



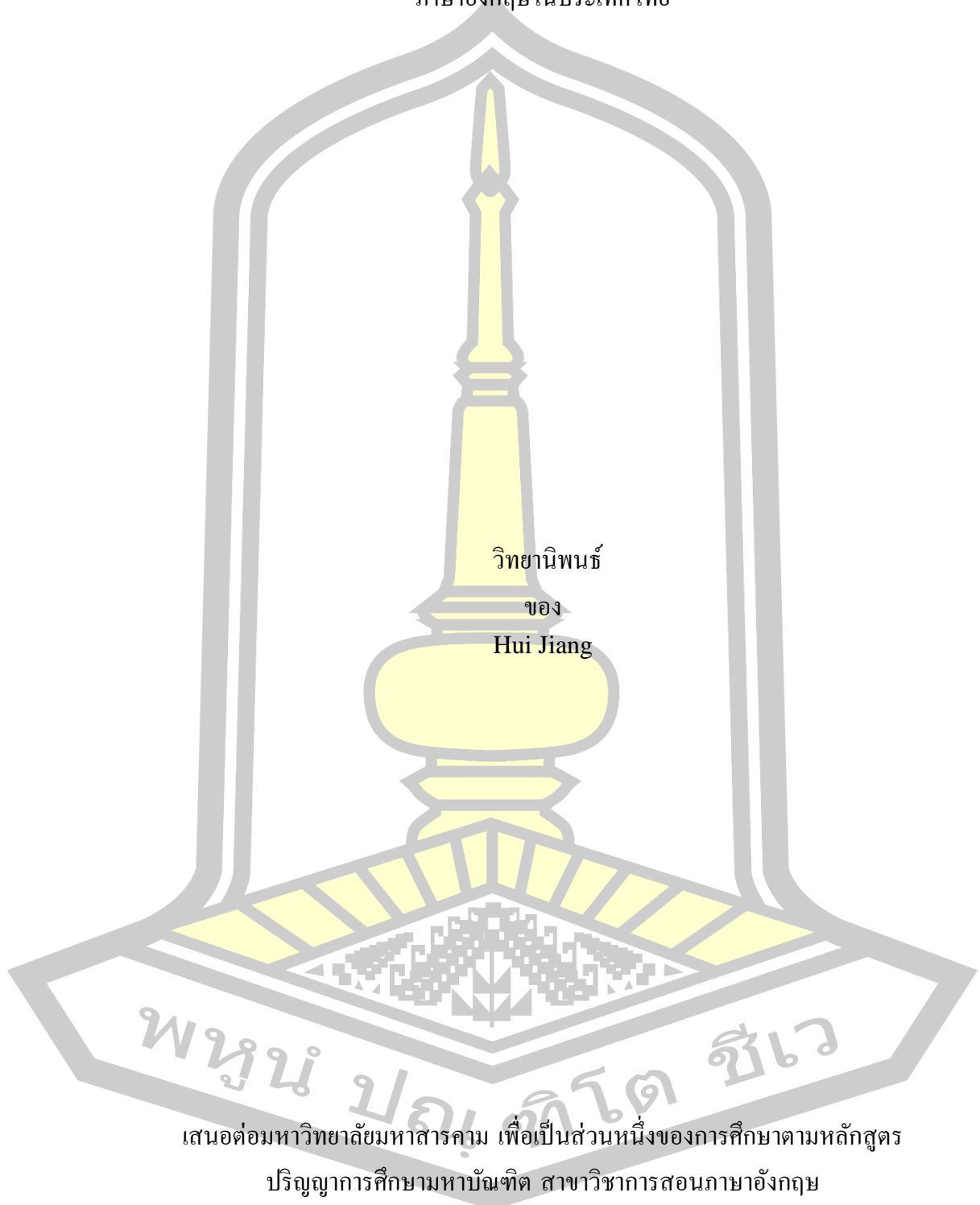
# Chinese University Students' Perceptions of English Speaking Difficulties in Thailand

Hui Jiang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
degree of Master of Education in English Language Teaching  
June 2023

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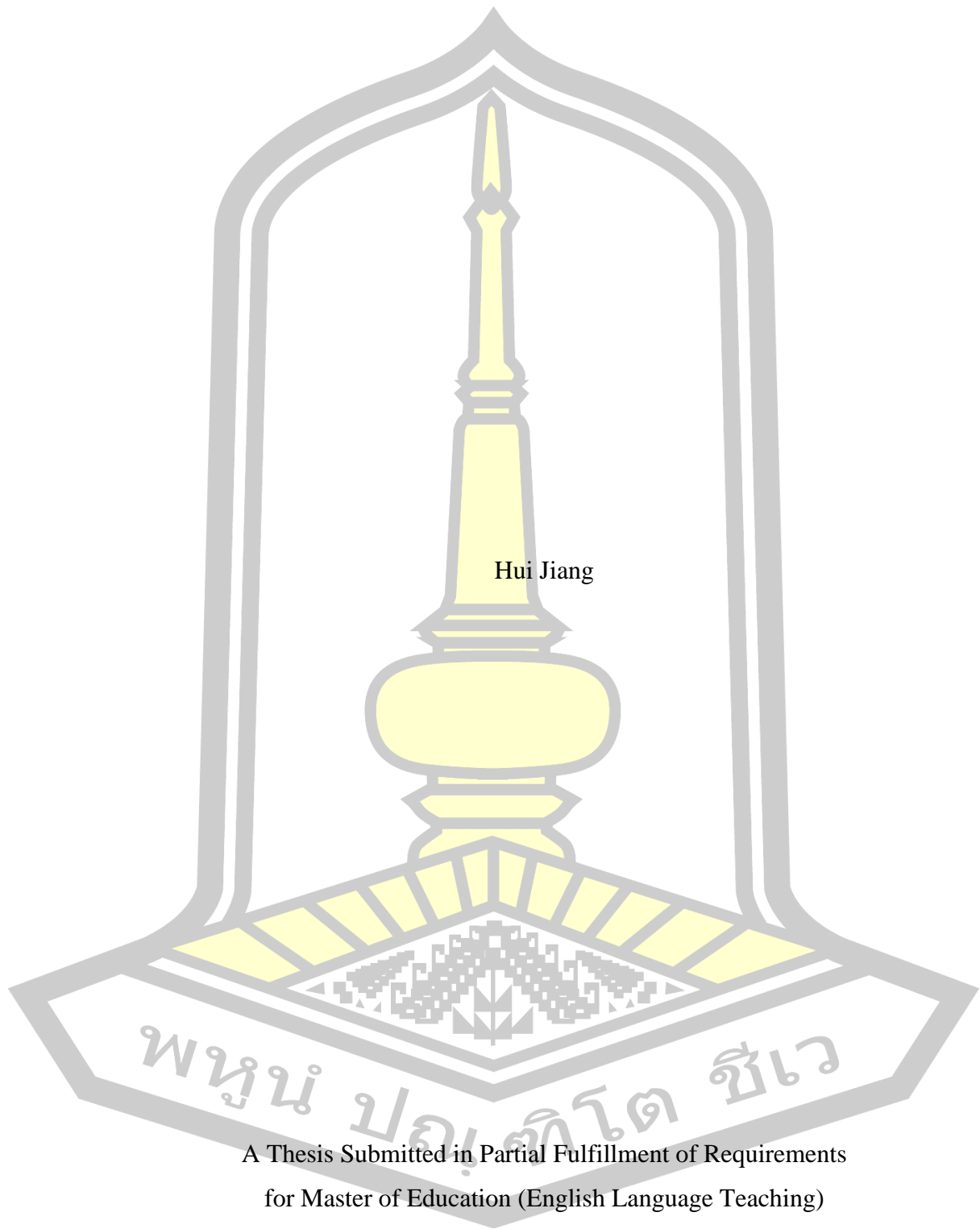
การรับรู้ของนักศึกษาชาวจีนที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศต่อปัญหาการพูด  
ภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย



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ลิขสิทธิ์เป็นของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม

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June 2023

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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Ms. Hui Jiang , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education English Language Teaching at Mahasarakham University

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate (1) the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, (2) the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and (3) how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. Eighty-five non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university participated in this study. This study used a mixed method design which includes a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire. Content analysis was used to look for themes that emerged from the data obtained from the semi-structured interview. The finding indicated that linguistic factors are the most influential for non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university when speaking English. Moreover, this study also found that the overall mean score of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university who participated in the survey was 3.66 out of 5 in English-Speaking Difficulties, which indicated that non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university experienced a high level of English-Speaking Difficulties. Furthermore, the results of how students perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties revealed in the semi-structured interviews can be divided into five themes: teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, and giving positive feedback.

Keyword : English speaking difficulties, Chinese EFL learners, Levels, Factors

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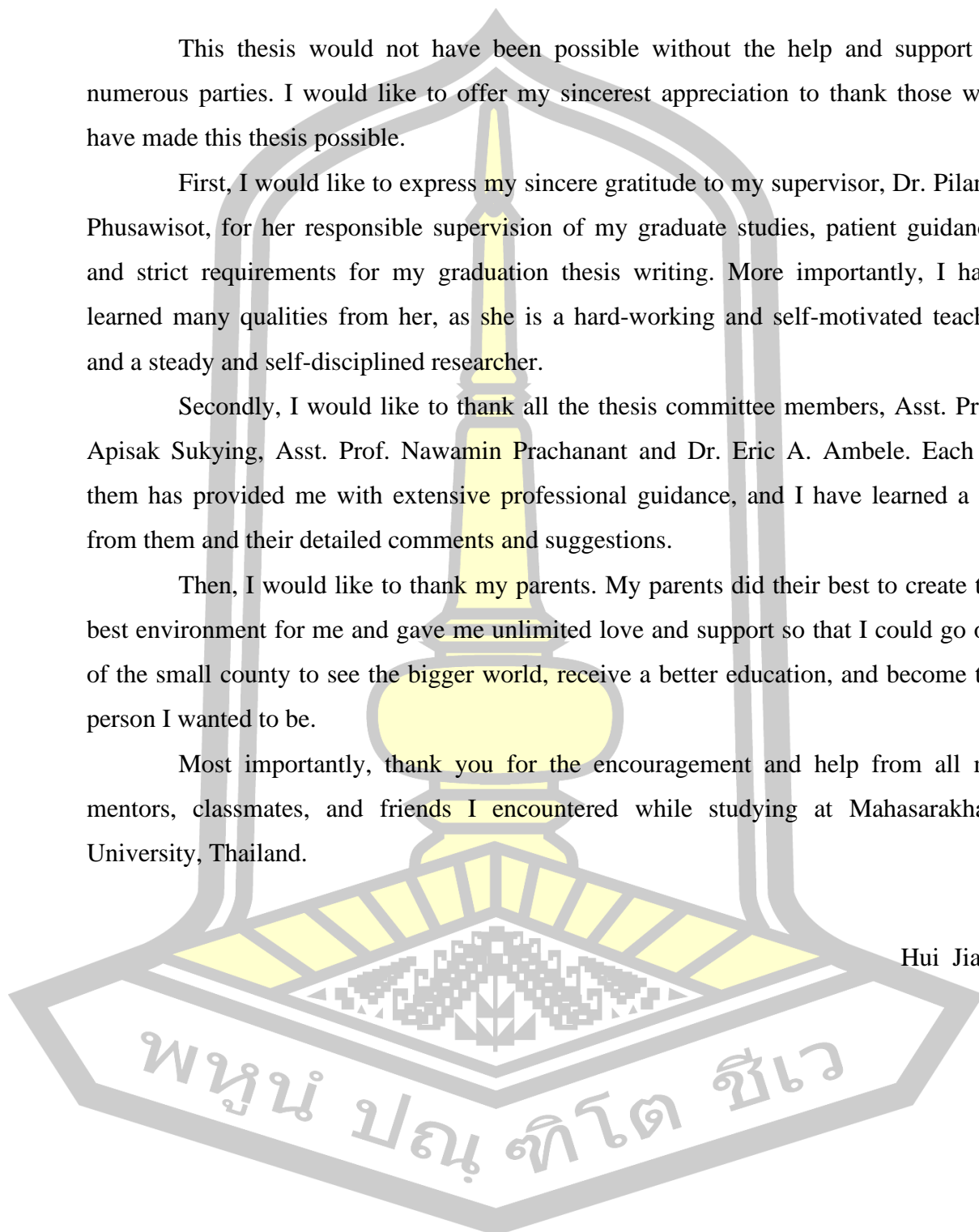
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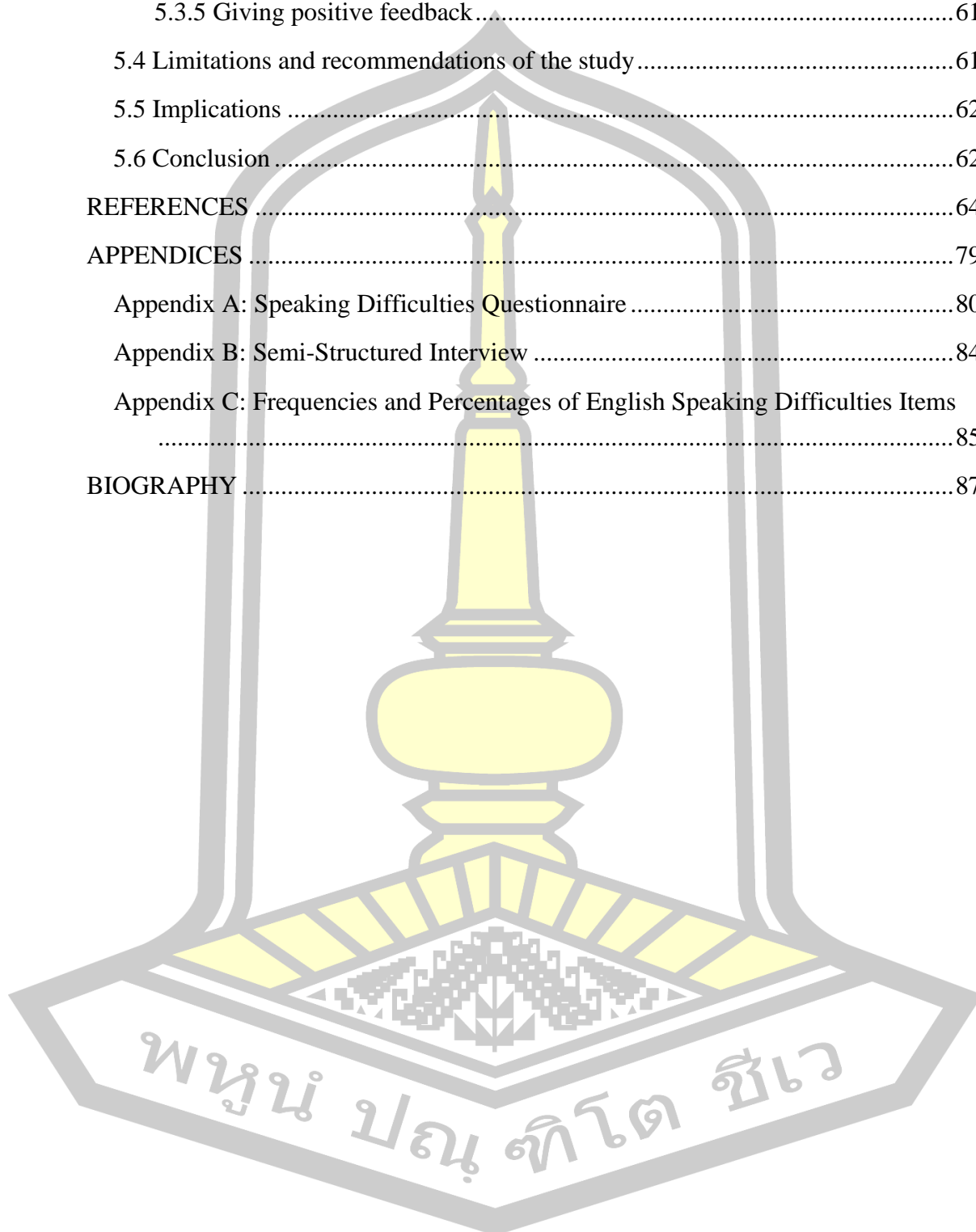
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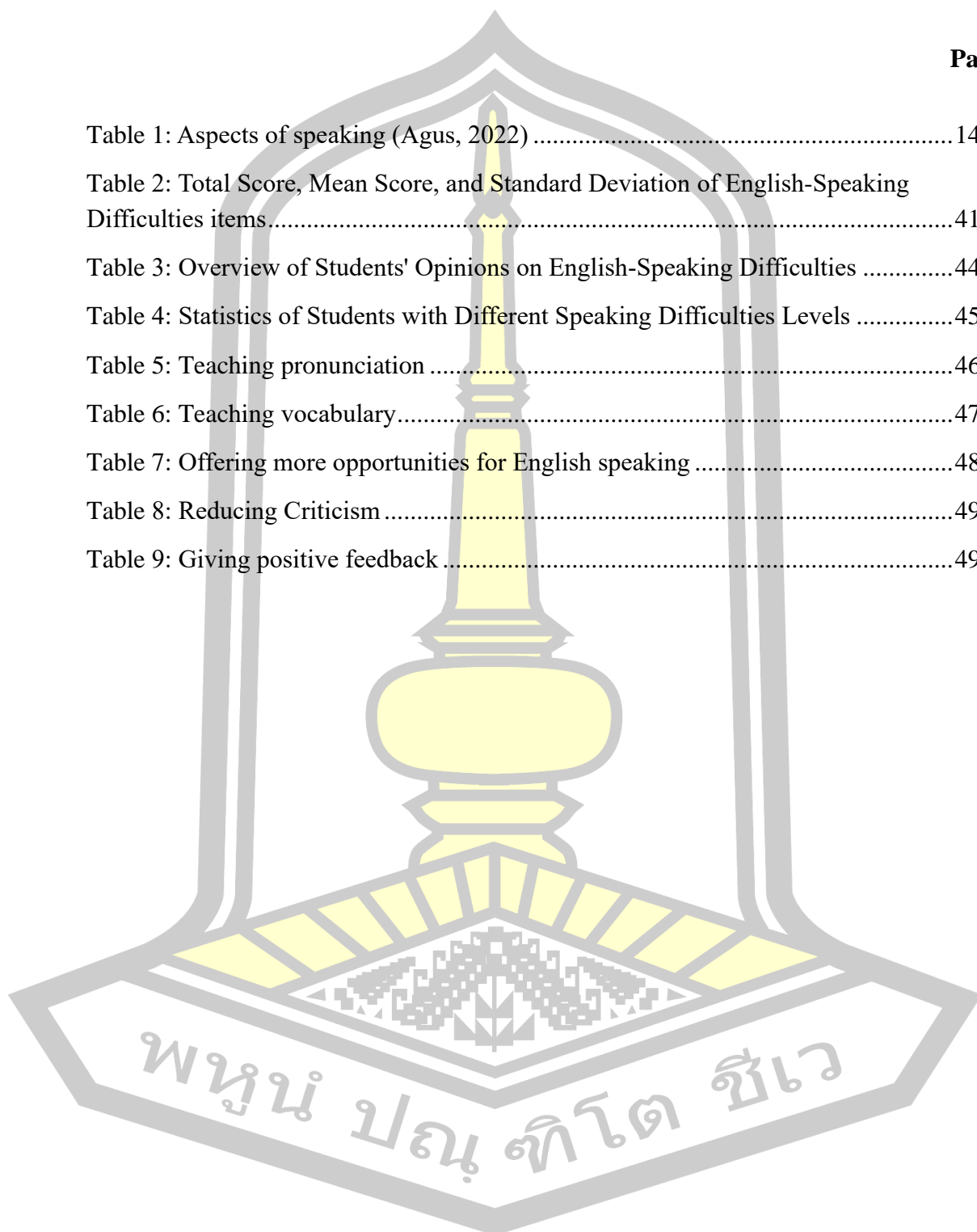


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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presented the study's introduction, which consists of the study's background, the study's purposes, the study's scope, the study, the significance of the study, and definitions of the terms. The topic was also addressed as follows.

