KHẢO SÁT TÌNH TRẠNG LO LẮNG KHI NÓI TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TẠI VIỆT NAM

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Từ kết quả khảo sát với 55 học sinh lớp 11 tại một trường học ở Việt Nam, nghiên cứu này đã phát hiện một số loại lo lắng thường xuất hiện và các yếu tố gây ra sự lo lắng khi nói tiếng Anh. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy học sinh dường như phải đối mặt với tình trạng thiếu động lực trong các giờ học nói tiếng Anh (hoặc sợ học nói), sợ mắc lỗi và sợ nhận những lời chỉ trích từ người khác. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng cho thấy học sinh ở vùng miền có thể trải qua mức độ lo lắng từ mức độ thấp đến trung bình khi nói tiếng Anh. Có ba yếu tố tác động tới sự lo lắng này là: động lực nói thấp, thiếu cấu trúc ngữ pháp và sợ phải nhờ giáo viên giúp đỡ. Dựa trên những phát hiện này, nghiên cứu phần nào giúp giáo viên và học sinh xác định tình trạng lo lắng và các yếu tố tác động nhằm tìm ra giải pháp tốt hơn xử lý hiện tượng này trong giờ học nói tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: *động lực, lo lắng, giờ học nói tiếng Anh.*

This study identifies a few prominent types of English speaking anxiety and their contributing factors experienced by 55 eleventh graders at a high school in Vietnam. The findings reveal that the students appeared to struggle with a lack motivation in speaking lessons, a fear of making mistakes, and a fear of receiving criticism from others. This study also shows that the local students experience a low-to-moderate level of English speaking anxiety, which can be attributed to low speaking motivation, a lack of grammatical structures, and a fear of asking for teacher assistance. This study is expected to help EFL teachers and learners identify levels of speaking anxiety and its causes to better address it in their speaking lessons.

Key words: *motivation, anxiety, English speaking lessons.*

AN INVESTIGATION INTO SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG VIETNAMESE EFL LEARNERS: A CASE AT SCHOOL IN VIET NAM

1. Introduction

English has proved itself to be one of the key factors to success when people communicate in their daily life and commonly use it worldwide in most business, working, studying, and social fields and situations. Mastering English brings an easier and broader route to those

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who desire to quickly adapt to a wider global business context and international education (Putra, 2020). Learning English allows the learners to successfully achieve both personal and professional goals (Nishanthi, 2018). English is also used as the lingua franca in emerging economies, such as Vietnam and other developing countries in Asia since these nations are in the progression of integrating with the global economy in terms of cross-border trading and foreign direct investment (Pham et al., 2020). Any of the international business practices need a certain level of English language proficiency and accuracy, especially the demands for fluent speaking ability.

In Vietnam, English has been introduced as a national compulsory learning subject since 1982 and currently is taught in primary and secondary education with a minimum of two or three periods per week during the total 35 weeks of the academic school year (Hoang, 2018). Of the four skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) language, speaking has its own roles. In fact, speaking is among popular productive language skills (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2020). Good speaking skills are essential for effective communication in daily activities and the academic environment (Thornbury, 2005; Rao, 2019). Speaking represents what the person knows and feels about something and conveys that knowledge or opinion to the listeners. Good speaking skills will positively affect other language skills

(Thornbury, 2005). As English speaking seems to be minor in formal assessment, the teaching and learning of EFL speaking are still considered as minor parts of the national English curriculum in comparison to those of reading and writing (Ma, 2021).

One of the most striking problems with EFL speaking skills is speaking anxiety - a fear of speaking in front of many people (Tridinanti, 2018). Explaining this problem, Le and Tran (2020) stated that fear of mistakes, fear of being laughed at, lack of confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of being the focus of attention are ubiquitous forms of this anxiety. EFL learners can be afraid that they are going to make many mistakes and be laughed at by their peers in their speaking class. They may lack self-efficacy (or self-confidence) in speaking. They can also feel shy of speaking in front of many people because they do not get used to being the center of all attention and evaluations. In the view of Rumiyati and Seftika (2018), speaking anxiety derives from not only linguistic aspects but also psychological and cultural issues. EFL learners who have low English proficiency may not always be willing to speak in English. They may not speak very fluently due to the lack of vocabulary, grammar, cultural knowledge in English, and motivation. Although a plethora of studies worked on speaking anxiety, most tend to be quantitative with statistical evidence. Not many studies, especially in Vietnamese settings, employed more descriptive qualitative findings or a

mixture of both quantitative and qualitative findings about speaking anxiety.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical background

