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The Effects of Communicative Tasks on Thai Grade 5 EFL Students' English-Speaking Anxiety, Speaking Skills, and Perceptions

ผลของการใช้ภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสารต่อความวิตกกังวลในการพูด ทักษะในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ และความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 5 ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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Abstract

English speaking anxiety is a common challenge among Thai EFL students and can negatively affect their willingness to communicate and speaking skills in the classroom. This classroom action study investigated the use of communicative tasks to reduce English-speaking anxiety, to develop English-speaking skills, and to explore perceptions among Grade 5 EFL students. The participants were 28 Grade 5 students selected by purposive sampling and five students for the interview session from a public school in the Sakon Nakhon educational service area in the academic year of 2025. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and pre- and post-tests of speaking. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential

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statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students' overall anxiety levels significantly decreased from 75.89 to 70.82 ($t = 2.31$, $p = .029$). At the same time, there was a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking skills, with mean scores increasing from 10.29 in the pre-test to 12.46 in the post-test ($t = 6.04$, $p < .001$). These results indicated that communicative tasks had a positive effect on both students' speaking skills and their anxiety levels. Moreover, four themes emerged from the qualitative data. The most prominent themes included the reduction of speaking anxiety and greater acceptance of making mistakes, indicating that participants perceived communicative tasks as effective in alleviating foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). However, some lower-proficiency students continued to experience anxiety, suggesting that the effectiveness of communicative tasks may vary in accordance with students' language proficiency levels.

Keywords: communicative tasks, speaking anxiety, EFL students, task-based learning, speaking development

บทคัดย่อ

ความวิตกกังวลในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นปัญหาที่พบได้ทั่วไปในหมู่นักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ และอาจส่งผลเชิงลบต่อความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารและทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียน การวิจัยเชิงปฏิบัติการในชั้นเรียนครั้งนี้มุ่งศึกษาการใช้ภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสารเพื่อลดความวิตกกังวลในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ พัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ และสำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 5 ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่มีต่อภาระงานดังกล่าว กลุ่มผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยประกอบด้วยนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 5 จากโรงเรียนรัฐบาลแห่งหนึ่งในเขตพื้นที่การศึกษาจังหวัดสกลนครในปีการศึกษา 2568 จำนวน 28 คน ซึ่งคัดเลือกโดยวิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง และนักเรียนจำนวน 5 คนจากกลุ่มดังกล่าวถูกคัดเลือกเข้ารับการสัมภาษณ์ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศ (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: FLCAS) การสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้าง การสังเกตการณ์ในชั้นเรียน และแบบทดสอบการพูดก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน ข้อมูลได้รับการวิเคราะห์ด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนา สถิติเชิงอนุมาน และการวิเคราะห์แก่นสาระ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ระดับความวิตกกังวลโดยรวมของนักเรียนลดลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญจาก 75.89 เป็น 70.82 ($t = 2.31$, $p = .029$) ขณะเดียวกัน ทักษะในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ โดยคะแนนเฉลี่ยเพิ่มขึ้นจาก 10.29 ในการทดสอบก่อนเรียน เป็น 12.46 ในการทดสอบหลังเรียน ($t = 6.04$, $p < .001$) ผลการวิจัยดังกล่าวแสดงให้เห็นว่าภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสารส่งผลเชิงบวกต่อทั้งทักษะในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษและระดับความวิตกกังวลของนักเรียน นอกจากนี้ ผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพพบแก่นสาระสำคัญ 4 ประการ โดยประเด็นที่โดดเด่นที่สุด ได้แก่ การลดความวิตกกังวลในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ และการยอมรับข้อผิดพลาดของตนเองได้มากขึ้น ซึ่งสะท้อนให้เห็นว่าผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยมีความคิดเห็นว่าภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสารเป็นวิธีที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการลดความวิตกกังวลในการพูดภาษาต่างประเทศ อย่างไรก็ตาม นักเรียนบางส่วนที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษในระดับที่ต่ำกว่ายังคงมีความวิตกกังวลในการพูด ซึ่งบ่งชี้ว่าประสิทธิผลของภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสารอาจแตกต่างกันไปตามระดับความสามารถทางภาษาของผู้เรียน

คำสำคัญ: ภาระงานเพื่อการสื่อสาร ความวิตกกังวลในการพูด ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ การเรียนรู้โดยใช้ภาระงานเป็นฐาน การพัฒนาทักษะการพูด

Introduction

English is an important medium for communication in educational and professional settings and plays a key role in cross-cultural interaction (Crystal, 2003). Consequently, educational systems worldwide emphasize the development of communicative competence (Richards, 2006). In Thailand, the Ministry of Education (2008) identifies real-life communication as a major learning objective. Speaking is therefore a crucial skill for communication, confidence building, and active classroom participation (Richards, 2008; Ur, 1996).

