

## On-site and Online Classroom Activities and Thai EFL Learners' Language Anxiety before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The present study has been conducted in order to study the classroom activities and the levels of learning anxiety of the third-year English majors both who show high academic performance (HAP) and low academic performance (LAP), before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers have compared the different levels of the students' anxiety and the effects of classroom activities on the students during both periods. The participants of the study were 114 third-year English majors from two public universities in Thailand: 1) Southern University (SU) and 2) Northeastern University (NEU) (the university names used are pseudonyms). The number of HAP students was 57, and the remaining 57 students showed LAP. To collect the data, the researchers adopted a questionnaire and an in-depth interview as data collection tools. The questionnaire was administered to 114 students, and four of whom voluntarily participated in the interview session - two of whom held HAP while the other two had LAP.

The results showed that before the pandemic, both HAP and LAP students similarly experienced the activities in the aspect of participation mode activity most often. The least often experienced activities for those with HAP were speaking activities, but ones for the LAP students were reading activities. During the pandemic, the HAP students most often experienced the participation mode activities while those with LAP experienced all types of classroom activities at a moderate level. However, the two groups were similar in that they experienced speaking activities the least. In terms of the level of English learning anxiety, both groups similarly had overall learning anxiety at a high level both before and during the pandemic. However, the data revealed that their levels of English learning anxiety before the outbreak were statistically significantly different, but the two groups had the similar levels of learning anxiety during the pandemic. In terms of the effects of classroom activities on the English majors, the data showed that the activities used before the pandemic including speaking activities (i.e., oral presentations and reading pronunciation) and taking exams (scheduled exams and pop-up quizzes) affected both groups similarly. This was because they were nervous and excited about being in front of the class while doing speaking tasks and they were worried about their marks when taking exams. However, two activities including 1) being unexpectedly called on and 2) group work had different effects on the two groups. That means only LAP students experienced anxiety when being randomly called on while group work only increased the learning anxiety of those with HAP. In addition, the activities causing both groups to have learning anxiety during the pandemic were doing group work, being called on randomly, online listening, and doing activities with evaluations. The data revealed the two causes of the anxiety that were 1) the problems about online communication and being unacquainted with other members when doing group work and 2) their unfamiliarity with the foreign teachers' accent and pronunciation. In addition, the results revealed online presentations can reduce both groups' learning anxiety while online examinations could reduce only LAP English majors' learning anxiety.

**Keywords:** learning anxiety, classroom activities, COVID-19 pandemic, English major

## 1. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic started spreading from Wuhan, China across the countries around the world including Thailand. Since Thailand had been impacted by the outbreak, the government has operated under a state of emergency decree since March 2020. Therefore, to prevent and control the spread, all venues have been temporarily closed, events and festivals have been cancelled, and public gatherings and the entry or use of buildings have been prohibited (Chutarong, Zhang, & Koetwibun, 2022). The Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESRI) has responded to the decree by prohibiting on-site teaching, so every class had to be taught online instead. Teachers had to adjust, change, or adapt both their teaching and the classroom activities to online classes effectively (Khan, Alnmer, Khan, Khan, & Zulfqar, 2022; Mohammed & Mudhsh, 2021; Satsin & Wongwisukul, 2021; Sompakdee, Chompurach, Thanamaimas, & Kotmungkun, 2021).

During the pandemic, online teaching and learning had been applied because they are more productive and able to prevent an infection through limited personal contact (Phanchamlong, Manee, Watwiset, Nuangchalerm, & Prachagool, 2021). In language classrooms, several teachers have been applying new information technologies to motivate their students' learning, such as online board games, online language learning programs, YouTube videos, online machine translation, etc. (Chompurach, 2021). To manage their online classes well, several teachers applied the online classroom management programs. The most used platform was Google Classroom while less popular programs were Zoom, Schoology, Edmodo, Moodle, Google Meet, and Whatsapp, respectively (Fitria, 2020). Also, Fitria (2020) found that Kahoot, Quizlet, Plickers, and Memrise were used to help arrange online class activities including quizzes and work assignments. However, some scholars noted that since the rapid and immediate change from face-to-face teaching and learning to online ones, those online classes affected English language learners' anxiety (Khan et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2021).

Anxiety is "an unpleasant emotion" (Hilliard, Kear, & Donelan, 2019, p. 2), and it has been the subject of much scholarly research. Language anxiety is the negative feeling of being worried, feeling hesitant, being confused, feeling uncertain about their own skills, feeling scared, and feeling stressed (Arnold, 1999). In terms of learning, the anxiety does affect language learners (Bashori, Hout, Strik, & Cucchiarini, 2021; Halder, 2018; Kamarulzaman, Ibrahim, Yunus, & Ishak, 2013; Lou & Noels, 2020; MacIntyre, 1999; Sanguanpong, 2007; Williams & Burden, 1997; Young, 1999). The previous studies reported that when having language anxiety, learners with a high level of anxiety would receive lower grades than ones with a low level of anxiety (MacIntyre, 1999), learners would avoid using English in classes (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), and those with a high level of anxiety would have problems about language perception and application (MacIntyre, 1999). Adversely, Bailey (1987 as cited in Brown, 1994) noted that learning anxiety could help language learners master language learning. This particular anxiety is called facilitative anxiety. If language learners experience this anxiety, they will be depressed, want to compete with themselves, and be motivated. So, they will have inspiration to learn languages by themselves (Bailey, 1983; Csikszentmihayi, 1975). Moreover, Resnik, Moskowitz, and Panicacci (2021) found that the anxiety could enhance a motivated learner's interests and enjoyment of their studying, so they would not give up on their studying easily. Not only could the anxiety positively affect students' language learning, but it also could have negative effects on language learners. Therefore, language teachers have to consider their choices thoughtfully or decide which classroom activities should be applied to their classrooms both online and on-site.

