

An Anxiety in Learning English of Thai Students at Yala Rajabhat University (YRU)

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Abstract

The research problem formulated for this study is to examine the anxiety experienced by students when learning English and how they cope with it. Qualitative research is employed to collect data and focus on the research problem. The descriptive analysis is applied to provide answers to the questionnaire about Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) factors of male and female students. The findings showed that foreign language anxiety of the first-year students at Yala Rajabhat University, Thailand, reached the same extent as that at different school levels. The current study shows that there is no discernible difference in the foreign language anxiety scale between male and female students..

Keywords: Anxiety, Speaking, descriptive analysis

INTRODUCTION

English is a widely spoken international language that plays a crucial role in facilitating communication between people worldwide. It is a vital component of the 21st century, as English serves as a central language in learning and communicating, promoting human resource development and mutual understanding. In today's world, where over 100 countries communicate in their native languages, language can serve as a mediator to ensure a common ground for understanding. As Kostyuk et al. (2010:221) state, English has become the lingua franca for modern globalization and has been widely studied for adaptation as an international language.

English has become an essential aspect of everyday life, including trade, education, work, and socialization. It is not only a medium for music, news, and movies, but also a fundamental aspect of society, culture, and the international economy. According to Lady Pratiwi et al. (2021:101), English as a lingua franca has four critical skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. As it is not their first language, learners often translate from their native language into English, leading to nervousness while using the language.

Language is crucial for successful communication among members of the same linguistic community. As McGregor cited by Al-Khresheh & Orak (2021: 9) states, language can be viewed as a system of conventions, an abstraction, or social set of rules.

The vast amount of information currently available in English, as stated by Ariffin et al. (2011:221), highlights the need to introduce English in classrooms at various levels to enhance English language competence and improve access to knowledge and information across various fields. Therefore, having good knowledge of the English language can help learners achieve their goals in various fields, such as journalism, banking, medicine, teaching, among others.

After the Ministry of Education announced the English-Speaking Year project in 2012 (MGR Online, 2011), more attention was given to language learning. Thailand has realized the importance of using English, and Thai people learn it as a foreign language. However, despite English courses being taught at various levels, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, Thai students still face anxiety and fear of making mistakes and being judged by others. This anxiety affects the student's ability to improve their English language skills, as revealed by low scores in the EF English Proficiency Index.

According to Sadiq (2017:5), anxiety can impede foreign language performance and production, leading to negative communication output. Learners with higher language anxiety avoid interactive communication more often than less anxious learners. Language learning under anxious circumstances can be traumatic to the learner's identity, as anxiety can be a predictor of language proficiency.

Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting a study titled "Anxiety in Learning English of Thai Students at Yala Rajabhat University (YRU)" to explore the various factors that cause anxiety in learners during English language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety is a common emotional state that people experience in their daily lives, whether at work, socializing, or learning. It is an overwhelming feeling of nervousness or apprehension about something that is happening or could happen in the future. According to Kalin (2020:365), anxiety and depressive disorders are among the most prevalent psychiatric illnesses, and they are highly comorbid with each other. Anxiety is a complex emotion that can cause physical and mental changes, the severity of which depends on the individual and the cause of the anxiety.

Santikarn (2020:15) states that feeling anxious is normal, especially on occasion. Anxiousness is a natural response to tension or intimidation, keeping us alert and focused to spur into action if necessary. However, an anxiety disorder is a common occurrence, and the severity of anxiety will depend on the individual. If left unaddressed, various factors can exacerbate anxiety and its impact, making it a significant concern that should not be ignored.

Anxiety is a prolonged, complex emotional state that occurs when someone anticipates a future situation, event, or circumstance that may involve a personally distressing, unpredictable, and out-of-control threat to their vital interests. According to Bielak (2018:228), negative emotional responses to situations and challenges

commonly encountered in language education are one of the obstacles to successful language learning. Anxiety, in its more specific guises such as language and test anxiety, can occur when someone encounters the unexpected or when the situation is not as expected.

Language anxiety, as defined by Macintyre & Gardner (1994:284), is the tension and apprehension specifically associated with a second language context, including speaking, listening, and learning. It can cause many language learners to have a mental block against foreign language learning. As Chatha et al. (2019:59) note, since language learning anxiety does not entirely depend on the learners' language proficiency level, researchers have conducted investigations on many groups of language learners from various fields of study and occupations.

