. Class size influenced student engagement, as smaller classes provided more opportunities for interaction, whereas larger classes made participation more challenging. Instructional methods were also essential, as students reported that structured participation formats, discussion prompts, and multimodal teaching strategies encouraged them to speak more frequently. These findings are comparable to those of Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri (2017), who argue that the effectiveness

of EMI classrooms depends mainly on how discussions are structured and whether students feel they can engage actively.

The findings suggest that various internal and external factors influence Thai master's students' engagement in EMI classroom discussions. English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, and motivation directly affect students' confidence and willingness to participate, while teacher support, peer influence, classroom environment, and instructional methods play an equally important role in shaping engagement.

5.2 Challenges and Factors Affecting Thai Master's Students' Engagement in EMI Classrooms

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a significant factor that affects Thai master's students' participation in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classroom discussions. This study found that FLA negatively impacts students' willingness to engage, leading to hesitation, avoidance behaviors, and decreased confidence in speaking English. Several key factors contribute to this anxiety, including fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence in pronunciation and grammar, peer pressure, and the classroom environment. Although some students employed coping strategies to manage their anxiety, others struggled to participate actively. These findings align with existing research on FLA while highlighting specific challenges Thai students face in EMI settings.

One of the primary reasons students experience FLA is the fear of making mistakes in front of their peers and instructors. Many students worry that their pronunciation, grammar, or word choice might be incorrect, leading to embarrassment or negative evaluation. This fear aligns with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) Theory, which states that language learners often avoid participation due to anxiety about making errors. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2023) also found that students with high FLA frequently remain silent in discussions to prevent embarrassment, a behavior observed among Thai EMI students in this study.

FLA may also stem from students' lack of confidence in their language proficiency, particularly their ability to express ideas clearly in English. Some students struggle to

find the right words or structure their thoughts in English, making them hesitant to participate. These findings are consistent with Woodrow (2016), who found that Asian EMI learners experience high levels of anxiety due to cultural expectations of linguistic accuracy. Gregersen and Horwitz (2022) also highlighted that learners who lack confidence in their fluency are more likely to withdraw from discussions, reinforcing their anxiety and limiting their practice opportunities.

Many students reported feeling intimidated by their more fluent classmates, leading to increased anxiety and reduced participation. Some students believed their English proficiency was lower than their peers, making them reluctant to speak. This finding is supported by Zhang and Head (2023), who found that students in EMI classrooms often compare themselves to their peers, which creates self-doubt and lowers participation levels. Similarly, Young (1991) argued that students in competitive learning environments experience heightened anxiety as they fear being judged by classmates who appear more competent.

The study also found that strict teaching styles, high expectations, and unclear instructions contributed to students' anxiety. Some students felt pressured to provide perfect answers and feared being corrected by their classmates. These findings align with Walsh (2023), who emphasized that teacher discourse and instructional strategies are crucial in determining students' willingness to engage in EMI discussions. Curle et al. (2022) also found that **students** felt more confident participating in EMI classrooms when instructors provided clear guidance, constructive feedback, and structured speaking opportunities.

5.3 Strategies Used by Thai Master's Students for Managing Anxiety in EMI Classroom Engagement

The study's findings reveal that Thai master's students employ various strategies to manage speaking anxiety and actively engage in EMI classroom discussions. These strategies primarily fall into three key areas: thorough preparation, peer collaboration and support, and relaxation techniques. Additionally, students reflected on their confidence-building journey and provided suggestions for improving participation in EMI classrooms. These findings align with previous research on foreign language

anxiety (FLA) and engagement strategies while also highlighting unique methods specific to the Thai EMI context.

One of the most effective strategies used by Thai master's students was thorough preparation before classroom discussions. Many participants highlighted the importance of reading extensively, reviewing key concepts, and organizing their thoughts ahead of time. These findings align with Dörnyei and Ryan (2020), who argue that structured preparation and goal-setting significantly increase learners' confidence in speaking activities. Similarly, Woodrow (2016) found that students with higher levels of preparation experience lower speaking anxiety and greater participation rates in EMI classrooms.

However, despite the benefits of preparation, some students struggled with technical vocabulary or felt uncertain about articulating complex ideas. For example, S6 noted: *"Reading more books and spending time alone reviewing the content helps me feel more confident before class. But sometimes, I still struggle with technical terms."* This suggests that while preparation helps alleviate anxiety, additional support in vocabulary reinforcement and guided practice may be necessary for students to feel fully confident in discussions.

Another key strategy used by students was seeking peer support before and during classroom discussions. Many participants reported that informal conversations with classmates before discussions helped them clarify ideas, refine responses, and reduce anxiety. The excerpts from S2 and S3 can evidence this. These findings align with Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), who found that peer collaboration reduces speaking anxiety by fostering a supportive learning environment. Additionally, Teng (2023) highlighted that engaging in small-group discussions before whole-class participation increases students' willingness to communicate in EMI settings.

