



English Reading Anxiety Among Chinese High School Students: Current Status and Countermeasures

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Abstract. With the increasing difficulty of English reading in China's college entrance examination in recent years, the current situation of high school students' English reading learning, especially the psychology of English reading learning, has gradually attracted the attention of scholars. From literature review, the author of this paper found that high school students generally have anxiety in English reading. Learning anxiety not only affects students' reading comprehension ability, but also may lead to a decline in learning motivation and self-confidence frustration. To solve the current situation of high school students' English reading learning anxiety and improve their reading performance, the author put forward suggestions on teaching strategies about English reading. This study provides theoretical basis and practical guidance for improving high school students' English reading anxiety, which can help to improve the effectiveness of English teaching and students' comprehensive language ability.

Keywords: high school English reading; reading anxiety; teaching strategies

1 Introduction

English reading, as an important part of language learning skills, plays a very important role in the learning and assessment of learners at all stages. When reading English articles, English learners usually produce some negative transfer phenomena, and the difference between their mother tongue and their second language usually interferes with their learning process, and when this interference reaches a certain level, it often causes anxiety, depression and other negative emotions. Among the many English learners in China, the English reading learning of high school students is particularly important for their personal acquisition. In the reality that the difficulty of the English reading questions in the college entrance examination has increased and the reading comprehension score accounts for more points, high school students who are in puberty and whose emotional state is prone to fluctuations will be particularly concerned about the high correlation between their own English reading level and their high scores, but the low correlation between the English reading strategies and their anxieties will make them difficult to make progress. The authors of this paper summarize the literature and find that in China's high school students' English learning, because of the role of the college

entrance examination baton and the deepening of the volume and difficulty of the English reading questions, China's high school students have moderate anxiety about English reading, and the anxiety level reaches a high level in some districts or in students of different grades.

2 Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

2.1 The Theoretical Basis of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

The theoretical basis of foreign language learning anxiety comes from humanistic psychology and Krashen's affective filtering hypothesis. Humanistic psychology advocates that in the learning process, the development of human psychological needs and learning interests should be emphasized. For example, Maslow, the famous American humanistic psychologist, put forward the most representative theory of motivation—the hierarchy of needs theory, that is, only after a person's lower-level needs are satisfied, the pursuit of higher-level needs can be realized. In the 1970s and 1980s, linguist Krashen proposed the affective filtering hypothesis. According to the affective filtering hypothesis, learners in the process of learning a foreign language will produce anxiety, fear and other negative emotions, which will form a great obstacle to the acquisition of foreign languages. Under the emotional state of anxiety, learners' state of mind, concentration, logical thinking and other aspects will be affected, leading to a decline in the reading effect and performance in English. Once in such a state for a long time, learners will gradually lose confidence and fall into deep anxiety and self-doubt.

2.2 Qualitative Research on Foreign Language Reading Anxiety at Home and Abroad

Foreign language reading learning usually requires learners to complete the tasks independently, with low interaction with the surrounding, and if under specific conditions such as time limitation or test taking, learners will have different degrees of anxiety while reading. Since the 1940s, scholars at home and abroad have been studying and exploring the qualitative description of foreign language reading anxiety, and Horwitz is one of the early linguistic scholars who put forward the idea of reading anxiety in English reading-related psychological state, which is mainly characterized by emotional reactions such as uneasiness, apprehension, and fear. Jalongo and Hirsch define reading anxiety as “the rejection of reading at both the physiological and cognitive levels,” which means that “when learners have no other choice but to read, they are unable to do so.” Yasemin and Mehamet pointed out that reading anxiety is a kind of “emotional state of uneasiness and fear that readers feel when they are reading”. On the basis of foreign scholars' research, Chinese scholars also put forward the concept of foreign language reading anxiety. Huang Dongmei first defined foreign language reading anxiety as “a feeling of discomfort and embarrassment”, and continued to explore the time when English reading anxiety arises “when students are unable to achieve the expected goals or overcome the obstacles encountered in the process of English reading process.”¹ Shi Yunzhang and Liu Zhenqian, after comparing learners' different responses

