



Speaking Anxiety and Related Factors of Freshmen towards Foreign Language Class

Rati Mhuentoei*

*College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand

*Corresponding Author. E-mail address: rati@tni.ac.th

Received: 28 July 2021; Revised: 23 September 2021; Accepted: 3 November 2021

Published online: 13 December 2021

Abstract

Foreign language learning anxiety has a debilitating effect on students' performance. This article examines levels of anxiety of TNI freshmen. It also explores sources of their anxiety as well as the methods used coping with anxiety. Mixed method was used for data collection. A Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (SLSAS) questionnaire was adapted as a tool for this research. A quantitative method could show overall results. Nevertheless, qualitative method is also suitable for a language course. An oral interview was used. Individual interviews could provide more and deeper details. The results reveal that TNI students have moderate levels of anxiety in speaking English in class. However, most students have high anxiety level. The factors were students' confidence. The sources of lack of confidence were almost similar for each student but the solutions were different. This research found various solutions used due to the different grade performance of students.

Keywords: Foreign language learning, Anxiety, Second language speaking anxiety scale (SLSAS), Classroom environment

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning has been found since 1960s (Williams & Andrade, 2008). Multiple studies about anxiety in foreign language class have been researched. However, there are various involved factors which are changing continuously. Students are still affected. Thus, this research is conducted to update factors and students' solutions though the problems. Tools and methods are being developed to examine anxiety factors. In 1986, the first tool called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales (FLCAS) was generated by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope. It is widely used as a tool to measure anxiety level of studying foreign language in a classroom context (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). In 2006, the tool was developed to measure anxiety in speaking skill, the Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (SLSAS) (Woodrow, 2006). The result from this instrument focusing more on oral communication.

Anxiety is a psychological construct perceived negatively with an object (Hashemi, 2011). Foreign language learning anxiety is a fear of negative outcome produced by language learners. It is a tension and nervousness of listening and speaking skills. These two skills are interacted which could not be separated (Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013). There are three related conceptual foundations of anxiety; 1) communication apprehension 2) test anxiety 3) fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz, 2016). Communication apprehension refers to difficulty when communicate with people whether individual or in group (oral communication anxiety); in public (stage fright); listening in a spoken message (receiver communication anxiety). Test anxiety is a fear of performing under the criteria. Students might have their own criteria. Even they practice, they might feel that their skills are not up to the standard. High anxiety students might avoid classroom procedures such as, oral presentation, oral quizzes and being asked to

answer orally. They might also avoid a language testing. The anxiety is higher because of unfamiliar materials and complicated exam instruction (Young, 1991). Fear of negative evaluation is defined as fear of being judged by other people. Students tend to avoid a situation which they might be evaluated as poor foreign language speaker. The speaker is afraid of losing a self-image. These anxieties affect classroom environment which also might affect students' performance. A low anxiety classroom environment and high learning motivation could help students have a better communication (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

In the classroom context, there are various sources of anxiety which could be defined. A dominant factor is the mismatch belief between teachers and students' beliefs. In details, some teachers believe that a good foreign speaker should be able to speak correctly. So the teachers try to correct everything that students say while students feel more depressed. Many students believe that being a successful speaker requires excellent pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and so on. If these factors are not perfect, some students do not want to speak. Some students have sweaty palms, nervous stomach, accelerated heartbeat and pulse rates (Leary, 1999). High anxiety students might express as freezing up and tell that they forget what they have learned (Horwitz, et al., 1986). Thus, error correction is necessary but too much error correction could be perceived negatively by students.

As different factors cause different anxiety, different solutions to deal with anxiety are used diversely (Park, 2014). Some students believe that a good foreign language speaker should be able to speak as the native. So they take the course in a native country while some students take more courses in their country with native teachers (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 2008). However, some students learn by themselves and surrounded themselves with the foreign language such as music,

movies, and so on (Williams & Andrade, 1999). They also consult with their teachers in class. They share their anxiety with peers. When they feel that their peers are in the same situation, the anxiety decreases (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To explore the level of speaking anxiety in foreign language class.
- 2) To explore sources of anxiety.
- 3) To explore student's methods used for dealing with anxiety of students getting different English grade.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Population and Samples

This research explores anxiety level, sources of anxiety and student's methods used for dealing with anxiety. Mixed method was applied by using a questionnaire, classroom observation and semi-structured interview as the tools.

