



INVESTIGATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY LEVELS IN THAILAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: GENDER DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

This study examines the level of anxiety in speaking a foreign language, especially English, among elementary school students at Ban Nonsawan School, Thailand, focusing on gender differences. The researcher aims to determine whether there is a correlation between anxiety in speaking English and gender. The researcher used descriptive quantitative correlation research design and supported with qualitative data methods to generate hypotheses and theories for further testing and to validate the findings from the quantitative data. The researcher used field interviews as corroboration for this study. The researcher found that elementary school students in Ban Nonsawan, Thailand have high levels of speaking anxiety and also showed that there is a correlation between English speaking anxiety and gender.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, Gender, Elementary School*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety can manifest in various ways, including physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, increased heart rate, dry mouth, and mental symptoms such as fear of making mistakes, negative self-talk, self-consciousness, and difficulty organizing thoughts (Khreisat, 2022). It can significantly impact an individual's ability to effectively communicate and may hinder language learning progress or professional development.

McCroskey (1988) argue that Speaking anxiety, also known as communication apprehension or stage fright, refers to the fear, nervousness, or discomfort experienced by individuals when speaking in public or using a foreign or second language. It is a common phenomenon that can affect people of all ages and proficiency levels in language learning or public speaking situations.



The causes of speaking anxiety can be multifaceted and vary from person to person. Addressing speaking anxiety is crucial for individuals to overcome their fear and improve their speaking skills. Strategies to manage and reduce speaking anxiety include regular practice and exposure, deep breathing and relaxation techniques, positive self-talk and reframing, seeking support, and setting achievable goals.

Research on elementary school speaking anxiety has been conducted in various countries. One of these studies aimed to determine the anxiety of an elementary student in second grade in Turkey. This study was written (Yaman & Demirtaş, 2014) This is based on interest, motivation, attitude, personality, value judgment and ego. The reason is that the research conducted is not only focused on examining speaking anxiety using English in elementary school children, but in the turkey language. So, to find whether there are differences in anxiety levels when speaking using English as their foreign language.

Another study conducted by (Palupi, 2021) it is argued that speaking anxiety can inhibit students from speaking which will be detrimental to their oral skills. they should have the motivation to speak more and for students to be active in speaking in class, then teachers should give more oral task instructions. Teachers should also use more creative and innovative learning media and methods in learning so that students do not think that speaking in front of others is scary.

Purandina (2022) found that early school students in Marga sub-district tend to feel anxious when participating in English language learning in class. The researcher also mentioned that this happens because of several factors such as the lack of time allocation for English lessons that they get, they also get more theory in class than direct practice, and the rare use of English in everyday life. The specific factors that influence English speaking anxiety are also mentioned in this study. Such as lack of confidence, fear of judgment, and fear of being compared with other friends.



Both male and female students are possible to use their emotions when learning a foreign language. As (Wardhaugh, 2006) says "gender is becoming one of the big "growth areas"". In this case, gender plays a very important role in foreign language speaking anxiety in this study. Gender (male and female) is considered as a variable in life just like social class, ethnic age and so on. On the other hand, (Tianjian, 2010) states that gender has no relationship with foreign language speaking anxiety, but depends on the level of a group. Based on (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007) stated that in language learning, female students are more likely to speak more than one language they use in communication, on the other hand, males rarely speak during language classes, however, males enjoy more when they practice directly with native speakers than females. It can be concluded that males are better in terms of society and females are better in terms of school learning.

Thailand, like other countries, attaches great importance to English education in the primary school curriculum. The few studies from Thai researchers have only examined the level of speaking anxiety within the scope of Thai schools (Akkakoson, 2016; Kalra & Siribud, 2020) and (Shamsuri et al., 2021) that focused on Speaking Anxiety and Strategies Used by internationals. Understanding the level of anxiety that primary school students experience in speaking English and identifying potential variations by gender can provide valuable insights for teachers, policy makers and curriculum developers in creating effective strategies to reduce speaking anxiety and improve the language learning experience.