Reviewing the literature, the researchers found a lack of research study on both classroom activities and language learning anxiety. The previous studies have been focused only on language learning anxiety (Kamarulzaman et al., 2013; Khoshaim, Al-Sukayt, Chinna, Nurunnabi, Sundarasan, Kamaludin, Baloch, & Hossain, 2013; Phanchamlong et al., 2021). Moreover, only the limited number of studies has compared the levels of the language learning anxiety and its effects on English language students before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Thailand. Therefore, the present study has been conducted to fill these gaps. So, the findings would shed light on Thai English major students' language learning anxiety and the classroom activities they experienced before and during the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, these could be used as one evidence in language teaching improvement and in understanding EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' learning anxiety.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- (1) To study the classroom activities the third-year English majors both with high academic performance (HAP) and with low academic performance (LAP) experienced before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (2) To study the levels of both HAP and LAP English majors' anxiety before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (3) To compare the different levels of learning anxiety between HAP and LAP English majors before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (4) To compare the effects of classroom activity use on both HAP and LAP English majors' learning anxiety before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1.2 Research Questions

To achieve research objectives set, the researchers have posed these research questions.

- (1) What were the classroom activities that both HAP and LAP English majors from the two public universities experienced in the classrooms before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (2) What levels of learning anxiety did both HAP and LAP English majors from the two public universities experience in the classrooms before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (3) What were the differences in learning anxiety levels between HAP and LAP English majors before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (4) How did classroom activities affect learning anxiety of both HAP and LAP English majors before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### 1.3 Conceptual Framework

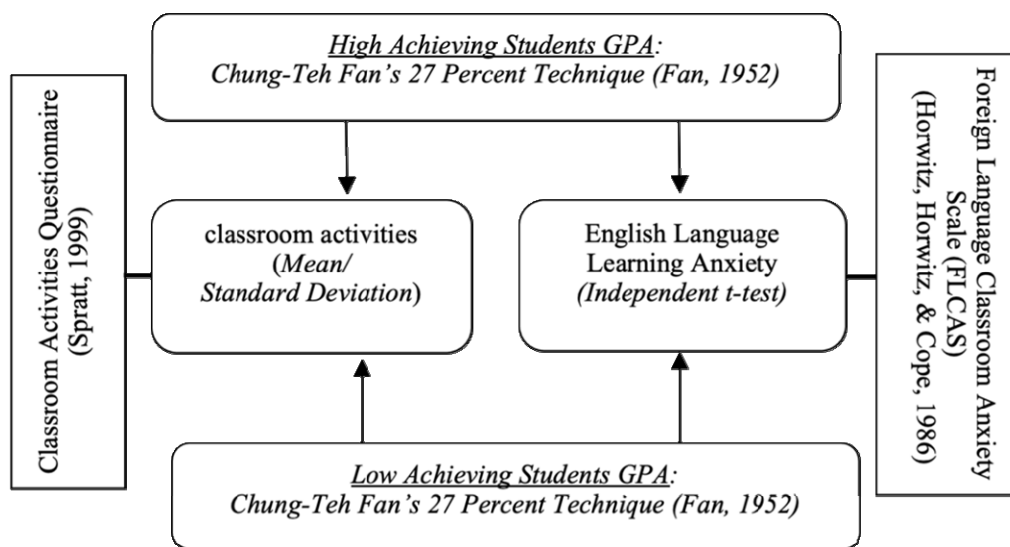


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the research and the research procedure to study classroom activities and English language learning anxiety experienced by the two groups of the students. There are two main theories in this research: classroom activity by Spratt (1999) and English learning anxiety by Horwitz et al. (1986). Research tools used in the study were 1) the classroom activity questionnaire developed by Spratt (1999) to study the classroom activities experienced by the students with high and low academic achievement levels before and during COVID 19 and 2) the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to study the levels of language learning anxiety of the two groups of students before and during the pandemic.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Samples of the Study

The samples to complete the questionnaire were 114 third-year English major students, divided into 57 high achieving students and 57 low achieving students from a public university in the south (SU) and a public university in the Northeast of Thailand (NEU). The researchers compared the sample size by using Yamane's tables (Yamane, 1970) and selected the samples by purposive sampling. The researchers divided the samples according to their GPAs (Grade Point Average) following Chung-Teh Fan's 27 percent technique (Fan, 1952) and increased the reliability of the research by adding up the number of the samples from 27% to 30% (Bausell & Li, 2002) as seen in the table below.

Table 1. Sample Size Based on Yamane's Table (Yamane, 1970)

Institution	The Amount of		Academic Achievement			
			27%		30%	
	Populations	Samples	High	Low	High	Low
SU	160	114	31	31	34	34
NEU	92	75	20	20	23	23
Total	252	189	51	51	57	57

Note. The institution names both SU and NEU are pseudonyms. SU=a public university in the southern part of Thailand; NEU= a public university in the northeastern part of Thailand

The participants who gave in-depth interviews were four third year English major students divided into two HAP students (one student per university) and two LAP students (one student per university).

### 2.2 Data Collection Tools

This research is mixed-method research with two types of data collection tools which are a questionnaire and an interview as mentioned below.