The population was 31 first year students from 3 faculties; Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Information Technology in the first semester of 2019 academic year at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

For quantitative sample, the sample of this research was 31 TNI students derived through Simple Random Sampling technique who enrolled in ENL-111 (English for Communication). For qualitative sample, from the answer from the questionnaire, four students were chosen through Purposive Sampling technique. These students gain different grades in English; A, B, C and D.

B. Instruments

There are two instruments used in this research; questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

Questions in the questionnaire were adapted from Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (SLSAS). The

questionnaire contained three parts. The first part (Part 1) questions explored speaking anxiety level and factors in class. The second part (Part 2) was opened-ended questions exploring factors and solutions which students used in class. The third part (Part 3) asked personal information; college year, faculty, GPA.

Questions in semi-structured interview were adapted from opened-ended question in the questionnaire.

C. Data Collection

The questionnaire was provided via Google Classroom by using Google Form after the first semester, 2019 finished. The result was analyzed. Then, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interview for more details from the questionnaire. Four students with different English grade result; A, B, C and D volunteered to join the interview. The interview was conducted individually.

D. Data Analysis from Questionnaire

These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation. Five points Likert scales for all questions were applied. In the analyzing results, the scale is different. Question number 1-13 are positive questions while question number 24-32 are opposite. All questions in the questionnaire are separated.

IV. RESULTS

A. The Results of Anxiety Levels of TNI Undergraduate Students.

These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation. Five points Likert scales for question 1-13 were applied as follows:

1.00 \leq 1.50	refers students had the lowest anxiety
1.51 \leq 2.50	refers students had low anxiety
2.51 \leq 3.50	refers students had moderate anxiety

3.51 \leq 4.50 refers students had high anxiety
 4.51 \leq 5.00 refers students had the highest anxiety

The analysis of the data from the student questionnaire reported by TNI students in 2018 academic year was presented as following.

Table 1: The results of anxiety level of TNI first – year students

Questions		S.D	Level of Anxiety
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.	3.81	1.00	High
2. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	3.74	0.98	High
3. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English.	3.58	1.21	High
4. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	4.00	1.02	High
5. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	3.81	0.86	High
6. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.	4.19	1.00	High
7. In a language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	4.03	0.78	High
8. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	3.48	0.88	Moderate
9. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.97	0.90	Moderate
10. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.	3.81	0.93	High
11. I often feel like not going to my English class.	3.03	1.09	Moderate
12. I'm afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.39	0.94	Low
13. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	3.84	0.81	High
14. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	3.65	0.90	High
15. I always feel that the other students speak the English better than I do.	4.10	1.00	High
16. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	3.71	0.96	High
17. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	3.16	0.95	Moderate
18. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.	3.39	1.29	Moderate
19. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	3.52	0.98	High
20. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the teacher says.	3.90	0.94	High
21. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	3.52	1.01	High
22. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	3.29	1.02	Moderate
23. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	4.03	0.74	High

The table shows that the speaking anxiety levels of first-year TNI students is at high level. Considering each item, it is found that item 6 shows the highest level: “*I worry about the consequences of failing my English class*” with the mean at 4.19 and the standard deviation at 1. In contrast, item 12 shows the lowest level: “*I'm afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make*” with the mean 2.39 and the standard deviation at 0.94.

