

English Anxiety among Thai Nursing Students of Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang, Thailand¹

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Abstract

Thailand is one of the ASEAN countries and is said to be the most visited country in Southeast Asia. Despite its development, Thailand falls as one of the countries with the lowest rates of English proficiency. This article is written to describe one of the possible factors of Thailand's low English proficiency, which is the foreign language anxiety of students. This article outlines references regarding the English language anxiety of Thai students and uses them as a basis in distinguishing English language anxiety among nursing students in Boromarajonani College of Nursing Nakhon Lampang, Thailand (BCNLP). A survey was conducted using a questionnaire based on the FLCA Scale by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, (1986) with a focus group consisting of 80 participants randomly selected from 1st year to 4th year nursing students of BCNLP. As found in the survey there were two sources of English language anxiety among nursing students: 1. Fear of negative evaluation due to unpreparedness, and feeling and thinking that others are better in language learning as the main factors; and 2. Communicating apprehension, where in speaking without preparation, speaking in the foreign language in front of other students, and self-doubt about one's ability to speak in the foreign language are the highest ranked causes of anxiety. The results indicate two main problems: unpreparedness and self-concept. Therefore, it is recommended that English Language classes should be taught with the learner-centered approach and that instructors should put importance in preparing the students during class, and encouraging them to increase a positive self-concept towards English language learning.

Keywords: FLCA – Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Anxiety, Thailand, Boromarajonani College of Nursing Nakhon Lampang

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Background

On 8 August 1967, five leaders – the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – sat down together in the main hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs building in Bangkok, Thailand and signed a document. By virtue of that document, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born. Taking this into consideration, Thailand entered the world of globalization, considering it the most visited country in Southeast Asia (Maierbrugger, 2016). It is expected that the English language plays a big role in supporting the country for its tourism and interaction with the other ASEAN countries. However, Thailand ranks one of the countries with the lowest English proficiency (Maierbrugger, 2016). In the EF English Proficiency Index (2017), Thailand ranks as the 15th out of 19 Asian countries and 56th out of 72 countries globally. An interesting point is that Thailand spends about 20% of its public annual budget on education, and shows an average of seven years of schooling, while countries with the best English proficiency worldwide, such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, just spend around 11% of their budget on education and have more than ten years of schooling on average. For the past four years the rankings have not changed.

Thailand's Education System

Coconuts Bangkok (2016) wrote that Thai education seriously needs remodeling. The Education Minister Dapong Rattanasuwan admitted that there are problems in all aspects of Thai education, particularly issues concerning English proficiency and critical thinking. Another article from the *Bangkok Post* (Lao, 2017), entitled “Educational Inequality in Thailand: The challenge,” discussed that it is not that Thailand does not have the resources needed to achieve across the board educational excellence. Thailand has, in fact, spent massive amounts of money on education. The government, for example, spent 19.35% of its annual 2.58-trillion-baht budget (\$80.5 billion US) in 2015 on education -- the largest portion of any item in the budget. Mostly, instructors think that teaching language content, vocabulary, and grammar is more important than teaching the way language is used or its functions in a communicative approach (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf, & Moni, 2006). Phongphul (2005) quoted Wasi (1998) who regarded the Thai education system as “pushing the country into disaster” because it does not prepare graduates to cope with the fast changing world of globalization. Therefore, as a result, the graduates lack the appropriate skills to be able to maximize their opportunities due to the absence of independence when it comes to learning and the ability to immerse themselves globally.

Literature Review

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition occurs subconsciously. While it is happening, we are not aware that it is happening. We think we are having a conversation, reading a book, watching a movie. Of course, we are, but at the same time, we might be acquiring language (Krashen, 2013). There are certain factors affecting the successful acquisition of another language. Schütz (2017) discussed one of the factors, which involves the Affective Filters by Krashen. The Affective Filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up,' it impedes language acquisition.