#### 2.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire can be divided into three parts: 1) general information, 2) classroom activity related questions developed by Spratt (1999), and 3) language anxiety related questions developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986). Before employing the questionnaire, the researchers asked for permission from the owners of the related questionnaire questions above and conducted a pilot test with an experimental group of individuals with similar traits to the real sample. Regarding section 2, classroom activity related questions, the questionnaire contains 28 items, divided into six categories: (1) speaking, (2) reading, (3) listening, (4) writing, (5) testing, and (6) participation mode. The evaluation criteria to identify classroom activities the samples experienced before and during the COVID-19 pandemic is in form of a five-point Likert scale including always or almost always (5), generally or often (4), sometimes or occasionally (3), generally not or seldom (2), never or almost never (1). In addition, the researchers applied the criteria or the concept of Punpinij (1990) to measure the level of experienced activities as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Criterias for Measuring the Level of Experienced Activities

Criteria	Average Rating
Never or almost never	1.00-1.50
Generally not or seldom	1.51-2.50
Sometimes or occasionally	2.51-3.50
Generally or often	3.51-4.50
Always or almost always	4.51-5.00

Classroom activity questions used in this study were both reliable and valid as seen in the study of Spratt (1999) and of Rasek and Valizadeh (2004). Spratt (1999) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the classroom activity questionnaire as 0.99 among 997 students and 0.80 among 50 teachers. Rasek and Valizadeh (2004) also reported the reliability of their classroom activity questionnaire as 0.92. For the current research, three experts related to the current study were invited to examine the IOC (The Index of Item-Objective Congruence) to verify the validity of the questionnaire. It was reported the validity at 0.85 meaning the questions were consistent with the

objectives of the study.

Concerning section 3, English language learning anxiety related questions were developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) containing 33 items with three categories which are 1) communication apprehension, 2) fear of negative evaluation, and 3) test anxiety. The evaluation criteria to identify the anxiety of the samples before and during the COVID-19 epidemic is in form of 5-point Likert scale covering strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The research team has criteria for measuring anxiety levels according to the concepts of Piniel (2006) and Lugossy, Horváth, and Nikolov (2009) (in Table 3) into two levels, high and low.

Table 3. Criteria for Measuring the Level of Language Learning Anxiety (Piniel, 2006; Lugossy, Horváth, & Nikolov, 2009)

Level	Measuring Criteria	Total score	Average score
High	Generally anxious – Highly anxious	100 – 165	3.01 – 5.00
Low	Never anxious – Slightly anxious	33 – 99	1.00 – 3.00

The FLTA questionnaire used in this study was both reliable and valid as seen in the study of Horwitz, et al. (1986) and of Aida (1994). Horwitz, et al. (1986) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire as 0.93 and the test-retest reliability as 0.83 ( $p < .01$ ). Aida (1994) also reported the reliability of the questionnaire as 0.94 and the test-retest reliability as 0.80 ( $p < .01$ ). For the current research, the three experts related to the current study were invited to examine the IOC (The Index of Item-Objective Congruence) to verify the validity of the questionnaire. It was reported the validity at 0.91 meaning the questions were consistent with the objectives of the study.

#### 2.2.2 Interview

The interview questions were divided into two parts: 1) questions about the learning experience and activities conducted in English-related subjects in the classroom before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) the effects causing language learning anxiety from those classroom activities before and during the pandemic. To improve the validity and reliability, the specialists both in Thai (the semi-structured interview was done in Thai to suit the prospective context) and in the related field of the current study were invited to examine 1) whether the language use was precise, not ambiguous, and clear and 2) whether the questions aligned with the research objective number 4. After the revision, the pilot study was done with two English major students having similar traits to the real samples. Then the researchers improved the interview questions based on the piloting results.

#### 2.3 Ethical Issues

The present research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, the following issues were met: 1) participation was purely voluntary; 2) the participants were adequately informed about the research objectives and information as well as their rights; 3) upon their agreement to take part in the study, the participants were required to sign informed consent forms; 4) before the interviews, the researchers asked the participants for permission to do audio recordings; 5) in reporting the findings, the researchers used pseudonyms in order to preserve the participants' privacy and identities including their names and institutions.

#### 2.4 Data Analysis

##### 2.4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The researchers used a statistical package called SPSS (or Statistical Package for Social Science) to analyze the data taken from the classroom activity questionnaire and the English learning anxiety questionnaire. Descriptive statistical analysis including mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the data and to answer the research questions number 1 and 2 while inferential statistical analysis covering independent *t*-test was used to analyze the data and answer the research question number 3.

##### 2.4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the interview data by adopting open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to answer the research question number 4. The interview data were collected from the students with HAP and LAP in order to obtain comprehensive and complete information.

According to Table 4, the four third-year English major students voluntarily participated in the in-depth interviews, and the interviews were between 25.56 – 28.53 minutes. Pseudonyms were used in place of the students' names in order to protect their privacy and identities.

Table 4. Interviewee Demographic Information

Institution	Pseudonym Names	Age	Gender	Academic Achievement	Interview Time (min)
SU	John	21	Male	High	25.56
SU	Gloria	21	Female	Low	27.32
NEU	Leo	21	Male	High	26.45
NEU	Gina	21	Female	Low	28.53

Note. Both institution names and the interviewee names are pseudonyms.

After the interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by employing Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open and axial coding.

