A Study on Investigating the Correlations between Chinese College Students' English Speaking Anxiety, Oral Performance and Oral Achievement

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Abstract: *As China continues to internationalize and deepen its engagement with the world, the frequency of English usage among Chinese people has increased. English, being the most widely used language globally, has seen a surge in oral proficiency among the Chinese populace. However, despite this trend, Chinese students often face challenges in achieving high scores in oral proficiency exams such as IELTS and TOEFL. Hence, there is a pressing need to delve into, analyze, and research the current state of oral anxiety among Chinese university students. This research aims to explore the fundamental characteristics of English speaking anxiety among Chinese college students, investigate its influence on English learning outcomes and oral expression, and examine the correlation between levels of English speaking anxiety and achievements in oral English proficiency. The study, involving 216 randomly selected college students, employs a questionnaire survey to investigate the overall situation of English oral anxiety. It explores the correlation between English oral anxiety, oral proficiency and oral performance. After that, interviews are conducted to explore the detailed situation. The results show: Chinese college students' English oral anxiety is generally present, and it has a negative impact on English performance. In addition, there is a negative correlation between college students' English oral anxiety and their oral performance. Based on the above results, the study suggests further exploration through diverse assessment methods and proposes recommendations for foreign language speaking teaching future research endeavors.*

Keywords: *English speaking anxiety; oral performance; college student*

1. Introduction

The chapter provides a brief introduction of the background information about anxiety on foreign language learning. On the basis, research purposes are raised to enrich prior studies. Then, theoretical significance for related research at home and abroad, and practical implications to foreign language teachers and learners in the future is proposed. The structure of this thesis will be simply presented at last.

1.1. Background of the Study

As China further integrates into the global community and expands its interactions worldwide, the prevalence of English among Chinese individuals has notably increased. With English being the predominant global language, there has been a noticeable improvement in the oral fluency of Chinese citizens. Nonetheless, despite this observable shift, Chinese students frequently encounter obstacles in achieving satisfactory scores in oral proficiency assessments like IELTS and TOEFL. Therefore, there is an urgent need to thoroughly investigate, scrutinize, and explore the prevailing levels of oral anxiety among Chinese university students. Understanding the causes and consequences of English speaking anxiety (ESA) in this demographic is essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers to develop effective strategies for addressing this issue.

In China, English is a mandatory subject in schools and universities, and proficiency in the language is often a requirement for admission to prestigious institutions and employment opportunities. Despite this emphasis on English language learning, many Chinese college students struggle with speaking English confidently and fluently. A significant number of students report feeling anxious, nervous, and self-conscious when speaking English, particularly in academic and social settings.

Several studies have investigated English speaking anxiety among Chinese college students, examining its prevalence, contributing factors, and impacts. These studies have utilized various research methodologies, including surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, to explore the phenomenon comprehensively. Previous research findings suggest that ESA in Chinese college students is influenced by a range of factors, including language proficiency levels, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, cultural differences, teaching methods, and classroom environments.

This study would investigate the present state of anxiety related to speaking English among college students, assess its effects on both their immediate and future oral learning capabilities, and delve into the factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

Employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research aims to gain insights into the prevailing English speaking anxiety among college students. It seeks to achieve this by administering questionnaires and conducting oral tests to assess their anxiety levels and analyze the correlation between such anxiety and students' oral proficiency (with "proficiency," "achievement," and "performance" all denoting the outcomes of oral assessments in this context). Furthermore, the study intends to investigate the primary factors influencing this correlation through semi-structured interviews. Following this investigation, the research aims to propose effective strategies to mitigate English speaking anxiety among college students.

1.3. Significance of the Study

(1)Academic Performance: English proficiency is increasingly essential for academic success and career opportunities globally. Understanding the factors contributing to speaking anxiety can help educators tailor teaching methods and support systems to improve students' language skills and performance.

(2)Cultural Context: Chinese students often face unique cultural and educational pressures, which can influence their language learning experiences. Exploring how cultural factors intersect with speaking anxiety provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics impacting language acquisition and communication apprehension.

(3)Psychological Well-being: Speaking anxiety can have profound effects on students' psychological well-being, including stress, low self-esteem, and avoidance behaviors. Investigating the causes and manifestations of English speaking anxiety can inform the development of interventions and support mechanisms to enhance students' mental health and resilience.