However, some students still feared being judged by more proficient classmates. This finding aligns with Zhang and Head (2023), who observed that social comparison in EMI classrooms can either boost motivation or increase anxiety, depending on the student's self-perception. It suggests that while peer discussions effectively reduce FLA, additional teacher guidance and positive reinforcement are needed to prevent negative self-comparisons.

Some students used relaxation techniques to manage their anxiety before engaging in discussions. These strategies included deep breathing, listening to music, and taking short breaks before returning to studies. These findings are consistent with MacIntyre and Gregersen (2023), who found that mindfulness techniques and relaxation strategies help lower FLA and improve speaking confidence. Moreover, Young (1991) suggested that developing self-regulation skills can help students cope with anxiety in language learning environments.

Despite the effectiveness of relaxation techniques, some students noted that these methods were short-term solutions. This suggests that while relaxation techniques help regulate emotions, they should be combined with preparation and peer support for long-term confidence-building.

Over time, students reported that consistent exposure to EMI discussions and encouragement from peers and instructors helped them gradually overcome their anxiety and build confidence. These findings align with Gregersen and Horwitz (2022), who found that consistent speaking practice and gradual exposure to EMI discussions improve learners' confidence.

To further enhance participation, students suggested practical classroom strategies, such as structured pre-discussion activities, small group discussions before whole-class participation, and scaffolding support from teachers. These recommendations align with Walsh (2023), who emphasized that structured speaking activities and teacher guidance reduce anxiety and improve engagement in EMI settings.

The study's findings indicate that Thai master's students employ multiple strategies to manage speaking anxiety and engage in EMI discussions, including thorough preparation, peer collaboration, and relaxation techniques. Over time, consistent practice, peer encouragement, and structured classroom activities helped students become more confident speakers.

5.4 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how Thai master's students navigate speaking anxiety in English-medium instruction (EMI) classrooms and suggest several implications for instructors, curriculum designers, and students.

Addressing these implications can help create more inclusive, supportive, and effective EMI learning environments that foster student engagement and language development.

5.4.1 Implications for EMI Instructors

EMI instructors play a crucial role in shaping classroom engagement by reducing foreign language anxiety (FLA) and fostering a supportive learning environment. The study highlights several pedagogical strategies instructors can implement to help students feel more comfortable participating in discussions.

First, scaffolded speaking activities can gradually introduce students to classroom discussions. Techniques such as think-pair-share exercises, small-group discussions, and role-playing activities allow students to practice speaking in low-pressure environments before engaging in whole-class discussions. This aligns with Walsh (2023), who emphasizes that structured speaking opportunities help students build confidence over time.

Second, providing supportive feedback rather than focusing on error correction can significantly enhance students' willingness to participate. Many students in this study expressed fear of making mistakes, which discouraged them from speaking in class. Instead of correcting errors in a way that increases anxiety, instructors should use constructive feedback and positive reinforcement to create a safe space for learning. Research by Dörnyei and Ryan (2020) supports this approach, emphasizing that encouraging feedback helps reduce communication apprehension in second-language contexts.

Additionally, interactive and student-centered teaching methods should be prioritized in EMI classrooms. The study found that peer collaboration was key in reducing anxiety and increasing engagement. Instructors can leverage this by incorporating collaborative activities such as group discussions, debates, and project-based learning. Studies by Teng (2023) and Mercer & Dörnyei (2020) confirm that collaborative learning enhances students' confidence, fosters deeper engagement, and facilitates language acquisition.

Furthermore, instructors can integrate relaxation techniques into classroom routines to help students manage anxiety. Since many participants used breathing exercises, listened to music, or took short breaks to relieve stress, EMI instructors can introduce mindfulness practices before discussions. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2023) suggest incorporating relaxation techniques into language learning can significantly reduce students' speaking anxiety and improve engagement.

5.4.2 Implications for Curriculum Design and EMI Programs

Curriculum designers and EMI program coordinators should consider structural changes to better support student engagement and mitigate speaking anxiety. One key recommendation is embedding language support into EMI courses. Many students in this study reported difficulties with technical vocabulary and comprehension, which hindered their participation. To address this, EMI programs should integrate discipline-specific language support, such as academic English workshops, glossaries, and vocabulary-building exercises. Hu and Lei (2022) found that linguistic scaffolding within EMI courses significantly improves students' comprehension and classroom engagement.

Another critical consideration is class size and classroom structure. The findings suggest that smaller classes facilitate greater student participation, while larger classes may limit opportunities for interaction. EMI programs should consider offering smaller, discussion-based sessions or incorporating breakout groups within large lectures to ensure students have more engagement opportunities. Research by Zhang and Head (2023) supports this, indicating that discussion-based learning environments lead to higher student engagement and reduced anxiety.