These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation. Five points Likert scales for question 24-32 were applied as follows:

1. 00 \leq 1. 50 refers students had the highest anxiety

1.51 \leq 2.50 refers students had high anxiety

2.51 \leq 3.50 refers students had moderate anxiety

3.51 \leq 4.50 refers students had low anxiety

4.51 \leq 5.00 refers students had the lowest anxiety

B. The Results of Anxiety Levels of TNI First- year Students.

The table shows that the speaking anxiety levels of first-year TNI students is at high level. Considering each item, it is found that item 26 shows the highest level: “I

am usually at ease during tests in my English class” with the mean is at 2.61 and the standard deviation at 1.07. Conversely, item 25 shows the lowest level: “It wouldn't bother me at all to take more in English classes” with the mean 3.35 and the standard deviation at 1.06.

Table 2: The results of anxiety level of TNI freshmen

Questions	S.D	Level of Anxiety
24. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	2.81	1.12
25. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more in English classes.	3.35	1.06
26. I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.	2.61	1.07
27. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes.	3.32	0.89
28. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.	2.87	1.13
29. I feel confident when I speak in English class.	2.87	0.91
30. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	3.26	1.05
31. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	3.03	1.03
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers.	3.00	0.88

C. The results of personal information of TNI first-year students

Table 3: The results of anxiety level of personal information of TNI freshmen

Demographic data of respondents	N	Percentage
1. Academic year		
1 st year	31	100
2. Faculties		
3.1 Engineering	8	25.80
3.2 Information Technology	5	16.12
3.3 Business Administration	17	58.08
3. GPA		
3.5 - 4.00	6	19.4
3.00 - 3.49	7	22.6
2.50 - 2.99	6	19.4
2.00 - 2.49	10	32.1
1.50 - 1.99	0	0
1.00 - 1.49	2	6.5
< 1.00	0	0
Total	31	100

D. The Results of Sources of Anxiety of TNI Freshmen

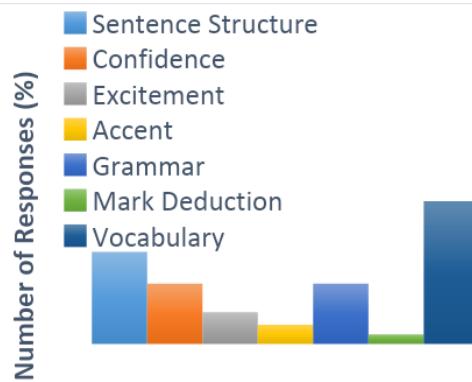


Figure 1: Sources of Anxiety of TNI Freshmen

The bar chart above shows various sources of speaking English in class. Seven factors were mentioned; sentence structure, excitement when speaking, grammar, vocabulary, confidence in speaking, accent and mark deduction. Almost half of source which students concerned most is vocabulary whilst the least is afraid of mark deduction. From opened-ended question and the interview, the main sources of anxiety were lacking of vocabulary and lack of confidence. It is

because students were afraid of being judged by other people. Students found that they did not know how to communicate without vocabulary. Some students concerned the meaning of sentences rather than grammar. Some students said, "I am afraid that people will not understand what I am speaking". Some students used body language if they do not know vocabulary while some asked for their friends or teachers help. However, they were worried about losing their face if they could not speak correctly. Being silence was the main choice that they used. Some students said, "I do not want people to laugh at me when I speak something incorrectly". They concerned about their classmates and teacher' reaction. Some afraid that their score might be deducted if they make mistakes. Moreover, a few students were concerned about accent where as some had low confidence in speaking.

E. The Results of Solution Dealing with Anxiety which TNI First-year Students Used.

The results can be divided into two groups base on students' grade result; above B and below B. Students' grade above B tend to focus on preparing and practicing. By preparing in advance, especially before class can reduce their anxiety. If they need more information that they do not know, they will search and ask their teacher. However, they feel depressed if they do not have a chance to prepare in advance. When they were asked without preparing, they tried to answer by using synonyms, easy words or old background knowledge. On the contrary, students' grade above B tend to ask their teacher or classmates for help. Sometimes, they played jokes when they could not answer. The classroom environment affected the anxiety. So the solution they mentioned mostly related to positive attitudes. One student said, "When I have to speak English, I tell myself to keep calm and relax."