Despite its importance, speaking remains challenging for many EFL learners. Effective speaking requires learners to express ideas and negotiate meaning to achieve successful communication (Hadi et al., 2020). However, Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) often limits participation and performance. Fear of making mistakes, concern about peer evaluation, and low self-confidence are common sources of anxiety (Akaraphattanawong, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Zhang & Tsung, 2023). This issue is particularly serious among Thai Grade 5 students, who are still developing their language proficiency and confidence (Cameron, 2001; Roihanah et al., 2024). Moreover, classroom practices that emphasize grammar and accuracy may limit opportunities for meaningful communication and contribute to speaking anxiety (Cedar & Jaiyote, 2024; Hadi et al., 2020; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025).

Previous studies have shown that collaborative and interactive tasks can reduce speaking anxiety by creating supportive learning environments (Erten & Altey, 2009; Sato & Ballinger, 2020). By emphasizing meaningful communication over linguistic accuracy, these activities encourage language use in authentic contexts and can improve both speaking ability and confidence (Ellis, 2020; Kalra & Siribud, 2020; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021; Zhu, 2024). However, limited research has examined these approaches among primary school students, particularly in Thailand. Since early language learning experiences can shape students' long-term attitudes toward English (Cameron, 2001), further research is needed on classroom activities that both develop speaking skills and reduce emotional barriers.

Therefore, this study investigates the use of communicative tasks to reduce speaking anxiety and improve speaking skills among Grade 5 EFL students. Grounded in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a framework within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the study addresses a common problem in the researcher's school context, where many students lack confidence, experience anxiety when speaking English, and have limited opportunities for meaningful oral communication. Accordingly, the study aims to create a supportive learning environment through communicative tasks that encourage students to speak with greater confidence and less fear.

Objectives

1. To examine the effect of communicative tasks on Thai grade 5 students' speaking anxiety
2. To examine the effect of communicative tasks on Thai grade 5 students' speaking skills
3. To investigate students' perceptions of the use of communicative tasks in the classroom

Literature Review

1. Speaking and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

Speaking is one of the most important components of communicative skills as it enables individuals to express ideas, opinions, and emotions through oral language (Ur, 1996). As a productive skill, speaking involves producing verbal responses to convey meaning and interacting with others to construct meaning (Shaimaa, 2006). Effective speaking requires students to utilize various language resources, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse management, while responding appropriately to their interlocutors (Thornbury, 2007).

Beyond accuracy, speaking requires students to communicate meaning appropriately in different social contexts. Successful speaking depends on linguistic skills, such as pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical accuracy, as well as communicative skills, such as achieving communicative purposes and maintaining interaction with listeners (Phakiti et al., 2021). Affective factors also influence speaking skills. Confidence, for example, plays an important role in students' willingness to communicate and participate in oral activities (Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Students with higher confidence are generally more willing to speak, whereas low confidence may limit participation despite adequate language ability.

Due to its complexity, speaking is often considered one of the most challenging language skills for EFL students. Many students experience Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), a feeling of fear and discomfort when speaking a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students may experience nervousness, unease, or fear arising from their perceptions of the language classroom, which can negatively affect language learning (Namsang, 2011; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). FLSA may also lead to avoidance of classroom participation, absenteeism, and reluctance to speak in front of others (Horwitz et al., 1986; Krashen, 1982; Liu, 2021; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three dimensions of FLSA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. These dimensions help explain students' difficulties in verbal interaction (Namsang, 2011). FLSA is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include personality and language proficiency. Fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, self-inferiority, low motivation, and negative attitudes toward English may reduce students' comfort in speaking (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Thongsrirak, 2018). Likewise, limited vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, fluency, pronunciation, and speaking competence can increase anxiety (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Dörnyei, 2020; Liu, 2021; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Thongsrirak, 2018).

External factors also contribute to FLSA, particularly in classrooms where accuracy is emphasized over fluency. Teacher-centered instruction, test-like activities, and limited opportunities for meaningful communication may increase students' fear of making mistakes and being evaluated negatively (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025). In addition, peer pressure and insufficient constructive feedback may create a threatening learning environment (Thongsrirak, 2018).

