

Thai EFL University Students' Perspectives on Foreign Language Anxiety

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to find out the level of foreign language anxiety perceived by Thai EFL learners through identifying their possible causes of foreign language anxiety and determining the potential solutions to minimize their English language learning anxiety. Drawing upon the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and focus group interviews, the findings revealed that Thai EFL learners experienced a high level of anxiety both inside and outside language classroom contexts. Four main possible factors including academic evaluations, negative evaluations, comprehension problems, and teachers-related factors were found to be contributing factors to Thai EFL learners' foreign language anxiety. Lastly, suggestions were proposed in order to create low-anxiety foreign language classrooms.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety; FLCAS; EFL university students

Introduction

Anxiety is one of the affecting variables that has been found to adversely affect foreign language acquisition and performance (Tallon, 2009). Additionally, foreign language anxiety is one of the predictors of success in foreign language learning (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989; Tallon, 2009; Wu, 2010). Based on its potential effects in predicting success in foreign language learning, the relationship between foreign language proficiency and foreign language anxiety has been widely investigated. Research has found that anxiety can play supporting or debilitating role in language acquisition. Anxiety, in addition, was found to be related to other affective factors such as motivation and attitude. A certain level of anxiety can be motivating while a high level of anxiety can inhibit foreign language learning as it creates a “mental block” which prevents effective language input and decreases learners' confidence. Anxiety, therefore, can be one of the hindrances in foreign language acquisition if it develops into a permanent trait rather than learners' reaction to specific language learning situations (Oxford, 2005). It is estimated that one-third of foreign language learners undergo foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In fact, foreign language anxiety is not restricted to certain language learners and the learners' level of foreign language proficiency is not indicative of their foreign language anxiety levels. Both advanced and beginner language learners can experience foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Tóth, 2009).

Foreign language anxiety, thus, can be overwhelming for EFL learners since it can hinder learners' cognitive process and performance. Studies suggest that foreign language acquisition takes relatively longer time with anxious foreign language learners than does with low anxious learners (Gregersen, 2003). To minimize learners' foreign language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) further assert that identifying learners' anxiety is essential as it helps both learners and teachers cope with foreign language learning anxiety effectively. Provided that the causes and levels of foreign language anxiety are likely to vary according to individuals and their learning circumstances, this study therefore aims to explore Thai

EFL learners' foreign language learning anxiety, the probable causes, as well as the ways to minimize negative influences of foreign language anxiety on Thai EFL learners.

Literature Review

Foreign language anxiety has been recognized as a distinct construct that can affect foreign language learning (Gregersen, 2003). What differentiates foreign language anxiety from other types of anxiety is that it is a type of anxiety which specifically occurs in foreign language learning contexts. Horwitz et al. (1986: 128) define foreign language anxiety 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.” According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is conceptualized into three different types of anxiety namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Characterized by shyness, nervousness, and the inability to express thoughts when conversing in a foreign language, communication apprehension was found to be one of the variables influencing foreign language learning and proficiency (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989). Language learners suffering from communication apprehension are likely to be reluctant when required to communicate in a foreign language. Test anxiety, the second type of foreign language anxiety, refers to the language learners' fear of failure in academic evaluation resulting in certain avoidance behaviors in evaluative circumstances. Lastly, fear of negative evaluation concerns the language learners' apprehension of evaluative situations and negative evaluations from peers (Kondo, 2010; Tallon, 2009). Learners with fear of negative evaluation tend to perceive themselves as inadequate and thus are often intimidated by other people's evaluation. To assess foreign language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) based on the three conceptualized anxiety. The conceptualization of foreign language anxiety as a distinct construct proposed by Horwitz et al.'s (1986) has influenced the

subsequent studies and their 33-item Likert-type scale questionnaire FLCAS has been widely adopted as the instrument in the studies relating foreign language anxiety. Research focusing on the relationship between foreign language anxiety and foreign language learning indicate that foreign language anxiety has negative effects on foreign language learning, performance, and achievement (Horwitz, 2001; Yan and Horwitz, 2008).