As Gregory et al. (2020:1) state, anxiety can worsen over time and have a severe impact on a person's ability to function normally, which is why treatment is essential. In most cases, medication and talk therapy can help lessen anxiety. Lifestyle changes, coping skills, and relaxation techniques can also be helpful. When feeling anxious or nervous, it is essential not to let it pass and to address the issue in time before it affects the body negatively. One way to overcome anxiety is to use relaxation therapy, including Benson relaxation (Mardiah et al., 2022:1).

Anxiety can occur due to many factors, whether external or internal. According to Makchuay et al. (2018:133), the reasons for anxiety in English learning are mostly from student factors and family factors, with students expected to use English like native speakers, and English teaching activities factors measured by all English teaching activities in the classroom. The researchers identified three factors causing anxiety as follows:

Learner factor: Learners lack confidence in using English, possibly because Thai learners use Thai as their main language in daily life. When required to use English, they may worry about grammar, incorrect pronunciation, and not being understood. A limited vocabulary can make the English language less flowing and smooth.

Instructor factor: As an instructor, several factors may contribute to anxiety among Thai students when learning English at Yala Rajabhat University. These factors include the instructor's teaching style and approach, classroom atmosphere, clear expectations and goals, approachable and supportive demeanor, adaptability and flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and professional development.

Factors related to classroom activities: Organizing English teaching activities that include questionnaires, Q&A sessions, conversations, or storytelling can help. Teaching can be divided into steps according to the level of difficulty. The content should explain the meaning of words and expressions that students do not know before practicing conversation and narrative speaking practice. The situation can help learners use the correct language under the circumstances and have fun. This factor is the most critical in the classroom because learners touch it first.

According to Ketchay (2019:17), classroom activities play a crucial role in facilitating English language learning. Here are some key factors that contribute to effective language learning in the classroom:

Engagement and interaction: Lesson activities should foster active student participation and stimulate dialogue among students. Group conversations, role-

play, debates, duo work, and team projects can help improve participation, language learning, and build confidence.

Authenticity: Making learning more relevant and meaningful for students can be achieved by using authentic materials and real-world circumstances in exercises. Newspaper articles, films, podcasts, and interviews are all examples of authentic resources.

Multimodal approach: Incorporating multiple modes of communication (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visual) can accommodate varied learning styles and improve language proficiency.

Task-Based: Learning can be made more purposeful by concentrating on projects that require students to utilize English to accomplish a particular activity or finish a project. For example, instructing students to write a letter, make a presentation, or resolve a problem in English.

Inclusive Environment: An inclusive and encouraging atmosphere encourages a sense of belonging, which can have a favorable effect on language acquisition and general students' motivation.

Regular assessment: Teachers can identify areas for growth and adjust their teaching by regularly assessing students' language ability.

Anxiety can have profound effects on many aspects of foreign language learning. According to Yiamsawat (2016), when anxiety occurs, it can affect academic, cognitive, social, and personal aspects. In this study, the researcher will collect data through a questionnaire via Google form to survey anxiety in English language learning and how students cope with anxiety. The study will involve third-year students at Yala Rajabhat University during the academic year 2020-2021.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to address the research question. Qualitative research is a method of gathering information that aims to provide an overview of the subject matter. This approach emphasizes the data source and meaning of the data from the informant's perspective. As stated by Grosseohme (2014:1), qualitative research involves the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of text materials gathered from conversations and questionnaires. By examining the phenomenon or behavior from the insider's perspective (in this case, students), it becomes possible to comprehend the meaning and reason behind the occurrence of the phenomenon or problem. Often, information can have a deeper meaning than what appears on the surface. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to try to understand the phenomenon through interpretation. To do so, the researcher must become part of the community and rely on a good relationship between themselves and the community to study the subject in depth and detail. As Purisan (2013:09) states, qualitative research is the study of social phenomena in every dimension. It emphasizes the importance of knowledge of the attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of those who have experienced the phenomena over time. The conclusions drawn are through an analysis technique that is primarily inductive. Qualitative research involves the pursuit of knowledge by emphasizing the importance of information on the feelings, thoughts, values, and ideologies of individuals related to that

phenomenon. The analysis method used is interpretation to generate a conclusion..

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

This section used descriptive statistics (means) to describe the central tendency of the measures, and a pie chart was utilized to display the data.

