

Influencing Factors and Coping Strategies of English Learning Anxiety among Chinese Non-English Major Students

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ABSTRACT

Learning anxiety becomes a common mental problem among students nowadays. The main purpose of this article is to investigate what makes overseas Chinese students of non-English majors feel anxious about English learning and how to solve this problem and focus on the research towards English language and Chinese students that are learning in college overseas. Firstly, there is an introduction of the definition of anxiety caused by the difficulties of bilingual learning. Some relevant researches are referred to know more about the situation of English learning of this target community. The influencing factors analysis will be divided into two parts, like internal causes and external causes, including personality, English foundation, study attitude, and the guidance as well as the teaching attitude of teachers, and then there will be the solutions to tell how to solve the anxiety correctly and efficiently. Finally, there is an analysis of the data from other researchers, to see what kind of method did they choose to investigate the reason for anxiety. After all, the main reason for the English learning anxiety of non-English major overseas Chinese college students is the fear of making mistakes and having tests. For the solution, it should be acted by the teachers as well as students themselves to increase the learning motivation.

Keywords: *Non-English major, English learning anxiety, Language learning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the desire for further study becoming stronger, many students choose to learn overseas, while the academic environment and the educational form are different from Mainland China. Due to a large number of overseas students of non-English majors, like mathematics, business, science, or engineering. English education is required during their continuing learning, so various requirements may cause huge pressure when the students start their college life overseas. Chinese Students are using English as a second language, but during their overseas learning, most of the courses are being taught in English. In order to meet the requirement, students should improve their English skills including reading, listening, writing, and speaking. From the aspect of linguistics, English is a different type of language from Chinese. According to Yang, English has obvious differences in word inflection, verb, modifier, and comma[1]. Moreover, English also absorbs vocabulary and pronunciation habits from other Indo-European languages, such as Latin and French. These are two languages that usually appears in

English article, and are also being used by native English speakers.

According to Horwitz, Tallon, and Luo, their research indicated that approximately one-third of students have English learning anxiety[2]. Anxiety is a common mental problem, depending on the research of the psychology of anxiety, anxiety is mentioned as a kind of timeless disease, and brings people long-term influence[3]. Learning anxiety always happens to students with high pressure, and this negative phenomenon will affect their daily life as well as their further studies. First of all, feeling anxious will influence concentration, efficiency, sleep quality, and appetite. Based on the medical research of anxiety and depression, if a person has anxiety and depression, the physical function will get adverse impact, especially some people who suffered from other physical diseases, the negative impact of anxiety and depression could be more obvious[4]. According to Ohata, in this research, the objectives are native Japanese students, about their anxiety during English learning[5]. Firstly, it could be the difficulty of the language itself, the level of the test, and the language habit differences. Secondly, it could be the

personality, learning surroundings, language foundation, and interest of the students. Lastly is the guidance of the teacher, for example, did they use a decent way to let students understand and remember relevant points of English study easily.

Taken together, because of the obvious problem of English learning anxiety of non-English major students, the main purpose is to find out the influencing factors and solutions, and this is the priority. After referring to relevant research, few particularly focus on English and do not specially focus on Chinese students studying abroad. Therefore, this review mainly analyzes the negative emotion of non-English major students towards English learning and figure out a solution. The literature review is divided into three parts, including the types of English learning anxiety, the causes of English learning anxiety, and solutions to English learning anxiety, respectively. What's more, the reasons can be divided into two types, internal causes, and external causes. Through the analysis of these three aspects, to prove what kind of anxiety usually occurs among college students, and what elements influence their English learning as well as lead to their anxiety. Finally, how do people solve the problem, for both students or teachers at school?

2. CAUSE

This article chose literature review as the methodology, and all the causes found are divided into two parts, including internal cause and external cause, and list causes that possibly lead to students' anxiety. Theoretically, internal cause means the English knowledge storage and personality of students, as well as their gender, those things that they cannot change on themselves. Meanwhile, the personality will be presented as their perfectionism and mental activism. For external causes, that means the influence from other people like teachers and classmates, such as the comment after completed tasks, and the sight from others in the class. Through a questionnaire survey, Lan and Chang, through the questionnaire they found out that the common types of English as foreign language learning anxiety are: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and fear of tests, respectively. In the diagram of their research, 43% of students chose high influence level for "Fear of making mistakes", and 57% chose high influence level for "Test Anxiety". For "Lack of confidence", the percentage of each level is quite average. 25% of the students thought that "Communication Apprehensive" and "Fear of negative evaluation" have a medium effect on them[6]. Therefore, "Fear of making mistakes" is the most serious phenomenon during English learning, and "Test Anxiety" can also be another important reason for their learning anxiety. Above all, fear is the usual performance of anxiety, students present their fear in class, assignments, presentations, and tests. Moreover, based on the survey

of Liu and Jackson, most of the anxiety is in the form of fear rather than worry or confusion[7]. They are scared of speaking and expressing themselves in class or even in their groups. Therefore, their fear is the manifestation of anxiety, and the cause factor should be found to decrease the adverse impact.

