

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Learning a foreign language is not an easy thing to do, especially if the native language differs relatively to the new language including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on. With mother tongue language interference, language comprehension seems hard to achieve. Therefore, foreign language mastery seems to be challenging to the individual learners who are naturally curious about the target language or have a higher level of language learning motivation. On the other hand, there might be some students who are not interested in any foreign language but they must study it as a compulsory subject required in their school or university. The latter learners may perceive foreign language learning as a hard time of learning. They may feel uneasiness, anxiety, worry, and tension in foreign language classrooms. These sorts of negative feelings are likely to interfere with the language learners' proficiency.

Besides learning motivation, anxiety in a classroom has been recognized as another crucial barrier to language learning. Foreign language learning anxiety is different to other classroom anxieties such as mathematics anxiety because students in a foreign language classroom are expected not only to master the subject content but also have to communicate in language that is not their native language (Cebreros & María, 2004, pp.1-2).

Many studies have attempted to measure anxiety in foreign language classrooms for teaching methodology improvement and reducing anxiety in classrooms. However, most of the studies have focused on the undergraduate or adult students who enrolled in a foreign language (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2004; E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Turula, 2002). Research or studies focusing on vocational students are still scarce, especially in Thailand.

In Thailand, English language has occupied a prominent role both in the business and academic world. English is a foreign language taught as a compulsory class in schools, colleges and universities. Non-English major students, including vocational students, must learn English as an educational requirement. For a student

without or with less motivation in learning English for special purposes, anxiety and stress is likely to hinder their foreign language acquisition.

Therefore, the present study was designed to find out the effect of learning anxiety in an English classroom on the learner's English proficiency. The first-year students of the Hotel and Tourism Industry vocational certificate at the Thai-Austrian Technical College (TATC) were chosen for the study.

1.1.1 General Background of Thai-Austrian Technical College (TATC)

According to TATC web site (<http://www.tatc.ac.th>), Thai-Austrian Technical College (TATC) is located 160 km south-east of Bangkok. It was officially established under a Thai-Austrian agreement in 1970 as "Sattahip Technical School" and then changed into "Thai-Austrian Technical College" on August 2, 1990; however, it is locally called "Sattahip Technical College". The training capacity is 3,200 students per year. There are certificate and diploma vocational levels including different fields of study as follows:

1.1.2.1 Certificate in Vocational Education (a three-year program after grade 9)

- Metal Work Production
- Metal Welding
- Machine Mechanics
- Tool and Die Making
- Mechanical Drawing
- Building Construction
- Electricity
- Electronics
- Auto Mechanics
- Hotel and Tourism

1.1.2.2. Diploma in Vocational Education (a two-year program after the Certificate in Vocational Education)

- Metal Work Production
- Building Construction and Civil Technology
- Electricity
- Electronics

- Production Technology
- Automotive Technology
- Industrial Instrumentation and Process Control
- Mechanical Drawing
- Information Technology
- Hotel and Tourism

1.1.2 General Background of Hotel and Tourism Program at Thai-Austrian Technical College

The Hotel and Tourism program at the Thai Austrian Technical College is a Dual Vocational Training (DVT), the cooperative education and training. There are two types of Hotel and Tourism students at TATC. One is the students from TATC who will be sent to cooperative hotels or companies for on-the-job training besides studying in classroom. The other is the staff of Ambassador City Jomtien hotel who are recruited and put through this program 2 days a week.

However, the courses for both groups of students are designed differently. The TATC students have to study more courses than the Ambassador City Jomtien students. Especially, for first-year students, the TATC Hotel and Tourism students have to take 2 English courses: English for Communication 1 and English for Tourism Industry because the TATC students have no experience in the tourism industry so English for Tourism Industry subject is required, whereas the first-year Ambassador City Jomtien students study only one course, that is, English for Communication 1.

The Hotel and Tourism students are likely to have more chance to learn and use English than other programs. However, the first-year students are new to the college, and it is their beginning English classes on the vocational certificate level. As E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and Cope (1986) have concluded that anxiety in a foreign language classroom is common to students, at least to the beginner, the first-year Hotel and Tourism students were chosen to examine the anxiety level compared with their English proficiency.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2.1 To what degree is there a relationship between English learning classroom anxiety and English proficiency of the first-year Thai vocational students?

1.2.2 What are the most common causes of language learning anxiety for the first-year Thai vocational students?

1.2.3 What are the ways the first-year Thai vocational students used to reduce their language anxiety in the English classroom?

1.2.4 What are the suggestions of the first-year Thai vocational students for English learning atmosphere?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 To review the degree of the relationship between learning anxiety in an English classroom and English proficiency level of the first-year Thai vocational students.

1.3.2 To find out the most common causes of language learning anxiety in an English classroom of the first-year Thai vocational students.