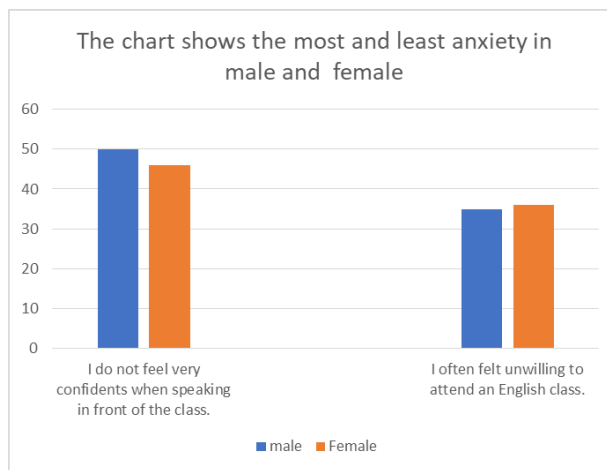
Prior to analyzing the data, the questionnaire items were grouped according to the factor they aimed to measure, which were based on the three components of foreign language anxiety. As the language learning process encompasses a complex construct of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with language acquisition in the classroom, three groups of factors were identified. The items measuring anxiety factors were grouped as follows:

Factors related to the learner: 2, 4, 3, 7, 9

Factors related to the instructor: 3, 5, 10, 11, 14

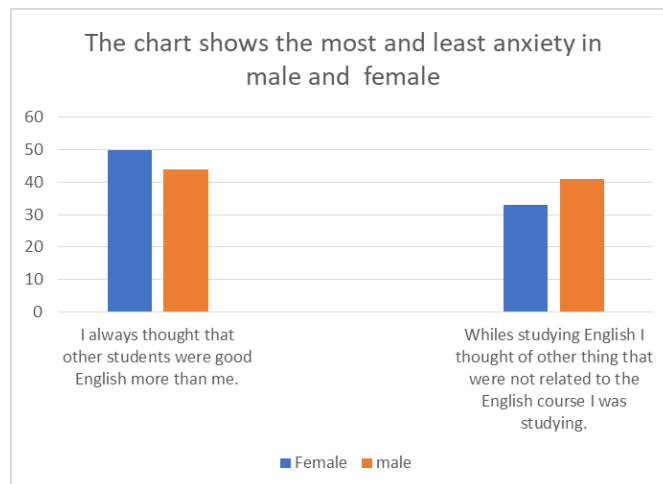
Factors related to classroom activities: 1, 8, 12, 13, 15

Diagram 4.1 Anxiety factor on Differences between male and Female students



According to the table, the most significant anxiety factor among males is a lack of confidence when speaking in front of the class, with a score of 50. In contrast, females scored 46 in the same category. The least prevalent anxiety factor among males was feeling reluctant to attend English class, with a score of 35, while females scored 36 in the same category.

Diagram 4.2 Anxiety factor on Difference between Female and Male student.



The table illustrates the most prevalent anxiety factors amongst female students. A significant cause of anxiety, as indicated by a score of 50, pertains to the perception that other students possess superior English skills compared to oneself. Conversely, male students scored 44 in this category. Furthermore, female students scored 33 for being distracted by extraneous thoughts while studying English, while male students scored 41 in this regard.

A few previous studies on gender differences, have yielded results that are significantly different from those of the current study. These studies suggest that females tend to perform better in verbal (linguistic) ability, while males tend to outperform females in math. Additionally, males tend to exhibit more physical aggression, while females tend to exhibit more relationship aggression.

The conclusion drawn from these gender differences is that females are generally more emotionally sensitive than males. This sensitivity is evident from infancy, as females tend to use language and gestures to express emotions more frequently than males. Females tend to discuss emotions in the context of relationships, and are more likely to express fear and sadness.

However, the current study has found no discernible difference in the foreign language anxiety scale between genders. This finding is inconsistent with accepted hypotheses, and raises questions about the uniqueness of this phenomenon. Although this finding is outside the scope of the current investigation, it may indicate a new gender characteristic that requires further study to verify.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is A research study analyzed foreign language anxiety in students and found that anxiety levels were generally high due to the fear of negative evaluation. The study identified three factors contributing to anxiety: the learner factor, instructor factor, and classroom activities factor. Female students reported higher anxiety levels than male students, mainly due to the fear of receiving a poor grade and communication apprehension. However, the study did not find any significant differences between male and female students in foreign language anxiety levels. The research suggests that instructors and students can work together to reduce anxiety levels by acknowledging and addressing concerns to improve the learning process.

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