In conclusion, speaking requires the integration of linguistic, communicative, and affective resources, while FLSA remains a significant barrier to EFL students' oral communication and speaking development. Therefore, teachers should provide supportive learning environments, opportunities for interaction, and sufficient preparation that encourage students to focus on communication rather than accuracy (Suratin & Sribayak, 2025).

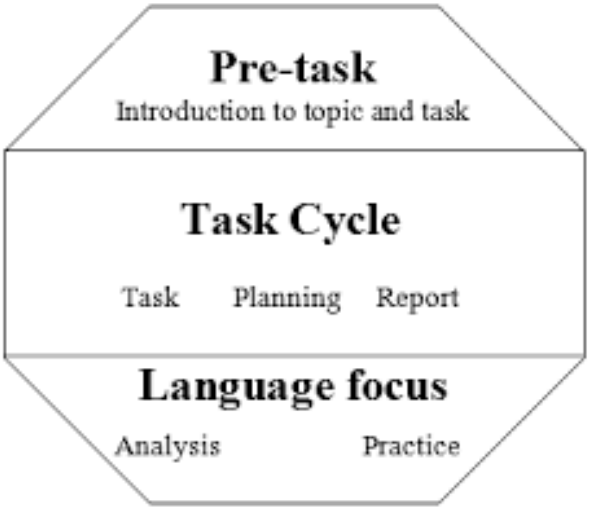
2. Communicative Language Teaching: Tasks in Task-Based Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a language teaching approach that emphasizes meaningful communication as the main goal of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Developed from CLT principles, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) uses tasks as the central component of teaching (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). While CLT provides the broader philosophy of learning through communication, TBLT offers a practical framework for designing and implementing communicative activities. In this study, communicative tasks were designed based on TBLT principles to provide students with meaningful opportunities to use English and achieve communicative goals.

Communicative tasks are activities in which students use language to complete specific goals, such as role plays, information-gap activities, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks. Through these activities, students interact, exchange information, and negotiate meaning rather than focus only on grammatical accuracy (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996). So, communicative tasks provide opportunities for students to practice speaking and develop confidence in communication. These tasks are particularly relevant in the Thai EFL context, where English instruction often emphasizes grammar, textbook exercises, and teacher-centered learning, resulting in limited opportunities for authentic communication (Ketkumbonk et al., 2025).

Figure 1

TBLT Model (Willis, 1996)



As shown in Figure 1, according to Willis (1996), TBLT consists of three main stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic, explains the task, and prepares students for the activity. During the task cycle, students complete the task through pair or group work, plan their responses, and report the outcomes of their work. In the post-task stage, students reflect on their performance and focus on language

forms that emerged during task completion. These stages provide opportunities for meaningful language use, reflection, and language development.

Previous studies have shown that communicative tasks can improve students' speaking skills and reduce speaking anxiety (Kalra & Siribud, 2020; Pham, 2025; Ramamuruthy, 2019). From an interactionist perspective, language development occurs through interaction with others. When students work in pairs or small groups, they have more opportunities to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and practice speaking in a less threatening environment (Long, 1996). As a result, communicative tasks can facilitate the development of speaking skills while creating a supportive classroom atmosphere that helps reduce foreign-language speaking anxiety.

In conclusion, communicative tasks, implemented through the TBLT framework and grounded in the principles of CLT, provide students with meaningful opportunities to communicate in English. Through interaction, collaboration, and purposeful language use, students can develop their speaking skills while gaining confidence and reducing speaking anxiety.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a classroom action research design (CAR) adopted from Kemmis and McTaggart's (1982) model. It is a systematic approach to investigation that enables teachers to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday teaching (Stringer, 1990). This study is a one-group pre-test and post-test design, and pre- and post-questionnaires were also used to gather data. The pre-test and pre-questionnaire were administered on the first day, followed by the 6-week development session. On the last day, the participants took the post-test and then filled out the post-questionnaire to assess the level of foreign language speaking anxiety.

2. Participants

The participants consisted of Grade 5 students studying English in a public school in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand, during the second semester of the 2025 academic year. The sample included 28 students selected through purposive sampling, as they showed high levels of speaking anxiety based on classroom observations and consultation with the English teacher, and five students selected through purposive sampling for an interview session. The participants were EFL students with basic English proficiency. Most of them had low confidence and felt nervous when speaking.

