

A Study of Foreign Language Anxiety on English Majors in Higher Vocational College

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The study investigated the foreign language anxiety of English majors who are Grade 2 in Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies by using the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) and semi-structured conversation. By using the method of qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study found that the anxiety level of English majors in vocational colleges is moderate. The students with higher academic achievement are not necessarily less anxious than the students with lower academic achievement. And there is no significant relationship between students' English achievement and their foreign language anxiety level.

Keywords: higher vocational college, foreign language anxiety, FLCAS, current situation

Introduction

Anxiety is one of the most affective factors in language learning. English has been introduced into China's education system for many years; there are still many kinds of problems to be solved. As an important part of higher education in China, higher vocational colleges are responsible for sending a large number of professional and practical talents to our country and society. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to investigate the current situation of English learning of English majors in higher vocational colleges. In the traditional English teaching, the teacher is the main of the class, and the students are in the passive acceptance of learning English. With the advance of educational theory, students' subjectivity in learning is increasing. However, in practical English teaching in higher vocational colleges, teachers tend to ignore the students' internal motivation, especially the students' foreign language anxiety in learning English. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the foreign language anxiety of English majors in vocational colleges in China, and reveal the current situation of foreign language anxiety of English majors in vocational colleges. It is necessary to provide the corresponding basis for the educators to adjust the teaching content, direction, and schedule to promote the development of the language ability of English majors in higher vocational colleges.

Methodology

Research Question

This paper aims to reveal the current situation of classroom anxiety of English majors in vocational colleges in China and its relationship with learners' academic achievement. The research questions are therefore as follows:

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- (1) What is the general situation of English classroom anxiety of English majors in vocational colleges?
- (2) What is the relationship between English classroom anxiety and students' achievement?

Subjects

This paper selects 70 students from two ordinary classes of the second year of Nanchang Foreign Trade College, Jiangxi Province, as the research objects. The reason why we choose the sophomore as the research objects is that they will face the CET-4; at this time, they may have a certain amount of foreign learning anxiety because of different problems. In order to explore the effects of foreign language classroom anxiety on students' English learning, six students were selected to have face-to-face semi-structured conversation. First of all, based on the questionnaire, teachers can get the basic background information of the students interviewed, and three boys and three girls in the same grade are selected for the interview.

Research Tools

The questionnaire used in this study was based on the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) used by Horwitz and his colleagues. The questionnaire was modified according to the characteristics of the subjects and the purposes of the study. Considering the subjects' English level, the Chinese version of the questionnaire is used in this study.

The questionnaire consists of two parts: The first part is personal information, which mainly includes students' age, sex, and English test scores, and the second part is the questionnaire questions.

Semi-Constructed Interview

Semi-structured interview mainly covers the following aspects:

- (1) Do you ever have anxiety in English class? If you have, when?
- (2) What do you think is the cause of your anxiety?
- (3) What do you do when you feel anxious? Or what do you want the teacher to do?

Discussion

All the questionnaires are input into the SPSS for data analysis, by using descriptive analysis, independent sample T-test, and other methods to reveal the status of foreign language anxiety of English majors in vocational colleges. Independent-sample T-test was used to test whether there was some relationship between academic achievement and foreign language anxiety of students in different score groups.

Statistics and Data Analysis

Through the questionnaire survey, the percentage of each question is obtained, as shown in the following figure:

Table 1

Results of FLCAS Questionnaire

N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)	N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)	N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)
T1	3.0714	T7	3.3714	T13	2.7857
T2	2.9143	T8	3.0429	T14	2.4429
T3	2.6286	T9	3.5429	T15	3.0857
T4	2.7714	T10	3.0571	T16	2.8571
T5	2.8143	T11	2.9857	T17	2.6286

(table 1 continued)

N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)	N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)	N	Mean (Maximum mean = 5.00)
T6	3.1286	T12	2.8000	T18	2.7571
T19	2.5429	T25	2.8286	T31	2.9571
T20	3.2571	T26	2.4714	T32	2.4571
T21	2.4286	T27	3.0000	T33	3.4714
T22	3.2857	T28	2.8143	Mean	2.93
T23	3.3714	T29	2.8143		
T24	3.1714	T30	3.2143		

