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Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety of Thai High School Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) of Thai EFL high school students and discover a significant difference of the foreign language anxiety among students in terms of group and gender. Six hundred and five Thai EFL learners from different educational backgrounds of English language teaching and learning: (a) Mini English Program (MEP), (b) Gifted Program, and (c) Normal program, completed a 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCA). The findings revealed that the students have moderate level of foreign language classroom anxiety, and indicated significant differences for group but not gender.

Keywords: Language learning, Anxiety, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

Introduction

In Thailand, although English is used and taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), it has played an important role in Thai education for more than a century due to a large and rising demand for a high proficiency of English. The study of English in Thailand is becoming importance and prevalence. As the world is changing and becoming more globalized, it has brought changes to Thai educational system. Thai students begin learning to read, write, listen to and speak English during their first year of school. English as a foreign language (EFL) program has widely broad its importance in primary and secondary schools. English as a core component of curriculum has been accepted by both public and private high school. This EFL program is offered in which foreign teachers are involved. Those foreign teachers teach English language lessons and other subjects at least three hours per week. Coming from the traditional Thai educational system to these EFL programs is a big change for the Thai students, in terms of teaching methods, context, and tasks.

Objectives of the study

According to Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, English is proposed as a core and compulsory subject for Thai students in grade 1 to 12, whereas other foreign languages are entirely taught as one schools' discretion. Moreover, the Ministry of Education has aimed to reform education in order to encourage learners to communicate and learn effectively. Despite the Thai government adopting English as a subject area, as well as pushing high schools and universities to teach more practical English skills, Thailand's English proficiency remains low. According to the Ordinary National Tests (ONET), the results of the 2015 national test in English showed that the average scores in each grade level were under 50; they were 33.82, 30.35, and 23.44, respectively. This indicates that despite Thai students spending more than 12 years studying in primary and secondary school, their proficiency are still reported as being low. That might be Thai students may have difficulties in learning and using English. According to Krashen (1982), "affective filter" is considered as the main obstacle, which block learners to succeed in second language acquisition. The

affective variables relate to success in second language acquisition falls into threefold; motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Krashen also pointed out that anxiety is the factor, which show a strong relationship to second language acquisition. In addition, Brown (2007) reveals that anxiety is the key factor affecting a successful in second or foreign language learning. Besides, Garcia (1998), claims that anxiety could occur in people’s learning processes. It is an obstacle for learners in academic learning. According to the various findings (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Aida, 1994), foreign language learning anxiety has been considered as a key factor influencing language learning.

According to the various findings (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Aida, 1994), foreign language learning anxiety has been considered as a key factor influencing language learning. Therefore, with the present problem of Thais’ English proficiency, the researcher aimed to explore foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) of Thai EFL secondary school students, and discover a significant difference among the foreign language anxiety of students in term of group and gender.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, two research questions were formulated:

1. What is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety level of secondary school students?
2. Is there a significant difference of the foreign language anxiety among students in term of group and gender?

Methodology

Participants

The subjects consisted of 605 secondary students at Saipanya Rangsit School who studied in grade 10, 11, and 12 in the first semester of academic year 2016. They were selected because they are in different educational backgrounds of English language teaching and learning. The total number included 605 students consisting of 240 males (39.7%) and 365 females (60.3%) who are studying Mini English Program (MEP), Gifted Program, and Normal Program at three different grade levels.

Instrument

The instrument used in collecting the data for this study is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Horwitz et.al, (1986) first developed an instrument called FLCAS (Foreign Language Anxiety Scale). It is often used as an instrument to measure the level of anxiety.

A questionnaire adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) generated by Horwitz et al. (1986) consisted of 33 items measuring foreign language anxiety in classroom. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-1 Likert Scale (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree). The 33 items questionnaire with three types of foreign language anxiety in a classroom are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1
Questionnaire Measuring Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Type of FLCA	Item number on questionnaire	Total quantity of items
Communication apprehension	1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29,	11
Fear of negative evaluation	2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, 33	7
Test anxiety	3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17,	15
Total		33

Data collection

The data collection collected through a questionnaire in February 2017 and lasted about three weeks. The 676 copies of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety questionnaire were distributed but only 605 were responded.

Data Analysis

The data acquired from the questionnaire, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was analyzed using t-test, one-way ANOVA via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 software program. The analysis of t-test was used to define whether there was a significant difference in the level of foreign language classroom anxiety between genders. Also, the analysis of one-way ANOVA was administered to determine whether there were differences in the level of foreign language classroom anxiety according to their groups. In addition, the collected data was coded according to the research questions.

