LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study investigated the level and sources of foreign language classroom anxiety among Thai learners of English as a foreign language at the university level. It also aimed to examine the difference between the level of foreign language anxiety and the student's academic performance in English. The study followed an exploratory-sequential design. The data of 195 second-year students from the faculty of education at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University during the school year 2020–21 were gathered through an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), their English class grades, and from an interview. The overall result showed that the Thai language learners had a moderate level of language anxiety in English and identified the fear of negative evaluation as a significant source of anxiety. Most Thai language learners performed better despite anxiety-provoking situations. There was a difference between foreign language anxiety levels and students' academic performance in English. The findings indicate the importance of creating a positive classroom environment and developing teaching strategies to alleviate foreign language anxiety.

Keywords: FLCAS, Language Anxiety, Foreign Language

Introduction

Learning a foreign language needs additional emotional and cognitive efforts. One variable that affects learning an additional language is foreign language anxiety (Abu-Rabia, 2004). In Thailand, foreign language education has multiplied in recent decades, and many English language classes are now available at many schools, ranging from primary to advanced levels. The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (Ministry of Education in Thailand, 2008) for foreign languages in Thailand is designed to help students develop a positive attitude toward foreign languages, as well as the ability to use them to communicate in a variety of situations, seek knowledge, earn a living, and pursue higher education.

Despite the ministry of education's aspirations, the present level of proficiency in most English classrooms in Thailand remains in sharp contrast to the curriculum's stated goals. According to Ashworth (2020), Thailand's English skills have declined for the third year, with a "very low" English language proficiency score. Thailand's ranking has declined from 74 to 89 out of 100 countries in the last year. According to the English Proficiency Index, Thailand received a score of 419 out of 800, which is deemed "extremely low." Thailand is ranked 20th out of 24 Asian countries examined and 7th out of 8 Southeast

Asian countries. According to the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), the newest (Ordinary National Education Test, 2019) results of students who failed remain alarmingly high, with an average score of 29.45 percent for the English subject. Furthermore, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Thai university students' English proficiency levels were at the level of basic users (A1 and A2). These abilities are comparable to those of primary and junior high school students.

Thai students were undeniably straining to acquire a foreign language. Moreover, according to some studies, many Thai pupils struggle with writing, reading, listening, and, most notably, speaking skills (Panthito, 2018; Noom-ura, 2013; Khamprated, 2012). Moreover, they are generally hesitant to talk in English because they fear making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from peers and teachers (Khamprated, 2012). In addition, students had communication anxiety due to a concern of receiving unfavorable feedback, implying that some students were suffering from foreign language anxiety in general.

To explore students' foreign language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Anxiety over learning a foreign language is especially noticeable in the classroom, and anxiety is a powerful predictor of academic achievement. Anxiety has been demonstrated to harm students' self-esteem, confidence, and degree of participation. During spontaneous speaking activities, anxious learners negatively affect their performance, affective reactions, and general attitudes toward learning their target language. Foreign language anxiety is a significant factor in foreign language acquisition. Therefore, this research study would like to investigate the students' foreign language anxiety levels, the sources of their anxiety, and the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic performance.

Research Questions
The study aspired to answer the following research questions:
1. What is the language anxiety level of Thai university students in learning the English language?
2. What is the academic performance of Thai university students in English?
3. Is there a difference in the academic performance of Thai university students in English with a high, mid, or low level of language anxiety?

