Public Speaking Anxiety in the Thai EFL Context

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Abstract

Anxiety can be both good and bad and thus facilitating or debilitating, as a confidence booster or as a de-motivator. Anxiety is worthy of investigation because it is a factor that influences perceived competence. The present study investigated public speaking anxiety problems faced by Thai EFL students from their own and the researchers' perspectives. In order to achieve these objectives, three main data gathering and triangulating tools were used: (1) classroom observation, (2) semi-structured interview, and (3) questionnaire. The results revealed that anxiety was found to cause problems related to self-confidence, self-esteem, risk-taking ability, and ultimately hampers proficiency in the foreign language. As a result, their personal, social, and academic contexts have been negatively affected due to this speaking anxiety. These findings advance the pedagogical understandings of anxiety-related public speaking in a foreign language issues, and may be useful in the context of enhancing the EFL learners' communication skills.

Keywords: anxiety, ELT, EFL learners, public speaking

Introduction

Language anxiety is a common phenomenon that most language learners have, though the level of anxiety varies from person to person. Learners usually become anxious when they are not native speakers of a particular language but are required to learn or use the language. Campbell and Ortiz (1991) found language anxiety among university students to be 'alarming' and estimated that up to one half of all language students experience debilitating levels of speaking anxiety.

Rationale of the Study

Several researchers view that "even without empirical proof, the mere awareness of foreign language anxiety, even on an intuitive level, is testimony enough to its existence and worthy of fuller investigation" (Shams, 2006, p.14). Yet, many language instructors at the tertiary level where this research is being conducted do not take learners' speaking anxiety in the classroom into account, though they are aware of this problem. When English as foreign language (EFL) learners enroll in language courses, they are only offered the opportunity to develop their English, but most of the time no systematic steps are taken to reduce their anxiety. Similar to numerous studies by various language researchers (e.g. Kunt & Tum, 2010; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013; Pappamihiel, 2002; Rassaei, 2015; Riasati, 2011; and Suleimenova, 2013), this small-scale study is a further step to investigate and identify factors that deal with the presence of language anxiety for EFL learners in a Thai university context.

Research Questions

The study set out to answer the following research questions:
1. What are EFL Students' perceptions about English Public Speaking Class?
2. What challenges do EFL students encounter in English Public Speaking Class?

Review of Literature

Language Anxiety

According to Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), when anxiety is related to learners' second or foreign language learning process, it is known as second/foreign language anxiety (p. 640). Young (1991) added that language anxiety involves a complex, multifaceted reality which may affect the learners in terms of their culture, previous language learning process, learners' characters, and classroom environment (p. 434). Horwitz et al. (1986) expanded the definition saying that language anxiety refers to 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors' which are connected to learners' language learning system (p.128). Horwitz (2001) added a psychological dimension to language anxiety saying that it is a factor that creates a negative effect on learners' psychology (p. 114). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) added that anxiety is 'the feeling of tension and apprehension' that appear when learners use a language (p.284). So, it can be said that language anxiety is a complicated psychological negative feeling, attitude, and belief of human beings that may be aroused in learners based on different issues when they learn or use a language.

According to Spielberger (1983) there are two types of anxiety: trait anxiety and state anxiety (as cited in Pappamihiel, 2002, p. 330). If people have a tendency to become anxious in most situations, it is called trait anxiety (Pappamihiel, 2002, p. 330). Riasati (2011) similarly defined trait anxiety as a characteristic of human psychology which makes people anxious in different situations. If people cannot reduce this type of anxiety, it becomes permanent. Many individuals learning a new language may experience a 'mental block' as a result of anxiety obstructing their performances in a language class (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). The term anxiety is then generally defined as a mental state of tension and worry (Spielberger, 1983 as cited in Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016a), and can be distinguished into three major categories: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (Hashemi, 2011).

State anxiety refers to the undesirable emotional state of mind in a temporary state, whereas trait anxiety is the permanent personality which leads to a person being prone to being anxious (Scovel, 1978 as cited in Aydin, 2008). Finally, situation-specific anxiety is the anxiety aroused by a specific situation, such as examinations or when having to speak in public (Ellis, 1994 as cited in Hashemi, 2011).

In general, anxiety is the feeling of uneasiness triggered by fear, and the excessive and unrealistic worry that interferes with everyday routines and social interactions. It is a major emotional stressor an individual may have to face on a daily basis (Suleimenova, 2013).