Foreign language anxiety is readily observable as it is often displayed through anxious learners' bodily reactions. Common manifestations of anxiety include physical reactions such as palpitations, sweating, apprehension, concentration difficulty, and avoidance behaviors. (Horwitz et al., 1986; Wörde, 2003). The perceived degree of foreign language anxiety, however, may vary depending on cultural and learning contexts (Horwitz, 2001; Kondo, 2010; Tallon, 2009). What provokes anxiety in one learning circumstance may not be anxiety-generating in another. Not only is the perceived degree of foreign language anxiety different, but learners with different anxiety levels also react to foreign language anxiety differently (Horwitz, 2001; Gregersen, 2003). Anxious learners, for instance, are likely to apply less diverse anxiety coping strategies compared to their less anxious counterparts.

Foreign language anxiety may potentially stem from various sources. Instructional practices, learners' competence, task types, and teacher's behaviors were stated to be accounted for learners' anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). Young (1991) proposes six causes of foreign language anxiety including personal and interpersonal anxiety, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and testing. It is apparent that sources of anxiety involve learners' internal factors such as personal anxiety and beliefs and external factors such as interactions between instructors and learners. The effects of foreign language anxiety therefore can potentially prevail throughout the foreign language learning process if not handled effectively. Moreover, foreign language anxiety does not exclusively have pervasive effects among learners with lower language competence. In fact, advanced language

learners also experience foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Tóth, 2011). Speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a foreign language were found to be anxiety-producing as learners are required to perform several tasks with their perceived limited foreign language competency. Although foreign language anxiety is categorized as situation specific anxiety that occurs specifically in the context of foreign language learning, the effects of foreign language anxiety can be profound and pervasive as it can disrupt foreign language acquisition and impair learners' performance beyond language classroom context (Cheng, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Würde, 2003).

Research related to foreign language anxiety in Thai EFL context have mainly focused on approaches, techniques, and learning strategies to cope with foreign language anxiety. A study investigating the effectiveness of cooperative learning approach in reducing anxiety reveals that the approach is helpful and low-proficiency students experienced less anxiety engaging in cooperative learning environment (Suwantarathip and Wichadee, 2010). Another study examining the levels of foreign language anxiety in public speaking class in different stages indicates that learners perceived the highest level of anxiety at the performance stage, emphasizing the negative effects of foreign language anxiety Thai EFL learners experienced when required to speak English (Plangkham and Porkkaew, 2012). However, investigations into approaches and coping strategies cannot provide the complete understandings of the issue as there is still the lack of the study into the factors influencing Thai EFL learners' foreign language anxiety in Thai EFL context. This present study, aiming to explore the Thai EFL learners' perspectives on foreign language anxiety and its underlying causes, not only provides useful insights on coping with foreign language anxiety and creating low-anxiety foreign language classrooms but also contributes to the growing body of foreign language anxiety-related research in the EFL context.

Research Methodology

Research Setting

The study was conducted at one of the leading research-based universities in Thailand. The participants of the study included 22 2nd, 3rd and 4th year university students from different faculties taking Reading and Writing I in the first semester of the 2014 academic year. Prior to taking this course, all participants (6 males and 16 females) had taken four fundamental English courses provided by the university. During the course, participants were trained to read multi-paragraph texts, identify key information and essential components of paragraphs, compose narrative paragraphs, and write paragraphs responding to texts they read. In addition, grammar lessons were given and the participants were assigned to write 10 weekly journal entries of 200-250 words long based on the selected topics in order to improve their writing. All participants were selected based on the basis of purposive sampling due to their varied levels of foreign language competence. The present study attempts to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions.

1. What is the foreign language anxiety level of Thai EFL university students?
2. What are the possible causes of foreign language anxiety of Thai EFL students?
3. What are the ways Thai EFL students believe can help reduce foreign language anxiety?

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to obtain the data regarding participants' foreign language anxiety, Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was employed as a research instrument. The FLCAS is a 33-item Likert-type scale questionnaire based on the three components of anxiety namely communicative apprehension, test anxiety,

and fear of negative evaluation. Each statement asked participants to rate on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) how anxious they feel in certain situations. The data obtained from FLCAS were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS) version 19. The possible score range for the FLCAS is 33-165. Maximum, minimum, and mean score were carefully calculated after the score of negatively worded questions were reversed.