The hypothesis of the Study
To fulfill problem three of this study, the researcher constructed the null and alternative hypotheses according to the study's assumptions.
**Null Hypothesis*: H_0*: There is no difference between the academic performance of Thai university students in English with a high, mid, or low level of language anxiety.
**Alternate Hypothesis*: H_a*: There is a difference between the academic performance of Thai university students in English with a high, mid, or low level of language anxiety.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on the original foreign language anxiety theory postulated by Horwitz et al. (1986). They provide that language anxiety is composed of the following components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.
The first component is communication apprehension. It is a subtype of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about interpersonal communication. Difficulty speaking in pairs or groups (oral communication anxiety), in public ("stage fright"), or in listening to

or learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety) are all symptoms of communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986). The second component is test anxiety. This arises from a fear of failure and is motivated by a fear of failure. Students who suffer from test anxiety become concerned about and burdened by foreign language tests. Due to the frequent administration of tests or quizzes in foreign language classes, test-anxious students will encounter numerous performance difficulties (Horwitz et al., 1986). The third component is the fear of negative evaluation. This emphasizes how we feel about other people's judgments or expectations. This anxiety is magnified in social evaluation situations, such as interviews, oral presentations, or public speaking contests. Thus, fear of negative evaluation is not limited to classroom test-taking situations. The individual who is fearful of negative evaluations may be susceptible to the perspectives of others in the classroom, including teachers, native speakers, fluent L2 speakers, and peers (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Regarding how the theory is classified, it can be seen that the theory of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) original model of language anxiety is classified in the attempt to combine two perspectives. The first perspective views language anxiety as a manifestation of other forms of anxiety, such as test anxiety and communication apprehension in language learning performances. It views language anxiety as a distinctive form of anxiety, also known as state anxiety, which makes someone nervous about learning a language. The second perspective views language anxiety as the worry and adverse emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language. This anxiety may occur in a specific situation, such as in a classroom context. The situation-specific perspective develops at a specific time due to a particular circumstance (Spielberger, 1983). This theory was converted into a survey questionnaire known as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), categorized into communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These three components identified the reasons for the participants' apprehension when learning a foreign language.

Methodology
Research Design
This research is a mixed-methods study that uses the explanatory-sequential approach. First, quantitative data was collected and analyzed, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. Then, descriptive statistics were applied utilizing mean, standard deviation, variance, frequency, and percentage for the other variables. Furthermore, this research was also conducted using the descriptive-comparative survey method to discover the relationships between variables.

Participants
The participants for this study included second-year undergraduate students under the faculty of education at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University who studied English Usage for Communication (1500103) in the academic year 2020–21. It came up with a final sample of 195 students as participants from a total population of 396 second-year education students.

Research Locale
This study was conducted at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University in Thailand. The Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University (NPRU) offers English subject programs in different areas under the Language Institute (LI). These programs are categorized as old, general, and education curricula.

Instruments

Questionnaire: The instrument used in this study was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The FLCAS was translated into the Thai language to avoid misinterpretations before it was given to the participants. FLCAS included 33 items that measured three dimensions of foreign language learning anxiety. These dimensions were (a) communication apprehension, (b) fear of negative evaluation, and (c) test anxiety. The latest validity-reliability of the scale is highly reliable and effective for being used and was understood to have been carried out by Paneerselvam and Yamat (2021).

Semi-Structured Interview: A list of thirteen open-ended questions was modified from the interview questions developed by Yan and Horwitz (2008) and Price (1991). However, after identifying the participants' foreign language anxiety levels from the FLCAS survey questionnaire, some interview questions were irrelevant to the current results. Therefore, the new interview questions were formulated based on the overall results of the FLCAS. In addition, the modified interview questions had undergone validation from the three experts before they were conducted on the selected participants.

Procedures: The FLCAS questionnaires were delivered and collected at scheduled times online. After identifying the participants' levels of foreign language anxiety, the researcher randomly selected some participants from the high, moderate, and low anxiety groups and contacted each participant for the scheduled online interview with a Thai language teacher. To determine their academic performance, participants' grades in the course English Usage for Communication (1500103) were collected from the instructors of different classes. In this subject, the participants were rated according to the following criteria: speaking and writing tasks, listening assessment, quizzes, oral presentations, and final exam. The researcher identified the grade, achievement, final score, grade point average, and the descriptions of the grade achievement for more clarification of the participants' overall performance. The grading system and grade equivalents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Grading System and Grade Equivalent