2.1.1. Definitions of EFL speaking

Speaking can be viewed differently. According to Torky (2006), speaking is an interactive process that is established to produce, to receive, and to process the information to construct meanings. Under the perspectives of sociolinguistics, speaking is understood as the system of words and the principles of word combinations that the people in the community use to communicate to each other (Wardhaugh, 2009). Abidova et al. (2020) considered speaking as a speech activity to be conducted for verbal or oral communication to transmit or to exchange information. In applied linguistics, speaking is a productive language skill in which speakers and listeners (or called as interlocutors) create and process their spoken interactions simultaneously (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2020).

2.1.2. Key features of fluent speaking

As noted by Thornbury (2005), a fluent speaker, regardless of any language, needs to master different types of knowledge, including extra-linguistic knowledge (world or sociocultural knowledge), linguistic knowledge (knowledge about genres, discourse, pragmatic, grammar, vocabulary, and phonology), and understandings about speech conditions.

As a result, EFL speakers need to understand many things while joining in a conversation in order to express the spoken message suitably to the listeners.

2.1.3. Speaking anxiety

Speaking anxiety, the feeling of anxiety while speaking, has been one of the most ubiquitous problems among many EFL learners (Erdiana et al., 2010). This anxiety can vary across different educational contexts (Jugo, 2020; Le & Tran, 2020). Most students studying EFL experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when speaking and communicating in public (Erdiana et al., 2020). The anxiety occurs when these students are asked to speak a second language in public places because they have not achieved fluency (Alzahrani, 2019). Among the reasons for this problem are coming to the class without being well prepared, forgetting words and phrases, being unable to understand the instructors' guidance, and so forth (Han, 2013). Speaking anxiety has a negative impact on EFL learners' speaking performance (Mohtasham & Farnia, 2017; Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018).

2.2. Previous studies related to EFL speaking anxiety and its related factors

Throughout the history of language teaching and learning studies, speaking anxiety has been considered a common topic and studied from different perspectives, based on different research objectives and resulting in different research findings. With reference to

speaking performance, various factors are put forward, among which are speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and self-confidence.

Mohtasham and Farnia (2017) conducted the quantitative research with the data collected from 125 female and 50 male EFL learners in Iran. The study aims to investigate differences in speaking anxiety levels among EFL learners by gender and the effects of speaking instruction on speaking anxiety. Based on the research findings, these authors concluded that female learners had higher anxiety than males and speaking instruction had certain effects on their speaking anxiety. Rumiyati and Seftika (2018) performed a descriptive qualitative analysis on students' anxiety of speaking English with the purpose of investigating the effects of speaking anxiety in speaking performance. The results indicated that the key anxieties were communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The results also showed that these anxieties negatively affected learners' performance on speaking English. Hasibuan and Irzawati (2019) ranked speaking anxieties from very low to very high, analyzing the correlation between speaking anxieties and speaking performance. The data was retrieved from 78 students of English as a second foreign language (EFL). The Pearson's correlation coefficient was -0.358 and it was statistically significant at a 1% confidence level. Similarly, Kabigting (2020) obtained the Pearson's correlation coefficient between English language classroom anxiety and the performance of senior high school learners at -0.348 and it was statistically significant at a 5% confidence level. In his study, Jugo (2020), however, classified foreign language anxieties into speaking activity anxiety, writing activity anxiety, error correction anxiety, communication with English speakers' anxiety, negative self-perception anxiety, non-comprehension anxiety, and foreign language anxiety. Among these types of anxieties, speaking anxiety and foreign language anxiety were believed to have the highest negative correlation with the overall English proficiency of the students. The Pearson's correlation coefficients of these factors were -0.675 and -0.613, respectively, and they were statistically significant at 1%. Le and Tran (2020) classified the anxiety when speaking English into fear of mistakes, fear of being laughed at, lack of confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of being the focus of attention. Analyzing the data containing 128 non-English majors in a university in Vietnam, the authors found out that students who had higher anxiety levels had lower language proficiency when. It can be noted from most of these studies that language anxiety in general and speaking anxiety in particular have certain effects on their speaking performance. Only two studies revealed that speaking anxiety is a minor problem in students' speaking performance (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2019; Kabigting, 2020).