The background of foreign language learning, especially English in Ban Nonsawan elementary school, is faced with various challenges. Many factors make English learning unsuccessful, such as complicated sentence structures, difficult pronunciation, learning motivation, students' attitudes towards the way teachers deliver English lessons and even students' attitudes towards teachers in teaching. Therefore, teachers try to attract attention and make students motivated to learn English in a fun way. Not only the teacher explains the material, students listen. However, the teacher facilitates so that students can be active but they do not realize that they are learning while playing.



Even so, the teacher's actions to motivate students are not good because there is no definite learning target, the teacher only provides motivation for students to like English lessons, not with English learning achievement targets for elementary schools. And from the researcher's observation, students still have anxiety when faced directly with strangers to have a light conversation. They are used to having conversations in their mother tongue and only use a few English words when learning English.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher examined the level of speaking anxiety in elementary school students with a focus on the correlation between anxiety levels and gender. the researcher hopes that with this study, English teachers can find out that the level of anxiety in speaking a foreign language in students is very different. and teachers will also know what factors are the reasons that students have anxiety when speaking, especially when speaking English and that way, English teachers will find out how to reduce the anxiety experienced by their students.

METHODS

The research design in this study was descriptive quantitative correlation research. Correlation quantitative research is research to help identify relationships between variables without manipulating them (Suryani, 2015). This research makes it easy to understand the strength and direction of the relationship between variables and develop theories to explain complex real-world relationships. To support the quantitative data, the researcher also used qualitative data to generate hypotheses and theories for further testing and to validate the findings from the quantitative data. The researcher used field interviews as corroboration for this study.

To see the anxiety level of speaking a foreign language in elementary school students, the researcher uses a questionnaire by (HORWITZ et al., 1986) which will be interpreted in Thai that will be calculated manually and described into levels of anxiety speaking a foreign language. The latest validity and reliability tests state that the instrument is very easy to understand and effective to use and has a scale of 0.90 on the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test that have been carried out by



(Paneersevam 2021). Up to manually calculated data with a score range of 33 to 165 taken from the total answers to the questionnaire that has been given by the researcher. So that the high and low scores will show the level of anxiety. If students score 33 to 98, then they have low anxiety. Meanwhile, if students score 99 to 165, then they have high anxiety.

To see if there is a correlation between speaking anxiety and gender (male & female), researcher used Spearman's analysis which is a non-parametric statistic. The data was measured using the interpretation of the correlation coefficient. As (Ary, 2018) stated as follows:

- 0.00 – 0.199 = very low
- 0.20 – 0.399 = low
- 0.40 – 0.599 = moderate
- 0.60 – 0.799 = strong
- 0.80 – 1.00 = very strong

After knowing the type of correlation, then finding the significant value will be measured using a specific number, H₀ is accepted if the significant value is > 0.05, but H₀ is declined if the significant value is < 0.05. the final score was used to answer if there was a significant or not between foreign language speaking anxiety and gender (male & female).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Students Speaking Anxiety Level

. The researcher used a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire from Horwitz which has been translated into Thai and has been validated by the mentor teacher regarding grammar and language structure. The following are the results of the questionnaires of the 55 research participants.

Table 1. Students Scoring and Categorizing

Participant	Gender	Score	Level
F1	Female	109	High Anxiety



M2	Male	91	Low Anxiety
M3	Male	92	Low Anxiety
M4	Male	101	High Anxiety
F5	Female	99	High Anxiety
F6	Female	90	Low Anxiety
F7	Female	90	Low Anxiety
F8	Female	108	High Anxiety
M9	Male	97	Low Anxiety
M10	Male	81	Low Anxiety
F11	Female	83	Low Anxiety
M12	Male	92	Low Anxiety
F13	Female	88	Low Anxiety
M14	Male	82	Low Anxiety
F15	Female	110	High Anxiety
F16	Female	96	Low Anxiety
F17	Female	96	Low Anxiety
M18	Male	96	Low Anxiety
M19	Male	107	High Anxiety
M20	Male	107	High Anxiety
M21	Male	108	High Anxiety
M22	Male	129	High Anxiety
M23	Male	117	High Anxiety
M24	Male	101	High Anxiety
M25	Male	109	High Anxiety
F26	Female	88	Low Anxiety
M27	Male	83	Low Anxiety
M28	Male	90	Low Anxiety
M29	Male	99	High Anxiety
F30	Female	102	High Anxiety
F31	Female	105	High Anxiety