Following questionnaire data analysis, four sessions of focus group interviews were conducted to acquire richer understandings concerning the participants' foreign language anxiety. According to Wilkinson (2004), focus group interview is a research methodology employed to obtain qualitative data as it involves the discussion of particular issues by 6-8 participants with similar characteristics and background. Thus, focus group interview was selected as a research approach in this study because it is a suitable method to elicit participants' perspectives of their foreign language anxiety. The researcher's role during the interviews was to moderate the sessions as well as to encourage each participant to discuss the given issues. Each session consisted of 5-6 participants and lasted approximately 40 minutes. Based on literature review, FLCAS, and the data obtained from FLCAS, interview questions were developed and subsequently assessed by two other researchers. The interview questions include:

1. How long have you been studying English?
2. How do you feel about learning English?
3. What do you like and dislike about learning English?
4. Have you experienced anxiety when learning and using English?
5. What are the causes of your anxiety?
6. What are the physical and mental symptoms you experience when you feel anxious?
7. How do you react to your anxiety?
8. What are the ways that can help reduce your anxiety?

Each interview session was conducted in a room and was digitally recorded. In addition, the participants were informed about the

purposes of the study, the interview procedures, and their rights prior to participating. The interview files were transcribed verbatim and the interview scripts were subsequently validated by the participants. Color coding was employed to analyze the interview scripts. The findings were categorized and presented under similar emerging themes and issues.

Results and Discussion

The purposes of this study were to find out (1) the level of foreign language anxiety perceived by Thai EFL university learners, (2) the possible causes of such anxiety, and (3) the solutions to ease the learners' foreign language anxiety. The research findings obtained from the Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) and focus group interviews are presented and discussed in the following sections.

What is the Foreign Language Anxiety Level of Thai EFL University Students?

The analysis of FLCAS revealed that the participants perceived a high level of foreign language anxiety as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The participants' foreign language classroom anxiety score

Participants	Gender	Min.	Max.	Sum
F1	Female	1	4	81*
F2	Female	1	5	81*
F3	Female	1	5	102
F4	Female	1	5	94
M5	Male	1	5	100
M6	Male	2	4	102
M7	Male	1	5	92
M8	Male	1	5	84
F9	Female	2	5	139**
M10	Male	2	5	107
F11	Female	2	5	117
F12	Female	1	5	110

Participants	Gender	Min.	Max.	Sum
F13	Female	2	5	116
F14	Female	1	5	106***
F15	Female	3	5	123
F16	Female	3	5	130
F17	Female	2	5	118
F18	Female	1	5	118
F19	Female	1	5	119
M20	Male	1	5	107
F21	Female	1	5	104
F22	Female	1	5	99

* The lowest FLCAS score ** The highest FLCAS score *** Mean FLCAS score

As illustrated in Table 1, the participants' mean anxiety score was 106. The maximum score was 139 whereas the minimum score was 81 out of the 33-165 possible score range. Participants who scored higher than the mean score are categorized as highly-anxious foreign language learners. It was found that exactly half of the participants (11 out of 22) were highly anxious about their foreign language learning. The fact that half of the participants experienced a high level of foreign language anxiety was significant considering their academic levels and background English knowledge.

The questionnaire data was further analyzed to find out what factors were regarded by the participants as the most anxiety-provoking when learning a foreign language. The questionnaire statements with the high mean score represented the high level of anxiety the situation is likely to provoke according to the participants' perceptions.

Table 2: FLCAS statements with mean scores

	FLCAS statements	Means	Sd.
10.	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	4.36	1.00
9.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class	4.04	.99

Table 2: Continued

	FLCAS statements	Means	Sd.
29.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	3.95	1.13
16.	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	3.77	.97
33.	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	3.77	.86
7.	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	3.77	.86
6.	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	3.72	.88
24.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	3.68	.89
12.	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.63	1.04
20.	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.59	.95
23.	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do	3.54	.85
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	3.54	1.05
22.	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	3.50	.85
30.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	3.27	1.03
27.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	3.18	1.25
2.	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	3.13	1.08
5.	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	3.13	1.39
32.	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	3.09	.97
11.	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	3.00	.97
28.	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.95	.84
14.	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	2.95	.95
21.	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	2.95	1.13
4.	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	2.90	1.15

Table 2: Continued

	FLCAS statements	Means	Sd.
26.	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	2.81	1.33
3.	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.77	1.06
13.	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.63	.90
15.	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.63	1.17
25.	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	2.54	1.01
17.	I often feel like not going to my language class.	2.54	.96
31.	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	2.54	1.05

As shown in Table 2, the consequences of failing the English class was the main source of the participants' anxiety ($M= 4.36$). Having to speak without preparation in English classes ($M=4.04$) and not understanding what teacher says can also lead to foreign language anxiety ($M=3.95$). Thinking that other classmates are better at languages than oneself, feeling inadequately prepared, having to answer teachers' questions without advance preparation were found to equally contribute to participants' foreign language anxiety ($M=3.77$). According to FLCAS scores, the factors contributing to the participants' foreign language anxiety primarily concerned their performance and expectation in classrooms such as failing the class and speaking English or answering questions without preparation. Comparing themselves with classmates was also found to cause anxiety. In addition, the obtained data also indicated that the lack of understanding in class posed some challenges for the participants.