Literature Review

The development of a theoretical model of language anxiety by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was a very important step forward in the study of anxiety in language learning. They also defined foreign language anxiety (FLA) as “a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et.,al,1986, p.128). They have divided foreign language anxiety (FLA) into three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. They proposed the three models as conceptual “building blocks” of the anxiety construct called foreign language anxiety.

a) Communication apprehension

It refers to a type of shyness, fear, or anxiety when communicating with people. The more people have trouble speaking in a group, the more they have difficulty in speaking in foreign language classes.

b) Test Anxiety

In addition, test anxiety is when one worries about a poor performance on a test or evaluation. Students who are test-anxious in foreign language classes are likely to experience difficulty in foreign language learning.

c) Fear of Negative Evaluation

Lastly, fear of negative evaluation refers to apprehension about making mistakes, and the fear of negative evaluation from the others in the classroom. Even though the fear of negative evaluation is similar to test anxiety, it does not only manifest in test-taking. It may occur in any social evaluative situation.

To date, foreign language anxiety (FLA) among EFL learners has been widely investigated and reported by many researchers (e.g Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Aida, 1994). An investigation conducted by Horwitz et.,al (1986) on the foreign language classroom anxiety experienced by language learners has been influential among many researchers, and found to be reliable and valid.

Based on the research done in Thailand, Pongpun and Sarobol (2012) studied students' anxiety in learning English at Wall Street Institute, Pinklao. This empirical article focused on investigating the level of anxiety in English language learning, among Thai EFL learners who had enrolled at Wall Street Institute. 60 intermediate-level students participated in this study. The results showed that the students experienced a moderate degree of anxiety in English language learning. Moreover, it revealed that the highest levels of anxiety (mean score = 4.03) were found with item 10, “I often feel like not going to take a test in my

English class". On the other hand, the lowest levels of anxiety (mean score = 2.97) were found with item 20, "I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.

It can be concluded that anxiety is a significant problem for Thai learners. Results showed that a large proportion of language learners experienced anxiety in the classroom and foreign language anxiety significant and negative correlation coefficient between the students' anxiety levels and their examination performance.

The researcher is interested in investigating foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) of Thai EFL secondary school students in order to discover whether they experience the same problems.

Findings

The results of foreign language classroom anxiety

The findings revealed that the students have moderate anxiety level with the mean of 3.01. Table 2 reveals the level of anxiety of the participants. It shows the means and standard deviations for each Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety items. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety items were listed from the high to the low according to the mean scores in order to show the level of anxiety.

Table 2

Means and Standards Deviations of each questionnaire items (N=605)

ITEM	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety
5	3.69	1.234	High anxiety
9	3.48	1.198	Moderate anxiety
22	3.46	1.063	Moderate anxiety
7	3.35	1.134	Moderate anxiety
28	3.34	1.064	Moderate anxiety
23	3.28	1.104	Moderate anxiety
32	3.27	1.119	Moderate anxiety
10	3.27	1.268	Moderate anxiety
8	3.25	1.063	Moderate anxiety
14	3.22	1.156	Moderate anxiety
2	3.21	0.982	Moderate anxiety
33	3.19	1.155	Moderate anxiety
11	3.17	1.144	Moderate anxiety
18	3.15	1.038	Moderate anxiety
24	3.09	1.150	Moderate anxiety
1	3.02	1.185	Moderate anxiety
16	3.01	1.147	Moderate anxiety
29	2.95	1.137	Moderate anxiety
20	2.91	1.151	Moderate anxiety
15	2.89	1.074	Moderate anxiety
3	2.88	1.147	Moderate anxiety
6	2.88	1.063	Moderate anxiety
27	2.87	1.173	Moderate anxiety
12	2.83	1.105	Moderate anxiety
4	2.79	1.153	Moderate anxiety
30	2.76	1.167	Moderate anxiety
13	2.74	1.106	Moderate anxiety
25	2.72	1.145	Moderate anxiety

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ITEM	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety
31	2.65	1.191	Moderate anxiety
19	2.61	1.076	Moderate anxiety
21	2.59	1.221	Moderate anxiety
26	2.53	1.201	Moderate anxiety
17	2.42	1.145	Little anxiety
Total	3.01	1.135	Moderate anxiety

Note: The mean of the items in questionnaire ranged from 1.00 to 5.00, indicating a little to a high level of anxiety.

When considering the levels of anxiety by each types, the students reported communication apprehension than others with the mean of 3.04, indicating moderate anxiety. The students were fear of negative evaluation in a target language at a moderate level with the mean of 3.01, and test anxiety with the mean of 3.00 as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Level of Foreign Language Anxiety in each types

Type	Mean	S.D	Level of Anxiety
Communication apprehension	3.04	1.141	Moderate anxiety
Fear of negative evaluation	3.01	1.107	Moderate anxiety
Test anxiety	3.00	1.144	Moderate anxiety

The results of foreign language classroom anxiety among group

Table 4

One way ANOVA to test difference of Communication Apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and Test Anxiety among groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between group	20.079	2	10.040	37.755	.000
Within group	160.079	602	.266		
Total	180.158	604			

Consequently, it can conclude that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety have significant impact on foreign language classroom anxiety among group of students in Gifted, Mini English, and Normal programs ($F=37.755$, $P=0.000<.05$).