### 1.1 Background of the study

Speaking, according to Mandasari & Aminatun (2020), is oral communication in a two-way process between speaker and listener that involves productive speaking skills and receptive comprehension skills. Speaking is a communication ability that a person possesses in expressing ideas and thoughts to convey to the interlocutor (Baron, 2020). According to Irsyad & Narius (2013), speaking is verbal communication used by individuals in their social relations. Through speaking, individuals can express their opinions, thoughts, and emotions to other people.

Many researchers believe that speaking skill plays a vital role in English learning. According to Rao (2019), speaking is an essential skill among all four language skills to communicate well in this global world. Speaking is one of the most necessary to be developed and enhanced as means of effective communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Dionar & Adnan (2018) stated that speaking is an essential skill for students. Learning English speaking skills is a preference for many English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners. Speaking skills are essential skills for all learners who wish to learn English to enhance their career, improve business, build confidence levels, get better job opportunities, make public speeches, attend interviews, participate in debates and group discussions, give presentations, and so on (Rao, 2019).

There are several important aspects of speaking ability. According to Pratiwi & PPrihatin (2021), there are several components of speaking skills: pronunciation, Grammatical utterances, Vocabulary knowledge, and Speaking Fluency. Differently, Rahmawati (2022) classified speaking into four aspects: pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. Furthermore, Alrasheedi (2020) stated that there are five aspects of speaking skills: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and

comprehension. In addition, Lackman (2010) identified the following as important and integral to developing speaking skills: functions, fluency, accuracy, appropriateness, grammar, turn-taking skill, relevant length, responding and initiating, repair and repetition, range of words, and discourse markers.

Speaking skill is regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Sangaji (2019) defined speaking difficulties as the factors that cause the students' lack of speaking skills. Al Nakhalah (2016) also stated that speaking difficulties are difficulties that a speaker could have when dealing with speaking skills. Furthermore, According to Wang (2021), speaking difficulties can be understood as obstacles language learners encounter in language acquisition. English-speaking difficulties are faced by English learners in oral communication and discourse production, unable to express their thoughts and understanding clearly and clearly.

A number of studies have examined various aspects of English-speaking difficulties. Sangaji (2019) divided students' speaking difficulties into three main categories: linguistic category, psychological category, and social category. Moreover, Younes & Albalawi (2016) also found that students face the following speaking difficulties when they try to speak: fear of mistakes, criticism, the disability to think of anything to say, speaking very little in their mother tongue and feeling shy to speak. Moreover, Zhang (2019) indicated that there are two kinds of oral English-speaking difficulties: language difficulties (pronunciation and intonation, grammar and vocabulary) and non-language difficulties (learning method and habit, psychological, environmental, and cultural).

Many researchers have studied the factors influencing students' English-speaking skills. For example, AAmoah & YYeboah (2021) stated that Chinese EFL learners have speaking problems that relate more to psychological factors like anxiety, fear of mistakes, unwillingness, and fear of negative evaluation than linguistic factors such as lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, insufficient knowledge of grammar rules, reading, and oral presentation. Abda (2017) also indicated that the students' speaking skills are related to motivation, attitude, fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, grammar knowledge, vocabulary, speaking background, and experience. Younes & Albalawi

(2016) proved that the following factors affect EFL students' speaking performance: conceptual knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teachers' feedback during speaking activities, confidence, anxiety, mother tongue, low participation time allowed to speak, and time allowed for preparation.

There have been some studies (Arbain, 2014; Burhanuddin & Indallah, 2021; Chand, 2021; Hosni, 2014; Thao & Nguyet, 2019; Thao & Trung, 2022; Günes & Sarigöz, 2021; Wangen, 2019) that have investigated the speaking difficulties encountered by ESL/EFL learners. Al Nakhalah (2016) studied the Problems and challenges of speaking experienced by language students at Al Quds Open University. This study's results indicated some difficulties in speaking among the students due to fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence. Suliman (2020) also investigated English-speaking difficulties among ESL students, and the findings demonstrated that students face several speaking difficulties, such as linguistic problems, using their mother tongue, and oral communication apprehension. Wangen (2019) investigated seven Thai students in the English department at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang. The questionnaire result revealed five difficulties: complicated feelings, grammar mistakes, improper pronunciation, less vocabulary, and less confidence. Günes & Sarigöz (2021) investigated 88 fourth-grade students in a public primary school in Turkey. The results indicated that the young EFL learners in focus are eager to speak in the EFL lessons. However, factors such as attitude, language aptitude, negative beliefs about foreign language speaking skills, and linguistic difficulties evoked a delay in speaking. Burhanuddin & Indallah (2021) investigated 30 first-and second-year students from a university in Indonesia and pointed out that most students might suffer from inadequate linguistic knowledge, negative effects of self-perception, and feelings of lack of confidence. These factors worsen their motivation to learn. Thao & Trung (2022) investigated the speaking difficulties encountered by Vietnamese University students. This study found three linguistic difficulties (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) and three psychological difficulties (attitude, difficulties, and motivation). The findings of the study revealed that students tend to encounter linguistic difficulties rather than psychological difficulties.

Chinese international students are the biggest international student body worldwide

(Meng et al., 2018). Many Chinese students travel overseas in order to pursue their higher education. For example, they travel to the United States, Canada, and Thailand. According to Hui (2017), OBOR Initiatives attracted more than 30,000 Chinese students to enroll in management, marketing, and Thai language programs at Thai public and private universities in 2016. Many Chinese students are coming to Thailand to pursue their higher education. Some are coming to Thailand to pursue their undergraduate degree, and some want to pursue their master's and doctorate degrees. This study focuses on postgraduate Chinese EFL learners studying at a Thai university. And such Chinese students may have English-speaking difficulties. Many studies have shown that Chinese international students have English-speaking difficulties in other countries. For example, Yang (2017) found that Chinese international students in Canada face some problems with English speaking, including (a) speed and accent, (b) vocabulary deficiency, and (c) limited verbal participation. Lack of practicing aural and oral English in previous EFL classrooms and lack of confidence in using the language is expected.

Furthermore, contrary to other parts of the world where the popularity of English is overemphasized, Asia as a continent, and China to be precise, is now getting around to accepting English language learning. English is recently taught in schools and training centers as a foreign language. However, there is limited or inadequate practice community (Amoah & Yeboa, 2021). The Chinese EFL Learners are therefore faced with many difficulties, especially with speaking. When allowing speaking, Chinese EFL learners fail to speak proficiently. The factors that affect their speaking performances are either linguistic, relating to vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, or grammar, or psychological, anxiety, shyness or fear of mistakes, and lack of motivation.

Furthermore, many Chinese postgraduate students are studying for their Master's degree in management in Thailand, and their English proficiency is generally low. They are taught Thai in the classroom, so they struggle to speak English. While several previous studies have examined the oral performance of students in the ESL and EFL settings, there is no study investigating the levels of English-speaking difficulties among Chinese EFL postgraduate students who are studying for their

Master's degree in management at a government university in a Thai EFL setting. Therefore, this present research aims to bridge this gap. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties.

### **1.2 Purposes of the study**

The current study aimed to investigate the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties.

Three questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English?
2. What are the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners?
3. What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

This current study aimed to investigate the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. Eighty-five non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university participated in this study. These students studied for their Master's in management at a government university in Thailand. These students were enrolled in English for Graduate Students taught in English by a Thai assistant professor in the second semester of the academic year 2022. This study used a mixed method design which includes a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Descriptive statistics, including Percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire.



Content analysis was used to look for themes that emerged from the data obtained from the semi-structured interview. The study lasted three months, covering the process of contacting participants, conducting a questionnaire survey, a semi-structured interview, and final data analysis.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The present study could contribute insight into knowledge about English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL postgraduate students that can affect learners' academic achievement. This research aimed to investigate the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL non-English major-major students at a Thai university, which has significance for providing useful information for Thai teachers. With the possible outcomes of this study, teachers can use them as a guideline for designing effective English-speaking courses that could help students overcome their speaking difficulties and later improve their English-speaking skills.

Moreover, this research contributed to classroom management regarding how teachers give instructions differently based on their speaking difficulty levels. And it could help teachers manage classroom environments, learning resources, or learning atmospheres according to learners' speaking difficulties. Last, the knowledge of English-speaking problems can greatly benefit materials selection. It can aid the teacher in considering the advantages and limitations of material types to link them with learners' different speaking difficulty levels and support them in reaching their goals easily. Moreover, the teacher can alternatively apply the materials according to the learners' speaking difficulties levels.

#### **1.5 Definition of key terms**

**English Speaking** refers to a form of oral communication commonly used by people in English-speaking countries, which is usually transmitted through sound.

**English-Speaking Difficulties** refer to the challenges individuals may face when communicating effectively in English. These difficulties can be related to various aspects of language use, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

**English-Speaking Difficulties factors** refer to the factors that lead to the student's lack of speaking skills.



**Levels of English-Speaking difficulties** refer to the degree of the English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL students.

**Linguistic factors** refer to the linguistic factors that cause the students' lack of speaking skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.

**Psychological factors** refer to the psychological factors that cause the students' lack of speaking skills, such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, etc.

**Learning Environmental factors** refer to a lack of learning context for English conversation, such as lack of opportunity for English conversation, lack of practice, poor support learning environment, lack of learning resources, low participation in class, etc.

**Chinese EFL Learners** refer to Chinese EFL students studying for their higher degree at a government university in Thailand.

## **1.6 Organization of the proposal**

The current research consisted of five chapters:

Chapter I presented the introduction of the current study. The first chapter included the background of the study, purposes, scope, and significance of the study as well as the definition of key terms.

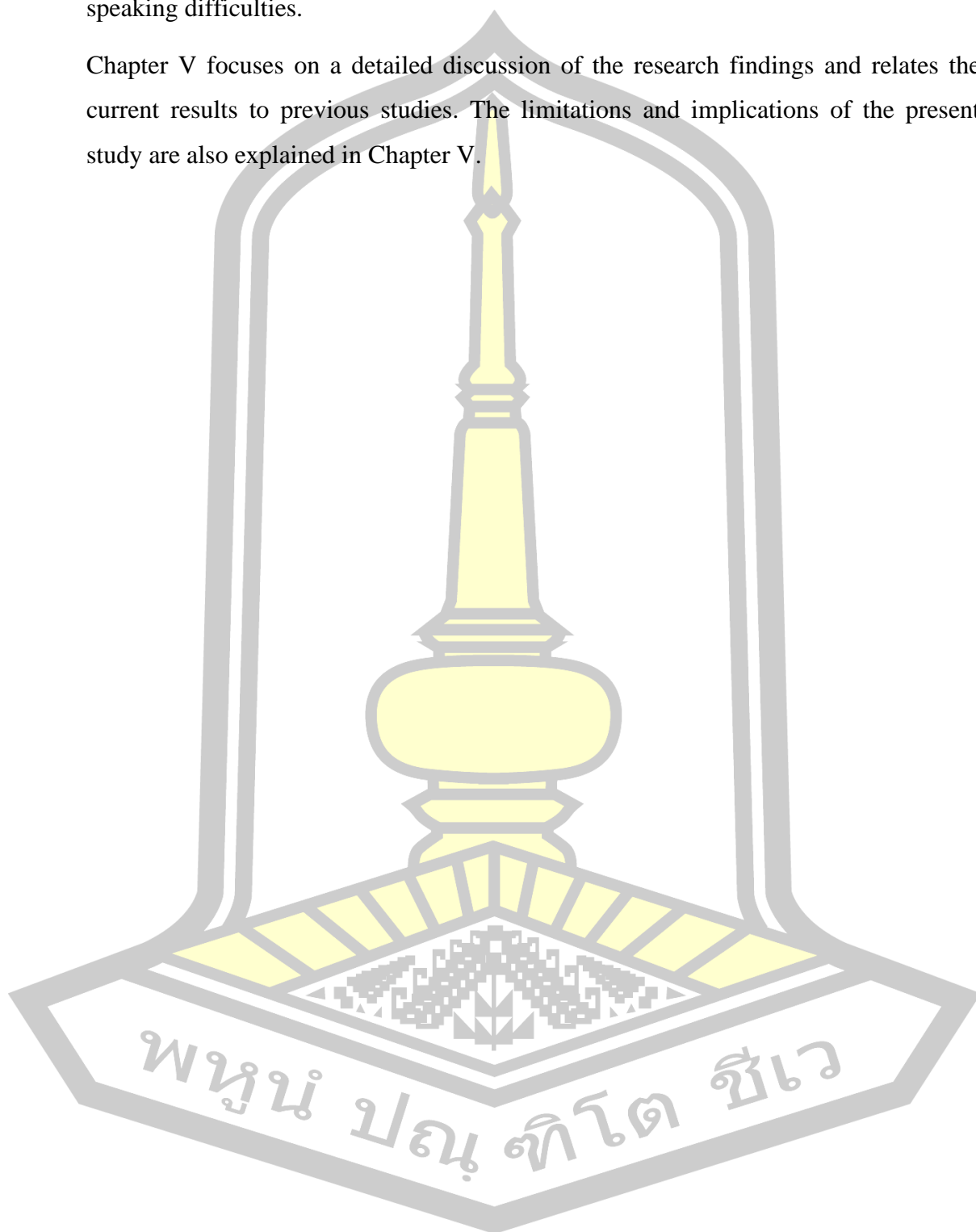
Chapter II presented the literature review of the present study, including the overview of speaking, which included the definition of speaking, the importance of speaking, and the aspects of speaking; English-speaking difficulties, which had the English-speaking difficulties definition, factors affecting students' English speaking skills and the types of English-speaking difficulties; and the review of previous studies on English-speaking difficulties in ESL/EFL context.

Chapter III presented the research methodology of the current study, including the participants and setting, the research instruments, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

In Chapter IV, the results of the current study are provided. Both quantitative and qualitative results are reported in Chapter IV to provide information on Chinese EFL

learners' speaking difficulties levels and factors contributing to Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties.

Chapter V focuses on a detailed discussion of the research findings and relates the current results to previous studies. The limitations and implications of the present study are also explained in Chapter V.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This current study aimed to investigate the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, the levels of English-speaking problems experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. To achieve the purposes of the present study, this chapter presented the literature review of the present study, including the overview of speaking, which includes the definition of speaking, the importance of speaking, and the aspects of speaking. The literature review of English-speaking difficulties, including the English-speaking difficulties definition, factors affecting students' English-speaking skills, and the types of English-speaking problems, are also explored. This chapter also reviewed previous studies on English-speaking difficulties in the ESL/EFL context.

#### **2.1 Overview of speaking**

##### **2.1.1 Definition of speaking**

There were a lot of definitions of “speaking” that have been suggested by many researchers (Al Nakhalah, 2016; Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 1987; Burnkart, 1998; Chaney & Burk, 1998; Celce-Murcia, 2003; Gumperz, 1999; Rebecca, 2006; Thornbury, 2004; Tarigan, 2008; Kingen, 2000; Kayi, 2006; Lackman, 2010) in language learning.

Eckard & Kearny (1981), Florez (1999), Howarth (2001), and Torky (2006) defined speaking as a two - way process including an accurate communication of opinions, information, or emotions. This top-down view regards expressed texts as the collaboration between two or more persons in a shared time and context. Furthermore, Brown (1994, 2007), Brown & Yule (1983), Burns & Joyce (1997), and Lackman (2010) defined speaking as an interactive process of making meaning that includes producing, receiving, and processing information. Moreover, speaking is a social event with a social purpose and context. (Burnkart, 1998; Thornbury & Slade, 2006), and it is the process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts (Chaney & Burk, 1998). Speaking is the most basic

means of human communication (Celce-Murcia, 2003) and a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, speaking is a part of daily life that we take for granted (Thornbury, 2004). It is also an interactive process that requires the ability to cooperate in managing (Thornbury, 2005). Bygate (1987) stated that speaking is the production of auditory signals to produce verbal responses in listeners. Tarigan (1985) also noted that speaking is the ability of someone to express ideas and feelings and is a system of human beings' signs for pictures.

Furthermore, Rebecca (2006) stated that speaking is the first mode children acquire language. It is part of the daily involvement of most people with language activities, and it is the prime motor of language change. Al Hosni (2014) pointed out that speaking is the active use of language to express meaning. For young learners, the spoken language is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced, and learned. According to Tarigan (2008), Speaking ability is the ability to utter articulation sounds or words to express and say and state thoughts, ideas, and feelings. In addition, Al Nakhalah (2016) said that speaking is the delivery of language through the mouth. Differently speaking is a multisensory activity because it contains paralinguistic aspects such as eye contact, facial emotions, body language, pace, pauses, voice quality variations, and pitch modulation, all of which influence conversational flow (Thornbury, 2005). According to Mandasari and Aminatun (2020), speaking is an oral communication in a two-way process between speaker and listener that involves productive speaking skills and receptive comprehension skills. Speaking is a communication ability that a person possesses in expressing ideas and thoughts to convey to the interlocutor (Baron, 2020). According to Irsyad & Narius (2013), speaking is verbal communication used by individuals in their social relations. Through speaking, individuals can express their opinions, thoughts, and emotions to other people.

To sum up, speaking is believed to be a tool used for daily oral communication. Speaking is verbal communication that individuals in their social relations utilize. Through speaking, individuals can express their opinions, thoughts, and emotions to other people.

### 2.1.2 Importance of speaking

Several researchers (Ashour, 2014; Al-Roud, 2016; Abda, 2017; Bygate, 1987; Brown, 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Dionar & Adnan, 2018; Efrizal, 2012; Florez, 1999; Kingen, 2000; Kayi, 2006; Nunan, 1995; Ur, 1996; Yule, 1989; Zaremba, 2006) have studied the importance of speaking. Speaking is considered a learner's language tool. According to Bygate (1987), speaking is "the vehicle par excellence of social solidarity, social ranking, professional advancement and business." Language learners sometimes evaluate their success in language learning based on their improved spoken language ability (Richards, 1990). According to Brown (1994), listening and speaking are learners' language tools. Furthermore, speaking seems to be the most crucial skill in communication or interaction in daily life (Ur, 1996). Speaking is a skill worthy of attention in both first and second languages. Speaking skills are one of the most important aspects of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured based on the ability to converse in the language (Nunan, 1995). Penny Ur, in her book titled 'A course in language teaching,' indicated: (...) of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing; and many if not most foreign languages learners are primarily interested in learning to speak (Ur 1996: 120).

According to Ur (2000), speaking is essential for effective communication. Moreover, Efrizal (2012) expressed that speaking is significant for people's interactions, where they speak everywhere and every day. Speaking is the way of communicating ideas and messages orally. According to Ashour (2014), speaking is a communication process of creating meaning through producing, receiving, and processing data or information for another person. Similarly, Al-Roud (2016) asserted that speaking is the most important language skill to effectively build a bond through communication between humans. According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), speaking is an essential skill as it requires the ability to convey information while communicating with others.

Moreover, there were many good aspects to speaking. Mastering speaking skills is considered necessary for most EFL and ESL learners (Richards, 2008; Florez, 1999). Furthermore, Speaking is used to fuel social intercourse (Yule, 1989), promote

emotional intelligence (Bora, 2012), fulfill specific goals, or convey particular ideas, intentions, desires, preferences, or opinions. In the same line, Zaremba (2006), Celce-Murcia (2001), and Kayi (2006) stressed the crucial role of speaking in maintaining oral communication. From this perspective, speaking helps strengthen interpersonal ties, primarily when used appropriately in social interactions. Baker & Westrup (2003) expressed that learners who speak English well have a greater chance of better education, finding good jobs, and getting promoted.