What are the Possible Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety of Thai EFL Students?

In order to elicit a clearer understanding regarding the participants' foreign language anxiety, four sessions of focus groups interviews were conducted. According to the interviews, foreign language anxiety manifested through a wide range of physical symptoms. The participants reported experiencing nervousness and tension when using English both inside and outside classroom. Some common reported symptoms were palpitations, temporary memory loss, stuttering, remaining silent, having sweaty and shaky palms, having dry throat, having shaky voice, feeling excited as well as losing some sleep and appetite. The interview data further suggested the possible intertwined factors responsible for the participants' feelings of uneasiness and worry when learning and using English. The following part presents the research findings regarding the four possible causes of foreign language anxiety perceived by Thai EFL learners.

Academic Evaluations

It was found that exams, test scores, and course grades are the major sources of the participants' foreign language anxiety. Low foreign language test scores, perceived as failures, can affect participants' confidence. The participants' perception of their foreign language aptitude was also stated to be anxiety-generating in foreign language classrooms. Additionally, test type was claimed to have affected the level of anxiety as clearly explained in the following interview excerpts.

M8: I always feel worried before taking exams. If my score was lower than I had expected, I'd see it as a failure and that makes me feel anxious. It also depends on the type of exams. If, for example, the exam I was taking was to write a paragraph from an unknown topic, I wouldn't feel much anxious because everyone else could not prepare for it either.

M10: The writing exams make me feel most anxious compared to other types of exams because I didn't know what to write or where to start. I couldn't think of anything. I didn't know how to answer. No matter how hard I try, I know I will not be as smart as my other classmates. It was pretty stressful during the exam time.

F13: The exam score always got me feeling so worried. Each time, the score can affect my overall grade. I need to do my best on every exam in order to get good grades. Also, I feel worried about my language ability. I don't think I'm good enough to do well on exams.

It appears that participants' foreign language anxiety resulted from the participants' worries about scoring less than expected which might be influenced by their belief of their inability to use English to perform the required tasks effectively. The worries about score and test combined with constantly comparing themselves with classmates can lead to declining confidence in using English and generate considerable anxiety. This is not surprising as language learners' perception of self-efficacy and their belief of their learning ability are influential to their academic performance and become the major contributors to foreign language anxiety (Cheng, 2001; Mills et al., 2006; Young, 1991). The participants' worries of failing English classes confirmed Horwitz et al.'s (1986) findings indicating that test anxiety is associated with foreign language anxiety. In addition, the findings are consistent with Young's (1991) claim that a particular type of language test generated considerably higher level of anxiety than others. According to the participants, writing exams appeared to be the most challenging type of exams. Since the participants felt that they could not prepare for this type of exams, they were likely to feel anxious. The interviews data confirmed the FLCAS findings that the consequences of failing English classes were perceived as the major concerns of Thai EFL learners. This is usually the case in EFL contexts where learners have

limited exposure to English. It is understandable that these learners tend to focus on achieving high test scores and were motivated to learn English mainly for fulfilling their academic requirements.

Negative Evaluations

The learners' fear of negative evaluation from both teachers and classmates can lead to foreign language anxiety. The majority of the participants stated that they were afraid of being ridiculed, humiliated, and judged by other people as incompetent.

M7: I was called up to write some sentences on the board. I didn't prepare for that, so I was nervous and worried at that time. I thought I was going to mess up and make my self look stupid in front of the whole class.

F2: Giving an impromptu presentation in English in front of the class always makes me feel uneasy. I don't like it because I'm afraid I would make mistakes. I'm afraid that I would mispronounce some words or use the wrong words when I speak. Also, I feel embarrassed when I answer the teacher's questions incorrectly. I'm afraid that my teacher and my friend would label me as 'not that smart'.