When addressing the issues of language learning and acquisition, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined 'language anxiety' as distinct complex beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in and arising from the language learning process in the classroom. This is a form of situation-specific anxiety, which has three major underlying components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This specific type of anxiety is arguably the most frequently observed issue in language learning (Cagatay, 2015).

It should be added that trait anxiety strongly increases an individual's situation-specific anxiety, like language anxiety (Huang, 2018). It was also found that the more fear for assessments the students have, the higher the language anxiety becomes.

To clarify, communication apprehension is the state in which an individual feels shy and displays fear of communicating with other people. Language learners with communication apprehension may have trouble speaking in a larger group or in public, may develop stage fright, and may be unable to receive a spoken message. Communication apprehension thus adds to foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Secondly, test anxiety is the fear of failing an academic assessment or the unpleasant experiences an individual has in such situations (Aydin, 2008). Finally, the fear of negative evaluation is the uneasiness against someone else's evaluation, which is expected to be negative (Watson & Friend, 1969 as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986). The scope of fear of negative evaluation goes beyond test taking situations as it includes any social-evaluative situation like being judged when speaking in front of the class or being interviewed for a job vacancy (Horwitz et al., 1986). Additionally, the fear that one would leave a negative impression on others significantly constitutes a higher level of language anxiety (Aydin, 2008).

Affective factors, one type of anxiety, can negatively influence the foreign language learning process. This is the origin of the term foreign language anxiety or language anxiety (Spielberger, 1983 as cited in Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016a). Horwitz and Young (1991 as cited in Huang, 2018) suggested that since learners in both the second language and foreign language learning contexts will experience somewhat the same type of anxiety, the label 'language anxiety' should be used inclusively, referring to both second language anxiety and foreign language anxiety. This more inclusive term will also be used throughout this current paper.

Language anxiety not only impairs the language learning process, but it also causes issues with self-confidence and self-esteem, interferes with an individual's ability to concentrate, and therefore hinders proficiency in the target language (Suleimenova, 2013). It was also found that learners who are more critical of themselves tend to develop more communication apprehension, which subsequently increases language anxiety (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2015).

In addition, Hashemi (2011) asserted that language anxiety is intrinsically found among language learners when learning a new language. This is a challenge for not only the learners, but also the teachers. It is important to note that the language teachers are often non-native speakers who may experience language anxiety themselves (Kralova, Skorvagova, Tirpakova & Markechova, 2017). This topic is therefore an important issue in enhancing the development of skills in the target language in the modern language classroom environment.

It is also worth noting that foreign language learners often find themselves burdened by language anxiety, which is intensified by various sources (Aydin, 2008; Sinnasamy & Karim, 2014). From the literature, the fear of failure from poor performance (Kocak, 2010), questions and corrections from the teacher in the classroom, and the fear of speaking in class (Aydin, 2008) are among the major sources of such anxiety.

Language anxiety and its relationship to language learning continues to be a growing topic of investigation, and remains a complex one (Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016b).

Speaking Anxiety and Fear of Public Speaking

Speaking as a language skill is perceived as rather embarrassing and causes anxiety according to language learners (MacIntyre, MacIntyre & Carre, 2010). When speaking, students are required to process linguistic inputs while producing outputs simultaneously (Harmer, 2004 as cited in Cagatay, 2015). Such skills are considered the most anxiety-provoking part of language education (Kunt & Tum, 2010). It is the fear of speaking, particularly, in an unfamiliar language that provokes language anxiety (Daly, 1991 as cited in Rassaei, 2015). Additionally, the emphasis of oral communication competency in today's world adds to the level of language anxiety (Suleimenova, 2013).

Speaking competency is perceived as a desired quality of a successful language learner (Daly, 1991 as cited in Suleimenova, 2013). In addition, although anxiety can be found in all four basic skills of language learning, Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that speaking is the skill that is affected by language anxiety the most. Kocak (2010) also added that communication in the classroom provokes more anxiety than other communicative situations a learner typically faces, and that speaking performance is negatively affected by the level of language anxiety.

Language learners are bound by the expectations that they must acquire phonological, syntactic, lexical, and discourse knowledge of the target language (Harmer, 1991 as cited in Aydin, 2008). So-called native like proficiency is a major source of anxiety among language learners. Students tend to be more relaxed in a collaborative and friendly environment and tend to blame the formality of the classroom as a powerful provoker of language anxiety (Hashemi, 2011).