Additionally, EMI programs should provide training on speaking anxiety management. Many students in this study employed self-regulation techniques such as preparation, peer discussions, and relaxation strategies to manage their anxiety. EMI institutions could offer workshops on public speaking, confidence-building strategies, and academic communication skills to equip students with the tools needed for effective participation. Gregersen and Horwitz (2022) emphasize that explicit training

in anxiety management techniques helps students overcome their fear of speaking in foreign-language academic settings.

5.4.3 Implications for Students

The study's findings also hold significant implications for students, particularly regarding self-regulated learning strategies that enhance classroom engagement. One major takeaway is the importance of thorough preparation before classroom discussions. Many participants reported that reading and researching the topic in advance helped them feel more confident speaking in class. Developing structured study habits, such as pre-reading materials, summarizing key points, and preparing discussion responses, can enhance both confidence and participation. Woodrow (2016) found that students who engage in structured preparation are more likely to actively contribute to EMI discussions.

Another crucial strategy for students is leveraging peer support and collaboration. The findings highlight that many students felt more comfortable participating when they discussed ideas with their classmates before engaging in whole-class discussions. Establishing study groups or informal English-speaking sessions can provide students additional opportunities to practice their language skills in a low-stress environment. Studies by Teng (2023) and Mercer & Dörnyei (2020) confirm that peer collaboration significantly improves language fluency and speaking confidence.

Additionally, self-regulation and relaxation techniques were found to be highly effective in managing speaking anxiety. Students who engaged in deep breathing, listening to music, or stepping away from their studies before revisiting them later reported lower anxiety levels. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2023) emphasize that students who use self-regulation strategies experience lower stress levels and are more likely to engage actively in discussions.

This study highlights the importance of pedagogical adjustments, curriculum modifications, and student-centered learning strategies to enhance engagement and reduce speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms. EMI instructors and curriculum designers can create a more supportive and engaging academic environment by

implementing scaffolded speaking activities, providing linguistic support, fostering collaborative learning, and integrating relaxation techniques.

For students, developing strong preparation habits, utilizing peer collaboration, and adopting self-regulation techniques are key strategies for managing anxiety and improving classroom participation. These findings align with previous research and offer practical recommendations for enhancing student confidence, participation, and overall language development in EMI settings.

5.5 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into how Thai master's students manage speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms, it has several limitations. First, the study's small sample size of 21 participants, all from a single government university in Thailand, limits the generalizability of the findings. The results may not fully represent students from different universities, disciplines, or cultural backgrounds, which could exhibit varying degrees of speaking anxiety and engagement strategies in EMI settings. Future studies should consider larger, more diverse samples to enhance the reliability and applicability of the findings.

Second, the study's cross-sectional design only captures a snapshot of students' experiences at a given time rather than tracking how their speaking anxiety and engagement strategies evolve. Future research could employ a longitudinal approach to examine whether continued exposure to EMI discussions leads to long-term reductions in anxiety and improvements in participation. This would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of different anxiety-reduction strategies and their sustainability over extended periods.

Additionally, the study primarily relied on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews and surveys. While these methods provided rich qualitative insights, they are inherently subjective. They may be influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may downplay their anxiety levels or overestimate the effectiveness of their coping strategies. Future research could incorporate triangulated methods, such as classroom observations, teacher evaluations, or physiological measures of anxiety (e.g., heart rate monitoring), to gain a more objective understanding of how students experience and manage speaking anxiety in EMI discussions.

Furthermore, cultural and institutional differences may influence the findings. Since this study focused exclusively on Thai master's students, future research should compare anxiety management strategies across different EMI contexts, including students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Investigating whether students from other non-English-speaking countries face similar challenges or employ distinct anxiety-reduction techniques could help identify universal versus culture-specific engagement strategies in EMI classrooms.

Lastly, given that teacher support emerged as a key factor in student engagement, further studies could examine the impact of EMI teacher training programs on student participation and anxiety management. Research on which instructor-led interventions are most effective, such as scaffolded speaking activities, feedback strategies, and student-centered classroom practices, would help EMI programs design targeted training models to enhance student engagement and confidence. Additionally, exploring teacher perspectives on managing speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms could offer valuable insights into pedagogical approaches that best support student learning.

In conclusion, addressing these limitations in future research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of EMI student engagement and inform the development of effective pedagogical strategies to support students in overcoming speaking anxiety and actively participating in EMI discussions.

5.6 Conclusion of the Study

This study explored the factors influencing Thai master's students' engagement in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classroom discussions, the impact of foreign language anxiety on participation, and the strategies students employ to manage speaking anxiety and actively engage in discussions.