Anxiety

Based on the Affective Filters by Krashen, anxiety plays a negative factor in language acquisition. Anxiety is a complex concept, dependent upon not only one's feelings of self-efficacy but also appraisals concerning the potential and perceived threats inherent in certain situations (Tobias, 1986 as cited by Pappaminiel, 2002). Anxiety can also refer to the intense and enduring negative feeling caused by dangerous stimuli from the outside as well as the unpleasant emotional experiences involved, such as anticipation, irritation and fear (Howirtz, 1986 as cited by Pappaminiel, 2002). Within the English macro skills, speaking has the highest relationship to anxiety. Communication Anxiety is defined as the amount of fear and worry about being understood and understanding whether this is real or just perceived (McCroskey, 1993). Hamilton (2011) also discussed how Communication Anxiety or Communication Apprehension can influence how people communicate with each other and how it could hold people back from communicating effectively in their workplace, adding that it is hard to share ideas, pass on instruction and information, interview or be interviewed, and even joining group discussions and giving presentations is difficult for those who suffer from communication anxiety. Communication anxiety is divided into two types according to Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, (1992) and Motley (1995), namely Trait Anxiety and Situational Anxiety. Trait Anxiety is seen as the most difficult one since it comes from our own feelings. The negative perception due to low self-esteem and self-confidence causes one to avoid situations in which they must speak.

Therefore, people are reluctant to communicate in many situations due to their negative self-perception (Lane, 2010). On the other hand, Context Apprehension or Situational Anxiety is the fear of the speaker to communicate in a certain situation or context. For example, one may be comfortable in communicating one on one, but may feel frightened when engaged in public speaking (Morreal, Spitzberg, & Barge, 2007).

Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p.129) wrote that “foreign language anxiety is a phenomenon related to but distinguishable from other specific anxieties.” Fundamentally, Foreign Language Anxiety is the fear of speaking one’s non-native language due to the threats the speaker may perceive, such as miscommunication, and the lack of vocabulary to communicate effectively and fluently.

English Language Anxiety of Thai Students

Thai students tend to have a negative perception of their ability to communicate using the English language. It was found in a study conducted in Satri Di Suriyothai School, Bangkok with middle school students that English language anxiety is a major factor that negatively affects students’ performance in English language class. Students who perceive a high level of self-efficacy in themselves experience lower level of English language anxiety. As a result, students who experience lower levels of English language anxiety perform better on their English language tests and/or exams (Anyadubalu, 2010). Self-efficacy is said to be a belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Implicitly, this aspect of general self-efficacy finds some kind of bearing in the students’ abilities to plan, organize, carry-out, and participate effectively in their English Language learning processes. Self-efficacy beliefs are vital in deciding human activity, especially in the area of one’s control over one’s self, actions, and environment (Bandura, 1994). This shows that having enough capability in dealing with the task on hand is one of the factors affecting one’s English language anxiety. For instance, students who perceive themselves as incapable of understanding and processing instructions using English would likely feel more incompetent, causing an increase in English language anxiety. Another study in Chiang Mai University, which looked at university students with a high level of foreign language anxiety, enumerated several factors affecting English Language Anxiety; the factors mentioned are as follows: Academic Evaluation, Negative Evaluation, Comprehension Problems, Instructors’ Personality, and Instructors’ Use of English. Academic Evaluation is where the participants worry about scoring less than expected, which might be influenced by their belief in their inability to use English to perform the required tasks effectively. Negative Evaluations is the learners’ fear of a negative evaluation from both instructors and classmates,

which can lead to foreign language anxiety. Comprehension Problems is the lack of understanding when learning, and using English was stated as the third factor triggering foreign language anxiety. Instructors' Personalities involves the instructors' friendliness and manner of correction and seemed to affect learners' feelings. Instructors' Use of English involves the instructor's voice, speaking pace, and accent, and also plays a part in creating confusion in the foreign language classrooms. The results showed that the consequence of failing an English class was the main source of the participants' anxiety. Having to speak without preparation in English classes and not understanding what the instructor says can also lead to foreign language anxiety (Chinpakdee, 2015). Meanwhile, at Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Thai undergraduate students experienced a high level of English language anxiety and many of them exhibited certain degrees of test anxiety in English class. It suggests that the anxiety is affected by being a non-English-major student with low self-esteem, a not so impressive English background, high pressure to pass English examination to qualify for graduation, and fierce competition in their future job-hunting (Namsang, 2011).

English Language Learning in Boromarajonani College of Nursing Nakhon Lampang as of 2017

Nursing students are required to attend 4 English classes throughout the 4-year nursing course. The subjects offered per semester are the following:

Year	Semester	Course	Description
First	1 st	English Communication 1	Using English for communication in various contexts including conversation, giving information, and giving socially and culturally appropriated opinions. The course emphasizes listening and speaking skills, and pronunciation.
	2 nd	English Communication 2	Using English for daily reading and writing in order to enhance life-long learning. The course emphasizes reading and principle, comprehensive reading, summarizing, grammar, and structure.
Second	2 nd	English for Academic Purposes	Using English for academic purposes including searching, reading, discussing, summarizing, and presenting as well as practicing English in academic context.
Fourth	1 st	English for Professional Purposes.	Using English for nursing professional purposes in various nursing contexts such as communication with patients and families, and health care team, writing nurses' notes, and nursing conferences.