On a similar note, fear of public speaking is seen as a prevailing anxiety disorder (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016). This may be because speaking in public involves being observed and judged by others (Garcia-Leal, Graeff & Del-Ben, 2014), and that it is associated with the sensitivity to punishment (Panayiotou et al., 2017).

Fear of public speaking can result in low academic performance, loneliness and isolation, and even lower life quality (Beidel, Turner & Dancu as cited in Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016). Language learners who possess a certain level of public speaking anxiety tend to perceive their own performance as being poorer when compared to the ratings of objective observers (Cheng, Niles & Craske, 2017). In addition, due to its prevailing fearful nature, public speaking is often used as a stressor that arouses various physiological responses in many experiments on anxiety (Garcia-Leal, Graeff & Del-Ben, 2014). One might be able to imagine how much public speaking is feared; yet such anxious feelings are very common for almost everyone (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2015).

Factors Associated with Foreign Language Anxiety

The first and foremost reason for speaking anxiety is the lack of competence in the foreign language linguistic items. Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013) indicated that pronunciation is a factor that creates anxiety in language learners. Participants in their study stated that when they cannot pronounce a word correctly or do not have knowledge about the pronunciation of any particular word; they mispronounce it, making them uncomfortable and thereby anxious (p. 150). Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) also added that sometimes learners' first language pronunciation interrupts their L2/foreign language pronunciation, which is also a source of language anxiety for some learners (p. 641).

Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013) also found from their study that among all difficulties related to linguistic items that a language learner may face, vocabulary is the most prominent one because lack of vocabulary in the target language leads to anxiety. When learners cannot

use suitable words in the target language due to lack of knowledge or cannot remember the word, they become anxious (p. 150). Therefore, when learners face difficulties in understanding and using the linguistics components of a foreign language, or have a lack of knowledge about these items, they may feel anxious.

According to Tanveer (2007), some foreign language learners have a tendency to memorize their presentation speech and try to remember every word that they have prepared. When they get stuck or face a problem in remembering, they become highly anxious (as cited in Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013, p.641). According to Tseng (2012), learners may become anxious when they are asked to communicate with someone with higher target language competency than them (p. 80). Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) added that, while communicating with language teachers, foreign language learners sometimes become nervous as their teacher's proficiency level in the target language is higher than them.

Besides, pressure and expectations play a vital role in triggering speaking anxiety. Not only do students sometimes put pressure on themselves to excel in the target language, but it is also the teacher's expectations that intensify learners' anxiety (Suleimenova, 2013). Because teachers play an important role in provoking language anxiety, Aydin (2008) suggested that any form of anxiety that involves the teachers should be addressed as another distinctive type of anxiety called 'teacher anxiety'.

Being called on and anticipating being called by the teachers is another cause of anxiety. Students often feel a great sense of self-consciousness when they are called and are asked to speak in the target language, and therefore feel highly anxious from not wanting to 'lose face' in front of their peers (Suleimenova, 2013). The perceived peer's negative judgments can increase the level of the fear of negative evaluation, which in turn contributes to the level of language anxiety (Aydin, 2008). Through practice, however, individuals may shift their focus away from the 'self' to the audience. This way, they can receive more feedback from the audience's reaction and thus it will result in better speaking performance (Cheng, Niles & Craske, 2017).

Native speakers are found to be another source of anxiety for non-native language learners. Native speakers are often viewed as ideal and perfect language users, so speaking with them is threatening to the language learners who fear being negatively evaluated (Horwitz et al., 1986), thereby minimizing their willingness to communicate (Cagatay, 2015).

Various other sources of fear and uneasiness in the classroom have led students to develop more language anxiety (Suleimenova, 2013), this includes feeling anxious about making mistakes, feelings of language inferiority, embarrassment (Khattak, Jamshed, Ahmad & Baig, 2011), and the fact that they do not fully understand what the teacher was saying (Khattak, Jamshed, Ahmad & Baig, 2011; Suleimenova, 2013).

The Effects and Factors of Language Anxiety

Several negative effects have been observed to have impact on one's language learning process, including loss of vocabulary and syntactic structure knowledge while speaking. More anxious language learners are therefore more prone to mistakes when producing in the target language (Aydin, 2008).