Grade	Achievement	Final score (% range)	GPA
A	Excellent	80-100%	4.00
B+	Very Good	75-79%	3.50
B	Good	70-74%	3.00
C+	Fairly Good	65-69%	2.50
C	Fair	60-64%	2.00

Grade	Achievement	Final score (% range)	GPA
D+	Poor	55-59%	1.50
D	Very Poor	50-54%	1.00
E	Fail	0-49%	0.00

Data Analysis

To examine anxiety, the questionnaire was valued according to the Likert Scale with five score levels: 5: strongly agree, 4: agree, 3: neutral, 2: disagree, and 1: strongly disagree. For research problem one, frequency distribution was used using the mean and standard deviation to identify the participants' foreign language anxiety levels in the three components. For research problem two, frequency and computation of the average grade

using the mean were used to identify the overall average grades of participants in English Usage for Communication (1500103). Finally, for research problem three, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the difference in academic performance among students with a high, mid, or low level of language anxiety.

Literature Review

Horwitz et al. (1986) say that language anxiety is a unique set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and actions related to learning a language in a classroom. Also, this is because the process of learning a language is unique. Similarly, MacIntyre (1999) defines foreign language anxiety as feelings of disquiet, tension, worry, anxiousness, and dread when learning or utilizing a second or foreign language. The feelings may originate from any second language situation, whether it involves productive speaking and writing skills or receptive reading and listening skills. Psychologically, anxiety has been categorized into three aspects: 1) trait anxiety, 2) state anxiety, and 3) situation-specific anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Trait anxiety refers to a persistent tendency to become anxious in any situation (Spielberger, 1983). State anxiety is a moment-to-moment experience of anxiety that varies in intensity and duration over time (MacIntyre, 1999). Situation-specific anxiety is similar to trait anxiety but is context-specific. Finally, situational anxiety is persistent over time but is not transferable across situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Foreign language anxiety demonstrates that it has a detrimental effect on foreign language learning. Also, this means that the higher an individual's level of language anxiety, the lower their academic performance will be (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999; Marwan, 2016). Aida (1994) reports a moderate negative correlation between language anxiety and course grades in Japanese language learning among college students. Additionally, Zhao (2007) discovered in her study that anxious students do not achieve much, and their low achievement contributes to their anxiety during the language learning process. Numerous studies demonstrate a negative correlation between language anxiety and proficiency in various courses (e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 1991; Na, 2007; Paranuwat, 2011). Additionally, Gardner, Smythe, and Lalonde (1984, as cited in MacIntyre, 1999, p. 34) argue that language anxiety may be associated with learner perceptions of actual second language competence. In other words, language anxiety can result in impaired performance or low achievement.

According to some research, virtual classes are conducive to such interaction. Ng (2007) gathered qualitative data from interviews with students and tutors at the Open University of Hong Kong regarding using a virtual classroom for tutoring. The participants perceived the virtual classroom as an effective learning environment that aided their L2 acquisition. Lan (2015) discovered that a virtual environment could improve students' English performance and provide an environment conducive to rich student interaction in an experiment with elementary students in Taiwan. Melchor-Couto (2017) discovered that the FLA levels of the virtual learners decreased over several weeks. The virtual students recognized that the anonymity of the learners in virtual classrooms could contribute to an increase in self-confidence and a decrease in nervousness. Côté and Gaffney (2021) stated that learners in online classes were significantly less anxious than in traditional classrooms and conversed more.