The results of foreign language classroom anxiety in terms of gender

The difference in the foreign language classroom anxiety in terms of genders was investigated through inferential statistics by using independent samples t-test. Contrary to the result which showed in terms of group, it reveals that there is no statistically significant difference ($p=.938$) in the foreign language classroom anxiety in terms of genders. It can also be seen from the means score that both female and male students experience a moderate level of anxieties. In addition, the results suggested that the female participants were found to be more prone to experiencing with fear of negative evaluation with the mean of 3.01.

Table 5

Communication Apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and Test Anxiety in terms of gender

Communication apprehension	Gender	N	Mean	P [sig.(2-tailed)]
	Male	240	3.04	.895
	Female	365	3.04	
Fear of negative evaluation	Gender	N	Mean	P [sig.(2-tailed)]
	Male	240	2.99	.651
	Female	365	3.01	
Test anxiety	Gender	N	Mean	P [sig.(2-tailed)]
	Male	240	3.00	.607
	Female	365	2.98	
Total	Gender	N	Mean	P [sig.(2-tailed)]
	Male	240	3.01	.938
	Female	365	3.01	

Discussion

The objective of this study have been to explore foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) of Thai EFL secondary school and to examine a significant difference of the foreign language anxiety among students in term of group and gender. In this chapter, the first part presents a discussion of the results based on the research questions. This study was concluded to answer two questions as follows:

1. What is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety level of secondary school students?
2. Is there a significant difference of the foreign language anxiety among students in term of group and gender?

Research Question 1: What is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety level of secondary school students?

It was found that students had moderate anxiety in foreign language classroom anxiety with a mean of 3.01 (SD = 1.135). The students reported a moderate level of communication apprehension than others, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety with the mean of 3.04, 3.01, and 3.00 respectively. Communication apprehension was found to be the major cause of anxiety among Thai secondary students. Respondents showed that the FLCA questionnaire on item of "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class" led them to feel apprehensive and anxious with the mean of 3.48. It can be said that generally Thai secondary students in this study are moderate anxious about oral communication in English. This indicate that the Thai secondary students in this study indeed had the feeling of anxiety in their English classroom. The finding of such results perhaps because these students live in monolingual country where all routine activities can be successfully made through their mother tongue and they have a little chance to expose to oral communication in English in their daily life. Therefore, they are likely to be nervous when having to speak in English. Although, these students have learned English from their programs, their English language skills are not good enough. It can be said that this leads to anxiety when students have to

make oral production in English. This anxiety is considered situation-specific, especially in classroom situations in which learners are particularly stressful (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference of the foreign language anxiety among students in term of group and gender?

The findings indicated significant differences for group but not gender. Since the significance level of t-value 0.938 is greater than the significance level of 0.05, it is inferred that there is no significant difference in the total foreign language anxiety scores between male and female of Thai High School students with respect to gender. However, the results suggested that the female participants were found to be more prone to experiencing with fear of negative evaluation with the mean of 3.01. On the contrary, males have higher foreign language anxiety of test anxiety with the mean of 3.00. Therefore, it can be concluded that both males and females are not confident in their abilities to learn foreign language well. Moreover, they were anxious about and discouraged by tests. Anxiety is the key factor affecting a successful in a second or foreign language learning (Brown, 2007).

Another notable finding of the study was the significant impact on foreign language classroom anxiety among group of students in Gifted, Mini English, and Normal programs. In Mini English Program (MEP), this program provides at least 17 classes a week learning English and the students learn English with native English speaking teachers, while other subjects such as science, mathematics, and computing are also taught in English. Also, the gifted program differs from Mini English and Normal programs because it is employed the Intensive Communication English Program (ICEP) three classes a week and taught by native English speaking teachers. Moreover, compared with Normal program, students employed at least 4 classes a week on speaking and listening courses with native English-speaking teachers. Meanwhile, the reading and writing courses are taught by both Thai and native English-speaking teachers. Therefore, it indicates that the students indeed experience with the foreign language classroom anxiety. The results can be concluded that students in Normal program are more anxious than in other classes due to the learning environment was not allowed them to communicate adequately and answer teacher's question in class. In addition, during the period of data collection was the final examination, so this is the reason why they experienced fear of negative evaluation.

Conclusion

This paper has presented some findings of Thai High School Students' foreign language classroom anxiety. It was found that students experienced foreign classroom anxiety in moderate level, especially communication apprehension. It also found that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety have significant impact on foreign language classroom anxiety among group of students in Gifted, Mini English, and Normal programs. Contrary to the result, which showed in terms of group, it reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the foreign language classroom anxiety in terms of genders.