First, the findings revealed that several key factors influence student engagement in EMI classroom discussions. These include English proficiency, foreign language anxiety, teacher support, motivation, peer influence, cultural background, class size, and instructional methods. Among these, teacher support and classroom atmosphere had the most significant impact, fostering confidence and encouraging student participation. In contrast, language proficiency and foreign language anxiety were

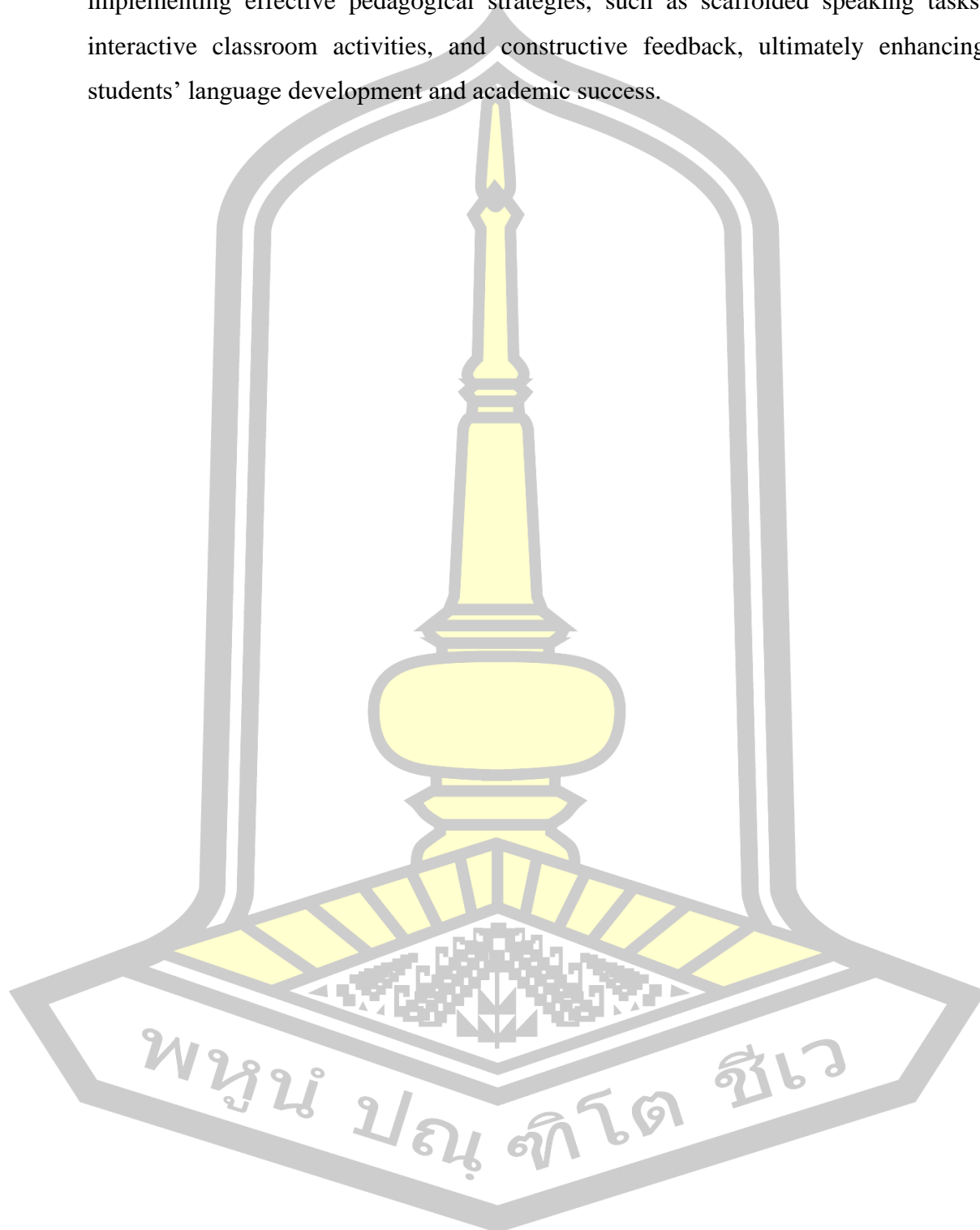
major barriers, as students with lower English confidence were more hesitant to speak due to fear of making mistakes or being judged. Additionally, peer influence and motivation played a crucial role, and students were more engaged when they felt supported by their classmates and had clear academic goals.

Second, the study found that foreign language anxiety significantly affects Thai master's students' willingness to engage in EMI discussions. Many students reported feeling anxious about speaking English due to concerns about grammar, pronunciation, and unfamiliarity with technical vocabulary. Some students also feared negative evaluation from peers and instructors, which led to hesitation or avoidance of classroom discussions. The study highlighted that students who lack preparation experience heightened anxiety, particularly when faced with complex discussion topics or strict classroom environments. These findings align with previous research suggesting that foreign language anxiety can lead to decreased participation, avoidance behaviors, and reduced confidence in language learning settings (Dewaele, 2019; Horwitz, 2016).

