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# Non –English Major Undergraduate Students' Perception towards Using Drama to Overcome Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: A Case of Thai – Nichi Institute of Technology

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## บทคัดย่อ

ผู้ที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษามักจะแสดงออกถึงความวิตกกังวลต่อการพูดภาษาอังกฤษซึ่งก็สามารถกล่าวได้ว่าพวกเขารู้สึกกังวลในการที่จะต้องใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการติดต่อสื่อสารกับคู่สนทนาซึ่งสิ่งนี้ได้ถูกให้ความหมายว่า ความกังวลต่อภาษาต่างประเทศนั่นเอง การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 1) เพื่อสำรวจทัศนคติของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีที่ไม่ใช่สาขาเอกภาษาอังกฤษต่อการกิจกรรมละครในชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ 2) เพื่อศึกษาถึงการรับรู้ของนักศึกษาต่อผลของการใช้การละครที่มีต่อระดับความกังวลในชั้นเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศของนักศึกษา กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยในครั้งนี้เป็นนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 ซึ่งมาจากต่างคณะกันในสถาบันเทคโนโลยีไทย – ญี่ปุ่น ที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน ในภาคเรียนที่ 1 ปีการศึกษา 2561 กลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งหมดไม่ได้เป็นนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ และได้ถูกเลือกมาโดยวิธีการแบบเจาะจง (purposive sampling) โดยที่ผู้วิจัยได้อ้างอิงจากชั้นเรียนที่ได้รับมอบหมายจากสำนักทะเบียนที่มอบหมายให้ผู้วิจัยรับผิดชอบสอน ข้อมูลถูกรวบรวมโดยใช้แบบสอบถาม ผลการศึกษาพบว่านักศึกษาเห็นว่ากิจกรรมการละครเป็นกิจกรรมที่สนุก นักศึกษาไม่รู้สึกกังวลต่อการใช้ภาษาในระหว่างการทำกิจกรรมในชั้นเรียน ยิ่งไปกว่านั้นนักศึกษายังรู้สึกว่าการละครช่วยคลายความวิตกกังวลมากขึ้นเมื่อต้องใช้ภาษาอังกฤษต่อหน้าผู้คนที่หลังจากที่ได้รับการฝึกฝนผ่านกิจกรรมการละครมาหลายสัปดาห์

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## Non –English Major Undergraduate Students' Perception towards Using Drama to Overcome Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: A Case of Thai – Nichi Institute of Technology

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## Abstract

Non-native speakers (NNS) always show reluctance when they have to speak in English. We can say that they suffer the anxiety to express themselves in a foreign language. The fear or anxiety from real or expected communication by a student with another person or group has been defined as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). The purposes of the study were 1) to investigate the students' attitude of Thai undergraduates who were not in an English major course towards drama related activities in class at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology and 2) to identify the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' ForeignLanguage Classroom Anxiety Level at Thai-Nichi Institute of

Technology. The samples were 30 first year students who studied an English Foundation Course and came from different faculties at TNI in the first semester of the academic year 2018. All of them were non-English major students and they were selected for purposive sampling based on the class assigned for the researcher by the university registrar's office. The data was collected through a survey questionnaire. The results of the research indicated that the students regarded drama as a fun activity. They did not feel any anxiety during the drama class. Moreover, they felt more relaxed when they spoke English in front of people after several weeks of drama training.

Keywords: Anxiety, FLCA, Drama, non-English major undergraduate students

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## Introduction

Increasing globalization has led to English becoming the leading language of speakers who don't speak the same native language. English is therefore the accepted global language, but the communicative skills of Thai students are considerably lower as a whole than those of other countries, even in South – East Asia. Studies have revealed that in general Thai students have very low English speaking skills (Pattaranon, 1988; Jong – Utsah, 1988). Employers generally view speaking and listening English skills as the two most important of the four skills. As those two skills are of the most benefit in the workplace, we can assume that potential employers would prefer schools and universities to concentrate on those two skills, over and above the skills of reading and writing (Kitjaroonchai, 2012). Such requirements would be an obstacle for students who are not skilled in English. This lack of skill will cause problems pertaining to their development.

Anxiety has been the subject of a lot of foreign language research for almost fifty years. It was defined by Rachman as a pervasive and significant negative effect that is a central feature of many psychological problems (Rachman, 1988). Anxiety in the language classroom has been the topic of wide – ranging research, and can be categorized as a situation – specific anxiety. It has been found that various types of ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning are affected by anxiety in the student (Lui and Jackson, 2008). Horwitz et al. (1986) classified three components of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. To measure the anxiety, they designed the 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Therefore, the researcher has adapted this anxiety scale to ask for students' responses.