### 3. Results

Results of the study will be presented in four sections based on the research questions:

#### 3.1 What were the Classroom Activities both HAP and LAP English Majors from the Two Public Universities Experienced in the Classrooms before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Table 5. Classroom Activities Used before the Pandemic

Activity	HAP students			LAP students		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Reading	2.43	0.501	Seldom	2.12	0.489	Seldom
Speaking	2.33	0.594	Seldom	2.20	0.569	Seldom
Listening	3.71	0.873	Often	3.60	0.840	Often
Writing	3.74	0.901	Often	3.55	0.876	Often
Examination	3.78	0.910	Often	3.55	0.803	Often
Participation mode	3.94	0.936	Often	3.72	0.924	Often
	$n = 57$			$n = 57$		

According to Table 5, the research findings showed that before the pandemic the students with HAP had often experienced most types of classroom activities. The type of activities the HAP students experienced most often was found in the aspect of participation mode activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.94$ ) (e.g., individual work), followed by examination ( $\bar{x} = 3.78$ ) (e.g., doing tests with scores), and the least often experienced activities for HAP students were speaking activities ( $\bar{x} = 2.33$ ) (e.g., group presentations). Meanwhile, the students with LAP also had often experienced most types of classroom activities. The type of activities the LAP students experienced most often was found in the aspect of participation mode activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.72$ ) (e.g., group work), followed by listening activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.60$ ) (e.g., listening to teachers explain about various skills, such as how to write a report in the language aspect). In addition, the type of classroom activities that LAP students experienced least often was found in reading activities ( $\bar{x} = 2.12$ ) (e.g., silent reading).

Table 6. Online Classroom Activities Used during the Pandemic

Activity	HAP students			LAP students		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Reading	3.42	0.926	Sometimes	3.19	0.799	Sometimes
Speaking	3.18	0.987	Sometimes	3.02	0.987	Sometimes
Listening	3.50	0.955	Sometimes	3.31	0.939	Sometimes
Writing	3.48	1.982	Sometimes	3.45	0.988	Sometimes
Examination	3.58	0.966	Often	3.35	0.982	Sometimes
Participation mode	3.62	1.205	Often	3.43	1.077	Sometimes
	$n = 57$			$n = 57$		

From Table 6, the research findings showed that during the pandemic the students with HAP had an average level of experience in most types of classroom activities. The type of activities the HAP students most often experienced was found in the aspect of participation mode activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ) (e.g., individual work), followed by testing activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.58$ ) (e.g., doing tests with scores) while the least often experienced type of classroom activities was found in speaking activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.18$ ) (e.g., a group presentation). For the students with LAP, they had average levels of experience in all types of classroom activities. The type of activities the LAP students most often experienced was found in the aspect of writing activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ) (e.g., writing related homework that is writing a letter, a memo, a summary, or a report), followed by participation mode activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.43$ ) (e.g., individual work), and the type of activities the LAP students least often experienced was found in speaking activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.02$ ) (e.g., a group presentation).

### 3.2 Which Levels of Learning Anxiety did both HAP and LAP English Majors from the Two Public Universities Experience in the Classrooms before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Table 7. Levels of the Students' English Learning Anxiety before the Pandemic

English Learning Anxiety	HAP students			LAP students		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Overall	3.08	0.661	High	3.40	0.476	High
	n = 57			n = 57		

According to Table 7, the HAP English majors experienced overall learning anxiety at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.08$ ) before the pandemic. In terms of the anxiety types, the data showed the HAP students experienced the highest level of communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when doing presentations in front of the class without preparation) followed by fear of negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., being nervous when English teachers asked questions that they did not prepare for) and test anxiety (e.g., being excited when being randomly called on to answer questions), respectively. For those with LAP, they also experienced overall learning anxiety at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ) before the pandemic. The LAP students experienced the highest level related to fear of negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., being nervous when English teachers asked questions that they did not prepare for) followed by communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when doing presentations in front of the class without preparation) and test anxiety (e.g., being excited when being randomly called on to answer questions), respectively.

Table 8. Levels of the Students' English Learning Anxiety during the Pandemic

English Learning Anxiety	HAP students			LAP students		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Overall	3.21	0.729	High	3.38	0.521	High
	n = 57			n = 57		

From Table 8, the HAP English majors experienced overall learning anxiety at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.21$ ) during the pandemic. In terms of the anxiety types, the students experienced the highest level of communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when doing presentations in front of the class without preparation) followed by test anxiety (e.g., being excited when being randomly called on to answer questions) and fear of negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., being nervous when English teachers asked questions that they did not prepare for), respectively. In terms of those with LAP, they similarly experienced overall learning anxiety at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.38$ ) during the pandemic. The data reported those LAP students experienced the highest level of fear of negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., being nervous when English teachers asked questions that they did not prepare for) followed by communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when doing presentations in front of the class without preparation) and test anxiety (e.g., being excited when being randomly called on to answer questions), respectively.

### 3.3 What were the Differences in Learning Anxiety Levels between HAP and LAP English Majors before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Table 9. Comparison of the Students' English Learning Anxiety Levels before the Pandemic

English Learning Anxiety	HAP students		LAP students		Independent t-test		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	df	P
Before the Pandemic	3.08	0.661	3.40	0.476	-2.915	112	.004*
	n = 57		n = 57			n = 114	

The Table 9 shows the comparison of the HAP and LAP English majors' learning anxiety before the pandemic. The data reported the level of learning anxiety before the pandemic statistically significantly related to the students' learning achievement at the .01 level. This means that the HAP students and the LAP students experienced different levels of learning anxiety which had a statistically significant difference at the .01 level.

Table 10. Level Comparisons of each Learning Anxiety Type before the Pandemic

Types of English Learning Anxiety	HAP students		LAP students		Independent t-test		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	df	P
Communication apprehension	3.12	0.724	3.38	0.519	-2.254	105.196	.026*
Test anxiety	3.06	0.642	3.36	0.468	-2.833	112	.005*
Fear of negative evaluation	3.07	0.800	3.50	0.613	-3.229	112	.002*
	n = 57		n = 57			n = 114	

According to Table 10, the data items presented are the level comparisons of the HAP and LAP English majors' learning anxiety types. Before the pandemic, the level of learning anxiety statistically significantly related to the students' learning achievement at the .05 level. This means the HAP and LAP students experienced different levels of learning anxiety statistically significant at the .05 level. Those types of anxiety included communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when doing presentations in front of the class without preparation or lack of confidence in English speaking), followed by test anxiety (e.g., being excited when being randomly called on to answer questions or being afraid of not being able to keep up with their friends) and negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., fear of being laughed at when speaking English and being nervous when English teachers asked questions that they did not prepare for), respectively.