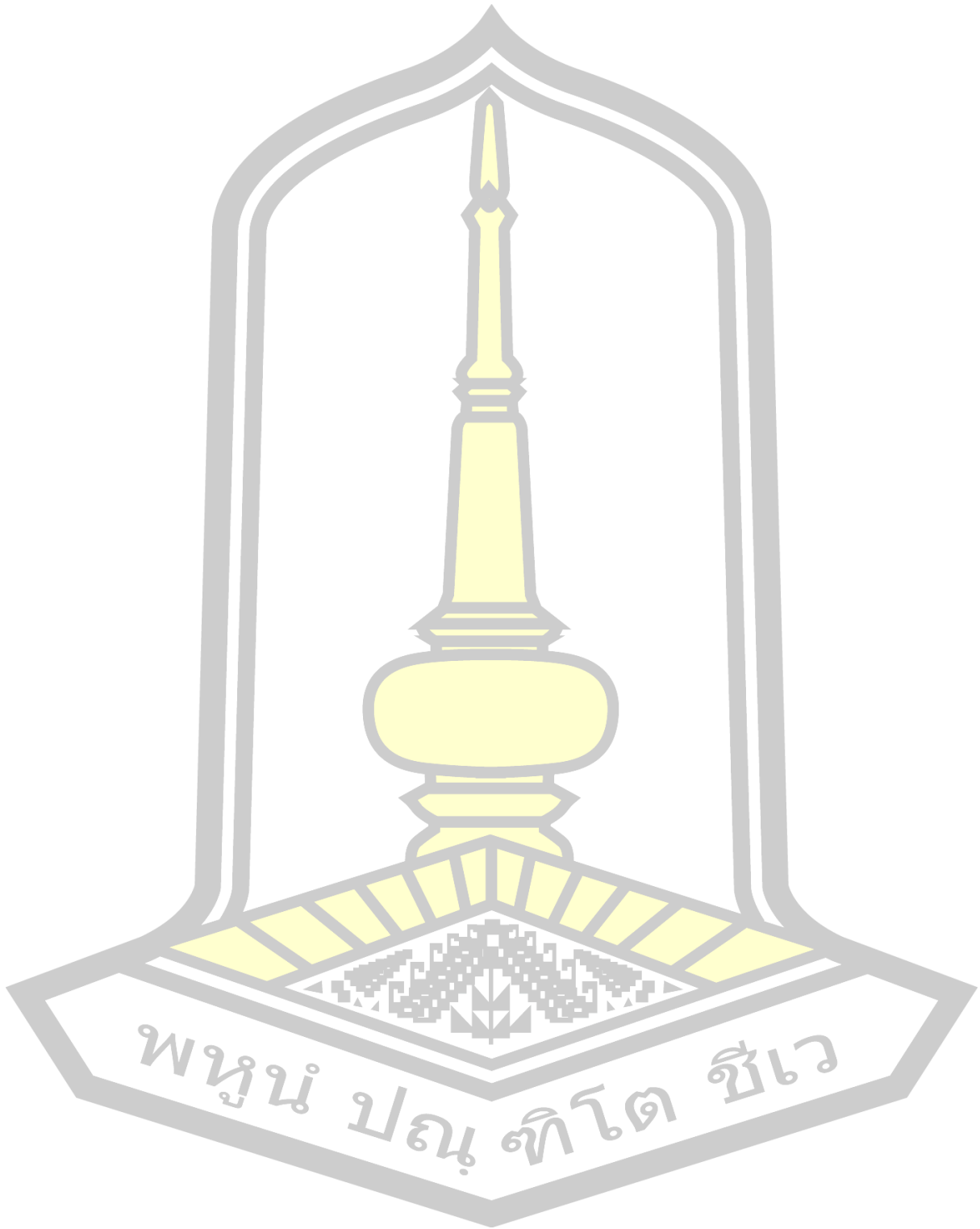
Finally, Thai master's students employed various strategies to manage speaking anxiety and actively participate in EMI discussions. The study identified three primary coping strategies: thorough preparation, peer support, and relaxation techniques. Many students emphasized the importance of reading in advance, preparing key points, and practicing responses to feeling more confident before discussions. Seeking support from classmates through pre-discussion brainstorming and idea-sharing also helped reduce anxiety and build confidence. Additionally, relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, listening to music, and taking short breaks before speaking, were used to manage stress and improve focus. Over time, students reported that consistent practice, teacher encouragement, and increased exposure to speaking opportunities contributed to gradual confidence-building and reduced anxiety in EMI discussions.