3. Research Instruments

Five research instruments were used in this study. First, communicative task lesson plans served as the primary instructional activities in this study. Five communicative tasks were implemented across five two-hour lessons and were designed based on the TBLT framework to provide meaningful communication opportunities while reducing speaking anxiety. The tasks included: (1) "Dream House" (describing places and expressing preferences), (2) "Classmates" (presenting a friend's characteristics), (3) "Daily Routine" (asking and providing information about daily activities), (4) "Weather" (expressing and justifying opinions), and (5) "Places" (exchanging information to identify and describe places). All tasks followed the TBLT framework of pre-task, task cycle, and post-task stages (Willis, 1996). Students were first introduced to the topic and relevant language, then completed tasks through pair and group

interaction, and finally presented their work, reflected on their performance, and reviewed useful language forms. To enhance engagement, simple gamification elements such as points and rewards were incorporated. All lesson plans and tasks were evaluated by three English language teaching experts, yielding an average Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value of 0.96, indicating high effectiveness.

Second, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used to measure students' speaking anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). An adapted version of the questionnaire was employed, focusing on speaking-related items relevant to the study. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items on a five-point Likert scale and covered seven areas: anxiety (3 items), motivation (3 items), self-confidence (3 items), attitude toward speaking (3 items), communication apprehension (2 items), fear of negative evaluation (4 items), and test anxiety (3 items). The questionnaire was administered twice, before and after the implementation of the communicative tasks. It was conducted in Thai during class time, and clear instructions were provided to ensure students understood all items. To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with all items achieving an acceptable value of 1.0.

Third, a speaking test was used to assess students' speaking ability. The test was based on the five topics used in the communicative tasks: Dream House, Classmates, Daily Routine, Weather, and Places. Students completed the test individually, with each performance lasting approximately three to five minutes. To ensure consistency, the classroom teacher served as the interlocutor and used the same prompts and procedures for both the pre-test and post-test. All performances were audio-recorded. Students were assessed on five criteria: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. These criteria reflected the key communicative and affective aspects of speaking skills identified in previous studies (Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Phakiti et al., 2021; Thornbury, 2007). The recordings were evaluated by the researcher and two English teachers using a shared analytic rubric and a consensus rating approach. Any scoring differences were discussed until agreement was reached. Scores from all criteria were combined and converted to a total score of 100. The test tasks and scoring rubric were reviewed by three experts in English language teaching. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) yielded an average value of 1.0, indicating acceptable content validity.

Fourth, a classroom observation form was used during the implementation of the communicative tasks. The observation focused on five aspects of students' classroom behavior: willingness to speak English, confidence in speaking activities, ability to express ideas in English, responses to mistakes and corrective feedback, and interaction. Field notes were recorded after each lesson to document individual behaviors and overall classroom interaction. These records were used to monitor changes in students' participation and speaking confidence throughout the intervention.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five selected students after the intervention to explore their perceptions of communicative tasks and experiences during the activities. The interview questions focused on three areas: students' feelings, perceptions of communicative tasks and classroom activities, and factors affecting their confidence and anxiety when speaking English. Sample questions included: "How did you feel when speaking English during the communicative tasks?", "Which activities helped you feel more confident in speaking English?", and "Did your feelings about speaking English change after participating in

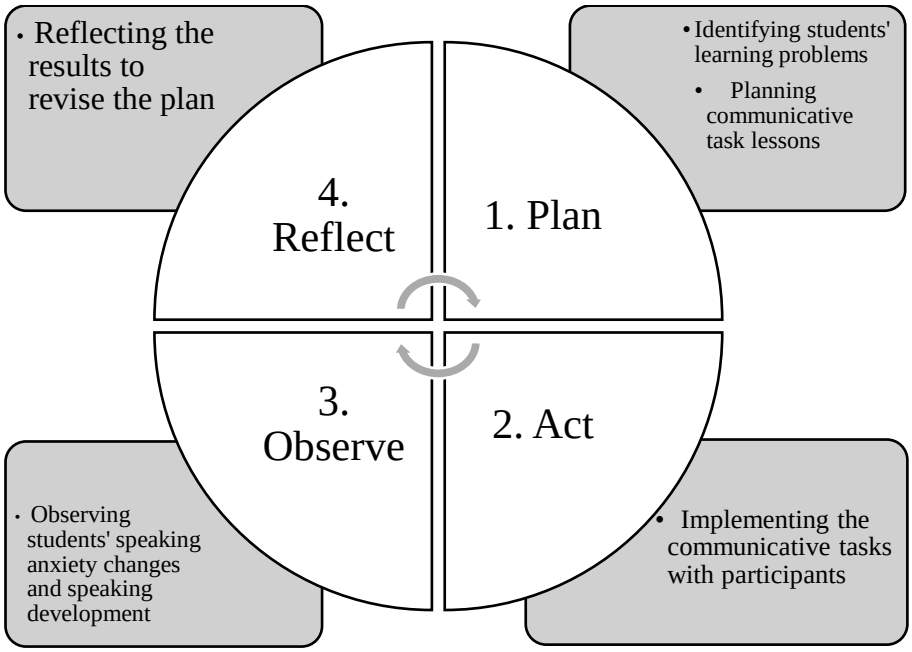
the activities? Why or why not?" The interviews provided additional insights into the effects of communicative tasks on students' speaking anxiety and confidence.