Findings

The foreign language anxiety was categorized by different components such as fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety to show the overall results. The summary of the three components is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Foreign Language Anxiety in Three Components

No.	Component	Total item	$\bar{x}$	sd	Level of anxiety
1.	Fear of negative evaluation	7	3.52	1.02	High anxiety
2.	Communication apprehension	11	3.22	1.03	Moderate anxiety
3.	Test anxiety	15	3.21	1.06	Moderate anxiety
	Overall	33	3.33	1.04	Moderate anxiety

Table 2 shows that the participants in this study showed moderate anxiety levels in foreign language learning. Therefore, the participants in this study felt reasonable fear about these elements when studying a foreign language in the classroom. However, the data demonstrated that the individuals experienced extreme anxiety when making errors and received poor assessments and thought it would affect their self-confidence and self-esteem. It was also described that highly anxious participants were not satisfied with their language abilities, less willing to communicate to avoid negative comments from their teachers and classmates, quitters, tense, less interested in learning, and employed avoidance strategies such as skipping class. Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of the cross-tabulation table of participants' grades.

Table 3
Cross Tabulation Table of Grades

No.	Grade equivalent	F	%	$\bar{x}$	sd
1.	Excellent	120	61.54%	88.75	5.49
2.	Very good	19	9.74%	76.94	1.47
3.	Good	20	10.26%	72.15	1.54
4.	Fair good	19	9.74%	67.31	1.33
5.	Fair	7	3.59%	63.00	1.00
6.	Poor	4	2.05%	56.00	0.81
7.	Very poor	4	2.05%	52.00	1.41
8.	Failed	2	1.0%	36.00	2.83
	Overall	195	100%	80.92	1.98

Table 3 reveals the overall academic achievements of the participants in English Usage for Communication (1500103), with an average mean of 80.92 (A), which has a grade equivalent to excellent. Therefore, most of the participants in this study communicate with clarity and fluency, handle ideas effectively and skillfully with active and complex interaction, indicating an excellent command of vocabulary with a consistently high level of grammatical accuracy, and convince and influence the audience. Table 4 indicates the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on academic performance in English according to the levels of anxiety.

Table 4

One-way Analysis of Variance on Academic Performance Classified According to the Levels of Anxiety

Anxiety level	$\bar{x}$	sd	*F*-value	p-value	Remark
Low anxiety	85.00	4.69			
Moderate anxiety	82.29	11.93	3.818	.024	Significant
High anxiety	77.15	12.32			

As shown in Table 4, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the difference in academic performance among students with a high, mid, or low level of foreign language anxiety. This indicates a significant difference between the levels of foreign language anxiety and the student's academic performance in English. This finding means that their level of foreign language anxiety may influence the student's academic performance in English. Table 5 shows the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on academic performance and language anxiety.

Table 5

One-way Analysis of Variance on Academic Performance on the Three Components of Language Anxiety

Variable	Level of anxiety	$\bar{x}$	sd	*F*-value	p-value	Remarks
Fear of negative evaluation questions	Low anxiety	92.00	.			
	Moderate anxiety	82.09	12.04	1.288	.280	Not significant
	High anxiety	79.93	12.39			
	Strongly high anxiety	75.29	8.54			
Communication apprehension questions	Low anxiety	81.73	9.51			
	Moderate anxiety	82.66	11.48	4.133	.007	Significant
	High anxiety	75.49	13.50			
	Strongly high anxiety	81.00	.			
Test anxiety questions	Low anxiety	83.18	9.00			
	Moderate anxiety	81.34	12.40	.702	.497	Not significant
	High anxiety	79.32	12.04			

Table 5 shows the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the student's academic performance on the different components of foreign language anxiety. Also, this illustrates that the academic performance of Thai university students in English revealed to have differences across the various levels of anxiety in terms of communication apprehension questions. On the other hand, the academic performance of Thai university students in English revealed to have no significant difference across the various levels of anxiety in terms of fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety questions. The multiple comparisons of means and summary of means with the corresponding anxiety level are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test on the Academic Performance Classified According to the Levels of Anxiety

Anxiety level	Anxiety level	Mean difference	Std. Error	p-value	Remark
Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	2.71	6.07	.896	Not significant
	High anxiety	7.85	6.20	.416	Not significant
Moderate anxiety	Low anxiety	-2.71	6.07	.896	Not significant
	High anxiety	5.14*	1.92	.022	Significant

Anxiety level	Anxiety level	Mean difference	Std. Error	p-value	Remark
High anxiety	Low anxiety	-7.85	6.20	.416	Not significant
	Moderate anxiety	-5.14*	1.92	.022	Significant

. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6 reveals that the multiple comparison test shows that moderate anxiety and high anxiety levels show a difference in their academic performance in English since the p-value of .022 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, this shows that the higher the participants' anxiety, the less they performed than low anxiety participants.