F32	Female	97	Low Anxiety
M33	Male	89	Low Anxiety
M34	Male	121	High Anxiety
M35	Male	118	High Anxiety
M36	Male	111	High Anxiety
M37	Male	109	High Anxiety
F38	Female	90	Low Anxiety
F39	Female	93	Low Anxiety
F40	Female	109	High Anxiety
F41	Female	105	High Anxiety
M42	Male	110	High Anxiety
M43	Male	97	Low Anxiety
M44	Male	98	Low Anxiety
F45	Female	89	Low Anxiety
M46	Male	112	High Anxiety
M47	Male	99	High Anxiety
F48	Female	86	Low Anxiety
F49	Female	110	High Anxiety
F50	Female	120	High Anxiety
M51	Male	115	High Anxiety
F52	Female	89	Low Anxiety
M53	Male	99	High Anxiety
M54	Male	100	High Anxiety
F55	Female	109	High Anxiety

As presented in the table above, the lowest anxiety score was achieved by M10 with a score of 81 and 129 (M22) being the highest score among the 55 participants. A total of 25 participants has a score between 33-98 which means that their level of foreign language speaking anxiety is low, while 30 participants have a high level of foreign language speaking anxiety which is vulnerable to scores between 99-165. From the data that has been analyzed above, 25 out of 55



participants have a low level of anxiety, this can be interpreted that they have a high level of confidence when communicating using a foreign language. They do not think that speaking is a scary thing, instead, they enjoy it even though they sometimes feel worried about grammar and pronunciation mistakes. On the other hand, 30 participants have a high level of anxiety when speaking a foreign language. This can be interpreted that these 30 participants are nervous and lack confidence when speaking in a foreign language. They assume that speaking in a foreign language is a scary thing so they cannot control their anxiety.

Table 2. Speaking Anxiety Level

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FLA	55	81	129	100.38	11.068
Valid N (listwise)	55				

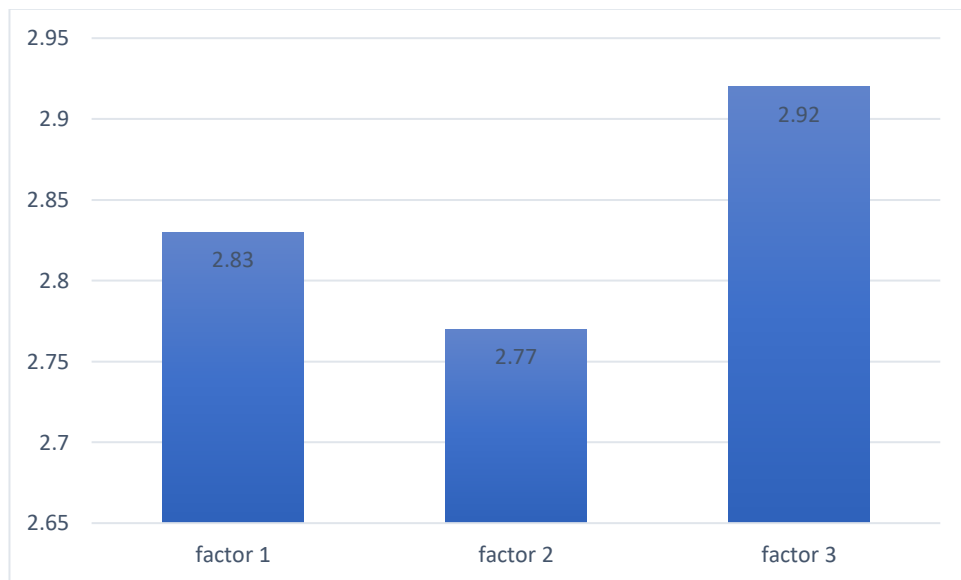
In the table above, N is the number of participants who participated in this study. The number of N is 55 consisting of 31 male students and the number of female students is 2. The minimum value obtained by participants is 81 while the maximum value obtained is 129. For the mean value we can see that out of 55 participants get a mean of 100.38 and a standard deviation of 11.068 indicating that the level of anxiety speaking English in elementary schools in Bannonsawan is high. This is because the range of values can be said to be a high level of foreign language speaking anxiety is 99-165 and the value of 33-98 is said to be a low level for foreign language anxiety. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of foreign language speaking anxiety in primary schools in Bannonsawan is high.