Additionally, speaking also plays a significant role in students' language learning. Rivers (1981) studied the use of language outside the classroom situation and understood that speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing combined. Astrawan (2013) stated that speaking becomes meaningful for students at a time when they should pay attention to what they say. Thus, students can learn better how they require the ability to speak or express their ideas eloquently with proper vocabulary and good or acceptable pronunciation. Dionar & Adnan (2018) said that speaking is an essential skill for students. Learning English speaking skills is a preference for many English as a Foreign/Second Language (ESL/EFL) learners.

To sum up, speaking is an important skill that tends to pay more attention to how people use a language to encourage good communication. Moreover, speaking is the most important skill for acquiring foreign or second language learning and among the four primary language skills. Speaking has important meanings as follows: first, speaking is a language tool for learners, and language learners sometimes evaluate their success in language learning according to the degree of improvement in their oral ability; second, in daily life, speaking seems to be the most important skill in communication or interaction; third, speaking helps to facilitate social interaction, strengthen interpersonal relationships, promote emotional intelligence, achieve specific goals or convey detailed thoughts, intentions, desires, preferences or opinions; finally, speaking also plays an essential role in students' language learning.

### **2.1.3 Aspects of speaking**

Several important aspects of speaking ability are essential elements that have existed long ago. According to Harris and Umeda (1974), aspects of speaking include understanding, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Bygate (1991)



emphasized two aspects of the language: language knowledge and skill in using it, and these are considered two fundamental aspects of effective communication.

According to Burnkart (1998), speaking entails three aspects. First, the mechanical aspects of language (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) allow the speaker to use the right words in the correct sequence and with appropriate pronunciation. Second, speaking functions (transaction and interaction) enable the speaker to know when the clarity of the message is needed (as in carrying out the transaction or in exchanging information) and when a deep understanding is not necessary (as in the development of relations). Third, the sociocultural norms (such as turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, and relative roles of participants) enable an individual to realize the conversational situation, whom he is talking to, and the purpose of speaking. Harmer (2001) emphasized that speaking has many different aspects, including two major categories: accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation practiced through controlled and guided activities, and fluency, considered to be 'the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously.' The aspects necessary for spoken production are connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, negotiation, and language.

Moreover, Thornbury (2005) proposed that speaking is a multisensory activity because it contains paralinguistic aspects such as eye contact, facial emotions, body language, pace, pauses, voice quality variations, and pitch modulation, all of which influence conversational flow. Furthermore, Fulcher & Davidson (2007) stated that there are five aspects of speaking skills: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, Lackman (2010) identified the following as essential and integral skills for developing speaking skills: functions, fluency, accuracy, appropriateness, grammar, turn-taking skill, relevant length, responding and initiating, repair and repetition, range of words, and discourse markers.

In particular, Agus (2022) defined each aspect of speaking as follows:

Table 1: Aspects of speaking (Agus, 2022)

Speaking Aspects	Definition
Grammar	Grammar is a rule regarding the pattern structure or drafting of sentences in English, making it feasible and polite to pronounce.
Pronunciation	The assessment of pronunciation includes the word stress or emphasis on one or two particular syllables in a sentence; the stress sentence is a certain word pressure on a sentence to make it easier to understand; how a specific word merges and pronunciation.
Vocabulary	This vocabulary is a set of words in English that can be mastered.
Fluency	The level of fluency is excellent; the more fluent or fluent a person in English will make a sound like a native speaker.
Comprehension	Comprehension is the ability to understand something delivered or a message read.

## 2.2 English speaking difficulties

### 2.2.1 English speaking difficulties definition

Many scholars (Al Nakhalah, 2016; Sangaji, 2019; Wang, 2021; Younes & Albalawi, 2016; Zhang, 2019) have described speaking difficulties differently. For example, a study conducted by Younes & Albalawi (2016) defined speaking difficulties as difficulties that can be affected by the student's emotional state and hinder them from speaking in English class. Among those difficulties are students' fear of making mistakes, fear of criticism, feeling shy to speak, using the mother tongue (to feel safe), and the disability to think of anything to say (lack of motivation). Al Nakhalah (2016) stated that speaking difficulties are difficulties a speaker could have when dealing with speaking skills. Similarly, Sangaji (2019) defined speaking difficulties as the factors that cause the students' lack of speaking skills.

Additionally, Zhang (2019) indicated that speaking difficulties refer to the problems or restrictions students encounter during oral English expression and oral presentation, which prevent them from going smoothly. Furthermore, according to Wang (2021), speaking difficulties can be understood as the difficulties learners encounter in language acquisition. English-speaking difficulties are faced by English learners in oral communication and discourse production, unable to express their thoughts and understanding clearly and clearly. To sum up, speaking difficulties are obstacles language learners encounter in language acquisition, and they could lead to



students' lack of speaking skills.

### **2.2.2 Factors affecting students' English speaking skills**

Performance conditions, affective factors, listening skills, and feedback during speaking tasks impact learners' speaking performance (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Many researchers (Alharbi, 2015; Abda, 2017; Bashir et al., 2011; Doff, 1998; Krashen, 1982; Latha, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009; Oxford, 1990; Xhemaili, 2016) have studied factors influencing students' English-speaking skills. According to Lukitasari (2003), learners' speaking abilities may suffer due to shyness, limited class participation, and speaking in their native language throughout the class. Abda (2017) investigated the factors that affect teaching speaking skills and found that the students' speaking skills are related to motivation, attitude, fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, grammar knowledge, vocabulary, speaking background, and experience. Younes & Albalawi (2016) proved that the following factors affect Saudi EFL students' speaking performance: conceptual knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teachers' feedback during speaking activities, confidence, anxiety, mother tongue, low participation, the time allowed to speak, and time entitled for preparation.

Nation & Newton (2009) believed that the performance conditions that can impact speaking performance are time constraints, planning, the standard of the undertaking, and the level of support. Without speaking opportunities, learners cannot speak or practice English with any English speakers. This is also supported by Xhemaili (2016), who thought that English is the primary method of communication in the L2 classroom, and teachers should provide students adequate time to practice English freely, as well as allow them to drill the target language and produce as much output in L2 as possible even outside of classes. Furthermore, Kioko & Muthwii (2001), Mwamba (2005), Bashir et al. (2011), Soureshjani & Riahipour (2012), and Alharbi (2015) noticed that speaking skills are related to whether speaking skills are valued in the curriculum, teachers' English proficiency. They also observed that speaking skills are related to whether classroom conditions facilitate speaking activities and opportunities to practice using English outside the classroom. Moreover, Urrutia & Vega (2010) stated that activities could improve learners' speaking ability and encourage teenagers to improve their speaking skills through games.

Affective factors are the most important factors in students' English Speaking Skills. These factors include emotion, feeling, mood, manner, attitude, etc. Oxford (1990) stated that one of the most important factors in language learning is the affective side of students. According to Krashen (1975), an affective filter is a psychological barrier that prevents language learners from fully absorbing comprehensible input. Moreover, Krashen (1982) and Edinne (2013) expressed that these factors influence second language input and output, particularly motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. In addition, Mahripah (2014) also pointed out that some psychological factors, such as motivation and personality, influence EFL learners' speaking skills. Anxiety might arise when speaking a foreign language. Woodrow (2006) and Bashir et al. (2011) found that anxiety has a negative impact on English speakers' oral performance, and extreme anxiety can sometimes lead to depression and a sense of failure among learners. Nunan (1999), Baldwin (2011), Mahripah (2014), and Humaera (2015) argued that low self-confidence among students makes them less willing to accept the chance of making errors during speaking exercises, which inhibits them from honing their speaking abilities, so their communication skills will suffer. Moreover, Nunan (1999) and Babu (2010) claimed in their study that motivation could be employed to easily influence learners on their hesitation toward speaking. Students who lack motivation cannot speak or participate in class discussions.

Listening skills are a prerequisite for speaking skills development. Doff (1998) stated that learners can only develop their speaking skills if they improve their listening skills. Similarly, Shumin (1997) indicated that speaking and listening are related. When one person speaks, the other person's participating behavior is listening. Therefore, everyone is a speaker and a listener. If a person cannot understand what the other person is saying, he cannot respond.

According to Bachman & Palmer (1996), People's speaking ability is influenced by their awareness of topical knowledge. Niebling et al. (2008) defined topical knowledge as the information and concepts students should understand about their subjects. However, Tuan & Mai (2015), as well as Kasbi & Shirvan (2017), identified a lack of topical knowledge as the cause of high speaking anxiety, which caused students to speak very little, or not at all because they couldn't think of anything to say

and became unwilling to participate in the speaking classroom.

Feedback during speaking activities also affects speaking skills. According to Harmer (1991), the flow of the dialogue and the purpose of the speaking task will be impacted if instructors directly correct their students' problems. Baker & Westrup (2003) also supported the above statement and said that if the learner keeps being restored by the teacher while speaking English, he will be frustrated and lose confidence in speaking.

According to Mahripah (2014), some linguistic components of language, such as phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics, influence EFL learners' speaking ability. Grammatical competence can assist speakers in appropriately applying and perceiving the structure of the English language, leading to fluency (Latha, 2012). Similarly, Humaera (2015) claimed that grammatical judgment prevents learners from communicating because they are fearful of creating grammatically incorrect utterances. On the other hand, Putri et al. (2020) said that Students' lack of vocabulary is one of the primary causes of academic failure. Moreover, Kelly (2006) pointed out that pronunciation is essential in producing precise information and meaningful communication in spoken communication.

Yang (2014) suggested effective strategies to enhance oral communication skills in students. For instance, previous studies have shown that learning strategies can improve language acquisition and assist students in overcoming learning challenges (Dina & Ghadeer, 2014; Sayuri, 2016; Yang, 2014). In addition, researchers recognize that learners can improve their speaking ability by developing learning strategies that enable them to become independent learners (Nakatani, 2010). This suggests that EFL learners must be aware of and proficient in using speaking strategies if they want to speak English fluently.

Based on the above research, it can be concluded that students' English speaking skill is related to motivation, attitude, fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, grammar knowledge, vocabulary, speaking background, experience, conceptual knowledge, teacher feedback in speaking activities, self-confidence, anxiety, native language, listening ability, classroom participation, performance conditions, and learning strategies.

### 2.2.3 Types of English speaking difficulties

Zhang (2009) argued that for most English learners, speaking is still the most challenging ability to acquire. English learners are still unable to effectively communicate orally in English. Many researchers (Aleksandrak, 2011; A-Hosni, 2014; Juhana, 2012; Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Ur, 1999) have examined various aspects of English-speaking difficulties, including affective difficulties, social difficulties, instructional difficulties, and linguistic difficulties.

In addition, Raba'ah (2005) pointed out that many factors cause English learners to have difficulty speaking in English. Some of these factors are related to the learner, teaching strategies, curriculum, and environment. For example, a learner's lack of vocabulary, inability to express himself well, lack of communication skills, and lack of motivation to speak English can lead to difficulties in speaking English.

Evans & Green (2007) examined the language difficulties experienced by students at a Hong Kong university. The study's findings showed that the students' speaking difficulties include grammar, fluency, and pronunciation.

Younes & Albalawi (2016) revealed that students face the following speaking difficulties when they try to speak: fear of mistakes, fear of criticism, the disability to think of anything to say, speaking very little in their mother tongue and feeling shy to speak.

Moreover, Zhang (2019) indicated that there are two kinds of oral English-speaking difficulties among non-English major Mongolian college students: language difficulties (pronunciation and intonation difficulties, grammar difficulties, and vocabulary difficulties) and non-language difficulties (learning method and habit difficulties, psychological difficulties, environmental difficulties, and cultural difficulties).

Furthermore, Sangaji (2019) divided students' speaking difficulties into three main categories: linguistic category, psychological category, and social category. From a linguistic perspective, speaking might be challenging due to students' lack of the language system. This requires proficiency in speaking, listening, and pronunciation. From a psychological perspective, the students' speaking difficulties might be due to a

lack of ideas and self-confidence. These two categories lead to the third category, which is the students' poor social communication skills.

Zhang (2019) clarified that the reasons for non-English major Mongolian college students' English-speaking difficulties include subjective and objective reasons. Subjective reasons include students' anxiety, vanity, timidity, psychological factors, lack of existing knowledge, and poor learning methods and habits. Objective reasons include lack of cultural background knowledge, mother tongue interference, lack of natural language environment, and the influence of teachers' factors.

Putri et al. (2020) studied the students' difficulties factors in speaking, which led to the discovery of four factors causing the difficulty in speaking English. These four factors are the student's factors (learners themselves), the factor of teaching strategies, the curriculum factor, and the environmental factor.

Pradya et al. (2015) carried out a study on tenth-grade students' difficulties in speaking. Their finding shows that the student's difficulties in speaking English are as follows:

1. The student's low vocabulary mastery resulted from their limited knowledge of the meaning of vocabulary, which led to their difficulties in understanding the conversation.
2. The students had difficulties pronouncing certain words because English words differ between pronunciation and writing.
3. The students were still confused about arranging words. Then, there were still some mistakes in their grammar.
4. The students often feared speaking English because they were worried about making mistakes.

Additionally, Shen & Chiu (2019) suggested that psychological problems (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence) were the primary reason for English-speaking difficulties, followed by linguistic problems (e.g., insufficient vocabulary), and environmental problems (e.g., lack of learning context for English conversation).



### *Affective/psychological difficulties*

The affective aspect of the learner is one of the most significant impediments to language acquisition success. Learners' affective difficulties include fear of making mistakes, shyness, loss of self-confidence, and anxiety. Many researchers (Brown, 2001; Dil, 2009; Gebhad, 2000; Horwitz & Horwitz, 1986; Juhana, 2012; Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Zhao, 2007) have studied English-speaking difficulties from the psychological aspect.

Thornbury (2005) argued that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the common factors that hinder students from speaking. Similarly, Juhana (2012) asserts that psychological or affective factors, such as fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of passion, frequently prevent learners from speaking English. Some of the psychological aspects that lead to speaking problems are listed by Nguyen & Tran (2015). First, inhibition is connected to or included in the self-esteem concept. Second, English majors' verbal communication is significantly impacted by anxiety. According to Brown (2001), shyness, anxiety, and fear are a few psychological characteristics that contribute to students' reluctance to communicate. Dil (2009) shared that speaking difficulties among EFL learners are mostly caused by anxiety and unwillingness throughout the English-speaking process. Moreover, Gebhad (2000) confirmed that shyness and nervousness are the main contributors to difficulties with speaking among learners.

Furthermore, anxiety interferes with a learner's ability to acquire a skill. According to Heron (2005), anxiety and fear often prevent learners from developing oral speaking. Three main causes of students' anxiety were identified by Horwitz & Horwitz (1986) and Zhao (2007): communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Additionally, learners' anxiety about being teased by their classmates or the instructor has a massive effect on this. Students commonly stop participating in speaking activities (Hieu, 2011).

Lack of confidence usually occurs when students think their interlocutors do not understand. According to Nunan (1999), students lacking confidence in themselves and their English will suffer from communication issues.

In addition, Aftat (2008) argues that the concern about criticism and repercussions is related to the fear of mistakes. Likewise, Saurik (2011) identified that most English language learners experience shyness when speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes and fear ridicule from their peers. Additionally, Humaera (2015) point out that speaking in front of people is a common phobia causing them to be shy, make their minds go blank, and forget what they want to say, so most of them fail to perform. Hamouda (2012) discovered speaking difficulties due to their fear of making errors, being laughed at and fear of criticism by the teacher and constant correction. They also worry about what their classmates may comment on their performance. Equally, EFL students frequently struggle with the fear of receiving a negative evaluation, which makes them more anxious when asked to speak. EFL students might feel discomfort and stop speaking to maintain their composure, particularly while receiving feedback and correction from teachers for imperfect language use (Juhana, 2012).

### ***Linguistic difficulties***

In addition to psychological difficulties, different linguistic difficulties are involved in learning a new language, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Many researchers (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Burnkart, 1998; Dan, 2006; Foppoli, 2009; Hamouda, 2012; Rababah, 2003) have studied English-speaking difficulties from the linguistic aspect.

Due to gaps in their language repertoire, ESL/EFL learners commonly struggle with language development. Incongruous association and acquaintance familiarity are two of the most common issues that learners encounter concerning their language knowledge. Students lack grammatical knowledge because they do not understand or do not have adequate fundamental English consciousness (Thao & Nguyet, 2019). Similarly, Amoah & Yeboah (2021) pointed out that linguistic competence refers to a language learner's ability to use the language and its aspects. According to Al-Lawati (1995), the essential difficulty field is found in the linguistic domain, which includes vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and conversation. Burnkart (1998) also focused on different types of knowledge, the first of which is the mechanics of aspects of language (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary). Bygate (2005) stated that

grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary are examples of linguistic elements known as language forms. For EFL learners, using precise pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary is more complicated than for native speakers. According to Foppoli (2009), grammar structures, vocabulary limitation, and poor pronunciation are among the speaking difficulties, even if EFL circumstances emphasise enhancing the learners' language skills. Moreover, Togatorop (2009) conducted a study on the student's difficulties in speaking English and found that students had limited vocabulary and weak grammatical skills, inhibiting them from effectively expressing themselves.

In addition, Rababah (2003) suggested that Arab learners may experience difficulty in communicative exchanges because they have a limited vocabulary, which prevents them from continuing discussions. Similarly, According to Smith (2011), a lack of vocabulary harms communication since it makes it difficult to understand what others say while speaking.

Precise and accurate pronunciation is one of the components of comprehensible communication. Without it, the conversation would be difficult to follow, which is difficult for EFL learners (Dan, 2006). Moreover, Hamouda (2012) discovered that most Saudi students experienced speaking difficulty due to pronunciation problems.

### ***Learning Environment Difficulties***

The lack of a target language environment can be another problem, resulting in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. Putri et al. (2020) suggested that students' surroundings affect the student's speaking ability. These environments include the school environment, which involves communication with friends, and outside the school environment, such as home or playground. Likewise, Shen & Chiu (2019) argued that a poor learning environment makes speaking English difficult. The results demonstrated that most EFL learners were not satisfied with their learning environment due to a lack of opportunities for English conversation. Besides, most of them revealed other poor learning environments, such as less support from school authorities and insufficient material resources. Moreover, Lukitasari (2008) found that EFL learners faced such speaking problems as inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use.



Teaching strategies also lead to speaking difficulties since some are insufficient and do not pay attention to speaking, resulting in limited development of this ability. Putri et al. (2020) suggested that the teacher's English teaching strategy of teaching students, mainly speaking, might make it difficult for them to communicate in English. In particular, Nawshin (2009) stated that various aspects of instructors' teaching strategies, such as their speaking time, the use of their mother tongue in the classroom, and their level of English proficiency, might make it difficult for students to speak English. In addition, Al Hosni (2014) revealed that the teaching strategies used by the teachers emphasize teaching the form of the language, which is indicated by focusing on teaching grammar rules and vocabulary items. Students are required to produce short, accurate sentences, while the communicative use of the language is almost neglected.

Littlewood (1981) argued that some teachers use their mother tongue for language teaching and classroom management, which may be an important factor in students' speaking difficulties. Using the mother tongue inevitably leads to students losing direct contact with the target language. In addition, it is not conducive to making students aware of the value of foreign languages as a communication tool. Some teachers think it is essential to use L1 to give the meaning of some words and explain the grammar rules. They believe using L1 is necessary to ensure the students understand the importance and get the point (Al Hosni, 2014).