(4)Communication Skills: Effective communication skills are crucial for success in various personal and professional contexts. By understanding the specific challenges Chinese college students face in English speaking situations, educators and counselors can offer targeted guidance and resources to help students build confidence and proficiency in verbal communication.

(5)Cross-Cultural Communication: In an increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in English facilitates cross-cultural communication and collaboration. By studying English speaking anxiety among Chinese college students, researchers contribute to a broader understanding of the cultural and linguistic barriers that may impede effective communication across diverse contexts.

1.4. Three Research Methodology

(1) Documentary method

English speaking anxiety is a pervasive and intricate issue faced by individuals striving to communicate effectively in the English language. As globalization continues to facilitate cross-cultural interactions, proficiency in English has become a crucial skill. However, for many, the process of speaking in English can be a daunting and anxiety-inducing experience. To comprehensively examine the multifaceted nature of English speaking anxiety, scholars often turn to research methodologies that allow for an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences and perceptions.

One such method that proves invaluable in unraveling the intricate layers of English speaking anxiety is the documentary method. Originating from the realm of qualitative research, the documentary method is a systematic approach that involves the analysis of various documents, texts, and artifacts to derive

meaningful insights into the social phenomena under investigation. In the context of English speaking anxiety, this method enables researchers to delve into a wide array of textual resources, such as personal narratives, online forums, academic literature, and even visual materials like videos or recorded conversations.

By adopting the documentary method, researchers can capture the nuanced expressions of English speaking anxiety as articulated by individuals in real-life situations. This approach goes beyond traditional survey methods and provides a rich, contextually embedded understanding of the phenomenon. In the subsequent sections of this thesis, we will explore the application of the documentary method, its strengths, and its limitations in the investigation of   English   speaking anxiety. Through a meticulous analysis of diverse textual sources, this study aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the psychological and linguistic challenges individuals face when communicating in English.

(2) Questionnaire method

This research methodology involves the construction and administration of a structured set of questions to a selected sample, with the aim of eliciting standardized responses. In the exploration of English speaking anxiety, a well-designed questionnaire can delve into various dimensions of this phenomenon, including the factors contributing to anxiety, coping mechanisms employed by individuals, and the impact of anxiety on language learning and communication.

The questionnaire method offers several advantages in the investigation of English speaking anxiety. It provides a systematic and efficient means of gathering data from a diverse group of participants, enabling researchers to identify patterns, trends, and correlations within the collected responses. Additionally, the method allows for the quantification of attitudes and perceptions, facilitating a comparative analysis of different variables related to English speaking anxiety.

Throughout this thesis, we will delve into the intricacies of the questionnaire method as applied to the study of English speaking anxiety. From the development of a targeted set of questions to the analysis of quantitative data, this research approach offers valuable insights into the prevalence, causes, and consequences of English speaking anxiety. By adopting a quantitative lens, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and linguistic challenges associated with speaking English, thereby informing strategies for effective language education and support.

(3) Interviewing method

Interviewing, as a qualitative research approach, offers a dynamic platform for engaging participants in meaningful dialogues that unveil the multifaceted nature of English speaking anxiety. Through structured or semi-structured conversations, researchers can navigate through the depths of participants' experiences, probing into the underlying causes of anxiety, exploring coping strategies, and uncovering the socio-cultural contexts that shape individuals' perceptions of language learning and communication.

Unlike survey questionnaires, which rely on predefined response options, interviews provide participants with the flexibility to articulate their thoughts and emotions in their own words. This not only fosters a deeper understanding of the subject matter but also allows for the emergence of unexpected insights and perspectives. Moreover, the interactive nature of interviews enables researchers to build rapport with participants, creating a supportive environment that encourages openness and honesty in sharing sensitive experiences related to English speaking anxiety.

