A Study of English Learning Anxiety of Non-English Major on Secondary Vocational School Students

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning anxiety is a factor that has a significant influence on students' performance and grades. Secondary vocational school students usually have less interest in learning English and their foundation is relatively poorer than senior high school. This study aims to investigate the circumstances of foreign language learning anxiety in secondary vocational school students. This study used quantitative and qualitative methods to carry out the investigation, including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS 26.0 and NVivo 12.0. Research results suggest that secondary vocational school students have the higher degree of foreign language learning anxiety. According to the descriptive analysis of SPSS 26.0, the average score is 105.2750. Besides, depending to the statistics of 33 specific items, 30 items exceed 3.0000. This study not only enriches the new perspective of foreign language learning anxiety but also provides references for secondary vocational school English teachers.

Keywords: *English learning anxiety; Non-English major; Secondary school students*

1. INTRODUCTION

Different students in different educational stages require to face different degrees of learning pressure. Although secondary vocational students do not be good at learning English, they have to face the pressure to pass the College Entrance Examination. They do not know how to learn and make up their weak points, so they usually have different degrees of English learning anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety was first proposed and defined by American psychologist Horwitz in the 1970s[3]. He believes that different from other types of anxiety, foreign language learning anxiety is produced in the process of learners' learning a foreign language. It is "a unique synthesis of self-perception, belief, emotion, and behavior that is produced in the process of foreign language learning and associated with classroom foreign language learning". In 1986, Horwitz and his colleagues compiled the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)[4]. This scale is widely used by scholars and researchers at abroad and home. Many graduates did empirical studies of foreign language anxiety during the stage of junior high school and senior high school (Sun Qianhui, 2018; Zhang Han, 2019&Yu Zijuan, 2021)[6][7][8]. In addition, some scholars did some empirical studies in college English classes. Meng &Chen (2014) did an intervention case study of college students' anxiety in EFL learning, the results showed that the psychological intervention is beneficial to relieving students' learning anxiety to some extent[1]. Fei Wei (2016) claimed that under the circumstance of network-based multi-modal teaching, new types of foreign language anxiety appeared[2].

At present, most scholars and researchers focus more on the compulsory education stage and higher education stage, and little does the investigation and empirical research on the secondary vocational school education stage. This study aims to investigate the current circumstance of English learning anxiety in secondary vocational schools, thus finding the real reasons and then providing pedagogical suggestions. This study not only enriches the perspective of foreign language learning anxiety but also know about the general situation of secondary vocational students' English learning anxiety. What's more, it could provide references for secondary vocational teachers to improve and upgrade their teaching.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To investigate the circumstances of English learning anxiety of secondary vocational school students, there are three questions required to explore:

1. What is the general and specific situation of secondary vocational students' English language anxiety?

2. What are the reasons for secondary vocational students' English language anxiety?

3. What strategies can relieve secondary vocational students' English learning anxiety?

2.2 RESEARCH SUBJECTS

The research subjects were chosen from a secondary vocational school in Wuhan, Hubei, China. 35 students participated in this investigation. All these students major in computers, so most of the students are boys. There are 30 boys and 10 girls. Most of these students have problems learning English for a long time. Besides, the pressure of college entrance examinations forces them to pay more attention to learning English. However, they do not how to check and make up their weak points.

2.3 RESEARCH METHODS

2.3.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

There are two parts to this questionnaire. The first part is personal information on research subjects, including gender and grade. The second part of this study is to use the Chinese version's questionnaires of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). It was framed by Horwitz et.al (1986)[4]. It has been used by many scholars and researchers and it has been testified for higher reliability and validity[5]. The second part of this questionnaire consisted of 33 questions, using the Likert 5 Scale, "1 represents totally disagree", "2 represents disagree", "3 represents objective", "4 represents agree" and "5 represents totally agree". Among the 33 questions, nine of them are reverse scoring. Items 8, 10, and 21 belong to test anxiety; items 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, and 31 belong to fear of negative evaluation; items 1，4，9，13，15, 18，20, 23, 27，29, 30, 32, and 33 belong to communication apprehension anxiety; items 5, 6，16，17，22，25，26 and 28 belong to general anxiety. The range of scores is from 33 to 165. The higher scores are, the higher degree the of English learning anxiety.