In terms of social behavior, language anxiety can result in students having minimal participation in and failure to start a conversation (Suleimenova, 2013), avoidance behavior (Kralova, Skorvagova, Tirpakova & Markechova, 2017), absenteeism and unwillingness to participate (Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013) or even withdrawal behavior by coming to class late on purpose (Suleimenova, 2013).

Psychologically, students might feel increasing fear, have bad memories, and feel a sense of embarrassment. Physically, students' hands might sweat, their mouths might be dry,

and their hearts might race fast (Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013) before reaching its peak the moment the student gets to the podium or the front of the class to speak (MacIntyre, MacIntyre & Carre, 2010).

In the literature, researchers have attempted to establish various correlations between language anxiety and other social factors, such as gender, age, and educational backgrounds.

Studies addressing gender, however, have not been consistent throughout the literature. In their study, Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu and Ergin, (2016b) found that female learners tend to be more anxious than their male counterparts. This is in line with Cagatay's (2015) research that claims females are more anxious, especially when they are speaking the target language, and with Aydin's (2008) study which stated that females have higher language anxiety due to the higher level of test anxiety. On the contrary, gender was not found to have any statistical significance on language anxiety in the studies of Huang (2018), Matsuda and Gobel (2004), and Ozuturk and Hursen (2013).

In addition, age can significantly influence the amount of language anxiety (Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013). The older the learners are, the less they tend to become anxious (Aydin, 2008).

Language anxiety is also observed to have positive correlation with the students' language level, meaning that more advanced language learners tend to display higher level of language anxiety, arguably because they feel more pressured to outperform their peers (Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016b). Proficiency level, however, does not affect the level of language anxiety one is experiencing (Cagatay, 2015).

Alleviating Language Anxiety

As can be seen, language anxiety is a major cause of troubles for many language learners, for example, the unwillingness to participate in and the failure to start a conversation. The important thing is to address what can be done to alleviate language anxiety and help language learners improve their experience learning the target language. From the literature, several solutions have been proposed.

To begin, Kocak (2010) claimed that language anxiety stems from the lack of practice, and therefore suggested that more opportunities to practice should be given to students. It was also suggested that instead of the formal classroom settings, one might create an informal situation where even highly anxious students can feel relaxed and be more willing to participate. Lexical and syntactic knowledge of the target language should also be emphasized as students reported that the lack of such knowledge aroused language anxiety.

When asked, learners often suggest a friendlier classroom environment where mistakes are welcomed and where they are given the chance to succeed regardless (Hashemi, 2011; Kralova, Skorvagova, Tirpakova & Markechova, 2017). The aim is to make the classroom less threatening to the learners (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004).

In addition, students preferred evaluation in the form of activities and games such as pair work and role-plays that involve the entire class. It is through these low-evaluative activities that students will feel less anxious (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Suleimenova, 2013).

With regards to feedback, it was found that metalinguistic feedback – providing explanation why the language is grammatically incorrect – is more beneficial for low-anxiety learners, while recasts as corrective feedback is more effective for those with higher language anxiety (Rassaei, 2015). Also, corrective but constructive feedback should always be made, while not interrupting the students' task performance, to the class collectively, and not targeting any individual learner (Hashemi, 2011).

Teachers play significant roles in the language learning process of the students. Teachers should therefore acknowledge that language anxiety exists among their students

(Hashemi, 2011), and they must learn to be relaxed in class themselves (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Teachers should recognize learners' affective emotions rather than merely evaluating them (Kunt & Tum, 2010).

Various forms of training and intervention were also recommended in the literature. Firstly, psycho-social training is a non-therapeutic form of intervention aimed to help a person cope with stressful situations, enhance self-esteem, and strengthen the ability to deal with stage fright. It was found to be an effective strategy in reducing the level of anxiety among student teachers who were having pronunciation anxiety (Kralova, Skorvagova, Tirpakova & Markechova, 2017).

It is imperative that teachers attempt to increase students' self-confidence as it plays a significant role in providing learners with a sense of success (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Based on the construct of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and optimism, 'positive orientation' is an approach which focuses on the idea of people appraising life experiences with positive viewpoints (Caprapa et al., 2012 as cited in Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Students with higher positivity tend to have more positive feelings towards their peers and teachers (Alessandri et al., 2012 as cited in Jin & Dewaele, 2018) and see challenges in language learning as less threatening, thereby reducing the level of language anxiety (Jin & Dewaele, 2018).