Overall, this study highlights the complex relationship between language proficiency, anxiety, and classroom engagement in EMI settings. The findings underscore the importance of teacher support, structured speaking opportunities, and collaborative learning environments in helping students overcome anxiety and actively participate

in discussions. Educators can create more inclusive and engaging EMI classrooms by implementing effective pedagogical strategies, such as scaffolded speaking tasks, interactive classroom activities, and constructive feedback, ultimately enhancing students' language development and academic success.



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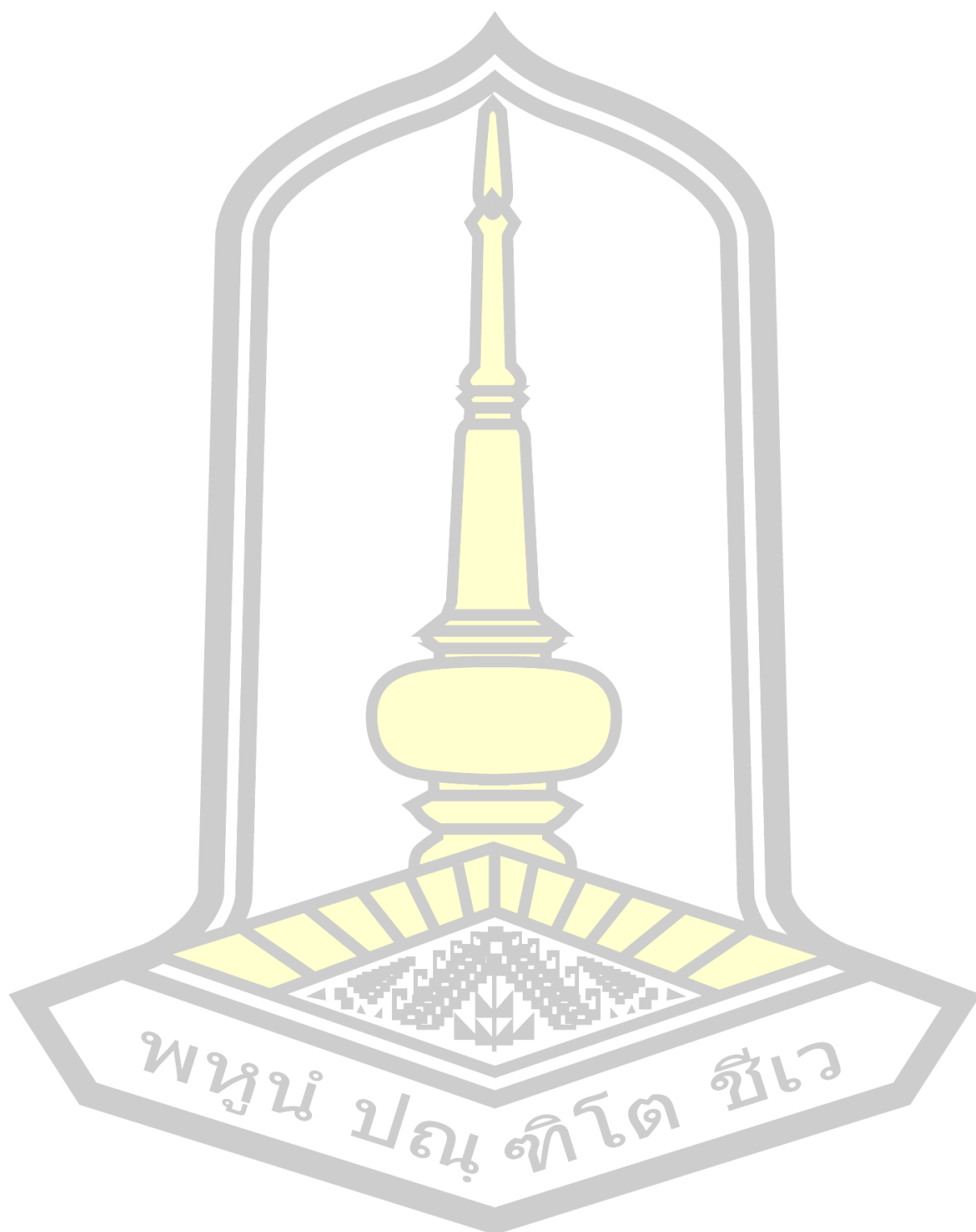
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APPENDICES



Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire: Factors Affecting Thai Graduate Students' EMI Classrooms

Part 1: Demographic Information

Gender: Male Female Other _____

Age: _____

Educational Background: _____

Job position: _____

Part 2: Factors Affecting Thai master Students' EMI Classroom discussion

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, where:

1 means Strongly Disagree

2 means Disagree

3 means Neutral

4 means Agree

5 means Strongly Agree

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
English proficiency levels					
I feel confident participating in discussions because of my English proficiency.					
My vocabulary knowledge supports my participation in discussions.					
I can understand complex academic discussions in English.					
I often struggle to find the right words during discussions.					
My grammar skills hinder my participation in discussions.					
I can follow the flow of discussions even when the topic is complex.					
Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)					
I feel anxious about making mistakes when speaking English in class.					
I worry about being misunderstood by my classmates or instructor.					
I feel nervous about participating in English discussions.					
I avoid participating in discussions because of my fear of making errors.					
My anxiety levels increase during English-medium discussions.					