Leong & Ahmadi (2017) suggested that participation in the speaking class is relatively low. Since only one student speaks in a class with many students at a time, the other students must try to hear them, and each student will have limited time to talk. Some students dominate the whole speaking class, while others speak infrequently or never. According to Rivers (1968), students frequently have nothing to say, usually because their teachers chose a topic that is either inappropriate for them or about which they lack sufficient knowledge. Baker and Westrup (2003) supported the above idea. They stated that when teachers ask their students to respond in a foreign language, it can be quite challenging for them to do so because they are unsure of what to say, which vocabulary to use, or how to correctly employ grammar.

This study adopted the suggestion of English-speaking difficulties from Shen & Chiu

(2019), which includes psychological problems (nervousness, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, stuttering, peer pressure, worries about not being understood, timidity and low volume), linguistic problems (insufficient vocabulary, insufficient expressions, talking intermittently, weak sentences organization, poor grammar, and inaccurate pronunciation), and environmental problems (infrequent English conversation, learning environment with less support, insufficient practice, insufficient resources, low participation in class).

### **2.3 Previous research on English speaking difficulties in ESL/EFL context**

There have been some studies (Al Nakhalah, 2016; Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Bani & Albalawi, 2016; Diaab, 2016; Gan, 2016; Diaab, 2012; Gan, 2013; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Putri et al., 2020; Suliman, 2020; Shen & Chiu, 2019; Maarof & Munusamy, 2015; Wang, 2014; Yahaya et al., 2021) which have investigated the speaking difficulties encountered by ESL/EFL learners.

For instance, one research by Gan (2012) conducted a study on L2 speaking problems among ESL students in Hong Kong. Participants were 20 students of a 4-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) (English language) program in a teacher training institution at the tertiary level in Hong Kong. The results obtained from this research showed that there are some difficulties in the speaking of ESL students due to some reasons, such as inadequate vocabulary, grammar as a stumbling block, imperfectly learned pronunciation and intonation, scarce opportunities to speak English in class, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum, the input-poor environment outside class.

In another study, Gan (2013) studied the English-speaking difficulties experienced by two Chinese populations: one group of university students from mainland China and one group of university students from Hong Kong. Drawing on various theoretical perspectives, the students' perceived difficulties are analyzed concerning linguistic deficiency, oral language processes, conversational skills, academic speaking conventions, affective influence, and affordance of opportunities to use English for spoken communication in the students' learning contexts. The data indicated that most students could be trapped in a vicious cycle of inadequate linguistic knowledge, adverse effects and self-evaluations, reticence, failure to see tangible progress, and

lack of confidence, which may further demotivate their investment of effort. The data reveal that many Chinese learners of English tend to experience a 'mother tongue to the target language translation process when speaking in English, which sheds light on why English speaking is stressful to them, and warrants further empirical research.

Moreover, Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal (2014) described the difficulties encountered in an EFL setting. Five hundred sixty-six students were randomly stratified from six Jordanian public universities. The study results showed a 'low' speaking proficiency level among EFL undergraduates and negligible instruction of speaking skills at the university courses level. More highlighted difficulties in this study were communication in L1, large classes, and lack of time.

Additionally, Wang (2014) studied the sources of speaking difficulties from ESL learners' perspectives. Sixty-six adults participated in the study, among which 38 were ESL learners and 28 were native English speakers. The results represented that 50% of the reported oral communication difficulties had nothing to do with language itself but instead had to do with social-psychological and cultural-related factors, such as fear of making mistakes and being laughed at or lack of cultural background to connect with NESs. Along the same line, more than 61% of the reported explanations for oral communication difficulties had nothing to do with language proficiency but instead had to do with ESL learners' insufficient cultural background and perceived bias, such as NESs' discriminations against their foreign accents. About 67.5% of the reported strategies were avoidance, such as avoiding or limiting further communication with NESs. There was a significant correlation between how people attributed their spoken English difficulties and their approaches to addressing the problems. For example, participants who attributed their English-speaking difficulties to NESs' bias or discrimination also reported using more avoidance strategies (e.g., avoiding occasions that require them to speak in English) than interactive strategies (e.g., improving English by interacting and communicating more with NESs).

Al Hosni (2014) examined the speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. The study revealed that the main speaking difficulties encountered by grade 5 students are linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. Students cannot speak in English because they lack the necessary vocabulary items and

grammar structures. They also lack sentence formation skills, which results in using their mother tongue. Students also think of making mistakes in speaking in front of their classmates as very embarrassing, which results in preferring not to speak to avoid such situations. Five main factors contribute to these speaking difficulties: teachers' perceptions and implicit beliefs of teaching speaking, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulations.

Moreover, Maarof & Munusamy (2015) focused on identifying the factors behind Malaysian undergraduates' experiences and their difficulties in the English as Second Language (ESL) classroom. The findings of this study suggest that learners at the tertiary level face challenges in their ESL classroom learning in areas such as the learning environment itself needing to be improved, the quality of education, the academics, and the role of educators. The teaching approach was, among others, pointed out by the learners themselves.

Furthermore, Al Nakhalah (2016) studied the Problems and difficulties of speaking encountered by English language students at Al Quds Open University. The results of this study showed and indicated some problems in speaking to the students due to some reasons, such as fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence. The researcher adopted some recommendations. The most important is establishing environmental support and encouraging the students to speak English frequently.

In the same way, Bani & Albalawi (2016) investigated the factors leading to speaking difficulties from both the EFL Saudi learners' and their teachers' perspectives. The subjects of the study are three hundred and fifty female preparatory year students and twenty English teachers at Tabuk University. The research findings proved that the following factors affect Saudi EFL students' speaking performance: conceptual knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teachers' feedback during speaking activities, confidence, anxiety, mother tongue, low participation, the time allowed to speak, and time entitled for preparation. The findings also revealed that students face the following speaking difficulties when they try to speak: fear of mistakes, criticism, the disability to think of anything to say, speaking very little in their mother tongue and feeling shy to speak. Data from class observations show that students' speaking performance is mainly affected by four factors: insufficient input, time for

preparation, poor instructions, and unsatisfactory amount of practice speaking.

Diaab (2016) also carried out a study on the role of faulty instructional methods in Libyan EFL learners speaking difficulties. One hundred twenty-five students from Sebha University participated in the study. The study revealed that Libyan learners face problems in oral communication due to linguistic and psychological barriers. The results also showed that insufficient exposure to the target language and frequent use of Arabic inside and outside the classroom were the main factors contributing to Libyan EFL learners' speaking difficulties. Lack of speaking activities and overemphasis on accuracy at the expense of fluency by the teachers were other contributing factors.

Moreover, Leong & Ahmadi (2017) focused on the factors affecting language learners' English-speaking skills. The findings of this study indicated that learners with low self-esteem, higher anxiety, and low motivation have severe difficulties in speaking skills despite having acceptable linguistic skills. The study showed that students with higher motivation and lower anxiety can speak easily and effectively. Thus, students should have a friendly and cooperative environment that can help them overcome their difficulties in oral performance.

Furthermore, Rahmaniah & Asbah (2019) investigated the speaking difficulties encountered by 15 significant non-English students at Muhammadiyah University. The results obtained from this research showed that the first was from the grammar aspect. There were 80% of students almost entirely inaccurate except in stock phrases. Second is the fluency aspect, in which 73% of speech is prolonged and uneven except for short or routine sentences. Third is the pronunciation aspect, in which 73% of students' gross errors occurred. A hefty accent makes understanding difficult as it requires frequent repetition. Fourth is from a vocabulary aspect. 60% of students have vocabulary limitations related to essential personal and survival areas. The last one is from the comprehension aspect. 55% of students understand only slow, simple speech on common social and touristic topics; it requires constant repetition and rephrasing. There are two main factors, namely internal and external factors, faced by non-English major department students in speaking English. Internal factors include being quiet, having difficulty remembering vocabulary, pronouncing words, lacking



grammatical mastery, being lazy to memorize vocabulary, lacking confidence, and fear of making mistakes. For external factors, learners seldom speak English in class because it is not mainly used in the classroom, as they prefer to use their mother tongue.

In addition, Thao & Nguyet (2019) studied four aspects of English-speaking difficulties encountered by 150 English-majored students at Ho Chi Minh City University. Their study's results indicated that speaking difficulties often affected English-majored students' speaking abilities. The aspect they experienced most was affective difficulties, while the least was instructional difficulties. The findings also revealed that the years spent learning English affected English-majored students' speaking skills.

Shen & Chiu (2019) explored the factors that caused the EFL learners' English-speaking difficulties and then investigated the successful learners' strategies to improve their English-speaking performance. The participants were 148 EFL sophomores and junior English majors in Taiwan. Results of the analysis showed that (a) psychological problems (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence) were the primary reason for English-speaking difficulties, followed by linguistic problems (e.g., insufficient vocabulary), and environmental problems (e.g., lack of learning context for English conversation); (b) a majority of successful learners tended to use various speaking strategies to improve their English speaking performance and mainly focused on linguistic accuracy by repeatedly practicing the pitch, pronunciation, and intonation. Furthermore, most of them seized the chance to practice speaking English, such as joining social activities, participating in English speech contests, etc. They also used body language (e.g., facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures) for better communication.

In the same way, Sangaji (2019) examined the students' speaking difficulties experienced by 14 university students. The results of this study represented that by using a performance test evaluated with a speaking rubric, it was found that the students' grammar knowledge (linguistic domain) was deficient. However, data from the interview, which has been condensed into some keywords, revealed that the student's performance in speaking activity had been affected by their psychological

problems like hesitance and low self-esteem. Moreover, the finding showed that vocabulary mastery was important in speaking activity. Psychological reason and vocabulary mastery are two main issues discovered through this research.

As well, Suliman (2020) investigated English-speaking difficulties. The findings demonstrated that students face several speaking difficulties, such as linguistic problems, mother tongue use, and oral communication apprehension. Furthermore, it was revealed that some influential factors cause speaking deficiency, such as teachers' perceptions toward speaking instruction, teaching methods, and lack of exposure to English.

Similarly, Putri et al. (2020) studied the students' speaking difficulty factors. Forty participants were randomly sampled from 157 eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Tembilahan in 6 classes. It is known that the four factors of speaking difficulty have a positive value of more than 50%. The values of these four factors were 62.5% for personal factors, 95% for teaching strategies factor, 90% for curriculum factors, and 57.5% for environmental factors. Therefore, it can be inferred that the dominant factor which causes students' difficulties in speaking is teaching strategies.

Additionally, Amoah & Yeboah (2021) conducted a study on Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties and their motivation towards speaking the English language. The study involved observing non-English major students in the foreign language department of Nanjing Tech University. Seventy-five respondents were conveniently sampled for the questionnaire. Ten out of the seventy-five were randomly selected to respond to the interview. The factors that inhibit speaking performances were categorized as either linguistic or psychological. The outcome of the study revealed that Chinese EFL learners have speaking problems that relate more to psychological factors like anxiety, fear of mistakes, unwillingness, and fear of negative evaluation than linguistic factors, such as lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, insufficient knowledge of grammar rules, reading, and oral presentation.

Yahaya et al. (2021) discussed the difficulties ESL learners face in their speaking skills. Learning perception, anxiety, social-related problems, and learning-related problems, were the focus of issues discussed in this study. The participants were 196 tertiary-level ESL respondents at one of the higher learning institutions in Ipoh. The

findings indicated that the respondents experienced interference of L1 when it came to speaking difficulties. The respondents also expected the teacher to correct every error they say and want the teacher to use various methods and the latest approaches to teach speaking skills and boost their interest.

Similarly, Aziz & Kashinathan (2021) examined the ESL Learners' Challenges in Speaking English in Malaysian classrooms. The findings show that ESL students experience internal and external English-language challenges. The learners' limited vocabulary is the most significant factor in their English difficulties. Malaysian students' efforts to learn English are natural shyness, timidity, and fear of embarrassment. Learners miss the opportunity to improve their communication skills and overcome psychological barriers.

Wulandari et al. (2022) performed a study on the problems in communication experienced by 130 senior high school students in the tenth grade in Jambi City. The results indicated that linguistic and psychological problems impacted the students' speaking negatively. Regarding linguistic issues, lack of grammar mastery and pronunciation brings great difficulties for students to speak in English. Psychologically, students' difficulty in speaking was influenced by the students' anxiety, lack of practice, and lack of confidence. The results of this study also indicated that the students from the three accredited schools felt that psychological problems had more impact on their speaking difficulties.

While several previous studies have examined students' oral performance in the ESL and EFL context, to the researcher's best knowledge, no study deals specifically with investigating the levels of speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese postgraduate students in Thailand. Therefore, the present study fills the gaps by examining the levels of English-speaking problems experienced by Chinese EFL learners and exploring how their perceived teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties.

## **2.4 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter provided a literature review. The concept of English-speaking difficulties, including factors affecting students' English-speaking skills and the types of English-speaking challenges, were also discussed. Lastly, a review of previous



studies on English-speaking difficulties in the ESL/EFL context was also provided. The conceptual framework of speaking difficulties adopted English-speaking complications from Shen & Chiu (2019), which include psychological problems (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence), linguistic problems (e.g., insufficient vocabulary), and environmental problems (e.g., lack of learning context for English conversation).



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODS

This current study aimed to investigate the factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English, the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. This chapter presented the research methodology of the present study, including participants and setting, research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and a summary of the research.

#### **3.1 Participants and setting**

##### **3.1.1 Participants for questionnaires**

Eighty-five Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university were purposely selected from a government university located in Thailand. They were in their first semester and studied for their Master's in Management. The questionnaires were initially administered to 91 students, but six papers were eliminated due to missing or incomplete answers or participants choosing the same answer for all the options. For these reasons, 85 participants were included in the study, with more females (51.76%) than males (48.24%). The age range of the participants was 22-49 years old. From the questionnaire responses, most of the participants were 30-39 years old (40.00%), followed by 22-29 years old (30.59%) and 40-49 years old (29.41%). They all had learned English in China for the whole period of public education before coming to Thailand for their Master's degrees. Regarding their English proficiency level indicated in China's Standards of English Language Proficiency exam, their average CET-4 (College English Test 4 level) score is 405.95. The total CET-4 score is 710, and if the listening score reaches 446, students' language ability can meet the minimum requirements of Level 5 of China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE 5) (Jin, Jie & Wang, 2022). Based on the score, these students' English proficiency level is not high.

These students were enrolled in English for Graduate Students taught in English by a Thai assistant professor in the second semester of the academic year 2022. The English for Graduate Students course aims to promote students' oral fluency in communicative English in academic settings. Employing English as the instructional

language, this three-credit course was taught 16 hours per week for four weeks and assessed with classroom discussion, assignments, and presentations.

This study was conducted at a government university located in Thailand. This university offers bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral degrees in education, humanities, science, business, accounting, law, humanities and social sciences, Management, agricultural technology, and other fields for international students. It is one of the earliest universities in Thailand to establish cooperation and exchanges with major Chinese universities. The governments of both countries jointly support various academic exchange programs with China. Many Chinese students attend this Thai University yearly to pursue their higher degrees.

Regarding their language learning background, 55.29% of the students stated that they had learned English for less than ten years, and 44.71% indicated that they had known it for over ten years. When asked about the opportunities to use English with foreigners, 63.53% of the students almost did not use English with foreigners, 31.76% of students sometimes used English with foreigners, 4.71% of the students often used English with foreigners, and no students always used English with foreigners. In terms of their level of English-speaking proficiency, 47.06% of the students could only have simple everyday conversations, 37.65% of the students hardly dared to speak, 10.59% of them could understand what the other person said but could not express themselves, and only 4.71% of them could communicate with foreigners without obstacles. When asked about their satisfaction with their English-speaking proficiency, 34.12% of the students were strongly dissatisfied, 34.12% were dissatisfied, 25.88% were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4.71% were satisfied, and just 1.18% students were strongly satisfied.

### **3.1.2 Participants for interview**

After the questionnaire, the participants were divided into high, moderate, and low English-speaking difficulties. Two participants were selected for the high, moderate, and low groups. A total of six participants were purposely chosen to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore how participants perceived teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. The information about the participants is described below:

- The first student, Tony, studied for his Master's in Management. He was 26 years old. He had studied English for 6-10 years and often communicated with foreigners in English, and his mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 1.83, which was a low level. He was neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with his English-speaking skill. He could understand what others said when using English but had difficulties expressing himself.
- The second student, Jennifer, is studying for her Master's in Management. She was 40 years old, had studied English for more than 21 years, and often communicated with foreigners in English. Her mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 1.83, which was low. She could communicate with foreigners without obstacles and was satisfied with her English-speaking skill.
- The third student, Lisa, is studying for her Master's in Management. She was 37 years old, had studied English for over 21 years, and sometimes communicated with foreigners in English. Her mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 3.11, which was moderate. She could only use simple everyday conversational language when using English and was dissatisfied with her English-speaking skill.
- The fourth student, John, is studying for his Master's in Management. He is 23 years old. He had studied English for 11-15 years, and he sometimes communicated with foreigners in English, and his mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 3.17, which was moderate. He could only use simple everyday conversational language when using English and was neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with his English-speaking skill.
- The fifth student, Brown, studied for his Master's in Management. He was 29 years old. He had studied English for 0-5 years, and he almost did not communicate with foreigners in English, and his mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 4.89, which was high. When using English, he hardly dared to speak and was strongly dissatisfied with his English-speaking skill.

- The sixth student, Cindy, studied for his Master's in Management. She was 32 years old and had studied English for 11-15 years and almost did not communicate with foreigners in English. Her mean value on the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was 4.94, which was high. She could only use simple everyday conversational language when using English and was strongly dissatisfied with her English-speaking skill.

### **3.2 Research instruments**

The research instruments for collecting data included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. They were used to answer the three research questions. Each instrument was described in detail as follows:

#### **3.2.1 Speaking difficulties questionnaire**

A Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. The speaking difficulties questionnaire developed by Shen & Chiu (2019) was adopted to collect the quantitative data. Cronbach's Alpha result was 0.787, indicating an acceptable level. And the participants in both studies were Chinese students. The participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire to investigate the factors contributing to English-speaking difficulties, divided into three factors: linguistic, psychological, and learning environment. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part involves the participants' general background information, which includes age, gender, the chance of using English with foreigners, length of learning English, and the level of English proficiency. The second part of the questionnaire consists of 18 questions about the linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors. Linguistic factors include insufficient vocabulary, poor English grammar, and difficulties organizing sentences (items 1-6). Psychological factors include peer pressure, lack of confidence, timidity, and so on (items 7-13). Learning environment factors include items concerning lack of practice, contents, and learning context (items 14-18). The questionnaire is a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). Each question has five preferences, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with "1 as Strongly disagree", "2 as Disagree", "3 as Neither agree nor disagree", "4 as Agree", and "5 as Strongly agree".

The questionnaire was written in English. The questionnaire was translated into

Chinese to prevent misunderstanding due to language barriers. After translating all items of the Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire, a complete questionnaire was sent to the research advisor for the first draft review. Then all items were sent to one expert. He was a Chinese professor who had taught English translation for ten years and was proficient in Chinese and English. Back translation was used to screen the item's quality. Back translation, also called reverse translation, is the process of re-translating content from the target language to its source language in literal terms. The researcher translated each item of the questionnaire from English to Chinese. Then the translator wrote a back translation from Chinese to English to make the research more understandable. When the back translation was completed, the questionnaire items were revised.

