

การศึกษาปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนของ
นิสิตสาขาวิชาวิศวกรรมคอมพิวเตอร์และสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษมหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

A Study of the Factors Contributing to English Language Learning
Anxiety in Classroom Perceived by Computer Engineering Students and
English Major Students at Naresuan University

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนของนิสิต 2 กลุ่มได้แก่ นิสิตคณะมนุษยศาสตร์ สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 3 จำนวน 49 คน และนิสิตคณะวิศวกรรมศาสตร์ สาขาวิชาวิศวกรรมคอมพิวเตอร์ ชั้นปีที่ 3 จำนวน 39 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร เพื่อทดสอบว่า นิสิตจากสาขาวิชาที่มีความแตกต่างกัน จะมีระดับความวิตกกังวลและปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนที่คล้ายคลึงหรือแตกต่างกันมากน้อยอย่างไร โดยใช้เครื่องมือที่มีชื่อว่า Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) ซึ่งคิดค้นโดย Horwitz และคณะ (1986) นอกจากนี้ยังได้ทำการเลือกตัวแทนนิสิตจากทั้งสองกลุ่ม จำนวนกลุ่มละ 5 คน ซึ่งมีคะแนน FLCAS สูงสุดมาทำการสัมภาษณ์โดยใช้คำถามสัมภาษณ์ซึ่งดัดแปลงมาจากบทสัมภาษณ์ที่คิดค้นโดย Toth (2011) เพื่อหาสาเหตุและปัจจัยเพิ่มเติมที่ส่งผลต่อความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนของนิสิตทั้งสองกลุ่ม

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ค่าความวิตกกังวลโดยรวมในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนของกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งสองกลุ่มมีความแตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญใน 2 ปัจจัยได้แก่ ความวิตกกังวลในการพูด และความกลัวต่อการได้รับการประเมินในเชิงลบ และทัศนคติในเชิงลบต่อห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ แต่ไม่แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในอีก 3 ปัจจัยได้แก่ ความไม่สบายใจขณะพูดคุยกับเจ้าของภาษา การประเมินตนเองในเชิงลบ และ ความกลัวต่อความล้มเหลวในชั้นเรียน

อีกทั้งผลการสัมภาษณ์เพื่อหาปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนของนิสิตทั้งสองกลุ่มยังมีความคล้ายคลึงกันในบางปัจจัย แต่ก็มีบางปัจจัยที่มีความแตกต่าง หรือเป็นปัจจัยที่ปรากฏอย่างเฉพาะเจาะจงในกลุ่มตัวอย่างกลุ่มนั้น ซึ่งมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับความคิดหวังทางสังคมที่มีต่อสาขาวิชาที่นิสิตเรียน

คำสำคัญ: ความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษา; การเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ; สมมติฐานตัวกรอง

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors causing the English language learning anxiety in classroom of 2 groups of students. In order to investigate the level and the differences of the factors concerning English language learning anxiety in classroom between two groups of students, 49 third year English major students and 39 third year Computer Engineering major students from Naresuan University were chosen as participants. This study adapted and utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) as the main instrument. Furthermore, this study had included in-depth interview questions, which were adapted from the constructed interview of Toth (2011), in order to find additional factors concerning English language learning anxiety in classroom.

The results of this study revealed that the level of English language learning anxiety of the participants from both groups were significantly different in 2 factors, namely speak anxiety and fear of negative evaluation and negative attitudes towards the English class, and not in the other 3; uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers, negative self-evaluation and fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure.

Additionally, the results from the interview section were similar in some aspects. However, some unique additional factors of each group were found with regard to people's expectation towards the participants' respective field of study.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety; english as a foreign language; hypothesis filters

Introduction

Foreign language learning anxiety (FLA) is the apprehension or fear that occurs with the language learners when they have expectations to perform in second or foreign language (MacIntyre, 2010). It has been viewed by many researchers and academics as a negative psychological factor that is considered as having impacts on the language learning process of language learners (Daubney, 2005). This kind of

anxiety does not only occur with language learners having low proficiency, but it also occurs with learners with high proficiency (Toth, 2009). It causes many language learners to have a mental block against foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Since FLA is considered as one of the effective variables that have impacts in language learning process, it has become a central concern among many second and foreign language learning researchers (Oda, 2011). However, FLA does not only have negative effects; it also has some benefits for the language learners (Daubney, 2005). Therefore, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the language learning process of the learners, the language instructors have to find ways of balancing the level of language learning anxiety of the learners, instead of completely eliminating it.

