

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) discussion of the findings, (4) conclusions, and (5) recommendations of further studies.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The summary of this study is as follows:

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

Under the assumption that foreign language anxiety can reduce students' learning proficiency, even when learning with a non-native teacher, this study was conducted to measure the anxiety level in Thai students while studying English (as a foreign language) in classroom as well as to find out if there is any correlation between English learning anxiety and the final grade of English subjects. Furthermore, the methods for reducing anxiety, and learning preferences were sought to further apply for teaching methodology development.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials and Procedures

The population of the study was the first-year students at vocational certificate level studying in the Hotel and Tourism program in the second semester of the academic year 2006, at the Thai-Austrian Technical College (TATC). There were 82 students who participated in the survey. The instrument of this study was a questionnaire for measuring anxiety in English classrooms, the method for reducing the anxiety and learning preferences.

The questionnaire was provided into 4 parts: 1) the respondents were asked about their personal data and educational background, 2) 33 items of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) were rated, 3) 9 methods for reducing English learning anxiety were listed for the respondents to choose and also the respondents could add suggested methods 4) 23 suggestions about teaching class atmosphere and learning preferences were exhibited for the respondents to choose.

The questionnaires were distributed and collected by a teacher (not one of their English teachers) during 25-27 December 2006. All data were recorded and analyzed by SPSS program.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Personal Data and Education Background

Most students in the present study were female. The grade point average of all participants was in the range of 2.00-2.99, whereas the final grade of English for communication 1 was mostly at 1.5. For the TATC students, most of them had got 1.5 for the English for Tourism Industry course. The majority of the students have had a good experience about learning English so far. Half of the students have a chance to speak English with native speakers, but not often.

5.2.2 English Language Classroom Anxiety Level

According to the FLCAS score, 50% of the students had got an anxiety level higher than the mean score. Compared with other anxiety components, fear of negative evaluation is the one that got the highest frequency of the above-mean score. That is to say, 52.4% of the students got the higher anxiety level of negative evaluation than the mean score. Of course, the correlation between anxiety level and final grade of English for Communication 1 was statistically significant with negative correlation coefficient ($r = -.259$, $p = .019$). It means that if the anxiety level was high, the final grade would be low and vice versa.

The participant who got the highest anxiety score had relatively low GPA (1.00-1.99) and English final grade (1.5). She revealed that she had a negative experience against learning English in the past. She had a chance to use English with native speakers but not often. On the other hand, the GPA of the two students who had the lowest anxiety score was in the range of 3.00-4.00. However, one had got 4 in the English final grade, the other got 2.5. They had a positive experience of learning English and often practiced English with native speakers.

5.2.3 Methods for Reducing Anxiety in English Classroom

The favourite methods for coping with English learning anxiety was to remember that error is a natural part of foreign language learning, followed by to attend every class to learn a little bit every week, and to seek out opportunities to practice English.

There were two more methods recommended by the respondents: “do something fun while studying English classroom” and “try to practice English with native speakers.”

5.2.4 Recommendation of Learning Preferences and Classroom Atmosphere

More than half of the students like to do class activities in groups, play language games in class, would like the English teacher to have an close relationship with them, and would like to study outside of class, for example, going to tourist attractions.

Interestingly, some students recommended that they would like to learn English with native speakers and would like to learn English in order to communicate with native speakers. Learning grammar makes them more confused than before.

5.3 DISCUSSIONS

According to the findings, the research questions can be responded and discussed as follows:

5.3.1 The Relationship between Anxiety in English Classroom and English Proficiency

Though the five-point scale of FLCAS used was adapted into a four-point scale, the findings showed the clear decision of the respondents. The participants in the present study revealed that most of them felt anxious when studying in the English classroom. In this study, 50% of the participants were high anxiety students (the anxiety scores showed higher than the mean score), whereas the findings of Von Worde (1998, p. 140) reported that 34% of the participants were highly anxious learners. Besides, 22 of the 33 statements were supported by the respondents and all these statements were supported by over half the respondents.

However, the findings of E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p.130) showed the 19 statements supported by the respondents and 7 statements received the over half agreement from the respondents. The majority of the respondents showed a fair level of English of Communication 1 (1.50-2.00), whereas the final grade of English for Tourism Industry (only for the TATC students) was poor (1.00-1.50). The FLCAS score and the final English grade, reported in the present study, exhibits a significant negative correlation ($R = -0.259$, $p = 0.019$).

Nevertheless, the final English grade and anxiety level can be also affected by other factors, past experience learning English and opportunity of practicing English with native speakers, for instance. Referring to the personal and educational background, the student who had got the highest anxiety score showed a poor GPA and English grade and had a negative attitude toward learning English in the past, whereas the student who got 4 in English for Communication 1 showed the lowest anxiety level, had a positive attitude toward learning English in the past, and also had a chance to practice English with native speakers frequently.

The anxiety test is recommended to do in beginning classes to check the anxiety level and get recommendations from the student's perspective in order to design the teaching methodologies that best fit each class.

5.3.2 The Commonest Causes of Learning Anxiety in English Classroom

In the present study, the fear of negative evaluation was the commonest cause of learning anxiety in English classroom (42 students with this anxiety level above mean score), closely followed by communication apprehension (43 students with this anxiety level above mean score). The fear of negative evaluation component can be separated into two parts: worry about critical reaction from others and test anxiety. On the other hand, communication apprehension component mainly reveals an embarrassment of speaking in front of class.

Both two components are relatively related to each other. Specifically speaking, fear of negative evaluation can hinder participation and speaking in front of class. Similarly, Jones (2007) mentioned that there are two basic fears that block students from participation in classroom: fear of failure and fear of peer disapproval. It is not only worrying about peer's evaluation but also teacher's. 74.3% of the

participants agreed that the teacher is ready to correct every mistake they make (item 19).