### **3.2.2 Semi-structured interview**

Interviews are the most commonly used data collection method, and the semi-structured format is the most frequently used interview technique in qualitative research (DiCiccoBloom & Crabtree, 2006). After the questionnaire, the participants were divided into high, moderate, and low English-speaking difficulties. Two participants were selected for the high, medium, and low groups. A total of six participants were purposely chosen to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore how participants perceived teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. The interview questions were developed to be utilized in this interview. An interview session with each participant lasted 15-20 minutes. The interview was recorded using an audiotape. The recordings were systematically transcribed to determine themes as answers to Research Question 3. The following are interview questions:

1. Do you have English-Speaking Difficulties when you need to speak English in class?
2. What makes you feel English difficulties speaking in class?
3. What are the main factors that affect your speaking difficulties when speaking English in class?



4. Do you think the teacher can help you overcome your speaking difficulties in English class? If yes, please tell me how your English teachers help you overcome your speaking difficulties. If not, how should the English teacher help you overcome your speaking difficulties?
5. Is there anything else you want to tell me about English-Speaking Difficulties in English class?

### **3.3 Data collection procedure**

The researcher collected the data in a step-by-step manner. First, the researcher contacted offices overseeing international student affairs in this university, acquired the exact number of target students, and asked for their cooperation in using Google Forms to distribute the online questionnaire. Data were collected using the questionnaire on Speaking Difficulties developed by Shen & Chiu (2019). According to the study, Cronbach's Alpha result is 0.787, which is acceptable. Therefore, the researcher can adopt this questionnaire ultimately. Data were collected during November 2022. The questionnaire was distributed to 85 Chinese EFL postgraduate students studying for a master's degree in Management at a government university in Thailand. These participants were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to sign a consent form. They were asked to complete the Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire. After the questionnaire, six participants were randomly chosen to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted in Chinese. The interview lasted 15-20 minutes. And the interview was recorded and transcribed later for data analysis.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

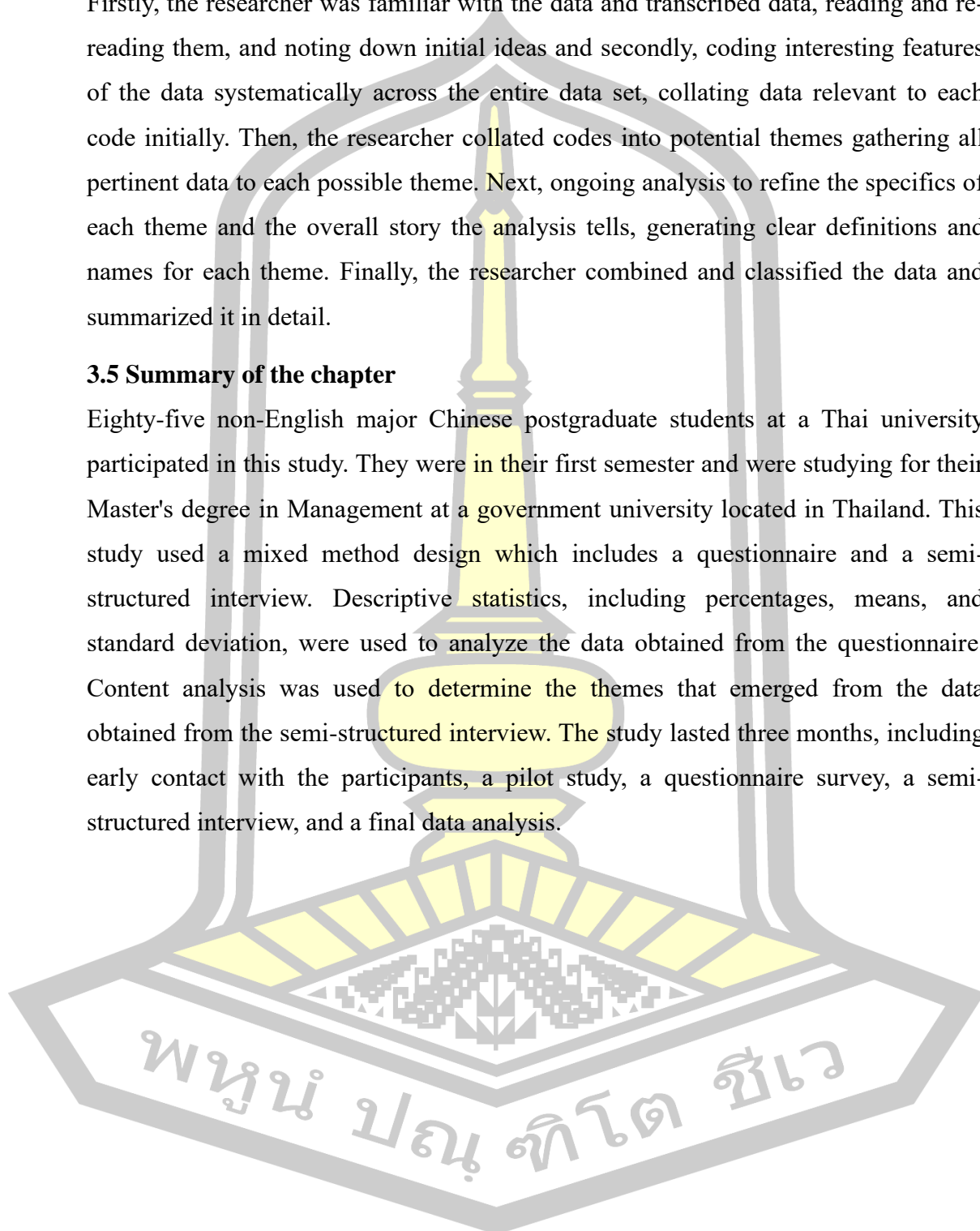
To answer Research Question 1 and 2, the quantitative data obtained from the Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire, which consists of 18 items, was analyzed using percentages, means, and standard deviation. For Research Question 2, Following Zhang (2019), a mean score of more than 3.5 reflects a high level of speaking difficulties, whereas a mean score ranging from 2.5-3.4 reflects a moderate level of speaking difficulties. A mean score of less than 2.4 indicated low speaking difficulties.

To answer Research Question 3, the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interview was analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis in qualitative

research after data were obtained. The interview content was written in Chinese. Firstly, the researcher was familiar with the data and transcribed data, reading and re-reading them, and noting down initial ideas and secondly, coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code initially. Then, the researcher collated codes into potential themes gathering all pertinent data to each possible theme. Next, ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Finally, the researcher combined and classified the data and summarized it in detail.

### **3.5 Summary of the chapter**

Eighty-five non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university participated in this study. They were in their first semester and were studying for their Master's degree in Management at a government university located in Thailand. This study used a mixed method design which includes a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire. Content analysis was used to determine the themes that emerged from the data obtained from the semi-structured interview. The study lasted three months, including early contact with the participants, a pilot study, a questionnaire survey, a semi-structured interview, and a final data analysis.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presented results from the data analysis of the responses made by the participants in answering the questionnaire and interviews, based on the research questions set in chapter one:

- What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English?
- What are the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners?
- What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?

The chapter was divided into five sections, including Research Question 1: What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English? (4.2), factors of Students' English-speaking difficulties (4.2.1), linguistic factors (4.2.2), psychological factors (4.2.3), learning environment factors (4.2.4); Research Question 2: What are the Levels of the English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners? (4.3), an overview of Students' opinions on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.1), levels of Students' Views on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.2); Research Question 3: What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties? (4.4), and a summary of the chapter (4.5).

#### 4.2 Research Question 1: What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' English-speaking difficulties?

To answer research question 1 (What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English?), the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire was completed by the participants. It used percentage, mean, and standard deviation to explore Eighty-five non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' opinions on their English-speaking difficulties. These findings are discussed based on the different sections of the questionnaire, namely: Factors of Students' English-Speaking Difficulties (4.2.1), Linguistic Factors (4.2.2), Psychological Factors (4.2.3), Learning

Environment Factors (4.2.4), What are the Levels of the English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners? (4.3), Overview of Students' Opinions on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.1), Levels of Students' View on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.2)

#### **4.2.1 Factors of students' English speaking difficulties**

This part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the factors affecting the 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' lack of speaking skills, including linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors. The quantitative data is collected through the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire comprising 18 items. The questionnaire uses the Likert five-level scale, with answers ranging from "1-5" to different levels of agreement, with a median of 3. The larger the mean value of the options, the higher the agreement degree among the students on the reason item. For this part, the total score, mean score, and standard deviation based on each respondent's answers to each item on the Likert scale were tabulated (see Table 5), and the frequencies and percentages of English-speaking difficulties items were also tabulated (see Appendix C).

By comparing the mean value between the three factors, the researcher can determine which element significantly impacts students. After that, to reach the mean values more conveniently, the researcher calculated the mean value of each factor.

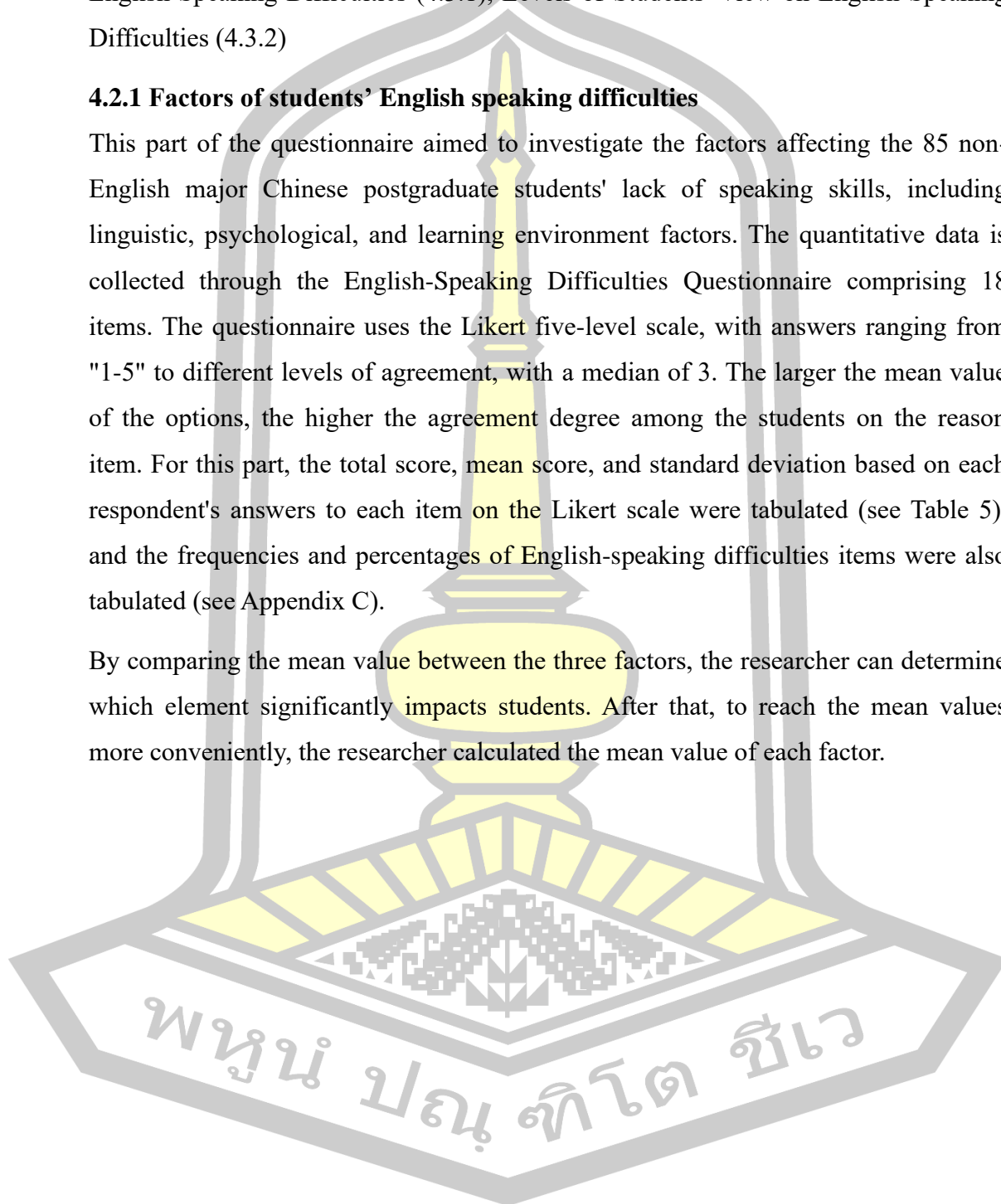


Table 2: Total Score, Mean Score, and Standard Deviation of English-Speaking Difficulties items

Section	No.	Items	N	Sum	Mean	S.D.	Rank
<b>Linguistic Factors</b>	1	Insufficient vocabulary	85	352	4.14	0.77	3
	2	Insufficient grammar	85	336	3.95	0.94	8
	3	Inaccurate pronunciation	85	305	3.59	1.18	10
	4	Insufficient expressions	85	348	4.09	0.89	7
	5	Talking intermittently	85	349	4.11	0.95	5
	6	Insufficient sentences organization	85	352	4.14	0.98	4
				<b>Total Mean: 4.00</b>		<b>High Level</b>	
<b>Psychological Factors</b>	7	Fear of making mistakes	85	296	3.48	1.18	11
	8	Peer pressure	85	265	3.12	1.27	16
	9	Nervousness	85	279	3.28	1.23	14
	10	Stuttering	85	249	2.93	1.32	18
	11	Lack of confidence	85	275	3.24	1.18	15
	12	Worries about not being understood	85	293	3.45	1.20	12
	13	Timidity and low volume	85	250	2.94	1.16	17
				<b>Total Mean:3.21</b>		<b>Moderate Level</b>	
<b>Learning Environment Factors</b>	14	Infrequent English conversation	85	359	4.22	1.03	1
	15	Learning environment with less support	85	349	4.11	1.01	6
	16	Insufficient practice	85	355	4.18	0.95	2
	17	Insufficient resources	85	307	3.61	1.21	9
	18	Low participation in class	85	283	3.33	1.18	13
				<b>Total Mean: 3.89</b>		<b>High Level</b>	

In summary, as shown in Table 2, the factors affecting English-speaking difficulties among 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university

included linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors. The order of the average values of the three factors were linguistic factors (mean value= 4.00), learning environment factors (mean value= 3.89), and psychological factors (mean value= 3.21). The average value of linguistic factors was the highest, it indicated that linguistic factors are the most influential factor for non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university when speaking English. The learning environment factors and psychological factors also affect English-speaking difficulties among 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university.

#### **4.2.2 Linguistic factors**

This part of the questionnaire investigated the linguistic factors that affect the 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' lack of speaking skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. There were six questions for the linguistic factors section. As shown in Table 2, a majority of the learners agreed that insufficient vocabulary and weak sentence organization (mean value= 4.14) were their predominant difficulties in English speaking, followed by talking intermittently (mean value= 4.11) and inadequate expressions (mean value= 4.09). However, it was interesting to find that poor grammar (mean value= 3.95) and incorrect pronunciation (mean value= 3.59) did not annoy the learners as much as the others. Those findings support Baker & Westrup (2003), who suggested it is difficult for many students to respond when the teachers ask them to say something in a foreign language because they barely do not know what vocabulary to use or how to use the grammar correctly.

#### **4.2.3 Psychological factors**

This part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the psychological factors that affect the 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' lack of speaking skills, such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence. The English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire in this section consisted of 7 items. As shown in Table 2, it revealed that a majority of them report their fear of making mistakes (mean value= 3.48), worries about not being understood (mean value= 3.45), nervousness (mean value= 3.28), and lack of confidence (mean value= 3.23). These were the main causes of English-speaking difficulties. Those findings were consistent with



Thornbury (2005), who argued that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, and fear of mistakes, are the common factors that hinder students from speaking. In addition, the author found that peer pressure (mean value= 3.12), timidity and low volume (mean value= 2.94), and stuttering (mean value= 3.93) did not annoy the learners as much as the others. On the contrary, one possible reason might be that the learners considered peer pressure less intimidating because they have been familiar with each other for years.

#### **4.2.4 Learning environment factors**

This part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the learning environment factors that affect the 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' lack of speaking skills, such as practice opportunities, learning resources, and teaching strategies. The English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire in this section consisted of seven items.

Table 2 showed that the average values of the learning environment factors for EFL learners in English speaking were generally high. Thus, the poor learning environment also resulted in difficulty in speaking English. The order of the average values from high to low were lack of opportunity for English conversation (mean value= 4.22), lack of practice (mean value= 4.18), poor support learning environment (mean value= 4.11), lack of learning resources (mean value= 3.61), and low participation in class (mean value= 3.33). The findings supported those indicated in Lukitasari (2008), who found that the EFL learners faced such speaking problems as inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. We assumed that the EFL learning context without an English-only environment might cause the EFL learners in this study to become anxious to speak English. In other words, the less practice they have in speaking English, the more anxious they become.

#### **4.3 Research Question 2: What are the levels of English-Speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners?**

The participants completed the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire to answer research question 2 (What are the Levels of English-speaking difficulties Experienced by Chinese EFL learners?). It seeks 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students' opinions on their English-speaking difficulties using percentages, means, and standard deviation. These findings are discussed based on the different sections of

the questionnaire, namely: Overview of Students' Opinions on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.1), Levels of Students' View on English-Speaking Difficulties (4.3.2).

#### 4.3.1 Overview of students' opinions on English speaking difficulties

The questionnaire results showed the overall English-speaking difficulties of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university. The quantitative data is collected through the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire comprising 18 items. The instrument utilized the 5-point Likert scale for each item used to collect data. For the second research question, the total mean score based on each respondent's answers to each item on the Likert scale was tabulated. Following Zhang (2019), a mean score of more than 3.5 reflects a high level of speaking difficulties, whereas a mean score ranging from 2.5-3.4 reflects a moderate level of speaking difficulties. A mean score of less than 2.4 indicates low speaking difficulties. Therefore, for each respondent, the author performed a descriptive analysis of the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire data, calculated the students' difficulties questionnaire score, find the maximum, minimum, and standard deviation.

Table 3: Overview of Students' Opinions on English-Speaking Difficulties

		N	Mean	Max	Min	S.D
Score	Valid	85	3.66	4.94	1.83	0.79
	N	91				

Table 3 showed that the overall mean score of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university who participated in the survey was 3.66 out of 5 in English-Speaking Difficulties. The student's overall English-speaking difficulties were at a high level.

#### 4.3.2 Levels of students' view on English speaking difficulties

As for the second research question (What are the English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners?), the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire data was used to calculate the students' difficulties questionnaire total score and find the mean score, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation. Following Zhang (2019), a mean score of more than 3.5 reflects a high level of speaking difficulties, whereas a mean score ranging from 2.5-3.4 reflects a moderate

level of speaking difficulties. A mean score of less than 2.4 indicated low speaking difficulties.

Table 4: Statistics of Students with Different Speaking Difficulties Levels

Levels of Speaking Difficulties	High Level	Moderate Level	Low Level
Range of Mean Score	3.5-5.0	2.5-3.4	1.0-2.4
N	53	25	7
%	62.35%	29.41%	8.24%

Table 4 showed that students' English-speaking difficulties were generally high. There were 53 participants (62.35%) whose English-speaking difficulties level was high, while 25 participants (29.41%) whose English-speaking difficulties level was moderate. Only 7 participants had low English-speaking difficulties, accounting for 8.24%. This result was also acceptable. The questionnaire analysis showed that students generally have English-speaking difficulties, and the English-speaking difficulties level is high.

#### 4.4 Research Question 3: What do the participants think teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?

A semi-structured interview was administered with participants to answer research question 3 (What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?). It sought six students' opinions on how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties by using the coding procedure of content analysis. These findings are discussed based on the interview's different themes: teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, and giving positive feedback.