Since language learning anxiety does not completely depend on the level of language proficiency of the learners, many researchers have conducted their investigation of many groups of language learners from many fields of study and many kinds of occupation. The frequently found differences from the results of the enquiry are the factors that caused language anxiety from each group. The field of study seems to have great influences towards the learner's FLA. According to Toth (2011), the advanced L2 learners (which referred to learners who studying L2 at more advanced level) like English major students who have a high level of anxiety claimed to have their field of study as one of the causes for their FLA. As English major students, they have to prove that their English language skill is up to standard. In case of Engineering students, motivation seems to be the effective factor of FLA that influences the success rate in English language learning of Engineering students (Sailaja, 2015). However, there are many factors that might influence the differences in the language learning anxiety of the students from each group, like learning environment, attitudes toward targeted language, the language learning experiences, etc.

Since there is no research contributing to English language learning anxiety which compares the similarities and the differences between two groups of students majoring in clearly different study fields, it is therefore worth investigating the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety in classroom of the students from two different fields of study by focusing on the similarities and differences of their

English language learning anxiety factors. In this study, the purposive sampling technique was employed in order to select the participants. One group was the advanced L2 learners and another group was the group of learners majoring in a field of study which does not necessarily specialize in studying languages. English major students seem to be the best group to be chosen as an advanced L2 learners group as they are the group which directly focuses on studying English language. Another group was a group of science-technology program students which does not directly focus on studying English.

Engineering field is one of the biggest fields of study in which most of the theories are taught and provided in English. Therefore, Engineering students and graduated engineers are required to have good English communication competence (Shamrao, 2013). English communication skills are essential especially for the engineers who work in a global arena. However, there are many pieces of evidence which indicate that graduated engineers lack the required standard communication skills that meet the international industry's needs (Riemer, 2002), a problematic scenario which also occurs with Engineering students in Thailand. The obvious role played by English is not only evident in the field of Engineering; in fact, English is even more important for students who study in the field of Computer Science/Engineering (Arshad, 2010). Although not every programming language is in English, the keywords used for most programming languages are in English (Mandl, 2016). Additionally, since most of the Computer Engineering graphs are also marked in English, Computer Engineering students should have an acceptable brand of English language competence in order to master their Computer Engineering knowledge better (Arshad, 2010). Therefore, it is for the reasons previously mentioned that the Computer Engineering group was selected as the second group.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety of Computer Engineering students and English major students in Naresuan University.

Research Questions

1. What are the similarities or differences in the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety as perceived by Computer Engineering students and English major students in Naresuan University?
2. Are there any other factors that cause English language anxiety in classroom other than those categorized in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)?

Theoretical Framework

According to Toth (2009), foreign language anxiety (FLA) was believed to be an issue that occurred only with low-proficiency foreign language learners. However, the results of Toth's study had shown something opposite. The finding revealed that not only the low-proficiency foreign language learners experienced anxiety during their language study but also the advanced L2 learners. The advanced L2 learners may have more language learning experience and have a high level of proficiency; however, they also have high expectation of themselves towards their goals of language learning as well as the expectations of people around them as advanced learners who have to perform effectively in English language communication. Therefore, foreign language learning anxiety sometimes occurs frequently with the learners with high proficiency. However, FLA has some benefits for the language learners. The more anxious they are, the more awareness and intention they have while learning languages (Toth, 2009). Thus, the best way to maximize the effectiveness of the language learning process of the learners is to balance the perceived anxiety, rather than to completely eliminate it.

Research Methodology

Participants

By using a purposive sampling, the participants of this study were divided into two major groups. The first group consisted of forty-nine third-year English major students from the Faculty of Humanities with four semesters of English language learning in-class experience, and the second group comprised thirty-nine third-year

Computer Engineering students from the Faculty of Engineering with four semesters of English language learning in-class experience; both faculties are in Naresuan University. The participants were 20 or 21 years old. The purpose of selecting these two groups is as follows: as a matter of policy, Computer Engineering students have to take English courses until the second semester of their third year. Therefore, it was a perfect timing that the third year Computer Engineering students were in their last year of studying English in class, with most of their English learning experiences taking place in classroom. The English major group was chosen in order to compare the results of the study with the findings from the Computer Engineering group. This group needed to be students who had direct and increased exposure to English language and must be in the same year as the other group from the same University in order to ensure closest proximity to the other group in terms of study experience, the environment of study, social environment, culture, etc. However, Engineering students have to take only one English course per semester and instructed by Thai lecturers while English major students have to take many English courses in one semester which some cause are lectured by native speakers. In this study, all participants were requested to complete the questionnaire.