However, different strategies or activities have been created and used to overcome or reduce the effects of anxiety on non – native speakers of English (NNS). One possible way to alleviate anxiety and build up confidence and motivation is to use drama in the English Language Learning (ELL) classroom. Wagner (1998) stated that to make learning enjoyable and relevant to real-life as well as exciting and challenging, a useful tool is drama. Drama requires both thought and feeling and so it is uniquely

powerful. Drama has the possibility for achievement to provide students an opportunity to practice their English in a setting where they feel safe. There are some researches recommend that drama holds the potential to lower anxiety and increase motivation for ELL students. A study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Singapore by Stinson and Free body (2006) also asserted that drama programs increase the students' level of confidence when speaking English and encourage them to carry on taking part in further drama programs. Baren (2014) indicated that the drama activities in the lower-level classroom had an instantaneous positive effect on the students in the English speaking class because most of those students had good feelings about a variety of drama activities. Moreover, Bundit (2011) investigated the effects of drama on non-English majored Thai EFL university students and the findings showed that the drama activities were able to reduce students' FLCA.

Additionally, evidence of the positive impacts of English teaching, delivered via drama can be found in the research of Ratchadaporn and Punchalee (2009) who studied 15 non-native undergraduate students (whose major was not English) and the subsequent beneficial findings and positive attitudes towards English through drama. Similarly, Shand (2008), also discovered that drama was successful in significantly decreasing level of anxiety in third-grade students while increasing their confidence and motivation towards speaking English.

Subsequently, drama activities were expanded to incorporate undergraduate students who were not English majors at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI). This was done because of the benefits of drama in decreasing students' anxiety with regards to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Consequently, the purposes of this study were to investigate the students' attitude of Thai undergraduates who were not in an English major course towards drama related activities in class. Another purpose of this research was to identify the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level. To achieve the purpose of this study, it was expected that the findings of this study would shed light on ways Thai teachers can effectively enhance their students' English speaking skills in their class. From personal experience in the classroom and the research already mentioned, we could make the claim that drama, as a learning experience, could help students a lot while, simultaneously, minimizing levels of anxiety.

## Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the students' attitude of Thai undergraduates who were not in an English major course towards drama related activities in class at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.
2. To identify the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

## Method

## Research Design

The present study aimed at investigating the students' attitude of Thai undergraduates who were not in an English major course towards drama related activities in class at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. Another aim of this study was to identify the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level. The study adopted the quantitative research design in order to achieve its objectives. Nunan (2001) stated that the methods used to collect vast numbers of data or, in fact, anything that can be measured is called quantitative research. Also, this type of research is valuable in allowing us to summarize and compare large amounts of data with other material or research.

## Participants

The population of the study was undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. The samples were 30 first year students who studied English Foundation Course and came from different faculties at TNI in the first semester of the academic year 2018. All of them were non - English major students and they were selected for purposive sampling based on the class assigned for the researcher by the university registrar's office.

## Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the questionnaire which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). They classified three components of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. To measure the anxiety, they designed the 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Therefore, the researcher has adapted this anxiety scale to ask for students' responses. Apart from this, no particular parameter such as age, group and gender was set for respondent selection.

## Research Procedures

The procedure, involving four teaching steps in the teaching of drama, were adapted from Ratchadaporn and Punchalee (2009). The teaching steps were divided into four steps consisting of: (1) working on drama script, (2) drama rehearsal, (3) drama production, (4) drama evaluation, each of which is detailed as follows:

### (1) Working on a drama script

In order to stage the play for the students in the first place, it is necessary to explain the background knowledge of the play. The students need to know the characters they interact with and why they interact the way they do. Class discussion of the play's characters, their nature, their relationship with other characters, or their problems will be debated to establish the background knowledge of the play. Through this information the students can understand more about the critical features of communication in addition to linguistic forms. Moreover, the students gain a chance to state their ideas, opinions and emotional state of mind which they can then input in the drama.

### (2) Drama rehearsal

To employ themselves wholeheartedly and physically in the drama, the students were guided at this stage. Divided into different groups, they were allowed to play the part of each character. The commitment was assisted through the background knowledge gained from the preceding action. To help students learn the different forms of words in the script, close monitoring and interventions by the teacher were required during this step. At this level, the teacher is needed to help with pronunciation, improve the comprehension of the student's parts, and to safeguard that student's production of a dialogue from their awareness of the context rather than learning lines by heart.

### (3) Drama production

Without teacher's intervention, the approach to involve an enactment of the drama to encounter genuine, real life circumstances were contributed to the students doing this stage. As a result of performing and delivering a dialogue, the students will be able to practice facial expressions, pronunciation and gestures to understand the designated intention of each character. To develop the students' internationalization process linguistically and non – linguistically in speaking skills, this approach can heighten their abilities.

### (4) Drama evaluation

The students' performances were videotaped for evaluation with the aim of giving them some feedback to subsequently improve their performance and learn from their mistakes.

### Data Collection

The data for this research were collected through the administration of a survey questionnaire administered to the participating students. The 20-item questionnaire was constructed and administered during the last class of the semester which was directly after the drama presentation. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit the learners' attitude and perception towards the drama activity in helping them overcome their foreign language classroom anxiety.

### Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

The data collection through the questionnaire were to analyse using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage.