Based on the previous related studies, anxiety is a significant problem for foreign language learners. The major results showed that language learners experienced anxiety in the classroom and foreign language anxiety significant and negative correlation coefficient between the students' anxiety levels and their examination performance. Similar to the finding of this study, it can be concluded that Thai high school students experienced the same problem of the foreign language classroom anxiety.

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Appendices

Questionnaire (Thai version)

แบบสอบถามความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศ

แบบสอบถามฉบับนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสารนิพนธ์มหาบัณฑิตเรื่อง “การศึกษาความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย” ผู้วิจัยจึงใคร่ขอความร่วมมือจากท่านในการตอบแบบสอบถามฉบับนี้ให้ตรงกับความคิดเห็นของท่านมากที่สุด ทั้งนี้ ข้อมูลที่ได้จากแบบสอบถามจะถูกเก็บไว้เป็นความลับ ไม่มีผลต่อการประเมินคะแนนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ และจะนำไปใช้เพื่อการวิจัยเท่านั้น ขอขอบพระคุณทุกท่านที่ให้ความร่วมมือไว้ ณ โอกาสนี้ด้วย

นางสาว วิไลนุช แสนเชื่อน

นิสิตปริญญาโท สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ

ตอนที่ 1. ข้อมูลทั่วไปของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม

คำชี้แจง โปรดทำเครื่องหมาย ✖ หน้าข้อความที่เป็นจริงเกี่ยวกับท่าน

1. เพศ

- () ชาย
() หญิง

3. ประเภทของห้องเรียน

- () นักเรียนห้องเรียนพิเศษ Gifted
() นักเรียนห้องเรียนพิเศษ MEP
() นักเรียนห้องเรียนปกติ

2. ระดับชั้น

- () มัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4
() มัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 5
() มัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6

14. ผู้ไม่มีมีความกังวลเมื่อต้องพูดภาษาอังกฤษกับชาวต่างชาติ							
15. ผู้รู้สึกสับสน เมื่อผู้ไม่มีเข้าใจสิ่งที่อาจารย์พูดทางด้านภาษาให้ฟัง							
16. ถึงแม้ว่าฉันจะเตรียมตัวมาดีแล้วฉันยังคงรู้สึกกังวลอยู่ในชั้นเรียน							
17. ฉันมักจะรู้สึกไม่สบายใจกับวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ							
18. ผู้รู้สึกว่ามีสิ่งรบกวนใจภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียน							
19. ฉันมักจะกลัวว่าอาจารย์จะขโมยข้อผิดพลาดทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษของฉัน							
20. ผู้รู้สึกว่าทำใจลำบากตอนเรียนภาษาอังกฤษตอนอยู่ในชั้นเรียน							
21. ยิ่งฉันอ่านหนังสือสอบวิชาภาษาอังกฤษมากเท่าไร ผู้ไม่มีเข้าใจมากขึ้นเท่านั้น							
22. ฉันมักจะรู้สึกสับสนที่จะเตรียมตัวที่จะสอบวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ							
23. ฉันมักจะรู้สึกว่าเพื่อนนักเรียนคนอื่นพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้ดีกว่าฉัน							
24. ผู้รู้สึกประทับใจที่ต้องอภิปรายภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียน							
25. ผู้รู้สึกว่าครูสอนวิชาภาษาทำให้ฉันมีกำลังใจที่จะอ่านหนังสือในชั้นเรียน							
26. ผู้รู้สึกสับสนกับคำศัพท์ที่ฉันเจอในชั้นเรียน วิชาภาษาอังกฤษมากกว่าในชั้นเรียนวิชาอื่นๆ							
27. ผู้รู้สึกกังวลและสับสนเมื่อต้องพูดภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียน							
28. เมื่อฉันกำลังจะไปเรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ฉันรู้สึกมีสิ่งรบกวนใจ							
29. ผู้รู้สึกว่าฉันต้องอ่านหนังสือให้ตัวเองฟังในชั้นเรียน							
30. ผู้รู้สึกว่าฉันต้องอ่านหนังสือให้ตัวเองฟังในชั้นเรียน วิชาภาษาอังกฤษมากกว่าในชั้นเรียนวิชาอื่นๆ							
31. ผู้รู้สึกว่าฉันต้องอ่านหนังสือให้ตัวเองฟังในชั้นเรียน วิชาภาษาอังกฤษ							
32. ฉันมักจะกังวลเมื่อต้องอ่านหนังสือให้ตัวเองฟังในชั้นเรียน							
33. ฉันมักจะกังวลเมื่อต้องอ่านหนังสือให้ตัวเองฟังในชั้นเรียน							

ขอขอบพระคุณทุกท่านที่ให้ความร่วมมือ