Discussion

This study found that Thai language learners had a moderate amount of anxiety when learning a foreign language and that the fear of being judged negatively caused the most anxiety. The participants were highly anxious when given negative evaluations and thought that it would affect their self-confidence and self-esteem. It was also described that highly anxious participants were not satisfied with their language abilities, were less willing to communicate, and were less interested in learning. Also, the participants were highly anxious about their classmates or teacher, especially when they made mistakes when being asked in class. This most likely occurred during interviews, oral presentations, public speaking contests, recitations, or lectures when their teacher called them to answer specific questions and would evaluate them negatively if they gave incorrect answers or performed poorly on the task.

Some classroom activities, such as oral production activities that require students to speak in front of the class, cause and enhance anxiety in students (Paranuwat, 2011; Anandari, 2015; Sayuri, 2016; Abrar et al., 2018). They said that the dread of negative evaluation encompasses all evaluative scenarios that arise within and outside the classroom due to a fear of criticism or judgment from others. For example, error correction is a part of the learning process in language classes. Furthermore, communicative efforts may be subjected to the teacher's or peer's evaluation and judgment. As a result, this factor may substantially influence language anxiety among students (Horwitz et al., 1986).

It was revealed that even though the students were moderately anxious about learning the foreign language and were discovered to be highly anxious when given negative evaluations, they still performed excellently in English. On the other hand, one thing to consider that could be relevant to the result of this study is that the participants

completed the course online during the second semester of 2020–21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic in which this study was conducted. Therefore, there was no actual assessment or face-to-face contact with their language teacher and peers, which may have led them to achieve higher grades in English. It was discovered that a virtual environment helped improve students' English skills and provided a setting that allowed for rich student interaction. Also, the virtual learners' FLA levels were decreasing as time went on. The virtual students recognized the learners' anonymity in virtual classrooms as a good element that could help to an improvement in self-confidence and a reduction in uneasiness (Lan, 2015; Ng, 2007; Melchor-Couto, 2017; Côté and Gaffney, 2021).

It was discovered that this study indicates a difference between the levels of foreign language anxiety and the student's academic performance in English. Therefore, this study would abolish the null hypothesis, which states that H_0: There is no difference between the academic performance of Thai university students in English with a high, mid, or low level of language anxiety. This finding means that their level of foreign language anxiety may influence the student's academic performance in English.

The higher anxiety levels are, the higher it hinders performance, which means high levels of language anxiety could be associated with poor levels of academic achievement in second or foreign language classes. In effect, they develop more anxiety while learning the language. Similarly, language anxiety is linked to learner perceptions of second language ability and measures of actual second language competence. In other words, difficulties experienced throughout the learning process might lead to poor performance or low achievement in a language subject (Young, 1999; Zhao, 2007; Gardner et al., 1984).

This study also revealed differences across the various levels of anxiety in terms of communication apprehension questions and no difference across the various levels of anxiety in terms of fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety questions. Aida (1994) claims that communication apprehension has a detrimental effect on language learning because individuals with high communicative apprehension experience tension while speaking with others and tend to avoid communication. This hesitation has also been noticed in foreign language classes. Students were shown to be afraid of doing things they did not know how to do and worried about not being able to say what they thought. Also, some participants reiterated that they were more concerned with their pronunciation and accent.