##### *Teaching pronunciation*

The first suggestion teachers could make to help students overcome speaking difficulties was to teach students proper English pronunciation. Accurately mastering the knowledge of English pronunciation is the basis for cultivating and improving oral communication skills. Three of six respondents, John, Brown, and Cindy, mentioned it. Cindy believed teachers could teach primary phonics to students in the classroom, and John viewed that proper pronunciation practice activities could be arranged in

class. Brown opined teachers should teach pronunciation. The excerpt below shows the participants' claims (see Table 5).

Table 5: Teaching pronunciation

Participants	Excerpts
Cindy	<i>...teachers should let students realize the importance of correct pronunciation by comparing correct pronunciation with wrong pronunciation (...) Teachers can introduce certain phonetic knowledge to students in class, such as pronunciation organs, phonemes, syllables, etc.</i>
John	<i>Appropriate pronunciation practice activities can be arranged before each class; for example, the teacher can let us imitate the dialogue of the movie and then correct our pronunciation (...) so that we can master correct pronunciation and intonation.</i>
Brown	<i>... teacher can teach me pronunciation ...</i>

The excerpts above illustrate that participants perceived that teaching pronunciation helps them to reduce English-speaking difficulties and finally improve their confidence in speaking.

### ***Teaching vocabulary***

The second suggestion teachers could make to help students overcome speaking difficulties was to teach students enough vocabulary. Pronunciation is the basic requirement of a person's English-speaking level. However, if students do not have enough vocabulary knowledge, they would likely fail to express themselves in communication, which easily creates anxiety in communication, making students lose confidence and feel ashamed to speak. Four out of six respondents, Brown, Lisa, John, and Cindy, mentioned it. Brown thought that teachers should teach students how to memorize vocabulary, and Lisa said teachers should teach vocabulary through songs. John mentioned that teachers should strengthen the inspection of vocabulary. The following excerpt revealed the students' perceptions (see Table 6).

Table 6: Teaching vocabulary

Participants	Excerpts
Brown	<i>..., teachers should also teach students some necessary strategies to memorize vocabulary (...) and encourage students to learn and accumulate vocabulary independently after class, collect and organize English Idioms, slang, and some fixed expressions.</i>
Lisa	<i>Teachers can use a variety of teaching methods to teach vocabulary... For example, teachers can use English songs to assist teaching and use lyrics as an example to explain English vocabulary (...) so that students (...) consolidate (...) vocabulary.</i>
John	<i>Teachers can help students to use various methods to memorize more vocabulary, (...) strengthen the inspection of vocabulary, encourage students to memorize words, and increase vocabulary.</i>
Cindy	<i>I dare not speak because of insufficient vocabulary, (...) If the teacher lets me remember enough vocabulary can help me overcome difficulties</i>

As shown above, the participants reported that teacher teaching vocabulary could help students overcome speaking difficulties. Therefore, students need to learn how to memorize vocabulary skillfully. Teachers should use various methods to help students understand and remember English vocabulary and expressions and enhance the vocabulary foundation of oral communication.

### ***Offering more opportunities for English speaking***

The third most common reply among the answer regarding the approach teachers took to help students overcome speaking difficulties was “offering more opportunities for English speaking.” Teachers can offer more opportunities for English speaking, for example, increase communication and interaction between students through various group activities, reduce students' speaking difficulties in oral communication, and enhance students' self-confidence in verbal expression. According to the questionnaire and interview results, the students think that the English-speaking opportunities offered by the school for Chinese students are relatively lacking, and few related English activities are conducive to students' English-speaking learning. Therefore, regarding pronunciation and vocabulary teaching, teachers should use various methods to design appropriate English-speaking tasks for students, offer more opportunities for English speaking, increase classroom interaction, and guide and encourage students to speak English.

All interviewees, namely Tony, Jennifer, Lisa, John, Brown, and Cindy, had similar opinions. Jennifer thought teachers should organize some class activities to allow students to speak. Cindy pointed out that teachers should use music or video to create a language environment in the classroom and guide and encourage students to speak English more. Tony stated that teachers should give students more opportunities to speak English and encourage them to express their points in the classroom. John thinks the class should be 100% in English communication. The following excerpt revealed the students' perceptions (see Table 7).

Table 7: Offering more opportunities for English speaking

Participants	Excerpts
Jennifer	<i>...Teachers can set up special English days or English corners or carry out some English competitions (such as singing English songs, dubbing, English short plays, English speeches, etc.) (...) I think the interesting activities will let us speak English speaking more.</i>
Cindy	<i>The teacher should allow us to speak English in the classroom because we cannot overcome our speaking difficulties without speaking (...) Some fun activities can make us more willing to talk.</i>
Tony	<i>Teachers should encourage us to speak in the classroom. (...) For example: with the help of the appreciation of the film, (...) organize students to discuss the film's theme. Active discussions can also lead to many new topics, (...) using English to express the relevant points of view.</i>
John	<i>(...) , I think the class should be 100% in English communication, and let the students participate in the topic discussion, express their views in turn, and let the students show their oral English expression to strengthen their class participation and oral ability.</i>
Lisa	<i>Teachers can provide English corners for students to practice oral English after class.</i>
Brown	<i>The teacher should let me (...) practice the conversation in class</i>

As explained by the participants above, overcoming speaking English difficulties requires a good language environment, which requires teachers to provide more opportunities for students to speak English.

### **Reducing criticism**

The third approach to dealing with Chinese postgraduate students' speaking difficulties was "reducing criticism." In the classroom, if the teacher criticizes the students too much, it is easy for them to feel ashamed of learning English, which leads to speaking difficulties. Two out of six respondents: Brown and Cindy,



acknowledged “reducing criticism” as a useful approach. The following excerpt revealed the students' perceptions (see Table 8).

Table 8: Reducing Criticism

Participants	Excerpts
Brown,	<i>When we learn to speak English, the teacher should not pay too much attention to our mistakes and reduce criticism. (...) With too much criticism (...), we refuse to speak English on our initiative. (...) pay special attention to error correction methods, (...) correcting errors after class.</i>
Cindy	<i>...teacher should (...) reduce criticism, (...) let us learn to speak English more happily.</i>

According to Table 11, It could be concluded that reducing criticism in the learning process can reduce students' anxiety, further cultivate students' interest and confidence, stimulate students' English learning motivation, and help them overcome English-speaking difficulties.

### ***Giving positive feedback***

Another suggestion that the teacher should adopt to deal with Chinese postgraduate students' speaking difficulties and report as being beneficial was “giving positive feedback.” Teachers should consider positive feedback as a useful approach and a constructive element that teachers could utilize to help them overcome their speaking difficulties. Three out of six respondents, Brown, Cindy, and John, demonstrated similar opinions. They all stated that teachers should encourage students in class. The following excerpts revealed the students' perceptions (see Table 9).

Table 9: Giving positive feedback

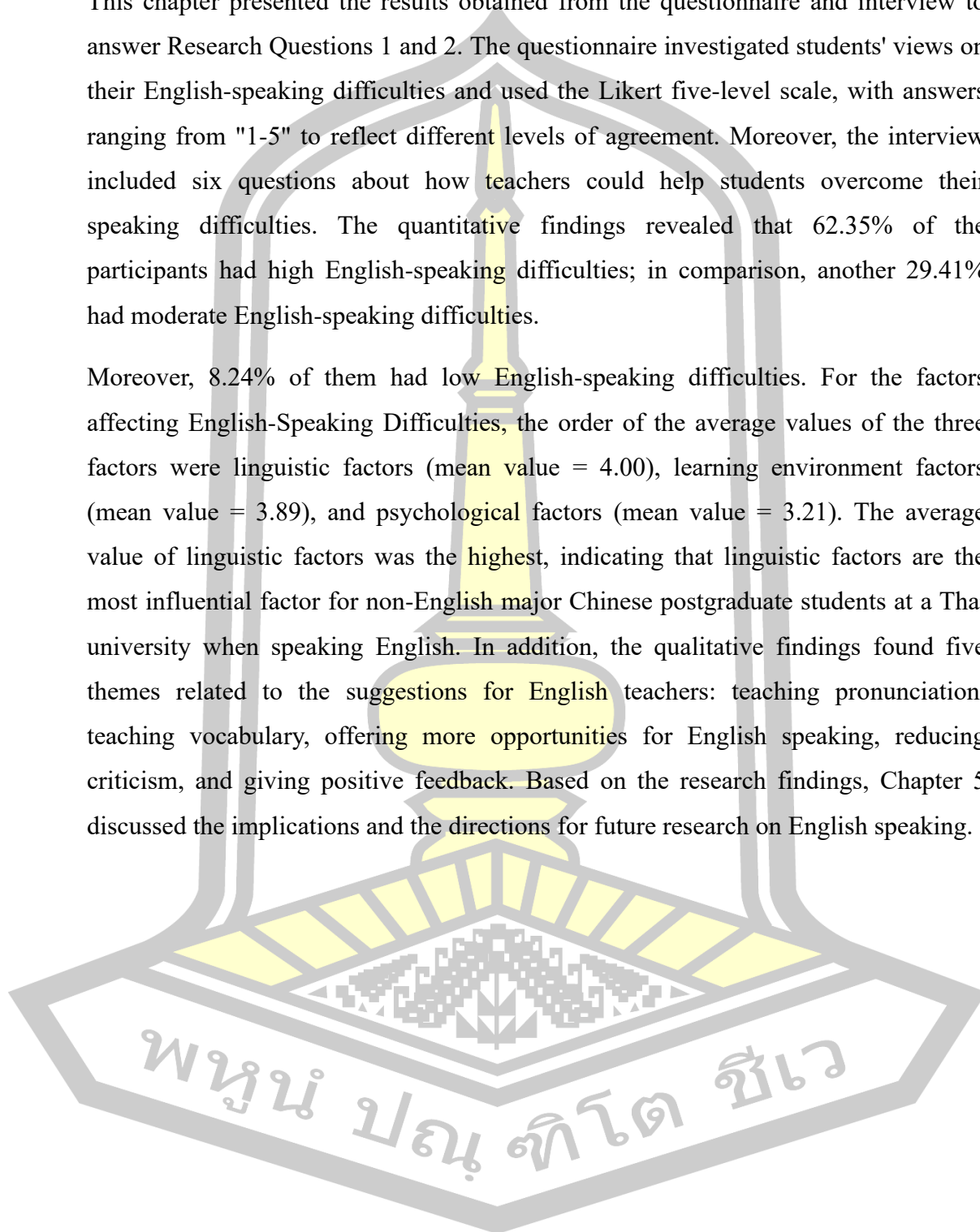
Participants	Excerpts
Brown	<i>Teachers should praise our progress in time and encourage us to build self-confidence.</i>
Cindy	<i>The teacher should give appropriate encouragement after we speak English, ... such as giving some positive comments.</i>
John	<i>... if we are anxious and nervous, teachers should wait and encourage us.</i>

According to Table 12, It could be concluded that positive feedback can promote enthusiasm for learning English speaking. In the English class, timely, sufficient, and appropriate encouragement should be given to students who dare to speak English, which will help them overcome their English-speaking difficulties.

#### 4.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented the results obtained from the questionnaire and interview to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. The questionnaire investigated students' views on their English-speaking difficulties and used the Likert five-level scale, with answers ranging from "1-5" to reflect different levels of agreement. Moreover, the interview included six questions about how teachers could help students overcome their speaking difficulties. The quantitative findings revealed that 62.35% of the participants had high English-speaking difficulties; in comparison, another 29.41% had moderate English-speaking difficulties.

Moreover, 8.24% of them had low English-speaking difficulties. For the factors affecting English-Speaking Difficulties, the order of the average values of the three factors were linguistic factors (mean value = 4.00), learning environment factors (mean value = 3.89), and psychological factors (mean value = 3.21). The average value of linguistic factors was the highest, indicating that linguistic factors are the most influential factor for non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university when speaking English. In addition, the qualitative findings found five themes related to the suggestions for English teachers: teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, and giving positive feedback. Based on the research findings, Chapter 5 discussed the implications and the directions for future research on English speaking.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the results from the current study were analyzed and discussed to provide new insights into English-speaking difficulties among Chinese EFL learners in Thai education. Limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies were also presented in this chapter.

Overall, this discussion revealed the English-speaking difficulties levels of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university. This chapter primarily focused on the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners. It investigated the factors that affect Chinese EFL postgraduate students' English-speaking difficulties, including linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors that emerged from the questionnaires. Furthermore, the results of how students perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties revealed in the semi-structured interviews were also discussed in this chapter, which can be divided into five themes, including teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, giving positive feedback. The results from the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to examine English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners and to answer three specific research questions:

- What factors affect Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties when speaking English?
- What are the levels of English-speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners?
- What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?

#### **5.1 Factors of students' English speaking difficulties**

Findings from the quantitative data of the current study revealed the factors affecting English-speaking difficulties among 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university in three sections: linguistic factors, psychological factors, and learning environment factors. The order of the average values of the three factors

were linguistic factors (4.00), learning environment factors (3.89), and psychological factors (3.21) (see Figure 2). The average value of linguistic factors was the highest; it indicated that linguistic factors are the most influential factor for non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university when speaking English. These factors were discussed in detail in the following sections.

In the current study, linguistic factors surpassed psychological factors and learning environment factors as the most important factors for Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties. The results showed that Chinese EFL learners were most affected by linguistic factors when speaking English. In terms of linguistics factors, insufficient vocabulary (4.14) and weak sentences organization (4.14), followed by talking intermittently (4.11), inadequate expressions (4.09), poor grammar (3.95) and incorrect pronunciation (3.59), brought a high level of difficulties to Chinese EFL students to speak in English.

The quantitative results showed that linguistics was the most difficult factor that affected the speaking of Chinese university students studying in Thailand. This is followed by learning environment and psychological factors, respectively. This situation could be explained by vocabulary being a critical component of language ability. Insufficient vocabulary knowledge may cause a struggle to convey their thoughts and ideas clearly and accurately. Students with inadequate vocabulary may also rely on simple or repetitive language to communicate. This can result in a lack of precision, nuance, and impact in their communication, which can be a barrier to effective communication. In addition, linguistic factors (e.g., sentence organization) could also make students unclear, ambiguous, or confused when speaking. This may be because that sentence organization is a skill that enables learners to process sentence information in units more prominent than a single (Weaver, 1979). Weak sentence organization can make it difficult for Chinese EFL learners to follow the speaker's ideas and can detract from the overall effectiveness of the speech. Moreover, according to Xia (2015), talking cannot speak consistently, at an even pace and pitch, and chat effortlessly. Native English speakers often pause to emphasize a point. For English learners, inappropriate pauses or repetition often occur, making the conversation difficult to understand.

Another explanation could be insufficient expressions (e.g., words, phrases, or sentences) that inadequately convey the intended meaning or fail to communicate the message clearly and effectively. Oral expressions are one of the requirements for proper linguistic communication; they consist of syntactic concepts compatible with the mental growth of students in the early stages. These patterns consist of the parts of speech (noun, verb, etc.) and the structures these parts can compose, such as the nominative or verbal sentences and various methods, interrogation, and exclamation (Khasawneh, 2021). Moreover, insufficient expressions can lead to confusion, miscommunication, and misunderstandings and can impact the effectiveness of the communication.

Poor grammar could be another linguistic factor affecting speaking difficulty among Chinese university participants. Grammar guides students in constructing English sentences to communicate with others (Muhsin, 2015). In addition, grammar is bounded to other language skills like speaking. Poor grammar can significantly affect the clarity and effectiveness of communication. It can make it difficult for Chinese EFL learners to understand the message being conveyed and can create confusion or misunderstanding. Besides, inaccurate pronunciation refers to the incorrect or improper articulation of sounds and words in spoken language. Understandable pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' competence, and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction. Good pronunciation leads to learning, while wrong pronunciation promotes great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein, 2012; Putri et al., 2020). Incorrect pronunciation can impact communication, making it difficult for others to understand the speaker's message. It can also affect the credibility and professionalism of Chinese EFL learners, particularly in formal or business settings. These findings align with previous studies that linguistic factors are a critical factor affecting learners' speaking difficulty (AAsgari & MMustaph, 2011; Thao & Nguyet, 2019).

The qualitative data from the interview supplement the quantitative results. The participants reported that lacking linguistic English knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) affected their ability to speak or communicate in English. Together, the linguistic factor was the most critical factor contributing to Chinese

university students' English-speaking difficulties. The participants' responses can support this claim:

*My vocabulary is insufficient, and I have problems with grammar. When I was studying in China, my basic knowledge of English was weak. We want to speak but don't know the words (Cindy).*

*My English vocabulary is not insufficient to support the expressions needed in English class (John).*

*The lack of vocabulary knowledge and the structure and tense of English sentences makes me struggle to speak English in class (Brown).*

*Because I lack vocabulary and expression ability, I find it difficult to speak English (...) I don't have enough vocabulary to express my ideas in class, and I find it difficult to connect words into sentences (Lisa).*

Therefore, consistent with previous studies, the current research demonstrated that most Chinese non-English major students have linguistic problems, especially in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, which directly affects the output of students' English speaking and causes difficulties in speaking. Therefore, teachers should help students improve their basic language knowledge, especially vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

The questionnaire analysis of the study also showed that the learning environment was the second problematic variable (factor) that affected their speaking difficulty. The primary aspect of the environment that caused problems in speaking was the inadequate opportunity to use English (4.22), followed by poor support learning environment (4.11), lack of learning resources (3.61), and low participation in class (3.33), respectively. These findings could be explained by inadequate opportunities to speak English in and outside lessons, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum, and an input-poor environment outside class could lead to speaking difficulty among EFL university students. The current study is consistent with previous findings that inadequate exposure to the target language is one variable contributing to learners' speaking difficulty (Bani & Albalawi, 2016; Diaab, 2016; Gan, 2012; Maarof & Munusamy, 2015)



The analyses of the qualitative results also indicated that the learning environment affected Chinese university learners' English-speaking difficulties. A lack of a supportive learning environment limits improving students' language abilities, leading to speaking difficulties. The participants' responses gave evidence to support the argument of for learning environment is essential for speaking problems:

*I can hardly use English at ordinary times, so I rarely have the opportunity to express myself in English, and I don't have the chance to practice my English speaking. I think this is why I have difficulty speaking English (John).*

*I speak English poorly because I don't have a good language environment (...). When I sit with Chinese people, we discuss in Chinese (Cindy).*

Another factor affecting Chinese university learners' speaking difficulty is the psychological factor. The quantitative results showed that psychological factors were the third important variable for Chinese EFL learners' speaking challenges. Among psychological factors consisted of fear of making mistakes (3.48), worries about not being understood (3.45), nervousness (3.28), a lack of confidence (3.23), and peer pressure (3.12). Those findings were consistent with Wulandari et al. (2022), which mentioned that psychological problems negatively affect language learners during the learning process. They are difficulties, low confidence, and fear of being laughed at by others.

The interview results also provided evidence to support the quantitative findings. Specifically, the participants noted that the fear of making mistakes, nervousness, not being understood, and lack of confidence affected their speaking performance, mainly when they wanted to communicate with classmates and lecturers. The following excerpts of the participants could support such an argument:

*When I communicate with the teacher, I am a little nervous. First, I was afraid I would not understand the teacher's words and was embarrassed to ask again. Secondly, when I answer the questions, I will forget the words I am familiar with and cannot express because of nervousness (John).*

*In English class, I get nervous when communicating with teachers and classmates. Because my English is not very good, sometimes, to understand what others say, I will*

*listen to them carefully. It takes me more time to know if it is a long sentence. Because of my poor English, I fear making mistakes when communicating in English (Cindy).*

*I never raise my hand to answer the teacher's questions because I think it's too embarrassing. I'm afraid of answering wrongly, and then I will feel embarrassed, so I prefer to keep silent (Brown).*

Together, the current study provided evidence that linguistic, learning environment and psychological factors were the main variables affecting the speaking difficulty of Chinese university learners studying for a Master's in Thailand. Indeed, the quantitative results showed that the linguistic variable was the most influential factor, followed by learning environment and psychological factors, respectively.