4. Research Procedure

This study followed the classroom action research cycle shown in Figure 2: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Figure 2

Classroom Action Research Cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982)



Stage 1: Planning

In the planning stage, the researcher observed the class to understand the problems in EFL learning and to get familiar with the students, and it was found that speaking anxiety seemed to be the most serious problem among the participants. Thus, the researcher sought different innovations and techniques to try to solve the problem. Finally, communicative tasks were designed to solve this problem. In the pre-intervention stage, students spent fifteen minutes completing the pre-test FLCAS and ten minutes on the speaking test to measure their anxiety level and speaking ability before the treatment.

Stage 2: Action

In the action stage, the researcher implemented the communicative tasks in the classroom over five lessons covering ten hours of the treatment period. The communicative tasks used in the lessons included, drawing and describing (Dream House), asking and describing a classmate's characteristics (Classmates), asking and reporting routines (Daily Routine), matching and explaining choices (Weather), and completing information-gap tasks (Places).

Stage 3: Observing

During the observing stage, the researcher monitored students' learning behaviors and recorded data using the observation form throughout the intervention. After the intervention, students completed the post-FLCAS questionnaire and the speaking test. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to gain deeper insights into students' learning experiences and perceptions of the communicative tasks. Five students were selected based on their speaking test scores, representing high-, medium-, and low-proficiency levels. This stratified selection approach allowed the researcher to explore perceptions across different proficiency levels. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was conducted individually in a quiet setting. Sixteen guiding questions related to speaking anxiety and learning experiences were used, while students were encouraged to respond freely.

Stage 4: Reflecting

Finally, the researcher reviewed all of the data to evaluate the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in reducing speaking anxiety and participants' perceptions of using communicative tasks to lower their anxiety.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer the three research questions. For the first and second research questions, descriptive statistics, including mean (M) and standard deviation (S.D.), were used to describe students' speaking anxiety and speaking skills. A paired samples t-test was conducted to examine differences between the pre-test and post-test scores, and Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine the practical significance of the intervention. Effect sizes were interpreted as small (0.20), medium (0.50), and large (0.80) (Cohen, 1988). For the third research question, qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observation field notes were analyzed using thematic analysis.

5.1 Questionnaire Data for Anxiety

A paired sample t-test was used to compare pre- and post-FLCAS scores to see if there was a significant difference after the intervention. For the FLCAS, the total score ranged from 21 to 105. The anxiety levels were interpreted as follows:

- 89–105 = very high anxiety
- 72–88 = high anxiety
- 55–71 = moderate anxiety
- 38–54 = low anxiety
- 21–37 = very low anxiety

These criteria were adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and interpreted using an equal interval approach to classify anxiety levels.

5.2 Speaking Test Data

For the speaking test, the total score was 100 points. The results were interpreted as follows:

- 81–100 = excellent
- 61–80 = good
- 41–60 = fair
- below 40 = needs improvement

These criteria were adapted from standard speaking assessment guidelines in language teaching, particularly Brown (2004), which classify performance levels based on overall communicative ability.

5.3 Interview and Observation Data

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observation field notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the interview data were transcribed and read repeatedly for familiarity with the data. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments related to students' perceptions of communicative tasks. These codes were then grouped into themes based on recurring patterns across the data. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' responses. Subsequently, each theme was clearly defined and named. Finally, representative excerpts were selected to support each theme and illustrate the findings. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the coding process was reviewed by a second researcher, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Research and Development Institute, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University (Approval No. HE59-033). Permission was obtained from the school principal, and informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians before data collection.

