



Teacher Anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has severely affected the world. As of 30th May 2020, according to a public release by the Thai Ministry of Public Health (COVID-19 Situation Report, 2020), nearly 3,034 individuals have been infected by COVID-19. The first confirmed case in Thailand was reported on 13th January 2020 in *The Nation Thailand*, involving a 61-year-old Chinese woman from Wuhan City in China who was released after being examined and diagnosed as a non-severe case (The Nation Thailand, 2020b). The spread of COVID-19 has since skyrocketed in Thailand and reached a staggering number of 53 confirmed new cases (including one death) over a 24-hour period as reported on 25th of April 2020 (The Nation Thailand, 2020a).

In response to the rising cases of COVID-19, Thailand implemented a partial shutdown starting on 16th March 2020 (Yuvejwattana, 2020). During this period, malls, schools and universities were closed and only essential services such as shops selling food remained open. In the effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure that teaching and learning proceed as usual for the students, the Council of University Faculty Senate of Thailand (CUFST) asked all higher education institutions to “utilise online platforms” for teaching and learning (Reporters, 16 March 2020). Teachers and educators were required to “work from home” and attend online meetings when the need arose. Chulalongkorn University was the first university in Thailand that adhered to the announcement and commenced its temporary closure of workplace and online classes on 16th March 2020 (Chulalongkorn University, 2020). Lecturers from different faculties were reported to use social media such as Facebook and Zoom as their main medium of instruction.

The drastic rate at which the Thai education system and the Thai society have changed over the last few months has brought enormous uncertainty into the lives of people, especially those working as teachers. This is due to the fact that they are subject to additional pressure as they play a central role in the society (Müller & Goldenberg, 2020). In a matter of days after the release of an official statement about COVID-19, teachers from all levels of education in Thailand were required to revamp the instructional practices that took them years to learn and master (Minahan, 2020). They have to now act as infection control agents, trainers to prevent the spread of the virus, information providers for the public (parents and students), advisors to community members, and more importantly, they are responsible for students’ welfare and education (Howard & Howard, 2012). Thus, the need to address their fears, worries,



and anxiety is a serious concern. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the sources of teachers' anxiety amidst the pandemic in the central region of Thailand.

Methods

A survey created on Google Forms was disseminated among volunteer participants who were all teachers in the central region of Thailand. Data collection spanned over a period of 2 months from April to May 2020. Bangkok and its neighboring cities were selected as the main focus for this study as these were the areas that were heavily affected by COVID-19. The questionnaire was adapted from the research of Wong et al., (2007) on Iranian teachers' anxiety and the work of Rahimi and Yadollahi (2011) on anxiety during the SARS pandemic. It consisted of 5 sections as follows:

- Section 1 explains the nature and the purpose of the study to the respondents.
- Section 2 solicits personal information on age, gender, and level of institutional affiliation of the respondents.
- Sections 3, 4 and 5 seek information on 3 forms of anxiety: COVID-19-related, personal-related and professional-related anxiety.

Each section of the questionnaire includes 10 indicators which are rated on a five-point Likert Scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A total of 132 responses were retrieved from the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and interpret the responses, particularly with reference to frequency count, percentage, and weighted mean.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the demographic information of participants as well as the mean scores, and anxiety levels according to gender, age and institutional affiliations.

Demographic Information

Of the 132 respondents, 68.2 percent were females and 31.8 percent were males. About 25 percent of the participants were between 20 to 30 years of age, 59.1 percent were between 31 to 45 years old, while only 15.9 percent were above 45 years old. 31.8 percent of the participants were teaching in primary schools; 29.6 percent in secondary schools; and 38.6 percent taught in tertiary schools. Table 1 summarises the demographic information of participants in the study.

TABLE 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n = 132)

<i>Demographics</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Female	90	68.2
	Male	42	31.8
<i>Age</i>	20-30 years old	33	25
	31-45 years old	78	59.1
	Above 45 years old	21	15.9
<i>Institutional affiliation</i>	Primary School	42	31.8
	Secondary School	39	29.6
	Tertiary School	51	38.6

Mean Scores

To interpret the mean scores, the study adopted the Degang's (2010) system of interpreting responses as appears in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Interpretation of Mean Scores

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Score Range</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Anxiety Level</i>
1	1.00 - 1.49	Strongly Disagree	Very Low
2	1.50 - 2.49	Disagree	Low
3	2.50 - 3.49	Neutral	Average
4	3.50 - 4.49	Agree	High
5	4.50 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High

Different Forms of Anxiety

Table 3 shows the frequency and mean of teachers' responses for the different forms of anxiety experienced along with specific indicators that describe their experiences during COVID-19. Overall, the teachers' anxiety comes from three areas: the COVID-19 pandemic, personal and professional concerns. They felt an average level of anxiety on both COVID-19 related and personal-related aspects of their lives with mean results of 3.41 and 3.24 respectively. However, a high level of anxiety with a mean score of 3.60 was revealed to be associated with professional concerns. This implies that the move from in-person instruction to e-learning caused a lot of stress and challenges among educators around Central Thailand (Bao, 2020; Sahu, 2020; Talidong & Toquero, 2020). This result is akin to Delamarter and Ewart's (2020) study in which they stated that COVID-19 had negatively affected the brightest student teachers, among other educators.