Apart from studies investigating speaking anxiety, the relationship between students' shyness and their English language proficiency was also investigated by various authors, focusing on different contexts. Among these studies are those conducted by Namaghi (2015), Marhamah (2016) and Olfaz (2019). Although these studies almost used statistical evidence on shyness as an indicator of speaking anxiety, the results were quite different. While Bashost et al. (2019) found no effect of shyness on students' English language proficiency, moderate, negative, and even remarkable effects were recognized by Namaghi (2015) and Olfaz (2019).

Together with shyness as an indicator of speaking anxiety, the correlation between the students' self-confidence and their speaking performance is also investigated. In their study, Normawati and Muna (2015) reported a very high correlation between these two factors. As the Pearson's correlation coefficient between the students' self-confidence and their speaking performance was estimated at 0.92, students who had high self-confidence levels were believed to achieve greater speaking performance. Tridinanti (2018) performed a quantitative assessment of the correlation between the students' self-confidence and their speaking performance in English as a foreign language learning. With the questionnaire administered to 50 students, the author obtained empirical evidence of the Pearson's correlation coefficient

between the students' self-confidence and their speaking performance, which was 0.48, and it was statistically significant at a 1% confidence level. Roysmanto (2018) also performed the quantitative assessment of the correlation between the students' self-confidence and their English-speaking skills. The survey results showed that these two factors were significantly correlated, with the Pearson's correlation coefficient being 0.32, which was at a low-to-moderate correlation level. Conducted quantitatively, the study entitled "Cognitive differences between male and female students in higher order thinking skills" conducted by Anggraini et al. (2019) indicated that the correlation between students' self-confidence and their speaking ability was at a low-to-moderate level with the Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.349 and this was statistically significant. It can be seen from these studies that self-confidence can exert certain effect on students' speaking performance, with the correlation ranging from low to moderate levels.

Previous studies demonstrated that speaking anxiety is a common problem among many EFL learners due to various factors such as fear of making mistakes, shyness, or lack of self-confidence. However, it seems that not many studies concentrated on speaking anxiety as a mixture of both socio-linguistic and psychological problems. Apart from such psychological factors as shyness, fear, or low confidence, speaking anxiety can also

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be influenced by socio-cultural factors, namely the need of saving face in Vietnamese communities, the lack of cultural knowledge, and low language proficiency. While most research employed quantitative findings based on statistical evidence, not many studies, especially in Vietnamese settings, employed more descriptive qualitative findings, or a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative findings about speaking anxiety, providing more insights into causes of speaking anxiety from research participants. In an effort to make contribution to bridging these gaps, the current study is going to investigate speaking anxiety from both socio-linguistic and psychological perspectives, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study also ends up with strategies to help students effectively deal with their anxiety in speaking English.

Towards these objectives, there are two research questions being addressed in the current study: *(i) What types of speaking anxiety do the eleventh graders encounter? and (ii) What are students' perceptions of related factors in their speaking anxiety?*

In answering these questions, the study will make practical contributions to the local EFL speaking instruction at the school and other educational institutions in Viet Nam as well. *Firstly,* it helps the teachers review and reflect on their students' speaking anxiety as one of psychological major problems. *Secondly,* it helps identify the causes of the speaking

anxiety, and then recommends solutions to help students overcome the anxiety that they are encountering.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study's emphasis was on speaking anxiety among Vietnamese EFL learners, and the mixed methods approach was used. In the study, the sequential explanatory was used, characterized by the qualitative data following the quantitative data. This design is believed to be effective as the quantitative results can be supported by insights from the qualitative data, thus contributing to the reliability of the results and arguments raised in the study (Creswell, 2012). Within this design, one online survey questionnaire was sent to the students as the primary method, aiming at collecting quantitative data related to students' speaking anxiety; and interviews with ten voluntary students were also conducted to collect qualitative data related to students' impressions, feelings, thoughts and ideas concerning their speaking anxiety and related factors.

3.2. Research setting

The study was conducted at a Vietnamese high school in the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. Within the English language curriculum, the expectation of the school is mainly to promote students' English-speaking skill in the future as it is a key to the students' future success in their later work and study

(As the current study investigates the overall speaking ability among these students, the singular form of EFL speaking skill is used rather than its plural form- speaking skills). At this high school, just a few English-speaking activities have been organized every semester like weekend English club activities. According to the current English curriculum of the school, speaking lessons are equally distributed every week (one per week). No foreign teachers are employed at this school.