Table 11. Comparison of the Students' English Learning Anxiety Levels during the Pandemic

English Learning Anxiety	HAP students		LAP students		Independent t-test		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	df	P
During the Pandemic	3.21	0.729	3.38	0.521	-1.464	112	.146
	n = 57		n = 57			n = 114	

The Table 11 shows the comparisons of the HAP and LAP English majors' learning anxiety before and during the pandemic. The results revealed that the levels of the learning anxiety did not statistically significantly relate to the students' learning achievement at the .05 level. This means the HAP students and the LAP students experienced the similar levels of learning anxiety which did not have a statistically significant difference at a .05 level.

Table 12. Level Comparisons of each Learning Anxiety Type during the Pandemic

Types of English Learning Anxiety	HAP students		LAP students		Independent t-test		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	df	P
Communication apprehension	3.29	0.748	3.41	0.571	-0.942	107.900	.348
Test anxiety	3.21	0.727	3.33	0.500	-1.110	103.119	.270
Fear of negative evaluation	3.08	0.903	3.45	0.649	-2.486	105.387	.014*
	n = 57		n = 57			n = 114	

Table 12 presents the level comparisons of the HAP and LAP English majors' learning anxiety types. During the pandemic, the data revealed there was only one type of anxiety i.e., negative evaluation anxiety statistically



significantly relating to the students' academic achievement at the .05 level. The other two types of anxiety including communication apprehension anxiety and test anxiety did not relate to the students' learning achievement at the .05 level. This means the HAP students and the LAP students had the statistically significantly different levels of negative evaluation anxiety (e.g., fears of being laughed at when speaking English and thoughts that others could do better than they could). However, both HAP and LAP students experienced similar levels of communication apprehension anxiety (e.g., being nervous when talking in English with native speakers and being nervous when speaking English in the classroom) and test anxiety (e.g., being more stressful and worried about English learning than other subjects) which did not have statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

### *3.4 How did Classroom Activities Affect Learning Anxiety of both HAP and LAP English Majors before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

#### 3.4.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Before the pandemic, classroom activities concerning practicing speaking skills (i.e., doing an oral presentation and reading aloud to the class) and the examinations (i.e., scheduled tests and pop-up quizzes) caused English majors both with HAP and LAP to feel anxious. For other activities, the data showed only the LAP students had anxiety when being called on randomly by a teacher. Also, working in a group could reduce the LAP students' learning anxiety whereas it increased the HAP students' anxiety.

##### (1) Classroom Activities as Causes of English Majors' Learning Anxiety

The researchers found that various types of the classroom activities could increase the students' anxiety, such as speaking activities, examinations, being unexpectedly called upon, and group work.

###### a. Speaking Activities

In terms of speaking activities, both HAP and LAP students experienced learning anxiety. These activities included oral presentations and reading aloud. Leo a student with HAP from NEU said he was nervous and excited when being in front of his teacher and classmates. This did affect his presentations, so he could not perform as well as he had practiced. Leo said,

"Effects of this activity, right? Yes, there are. When standing in front of the class, I mean being in front of the teacher and my friends, I felt nervous and anxious. This affected my presentation. It might not be as good as I've practiced."

Similarly, Gina a LAP student from NEU said when being in front of the class, she was anxious and afraid of making mistakes. Gina said,

"While doing presentations, I felt excited and anxious because I'm afraid of making mistakes or unexpectedly laughing. Being in front of many people, I was excited. So, I was afraid of mispronouncing words. Then others wouldn't understand me."

Moreover, the analyzed data showed reading aloud in front of the class was a source of the learning anxiety for many students. John a student with HAP from SU said that this task made him felt anxious because he could not pronounce some words correctly. He said, "I kinda felt anxious because I cannot read some words". This showed that both HAP and LAP students were anxious about speaking activities because when being nervous or anxious, they were afraid of making mistakes.

###### b. Examinations

For classroom examinations, these activities, both in the form of scheduled tests and pop-up quizzes, could increase the HAP and LAP students' learning anxiety. The findings showed that the students were anxious when taking the tests because they had to prepare themselves well since the activities affect their grades and marks. Gina a LAP student from NEU said,

"I felt stressed because it affected my grades and everything. It's quite hard. It took a lot of time to read, but it couldn't help me understand the lessons. I had to cram for the exam. During those days, I felt depressed and exhausted."

Also, the students had anxiety when taking the tests because of the time limitation. For pop-up quizzes, Gloria a LAP student from SU said that she felt anxious when doing a pop-up quiz because she did not prepare herself well. So, she could not do it. To sum up, both the students with HAP and LAP felt anxious when taking exams because they had to prepare themselves well for it, it affected their grades, and the time provided to take the test was limited.

### c. Being Unexpectedly Called Upon

In terms of being randomly called on, the activity only made the two LAP students feel anxious. Gloria said that this activity made her feel anxious because if she could not answer correctly, the teachers' feeling and the class atmosphere would be negatively impacted. This was similar to Gina's view. She thought that she felt anxious because it would be embarrassing if she could not answer her teacher's question, or the teacher might blame her for this. Therefore, being called randomly by their names on to answer questions increased the LAP students' learning anxiety. This was because they were worried about not being able to answer the questions, and it would negatively impact the teacher's feeling and the class atmosphere and make them feel embarrassed.