2.1. Internal Cause of English Learning Anxiety

This part mainly discussed the personal reasons which may influence their English learning, like their own gender, characteristics, self-awareness, and personality causing the English learning anxiety. Due to these internal causes, solving the anxiety became more difficult, and it also requires effort from the learner side.

2.1.1. Gender

In the research of Andrade and Williams, about 65.91% of male students looked down on themselves, while there are about 54.95% of female students also have not enough confidence in themselves[8]. Referring to the research of Nahavandi and Mukundan, in their questionnaire for the students whose mother language is not English, there was a table showing that male students performed a little weaker on the frequency than female students, but it only showed a tiny difference[9]. Therefore, it indicated that there is not an obvious or significant difference between the two genders on the maximum of learning language, and probably all the students are facing the pressure of learning anxiety in varying degrees.

2.1.2. English Foundation

In this part, the English foundation is mainly focused on the English ability of students, and their original storage of English knowledge, like vocabulary, grammar, skills of writing, and other output. According to Liu, in the oral English classes in a university located in China, students performed anxiety because of reasons below: lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency, lack of practice, fear of losing face, fear of being the focus of attention, and inability to express ideas[10]. These factors showed that students themselves need to improve their English skills and establish confidence to face the difficulty during English learning. In most of the surveys, many students had not enough English proficiency, and this depends on the foundation as well as their interest in English, some of them are not good at language learning and understanding. Hence, they chose to only remember the vocabulary and grammar directly without other effective methods in most of the cases.

2.1.3. Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a kind of desire to achieve the highest

and perform the best[11]. When students care too much about their daily performance, even the correctness of their answers in class, this status always brings anxiety to students. These kinds of students require themselves harshly and make simple things complicated. On the one hand, perfectionism can make them be motivated to learn more and perform better, but it can also let some pessimists feel despair after they fail to reach their target.

In the previous research, the objectives concluded two types of perfectionist students—high anxious students as experimental group and low anxious students as a control group with their anxiety level confirmed by a series of tests[12]. The research result showed that the more student wants to be perfect, the more they feel anxious. Most of the participants claimed that they always care too much about the details of their wording, so they did feel very anxious, and no matter their English ability is good or not, they always chase the higher target and give more pressure on themselves.

2.2. External Cause of English Learning Anxiety

For the external causes, it means students are influenced by the surroundings, evaluation, negative emotion, and teachers' teaching experience. The surroundings mean the learning atmosphere and the environment of the school, whether it made learners feel nervous. Evaluation means the teacher is strict or not, and whether they will blame students when they make mistakes, and easy to let students get a bad mark, without encouragement and positive comment for students.

2.2.1. Attitude and Teaching Method of Teachers

Firstly, some external causes formed by the inappropriate way of teaching, students got bad marks or comment as long as they made any mistake in assignments or presentation, the shame and guilty made students feel frightened, especially the oral English courses, presentation required students to show and tell, in this case, most of the students are nervous due to the fear of losing face. Not only the correctness of the contents but also their pronunciation included.

According to the research of Tran, teachers' awareness of foreign language learning anxiety needs to be stronger, with the help of another research of Indonesia, it is obvious that teachers have quite a responsibility in this kind of situation[13]. Most of the students lost their confidence or interest for the reason that the teaching is not effective enough for them to disgust the knowledge, or even can not follow the pace of classes. Therefore, the external element could be the mistakes made by teachers during their teaching, the way they pointed out the mistakes of students, or they use strict ways to require students to finish their tasks.

2.2.2. Cultural Background and Mother Language

The research of English as foreign language students in Vietnam has mentioned the attitude of both students and teachers towards foreign language anxiety[13]. Through the interview, the teacher said that English learning anxiety always happens to students that learn English as a second or foreign language, if students care enough about their learning result, anxiety would exist. Anxiety can provide positive and negative at the same time, if the student can overcome the difficulties of English learning, they can improve their English skills in the end. But for those who are only impacted by the negative side, then the student needs to figure out how to transform the pressure into motivation because solving the anxiety can help increase their English proficiency. In their opinion, students' English learning anxiety is just a normal performance of hard-working and emphasis. Ngo, Spooner-Lane, and Mergler claimed that most of the English major students are very clear about their future job and life plan, like translator or interpreter[14]. In another word, they realized the importance of English to them, and this is their major, and most of them had less difficulty with daily English using than non-English major students. Although the anxiety happens to a specific individual, based on Subekti's research, teachers and their teaching method are also elements to be considered, and this inspired the investigation of how to make Chinese students get well known of academic English as soon as possible[15]. What's more, in that research, there also mentioned about anxiety could be a barrier for students to absorb knowledge, and weaken the effect of teaching.