3.3. Sampling and participants

Convenience sampling method was employed to include the research participants for its convenience. The participants included in the survey were fifty-five eleventh graders at Vo Minh Duc high school. These students were sitting in two different classes at the school and voluntarily completed the online questionnaire. In terms of their demographic information, there is a prevalence of male over female students (34 males / 21 females). Most students were aged 17 (43 students), accounting for 78.2%, and the others were at the age of 18 (11 students), accounting for 21.8%. For the interview, 10 out of these students are randomly selected (The names of the students are coded A, B, C, ...). As the objectives of the survey were clearly stated by the researcher himself right at the beginning of the survey, all of the students showed their interest and deliberation in completing the questionnaire.

3.4. Research instrument

To select an acceptable research method, a variety of aspects must be taken into consideration, including the study's objectives, the availability of resources, and the number of participants (Creswell, 2012).

In the current study, a questionnaire was employed to obtain the perceptions of the participants towards their speaking anxiety and a semi-structured interview was also employed to achieve the goal of obtaining more information, which is utilized as supporting evidence for the results of the questionnaire.

The original questionnaire was adapted from a study conducted by Le and Tran (2020) to investigate Vietnamese EFL learners' speaking anxiety and the contributing factors. After being revised, the finalized questionnaire included three parts: *Part 1* for personal information with three questions related to students' age, gender, and English learning experience; *Part 2* for speaking anxiety including eight items; and *Part 3* for factors related to students' speaking anxiety with ten statement items. Designed in the format of a Likert scale questionnaire, one of the effective tools to investigate different levels of an attitude or response (Creswell, 2012), the questionnaire required students to respond by choosing one of the given numbers ranging from 1 to 5 for each indicator, indicating "**Strongly disagree**" for 1 to "**Strongly agree**" for 5.

Comprehensive instructions were carefully provided once students received the questionnaire. If a student had trouble understanding a question on the questionnaire, he or she was urged to request for more clarification.

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. The alpha coefficient for 19 items in the questionnaire is 0.655 (see Table 7), indicating that these items have relatively high internal consistency. The reliability value of the questionnaire employed in this research varied from .655 to .728, suggesting that the instrument for data collection is trustworthy and reliable. These figures can be clearly seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Reliability statistics of the clusters in the questionnaire*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.655	0.728	19

As mentioned in Creswell (2012), the first common advantage of using a questionnaire is to help the researcher collect the data in the most convenient way. By contacting available participants and sending questionnaires as the primary data collecting instrument, the survey helps describe the research phenomenon through the perceptions and responses of the informants.

The semi-structured interview in English was also employed to gather more in-depth information related to students' speaking anxiety. In a qualitative study, semi-structured interviews are often employed and are the most prevalent source of qualitative data in research. This method for data collection often involves a conversation between the research group and the participants, led by a flexible interview process and augmented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments. The use of interviews was intended to achieve the goal of obtaining more information, which may also be obtained via the use of questionnaires (Creswell, 2012).

For each participant, three open-ended questions were self-written by the current researcher and carefully proofread by an invited expert for their validity. The questions include (*1*) *What types of speaking anxiety do you often suffer? (2) What are the causes of these anxieties? (3) How do you overcome these anxieties?* As several participants who joined the interview sections had their own personal concerns and specific scheduling difficulties, they were each questioned separately at a time that was convenient for them.

In the current study, these interviews were conducted by the research group themselves. In order to efficiently analyze the interview results, all of the meetings were carefully recorded with the agreement of the participants and reexamined afterward. The research group assured the respondents that their responses would not be used in any way other than for the

purpose of the study, and they made it very apparent that the data would not be used for any other reason. After completing the interview, the researchers re-listened to the audio, input the data into Microsoft Excel, and then began to analyze and contrast the various participants' comments.

3.5. Data collection and analysis

In order to gather data from the students, an online questionnaire in English only was employed, and students were given the option to administer it to themselves. To minimize the non-response rate of the survey, the researcher was available at the time of disseminating the online questionnaire to the sample, and while the sample was filling out the online questionnaire. After obtaining the questionnaire data, the results were statistically analyzed using SPSS version 20; reliability analysis, as well as mean and standard deviation estimates, were also included in the statistical analysis.