### d. Group Work

The data showed working as a group could increase HAP students' anxiety but decrease the anxiety of the LAP students. John one of the HAP students said he felt anxious because other members did not cooperate enough but received the same marks as he did. For those with LAP, Gina and Gloria revealed doing a group presentation could reduce their anxiety because they could ask other members for help.

## 3.4.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the pandemic, the results showed both HAP and LAP English majors experienced various types of online classroom activities that could increase and decrease their learning anxiety.

### (1) Online Class Activities Increasing English Majors' Learning Anxiety

The data showed that online classroom activities including group work, doing tasks in which they were evaluated, and being unexpectedly called upon affected English majors' learning anxiety.

#### a. Online Group Work

The findings showed both HAP and LAP students from the two universities had learning anxiety when doing online group work. This was because of the problem regarding online communication among members, and this also affected their work efficiency. Leo a HAP student from NEU said,

“For an individual assignment, I can do it anytime. For group working, gathering other members together to work was hard because I had to work with unfamiliar classmates or strangers. We may not get along with each other as well as those ones we are acquainted to.”

Leo's view agrees with John's. John a HAP student from SU said teachers should assign individual work instead during the pandemic. Also, the other two students with LAP from NEU (Gina) and from SU (Gloria) felt anxious when being assigned to work not only as a group but also as an individual. This was because they were afraid of making mistakes.

#### b. Being Unexpectedly Called Upon

The data showed the two students from SU, John and Gloria, experienced learning anxiety when being randomly called their names to answer a question in online classes. John found this activity depressing. This was because if he could not answer the question, his friends had to wait until he could. For Gloria, she was nervous and anxious because she worried about not being able to answer the question.

#### c. Online Listening

The results revealed both HAP and LAP students from SU felt anxious when doing online listening activities. In doing an online listening activity, their foreign teacher read them passages or gave them a lecture. Gloria shared, “Sometimes, I could not follow what the teacher said because he speaks too fast but unclearly. And I was not get used to his accent.” Similarly, John said that he was anxious while doing an online listening task because of the teacher's accent and the way he mumbled words or sentences. Therefore, this activity increased both HAP and LAP students' anxiety because they could not understand what their teacher, who was a native speaker, said.

#### d. Being Evaluated

The findings reported that both HAP and LAP students viewed any activities in which they were evaluated could cause them to feel anxious. John a SU student with HAP found himself nervous when doing this type of activity. John said,

“This activity made me feel anxious and nervous because I had to redo a video record several times. Sometimes, I forgot what to say as written in my script, or I stammered. My teacher did not allow me to read the script, and my work would be evaluated following the rubrics, such as the way I speak, my body language or gestures, my appearance, and so on.”

His view is supported by Gina. When doing video recordings, she experienced anxiety because she did not clearly understand what she learned from the online class. So, she could not do it well.

## (2) Online Class Activities Reducing English Majors' Learning Anxiety

The findings reported both HAP and LAP students feel less anxious when doing the following online activities: online presentations and online examinations.

### a. Online Presentations

The present study found that both HAP and LAP students from NEU similarly felt less anxious when doing their online presentations. For Leo, he said that he did not have to worry about making eye contact with the audience, could apply technologies, and could read or look at his notes. Also, Gina thought that she felt more relaxed and was not anxious about making mistakes although she was worried about the Internet and computer issues.

### b. Online Examinations

The data showed both LAP students, Gina and Gloria, from the two universities experienced less anxiety when taking online exams. For Gina, she found that the online exam did not affect her studying. She said,

“Taking online exams did not affect my studying because, as I’ve said, I had more time preparing and reading books for it. It’s like the time was expanded. I was not depressed by the online exam, but taking the on-site one, I was. For the on-site one, I felt both depressed and afraid of not being able to do it. Also, I was anxious about the time.”

Also, Gloria the other student with LAP from SU similarly shared her opinion towards taking online exams. She said, “When taking an online exam, I felt less anxious because sometimes I could search for some information online which could help me answer some questions”. It could be concluded that taking an online exam could reduce the LAP students’ learning anxiety because they had more time to prepare and were not as depressed as they were when taking on-site examinations.

## 4. Discussion

The results from this study can be discussed as follows:

### 4.1 *What were the Classroom Activities that both HAP and LAP English Majors from the Two Public Universities Experienced in the Classrooms before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

#### 4.1.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

The research results showed that the English majors with HAP and LAP similarly often experienced various classroom activities including listening and writing tasks, examination, and participation mode activities. For those with HAP, the activities the students did most often were individual work assignments; however, the tasks rarely done were speaking activities, such as group presentations. For those English majors with LAP, the classroom activities they mostly did were in-class assignments, but they rarely performed reading activities.

Overall findings here differ from the ones reported by Al-Jarf (2021). In the research, the researcher found that English majors in a university in Saudi Arabia, had experience in doing speaking tasks in listening and speaking courses; the most frequently experienced were individual or group assignments. The activities included role-plays, debates, oral presentations, and so on. Also, the present findings are contrary to Pardede’s (2020) study which showed most teachers applied ICT to their English classes.

#### 4.1.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The findings showed both English majors with HAP and LAP experienced most types of online English class activities at a moderate level. The class activities the students with HAP mostly did were individual assignments while they rarely did speaking tasks i.e., oral presentations. For those who had LAP, they mostly did writing activities, such as doing written homework, writing letters or memos, summarizing, and writing reports. On the contrary, they rarely did speaking tasks, including group presentations.