The third concept is the concept of exposure. Exposure to fear repeatedly in a safe environment can reduce fear itself (Shin & Newman, 2018). This applies to public speaking anxiety as well (Cheng, Niles & Craske, 2017). That is to say the fear of public speaking can be reduced by frequent practice.

Besides psycho-social training, positive orientation, and exposure techniques, self-talk will be discussed. The self-talk scale is an approach designed to track how much an individual criticizes, reinforces, manages, and assesses one's own self. Because individuals who criticize and negatively assess themselves tend to develop a higher level of public speaking anxiety, educators should try to intervene to help students adjust the nature and how frequently they talk to themselves (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2014).

Teachers should encourage students to engage in contexts where the target language is used authentically, such as going abroad. Emerging oneself in the native speaker environment could help reduce language anxiety (Cagatay, 2015). That being said, native-like proficiency, however, should be abandoned as it poses more pressure on the students and subsequently affects their language performance (Hashemi, 2011). Therefore, a more friendly and collaborative classroom environment might be the main goal for language teachers as it tends to reduce students' anxiety, thereby improving language performance (Hashemi, 2011).

Finally, heart rate variability could also help an individual cope with emotion and deal with speaking anxiety. This, however, depends on the ability of one's heart to adjust itself in response to stressful situations (MacIntyre, MacIntyre & Carre, 2010).

Previous Studies

Chandran et al. (2000) investigated how oral presentation anxiety affected students who took a seven-week oral presentation module. The causes of anxiety and the effect of gender differences on anxiety, if any, were investigated. Sixty-three first-year engineering students of ITB (36 male, 27 female) took part in the study. The study used a mixed methods paradigm to gain new insights into the social world and a McCroskey PRPSA survey tailored for public speaking anxiety (34 items, 5-Likert scaled survey). The results showed that 64% of the students experienced low level anxiety, while 36% experienced moderate levels of anxiety, indicating that exposure to oral presentation strategies during the seven-week preparation period allowed students to develop the confidence to present. Results showed that different audience types did affect the level of oral presentation anxiety, with female students

slightly more anxious. More authoritative audiences generally induce more anxiety than familiar audiences. Multiple factors contribute to anxiety, including fear of audiences, fear of making a mistake, and insufficient preparation. The study recommends practicing before the presentation and relaxing to be effective methods of reducing oral presentation anxiety.

Another study by Tsu-Chia (2011) investigates how public speaking anxiety (PSA) affects EFL students who took a yearlong public speaking course in Taiwan by determining (1) the underlying factors behind PSA, (2) to what extent gender differences and preparation time affect PSA, (3) to what extent gender differences and different types of audience affects PSA, and (4) the advantages and disadvantages brought about by the yearlong public speaking course. A mixed methods paradigm with both qualitative and quantitative data was used, along with a PRPSA survey. Participants included 82 third-year technical-vocational college students. Results show that the public speaking course did reduce students' PSA. The relationship between PSA and gender differences was significant. Female students did require longer preparation time than male students. This difference was caused by grade consciousness and fear of underperforming in front of their peers.

Besides, Afshar & Asakereh (2012) investigated the speaking skill problems faced by Iranian EFL fist-year and fourth-year students from both their own and their instructors' perspectives. A total of 238 Iranian EFL students and 30 English instructors from multiple universities participated in the study by completing a speaking-skill problems questionnaire. Thirty EFL students and 10 instructors were randomly selected to sit through a semi-structured interview. Several socially related and instructor related problems were revealed such as lack of teaching facilities or subpar national education curricula. There was no difference between fourth-year students' and first-year students' perceptions of their own speaking skill problems. The one-way ANOVA test also showed no significant difference among the two groups of students', or instructors' perception of speaking skill problems.

The literature suggests that language anxiety is an ongoing topic of interest among many language researchers. Various correlations have been established between language anxiety and gender (e.g. Aydin, 2008; Cagatay, 2015; Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016b), age (e.g. Aydin, 2008; Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013), and language level (e.g. Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016b). The present study places emphasis on the level of foreign language anxiety and students' performance in a public speaking class in the EFL context.

Methodology

In order to gather and triangulate the data collected, three main tools – classroom observation, semi-structured-interview, and questionnaire – were used to answer two research questions:
1. What are EFL Students' perceptions about English Public Speaking Class?
2. What challenges do EFL students encounter in English Public Speaking Class?