For the interview survey, the researchers randomly selected 10 individuals from the pool of 55 respondents, who had previously shared their opinions through responses to the questionnaire. Since several participants who joined the interview sections had their own personal business and certain scheduling difficulties, they were each questioned separately regarding the three interview questions at a time that was convenient for them. In order to efficiently conduct the finding outcomes during the interview, the researchers recorded the meeting in order to examine it afterwards with the agreement of the participants. The researchers assured the respondents that their responses would not be used in any way other than for the purpose of the study, and they made it very apparent that the data would not be used for any other purposes. After completing the interview, the researchers re-listened to the audios, input the data into Microsoft Excel, and then began to analyze and contrast the various participants' responses. After being provided with full transcriptions, the interview data were then organized with reference to the research objectives. The author also identified and coded pertinent themes.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Results from the questionnaire

4.1.1.1. The EFL speaking anxiety

The statistics from Table 2 revealed that the average level of EFL speaking anxiety was not very high as the overall mean score was lower than 3.50 (M=3.37, SD =.586). The highest anxiety belonged to the statement "I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I am speaking" (Item 8: M=4.02, SD=.952). The rest which range from higher-to-lower levels include "I often feel like not want to go to English speaking class" (Item 2: M=3.58, SD=.975); "I am worried of making mistakes when speaking English" (Item 5: M=3.55, SD=1.168); "I feel shy of

speaking English when speaking in front of other people" (Item 9: M=3.38, SD=1.080); "I feel anxious about English speaking class even if I am well prepared" (Item 4: M=3.36, SD=.950); "I am afraid that my teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make" (Item 7: M=3.33, SD=

1.037); "I am worried of bad consequences if I fail in speaking English" (Item 6: M=2.89, SD=1.031); "My heart was pounding when I was called on English speaking class" (Item 3: M=2.83, SD=1.008).

Table 2. *Students' speaking anxiety*

Statements	N= 55	
	M	**SD**
1. Overall anxiety.	3.37	.586
2. I often feel like not wanting to go to English speaking class.	3.58	.975
3. My heart was pounding when I was called to English speaking class.	2.85	1.008
4. I feel anxious about English speaking class even if I am well prepared.	3.36	.950
5. I am worried about making mistakes when speaking English.	3.55	1.168
6. I am worried about bad consequences if I fail in speaking English.	2.89	1.031
7. I am afraid that my teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	3.33	1.037
8. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I am speaking.	4.02	.952
9. I feel shy when speaking English in front of other people.	3.38	1.080

It can be reflected from the statistical data in Table 2 that the level of EFL speaking anxiety among the informants was not remarkably high, except for a few cases as in Items 2, 5, and 8. Of the eight given statements which include situations for speaking anxiety, only three could be perceived as the most thrilling events, notably being anxious for daily English-speaking classes, worrying about own mistakes, and especially fear of criticism from other teachers and peers.

4.1.1.2. Factors affecting EFL speaking anxiety

From the responses of the students, there were three most prominent factors affecting students' EFL speaking anxiety: (1) low motivation in speaking English, (2) lack of grammatical structures, and (3) fear of asking the teacher. These results are statistically presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Factors affecting students' speaking anxiety*

Statements	N=55	
	M	**SD**
1. I lack motivation for English speaking class.	3.67	1.277
2. I don't have enough lexical resources to speak.	3.20	1.112
3. I don't have enough grammatical structures to speak.	3.55	1.119
4. My pronunciation is poor.	3.25	1.022
5. I lack useful ideas to speak.	2.78	1.182
6. I lack cultural knowledge.	3.33	1.233
7. I lack useful speaking strategies.	3.20	1.145
8. I want to stay in my safe zone.	3.20	1.145
9. I often feel that I have poorer English-speaking skills than other students in the class.	3.18	1.249
10. I fear asking my English teacher.	3.53	1.331

As can be seen from Table 3, the most prominent factor related to EFL speaking anxiety was the low motivation for English speaking classes (Item 1: M=3.67, SD=1.277). The lack of useful grammatical structures for speaking ranked second (Item 3: M=3.55, SD=1.119). The fear of asking the English teacher ranked the third (Item 10: M=3.53, SD=1.331). The other factors, like the lack of vocabulary (Item 2), the poor pronunciation (Item 4), the lack of cultural knowledge (Item 6), the lack of speaking strategies (Item 7), the fear of escaping from the safe zone (Item 8), and the fear of being compared (Item 9) were not clearly noted by the students because their mean scores were all lower than 3.50 but still higher than 3.0. The least noted factor related to students' speaking anxiety was the lack of useful ideas for speaking (Item 5: M=2.78, SD=1.182). These statistical data revealed the main correlated factors being the low motivation for English speaking, the inadequacy of syntactic structures, and the fear of asking the teacher.