2.2.3. Learning Surroundings

Some students could not adapt to surroundings with too many audiences, even having the discussion, they can only feel free to talk in a small group or pairs. According to the research that has also been done on Japanese students' performance by Andrade and Williams, they figured out that whether working in pairs or small groups can make difference in students' learning anxiety through questionnaires, all of the students are from different universities of Japan[8]. The questionnaire asked them some questions about learning habits and how is their anxiety, including the frequency, duration, impact, and reactions of their English learning anxiety. As the result, the research indicated that learning in pairs or small groups could help students feel relaxed, and decrease the pressure of presenting in front of too many people. As mentioned before, some students had fear of losing face or being present in front of the class[10]. In the conclusion of Amiri and Ghonsooly, after adopting the method of divided students into small groups or in pairs, they could feel more secure to express their opinions, as well as finish the discussion[16].

3. SOLUTIONS

After reviewing the research about English learning anxiety, including cases from Vietnam, Japan, Indonesia, and especially China, the analysis starts from three main points, language feature, students themselves, and teaching quality of teachers. This paper is going to discuss the research direction of this article, outlook as well as suggestions, and in the continued discussion, some methods that figured out by different researchers to solve the negative situation will be mentioned. Research tended to continue to focus on how to deal with the negative emotion, find the main reason, and avoid accumulating the fear or concern.

The first way is to use positive implications, take the case of Vietnamese university as an example, teachers should use encouraging words to inspire students, create an animated atmosphere that can comfort the anxiety of students, such as paying more attention to the students who made mistakes and have difficulty on learning English, use an effective method to let them understand the key points of academic English, and make them using academic expression proficiently [14]. Even though most of the problems can be solved with others' assistance, students should be more active and motivated by their subjective initiative. The second method is that active the subjective initiative of students, guide them to face the fear to reduce their anxiety.

Secondly, teachers should show more concern about the mental health problem of students. In the research of Vietnam students, the researchers suggested that teachers should learn more about English learning anxiety and pay more attention to the mental situation of the students because, during the interview, teachers did not show their concern towards the anxiety of students. To solve the problem from the aspect of teaching, teachers should have a plan about how to establish students' confidence and determination instead of making them believe anxiety is a way to prove their effort. With the opinions of Subekti and Eugene, as mentioned before, anxiety did encourage students in a way during language learning, so it is reasonable for teachers to regard anxiety as a motivation for students [3,15]. However, long-term anxiety and high pressure could adversely impact human beings' physical health and mental health. The researcher of the anxiety itself pointed out that the fear that anxiety brought to students can destroy them in the future, especially college students around 20 years old. It might lead to malignancy if a student suffers from a bad status for a long time.

Furthermore, the solution should include both student and teacher, if there is only one side putting effort, that would not be efficient enough. Students themselves need to clear their target, which is not too hard to achieve with a little bit challenge. What's more, set some goals like what kind of English level they need to have, for example,

some of them, just need the basic level of academic English to meet the standard of their projects, reports, and essays, or rather they want to have high-level English skills to face the challenge of some future jobs that require flexible English usage. Once they know what level they need to reach, they could feel more relaxed instead of worried and doubtful about their ability, and at least students can have a clear awareness of their level of English.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the article already analyzed the English learning anxiety of Chinese students who study in college overseas, as well as the influencing factors and coping strategies of this mental problem. It is easy for Non-English major students with weak foundations to ignore the importance of learning English because most of them will pay more attention to their major instead of language training. Moreover, the most important point is personality, and it might be the main reason why non-English major students feel anxious. According to some relevant research, students mostly feel anxious because of their fear, perfectionism, lack of self-activism. What's more, teachers' effort is also included and formed another reason for students' anxiety. Therefore, teachers should use decent teaching methods to encourage and motivate students.

On the one hand, some teachers did not pay enough attention to students' acceptance level, so they have to care about the anxiety of students, and encourage students to share their thoughts, or recommend them to have counseling in the student service center and deal with the difficulty they are facing. On the other hand, students need to realize what level of English skills they need to reach, and then they can find other friendly classmates or partners who would not make them feel losing face or uncomfortable cooperating, practicing both oral, and written English together. Therefore, systematical learning would be helpful for them to make more progress, at the same time, the problems could be solved under the effort of both students and teachers.

During the investigation, most of the scholars are focusing on other Asian countries, as well as the learning anxiety of other subjects. This paper helped to fill up the gap that lack of information about Non-English major Chinese students' English learning anxiety.

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