The findings are contrary to the previous studies of Al-Jarf (2021). For Al-Jarf’s, the researcher found that teachers mostly applied the activities, such as speaking activities, presentations, online debates, asking and answering questions, Kahoot games, and so on. Moreover, the results of the present study share some differences and similarities to the findings of Nayman and Bavli (2022). While the present study found that speaking tasks were least used in online classes, Nayman and Bavli (2022) found the teachers applied various speaking and writing online activities to the English classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activities included speaking ones (i.e., discussion, storytelling, drama performance) and writing ones (i.e., brainstorming, demonstrating well written work, writing on authentic subjects).

#### *4.2 Which Levels of Learning Anxiety did both HAP and LAP English Majors from the Two Public Universities Experience in the Classrooms before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

##### *4.2.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The results of the present study showed both HAP and LAP English majors similarly had overall learning anxiety at a high level. The findings are in agreement with Charoensuk, Tantihachai, and Chuai-in's (2022) study, Udomkit's (2003) study, and Nuypukiaiw's (2018) study. According to Charoensuk et al. (2022), the students from every major similarly had a high level of language learning anxiety. Also, Udomkit (2003) found that the students had a high level of language learning anxiety when communicating in English, especially when doing oral presentations in front of the classes. Similarly, Nuypukiaiw (2018) found that the students had a high level of anxiety when learning English. However, the findings of the present study differ from Santikarn's (2020) and Yutthapirut's (2020). Both mentioned studies found that the students had a moderate level of English learning anxiety.

##### *4.2.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The results showed that both HAP and LAP English majors similarly had overall learning anxiety at a high level. These are consistent with data obtained in Islam, Sarkar, Khan, Mostofa Kamal, Hasan, Kabir, Yeasmin, Islam, Amin Chowdhury, Anwar, Chughtai, and Seale (2020) and Khoshaim et al. (2020). For Islam et al.'s (2020) study, they found that 18.1% of the students had a high level of learning anxiety because of online teaching and learning unreadiness and students' financial instability. Also, Khoshaim et al. (2020) found 35% of the students had a high level of anxiety related to their ages, genders, and education levels. However, the findings are not in line with the study of Mohammed et al. (2021) which found that EFL students had a moderate level of learning anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *4.3 What were the Differences in Learning Anxiety Levels between HAP and LAP English Majors before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

##### *4.3.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The levels of anxiety between high and low academic performance students showed a statistically significant difference at the 0.1 level. The findings are in line with Sanguanpong's (2007) study, Halder (2018), and Kamarulzaman et al. (2013). According to Sanguanpong's (2003), the students with HAP had a low level of anxiety while the students with LAP had a high level of anxiety. For Halder (2018) similarly found the negative relationship between English language anxiety and academic performance. This means the LAP students had a higher level of anxiety than the ones with a high level. Also, Kamarulzaman et al. (2013) similarly found the negative relationship between learning anxiety and academic performance which showed that their academic performance would be lower if they had learning anxiety.

##### *4.3.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

During the pandemic, the researchers found that both students with HAP and LAP had a similar level of learning anxiety. This finding confirms the previous study of Bulan Anugrah, Estika Satriani, Algaziah Kurnia Difa, Haura Nadya (2022). In their study, they found the students from the English Language Education Study Program of Universitas Islam Riau had a high level of learning anxiety when speaking English.

#### *4.4 How did Classroom Activities Affect Learning Anxiety of both HAP and LAP English Majors before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

##### *4.4.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The data showed these activities including speaking activities (i.e., oral presentation and reading pronunciation) and taking exams (i.e., scheduled exams and pop-up quizzes) similarly affected both HAP and LAP English majors. This finding is also reported by Diaab (2016) and Jugo (2020). Diaab (2016) found that all samples (n=125) had anxiety when doing speaking activities. Also, the results of Jugo's (2020) study revealed a speaking activity was the main source of high anxiety.

Moreover, the data also revealed some causes of the anxiety mentioned earlier. Those causes were being nervous in front of the class, excited, and afraid of making mistakes i.e., mispronunciation. The findings are consistent with data obtained in Atas's (2014) study which reported that the grade-12 students were anxious and excited when speaking English because of fear of mispronunciation. Also, Demir and Zaimoğlu (2021) similarly found the students had anxiety when doing speaking activities because they were afraid of being in an awkward situation. Therefore, they made some mistakes, such as mispronouncing words, incorrectly ordering sentences, making mistakes on their accents, and so on.

In terms of the examinations, these activities also caused both HAP and LAP English majors to feel anxious. This was because the students were worried about their marks, so they had to study hard to prepare themselves. Moreover, the findings showed that providing limited amount of time to complete an exam made them feel anxious. These results corroborate the findings of Conway's (2007 as cited in Demir & Zaimoğlu, 2021) study revealing the students had learning anxiety when taking an exam because they were afraid of making mistakes. Also, while doing the exam, they could be nervous and have a high level of anxiety when being in a rush.

However, the findings showed two activities that were 1) being unexpectedly called on and 2) group work that had different effects on both HAP and LAP English majors. For the first activity, the data showed being unexpectedly called on only caused the LAP students to feel anxious. The results are consistent with the findings obtained in Pennino, Ishikawa, Hajra, Singh, and McDonald's (2022) study. They found that being randomly called on only affected the LAP students and can increase their learning anxiety. For the second task, English majors with HAP had anxiety when working in a group; however, the activity could reduce the anxiety of those with LAP. This finding was also reported by Pennino et al. (2022) who found that group work could both increase and decrease students' anxiety depending on the types of activities and students' learning proficiency. The present study further found the causes that increase HAP students' learning anxiety and the causes that reduce LAP students' learning anxiety while doing group work. On the one hand, the HAP students were anxious when working in a group because other members did not cooperate enough. On the other hand, the LAP students thought that group work can reduce their anxiety because other members can help each other. The latter finding is consistent with Downing et al.'s (2020) study revealing group working can reduce the students' anxiety if they could work with ones they were familiar with. Also, they can ask for some advice from other members.