4.1.2. Results from the interview

The interview responses clarified that most students experienced the worry about making mistakes and being laughed at (8 out of 10 interviewees): "Speaking in front of the class makes me afraid that I am going to make a lot of mistakes and then I will be laughed at." (Student A); "I am always worried about my English speaking skill in class… My English is poor, so it is likely for me to make mistakes. I fear being laughed at." (Student B). Only two students admitted that they just feel shy of speaking in front of many people.

With reference to the causes of these problems, most of them (7 out of 10) gave both linguistic and psychological factors: "The reasons for the anxiety are my low English proficiency level and my own fear"

(Student C); "I think there are two key causes. The first one is lacking vocabulary and grammar to speak. The second one is I don't know how to keep calm during speaking" (Student D). The minor group of the students perceived that cultural issues affect their speaking performance. They thought Vietnamese culture is different from Western one, and when they are speaking, they are often required to be different: "Speaking in English is different from speaking in Vietnamese. I am used to my home culture, Vietnamese culture, so many times I do not know how to speak properly in such a Western culture" (Student E).

Regarding the solutions to these problems, all of the students shared similar suggestions: (1) regular speaking practices in class and after class, (2) being calm and well-prepared before speaking, and (3) joining more group work activities in speaking sessions: "I don't think our speaking problems are caused by the teachers. To deal with these problems, however, I need more speaking practice in my English class and at home. I also need to be instructed how to stay calm and well-prepared before speaking. Group work is also useful because we can help one another in a speaking team" (Student F).

4.3. Discussion of the results

The study results revealed that the speaking anxiety was not extremely high among the EFL learners at the school because the overall mean score stayed under 3.50. In comparison to all previous studies, this finding can be in opposition.

(i) When they felt anxious for daily English-speaking class. As agreed by Le & Tran (2020), EFL learners can feel fear of speaking activities as they have to speak in front of many people. This can be a normal psychological symptom of every student in speaking, regardless of any language they are learning.

(ii) When they are worried about making mistakes. In the views of Alzahrani (2019), fear of making mistakes can be considered as a common fear in speaking English.

(iii) When they are in fear of being criticized. This result was in line with that from the study conducted by Le and Tran (2020) as Vietnamese students tend to be afraid that surrounding people can laugh at their speaking performance.

The results also illustrated the students' confirmation of key reasons related to their speaking anxiety. As the most prominent reason, the students' low motivation for speaking activities, which was concluded by Le and Tran (2020), should not be ignored when researching the students' anxiety for speaking. The students' limited linguistic knowledge, particularly the lack of useful grammatical structures, was also highlighted. This finding is more or less in line with that of Tridinanti (2018), who suggested that the students' lack of confidence in speaking might come from their low proficiency level.

The current research results did not demonstrate a balanced evaluation of the linguistic factors. While grammatical structures were stressed as a major problem,

the others like vocabulary and pronunciation did not receive much attention from the students. This insight could add more details into the existing theories noted by Le and Tran (2020) because Vietnamese students might not be always experiencing the same linguistic problems in speaking.

The fear of asking the teacher might be another typical sign of the students' shyness. As agreed by Marhamah (2016), students' shyness is normal in speaking classes because they may feel afraid of speaking in front of other people. Also, as stated by Le and Tran (2020), the cultural background of every student can decide the students' level of speaking anxiety. The survey results, nevertheless, did not reveal the remarkable figures for these factors.