While the other student said, "I always tell myself that it is fine. I can pass this moment."

Nevertheless, these two groups have one same solution dealing with anxiety which is using technology. Most of them use online dictionary. Students' grade above B had more concern with sources. It must be credible and can be trusted. They judged by sources' reputation, references and teacher's suggestion.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the results, it can be discussed that the main sources of TNI freshmen's anxiety is from their attitude towards their English skill. It can be analyzed according to conceptual foundations of anxiety. Perceiving others are better, being anxious in the exam, or being panic of not enough preparation affect students' confident in using English. These related to communication apprehension. From the observation, the classroom environment is very important, especially between instructors and learners. If students feel that learning is exchanging ideas rather than getting good grades, they tend to participate more. They do not have to worry about score allocation or mark deduction. In addition, if they are closed with their classmates, they will have more confident to speak or answer questions. Many students do not want to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes and losing self-image. This thought also related to anxiety in fear of negative evaluation. They are not afraid of being judged because their classmates already know them. However, some students mentioned that they feel comfortable studying privately with teachers or asking individually after class. There would be no people with them at that time so they do not have to worry about self-image. They are not worried of making mistakes with the teacher because they know that they will make mistakes. Mistakes are perceived positively by some students. They said that making mistakes is normal for

learning and they can learn from making mistakes. For test anxiety, many students practice more but they still do not feel that it is enough. Moreover, many students forget what they have learned when they are anxious.

For all above anxiety, the main factor is from the learner's attitude so the solution should involve the attitude. For students, different students have different ways of healing themselves with anxiety. They have their own different appropriate ways which should be used individually. Nevertheless, they have to understand that their anxiety might not be disappear but it can be reduced. For teachers, teachers play main role in students' learning process. Positive classroom environment can help reducing anxiety. The researcher thinks that if the factors and sources of anxiety can be reduced, students' performance will be less affected. From the observation, positive classroom environment can increase students' attention and willingness in studying. When students have more positive attitude, they would have more confident.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The results might be varied if the sample is different due to the different factors such as, gender, years of studying English, studying criteria. The future study can study learner's anxiety by using this method to update factors and solutions. One of the outstanding factors is technology. As technology is one of the important factors which students use to help with their studying. The technology is going to be more advance so it might affect the result in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I got supported and a lot of recommendation from some of my senior colleagues in English department at TNI which I really appreciate it. Moreover, I would like to thanks my students for their willingness of being my

participants. With all corporation, my research could be completed smoothly.

REFERENCES

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, K. (2002). Language Learning and Perfectionism: Anxious and Non-Anxious Language Learners' Reactions to their own Oral Performance. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(4), 562-570.

Hashemi, M. (2011). Language Stress and Anxiety among the English Language Learners. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 1811-1816.

Horwitz, E. K. (2016). Factor Structure of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: Comment on Park 2014. *Psychological Reports*, 119(1), 71-76.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.

Leary, M. R. (1999). Making Sense of Self-Esteem. *Psychological Science*, 8(1), 32-35.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and Results in the Study of Anxiety and Language Learning: A Review of the Literature. *Language Learning*, 41(1), 85-117.

Ozuturk, G., & Hursen, C. (2013). Determination of English Language Learning Anxiety in EFL Classroom. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84, 1899-1907.

Park, G. (2014). Factor Analysis of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in Korean Learners of English as a Foreign Language. *Psychological Reports: Relationships & Communication*, 115(1), 261-275. doi: 10.2466/28.11.PR0.115c10z2

Saito, Y., Garza, T. J., & Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Foreign Language Reading Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), 202-218.

Williams, K. E., & Andrade, M. R. (2008). Foreign Language Learning Anxiety in Japanese EFL University Classes: Causes, Coping, and Locus of Control. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(2), 181-183.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and Speaking English as a Second Language. *Regional Language Centre Journal*, 37(3), 308-328. doi: 10.1177/0033688206071315

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Environment: What Does Language Anxiety Research Suggest?. *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(5), 427-428.