FLCAS Factor Specification

The questionnaire data was further analyzed to find out which factors were considered by the participants as the most anxiety-provoking factors when learning a foreign language. In this case, it will support the first research question and will show the reasons why Ban Nonsawan primary school students have a high level of foreign language speaking anxiety. The statements in the questionnaire with high mean scores indicate high levels of anxiety according to the participants. To find

out the factors of foreign language speaking anxiety in dominant students, the researcher specifies 3 factors in speaking anxiety; factor 1 = test anxiety, factor 2 = communication apprehension, and factor 3 = fear of negative evaluation.

Figure 1. Mean Score of Each Factor Cause Speaking Anxiety



From the data above, it shows that the mean value of factor 1 (Test Anxiety) is 2.83, then the mean value of factor 2 (Communication Apprehension) is 2.77. but the highest mean value comes from factor 3 (Fear of Negative Evaluation) which is 2.92. this proves that the dominant factor and causes English speaking anxiety in elementary schools of Bannonsawan School is the Fear of Negative Evaluation factor.

Correlation between Speaking Anxiety and Gender

The researcher used nonparametric Spearman correlation to analyze whether there is a correlation between speaking anxiety and gender in primary schools in Bannonsawan. The results of the correlation will be presented in the following table:

Table 3. Correlation between speaking anxiety level and gender

		SA	gender
Spearman's rho	SA	1.000	.341**
			.004
	N	55	55



gender	Correlation Coefficient	.341**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
	N	55	55

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The spearman program will give a sign (**) to state whether there is a significant value or not. And the results of the table above show the sign (**) so there was significant value. In table 6 shows the value of Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.004, because the value of Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05 , it means that there is a significant relationship between speaking anxiety and gender. The table also shows the Correlation Coefficient value of 0.341** which means that the level of correlation strength is low.

Because the significant value of $0.004 < 0.05$, so H_0 (null hypothesis) in the previous chapter is rejected because it is less than 0.05 and H_1 is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is enough evidence to conclude that between speaking anxiety and gender are correlated positively, significantly but weakly. This finding is supported by (Kumar, 2011), he found that gender plays significant role in classroom experience of foreign language learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings described, we can conclude that elementary school students at Ban Nonsawan school have a high level of foreign language speaking anxiety. The results of this study are not good, this is because the level of speaking anxiety in elementary school students at Ban Nonsawan school is high and it can be interpreted that English remains a daunting subject for some students at Ban Nonsawan school. The gender that has a high speaking anxiety score is male students with a score of 101.94 while female students are 98.38 and both have a score difference of 3.56.

On the other hand, the researcher also showed that there is a significant correlation between gender and Speaking Anxiety level. This result is supported by the alternative hypothesis (H_1) which states that there is a significant correlation



between gender and Speaking Anxiety in Ban Nonsawan elementary school students. The findings found that gender has an effect on students' learning process.

In this study, the researcher has a different contribution to the previous researcher. In this study, the researcher used interviews as a reinforcement of the argument from the questionnaire which was not in the previous study. In previous studies only used questionnaires as instruments which resulted in a lack of strong evidence to support the results of the study. Also have different research participants with previous researchers. In previous studies have a different focus of participants such as in junior high school groups, high school, and on college students. Researchers also use subjects from regular classes whose daily learning activities use mother language rather than English. While previous researchers used English-only classes where it is likely that the way of communication with teachers and friends uses English and this can affect the results of speaking anxiety.

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