Teachers who are teaching English speaking skills can leverage the results of the study to amend or improve their teaching approaches or techniques. They may need to increase the direct conversations with the students to better understand their English backgrounds, their feelings, their concerns, and their inspiration. In many cases, direct conversations between the teachers and the students sometimes may not be helpful, since it cannot collect actual opinions from the students for their nervousness or unavailability to share. In these cases, the teachers and even the academic board need to establish a channel where the students can post their ideas after they join English speaking classes or activities. Collecting students' evaluation and behavior through social networking sites like Facebook or

Zalo is also recommended, and it is considered as an effective means to help teachers better understand their students' anxiety levels. To deal with students who are highly anxious about speaking English, the teacher needs to be more attentive, providing helpful instructions and tips to help these students overcome their negative feelings. Teachers also need to collect mistakes frequently committed by the students, and they can hold open discussions with their students about these mistakes. These discussions may not be for blaming the students but for learning purposes, where students can learn from others' mistakes and also can avoid those mistakes to happen. To boost students' speaking performance, teachers need to guarantee that their students will not receive any bad feedback or bad marks when they make mistakes in the class or during the discussions. The guarantee is supposedly aimed at releasing the students from being fearful of making mistakes. This guarantee should be repeated via constant communication between the teacher and the students before and during speaking classes so that the students get sufficient confidence when they speak English. Teachers, as well as other persons that they know, may also share their own experiences in practicing speaking skills. Real experiences and real speakers may help students realize their own mistakes and drawbacks, from which they finally can find their own strategies to overcome their difficulties in speaking and get improved after their continuous effort and practice.

Although the interview might not include all types of speaking anxiety, there is a link between the questionnaire results and interview responses. *Firstly,* similar findings about the reasons for this problem were noted. When students encounter language, cultural, and psychological barriers, they are more hesitant to speak in another language. *Secondly,* the interview responses might imply that speaking anxiety is among normal and unavoidable conditions among EFL learners. Vietnamese learners, who grow up in their home culture, may not find it easy to adapt to fluent English speaking. The discrepancies between the two cultures might create many errors or misunderstandings if students are not active and are unable to control themselves in their speaking practices.

Despite most similar findings claimed in previous studies, the current study strengthens the view that Vietnamese EFL learners' speaking anxiety can be rooted in their cultural background besides its linguistic and psychological factors. Irrespective of the differences in personal characteristics on the part of the students, this insight can contribute to improving teaching and learning quality in EFL speaking classes at local high schools, where the students encounter speaking anxiety in EFL speaking classes. Understanding all possible reasons for Vietnamese EFL learners' speaking anxiety can help students to improve their speaking learning strategies and at the same time encourage local teachers to find optimal solutions to improve their teaching practices in speaking classes.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Through the findings obtained from 55 eleventh graders at a local school in Vietnam, the current study revealed the extent to which the EFL learners encountered speaking anxiety and its notable correlated factors. The findings suggested that students had a low-to-moderate speaking anxiety, with the items chosen with high frequencies being the low motivation for speaking English, fear of making mistakes, and fear of receiving criticism. Only three factors were prominent: the personal dislike for speaking English, the lack of grammatical structures in English, and the fear of asking for the teacher's help.

5.2. Implications

The results can have a few practical applications into teaching and learning EFL speaking activities at the local schools. Students should acknowledge that speaking anxiety is a normal problem, so seeking ways to overcome their anxiety in speaking is necessary (Le & Tran, 2020). Accordingly, students should also identify the sources of their speaking anxiety and apply effective solutions to speak English with less anxiety. Teachers can refer to the findings of this study to amend or add more of their teaching techniques. Additional supporting materials such as video clips of conversations or speaking tests should be presented to the students; or new and flexible classroom activities can be delivered to the students during their speaking lessons. Teachers should also

encourage students to conduct other speaking activities, such as outdoor interviews, speaking and recording for self-correction or cross-check with their peers later on, and the like.

5.3. Limitations

The current study has a few limitations in terms of its research methodology. *Firstly,* the modest sample size of the students was included, which could not help fully reflect the speaking anxiety of all students at the school. *Secondly,* as speaking skill is discussed generally, no in-depth discussion about speaking anxiety in different speaking skills or areas is revealed.

5.4. Recommendations for future research

Due to the above limitations, there is a need for better future research. Further academic work should include more research participants, namely EFL teachers and students. Employing more descriptive qualitative findings like interviews or observations could help describe the speaking anxiety and its related factors in a clearer and deeper manner. Instead of the questionnaire as the only instrument, future studies should employ more qualitative instruments like in-depth interviews to gather the students' and teachers' deeper insights into the issue. The questionnaire should also be revised to include more question types to better collect the informants' ideas. In addition, more statistical evidence should be given to indicate the key factors related to speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety should also be researched with reference to different speaking activities and skills as well.

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