### Results and Discussion

There were two findings found in this study:

1. To investigate the students' attitude of Thai undergraduates who were not in an English major course towards drama related activities in class at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

This results obtained from this study revealed the students' attitude towards drama related activities in their English lessons. The table below demonstrates the frequency, and percentage of the variables of students' attitude towards the drama activities (see Table 1).



Table 1: The results of students' attitude towards the drama activities in their English lessons

Item No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Performing drama for this English course is fun.	29	96.6%
2.	Participating in drama for this course is not difficult.	26	86.6%
3.	I enjoy drama activity because it gives me the opportunity to speak English.	28	93.3%
4.	I have increased confidence when communicating in English.	27	90%
5.	Drama is my favorite kind of speaking activity because it is interesting and fun.	28	93.3%
6.	Memorizing lines for drama activities does not cause me stress.	25	83.3%
7.	I think that drama is a good way to consolidate and improve English speaking skills.	24	80%
8.	Drama gives me an eagerness to learn English.	25	83.3%
9.	Drama presentation gives me the motivation to learn different English phrases and colloquialisms.	24	80%
10.	My English Foundation course has been a pleasurable experience this semester.	25	83.3%

As shown in Table 1, the results revealed that according to the variables in the table: item 1 indicated the highest percentage of 96.6%. It showed that the students agreed to the statement "Performing the drama for this English course is fun." Followed by items number 3 and number 5 which had the same percentage of 93.3%, they showed that the students perceived drama as enjoyable, fun, and interesting because drama activities gave them the opportunity to speak English. Item number 4 indicated the third highest percentage of 90%. 27 of the 30 participants chose the statement "I have increased confidence when communicating in English". Finally, item number 2 indicated the fourth highest percentage of 86.6%. It proved that the students believed in participating in drama for this course was not difficult.

2. To identify the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

The results obtained from this study revealed the students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. The table below demonstrates the frequency, and percentage of the variables of students' perception towards the impacts of using drama presentation (see Table 2).

Table 2: The results of students' perception toward the impacts of using drama presentations on students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety level

Item No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	My awareness of the correct English expressions needed in different situations has increased.	26	86.6%
2.	I have witnessed an improvement in my English pronunciation.	24	80%
3.	My confidence has grown when speaking to public audience.	28	93.3%
4.	When speaking in public, I no longer feel nervous about making errors.	28	93.3%
5.	I am no longer reticent with regard to stating my view in public.	27	90%
6.	Even with no preparation, I do not panic when I am required to speak in public.	29	96.6%
7.	I do not get palpitations anymore before presenting a speech in class.	52	96.6%
8.	There is no longer a feeling of self-consciousness when speaking English in front of my peers.	25	83.3%
9.	The fear of being humiliated and laughed at by my classmates is no longer apparent.	25	83.3%
10.	Generally, I have more control over my fears and anxieties than previously.	24	80%

As shown in Table 2, generally the students agreed that drama has a positive impact on their language learning anxiety. According to the variables in the table, item number 7 indicated the highest percentage of 96.6%. It showed that most students agreed with the statement "I don't get palpitations anymore before presenting a speech in class." This probably means that their engagement in drama manages to reduce their anxiety level. Item number 3 and item number 4 had the same percentage of 93.3%. They showed that the students perceived drama did help increase their self-confidence when they had to speak in public. Moreover, they also believed that their anxiety levels were reduced. Item number 6 indicated the third highest percentage of 90% as 27 out of 30 chose the statement "Even with no preparation, I don't panic when I am required to speak in public." For this statement, the students agreed that drama was very helpful to reduce or overcome their anxieties. Finally, item number 1 indicated the fourth highest percentage of 86.6%. It proved that the students supported the statement that drama activities made them more aware of the need to use appropriate expressions in various situations.

## Discussion

The findings obtained from the survey questionnaire showed that TNI students had a positive experience with the drama activities in their language classroom. By engaging in drama and practicing their speaking skills, the students also believed that their anxiety levels were reduced. The reduction in the level of anxiety in the classroom leads to a further advantage in subsequent improved level of self-confidence. This result was supported by Shand (2008) who stated that drama was successful in significantly decreasing level of anxiety in students while increasing their confidence and motivation towards speaking English. For this reason, in any EFL learning situation, which has the target of improving speaking skills, we can assume that it would be worthwhile to introduce drama in the language classroom. The result of the research also indicated that it was hugely important for EFL students to have the opportunity to be involved actively in contrived conversations and dialogues related to real-life situation with an aim to improve speaking level. This result was similar to Wagner (1998) who stated that to make learning enjoyable and relevant to real-life as well as exciting and challenging, a useful tool is drama. Additionally, it is important for instructors to emphasize that conveying meaning is the aim rather than the perfect grammatical communication. Any flaws in grammar should be ignored in favor of comprehension of target language. Therefore, the design of activities that are both engaging and enjoyable, coupled with an aim of improving the targeted skills of the learners internally, should be applied by teachers using this pedagogical technique.

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