For the interview part of this research, five students with the highest FLCAS score from each group were interviewed individually to share their English language learning anxiety experience. They were asked to answer the interview questions in order to get as many English language learning anxiety factors as possible. The results in this section from each group were compared in order to find the similarities and differences.

Research Instrument

1. FLCAS (Adapted from Horwitz et al.)

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed by Horwitz, et al. in 1986. This instrument had been widely adopted and used by the researchers in the field of Foreign Language Anxiety. The researcher employed this instrument in order to measure the English language anxiety of English major students and Computer Engineering students.

There are thirty-three items scored on the five-point Likert scale in FLCAS including strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neither agree nor disagree (N), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). Items are stated either in the positive or in the negative questions (including questions number 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32) for which the given scores were inverted (see Appendix I).

Because this study aims to focus only on English language learning, not any foreign language, some modifications were applied to the instrument. “Foreign Language” in the original questionnaire was replaced with the “English Language”. The Thai translations were added to the questionnaire in order to ensure understanding among all the subjects from both groups.

The items in FLCAS were further categorized into 5 factors proposed by Barley (2011). These 5 factors were 1) speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, 2) uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers, 3) negative attitudes towards the English class, 4) negative self-evaluation, and 5) fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure. All FLCAS 33 items were categorized as follow.

Table 1: FLCAS Items Categorized by Barley’s 5 Factors

Factor Type	Factor Name	Categorized Items
1	Speech Anxiety and fear of negative evaluation	1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 24, 26, 27, 29, 31, and 33
2	Uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers	8, 11, 14, and 32
3	Negative attitudes towards the English class	5, 6, and 17
4	Negative self-evaluation	7 and 23
5	Fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure	10, 15, and 22

Six items in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale were not categorized into any type of factors; these included items number 2, 18, 21, 25, 28, and 30.

2. Qualitative Interview Questions (Adapted from Toth, 2011)

The interview questions were adapted from the work of Toth (2011). These questions consist of four main topic areas, which are as follows:

1. Language learning history
2. Attitudes to English
3. Impressions of and attitudes to university English classes
4. Attitudes to communication in English

The 11 interview questions were generated based on Toth's scope of questions with the approval of the adviser and specialists.

Procedure

Data Collection

For the quantitative data gathering, the researcher asked permission from both the faculty of Humanities and faculty of Engineering to distribute the questionnaires to the target students. This data collection took place during English class hours, with the permission from the course instructors. While completing the questionnaire, the students were allowed to ask any question regarding the contents of the questionnaire.

After the results of the questionnaire were calculated, five students with highest FLCAS scores from each group were asked for an in-depth interview, which consisted of four main areas of questions. The interview lasted 15-30 minutes for each session. Because all the students are Thai native speakers, the interview for both groups of the students was conducted in Thai in order to let the students express their feelings and answer the questions precisely. The interviews were recorded and used for analysis.

Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The results of the FLCAS were categorized into five categories based on Barley's study (2011). These five categories included 1) speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, 2) uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers of English, 3) negative attitudes towards the English class, 4) negative self-evaluation, and 5) fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure. The score of each FLCAS item was kept and reported in frequency order. In addition, the mean scores of each factor were analyzed using T-Test method in order to check if FLA level of each factor was significantly different or not. The results of this quantitative data analysis were used to answer the research question 1.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis

In this section, the five participants from each group who got the highest FLCAS score were selected for an in-depth interview. The additional factors that the interviewees gave which were not categorized in FLCAS based on the types of factors of Barley's study (2011) were reported. These additional factors were class environment and social expectation of English major students. The results had been used to provide an answer to research question 2.

Findings and Discussion

1. FLCAS Results and Discussion

This section reports the FLCAS scores from both groups of English major and Computer Engineering major students. Figure 1 shows the comparison of the mean scores of each type of factors in FLCAS between English majors and Computer Engineering students.