Findings

1. Students' Anxiety Levels

Table 1

Students' Anxiety by Dimensions (n=28)

Dimensions	T1 (Pre)		T2 (Post)		*t-value*	*p-value*	*Cohen's d*
	Mean	*S.D.*	Mean	*S.D.*			
Anxiety (3)	11.46	2.66	11.21	2.64	.47	.643	0.09
Motivation (3)	9.89	2.83	7.86	2.37	6.00	<.001*	1.15
Self-Confidence (3)	11.29	2.05	9.89	3.31	2.42	.023*	0.35
Attitude Toward Speaking English (3)	10.50	2.66	9.04	3.18	3.23	.003*	0.61
Communication Apprehension (2)	6.68	2.14	7.46	2.25	-1.53	.137	0.29

Dimensions	T1 (Pre)		T2 (Post)		*t-value*	*p-value*	*Cohen's d*
	Mean	*S.D.*	Mean	*S.D.*			
Fear of Negative Evaluation (4)	14.50	4.59	14.43	3.94	.07	.942	0.01
Test Anxiety (3)	11.57	3.21	10.93	3.31	.99	.332	0.19
Total (21)	75.89	10.08	70.82	11.83	2.31	.029	0.44

Note. T1 = Pre-test, T2 = Post-test, *p < .05

Before the intervention, the overall anxiety mean score was 75.89, which was at a high level. This indicates that students experienced considerable anxiety when speaking English at the beginning of the study. Among the seven dimensions, fear of negative evaluation (M = 14.50) and test anxiety (M = 11.57) had the highest mean scores before the intervention, whereas communication apprehension showed the lowest mean score (M = 6.68).

After the intervention, the overall mean score decreased to 70.82 which was at a moderate level. This suggests an improvement in students' emotional state after participating in communicative tasks. Some dimensions, such as motivation (7.86), self-confidence (9.89), and attitude toward speaking English (9.04), showed clear improvement.

To determine whether these changes were statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The results showed a significant decrease in overall anxiety (t = 2.31, p = .029, d = 0.44). The total effect size was small to moderate (Cohen, 1988), indicating that the intervention had a meaningful practical effect on reducing students' overall speaking anxiety. Significant changes were found in motivation, self-confidence, and attitude toward speaking English. The effect sizes varied across the dimensions, ranging from negligible to large. Motivation showed a large effect (d = 1.15), attitude toward speaking English showed a moderate effect (d = 0.61), and self-confidence showed a small effect (d = 0.35). However, anxiety (d = 0.09), communication apprehension (d = 0.29), fear of negative evaluation (d = 0.01), and test anxiety (d = 0.19) did not show significant changes. This implies that while the intervention was effective in improving internal factors, some aspects of anxiety related to social pressure may require longer-term support.

2. Students' Speaking Skills

This section presents the development of students' speaking skills before (T1) and after (T2) the intervention. Mean (M) and standard deviation (S.D.) were used to describe the results, while a paired sample t-test and Cohen's *d* were used to determine the statistical and practical significance of the changes. Table 2 shows the comparison of students' speaking skills between the pre-test and post-test.

Table 2

Speaking Pre-Test and Post-Test Results (n=28)

Aspects of Speaking	T1 (Pre)		T2 (Post)		*t-value*	*p-value*	*Cohen's d*
	Mean	*S.D.*	Mean	*S.D.*			
Pronunciation	2.07	.94	2.57	.92	3.15	.004*	0.60
Fluency	1.68	.82	2.14	.76	3.55	.001*	0.67
Vocabulary	2.43	.88	2.75	.89	2.35	.026*	0.44
Grammar	1.79	.63	2.29	1.01	2.75	.011*	0.52
Confidence	2.32	.90	2.71	.85	2.50	.019*	0.47
Total	10.29	3.15	12.46	2.96	6.04	<.001*	1.14

Note. T1 = Pre-test, T2 = Post-test, *p < .05

As shown in Table 2, the overall speaking skills of the students improved after the intervention. The mean score increased from 10.29 (51.45%) in the pre-test to 12.46 (62.30%) in the post-test, indicating a clear improvement in students' speaking ability.