1.3.3 To seek how the first-year Thai vocational students cope with their language anxiety in an English classroom.

1.3.4 To search for the English learning preferences suggested by the first-year Thai vocational students.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms used this study are the following:

Thai vocational students: the first-year Hotel and Tourism students who are studying at vocational certificate level at Thai-Austrian Technical College.

TATC students: the first-year students of Thai-Austrian Technical College who are studying Hotel and Tourism dual vocational training program.

Ambassador students: the staff of Ambassador City Jomtien hotel who are recruited and put through the Hotel and Tourism dual vocational training program at Thai-Austrian Technical College. Only the first-year Ambassador students were chosen to study.

Anxiety: a feeling of fear or nervousness to a situation or something that is happening. In the study, anxiety means the fear or nervousness that the students feel when they are learning in the English classroom.

English for Communication 1: English subject that is taught for the first-year Hotel and Tourism students both TACT students and Ambassador students.

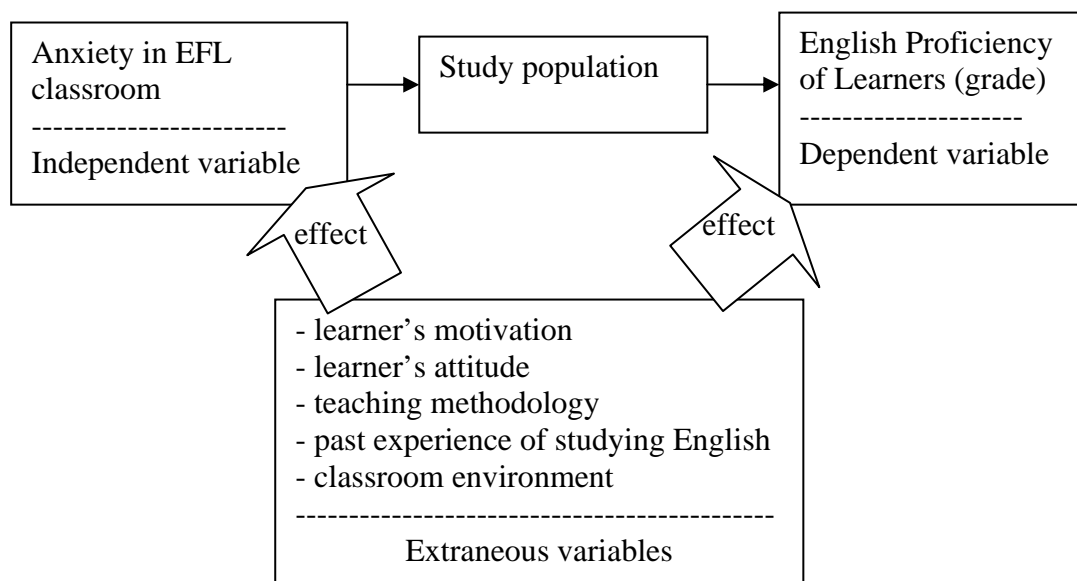
English for Tourism Industry: English subject that is taught for the first year TATC students.

English proficiency: Only English for Communication 1 was used to estimate relationship between English anxiety and English proficiency because both TATC students and Ambassador students have studied this.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS): a famous questionnaire designed by E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and Cope (1986) for measuring language anxiety.

1.5 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study includes the concepts of learning anxiety and English proficiency. Learning anxiety is an independent variable, whereas English proficiency is a dependent variable. However, there are many extraneous variables that can affect both independent and dependent variables of this study such as learner's motivation, learner's attitude, teaching methodology, past experience of studying English, classroom environment and so on.



1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 This survey covered only the first-year Hotel and Tourism students in Vocational Certificate Level at Thai-Austrian Technical College. The results do not represent the overall view point of technical students in other colleges.

1.5.2 Anxiety measurement in this study was the student's perception of the past English learning; therefore, it might not correspond to their English grade used in this study.

1.5.3 Only the final grade of English for Communication 1 was estimated to find out the relationship between anxiety and proficiency. However, the final grade of English for Tourism Industry was used to be the general background of English proficiency of the participant.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are expected to be useful for English teachers or concerned persons as following purposes:

- 1.6.1 To acknowledge the anxiety that can affect the student's proficiency
- 1.6.2 To improve teaching methodologies in the English classroom
- 1.6.3 To increase the student's motivations in English learning

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The presentation of this paper is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: This chapter presents the introduction of the research, including background of the notion of the research, statement of problem, objectives, scope and significance of the study

Chapter Two: Related literature and theories were reviewed in this chapter as well as the findings of previous studies about foreign language learning anxiety.

Chapter Three: The methodologies of the research are explained including the instrument and procedures that used to collect data and also the data analysis method.

Chapter Four: The results of the research study were exhibited with the statistical descriptions.

Chapter Five: The results exhibited in chapter four were discussed with conclusion and recommendations.