In Thailand, the situation is exacerbated by lack of preparation and solid support for teachers (DaSilva, 2020). Of the 30 indicators included in the study, 17 were rated as causing high levels of anxiety among the teachers - the quick spread of COVID-19; the financial constraints; family safety; weak internet; and lack of devices among students caused high levels of anxiety among the teachers. On the other hand, teachers were less worried about being infected with COVID-19, their physical and mental health, their lack of skills in computers in response to conducting online classes, the restrictions on recreational activities, and going to hospitals for medical check-up.

TABLE 3
Teachers' Anxiety Indicators during the COVID-19 Pandemic (n = 132)

INDICATORS		5 (SA)	4 (A)	3 (N)	2 (D)	1 (SD)	Mean
A: COVID-19 related anxiety							3.41
1	I feel that I might be infected by the COVID-19 virus at any moment.	15	57	51	3	6	3.55
2	I worry that I have been infected with COVID-19.	6	15	42	39	30	2.45
3	I am afraid of going to hospital for consultation regarding COVID-19.	12	21	36	45	18	2.73
4	I worry that my family members and friends will be infected with COVID-19.	42	51	15	12	12	3.75
5	I feel COVID-19 will spread quickly.	39	63	24	0	6	3.98
6	I feel COVID-19 will persist in the community for a long time.	18	66	33	12	3	3.64
7	I feel that it is difficult to diagnose COVID-19 patients.	12	66	21	27	6	3.39
8	I feel that it is difficult to treat COVID-19 patients.	33	42	33	21	3	3.61
9	I feel COVID-19 is difficult to prevent.	9	42	36	42	3	3.09
10	I feel that COVID-19 patients might have serious consequences.	27	75	21	6	3	3.89
B: Personal concerns related anxiety							3.24
1	I worry about financial constraints during the pandemic.	45	51	21	9	6	3.91
2	I worry that my health is not well.	9	21	51	42	9	2.84
3	I worry about my mental health.	6	18	30	45	33	2.39
4	I worry about the restrictions in doing recreational activities	6	48	33	24	21	2.95
5	I worry about the restrictions in my social meetings with my friends.	9	42	42	21	18	3.02
6	I feel the government fails to provide enough, adequate and true information.	18	33	54	15	12	3.23
7	I feel the government fails to provide financial support during the crisis.	18	39	36	27	12	3.18
8	I feel that my insurance is not sufficient during the pandemic.	24	39	39	21	9	3.36
9	I worry about the safety of my family.	57	36	21	15	3	3.98
10	I worry about my survival from the COVID-19 outbreak.	21	51	36	21	3	3.50
C: Professional concerns related anxiety							3.60
1	I feel that it is difficult to focus on the lesson during this time of pandemic.	33	30	30	27	12	3.34
2	I worry about students' expectations during the pandemic.	27	57	21	21	6	3.59
3	I worry about the difficulty of preparing lesson plans for online classes	24	54	24	27	3	3.52
4	I worry about interacting with students online and not face-to-face.	33	54	18	21	6	3.66
5	I worry about my lack of skills in using computers and other online teaching platforms.	15	30	36	24	27	2.86
6	I worry about the availability of technology needed for online classes.	24	63	24	6	15	3.57
7	I worry about my students who do not have the devices for online class.	45	51	21	12	3	3.93
8	I worry about the weak internet.	51	42	21	12	6	3.91
9	I worry about the confidentiality of doing online classes.	42	30	36	24	0	3.68
10	I worry about the assessment of students' output online.	39	54	24	15	0	3.89

Anxiety levels according to gender

As of April 17, 2020, the World Health Organization, Thailand (2020a) reported a mortality rate of 2.7% among men and 0.7% among women. Despite the data, female teachers experience a high level of anxiety on profession-related issues more than male teachers who showed average levels of anxiety on all aspects. Sili (2020) explains that figures on mortality rate are not the only factors that affect how men and women react to the pandemic. Other considerations may include socially prescribed attitudes, norms and practices that induce certain feelings and emotions despite extreme conditions.

Wood (2012) also pointed out that male teachers are laid-back, relaxed and humorous compared to their female counterparts who are more likely to be sensitive and emotional. Such gender differences between male and female teachers may have contributed to the more positive outlook of male teachers. Wang et al., (2020) found similar results in their study of the psychological states of people during COVID-19. Their respondents, however, are Chinese nationals of varied occupations including doctors, teachers, lawyers, students, employees, service workers, retired, freelance and even jobless individuals. Their study revealed that females are 3.01 times more likely to experience anxiety than males during the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 4

Teacher's Anxiety According to Gender during the COVID-19 Pandemic (n = 132)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Anxiety Type</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description of Anxiety Level</i>
Male	COVID-19	3.39	Average
Female		3.42	Average
Male	Personal	3.21	Average
Female		3.25	Average
Male	Professional	3.45	Average
Female		3.67	High

Anxiety levels according to age

On 15th April 2020, COVID-19 cases in Thailand were reported as the highest among the age group of 30 to 44 years old; followed by 15 to 29 years old and, 45 years old and above. The least number of cases were noted among those who were 15 years old and below (WHO-Thailand, 2020b).