When considering each aspect of speaking, all aspects of speaking showed improvement. In the pre-test (T1), vocabulary (M = 2.43), confidence (M = 2.32), and pronunciation (M = 2.07) obtained the highest scores, while grammar (M = 1.79) and fluency (M = 1.68) obtained the lowest. After the intervention (T2), the scores of all aspects increased. Vocabulary (M = 2.75), confidence (M = 2.71), and pronunciation (M = 2.57) remained the highest, while grammar (M = 2.29) and fluency (M = 2.14) also improved noticeably. This shows that students developed in all speaking aspects, especially in areas that they were weak at the beginning.

To examine whether the improvement was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between T1 and T2 in overall speaking skills ($t = 6.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.14$). The total large effect size indicates that the improvement was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. In addition, the improvement of all individual aspects was statistically significant, including pronunciation ($p = .004$, $d = 0.60$), fluency ($p = .001$, $d = 0.67$), vocabulary ($p = .026$, $d = 0.44$), grammar ($p = .011$, $d = 0.52$), and confidence ($p = .019$, $d = 0.47$). The effect sizes for the individual aspects ranged from small to moderate, indicating meaningful improvement across all speaking aspects.

Overall, these findings indicate that the intervention helped improve students' speaking skills in all aspects, and the improvement was statistically significant.

3. Perceptions of Communicative Tasks in Reducing Speaking Anxiety

The qualitative data were collected from five participants selected using purposive sampling. Pseudonyms were used for the sake of participants' privacy, including (1) Pochaco, (2) Kuromi, (3) Melody, (4) Cinnamon, and (5) Pompompurin. The findings reveal how participants perceived the use of communicative tasks in lowering their foreign language speaking anxiety. Analysis of interview (i) and classroom observation (o) data generated four interrelated themes: (1) reduction of speaking anxiety through greater acceptance of mistakes, (2) comfort through peer interaction, (3) increased motivation and enjoyment, and (4) persistent anxiety among lower-proficiency students.

3.1 Reduction of Speaking Anxiety Through Greater Acceptance of Mistakes

Participants reported that their speaking anxiety gradually decreased as they became more familiar with communicative tasks and more accepting of making mistakes during classroom interaction. Frequent opportunities to practice speaking, together with a supportive learning environment, appeared to help students feel more comfortable using English. For example, Pochacco explained that his nervousness had "*reduced*" (24, i), while Kuromi reported feeling "*a little less*" anxious when speaking English (28, i). Melody also noted that her anxiety had decreased because she had more opportunities to practice and had learned more vocabulary, stating that "*Anxiety reduced… because I got to practice often and I know more vocabulary now*" (29, i). Participants also reported becoming less concerned about making mistakes. Pochacco stated that he was "*not worried*" because his classmates also made mistakes (30, i). Similarly, Kuromi explained that when she made an error, she would "*just speak again correctly*" (34, i), while Melody noted that "*I can correct my mistake if I make it*." (6, i). These responses suggest that students gradually viewed mistakes as a normal part of language learning rather than something to be avoided. The classroom observations supported these perceptions. *During the later lessons, more students volunteered to participate in speaking activities, showed fewer signs of hesitation, and were more willing to continue speaking after making mistakes* (25, o). This finding suggests that communicative tasks helped reduce both speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation by creating opportunities for repeated practice and supportive peer interaction.

3.2 Comfort Through Peer Interaction

Participants perceived peer interaction as an important factor in reducing their foreign language speaking anxiety. Working in pairs or small groups made them feel more comfortable and less pressured compared to speaking in front of the whole class. Many participants mentioned that they felt braver when working with friends. Pochacco said, *"Starting to be braver…but I liked to work with my close friend."* (25, i). He also indicated that he felt more confident when working with peers. Similarly, Cinnamon noted, *"I dare to speak more when friends are around."* (55, i), suggesting that peer presence encouraged her to participate more actively. Melody also demonstrated increased confidence by stating, *"I dare to speak more and am not afraid of mistakes in group presentations."* (45, i), showing greater willingness to take risks in speaking.

3.3 Increased Motivation and Enjoyment

Participants perceived communicative tasks as enjoyable and engaging, which positively influenced their participation. Many described the activities as more interesting than traditional textbook-based lessons. For example, Kuromi stated that the tasks were *"fun… not as boring as reading a book"* (43, i), while Pompompurin appreciated the opportunity to "*speak and do it myself"* (46, i). Classroom observation data showed high levels of engagement and active participation during communicative activities. *"They participated in group work and showed willingness to communicate in English*" (40, o). These findings suggest that increased motivation and enjoyment helped reduce anxiety and encouraged students to communicate more freely.