Throughout this thesis, we will embark on a journey into the realm of interviewing as a methodological approach for studying English speaking anxiety. From the design and conduct of interviews to the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, this research endeavor seeks to illuminate the lived experiences of individuals grappling with the challenges of speaking English. By amplifying the voices of participants through in-depth interviews, this study aims to enrich our understanding of English speaking anxiety and inform the development of tailored interventions and support mechanisms for language learners navigating this intricate terrain.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Basis

2.1.1. Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology is a branch of psychology that emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences, personal growth, and the inherent goodness and potential of individuals. It emerged in the mid-20th century as a reaction against the deterministic and reductionist approaches of behaviorism and psychoanalysis. Humanistic psychologists, such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May, sought to understand human behavior and experience from a holistic perspective, focusing on aspects such as self-awareness, creativity, and the pursuit of meaning and fulfillment in life.

At the core of humanistic psychology is the belief in the uniqueness and dignity of each individual. Humanistic psychologists reject the notion of humans as passive beings controlled by external forces or subconscious drives, instead emphasizing personal agency and the capacity for self-actualization—the realization of one's full potential. They view people as active participants in their own lives, capable of making choices, pursuing growth, and seeking authenticity.

One of the key concepts in humanistic psychology is Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which proposes that individuals have a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological and safety needs to higher-level needs for love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. According to this theory, people strive to fulfill these needs in a sequential manner, with self-actualization representing the highest level of psychological development.

Another influential figure in humanistic psychology is Carl Rogers, who introduced the person-centered approach to therapy. Rogers (1969) believed that individuals possess an innate drive towards growth and self-improvement, and that the role of the therapist is to provide a supportive and empathetic environment in which clients can explore and resolve their own issues. Central to Rogers' approach is the concept of unconditional positive regard—the acceptance and nonjudgmental attitude towards clients, which facilitates their self-exploration and personal growth.

Humanistic psychology has had a significant impact on various fields, including psychotherapy, education, and organizational development. Its emphasis on the subjective experience, personal agency, and holistic well-being has contributed to a broader understanding of human nature and the factors that promote psychological health and fulfillment.

2.1.2. Affective Filter Hypothesis

The Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by Stephen Krashen in the field of second language acquisition, posits that the emotional and motivational state of a language learner plays a crucial role in the success of language acquisition. According to this hypothesis, when learners are anxious, stressed, or unmotivated, their "affective filter" is raised, hindering the intake of new language input and impeding the learning process.

The affective filter acts as a metaphorical barrier that filters or impedes the flow of language input from reaching the language acquisition device, a concept also introduced by Krashen. When the affective filter is high, due to factors such as anxiety, boredom, or lack of motivation, learners are less receptive to language input, making it more challenging for them to acquire the language effectively.

Conversely, when the affective filter is low, indicating a positive emotional and motivational state, learners are more open to language input, facilitating a more effective language learning experience. Krashen (1985) argues that a low affective filter creates optimal conditions for language acquisition by allowing learners to focus on input, comprehend language structures, and internalize linguistic patterns more readily.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of creating a positive and supportive learning environment to enhance language acquisition. It suggests that educators and language programs should consider not only the linguistic aspects of instruction but also the affective factors that can influence a learner's receptivity to new language input.

2.1.3. Tobias Model

The Tobais Model, also known as the Competence-Performance Model, was developed by David Tobais to understand the factors that influence language production in bilingual individuals. This model seeks to explain why bilinguals may exhibit different levels of proficiency in their second language (L2)

across various situations, despite possessing comparable language competence.

At the core of the Tobais Model is the distinction between competence and performance. Competence refers to an individual's underlying knowledge of language, including grammar rules, vocabulary, and linguistic structures, which is largely acquired through formal instruction or exposure to the language. Performance, on the other hand, refers to the actual use of language in real-world communication settings, which may be influenced by factors such as anxiety, motivation, and context.

The Tobais Model proposes that several factors can affect language performance and, consequently, the observable proficiency level of bilinguals in different situations. These factors include: Anxiety, Context, Cognitive Load, Motivation, Language Dominance. (Tobais, 1979&1986)

Overall, the Tobais Model provides a framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between competence and performance factors in bilingual language production. By considering these factors, researchers and educators can gain insights into the variability observed in bilingual language proficiency across different contexts and individuals.