to Chinese and foreign reading materials, concluded that “foreign language reading anxiety refers to a negative emotional experience induced by foreign language learners' inability to meet the standards of reading native language texts when reading in a foreign language, which is in an inwardly wrapped relationship with foreign language learning anxiety.”² In her study, He Aihong explored the importance of learners' metacognition in English reading, and she suggested that “learners' low self-evaluation or difficulties encountered during reading in a foreign language will affect their reading performance, resulting in lower efficiency or interruption of reading comprehension, and a consequent emotional state of panic”³.

In short, psychological tension and fear in the process of foreign language reading comprehension can be regarded as foreign language reading anxiety. During the English reading process, English learners may anticipate and worry about the difficulties encountered, which may pose a threat to self-esteem and may also reduce the impact of reading achievement and create neuroticism. It appears that teachers and parents must pay attention to this adverse emotional experience, as it may make the students' learning and quality of life diminish.

2.3 Quantitative Research on High School Students' English Reading Anxiety by Our Scholars

Since the 1980s, scholars in China have also begun to study foreign language learning anxiety. For example, research on the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and learning; development of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS); exploration of the factors affecting foreign language learning anxiety; and research on countermeasures to alleviate foreign language learning anxiety. In terms of empirical research on high school English reading, our scholars have also obtained persuasive quantitative data, as shown below:

In Duan Qinyue's research, 206 high school students in a middle school in Harbin City were randomly selected as survey respondents for investigation. The study found that the transfer of 88.8% of the survey respondents in the English reading study were in the presence of moderate or even high anxiety phenomenon⁴. You Youmin selected 256 freshmen and sophomores as the object of investigation (retrieved 243 valid questionnaires). The students were from a high school in Y City, Jiangxi Province. The study found that the high school students generally have English reading anxiety, anxiety level are in the intermediate level, there is no significant difference between the different genders, but the phenomenon of reading anxiety in the first year of high school students is more significant⁵. Ouyang Yanmin found that high school students generally felt anxious during the English reading process, and their English reading anxiety was generally at an intermediate level through a survey of 409 students in the first year of a middle school in Foshan City⁶. Through a survey study of 328 high school students in a middle school in Ganzhou City, Ai Tian found that 84.10% of the students were in a medium-high level of English reading anxiety⁷.

In summary, the overall English reading anxiety level of high school students in China is of medium level, and the percentage of anxious students is higher than 80%.

This shows that under the objective conditions of high difficulty and high score of English reading in China's college entrance examination, high school students generally have anxiety about English reading, which needs to attract the attention of scholars and teachers to study and adopt effective teaching strategies to solve the problem.

3 Suggestions on High School's English Reading Teaching Strategy

A good level of foreign language reading strategy may significantly predict the learner's foreign language reading achievement⁸. And as illustrated by the quantitative data (questionnaires, etc.) of several scholars, most high school students believe that they are not confident enough in mastering English reading strategies and are prone to psychological anxiety. The students are quite sure of the fact that English reading teaching strategies will alleviate students' anxiety and improve their English reading skills. Accordingly, the author of this paper suggest as the following:

3.1 Adoption of Multimodal English Reading Teaching Mode

The performance of multimodality in English reading teaching is mainly in the three aspects of speech, text and other symbols⁹. According to the English Curriculum Standards for High Schools (2020 Edition): "... advocates the use of multimodal language modes and nonverbal functional symbols such as audio, video, and images to develop literacy skills¹⁰". Therefore, it is necessary to reduce anxiety in the English classroom and enhance the use of multimodal reading pedagogy. Teachers use multimodal language media in the classroom, such as color, sound, pictures, video and teacher's body language, etc., and apply two or more of these forms which are assisted by multimedia, teaching software or other resources to cooperate with reading teaching. It aims to stimulate students' interest in learning, to enhance their understanding of the background knowledge of the text, and to improve the complementarity between the English language text and other symbols. For example, the oral modality is used to cause teacher-student interaction, the auditory modality is to draw students' attention, and the visual modality is adopted to arouse students' brainstorming. In short, the function of presenting or transmitting information by using multimodal teaching realizes the correlation between the reading text and each modality.