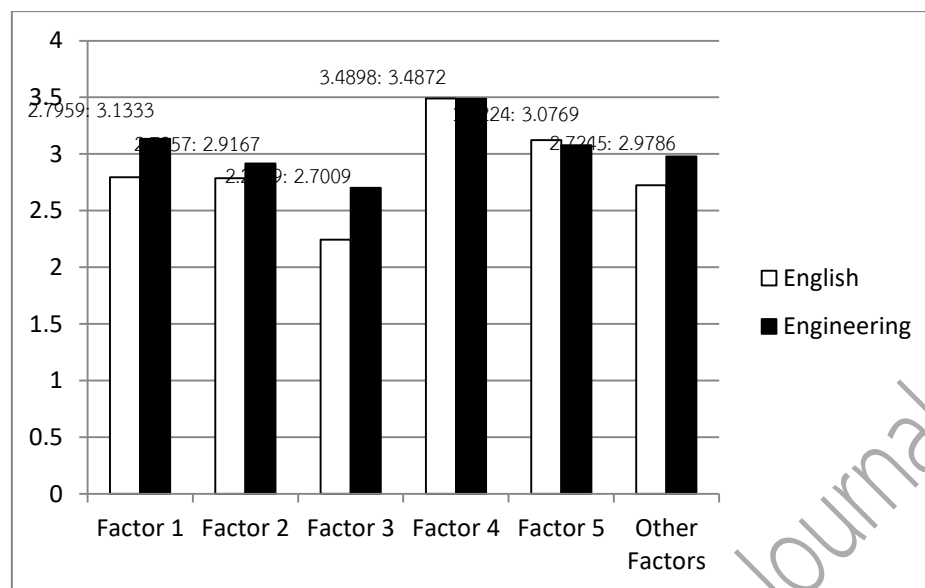


Figure 1: The mean scores for each category of English Major Students and Computer Engineering Students

Figure 1 shows that the mean scores of the two groups of students are significantly different in factor 1 and factor 3 which are speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, and negative attitudes towards English class. The others factors have mean scores that approximate to each other.

For factor 1 (Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation), Computer Engineering students' FLCAS mean score is 3.1333, which is higher than the mean score of English major students, which is 2.7959. According to the T-Test result, the mean scores of these groups of students are significantly different at $p < 0.05$ ($t = -2.534$, $p = 0.000$). This clearly indicates that Computer Engineering students are more anxious with English language performance, especially speaking. The possible reason is that speaking is considered the most essential language skill to be mastered because English is in a powerful position as a medium for international communication (Crystal, 1997). Oral communication and presentation skills are considered to be among the biggest factors that determine a student's success or failure in a career (Riemer, 2002). Many Engineering students realize the importance of English speaking skill in their future occupations. But since Computer Engineering students' English courses are mostly focused on general English and academic English courses, Computer Engineering students seem to be hardly familiar with English language performance like speaking in front of other people. In the case of

English major students on the other hand, they have many specific English courses, including oral skill specialized courses. Therefore, English major students practice English speaking in class more frequently. This is the reason why most of them are more confident in English language performance than the Computer Engineering group.

For factor 2, Uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers, the mean scores of both groups approximate to each other (2.9167: 2.7857). It shows that both English major students and Computer Engineering students are anxious when they have to speak with the native speakers equally. According to Xu (2012), to allow some L1 using in classroom can help the students (especially the low proficiency students) in many cases of L2 learning. The English instructor can use L1 for explanations, or in translations. The students can also ask anything they do not understand about the targeted language by using the L1. However, if the English instructor is a native speaker, the frequency of L1 using in classroom is limited since many native speakers are not experts in the students' L1. Therefore, many students who are not proficient in English language are not confident enough to ask native speakers anything they do not understand for fear of making mistakes. Factor 2 is also caused by the study environment. Since there are not many foreign instructors in the University, most students are not used to communicating with native speakers.

Both groups have the same factor with the lowest mean scores. This factor is factor 3: Negative attitudes towards English class. However, the mean scores of both groups are significantly different at $p < 0.05$ ($t = -3.249$, $p = 0.000$). The Computer Engineering got higher mean score of 2.7009, compared to 2.2449 mean score of the English majors. It shows that Computer Engineering students are more anxious with English language learning; such anxiety is caused by their attitudes towards their English class. According to the study of Jindathai (2015), Thai students are aware of the importance of learning English. However, they have negative attitudes in devoting their time to practicing English. This case is not surprising at all with Computer Engineering students since most of them choose their major in order to study in the Science field and avoid language learning, while English major students, on the other hand, study language as their main focus of learning.