Many anxious people have a negative belief system; they always interpret things in negative ways. Self-concept of competency disability seems common to people who feel fear failure and frequently compare their ability to the others.

Even though all teachers for English classes at TATC are Thai and normally teach in Thai, the students are likely to feel highly anxious about speaking in class. According to the present findings, the first two items that got highest agreement all were speech anxiety: I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class and I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. The findings respond to the Suan Dusit poll reported in The Nation newspaper (Brown, 2006) that fear of speaking English or making mistakes are the major problems of learning English (31.58%). Probably it is because the non-native English speaking teacher focuses more on accuracy, form, grammar rules, printed word and formal registers (Medgyes, 1994, p. 59). This could make the students feel nervous when speaking or sharing their opinions in class. Traditional Thai learning style might be another good explanation: sitting quietly, listening to the lecture and taking notes. Participation in class is not common for most Thai learners due to fear of being foolish and worrying about wasting others' time as Mutita Na Songkla (2002) has shared with her opinion in ELI news:

...most Thai students are ashamed to ask questions because they are afraid that they will ask a foolish question. Sometimes they think that they waste other student's time if they ask some questions which another student knows the answer and those students have to listen to the professor explain it again.

Most Thai students have never been taught to share their opinions or ask questions in class. Therefore, the students feel uncomfortable when being called on in class. A teacher is a key person in classroom who can make the class atmosphere relaxed, friendly, joyful, or anxious, threatening, and boring. Motivation and encouragement might help them feel more comfortable to share ideas.

5.3.3 Methods for Reducing Anxiety in the English Classroom

The majority of the students in this study preferred to tell themselves that error is a natural part of foreign language learning to encourage self-esteem and risk taking. Error is a common phenomenon of transferring the first language to the second language. Not only the student, but also the teacher, should realize this fact. The teacher should be sensitively aware when correcting student's errors. Correcting a student's error especially in the classroom is like a two-edge sword. Correction is useful for students to know their mistakes and understand the correct ones. However, too often and immediate reaction to errors can embarrass and discourage some students (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 167). Effective and constructive error correction should be in the extent that "the student feels comfortable enough to take risks in your language classroom" (Kristmanson, 2000).

Attending every class to learn a little bit every week and to seek out opportunities to practice the foreign language were also frequently selected methods to reduce the student's anxiety. The students choose to improve their English little by little especially in a practical way rather than to share their anxious feeling with others. They are likely to think that if they can master their English, it will reduce their anxiety in classroom.

5.3.4 Atmosphere and Learning Preferences in English Classroom

Group work is the learning style most preferred in language class. Although group work is not so effective to improve speaking, it does not produce more mistakes than with the teacher (Lightbown and Spada, 1999, p.168). Interestingly, the book entitled "Improving Teaching in Higher Education" quotes that "...I feel we don't mind if a friend ask a question, but if a lecturer asks you, you dry up..."(University Teaching Methods Unit, 1978, p.45). A student is likely to feel more comfortable and safer when showing their competency among friends who have the same level of proficiency. Group work could reduce the student's anxiety and provide the student with a chance to express their idea at least with friends.

The way the teacher conducts his or her classroom is relatively significant in classroom atmosphere. The teacher can create either a relaxed environment or an anxious ambiance. Relaxed and friendly atmosphere are key factors to reduce the anxiety and encourage learning motivation. In this study, a close

relationship between students and their teacher is highly preferred by the participants. Language games were also desired by a majority of the participants. Teachers can create the language game to explain or simplify the difficult and confusing points such as grammar, reading and vocabulary. Well-designed language games can provide the student not only fun and entertainment but also language practice and development by degrees. However, the language games should not be overly competitive; otherwise, the student will be again driven into anxious atmosphere (Kristmanson, 2000).

The preferences of learning outside class, learning with native speakers and learning for communicating with native speakers can imply that the students in the present study are willing to learn English for practical use rather than bookish use.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above.

The findings of the study support the notion that the anxiety is one of significant factors that can weaken the learner's proficiency and most participants had a high language anxiety level. The researcher agrees with Von Worde (1998, pp. 155-156) that English teachers should survey their students' anxiety at the beginning of the semester for adapting teaching methods and classroom environment best fitted to the particular group of students.

The major anxieties of the first-year Hotel and Tourism students at TATC are fear of negative evaluation both peers and teachers and fear of speaking in front of class. These anxiety components are connected to the learning preferences that the students choose. The students preferred doing activities in group in order to stay in the safe place—not being spotlighted—and would like their teacher to be friendly with them for a happy classroom atmosphere. The teacher should encourage students to speak without embarrassing them. For instance, the teacher should not interrupt while the student is speaking, should not correct all mistakes but only serious ones, and should feedback on their response positively. Language games are recommended to apply to teaching grammar, reading and vocabulary.

The methods that most students preferred for reducing their anxiety in English class are telling themselves that mistakes are common for learning English and

attending class every week to learn English little by little. Motivation and relaxed classroom atmosphere are crucially important for students, especially for the participants in this study. Teachers should emphasize in the first class that mistakes are allowed in the class, and encourage students to participate in class.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research.

5.5.1 The sample of further studies is recommended to be varied. For example, the comparison between FL anxiety level of undergraduate students in English major and non-English major.

5.5.2 The further study is recommended to be conducted in qualitative methodology. Interview should be done after evaluating the FLCAS score to find out the specific reasons for FL anxiety in classroom and their learning preferences.

5.5.3 The next study should examine the anxiety in English classes taught by native speakers.