I feel self-conscious about my accent when speaking English.					
Teacher Support and Classroom Atmosphere					
My teacher provides a supportive environment for participating in discussions.					
The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak up during discussions.					
My teacher helps reduce my anxiety about speaking English.					
I feel comfortable asking questions in my English classes.					
My teacher encourages all students to participate equally.					
The feedback I receive from my teacher is helpful for improving my participation.					
Motivation and Goal Orientation					
I am motivated to participate in discussions to improve my English skills.					
My personal goals drive me to engage actively in discussions.					
I participate in discussions to achieve better academic results.					
I feel a sense of achievement when I participate in English discussions.					
I set specific goals for my participation in English classes.					
My motivation to learn English influences my participation in discussions.					
Peer Influence and Classroom Dynamics					
My classmates' participation encourages me to speak up.					
I feel more confident participating when my peers are supportive.					
Peer pressure affects my willingness to participate in discussions.					
I collaborate well with my peers during group discussions.					
My classmates' attitudes towards English discussions influence my participation.					
I feel more comfortable discussing in smaller peer groups.					
Cultural Background					
My cultural background influences how comfortable I feel speaking English.					
I feel that my cultural norms impact my participation in class discussions.					
Understanding different cultures in the classroom helps me participate					

more.					
I am aware of cultural differences that may affect my communication style.					
Cultural sensitivity in the classroom encourages me to participate.					
I feel that my cultural background is respected in the classroom.					
Class Size and Structure					
Smaller class sizes make me feel comfortable speaking in discussions.					
The structure of the class influences my willingness to participate.					
Group discussions are more effective for my learning compared to whole-class discussions.					
I prefer structured discussions with clear guidelines.					
The physical arrangement of the classroom affects my participation.					
Smaller discussion groups help me express my ideas more freely.					
Instructional Methods					
The use of multimedia in teaching helps me engage in discussions.					
Interactive teaching methods make me more likely to participate in discussions.					
Role-playing activities enhance my speaking confidence.					
I find project-based learning helpful for improving my discussion skills.					
Hands-on activities make it easier for me to participate in discussions.					
Technology-enhanced learning environments encourage my participation.					

Other ideas:



Interview questions

Background Information

1. Can you briefly describe your academic background and your experience with English language learning?
2. What are your general impressions of learning in an EMI setting?

Experiences with Speaking Anxiety

3. How do you feel when participating in discussions or presentations in your EMI classroom?
4. What specific situations make you feel most anxious when speaking in English?
(e.g., answering questions, presenting ideas, reacting to classmates' opinions)
5. Can you share an example of a time when you felt very anxious during a class discussion? What happened?
6. How does your anxiety affect your ability to express your ideas or contribute to discussions?

Factors Influencing Speaking Anxiety

7. What do you think are the main reasons behind your speaking anxiety in EMI classrooms?
(e.g., fear of making mistakes, language proficiency, peer judgment)
8. How do classroom dynamics, such as the behavior of your peers or teachers, influence your level of anxiety?
9. How does the language difficulty or complexity of the topic impact your discussion to speak in class?