## **5.2 Levels of English-Speaking difficulties experienced by non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university**

The current study examined English-speaking difficulties among non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university. Through a detailed analysis of the English-Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire, the overall mean score of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university who participated in the survey was 3.66 out of 5 in English-speaking difficulties, which is at a high level. This can be interpreted as the participants often faced difficulties when speaking English. These 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university generally have English-speaking difficulties in English classrooms. In contrast, most students (62.35%) have a high level of English-speaking difficulties, while only a small proportion of students are in a state of moderate level (29.41%) and low level (8.24%). According to Shen & Chiu (2019), psychological, linguistic, and environmental problems were the main reasons for English-speaking difficulties. From the response to the semi-structured interview, two interviewees who had a high level of English-speaking difficulties stated that:

*I never raise my hand to answer the teacher's questions (...) I prefer to keep silent (Brown).*

*I hardly dare to communicate in English (...) when I sit with Chinese people; we discuss in Chinese (Cindy).*

Many researchers have also investigated the level of English-speaking difficulties in English learners. For example, Zhang (2019) investigated the English-speaking obstacles of non-English primary Mongolian college students. The results showed that the average value of the sample population was 3.29 (standard deviation: 0.90), which indicated that non-English major Mongolian college students had a moderate level of difficulty in speaking English. Another study by Train & Tham (2015) investigated the four aspects of speaking difficulties: affective, social, instructional, and linguistic difficulties encountered by English-majored students at one university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The results showed that speaking difficulties often affected English-majored students' speaking abilities. Many factors affect the achievement of a high level of English-speaking difficulties. According to AAmoah & YYeboah (2021), the study's outcome revealed that Chinese EFL learners' average for all factors was more than 3, which showed that most learners experience moderate to high English-speaking difficulties.

Therefore, consistent with previous studies, the current results demonstrated that non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university generally have high English-speaking difficulties in English classrooms.

### **5.3 What do the participants think the teacher could do to help them overcome speaking difficulties?**

As shown in the qualitative data, the semi-structured interview explored six students' opinions on how they perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties. Five suggestions were mentioned for teachers to help students to overcome their speaking difficulties, including teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, and giving positive feedback. For example, the interviewees reported that:

*Teachers can use a variety of teaching methods to teach vocabulary... For example, teachers can use English songs to assist teaching and use lyrics as an example to explain English vocabulary (...) so that students (...) consolidate (...) vocabulary (Lisa).*

*I think the class should be 100% in English communication. Let the students participate in the topic discussion, express their views in turn, and show their English-speaking expressions to strengthen the students' class participation and oral ability (John).*

Several previous studies have also mentioned how teachers help students overcome English-speaking difficulties. For example, AAmoah & YYeboah (2021) stated that teachers should help create a conducive environment that will help reduce the feeling of problems or shyness; teachers should gather adequate strategies such as regular oral presentations or classroom debates to boost EFL learner's speaking confidence; by critically observing learners and giving mindful feedback, instructors will encourage learners to speak without fear or shame. The teacher should encourage students to join English debating clubs or societies and motivate them to spend time reading literature and learning grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Thao & Nguyet (2019) recommended that teachers should allow students to talk about their English-speaking difficulties, ask questions, and share good-experience or effective ways of learning English that they have tried. The teachers should make their sympathetic expressions clear to weak students so that they dare to confide to teachers about their problems. Teachers should move around the class, talk to students to identify weak students and help them overcome their inferiority complex. Thanks to the teacher's encouragement, vulnerable students can feel more confident communicating with their peers in English.

Furthermore, Leong & Ahmadi (2017) stated that teachers should give their learners enough time for speaking skills, help them overcome their timidity through friendly behaviors to make them feel comfortable when speaking, remind their learners not to worry about making mistakes, and give them true instructions and enough guidance. Teachers should give their learners more opportunities to speak English by using speaking tasks that help them speak and urge them to participate in speaking activities. In addition, teachers should know when and how to correct their learners' mistakes so that they are not afraid of making mistakes.

Therefore, according to the previous findings, it was suggested that teachers should use different strategies to overcome the students' English-speaking difficulties. For example, teaching pronunciation and vocabulary could offer more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, giving positive feedback, giving enough time, giving them proper instructions and enough guidance, etc.

### 5.3.1 Teaching pronunciation

Based on the previous study, data collected through the questionnaire showed that inaccurate pronunciation is one of the most influential linguistic factors. Pronunciation is an integral part of language learning, and anyone who wants to gain communicative competence must study pronunciation (Wei, 2006). Data collected from the student interview supported this because one of the students reported that teachers could teach them pronunciation. Several previous studies have also mentioned the importance of teaching pronunciation. For instance, Fraser and Perth (1999) agreed that explicit pronunciation teaching is essential to language courses.

On the one hand, confidence in pronunciation allows learners the interaction with native speakers, which is so essential for all aspects of their linguistic development. On the other hand, poor pronunciation can mask otherwise good language skills, condemning learners to less than their deserved social, academic, and work advancement. Furthermore, BBreitkreutz et al. (2001) stressed that no one questions whether pronunciation is to have a place in the language curriculum. According to Hişmanoğlu (2006), pronunciation teaching is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Since sounds play an important role in communication, foreign language teachers must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. Therefore, according to the previous findings, it was suggested that teachers should teach pronunciation to overcome the students' English-speaking difficulties.

### 5.3.2 Teaching vocabulary

Based on previous studies, data collected from questionnaires showed that insufficient vocabulary is one of the most influential linguistic factors. Students cannot communicate their thoughts in phrases due to a lack of vocabulary (Ghafar & Amin, 2022). Data collected from the semi-structured interview supported this. A student even said they wanted to speak but did not know the word. Several previous studies have also stressed the importance of teaching vocabulary. For example, to master English skills, students must know the vocabulary of the language, especially a list of words with their meanings, because vocabulary enhances their language skills (Linse, 2005). To speak and write English, students need to learn 1,000 – 2,000 words (Cameron, 2001). According to Shahzadi et al. (2014), learners could not express



themselves effectively or well since they lacked enough vocabulary. In addition, Susanto (2017) also stated that vocabulary is central to language teaching and is paramount to a language learner. Vocabulary is the basis of learning a foreign language. Therefore, according to the previous findings, it was suggested that teachers should teach vocabulary to overcome the students' English-speaking difficulties.

### **5.3.3 Offering more opportunities for English speaking**

According to the questionnaire results, infrequent English conversation and insufficient practice are two of the most influential learning environment factors. Based on pronunciation and vocabulary teaching, teachers should also offer more opportunities for English speaking. Harmer (1983) stated that language activities are essential to teaching language for communication. One of the students in the semi-structured interview reported that they did not have the opportunity to practice English speaking, which supported this statement. Several previous studies also mentioned the importance of offering more opportunities for English speaking. For example, according to Suban (2021), in the EFL context, students only study English as a school subject and do not use it for communication. Hence, the students have minimal opportunities to practice the language. Optimizing classroom time with practical activities may be a better option to choose. Huang and Hu (2016) stated that classroom activities, such as English dubs, role-play, and brainstorming, can be beneficial for teaching oral English. In addition, by providing structured opportunities to practice oral language skills with partners and in small groups, teachers help increase learners' oral English, deepening learning (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, according to the previous findings, it was suggested that teachers should offer more opportunities for English speaking to overcome the students' English-speaking difficulties.

### **5.3.4 Reducing criticism**

Based on previous studies, data collected through questionnaires showed that fear of making mistakes, nervousness, and lack of confidence was the main psychological factors of English-speaking difficulties. These psychological factors are related to the teacher's criticism. Data collected from the student interview supported this. For example, one interviewee reported that when students learn to speak English, the



teacher should not pay too much attention to their mistakes and reduce criticism. With too many criticisms, students refuse to speak English on their initiative. Several previous studies also mentioned the importance of lowering criticism. For example, Wang (2021) suggested that teachers should reduce criticism, avoid correcting mistakes directly to students, and avoid discouraging students' enthusiasm and confidence in learning. Moreover, Zhong (2007) pointed out that the student frequently receives negative external emotional feedback: correction and criticism. This reduces the learner's readiness to engage in any unnecessary further interaction. Aftat (2008) added that fear of making mistakes is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. This is also much influenced by the student's fear of being criticized by the teacher. Therefore, teachers must convince their students that making mistakes is not wrong or bad because students can learn from their mistakes (Dalem, 2017). According to the previous findings, it was suggested that teachers should reduce criticism when students speak to overcome the students' English-speaking difficulties.

### **5.3.5 Giving positive feedback**

Teachers' positive feedback can lower students' anxiety, increase their confidence, and encourage their willingness to communicate (Al NNakhalah, 2016). Data collected from the student interview confirm the statements. One participant reported that teachers should encourage students to build self-confidence. Several previous studies have also mentioned the importance of giving positive feedback. For example, Thao & Nguyet (2019) stated that weak students could feel more confident communicating with their peers in English thanks to the teacher's encouragement. The cause of students' lack of confidence also concerns the lack of motivation from the teacher (Brown, 2001). In addition, Dalem (2017) suggested that incentive becomes vital to build students' confidence. Therefore, encouraging students and showing that they can communicate well in English plays a role in students' success in learning.

### **5.4 Limitations and recommendations of the study**

Although this research has drawn some research conclusions and pedagogical implications, the conclusions and suggestions of the study still have to be further verified and refined because there are still some limitations in this research. First of

all, the sample is limited, and participants in this study were limited to 91 students from one university only. Future studies may wish to increase the number of participants from different locations (e.g., south, east, west). Second, future studies are needed to gain further insight into Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties. For example, future research may investigate the relationship between English-speaking difficulties and other variables such as gender, educational background, age, attitude, working experience, and motivation.

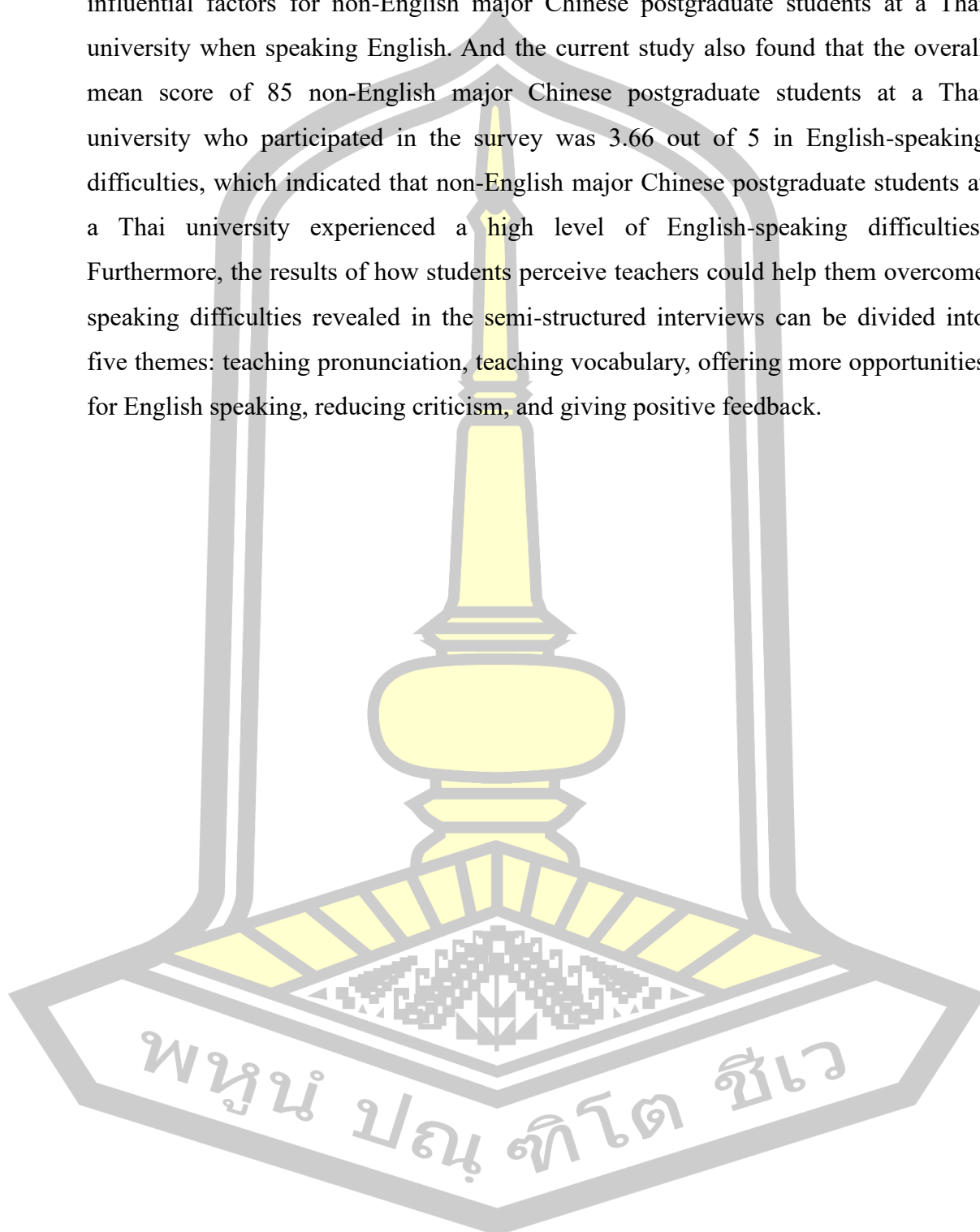
### **5.5 Implications**

This study was conducted in the EFL context of North Thailand only. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a similar study nation-wide to gain a more thorough understanding of English speaking difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL students who study in Thailand. However, there is no study investigating the levels of English speaking difficulties among Chinese EFL postgraduate students in a Thai EFL setting. Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties still remain relatively scarce and more studies are needed to raise awareness and gain further insight into Chinese EFL learners' speaking difficulties. For instance, investigations on the relationship between English speaking difficulties and other variables such as gender, educational background, age, attitude, learning style and personality type. Moreover, as this study focused on English speaking difficulties among Chinese EFL postgraduate students in a Thai university, studies in other educational contexts are still needed.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

To conclude, linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors affect students' English-speaking difficulties. Regarding linguistic factors, insufficient vocabulary, weak sentence organization, talking intermittently, insufficient expressions, poor grammar, and inaccurate pronunciation contribute to difficulties in English speaking. Psychologically, fear of making mistakes, worries about not being understood, nervousness, lack of confidence, and peer pressure were the main psychological factors of English-speaking difficulties. As for learning environment factors, students' difficulty in speaking was influenced by the poor learning environment, such as lack of opportunity for English conversation, lack of practice, poor support learning environment, lack of learning resources, and low participation

in class. The results of this study also indicated that linguistic factors are the most influential factors for non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university when speaking English. And the current study also found that the overall mean score of 85 non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university who participated in the survey was 3.66 out of 5 in English-speaking difficulties, which indicated that non-English major Chinese postgraduate students at a Thai university experienced a high level of English-speaking difficulties. Furthermore, the results of how students perceive teachers could help them overcome speaking difficulties revealed in the semi-structured interviews can be divided into five themes: teaching pronunciation, teaching vocabulary, offering more opportunities for English speaking, reducing criticism, and giving positive feedback.



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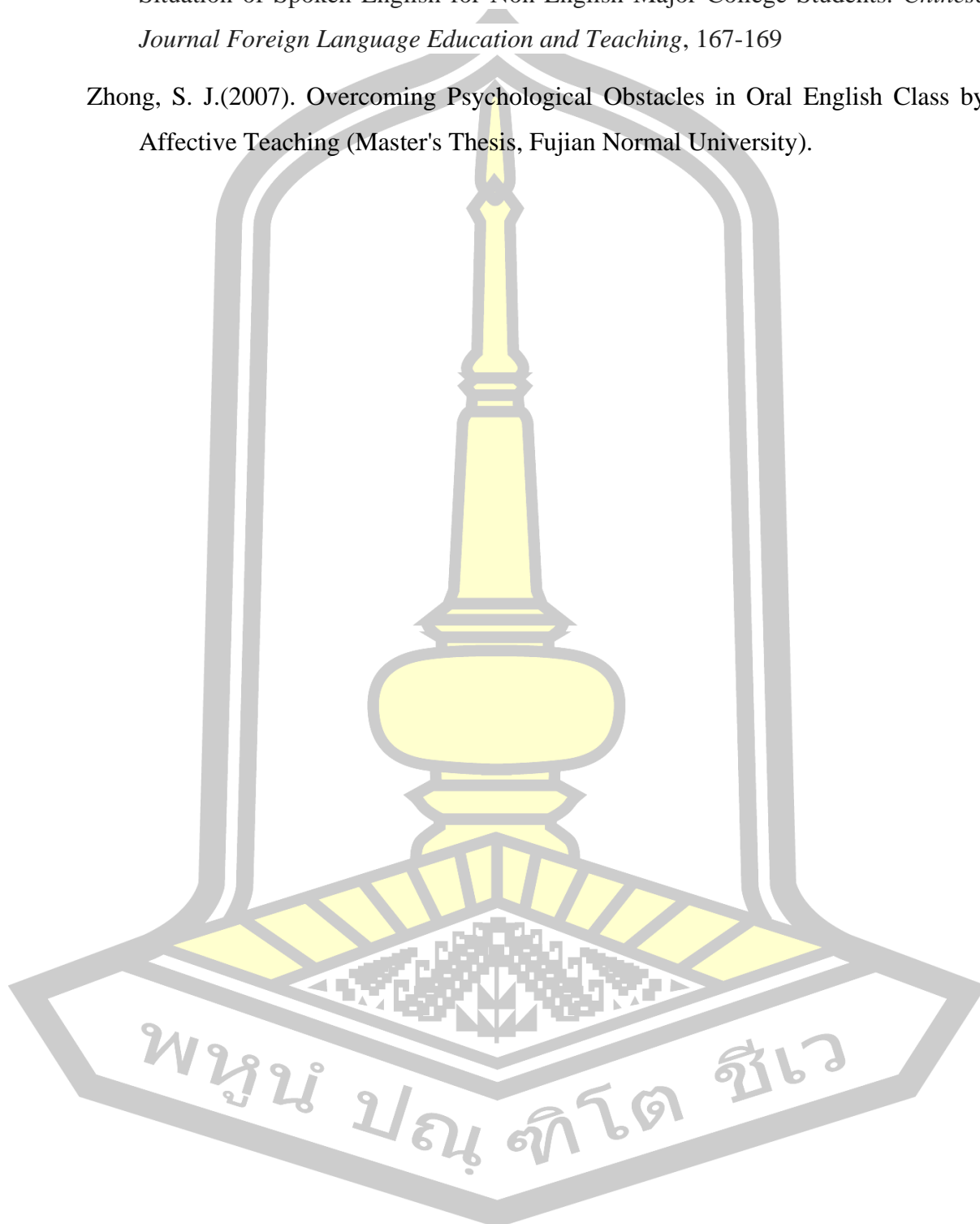
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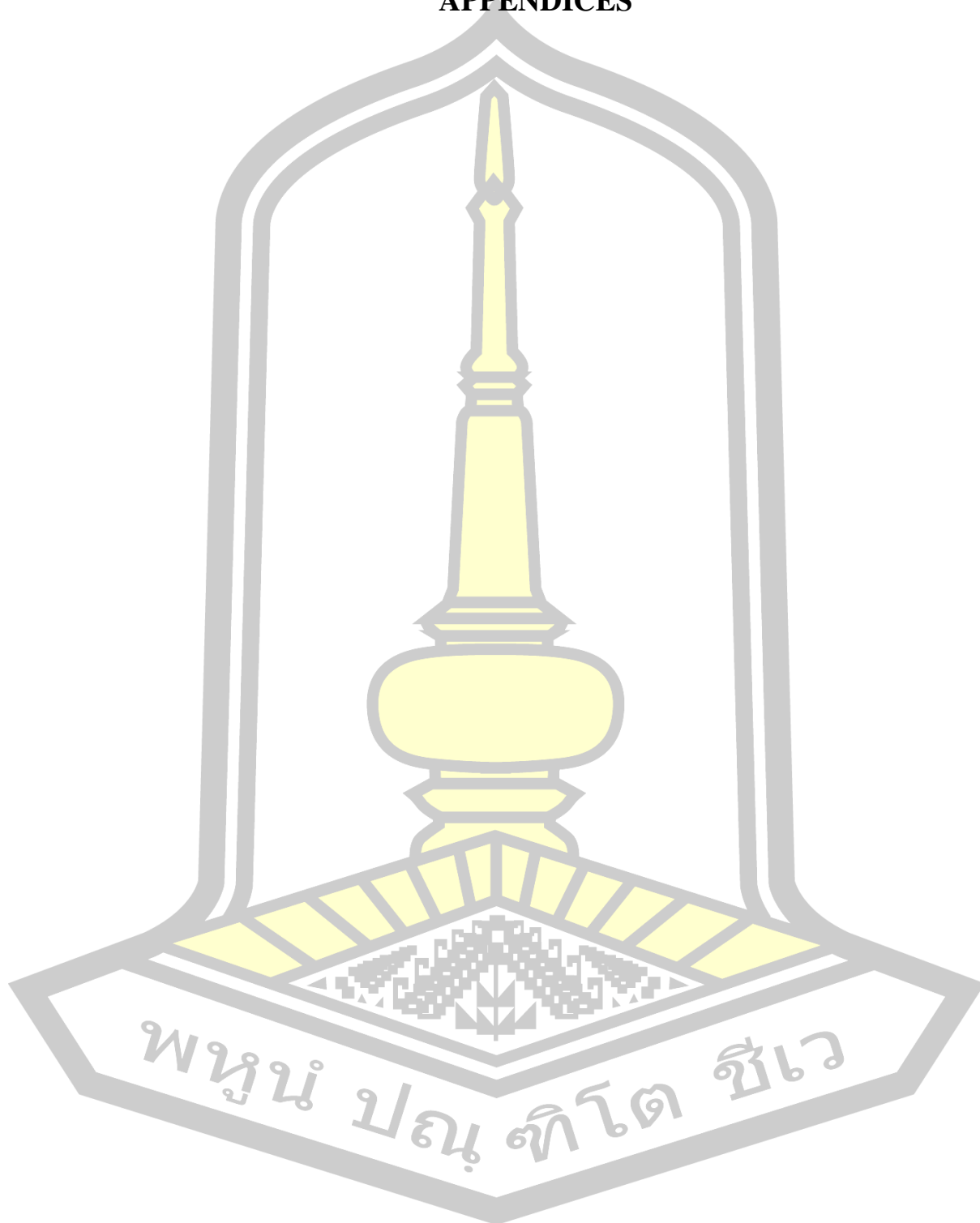
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## APPENDICES