In the classroom context, impromptu tasks appeared to be the most common cause of anxiety of the participants. It is understandable that impromptu tasks stimulate high level of foreign language anxiety since they allow learners little to none preparation time. The learners, therefore, are susceptible to the fear of negative evaluation from both teachers and peers. In fact, the participants' anxiety seemed to be aggravated by the fear of making mistakes and appearing foolish in front of other people. The finding is congruent with Gregersen's (2003) study indicating that

learners who perceive themselves as low-proficient language learners are likely be anxious due to the fear of making mistakes and forming negative impressions on others.

In addition, it can be interpreted from the interview data that teachers are perceived as an authority figure in class whose main function is evaluating learners' performance instead of facilitating and supporting the learning process. This can certainly contribute to the learners' anxiety (Young, 1991). Teachers who are aware of learners' anxiety and provide supportive feedback are likely to be perceived as less anxiety-provoking. Besides the anxiety of being negatively evaluated, classmates' expectation was also revealed to be the cause of foreign language anxiety.

M10: I used to study at an international school and everybody knows that. They expect my English to be perfect. In fact, it's not that good. I always feel that other students' pronunciation is way better than mine. I don't want to make mistakes. I don't want to fail them. Based on the amount of effort and time I had spent learning English, my speaking skill should have been nearly the same or exactly like native speakers'. That really frustrates me.

The interview data reflected that foreign language anxiety primarily stems from the learners' worries of their foreign language inadequacies being exposed. It also showed participants' unrealistic expectation to become their unattainable ideal self as a language learner which in turn makes them anxious and sensitive to others' comments. This finding is consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) claim that less proficient language learners often have a fear of being negatively judged. The research finding also corroborates the previous research findings indicating that comparing one's foreign language proficiency with that of the more proficient classmates or native speakers may lead to anxiety (Kitano, 2001; Tóth, 2009).

Comprehension Problems

Lack of understanding when learning and using English was stated as the third factor triggering foreign language anxiety. Participants reported feeling nervous and overwhelmed when communicating in English both inside and outside classrooms because they could not fully understand their interlocutors. Surprisingly, the thoughts of using the foreign language alone can cause major stress to the participants as one female participant vividly described:

F18: In class, I felt like I was sometimes left behind. I didn't fully understand what my teacher said and that made me feel worried because I knew I had to work hard to catch up. I remembered well when I was assigned to give a short speech in English in front of class. That task got me confused and worried since day one. I didn't understand the lesson and the task well enough. I was so anxious that I lost appetite and didn't feel like sleeping at all.

It is apparent that the effects of foreign language anxiety extend beyond language classroom context. When communicating in English outside classroom, the different accents of the interlocutors as well as the participants' own accent were claimed to cause comprehension problems which ultimately led to communicative breakdown and anxiety. Although, participants reported experiencing communication anxiety, it can be noted that the perceived anxiety level might not be strong enough to prevent them from communicating in English.

M5: As a naturally shy person, I always have a lot of anxiety when I talk to foreigners in English. What makes me so anxious is that I often don't understand what they said because some foreigners have thick accent when they speak English. That is very confusing. I lose my confidence because I could not answer their questions. Sometimes I just stay quiet and smile.

F4: My story is totally opposite from my friends'. My poor English accent makes me feel worried the most. If I mispronounce certain words, the meaning may change from what I intended to say. Other people might not understand me and that makes me feel nervous. But that doesn't make want to avoid talking to foreigners.

According to the findings, the lack of comprehension while learning and using English are revealed to be anxiety-provoking. The finding presents a rather common experience of language learners with the inabilities to use the foreign language in authentic communicative situations successfully. The incomplete mastery of the target language can be frustrating and lead to communication apprehension (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). Likewise, the lack of the ability to use the target language to communicate and the concerns about making grammatical mistakes can make learners feel uncomfortable (Williams and Andrade, 2008). Based on the findings, it is likely that the underlying causes of the comprehension problems in the foreign language classroom may be the unclear task instruction, the use of English as an instructional language, or the individual learner's personality. However, the causes of difficulties when using English outside the classroom rather concern learners' personal preferences and their foreign language competence. It is yet worth noting that the effects of anxiety extend beyond classroom contexts and might not decrease over time for some learners.

Teachers-Related Factors

The final factor contributing to Thai EFL learners' foreign language anxiety concerns language teachers. According to the interviews, teachers-related factors also played a significant role in provoking participants' anxiety. Teachers' personality and the use of English as an exclusive instructional language in class were found to be anxiety-producing.

Teachers' Personalities

In terms of teachers' personalities, the findings revealed that teachers' friendliness and manners of correction seemed to affect learners' feelings as described in the following excerpts.