Strategies for Managing Speaking Anxiety

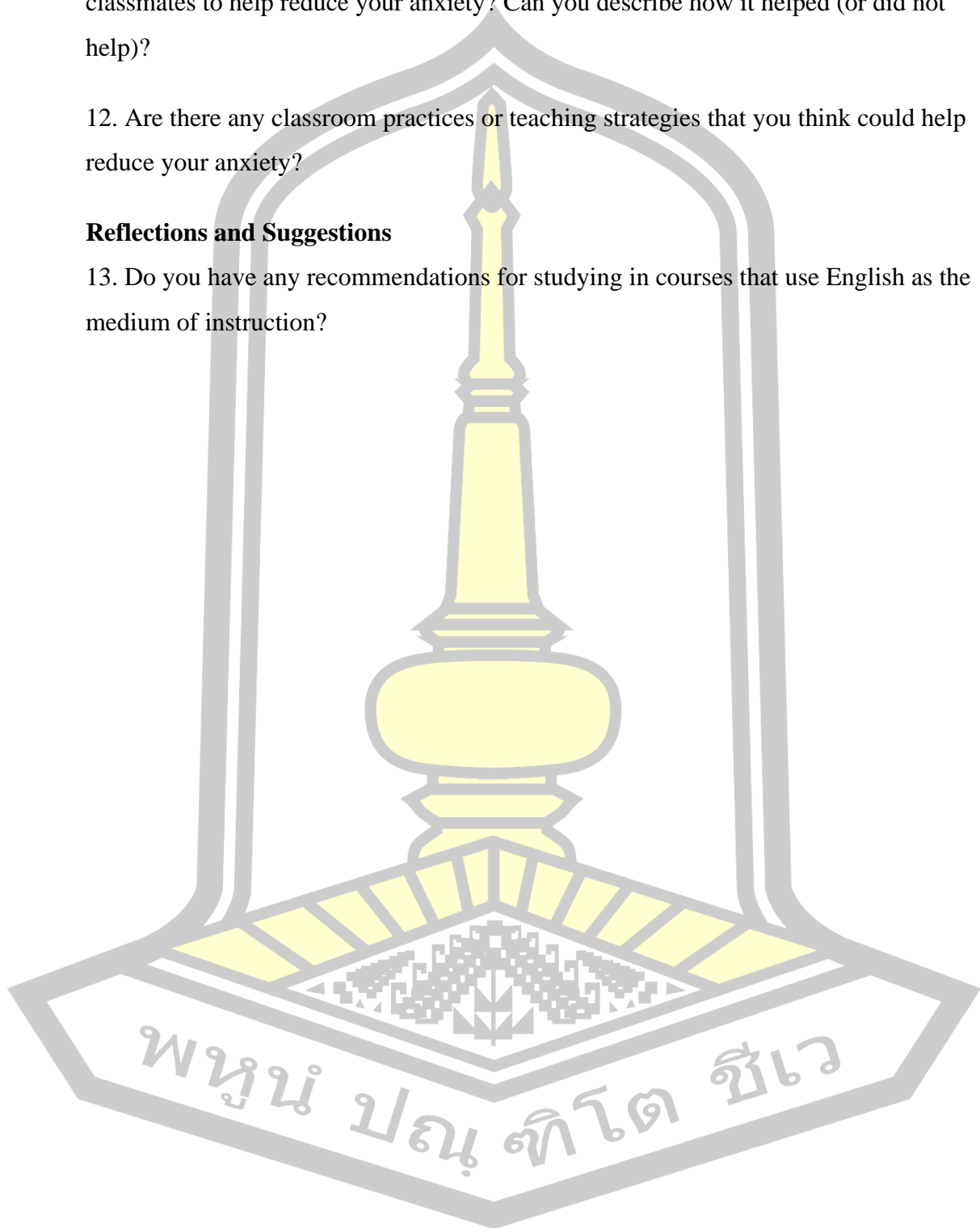
10. What strategies or techniques do you use to cope with speaking anxiety in class?
(e.g., preparation, rehearsing, relaxation techniques)

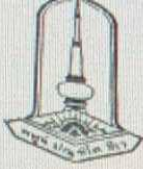
11. Have you received any support or encouragement from your teachers or classmates to help reduce your anxiety? Can you describe how it helped (or did not help)?

12. Are there any classroom practices or teaching strategies that you think could help reduce your anxiety?

Reflections and Suggestions

13. Do you have any recommendations for studying in courses that use English as the medium of instruction?



Appendix B: Ethics approval

MAHASARAKHAM UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR
RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Certificate of Approval

Approval number: 014-784/2025

Title : Exploring Classroom Anxiety: Insights from Thai Master's Students' Experiences in Discussion in EMI Settings.

Principal Investigator : Mr. Trisutta Jamsri

Responsible Department : Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences

Research site : The University in northeastern Thailand

Review Method : Expedited Review

Date of Manufacture : 15 January 2025 Expire : 14 January 2026

This research application has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. Approval is dependent on local ethical approval having been received. Any subsequent changes to the consent form must be re-submitted to the Committee.

Ratree S.
.....
(Assistant Professor Ratree Sawangjit)
Chairman

Approval is granted subject to the following conditions: (see back of this Certificate)

All approved investigators must comply with the following conditions:

1. Strictly conduct the research as required by the protocol;
2. Use only the information sheet, consent form (and recruitment materials, if any), interview outlines and/or questionnaires bearing the Institutional Review Board's seal of approval, and return one copy of such documents of the first subject recruited to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the record (if applicable);
3. Report to the Institutional Review Board any serious adverse event or any changes in the research activity within five working days;
4. Provide reports to the Institutional Review Board concerning the progress of the research upon the specified period of time or when requested;
5. If the study cannot be finished within the expire date of the approval certificate, the investigator is obliged to reapply for approval at least two month before the date of expiration.
6. All the above approved documents are expired on the same date of the previously approved protocol (Protocol Number.....)

* A list of the Institutional Review Board members (names and positions) present at the meeting of Institutional Review Board on the date of approval of this study has been attached (per requested). All approved documents will be forwarded to the principal investigator.

ศูนย์ ประถมศึกษา

BIOGRAPHY

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พหุบัณฑิต ชีวะ