The multiple comparison test reveals that students with moderate anxiety and those with high anxiety have distinct academic performance in English. Moreover, the data demonstrates that the more anxious the participants were, the less they performed than those with minimal anxiety. According to the theory of the affective filter hypothesis established by Krashen (1986), learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, a low level of anxiety, and extroversion are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Also, low motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, introversion, and inhibition can raise the affective filter and form a "mental block" that stops comprehensible input from being used for learning. Also, this can make it challenging to learn new things. He also added that students should not be frightened to make errors in a secure classroom.

According to the discoveries of Na (2007), high anxiety discourages students from learning a foreign language and causes them to lose confidence and trust in their abilities to perform better in the classroom. As a result, students withdraw from classroom activities, and the worst-case scenario is that they refuse to learn the language. Furthermore, students with low academic achievement frequently experience foreign language anxiety due to poor academic performance. Thus, most research on foreign

language anxiety concludes that foreign language anxiety has the opposite effect on learning a foreign language (Maclntyre, 1999; Horwitz et al., 2010; Marwan, 2016).

Limitations

The participants were only limited to selected second-year education students enrolled in English Usage for Communication (1500103), the second foundation English course. For the following research, it would be better to investigate the participants' anxiety while learning the first foundational English courses as well as any of the later English courses for a better understanding of the changes in participants' foreign language anxiety in different periods and levels of learning English. In addition, since the total number of samples was only drawn from participants majoring in education, other major courses were not examined in this study. However, this merits future exploration. With varying numbers of participants from different majors, the levels and sources of anxiety may be different.

In addition, this study was also conducted during the pandemic of COVID-19. The participants studied the course online and achieved their grades in their comfort zones, not in the actual setting of the classroom, where they would be tested differently. So, the results of their academic performance may differ since they would perform all the activities, tasks, and tests in an actual scenario and would be more anxious with their classmates and teacher.

Recommendation

To help the students be less anxious about learning a foreign language, they should be informed of what they are expected to do to prepare themselves in advance. For example, before asking students to perform publicly, the teacher may want to ensure they have practiced enough. To reduce students' communication apprehension when speaking in class, the teacher may regularly employ various communicative activities such as role-plays and group discussions to develop fluency and confidence. In addition, it is better to promote a fun and sociable atmosphere by watching some movies, listening to songs, and playing games related to the lessons. Also, teachers can do more pair work or small group work to reduce foreign language anxiety. Likewise, in giving feedback to students, the teacher may give an encouraging, positive, and appropriate feedback response that will not discourage the students. In short, we may say it is the teacher's job to help learners minimize their anxiety and keep it at a moderate pace, which can motivate learners to perform better in language class. Also, to improve the student's confidence, it may be better for them to take some extra classes in English that would prepare them to be more positive and effective language learners. For example, students may join English clubs, take reading and speaking short courses, participate in speaking activities, and attend plays, workshops, seminars, and webinars. These activities would encourage them to learn and appreciate foreign languages without apprehension.

Conclusion

It was found that the second-year education students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University had a moderate level of anxiety about foreign language learning. Therefore, the participants in this study were moderately worried about the consequences of failing language tests, less worried about their pronunciation, less concerned about grammatical mistakes, less anxious about understanding long written sentences, and less nervous about speaking the English language without preparation, and even feel comfortable around with native speakers of English. Therefore, the participants viewed foreign language anxiety as relating to the second perspective, which views language anxiety as the worry and adverse

emotional reaction aroused when learning or using the second language, also known as situation-specific anxiety. The students communicate with clarity and fluency, handle ideas effectively and skillfully with active and complex interaction, indicating an excellent command of vocabulary with a consistently high level of grammatical accuracy, and convince and influence the listeners. Also, it was revealed to have a difference between the student's academic performance in English and their foreign language anxiety levels. As a result, the greater the level of foreign language anxiety, the more it has a chance to affect the level of learning performance. Also, this was discovered to be true for groups with both high and moderate performance levels.

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