3.2 Helping the Learners to Improve the Ambiguity Tolerance in Reading

Ambiguity tolerance refers to the degree of learners' cognitive tolerance for ideas and claims that are contrary to their own concepts and knowledge structures. According to domestic scholars' studies on the correlation between ambiguity tolerance and anxiety, and ambiguity tolerance and English reading, there is a significant correlation between ambiguity tolerance and reading comprehension. The higher the ambiguity tolerance of high school students, the higher their reading scores. High school students' ambiguity

tolerance is negatively correlated with English reading anxiety. In the process of English reading teaching, teachers should help students to change the learning strategies that are not conducive to reading comprehension. This measures should be adopted on the basis of understanding their own cognitive styles, thus to improve their English reading ambiguity tolerance.

3.3 Utilizing the Function of Teachers' Positive Classroom Feedback

Teachers' feedback in the English classroom is an important part of reading teaching. Different teachers' feedback produces different classroom teaching behaviors, and will subconsciously influence learners' learning attitudes and produce different learning effects. In other words, teachers' feedback is positively related to students' learning attitudes and performance. Most students believe that the praise or affirmation from the teacher can relieve the learners' reading anxiety. Also, it may enhance learners' learning interest, and improve their reading comprehension accuracy. Therefore, teachers should utilize more encouragement and affirmation phrases to enhance students' learning concentration, and use classroom feedback such as expanding, pursuing, and inspiring to trigger students' positive thinking. In conclusion, teachers' support is a key part of the social support available to students. Teachers should utilize the role of feedback to create a relaxing and positive classroom atmosphere for students, so that students can take the initiative in learning and improve their learning efficiency.

3.4 Taking the Advantage of Cooperative Learning Strategy in English Reading Classroom

High school students are easy to be influenced by their peers, and they can't do without the assistance of their peers in learning. According to this characteristic of students, teachers can adopt the cooperative learning mode in the reading classroom appropriately. If the reading task is difficult and some students find it hard to complete independently, teachers can divide the students into groups and then carry out cooperative learning according to the students' gender, learning foundation, personality traits and so on. Thus, the difficulty of the task is downgraded, which will reduce the learning pressure of students. Also, the anxiety of students in completing the task independently can be relieved, and they will be in a better state to devote themselves to learning. In addition, in the process of cooperative learning, students will have a lot of opportunities to learn the strategies of others to understand the problem and solve the problem, which will have a positive impact on improving students' learning ability to improve their academic performance.

3.5 Enhancing the Students' Accumulation of Cultural Background Knowledge

According to the data of Duan Qinyue's study, "the students have high anxiety in understanding the cultural background knowledge of the texts". Lack of understanding of English reading content, also, lack of confidence in one's English reading ability can

cause reading anxiety. To solve this problem, teachers need to strengthen the input and accumulation of students' cultural background knowledge. For example, teachers may help students choose appropriate English reading magazines, APPs, online resources, etc.. In addition, teachers may help students form a good habit of reading regularly; encourage students to share their reading experience and pass on their personal knowledge to more peers. Teachers may also give extra credit rewards to students who persist in their studies.

4 Conclusion

English reading is not only an important part of high school English learning, but also an important way for students to improve their learning skills for future work. Therefore, teachers should adopt effective teaching methods to alleviate students' English reading anxiety, pay more attention to students' emotions, help students build up their learning confidence, enhance their interest in reading, thus to establish an efficient learner-centered English reading classroom. Last but not least, addressing the students' reading anxiety requires a collaborative effort among educators and researchers in the terms of creating a more supportive learning environment.

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