Table 2

Average Anxiety Index of Questionnaire Subjects

Descriptive statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	70	74.00	121.00	96.7714	9.57983
high-achievement	19	82.00	116.00	97.1579	9.20304
middle-achievement	29	78.00	115.00	96.3448	9.29776
middle-achievement	22	74.00	121.00	97.0000	10.64134

From Table 1 and Table 2, we can see that the average anxiety index of all the subjects is 96.77. The answers of the questionnaire are divided into five grades; the middle degree is 3, and the average of this questionnaire is 2.93, which is slightly lower than the middle degree. This shows that the English classroom anxiety of English majors in higher vocational colleges belongs to the middle to lower anxiety state, but there is some anxiety.

According to Horwitz, these 33 items can be classified as communication apprehension (1, 3, 4, 9, 13, 14, 18, 20, 24, 29, 27, 33), test anxiety (5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 30, 32), fear of negative evaluation (2, 7, 8, 15, 19, 21, 23, 31). As can be seen from Table 1, the most anxiety-provoking questions were 14 questions: 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 30, 33, which accounted for more than half of the total, or 42.4%. In particular, the anxiety caused by questions 9, 33, 23, 7, 22, 20, 30, 24 and 6 ranked first, accounting for 27.2%.

The results show that the main causes of students' English anxiety are communicative apprehension, followed by fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, whose average values are 2.98, 2.96, and 2.87 respectively. It can reveal a common fact: English majors in Chinese vocational colleges have been lacking self-confidence and courage in speaking English. They always feel that their English is not good. So, they are afraid that if they speak out they will be criticized negatively by others. Moreover, in English classes in China's higher vocational colleges, most of the time they are conducted in the traditional teaching. We should encourage English classes to be student-oriented and give students more opportunities to express their real ideas in English. It is good for students to overcome the fear of communication and negative evaluation.

Table 3

Independent Sample T-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variances assumed	0.039	0.843	0.205	68	0.839	0.53044	2.59287	-4.64355	5.70444
	Not assumed			0.211	34.228	0.834	0.53044	2.51825	-4.58599	5.64688

Discussion of Question 2

In this study, the students were divided into three groups: high-achievement, middle-achievement, and low-achievement. From Table 2, we can see that there is no significant difference between the students' academic achievement and the students' foreign language anxiety. However, from Table 2, it can be seen that the average foreign language anxiety index of the high-achievement group, the middle-achievement group, and the low-achievement group is 97.16, 97, 96.34 respectively. The students in the high-achievement group are the highest anxiety level, higher than the average foreign language anxiety level of 0.39. The middle group students' foreign language anxiety is higher than the average of 0.23, while the low-achievement students' learning anxiety is lower than the average of 0.43. It can be seen that: There is no significant relationship between foreign language anxiety and achievement. The students with higher academic achievement are not necessarily less anxious than the students with lower academic achievement. In the personal interview, the author selects six people to carry on the interview: two high-achievement, two low-achievement, two middle-achievement students. Many students are in foreign language anxiety, but their anxiety levels vary from person to person; the reasons are also very different. Some students fear the test, some students worry about their oral ability is not good, and some students desire the teacher's encouragement. These also reflect that students want to learn; a certain degree of anxiety may promote students' learning, but teachers should be proactive to calm students' psychological state and encourage students to learn in the teaching process.

Conclusion

In this study, we found that students' communicative apprehension is stronger than fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, which reflects students' fear of communicating and expressing in English. Through the interview, we can learn that the students are not very confident in their oral ability, which gives us a strong hint for language teaching. We must pay attention to the cultivation and practice of students' spoken language, and take students as the main role in the teaching process. In fact, if we pay more attention to the psychological state of students, we can help students overcome their foreign language anxiety, and let them bold to express themselves in English. Secondly, this study finds that there is no significant relationship between students' English achievement and their foreign language anxiety level. This is contrary to many previous studies, which have shown that the higher the students' English achievement, the lower the corresponding level of learning anxiety.

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