F13: Whether my anxiety will be high or not depends solely on the teacher. If my teacher seems kind and easy-going, I won't feel anxious in my English class. I won't be worried even if I get called to answer questions in class.

M7: One thing I don't like is being corrected in front of my friends. I remember when my teacher did that and I felt so embarrassed. I didn't want to answer the teacher's questions again because I was afraid that I would get it wrong.

M20: I once had a teacher who was very strict and unsympathetic. My friend and I had to give a presentation and somehow we made a mistake in class. The teacher gave us a comment using the word which was unpleasant to hear. We were very shocked at that moment. That was harsh and it hurt my feeling. I didn't want to go to that class since.

The present study's findings supports Wörde's (2003) claim that teachers' personalities and interactions between teachers and learners can lead to foreign language anxiety. The results revealed that teachers who appear friendly and accepting are perceived as more approachable. The interview results yielded an interesting finding that teachers' emotional state and personalities can be influential to classroom atmosphere which consequently affects learners' attitudes towards the class and motivation to continue studying the language.

Apart from teachers' personalities and manners of correction, the interviews also revealed that teachers' use of English as an instructional language as well as other factors including tone of voice, speaking pace, vocabulary choice, and accents tend to cause comprehension problems which can eventually lead to foreign language anxiety.

Teacher's Use of English

Teacher's use of English as an instructional language was stated to be another teachers-related cause of foreign language anxiety as it was perceived to be the cause of confusion and uneasiness in foreign language classrooms.

F2: Native speakers would use simple language while Thai teachers often use difficult words like academic words which are hard to understand. That often makes me feel anxious because I don't understand what my teacher said. Even if it was the same word, the native speakers would use simple vocabulary which I can get immediately.

Teachers' voice, speaking pace, and accents were also found to play a part in creating confusion in the foreign language classrooms as explained in the following excerpt.

F2: The way my teacher speaks makes me feel a little anxious. Her voice is very soft and she sometimes talks too fast. I don't like it when she only uses English in class because it is confusing and I could not understand her.

According to the interviews, it should be noted that teachers' personality and manners of correction can affect learners' perception and perhaps motivation to learn the language. Negative comments given by teachers can be discouraging for learners. Not only do negative feedbacks from teachers make learners anxious, but they can also be the potential cause of learners' declining motivation and attention (Ehrman et al., 2003). The findings are in accordance with Hsu's (2010) findings indicating that teachers' personality can have immediate impacts on learners' motivation. The interview results also suggested that some factors such as the teachers' voice and their use of English as an instructional language in EFL contexts can also lead to comprehension problems and worries in the

English language classrooms.

In conclusion, the findings from the focus group interviews supported the FLCAS results that Thai EFL learners experienced foreign language anxiety mainly in the language classrooms. The findings also indicate that academic evaluations, negative evaluations, comprehension problems, and teachers-related factors are the four main anxiety-producing factors for the participants. The findings are partly consistent with Young's (1991) findings which revealed six causes of foreign language anxiety namely personal and interpersonal issues, instructors-learners interactions, classroom procedures, language testing, instructor beliefs about language learning, and learner beliefs about language learning. In addition, the findings confirm Horwitz et al's (1986) study that communicative apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are common aspects of anxiety experienced by learners.

What are the Ways to Reduce Foreign Language Anxiety?

Although learning English as a foreign language and using it outside of the classroom context can cause considerable anxiety, some solutions were proposed by the participants to reduce their foreign language anxiety. The following section presents the participants' recommendations.

Teachers-Learners Interaction and Classroom Atmosphere

Though perceived as one of the most common causes of foreign language anxiety, the issue of teachers-learners interaction is often overlooked (Oxford, 2005). In order to create an anxiety-free language classroom, it is important to consider the interaction between language teachers and learners as well as the learning atmosphere. The findings indicated that teachers' personalities and their use of English as an instructional language are the sources of anxiety. Teachers' ability to teach seems inadequate in carrying out a comprehensive and entertaining lesson. It was recommended that teachers should also be friendly and approachable. Furthermore, it is essential that teachers should observe and constantly improve classroom atmosphere to optimize learning process

(Matsuda and Gobel, 2004). Most importantly, since teachers' emotional state can make the students feel anxious, foreign language teachers should train themselves to be supportive and encouraging as one participant clearly stated:

F14: Teacher is the most important factor. If they are friendly and approachable, it would tremendously lessen our anxiety. If they understand us, it will be a lot easier to talk to them and ask questions. Teachers should at least look energetic. They should not just sit in front of the computer screen and read to us. It would be more fun if they walk around the class or to us learners. It will be better because we can feel connections between both sides.