The college usually recruits their English teachers from a different university. The students get to meet native and non-native English teachers. The English subjects are taken 1 day per week containing a theoretical lecture in the morning and application in the afternoon. Moreover, studying English for extended periods of time tends with a large number of students causes stress among nursing students and at times makes the learning retention low. In addition, the students also get a chance to interact with foreign guests during international events such as conferences and visitations. Only a small percentage of the students are able to attend such occasions.

Objectives

1. To identify the factors causing English language anxiety among nursing students studying in Boromarajonani College of Nursing Nakhon Lampang, Thailand (BCNLP).
2. To formulate possible recommendations for improved language learning.

Method

Taking all the research into consideration, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire based on the FLCA Scale by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) with a focused group consisting of 80 participants randomly selected from 1st year to 4th year nursing students at BCNLP. The results were then computed with simple averaging and the division of the 3 categories into the positive and negative items.

Throughout the years, the FLCA scale has been used by many researchers as a basis for determining the anxiety level of students due to its validity. The items were mainly divided into three subgroups, which were communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication Apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people. Test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as “apprehension about others’ evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively,” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Findings

Table 1: Communication Apprehension

	Item	Description	Mean	S.D.
Negative	9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.73	1.03
	24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	3.6	1.03
	1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	3.35	1.09
	29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language instructor says.	3.34	0.99
	30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	3.29	0.94
	4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the instructor is saying in the foreign language.	3	1.07
	27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	2.83	1.06
	15	I get upset when I don't understand what the instructor is correcting.	2.58	1.04
Positive	32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	3.63	0.97
	14	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	3.06	1
	18	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	2.96	1.01

Table 1 exhibits that speaking without preparation ($\bar{x}=3.72$, *S.D.* 1.03) is the first ranked reason for Communication Apprehension. Feeling self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students ($\bar{x}=3.6$, *S.D.* 1.03) and being unsure of oneself in speaking using the foreign language ($\bar{x}=3.35$, *S.D.* 1.09) are the next ranked factors affecting communication apprehension. Feeling comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language ($\bar{x}=2.38$, *S.D.* 1) ranks the lowest based on the inverted computation.

Table 2: Test Anxiety

	Items	Descriptors	Mean	S.D.
Negative	3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.9	1
	10	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	3.73	1.02
	12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.41	1
	16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	3.36	0.93
	26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	3.11	1.28
	25	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	3.03	1.16
	20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.89	1.28
	17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	2.54	1.08
	21	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	2.53	1.17
	6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.39	0.99
Positive	5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	3.58	1.2
	22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	3.39	1.04
	11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	3.36	0.93
	28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	3.24	0.94
	8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	2.81	0.93

Table 2 displays trembling in the thought of being called in language class ($\bar{x}=3.9$, *S.D.* 1) ranks the highest factor in test anxiety. Worrying about the consequences of failing

the foreign language class (\bar{x} =3.73, *S.D.* 1.02) and forgetting things they know when nervous (\bar{x} =3.41, *S.D.* 1) are the next ranked factor causing test anxiety. Thinking of other things unrelated to the language course (\bar{x} =2.39, *S.D.* 1) ranks the lowest.

Table 3: Fear of Negative Evaluation

	Items	Descriptors	Mean	SD
Negative	33	I get nervous when the language instructor asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	3.56	1.07
	23	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	3.55	0.97
	7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	3.45	0.88
	31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	3.01	1.16
	13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.84	1.06
	19	I am afraid that my language instructor is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.74	0.94
Positive	2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	3.31	1

Table 3 shows that getting nervous when the language instructor asks questions that the respondents have not prepared for in advance (\bar{x} =3.56, *S.D.* 1.07) ranks as the highest factor in fear of negative evaluation. Always feeling that the other students speak the foreign language better (\bar{x} =3.55, *S.D.* 1) and thinking that the other students are better at language learning (\bar{x} =3.45, *S.D.* 0.89) are the next ranked factors in fear of negative evaluation. Not worrying about making mistakes in language class (\bar{x} =2.69, *S.D.* 1) ranks the lowest based on the inverted computation.