2.2. Studies About Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

2.2.1. The Definition of Anxiety

Anxiety is a psychological state characterized by feelings of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. It often involves anticipation of future events or situations perceived as threatening or challenging, leading to physiological arousal and cognitive disturbances. Anxiety can manifest in various forms, ranging from mild discomfort to severe distress, and may impact an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. As defined by research, anxiety is a multifaceted emotional state characterized by heightened arousal, negative affect, and subjective feelings of apprehension and worry. Spielberger (1966) conceptualized anxiety as comprising both state anxiety, which refers to temporary emotional distress experienced in response to a specific situation, and trait anxiety, which denotes a stable tendency to perceive situations as threatening and to respond with elevated levels of anxiety. Building upon this framework, Barlow (2000) proposed a more comprehensive model of anxiety that incorporates cognitive, physiological, and behavioral components, highlighting the interplay between biological predispositions, environmental stressors, and maladaptive coping strategies.

2.2.2. The Definition of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Foreign language learning anxiety refers to the feelings of apprehension, nervousness, or unease experienced by individuals when engaging in activities related to learning a second or foreign language. It encompasses the emotional and psychological barriers that learners encounter while acquiring proficiency in a language other than their native one. This anxiety may arise from various factors, such as fear of making mistakes, concerns about being judged by others, or difficulties in understanding and expressing oneself in the target language. Foreign language learning anxiety can hinder learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to engage in language learning activities, ultimately affecting their language acquisition and proficiency levels.

This investigation explores diverse definitions of foreign language anxiety. Initially, Selye proposed the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory(1936), which suggests that anxiety arises from the body's nonspecific response to stress. He described anxiety as part of the body's natural response to perceived threats or stressors, known as the "fight-or-flight" response. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope(1986), anxiety involves a distinct combination of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors arising from unique aspects of the learning process. Moreover, Young's (1999) elucidation portrays foreign language anxiety as the unease and undesirable emotional reactions that arise during the acquisition or utilization of a second language. Expanding on these conceptualizations, subsequent research endeavors have delved into the nuanced facets of foreign language anxiety. Recent studies by Ahmed, N.F.(2016) underscore the role of individual differences and cultural factors in shaping the intensity of foreign language anxiety. The study suggests that varying levels of anxiety may be attributed to learners' distinct personalities, cultural backgrounds, and prior language learning experiences.

2.3. Previous Correlational Studies

2.3.1. Domestic studies on the relationship between oral anxiety and oral proficiency

Recently, there has been a nascent exploration of foreign language anxiety within domestic settings,

and its progress remains at an early stage to this day. Over the past several decades, the scope of research on this subject has progressively broadened, shifting from merely examining the impact of anxiety to delving into its fundamental nature, measurement scales, influencing factors, and potential remedies. The methodologies employed have evolved from non-empirical approaches to empirical investigations. As attention to anxiety in language learning has grown, the academic significance of domestic research has been increasingly acknowledged and validated.

Qin Zhichao (2023) carried out a Study on Investigating the Correlations between Senior High School Students' English Speaking Anxiety and Oral Achievement. The results claimed that it is ubiquitous for senior high school students to experience speaking anxiety in English learning and most of them are at a moderate level of anxiety. In addition, students' English speaking anxiety presents a significant negative correlation with their oral scores. In the research of Gao Chi (2013) discussed the Current Status and Development Proposals of High School Students' Oral English Anxiety and the result shows that the anxieties originating in the English conversational anxiety survey questionnaire are analyzed by four dimensions: Social anxiety, adverse criticism fear, examination tension, and other elements of anxiety. In the study of Nuo Tani (2020), Social and Psychological Exploration of EFL Learner's Language Anxiety in Speaking, 38 subjects were selected from both countries for interviews. The results showcased that the instigate of foreign language anxiety can be student's self- related cognition, various difficulties in learning a new language, cultural difference in first and foreign language, difference in the status of teacher and learners and the fear of losing face in front of others.

2.4. Previous Studies on the Correlations between Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Oral Performance Abroad

Upon delving into numerous pieces of literature pertaining to the topic of speaking anxiety, it becomes apparent that international scholars commonly posit a connection between anxiety and oral learning. They assert its influence on learners' spoken proficiency to a certain degree.

In a recent study conducted by Art Tsang and Jean Marc Dewaele (2022), a replication of the interplay among young foreign language learners' classroom emotions, engagement, and foreign language proficiency highlighted the pivotal role of enjoyment in the realm of teaching and learning foreign languages for younger individuals. Jean-Marc Dewaele and Mateb Alfawzan (2018) investigated the impact of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) on self-reported outcomes, revealing that positive emotions exhibit a stronger correlation with performance in foreign language acquisition compared to negative emotions.