Teachers' instructional practice is yet another aspect to be considered. The participants suggested allowing time for discussions would not only lessen their nervousness, but also make the lesson and the classroom atmosphere more casual since every learner will be given an opportunity to voice their opinions.

F22: I really like it when the teacher simplifies the content we have to learn and gives us time to discuss what we learned in class. It helps me get rid of my anxiety. Also, it's a good opportunity to learn about my classmates.

Apart from teachers' friendliness, approachability, and instructional practices, it was suggested that the gap between teachers and learners should be reduced. Participants mentioned that the perceived gap between them and the teachers could be discouraging. They, hence, suggested simple yet interesting ways to bridge the gap and build good rapport between both teachers and learners.

M5: Teacher-fronted class often got me feeling anxious because there was less connections between teachers and learners.

That's why giving a presentation in front of the classroom can be frightening for some learners. I think the best way to eliminate my anxiety is to create some sort of a shared space to reduce the gap between teachers and learners. Actually, I think forming seats in a U-shape will solve such problem.

F22: I think it is also important to at least get to know each other in class. When we all know each other, we can cooperate and I think working in groups would be a lot easier for everyone. Most importantly, I would feel less nervous when I need to give a presentation or speak English in front of the class.

According to the interviews, it is apparent that a non-threatening and cooperative classroom environment is preferable. The perceived support from teachers and cordiality between learners seem to create a less distressing and more welcoming foreign language classroom since the friendliness can help minimize the learners' fear of negative judgment from their peers. In order to reduce foreign language anxiety, several factors should be considered. Creating the sense of involvement in class is one of the ways to reduce foreign language anxiety (Matsuda and Gobel, 2004). U-shaped seating arrangement, for instance, can potentially reduce learners' anxiety as it can increase learners' engagement in the language classroom. In addition, the findings also suggested that the atmosphere of foreign language classrooms also plays a key role in generating foreign language anxiety. Perceived friendliness among learners, teacher's support, and clear pedagogical instruction can minimize learners' anxiety level in foreign language classrooms (Horwitz, 2001; Wörde, 2003; Yan and Horwitz, 2008).

Evaluations

The findings revealed that academic evaluations can lead to

foreign language anxiety. Another important factor to be considered, thus, concerns evaluation and score. To alleviate learners' test anxiety caused by academic evaluations, the participants also proposed that regular quizzes with minimum score could be ideal in reducing their anxiety. Evaluations are not viewed as anxiety-generating as long as they are not the major ones that take up the maximum portion of the course score.

M6: English courses would be more fun if I don't have to constantly worry about quizzes and scores. My major concern is the score because it can affect my overall grade. I won't mind having regular quizzes as long as those quizzes don't worth 50% of the course grade.

The research findings clearly indicate that Thai EFL learners perceived foreign language anxiety. They were also aware of the anxiety sources and further recommended some useful means to diminish their anxiety. It is, however, important to consider that reducing foreign language anxiety is a process that requires co-operation from both teachers and learners as discussed in the following sections.

Implications for Pedagogical Practices

It was revealed in the research findings that Thai EFL learners experienced foreign language anxiety when learning English in classrooms and using English outside classrooms. The present study's findings confirmed the findings of the previous studies in this area that EFL learners' foreign language anxiety resulted from various sources depending on their cultural background and learning circumstances. In the case of Thai EFL learners, it should be noted from the findings that the main source of their anxiety is the fear of failing the English courses. This might be a reflection of Thai EFL learners' motivation in learning English as foreign language. Since the learners learn English because they want to get good grades from the courses instead of acquiring full command of the essential language skills and being able to use English effectively

in the authentic communicative situation, it is not surprising that they experienced foreign language anxiety when using English both inside and outside classrooms as discussed in the findings. Foreign language anxiety is, thus, an important issue that cannot be overlooked. The following section discusses suggested measures for reducing foreign language anxiety in EFL classrooms.