Results of the responses on anxiety levels revealed that the middle-aged group (31-45 years old) experienced only an average level of anxiety in all three forms. Young adult groups, who ranked second among the infected groups in Thailand, experienced high levels of anxiety only in relation to their profession. Adults who are above 45 years old, on the other hand, showed high levels of anxiety in all forms - COVID-19, personal, and professional. The latter were the third most infected group in Thailand and at the same time considered high risk for more severe coronavirus disease (Kilgore, 2020).

TABLE 5

Teacher's Anxiety Levels According to Age during the COVID-19 Pandemic (n = 132)

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description of Anxiety</i>
20 to 30 years' old		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.48	Average
Personal -related anxiety	4.42	Average
Professional related anxiety	3.96	High
31 to 45 years' old		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.34	Average
Personal -related anxiety	3.08	Average
Professional related anxiety	3.32	Average
Above 45 years old		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.56	High
Personal -related anxiety	3.54	High
Professional related anxiety	4.06	High

Anxiety levels according to institutional affiliation

Primary school teachers felt a high level of anxiety in their profession. Secondary school teachers, on the other hand, felt an average level of anxiety in all 3 areas - COVID-19, personal and professional. Those teaching in universities experienced higher levels of anxiety in both COVID-19 and professional aspects. They also rated all COVID-19 related indicators as causing high levels of anxiety except going to hospitals for consultation.

Universities were considered “outbreak centers” during the pandemic (Van et al., 2010). University students in the universities are young adults who are often free to go in and out of the campus, which places them at high risk, not to mention the high level of social contacts within the campus. Primary schools are also high-risk areas. Besides the difficulty in teaching young learners the safety measures, students in these educational settings are also susceptible to infection due to poverty, malnutrition, unawareness and special health care needs (Saxena & Saxena, 2020).

Professional-related anxiety among both primary and tertiary schoolteachers was due to the fear over weak internet connections, online classes, non-availability of devices, and online assessment of students. These concerns were no different from the experiences of teachers in Hong Kong during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003. Lessons taken away from the crisis include a need for schools to re-train their teachers, prepare their students, provide technological support, and set up a mechanism for effective assessment if schools are to overcome the outbreak (Kwok & Hodgson, 2004).

Present practices even show that educational organizations are conducting surveys not only of students’ health status but also internet connectivity issues and availability of learning devices (Lansangan, 2020). As of April 2020, the Ministry of Education in Thailand has been devising plans to address these concerns (Kertbundit, 2020). Aside from mobile and online learning, radio and television were tapped as additional distance learning platforms for students. The state also offers subsidies on gadgets and free broadband to students in need. COVID-19 has, thus, become a catalyst for educational institutions worldwide to search for innovative solutions in a relatively short period of time (Niranjan, 2020).

TABLE 6

Teacher’s Anxiety According to Institutional Affiliation during the COVID-19 Pandemic (n = 132)

<i>Institutional affiliation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description of Anxiety</i>
Primary School		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.26	Average
Personal-related anxiety	2.99	Average
Professional related anxiety	3.60	High
Secondary School		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.42	Average
Personal-related anxiety	3.34	Average
Professional related anxiety	3.20	Average
Tertiary School		
COVID-19-related anxiety	3.52	High
Personal-related anxiety	3.36	Average
Professional related anxiety	3.85	High

Conclusion

For several months now, educational systems all over the world have been grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from this study show that teachers’ anxiety comes from three areas: the COVID-19 pandemic, personal and professional matters. The level of anxiety, however, is average on both COVID-19 and personal-related issues but high in professional-related concerns. The enormous changes

that totally transformed the mode of instruction have greatly caused anxiety among teachers in Thailand. This means that teachers in Thailand are very much concerned about their professions. In light of this, providing them with sufficient support to enable them to carry out their work effectively will ease their worries to a great extent. Assistance may also include support for teacher resilience, teaching instructions, and technology (Van et al., 2010).

While this study provides a glimpse of the anxiety experienced by teachers in Thailand, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the sample size is insufficient to make a generalization of the anxiety felt by teachers in Thailand. Future studies should include a greater number of teachers as participants. Secondly, this study utilized descriptive statistics to present and describe the data gathered, limiting the amount of accurate inferences that can be reached. Future researchers may extrapolate results using other statistical measures as inferential statistics to further strengthen the validity of the data interpretations. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study reports essential data regarding the anxiety experienced by teachers in the first few months of a viral crisis.

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(Received May 23, 2021; Revised August 20, 2021; Accepted September 18, 2021)