In addition to this discourse, Brown (2008) examined the anxiety levels of international graduate students regarding their English proficiency. Despite achieving IELTS scores exceeding 6, a significant majority of students experienced feelings of anxiety, shame, and self-deprecation, resulting in subpar performance in spoken English. This predicament manifested as an impediment to their active participation in classroom discussions and social interactions conducted in English, exacerbating their speaking anxiety and hindering language progress.

The study by Phillips (1992) has provided valuable insights by focusing on the impact of students' speaking anxiety specifically in the context of oral tests. By revealing a stark revelation, the study demonstrated that anxiety could severely undermine students' oral proficiency.

In summary, it is not uncommon for learners to face serious obstacles when attempting to communicate effectively, which may impede their ability to achieve their communication goals. The interplay between emotions, anxiety, and language performance is a crucial aspect that requires attention in the realm of language acquisition.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to know the current situation of Chinese college students' English speaking anxiety and its consequences on oral English achievement. Therefore, to achieve the purpose, there are three research questions being put forward.

(1) What is the basic situation of Chinese college students' English speaking anxiety like?

(2) What is the impact of speaking anxiety on English learning and oral expression result?

(3) What is the relationship between oral English achievement and English speaking anxiety?

3.2. Research Subjects

The subjects of this research are 226 Chinese college students whose first foreign language is English. They come from two universities in Beijing and Guangzhou. The questionnaires are distributed online with college students as the research subjects, and 226 questionnaires are collected. They come from different grades. 56 of them are male, and 170 of them are female.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed according to Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. and Cope, J.(1986) based on their own experience, students' self-reports and a survey of related scales. After that, its reliability and validity were tested by Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M.(1986). And it focuses more on the oral aspect(Dong Lianqi, 2021). Therefore, it is used to collect the data needed for this study. Some items have been adapted or deleted, taking into account the reality of the situation. Because the participants are Chinese students, the questionnaire is translated into Chinese. A reliability test and a validity test are conducted with the help of SPSS.29.0. The Cronbach's Alpha is 0.921 which is over 0.80, indicating that this questionnaire is reliable. The KMO is 0.942 which is over 0.80, showing that the questionnaire is valid. The results of reliability and validity are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

		Item
Cronbach's Alpha	0.921	14
KMO	0.942	14

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out the English speaking level of college students, the current status of speaking anxiety and the effects of anxiety. The questionnaire has 19 items, and in order to improve the fluency of the survey and the efficiency of data analysis, it is mainly set up with single-choice, indefinite-choice and short-answer questions. The questions in the questionnaire are set with a clear theme, and in this paper, the questions in the questionnaire are divided into three main categories:

The first part is questions 1-4, this part of the survey around the basic situation of college students. For example, the gender of the survey respondents, the specific grade, and the level of spoken English. This part of the survey is mainly used to ensure the credibility of the survey data and the broad scope of the survey, and it also helps to find college students who have a certain interest in the topic and have free time, so as to prepare for the later interviews.

The second part is questions 5-8, which revolves around the anxiety of college students about speaking English.

The third part was questions 8-17, which centred on the effects of anxiety on speaking English, including the effects of anxiety on speaking performance, English learning and motivation to participate in related activities.

The fourth part was questions 18-19, which asked questions about the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking proficiency, and asked for willingness to be interviewed and contact information. This section was intended as an initial preparation for further interviews.

In order to do a quantitative analysis, the items are divided into three dimensions as *Table 2*.

Table 2 Dimensions of the Questionnaire

Speaking Level	3, 4
Anxiety Level	6, 7, 8, 9
Effects of Anxiety	10, 11, 12, 13 , 14, 15, 16, 17

3.3.2. Interview

After the interview, some limitations are found because of the complicated causes and aftermath of English speaking anxiety. As a result of it, interviews are conducted in order to more deeply explore the

specific situation of college students' English speaking anxiety and try to find suggestions for oral English teaching. The interview comprises four questions concerning the situation, reasons and suggestions about English speaking anxiety.