3.4 Persistent Anxiety Among Lower-Proficiency Students

Despite generally positive perceptions, some lower-proficiency students still experienced anxiety when speaking English. For example, Cinnamon reported feeling *"afraid of making mistakes"* (32, i) and occasionally *"worried*" when speaking. The classroom observations also indicated that *a few students were hesitant to participate and required additional support before engaging in tasks* (44, o). This suggests that while communicative tasks were effective for most students, their impact may vary depending on individual differences, especially language proficiency. Additional scaffolding may be needed to support these students.

Discussion

The findings indicated a reduction in students' overall speaking anxiety. Motivation, self-confidence, and attitudes toward speaking English improved, whereas fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety showed little change. These results support previous research suggesting that communicative and student-centered approaches reduce anxiety by creating supportive learning environments (Horwitz et al., 1986). This reduction may be explained by TBLT principles, as communicative tasks emphasize meaning over accuracy and encourage collaboration through pair and group work, thereby reducing pressure on learners.

The findings also support Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Dörnyei's (2001) motivation theory, which suggest that lower anxiety and supportive learning environments facilitate language learning and motivation. However, the limited change in fear of negative evaluation indicates that some forms of anxiety may be more deeply rooted and require longer-term support. Thus, communicative tasks appear effective in reducing internal aspects of speaking anxiety, although additional strategies may be needed to address socially driven anxiety.

Students' speaking skills also improved significantly. Development was observed across all speaking aspects, including pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. This finding is consistent with TBLT research showing that task-based activities promote communicative competence and meaningful language use (Ellis, 2003). The improvement may be attributed to the meaning-focused and authentic nature of communicative tasks, which provide opportunities for interaction and negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2009; Kalra & Siribud, 2020; Pham, 2025; Ramamuruthy, 2019). Through repeated communication, students developed both fluency and confidence. This interpretation is supported by qualitative data. For example, Pochacco stated, "*I can actually speak when it's my turn*" (26, i), while Melody commented, "*I feel more*

confident when I speak with my friends" (14, i). These responses suggest that communicative tasks and peer interaction contributed to improvements in both confidence and speaking ability.

The qualitative findings further revealed positive perceptions of communicative tasks. In Theme 1, students reported feeling less nervous when speaking English and less afraid of making mistakes, suggesting that the activities created a relaxed and supportive environment. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) view that lower anxiety facilitates language learning and reflects the TBLT emphasis on communication rather than accuracy (Willis, 1996).

Theme 2 highlighted the role of peer interaction. Students felt more comfortable working with classmates, which reduced pressure and encouraged participation. This supports Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of feedback, clarification, and negotiation of meaning in language learning.

In Theme 3, students described the tasks as enjoyable, engaging, and less stressful than traditional methods, which increased their willingness to participate in speaking activities. For example, Kuromi remarked, *"It's fun... it's not as boring as reading a book"* (10, i), while Melody stated, *"I like learning English this way"* (22, i). These findings support Dörnyei's (2001) argument that interesting activities enhance motivation and promote positive attitudes toward language learning.

However, Theme 4 revealed that some lower-proficiency students continued to experience anxiety when speaking English. Although communicative tasks benefited most students, those with lower proficiency may require additional support to participate confidently. Teachers should therefore provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere, supportive peer interaction, and sufficient preparation and scaffolding before speaking tasks.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of communicative tasks on Thai Grade 5 EFL students' speaking anxiety and speaking skills, as well as their perceptions of these activities. The results showed that communicative tasks significantly reduced speaking anxiety and improved speaking skills. Students demonstrated greater confidence, less fear of making mistakes, and a higher willingness to participate in speaking activities. Improvements were also observed in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence, indicating that communicative tasks provided meaningful opportunities for oral language development.

The qualitative findings revealed positive student perceptions of communicative tasks. Participants described the activities as enjoyable and supportive, as pair and group interactions enabled them to practice English in a less stressful environment. However, some lower-proficiency students continued to experience anxiety, suggesting the need for additional support and scaffolding.

The findings indicate that English teachers can incorporate communicative tasks into speaking lessons to provide meaningful communication opportunities while promoting language development and learner confidence. Nevertheless, this study was limited by its small sample size, single-school setting, and short intervention period. Future research should involve larger samples, diverse educational contexts, and longer intervention periods to further examine the impact of communicative tasks on speaking development and anxiety reduction.

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