Learning Atmosphere

As evidenced by the research findings, anxiety is displayed through several observable physical reactions such as fidgeting, sweating and stuttering. It is, therefore, important for language teachers to pay attention to their learners in class in order to help reduce their learning anxiety (Kitano, 2001; Tallon, 2009; Wörde, 2003). As discussed in the findings that the perceived gap between language teachers and learners prevents the learners from approaching their teachers, it is advisable that good rapport between the teachers and learners be established as the starting point of overcoming foreign language anxiety. Recognizing the behavioral and physical manifestations of foreign language anxiety enables teachers to respond to the problem more effectively (Young, 1991). The perceived support and the friendly foreign language classroom atmosphere can foster learners' positive outlook towards learning a foreign language.

Teachers' Role

Another important factor for consideration in developing low-anxiety foreign language classrooms concerns teachers' role. The findings also indicated that causes of foreign language anxiety are likely to be interrelated. Teachers, for instance, were found to be the major anxiety contributing factor both in the aspect of teachers-learners interaction and the learners' fear of evaluative situations. Therefore, it is also crucial for language teachers to reconsider their roles in foreign language classrooms in order to create a relaxing learning atmosphere. For example, instead of maintaining a traditional teacher-fronted class which offers language learners little practice opportunity, teachers should play a role of a facilitator who encourages learners' involvement and support learning

process rather than being an evaluator who constantly monitors and corrects the learners' errors (Gregersen, 2003; Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Young, 1991).

Learners' Beliefs

Additionally, the findings also suggested that the learners' anxiety is a result of their erroneous beliefs about their own foreign language proficiency. Regarding themselves as non-competent and comparing themselves with peers can lead to lower self-esteem and deteriorating confidence. Thus, these irrational beliefs should be reframed (Cheng, 2001). Supplementary activities that allow learners to identify their own concerns and anxiety such as group discussion, role play, and positive self-talk should be introduced in the language classrooms to enhance the learning atmosphere (Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Young, 1991). In order to strengthen the learners' confidence in learning and using the foreign language, it is necessary for language teachers to help learners develop realistic learning objectives and point out that errors are common and expected in the process of foreign language acquisition (Gregersen, 2003; Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). Most importantly, it should be emphasized that foreign language anxiety is a common experience shared by many foreign language learners (Wörde, 2003). Sufficient practice opportunities, constructive comments, and positive feedbacks should be provided in the foreign language classrooms to reinforce learners' confidence and increase the learners' perception of self-efficacy (Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Mills et al., 2006). Moreover, various useful language learning strategies should be introduced in the foreign language classroom as a means to help learners cope with their stress and anxiety (Williams and Andrade, 2008).

Learning atmosphere, teachers' role, and learners' beliefs are the key factors in minimizing the negative influences of foreign language anxiety. Pleasant learning atmosphere facilitated by supportive teachers can stimulate favorable learning environment. Yet, a successful foreign language classroom also requires cooperation from learners. Language learners, in fact, should not be intimidated by the fear of making mistakes

when using the language. The present study indicates that although the potentially profound and pervasive repercussions of foreign language anxiety can negatively affect the process of foreign language learning, foreign language anxiety can still be reduced and possibly overcome with appropriate pedagogical treatments.

Conclusion

The present study explored the level of Thai EFL learners' foreign language anxiety, identified the possible sources of the learners' anxiety as well as attempted to propose the anxiety-reducing solutions. It is clear that foreign language anxiety exists and is perceived by Thai EFL learners. The effects and manifestations of foreign language anxiety may vary depending on several involving factors such as learners' personality, teachers-learners interactions, learners' perceptions of their own language competence, classroom climate, instructional approaches, language test types, and learners' language using experience outside classroom contexts. Although it is difficult to precisely measure the learners' level of foreign language anxiety, language teacher can identify and alleviate the anxiety through the range of anxiety-reducing means. It is essential that language teachers are aware of foreign language anxiety's existence. Simple means such as observation and discussion about the learners' concerns can lead to a deeper understanding of the issue. As presented in this study, the FLCAS and the focus group interviews provided some useful insights from Thai EFL learners' perspectives based on their in-class learning experience as well as their use of English in authentic communicative situations. Although acquired from a limited number of Thai EFL learners, some useful pedagogical implications can be drawn from the research findings. It is hoped that the findings from both the questionnaire and the learners' self-reported accounts will raise some awareness about the issue of foreign language anxiety in Thai EFL context and be the starting point of consideration for teachers and foreign language program administrators to help reduce the learners' unnecessary anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Finally, it is important for language teachers to employ

instructional practices and implement anxiety-reducing measures that are suitable to their own cultural background and learning circumstances in order to create low-anxiety foreign language classrooms where English language acquisition can fully flourish.

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