2.3.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The semi-structured interview is an effective way to know about the detailed information of questionnaires. Four students were chosen to have one-to-one interviews, including two boys and two girls. In addition, an English was interviewed to tell the circumstances of English classes.

2.3.3 CLASS OBSERVATION

Class observation is a way to record students' performance during classes. An English teacher's class is chosen and 8 lessons are recorded.

2.3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaires were distributed to 40 students online, and all were recovered and valid. The recovery rate and effectiveness are both 100%. The questionnaire data were collected and analyzed by SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach α is 0.960. So it is proved that the questionnaire has higher internal consistency. The semi-structured contents of teacher and students as well as class observation records were analyzed by NVivio 12.0 to find the reasons for English learning anxiety and thus provide pedagogical suggestions for teachers to relieve students' anxiety.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 THE GENERAL SITUATION OF ENGLISH LEARNING ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

Through descriptive analysis on the scores of English learning anxiety of 40 research subjects, the maximum value is 165.0, the minimum value is 45.0, the standard deviation is 26.4313, and the average score is 105.2750, as shown in **table 1**.

Table 1 The general situation of English learning anxiety

	N	Min	Max	Average	SD
Anxiety	40	45.00	165.00	105.2750	26.43132

3.2 THE SPECIFIC SITUATION OF ENGLISH LEARNING ANXIETY OF SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

To find out the specific aspects of English learning anxiety of secondary vocational students, this study also

makes descriptive analysis on these 33 items, as shown in table 2.

Table 2 The specific descriptive statistics on 33 items

Question	N	Min	Max	Average	SD
Q6	40	1.00	5.00	3.5500	1.10824
Q1	40	1.00	5.00	3.4000	1.15025
Q24	40	1.00	5.00	3.3750	1.19158
Q9	40	1.00	5.00	3.3750	1.27475
Q15	40	1.00	5.00	3.3750	1.03000
Q30	40	1.00	5.00	3.3250	1.24833
Q3	40	1.00	5.00	3.3250	1.28876
Q13	40	1.00	5.00	3.3000	1.18105
Q4	40	1.00	5.00	3.2750	1.13199
Q11	40	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.29595
Q20	40	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.17124
Q14	40	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.12660
Q23	40	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.27601
Q16	40	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.08012
Q29	40	1.00	5.00	3.2250	1.25038
Q10	40	1.00	5.00	3.2250	1.25038
Q12	40	1.00	5.00	3.2250	1.14326
Q22	40	1.00	5.00	3.2000	1.09075
Q19	40	1.00	5.00	3.1750	1.05945
Q33	40	1.00	5.00	3.1750	1.21713
Q25	40	1.00	5.00	3.1500	1.29199
Q7	40	1.00	5.00	3.1500	1.33109
Q28	40	1.00	5.00	3.1000	1.25678
Q17	40	1.00	5.00	3.1000	1.31656
Q32	40	1.00	5.00	3.0500	1.23931
Q21	40	1.00	5.00	3.0500	1.15359
Q5	40	1.00	5.00	3.0500	1.25983
Q8	40	1.00	5.00	3.0500	1.17561
Q2	40	1.00	5.00	3.0250	1.22971
Q31	40	1.00	5.00	3.0000	1.28103
Q27	40	1.00	5.00	2.9250	1.24833
Q26	40	1.00	5.00	2.9250	1.30850
Q18	40	1.00	5.00	2.9250	1.24833
Valid(N)	40				