3.4. Research Procedure

3.4.1. Data Collection

In February, the questionnaire was sent online through WJX, a platform providing service concerning questionnaire. Then, it was sent to students in two Chinese universities. Within 2 days, 227 participants took part in this research. After that, an interview was conducted among 8 students for about 10 to 15 minutes. Each participant was interviewed face to face with the details of the interview being recorded. Then, the sound was converted into transcript.

3.4.2. Data Analysis

The data in this study were analysed with SPSS software 29.0 for data entry, descriptive statistics, reliability, validity and correlation etc.

4. Research Results Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Results Analysis of the Questionnaire and Discussion

4.1.1. Descriptive Analysis

After screening according to the length of answer and filling in, 216 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective recovery rate of 95.6%. Among them, there are 51 male students, accounting for 23.6%, and 165 female students, accounting for 75.4%. And they are divided into 77 freshmen, accounting for 35.6%, 43 sophomores, accounting for 19.9%, 63 juniors, accounting for 29.2%, 21 seniors, accounting for 9.7%, and 12 graduate students, accounting for 5.6%. The detailed information of research subjects is showed in *Table 3*.

Table 3 Distribution of the Grade and the Gender of the Subjects

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	23.61%
	Female	165	76.39%
Grade	Freshman	77	35.6%
	Sophomore	43	19.9%
	Junior	63	29.2%
	Graduate	21	9.7%
	Postgraduate	12	5.6%

Table 4 English Speaking Anxiety

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Anxiety Level	216	16	4	20	12.81	3.678	13.531

Table 5 The Range of Anxiety Level

Item	Level	Range	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Anxiety Level	Low	[4.0,8.0)	17	7.9%
	Moderate	[8.0,16.0)	138	63.9%
	High	[16.0,20.0]	61	28.2%
Sum			216	100

Table 4 and *Table 5* show that the highest score of the participants' English speaking anxiety in this study is 20 while the lowest one is 4. The mean value of the score is 12.81, showing the generally high level of anxiety. When the scores are divided into three groups, 28.2 percent of participants' anxiety level is high while only 7.9 percent of participants' anxiety level is low, which helps to show that most students are anxious for their English speaking.

Table 6 Anxiety and Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	t	p
Anxiety Level	Male	51	12.412	4.309	-0.522	-0.789	0.433
	Female	165	12.933	3.466			

According to *Table 6* there is obvious difference in the number of male participants and female participants, which is related to the male to female ratio of the two schools surveyed. However, the independent samples t-test showed that there is no significant gender differences in anxiety level.

4.2. Correlation Analysis on Speaking Level, Anxiety Level and Effects of Anxiety

Table 7 Speaking Level, Anxiety Level and Effects of Anxiety

		1	2	3
1. Speaking Level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.500**	-.475**
	Sig.		<.001	<.001
	N	216	216	216
2. Anxiety Level	Pearson Correlation	-.500**	1	.747**
	Sig.	<.001		<.001
	N	216	216	216
3. Effects of Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.475**	.747**	1
	Sig.	<.001	<.001	
	N	216	216	216

Table 7 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between college students' English speaking level and speaking anxiety level, and a significant negative correlation with effects of anxiety, and a significant positive correlation between speaking anxiety level and effects of anxiety.

Table 8 Anxiety Level and its Effects

		1	2	3	4
1. Anxiety Level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.681**	-.713**	-.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	216	216	216	216
2. Enthusiasm for English Study	Pearson Correlation	-.681**	1	-.781**	-.860**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	216	216	216	216
3. English Speaking Achievement	Pearson Correlation	-.713**	-.781**	1	-.858**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	216	216	216	216
4. Enthusiasm for English communication	Pearson Correlation	-.725**	-.860**	-.858**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	216	216	216	216

This suggests that the higher the level of spoken English, the lower the level of anxiety about speaking, and the lower the negative impact of speaking anxiety on the development of spoken English. The higher the level of anxiety about speaking, the greater the negative impact of speaking anxiety.

Furthermore, *Table 8* indicates that there is a significant negative correlation between English speaking anxiety level and English speaking achievement, enthusiasm for English study and English communication.

The result furthur confirms the negative effect of English speaking anxiety. The higher the level of English speaking anxiety, the worse English speaking achievement, and the lower enthusiasm for English study and communication.