#### 4.4.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the pandemic, the activities that caused HAP and LAP English Majors anxiety were group work, being called on randomly, doing online listening, and doing tasks with evaluations. However, the results showed the activities including online presentations and examinations can reduce the students' learning anxiety.

The data showed both HAP and LAP English majors had anxiety when doing group work. The causes reported were problems about online communication, being unacquainted with other members, and following up on the others' work progress. Therefore, the students felt anxious because this activity needed cooperation; moreover, the mentioned problems also affected their working efficiency. The results are in agreement with Hilliard et al.'s (2019) and Phanchamlong et al.'s (2021) findings. The two mentioned studies found the main source of group work anxiety was feeling uncertain because they had to work with unfamiliar people. So, they felt worried about completing an assignment and being evaluated.

In terms of being called on randomly, the findings showed both HAP and LAP English majors felt anxious and depressed. During online classes, the students were unexpectedly called on to practice reading the passage aloud and answer the teacher's questions. They could not do it because of anxiety and depression. The findings are similar to the previous studies of Resnik et al. (2021) and Pennino et al. (2022). According to Resnik et al. (2021), one of the factors increasing students' online learning anxiety was being randomly asked to answer questions. It did not only increase anxiety in language learners but also for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) learners. For Pennino et al. (2022), they found that the students had a high level of anxiety when they have to unmute their microphone while doing online activities. On the contrary, they felt less anxious when doing these activities, including completing online polls and answering questions via Zoom chatting. The data from the present study also revealed the reason why they were anxious being called on in online classes. Particularly, the reason was that they felt nervous about answering questions because they did not concentrate in the online classroom. Moreover, Pennino et al.'s (2022) study reported being distracted by students' surroundings during the pandemic was a major obstacle to participating in online classes.

For the online activities concerning listening skills, the data showed both HAP and LAP English majors had anxiety in performing those activities. The findings revealed the causes of the anxiety that were 1) being unskilled and 2) not being used to the foreign teacher's accent and pronunciation.

Furthermore, both HAP and LAP English majors had learning anxiety when doing the activities with assessments. In this study, the analyzed data showed how differently the two groups coped with this anxiety. For the HAP students, the anxiety made them try harder for better marks. On the contrary, those with LAP perceived that they did not understand the previous lessons, so they did not have to try to do better or improve. These findings support the previous studies (Hilliard et al., 2019; Resnik et al., 2021). The two mentioned studies found that when having learning anxiety, students dealt with it differently. This was because the learning anxiety impacted each student differently. Resnik et al. (2021) noted the students with a high passion and perseverance

enjoyed online classes more, did not give up easily, and were able to deal with challenging or difficult situations better.

Not only did the online activities increase their learning anxiety, but some online classroom activities also reduced the HAP and LAP English majors' anxiety. Those online classroom activities were online presentations and online examinations. The data showed three reasons why online presentations made them feel less anxious: 1) they could apply technologies for the presentations; 2) they did not have to worry about making eye contact; 3) they felt more comfortable and less afraid of making mistakes although there were some Internet issues. However, the findings do not support the previous research (Amrullah et al., 2022; Pennino et al., 2022; Phanchamlong et al., 2021). Pennino et al. (2022) found that the students had more anxiety when participating in any intrusive tasks that they had to be seen or heard by others and interact with others directly. Moreover, the Internet issues caused students in Amrullah et al.'s (2022) and Phanchamlong et al.'s (2021) studies to have more anxiety.

In terms of online examinations, the results showed these examinations could reduce only the LAP English majors' learning anxiety. The examinations included Google forms and class assignments found less anxiety inducing because they had more time to prepare themselves. The findings are in agreement with Fitriyah and Jannah's (2021) study. Their research reported that students with lower scores felt less anxious when taking an exam although they felt uncertain about their answers and the Internet connection. This was because taking online exams was more flexible in terms of time, and the students could look at their notes. However, those results differ from Pennino et al.'s (2022) findings. The researchers found that 20% of the students who used a lockdown browser to do their exams had a high level of anxiety.

## 5. Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, and Recommendations

The present study was conducted to explore classroom activities and their effects on the anxiety of third-year Thai English majors with HAP and LAP before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results reported that the most often used tasks in the English classrooms before the pandemic were in the aspect of participation mode activities and during the pandemic were the same type, followed by writing tasks while speaking tasks were rarely used. For the levels of the students' anxiety during both periods, the HAP students felt the most anxious about doing presentations while those with LAP experienced anxiety at a high level when doing activities that they could receive negative evaluation. Also, the data showed both speaking tasks (i.e., oral presentations) and examinations could increase both groups' learning anxiety before the pandemic; however, one of those tasks, i.e., online presentations, could reduce both HAP and LAP students' anxiety during the pandemic.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the findings shed some light on how classroom activities affect Thai English majors' anxiety. Therefore, these could be used as references for language teachers in designing or developing effective teaching and learning classroom activities, in decision making on which types of classroom activities should be applied or used to their classrooms, and in understanding the Thai English major students' learning anxiety. Moreover, the related stakeholders could apply the research results to handle the possible impact of COVID-19 pandemic and prepare suitable lessons and activities for EFL classes.

With some limitations of the present study, the researchers would suggest the further study to 1) apply the observation method to help paint a clearer picture of teaching and learning environments; 2) study the types of class activities reducing English learning anxiety in both on-site and online classrooms; and 3) increase the amount of the sample size and the variety of learners' majors.

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