Table 4: Overall

Overall	Mean	SD
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.12	1.01
Communicating Apprehension	3.12	1.02
Test Anxiety	2.97	1.06

Table 4 shows the overall findings of the survey where the primary causes of English language anxiety among nursing students come from the Fear of Negative Evaluation $\bar{x}=3.12$ (S.D. 1.01) and Communication Apprehension $\bar{x}=3.12$ (S.D. 1.02). Meanwhile, Test Anxiety $\bar{x}=2.97$ (S.D. 1.06) ranked as the last cause of English language anxiety.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the English language anxiety of nursing students mostly is due to two causes: fear of negative evaluation when being asked to answer without preparation and feeling and thinking other students are better in language learning were the main factors; and communication apprehension when speaking without preparation, speaking in the foreign language in front of other students, and self-doubt in one's ability to speak in the foreign language are the highest ranked causes of anxiety. The result of each category is correlated with the other categories and that they feel and think that other students are better than them, which causes them to have high anxiety in front of other students due to a low self-concept in learning English.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey, recommendations were drawn focusing on the approach and the instructors.

Learner-Centered Approach

Learner centered "is the perspective which focuses on the learners' experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs. It creates a learning environment conducive to learning and promotes the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9). As reviewed in this article, Thailand applies an instructor-centered approach in teaching not only languages,

but other subjects as well. Instructors should then shift the focus of the learning to the students' needs, depending on their capabilities.

Preparedness. Instructors should allot reasonable preparation time for the students during English language class considering their strengths and weaknesses.

Transformative Learning The Transformational Learning Theory originally developed by Jack Mezirow is described as being "constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning (Mezirow, 1991). To be able to make learning more meaningful and remarkable, instructors should consider the past experiences of the students and their present abilities and use those as foundations in creating learning with practical applications of the gained knowledge. This will enable students to learn with a continuous understanding of the process of language learning.

Development and Support for a Positive Self-Concept

According to our survey, many nursing students perceive themselves as incapable of speaking and understanding the English language. As mentioned by Du (2012), self-concept has to do with a person's perceptions and evaluations regarding him/herself, which is a basic requirement for successful cognitive and affective activity. Therefore, instructors must see to it that they cater to the needs of the students to encourage a positive self-concept that will result to productive and conducive learning. The language instructors may do so by considering the following factors:

Comfort. Instructors must build a student-friendly environment where students would feel at ease in using the foreign language and feel free to make mistakes without the threat of humiliation. Comments and corrections should be made with the utmost sensitivity and if possible, in general.

Safety. Instructors must reassure the students that, regardless of their differences, they are safe to express themselves, taking into consideration that students have different learning patterns from one another.

Interest and usefulness. Instructors should emphasize how English could affect their lives in their future profession and as well as their interaction with the world. It is important to emphasize the possibilities they may achieve. For instance, in the field of nursing, they need to be updated with the latest medication and treatment, and most of the resources for such information are in English. This shows how important it is to make the

student realize that the English language could help them develop more in their chosen profession and other goals in life.

Meaningfulness. For most nursing students, English is only part of the curriculum and a factor for academic evaluation. Instructors should show a wider perspective in the range of opportunity wherein the English language can be of help to increase their interest in learning, to show them how the English language is used in real situations, not only focusing on the grammar and structure.

Goals and expectations. Instructors should set realistic goals and expectations for the students considering the factors that hinder the language learning. For instance, the location and the surroundings of the college cannot provide enough exposure for the students to have sustainable English language learning. As for BCNLP, it may be best to set standards based on the current ability of the students.

Self-efficacy. As most nursing students doubt their own ability, instructors should be the main source of encouragement. Instructors should introduce a variety of modern strategies in language learning, which would let them learn in accordance with their own preferences, such as using dictionary application, watching movies, or listening to music. Instructors should guide students in building their own language learning strategy based on their current capabilities and on modern resources.

Learning Session

As mentioned before, the students study English in extended periods of time with a large number of students. It is recommended to divide the students into smaller sessions to increase English encounter and learning retention. Thailand has been using the communicative approach in English language teaching. This approach involves placing an emphasis on meaning rather than structure. This approach may be effective if applied accurately. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the English language learning experiences of the participants.

Overall, the Thai nursing students need to have consistent support and guidance in language learning. It is important that instructors should instill a positive self-concept in the students regarding English language learning. In the end, it all leads back to the instructors and how they encourage and change the students' perception towards English language learning.

Limitations of this Paper

This paper was conducted within one college in the Northern part of Thailand. Any conclusion made only reflects the participants within BCNLP. Further research with a wider range of participants is needed to have a better understanding of the English Anxiety of Thai undergraduate students.

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