4.3. Results Analysis of the Interview

Most participants rely that they always feel great anxiety when taking part in examinations or assessment for their spoken English proficiency. And Students Four gives an clear description of this: "When it comes to serious situations in a more professional field, I may feel very nervous and uneasy, such as oral exams, competitions concerning English."

As for the reasons why students feel anxious for English speaking, there are four main reasons being provided, including the lack of confidence for their spoken English, the worry for the amount of lexical resources and accent, and the lack of opportunity to practice.

Participant One:"I feel worried about not speaking with standard and idiomatic expressions. And I'm not confident in my accent, unsure weather my intonation is correct or not."

Participant Three:" I am afraid of causing misunderstandings, embarrassing the situation, and more importantly, making too many mistakes and being laughed at by others."

Participant Four:"I worry about making mistakes and using unclear expressions. And because the wording in the professional field is complex, with high requirements for accuracy, I'm greatly afraid of making mistakes."

Participant Five:"My vocabulary is not enough, and sometimes I can't understand the local accents while listening, which makes me feel uneasy."

Participant Seven:"In terms of spoken English, there is relatively little practice in daily life. This makes me anxious about my spoken English."

The relaxing situation always makes students not feel anxious. Such situations as talking with acquaintances, talking in frequented visited places and talking about familiar topics.

Participant One:"When speaking English to acquaintances or friends, I feel relaxed and at ease, or in familiar environments such as my dormitory, home, frequently visited coffee shops, etc."

Participant Five:"In the classroom, for me, unless it is well prepared. Or rather, this part of the content is familiar to me and I have mastered it, and then I will feel a bit relaxed."

When being asked about ways useful for alleviating students' anxiety that could be used or have been used by teachers, participants give answers on the basis of experience from their teachers and their own.

Participant Seven refers to the importance to be tolerant of students' mistakes. "Teachers must guide students to express themselves. For example, when students express themselves, they should not immediately correct their mistakes. And it's important to give this oral speaker enough time to make mistakes."

The importance of group collaboration is also emphasized by two participants.

Participant One:"Encourage everyone to speak more English; start with oral communication within small groups, gradually break through psychological barriers, and gradually increase the number of listeners."

Participant Six:"Try to make students the center of the class. Let them interact with each other, then they can achieve the effect of one plus one being greater than two. In this case, students are the center, and the teacher is the one who guides and provides them with such a form and platform."

Two participants mention their teachers' interesting activities or games which they are immersed in and learn from.

Participant Two:"For oral teaching, pronunciation correction can be done. I think last semester, I registered for that week's oral class. It was quite interesting. I was taught American pronunciation by my senior sister, who taught us pronunciation correction and put words into small games to stimulate our emotions. For example, 'Carrot Squat', whose another version is always used and 'Pirate Ship' referring to a person who represents a word and guides the person to become the captain, while the people on both sides have to row the boat."

Participant Five:"The game was called a candy tree.The teacher asks us to imagine something that doesn't exist in this world, but the students of our age would love it. Then, let's draw it and use this way of presenting it on stage."

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1. Summary

(1)Most Chinese college students are anxious for their spoken English. In this research, only 7.9 percent of participants' anxiety level is low. And there is no significant different between Chinese male college students' and Chinese female college students' English speaking anxiety level.

(2)English speaking anxiety has negative impact on English learning and oral expression result. The higher the level of English speaking anxiety, the less enthusiasm students have on furthur English communication and learning.

(3)There is a negative correlation between oral English achievement and English speaking anxiety. The higher students oral English achievement, the less anxiety students have when speaking English.

5.2. Suggestions

After the study, anxiety for spoken English is found having the tendency to reduce students' enthusiasm to related English activities and to worsen their performance in related examinations and assessment. As a result of this, it is vital to decrease the level of anxiety for spoken English.

(1)Try to improve students' confidence. Confidence plays an important role in spoken English by driving them to practice more and bravely. Teachers could try to lead students to speak out by giving them hints and encouragement. And more patience and tolerance should be put in the teaching of spoken English.

(2)Adjust the evaluation system of spoken English. Teachers should pay more attention to the formative evaluation, instead of relying too much on the final evaluation. Students' improvement is equally important or even more important than their proficiency.