## Appendix A: Speaking Difficulties Questionnaire

Hi! I would like to invite you to participate in this questionnaire which is concerned with your English speaking difficulties. In order to understand the difficulties you have encountered in English speaking, and to help you improve the accuracy and fluency of English speaking, we set up this speaking difficulties questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is to collect demographic information. The second part is questions regarding general perception of your speaking difficulties in classroom. There are no right or wrong options in this survey. Please fill in the information truthfully. Thank you very much!

### Part 1: Background information

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long have you been studying English?

A: 0-5 years

B: 6-10 years

C: 11-15 years

D: 16-20 years

E: > 21 years

4. What is the frequency of opportunities to use English with foreigners

A: always

B: often

C: sometimes

D: almost not

5. How is your the level of English speaking proficiency?

A: I can communicate with foreigners without obstacles

B: I can understand what the other person is saying, but I can't express it myself

C: I can only have simple everyday conversations

D: I hardly dare to speak

6. How satisfied are you with your current English speaking level?

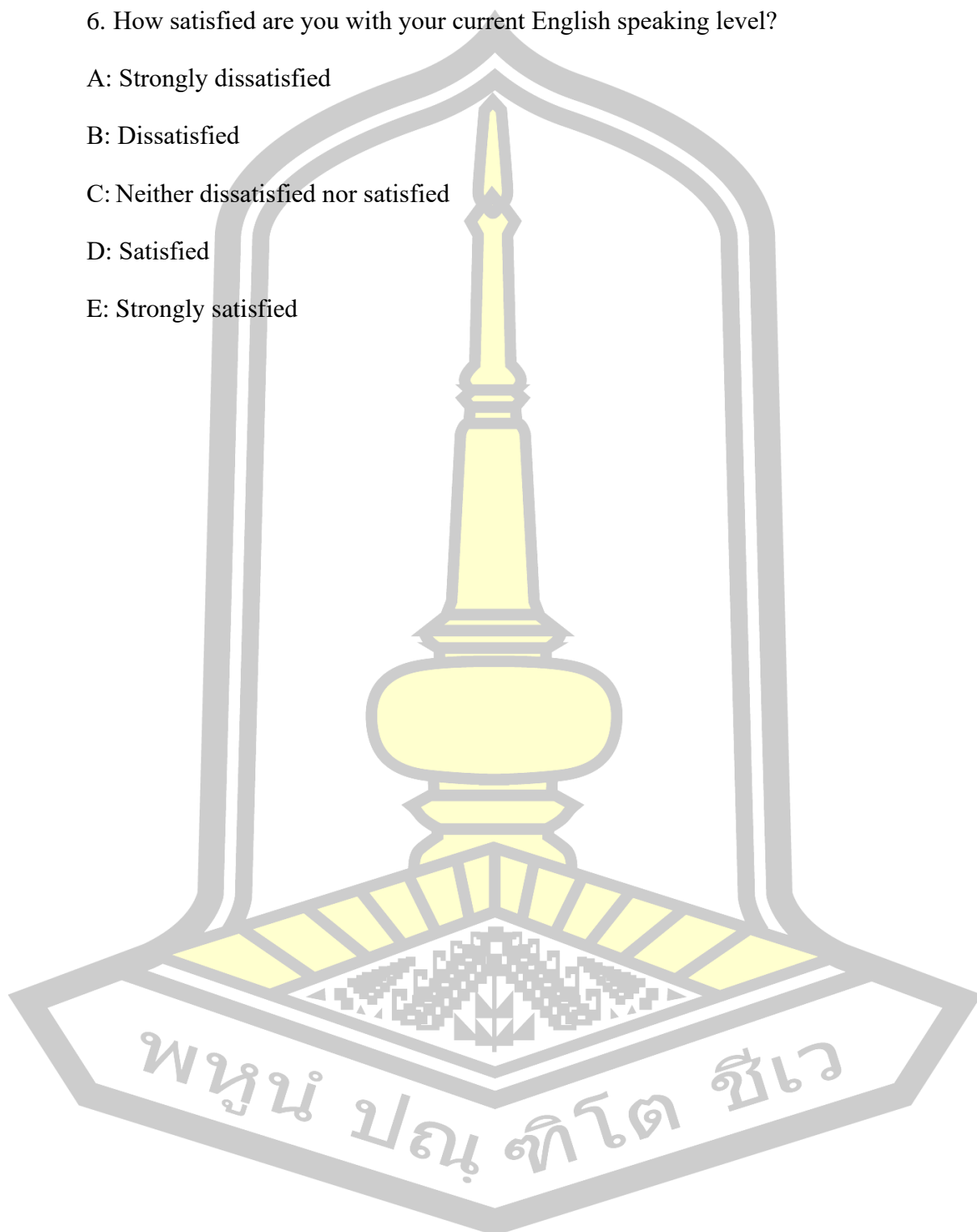
A: Strongly dissatisfied

B: Dissatisfied

C: Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied

D: Satisfied

E: Strongly satisfied



## Part 2: Speaking Difficulties

The speaking difficulties questionnaire is developed by Shen & Chiu (2019). To complete, read each sentence carefully and consider if it applies to you. Mark "√" in the table that applies to you most. Please respond to all questions.

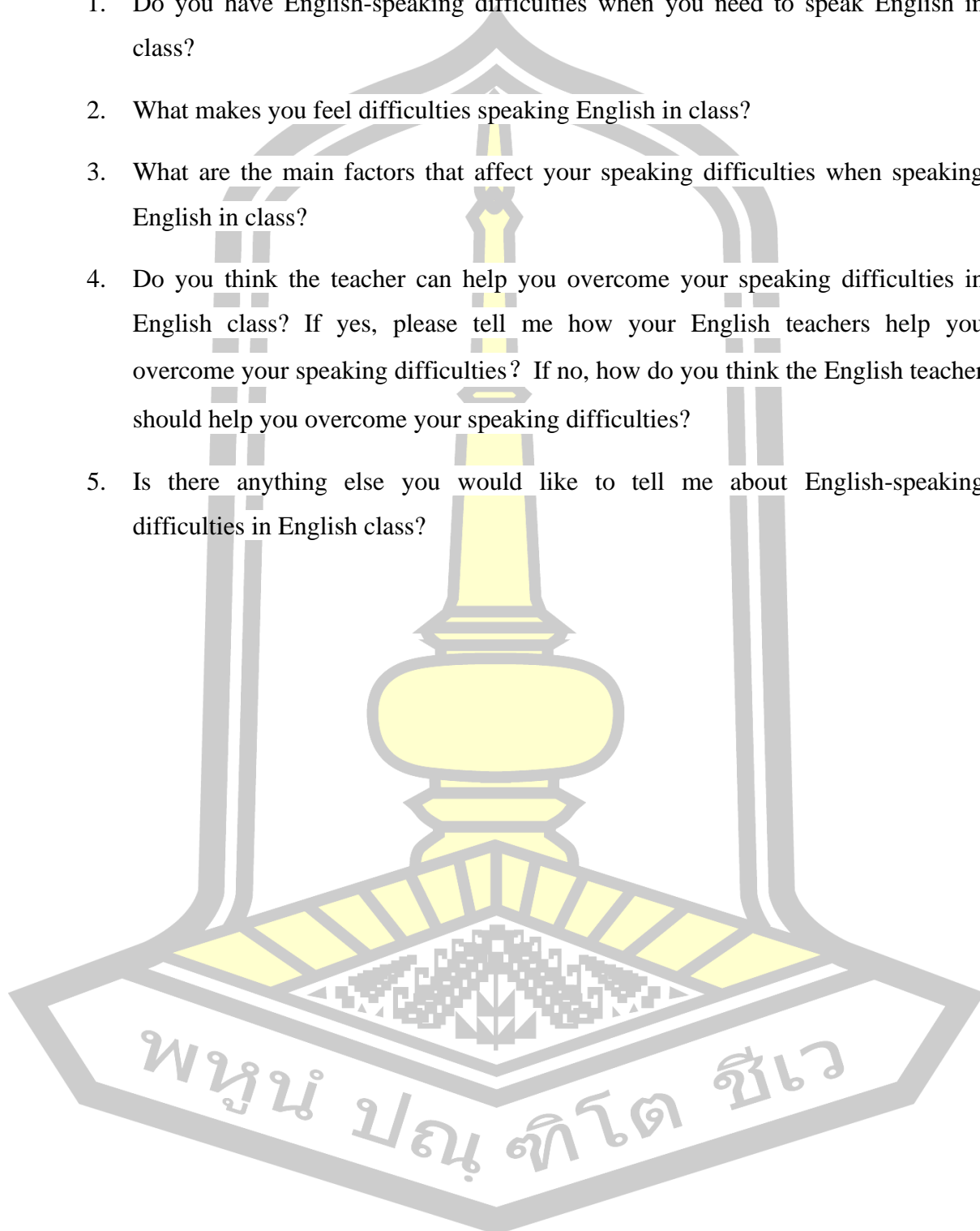
No.	Items	Rating				
		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
<b>Section one</b> (Linguistic Factors)						
1	I find it difficult to speak English because of my insufficient vocabulary					
2	I find it difficult to speak English because of my insufficient grammar					
3	I find it difficult to speak English because of my inaccurate pronunciation					
4	I find it difficult to speak English because of my insufficient expressions					
5	I find it difficult to speak English because of talking intermittently					
6	I find it difficult to speak English because of my insufficient sentences organization					
<b>Section two</b> (Psychological Factors)						
7	I find it difficult to speak English because of fear of making mistakes					
8	I find it difficult to speak English because of peer pressure					
9	I find it difficult to speak English because of nervousness					

No.	Items	Rating				
		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
10	I find it difficult to speak English because of stuttering					
11	I find it difficult to speak English because of lack of confidence					
12	I find it difficult to speak English because of worries about not being understood					
13	I find it difficult to speak English because of timidity and low volume					
<b>Section three</b> (Learning Environment Factors)						
14	I find it difficult to speak English because of infrequent English conversation					
15	I find it difficult to speak English because of learning environment with less support					
16	I find it difficult to speak English because of insufficient practice					
17	I find it difficult to speak English because of Insufficient resources					
18	I find it difficult to speak English because of low participation in class					

พหุ ประถมศึกษา

**Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview**

1. Do you have English-speaking difficulties when you need to speak English in class?
2. What makes you feel difficulties speaking English in class?
3. What are the main factors that affect your speaking difficulties when speaking English in class?
4. Do you think the teacher can help you overcome your speaking difficulties in English class? If yes, please tell me how your English teachers help you overcome your speaking difficulties? If no, how do you think the English teacher should help you overcome your speaking difficulties?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about English-speaking difficulties in English class?

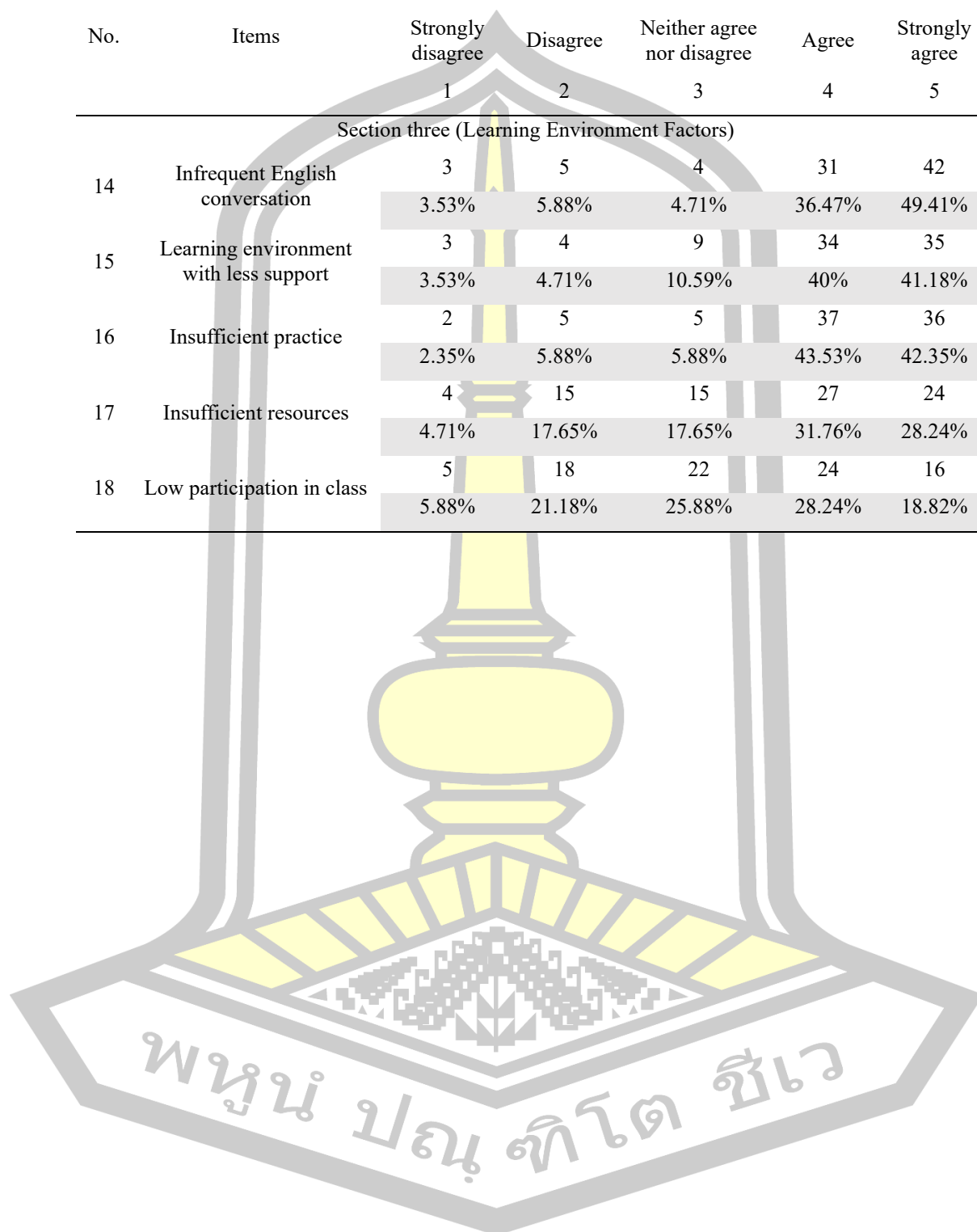




### Appendix C: Frequencies and Percentages of English Speaking Difficulties Items

No.	Items	Rating				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
Section one (Linguistic Factors)						
1	Insufficient vocabulary	0	4	8	45	28
		0%	4.71%	9.41%	52.94%	32.94%
2	Insufficient grammar	0	9	12	38	26
		0%	10.59%	14.12%	44.71%	30.59%
3	Inaccurate pronunciation	4	14	17	28	22
		4.71%	16.47%	20%	32.49%	25.88%
4	Insufficient expressions	1	5	9	40	30
		1.18%	5.88%	10.59%	47.06%	35.29%
5	Talking intermittently	1	7	7	37	33
		1.18%	8.24%	8.24%	43.53%	38.82%
6	Insufficient sentences organization	0	10	5	33	37
		0%	11.76%	5.88%	38.83%	43.52%
Section two (Psychological Factors)						
7	Fear of making mistakes	3	19	17	26	20
		3.53%	22.35%	20%	30.59%	23.53%
8	Peer pressure	7	29	9	27	13
		8.24%	34.12%	10.59%	31.76%	15.29%
9	Nervousness	5	24	14	26	16
		5.88%	28.24%	16.47%	30.59%	18.82%
10	Stuttering	10	32	11	18	14
		11.76%	37.65%	12.94%	21.18%	16.47%
11	Lack of confidence	5	24	14	30	12
		5.88%	28.24%	16.47%	35.29%	14.12%
12	Worries about not being understood	5	18	13	32	17
		5.88%	21.18%	15.29%	37.65%	20%
13	Timidity and low volume	6	32	17	21	9
		7.06%	37.65%	20%	24.71%	10.59%

No.	Items	Rating				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
Section three (Learning Environment Factors)						
14	Infrequent English conversation	3	5	4	31	42
		3.53%	5.88%	4.71%	36.47%	49.41%
15	Learning environment with less support	3	4	9	34	35
		3.53%	4.71%	10.59%	40%	41.18%
16	Insufficient practice	2	5	5	37	36
		2.35%	5.88%	5.88%	43.53%	42.35%
17	Insufficient resources	4	15	15	27	24
		4.71%	17.65%	17.65%	31.76%	28.24%
18	Low participation in class	5	18	22	24	16
		5.88%	21.18%	25.88%	28.24%	18.82%



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