Each item in the questionnaire was deigned based on the literature review of this paper. The 24 items asked for the students' opinions about the factors responsible for foreign language speaking anxiety, the effects of language anxiety and the appropriate ways to alleviate it. A five-point Likert scale was used, and the students had to tick the appropriate box for their opinion on each item. The chosen questionnaire items were based on the results of IOC from five experts, which were no less than 0.8. The items that were below 0.8 were excluded from this study. Based on the experts' comments and suggestions, some new questions were formed.

The semi-structured interview was carried out with all participants of this study by one of the researchers. This method, according to Dörnyei (2007), leaves room for respondents to answer without restrictions. Interviews are among the most frequently used

research methods in applied linguistics (Block, 2000), partly because they can help researchers investigate phenomena that are difficult to investigate through observation. In this case, an interview was used to investigate students' anxiety of public speaking.

For the purpose of this study, a semi-structured interview was carried out. Students were given time to answer questions and were also allowed to interrupt, ask questions, and comment. The purpose of the interviews was to fill in the gaps that might not be answered through the items in the questionnaire. All interviews were conducted in the researcher's office at the university.

Classroom observation allows for the opportunity to see how and what methods the teacher uses to create a positive atmosphere for learning. It helps students and teachers familiarize themselves with the classroom setting, course materials, and teaching strategies, teacher interactions with students and student interactions with each other. It allows the students and teacher to prepare methods to deal with problems that could arise.

While observing the class, the observer may only know directly what can be seen such as the amount of talking or attention paid by students, however knowing whether these are indicators of interest or confusion can be difficult. The presence of the observer may also cause the teacher to teach differently. Teachers might over-prepare because they may feel that that they are being evaluated or they may be distracted by the observer's presence. It is important for the observer to discuss the meaning of the observations with the teacher so that what is perceived can be correctly interpreted.

The Classroom and Participants

Using a simple random sampling technique, a Public Speaking in English classroom in the second semester of Academic Year 2018 was selected for the study. The classroom consisted of 23 students, 21 of which were Thai and two were non-Thai. For the purpose of this study, only the Thai students were studied. Of the 21 Thai students, two did not complete the language anxiety questionnaire and were thus removed from the study, leaving 19 students in total.

As part of the regular requirements, students were asked to prepare and deliver a total of four classroom speeches on topics of their choice throughout the semester. For every speech delivered, students were asked to videotape themselves so they could watch their own performance and trace their own developments. Teacher-feedback and peer-feedback were given immediately in class after every speech.

The speeches were approximately six minutes each. Students were told to focus on the content, the organization of the speech, the delivery, and their language use. For the purpose of the study, only the first speech delivered by each student is used for analysis.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive data indicates that most Thai ESL students had a high level of anxiety towards speaking in English (75%). Five percent of the students experienced a low level of anxiety towards public speaking and 20% of them experienced a low level of anxiety towards speaking in English.

In terms of educational attainment, there is of course a higher level that could be achieved as target improvement in as far as anxiety is concerned. Therefore, the details of the responses could be investigated in order to reveal the relative concerns of the factors that could have an impact on anxiety and the effects of training and educational awareness that may lead to further decision making about organizing teaching targets and management. Based on the responses from both questionnaires and the semi-structured interview, students'

confidence level is an area that needs the most consideration. The majority of the participants (63.21%) revealed that they never feel sure of themselves when speaking English. Besides, 42.2% worry a lot about making mistakes when speaking. In view of these responses, more speaking activities should be encouraged among foreign language learners of English to emphasize speaking as a spontaneous act in naturalistic settings.

Based on the interviews, students considered their lack of knowledge on a particular speech topic in English to be moderately responsible for creating their English speaking anxiety. Moreover, this indicates that students considered their unrealistic high ambitions at being proficient in English like native speakers to be moderately responsible for creating their English speaking anxiety.

From the classroom observation field notes (Appendix A), it was observed that over-preparation before speaking in English is valued, though it would lead to some erosion of speech authenticity. However, students appear to have a negative attitude if they had to speak without preparation. Often, in Thai classrooms, students are overly guided, resulting in them being unable to transfer the skills learned to automatic and spontaneous use. Thus, it is not unusual for students to have panic attacks, especially when students have to speak extemporaneously. Confidence is also linked to self-consciousness. The students generally felt that other students spoke better English than they did. Many students lacked the confidence to speak in public. Generally, Thai students in the study felt uncomfortable delivering their speeches.