(3)Create a relaxing atmosphere. Teachers could try to make friends with students and know more about their real thoughts. And many activities are be performed to activate the students.

(4)Develop collaborative learning in groups. More attention should be attached to the interaction between students by dividing them into groups.

5.3. Limitations of the Present Research and Prospect

First of all, the research lacks of a uniform measure of English speaking level. The students' English speaking level in this study is based on self-assessment, supplemented by speaking grades, but the diverse sources of speaking grades result in the lack of a uniform standard for the measurement of speaking level. Therefore, the speaking level of the experimental subjects in this study may not fully reflect their true level of oral output, which may affect the reliability of the findings to some extent.

Secondly, the research subjects are not sufficiently representative. The experimental subjects in this study come from two universities, which may still be under-represented although they have been involved in different genders and grades. The interviewees are all students who were happy to be introduced to further interviews, but the interviewees are not enough general due to the interference of their own speaking level and anxiety level.

Based on limitations of the study mentioned above, there are two suggestions for furthur studies.

Firstly, use richer research methods. More in-depth studies could use a wider range of assessment methods, such as using interviews rather than questionnaires to assess students' foreign language speaking levels, their foreign language speaking anxiety levels, and the effects of their anxiety. Longitudinal studies could also be used to observe changes in speaking levels over time among students with similar initial levels of spoken English but different levels of speaking anxiety.

Secondly, investigate a larger number of students. A more in-depth study could investigate a wider range of students, a stratified sampling method to investigate the speaking anxiety of students from different regions and different age groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Information

1.1 Grade:

[ ] Freshman

[ ] Sophomore

[ ] Third Year

[ ] Fourth Year

[ ] Postgraduate

1.2 Gender:

[ ] Male

[ ] Female

1.3 How would you rate your overall English proficiency?

[ ] Beginner (Able to carry on simple everyday conversations)

[ ] Between Beginner & Intermediate

[ ]Intermediate (Able to communicate fluently in multiple situations & have enough vocabulary to deal with unknown topics)

[ ] Between Intermediate & Advanced

[ ] Advanced (Similar to native speakers' level & use English fluently on any occasion)

Section 2: Anxiety in English Oral Skill Learning

Please rate the following statements based on how often you experience each situation using the scale provided:

(1 Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Occasionally, 4 Often, 5 Always)

2.1 I feel nervous when asked to speak in English in front of the class.

2.2 I feel comfortable speaking English with native speakers.

2.3 Before an English-speaking assessment, I experience physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, or a racing heartbeat.

2.4 I feel anxious when I have to speak English in a group discussion or presentation.

Section 3: Impact of Anxiety on English Learning

Please rate the following statements based on the impact you believe anxiety has on your English language learning using the scale provided:

(1 No impact, 2 Minimal impact, 3 Moderate impact, 4 Significant impact, 5 Very significant impact)

3.1 Anxiety negatively affects my ability to learn English.

3.2 Anxiety hinders my participation in English language activities.

3.3 Anxiety affects my overall performance in English language assessments.

3.4 Anxiety leads me to avoid opportunities to practice speaking English outside of the classroom.

3.5 Anxiety makes it difficult for me to concentrate during English language lessons.

3.6 I believe anxiety harms my motivation to improve my English speaking skills.

3.7 Anxiety causes me to avoid taking advanced English courses or opportunities for language immersion.

3.8 I find it challenging to retain English vocabulary and grammar when I'm anxious.

3.9 Anxiety makes it difficult for me to engage in English language practice outside of the classroom, such as watching English movies or speaking with native speakers.

Section 4: Additional Comments

Please share any additional thoughts or comments you have regarding your experiences with anxiety in English oral skill learning. Your insights are valuable and may provide further understanding.

[Open-ended response]

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Your participation is crucial to the success of this research. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the researcher at [Researcher's contact information].

Appendix B Interview

1. Do you feel anxious when expressing yourself in English speaking? What kind of situation makes you feel most nervous and uneasy?

2. What do you think is the reason why you feel nervous and uneasy during the English expression process?

3. In what situations do you feel relaxed and comfortable when expressing yourself orally in English?

4. How do you think English teachers should conduct oral teaching to better alleviate students' English speaking anxiety?