In a general, the results show that the most English learning anxiety is Q6 (3.5500) "During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course." It shows that most students are hard to pay more attention to their classes. In the face of this question, the author interviewed some students, they said that it is difficult to understand and follow teachers' words and steps. Because their English foundation is poorer and their English level is much lower. The reasons for class distraction are diversified such as teachers' teaching methods, students' levels, and so on. Another higher score is Q1 (3.4000) "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English." Most students would like to restart learning and improve their English, but they are still afraid to fail again. In addition, some students who are good at English learning cause pressure on them. Moreover, some students claim that "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class" and "In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know" (3.3750). From these two questions, it is concluded that students are easy to become nervous. It is related to their communicative surroundings as they are non-English major students and they are afraid to make mistakes during their speaking and talking, but to some extent, it does not result in a serious impact on their normal performance in English class. The results coincided with Q29 "I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says", and Q30 "I feel overwhelmed with the number of rules I have to learn to speak English" (2.9250). It suggests that students are willing to attend English classes and does not engender a feeling of excessive uneasiness.

From the aspect of test anxiety, the highest score is Q10 (3.2250) "I am usually at ease during tests in my English class", it is seen that test is still an important factor that leads to English learning anxiety. Q2 (3.0500) "The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get" and Q8 (3.0500) "The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get" also illustrate the proportion of test anxiety. Although the test is a means to examine students' knowledge mastery and talent selection, it inevitably puts pressure on students.

From the aspect of fear of negative evaluation, the highest is Q15 (3.3750) "I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting", which shows negative evaluation could produce some negative effects on English learning anxiety. In general, the scores of other questions concerning negative evaluation are relatively higher such as Q3 (3.3250), Q12 (3.2250), and Q20 (3.2250). Therefore, negative evaluation is the main factor influencing students' class performance and learning experience. They may feel ashamed or embarrassed if they make mistakes during classes and teachers correct students' mistakes at once.

From the aspect of fear of communication apprehension anxiety, the first three highest scores are Q1 (3.4000) "I never feel quite sure of myself when I

am speaking in English", Q9 (3.3750) "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English in class", Q4 (3.2750) "It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English". There are two main points, one is that students seldom understand teachers' expressions, and the other is that students are fearful to make mistakes so they are unwilling to actively answer questions.

From the aspect of fear of general anxiety, except the score of Q6（3.5500）is the highest, other scores of general anxiety items are much lower. For example, the scores of Q25（3.1500）"English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind", Q17（3.1000）"I often feel like not going to my English class", Q26（2.9250）"I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes " are lower. At the same that students are not afraid to attend English classes, and they have the confidence to upgrade their English to some extent.

3.3 THE REASONS FOR DEALING WITH ENGLISH LEARNING ANXIETY

First and foremost, the students' level is relatively poor and they lack confidence in restarting learning English. For this reason, they usually become nervous and are afraid to answer questions during classes. In addition, most teachers regard upgrading students' scores as the first point, and teachers seldom find out what English learning anxiety students have as well as never know why and how to deal with it. Teachers think that it is a kind of teaching load and they are unwilling to further explore it. What's more, many teachers and students have a stereotype of secondary vocational school students. Students think they are incorrigible and they are used to using outdated teaching modes.

3.4 THE STRATEGIES TO RELIEVE ENGLISH LEARNING ANXIETY

First of all, a teacher is a key role to help students establish confidence and improve students' thoughts. Teachers could lead some positive videos and conversations to talk with students to further know more about each other. Besides, adopt psychological intervention to ease students' anxiety. Their anxiety is mostly from the entrance examination pressure. What's more, teachers should utilize all kinds of teaching methods and transform their inveterate teaching ideas. Teachers should not evaluate students by just grades. They should adopt diversified evaluation methods such as formative assessment. Last but not least, students

themselves establish learning beliefs, and they should take specific actions to achieve their goal of getting an opportunity to further study in institutes of higher education.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, English learning anxiety exists in secondary vocational school students. And it has different degrees of impact on different students from the aspects of test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension anxiety, and general anxiety. Through quantitative and qualitative methods, the author finds the reasons for English learning anxiety and gives some countermeasures.

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