For the language anxiety level questionnaires, the overall average scores for each student were computed based on the Likert Scale responses where 5, strongly agree, was chosen. Therefore, it can be implied that the lower the average score, the more the students agreed that they felt anxious.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was then computed between the overall average anxiety scores obtained from the questionnaire and the speaking scores as given by the instructor in class. The r-value was -0.011759049, indicating that there is no correlation between the two variables (See appendix B). This means that for this current study, the level of anxiety does not statistically predict the speaking score.

The analysis of the noted results suggests that foreign language speaking anxiety does play an important role in EFL learning. Moreover, not all anxiety is simply harmful or helpful. Anxiety has both positive and negative effects on EFL learners. When students are anxious, they should ask themselves if that anxiety is debilitative. A little nervous tension can keep students alert in their learning process. The facilitative anxiety is considered to be competitive (Brown, 2000, p152). Anxiety is only helpful in the appropriate proportion. Also, The results found in this study is consistent with research on other types of specific communication anxiety, which states that anxious learners generally speak, write, and participate less in the language classroom than relaxed students (Spolsky, 1989).

Limitations of the Study

The data obtained rested on responses that were captured in a five-point Likert scale. From the pattern of responses, it was obvious that many respondents chose to be 'fence sitters' resulting in a reasonably big proportion of them not giving an opinion. While this option is seen as ethical, the data for the other two categories of agreeing or disagreeing is naturally affected. It might be worthwhile to reduce the scale to a four-point scale to investigate the trend of responses using this approach.

Pedagogical Implications

The following pedagogical recommendations are made for the language teachers to alleviate their foreign language learners' anxiety in public speaking.

First and foremost, language teachers may consult with their anxious learners to find out the reasons for their anxiety. Secondly, the teachers should also conduct needs analysis of the learners before implementing the public speaking course in order to determine which situations learners will become less anxious to speak in English. Furthermore, language teachers are also encouraged to use different, interesting speaking activities such as role plays in class where students may get the chance to play different characters and gradually overcome their anxiety. Lastly, students should be encouraged to join English language speaking clubs to practice speaking English outside their classrooms.

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Appendix A
Observation Field notes

Student A
      Student seems happy to be speaking and appears lively with positive enthusiasm. Her eye contact with the audience is rather consistent, and her gestures compliment her verbal language well at first but becomes rather distracting towards the second half of the speech. Elocution is loud and clear.

Student B
      Student seems fairly relaxed with mild tension, but demonstrates few movements during the speech. Her eye contact is minimal as she looks at her notes rather often. Student displays a lack of enthusiasm of the topic she chooses.

Student C
      Student's gestures show tension. Her movements are repetitive and unnatural and is distracting. Student is also distracted as she tends to look outside the classroom, minimizing the eye contact with the audience. Student lacks interests in the topic.

Student D
      Student is visibly anxious. Her gestures are repetitive and do not compliment her verbal language which is also disconnected. Many verbal fillers can be noticed throughout the speech. Eye contact is very fixed as she does not acknowledge the entire class.

Student F
      Student seems rather lifeless and lacks interest in the speech. Body language is very tense as there is very little movement. The use of eye contact is very ineffective as she reads through some parts of the speech.

Student G
      Student looks fine in the beginning but all of a sudden loses it and asks to start over. The second attempt is rushed while she tends to look down at notes and she occasionally looks up. Student still lacks effective movements and appears very still.

Student H
      Student seems natural and fluently talks to the audience, while gestures compliment the verbal language well. Self-confidence is demonstrated and anxious behaviors are seldom observed. Student presents herself to the observer as someone who knows what she is talking about and is confident about it.

Appendix B
Correlation Coefficient

Anxiety Score	Speaking Score	Student
3.389	76	1
1.833	76	2
4.278	76	3
3.278	72	4
3.111	76	5
2.889	84	6
3.056	78	7
3.722	82	8
3.500	70	9
3.778	82	10
1.667	74	11
2.778	76	12
3.111	68	13
3.056	70	14
2.833	86	15
3.500	74	16
2.667	78	17
3.111	70	18
2.500	80	19