Both groups share the same factor with the highest mean scores; such factor is considered the most affective FLA factor. This factor is factor 4, Negative self-evaluation, in which English major students and Computer Engineering students' mean scores approximate to each other, that is: 3.4898: 3.4872. It shows that both groups of students' FLA are mostly concerned with their individual self-confidence and attitudes. "One's degree of self-esteem can play a crucial role in language acquisition. In fact, those individuals who benefit from a high level of self-esteem are expected to experience lower degree of anxiety and thus achieve more success in their language learning", according to Zare and Riasati (2012). In Xu's study in 2012, her participants also gained the highest mean score in factor type 4, which she claimed to be the most affective contributing factor to speaking-in-class anxiety in EFL classroom.

English major students and Computer Engineering students gained the mean scores that approximate to each other in factor 5, Fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure; 3.1224: 3.0769. It shows that both English major students and Computer Engineering students' anxiety is also caused by their fear of personal failure. Failing the English class or having low score in English is a major problem for English major students since English is their target subject. Even for the Engineering students whose target subject is not English, failing English class or scoring low in English still affects their overall GPA. Therefore, the fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure seems to be the common problem among the students from both groups.

As mention earlier, factor 4 seems to be the most affective FLA factors since it gains the highest scores from both groups of respondents. The two groups of this study's participants also share the same least affective factor which is factor 3. Both groups scored differently in the other 3 factors as shown in figure 1.

2. In-depth Interview Results and Discussion

Apart from the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety in classroom categorized in FLCAS, a semi-structured interview was conducted in order to explore whether there were more factors which caused English language learning anxiety in classroom of the selected 10 participants from both participating groups.

During the interview, many participants mentioned some English learning anxiety factors which were already categorized using Barley's FLCAS and Five Categories of Factors Contributing to Speaking-in-class Anxiety. The frequency of the factors mentioned is reported in the following table. (Group A refers to English major students, Group B refers to Computer Engineering students)

Table 2: FLCAS factors mentioned by participants

Factor	Frequency			Participants (Mentioned)
	Group A	Group B	All	
Factor 1: Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation	2	4	6	A1, A4, B1, B2, B4, B5
Factor 2: Uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers	2	2	4	A2, A4, B1, B5
Factor 3: Negative attitudes towards the English class	0	3	3	B1,B3, B4
Factor 4: Negative self-evaluation	1	2	3	A4, B1, B4
Factor 5: Fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure	0	1	1	B2

Additionally, many English major students had mentioned 2 additional FLA factors. These two factors were categorized as 'Classroom Environment' and 'Social Expectation of English Major Student', as shown in the following table:

Table 3: Additional factors mentioned by participants

Additional Factor	Frequency			Participants (Mentioned)
	Group A	Group B	All	
Factor 6: Classroom Environment	5	0	5	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5
Factor 7: Social Expectation upon English Major Student	2	0	2	A1, A4

For additional factors which were mentioned during the interview part of this study, the participants who mentioned these influences are all from the English major group. All of these students seem to feel uncomfortable with their classmates. They claimed that English major students are very competitive with one another. Therefore, any mistake they do in the English class would mostly unacceptable and embarrassing.

Engineering students seem to have no uncomfortable feeling with their classmates in English class since they are not very competitive with one another in studying English language. Furthermore, most Engineering students are not good at English, so any mistake in English class is common and acceptable.

Two participants from English major group mentioned about their anxiety caused by ‘Social expectation of English major students’. They claimed that since they’re English major students, people expect them to be good at English. This adds additional anxiety to them because their English is not perfect.

Conclusion

This study investigated the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety in classroom as perceived by Computer Engineering students and English major students at Naresuan University. Language learning anxiety does not happen only with the low-proficiency language learners but also with the high-proficiency learners (Toth, 2009). It can happen to any language learner regardless of the field of study. Both English students and Computer Engineering majors have their own FLA

caused by many kinds of factors. The result showed that the factors that specifically caused FLA in Computer Engineering students, on one hand, were their proficiency and low self-esteem. On the other hand, English major students' FLA factors were specifically caused by the English competition environment in their study field and social expectation of them as English major students. Therefore, the instructors should understand the nature of the students from each field of study and adapt their teaching-in-classroom methods in order to balance the language learning anxiety level for the most effective language learning and maximize the learners' performance in class.

In a further study, it would be interesting to investigate the language learning anxiety among other groups of students majoring in other study fields. There could be similarities and differences between other student groups from different fields of study, similar fields of study, or any aspect that is worth investigating.

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