

The Effects of Academic Anxiety on College Students' Learning of Spoken English

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Abstract: This paper examines the effects of academic anxiety on college students' learning of spoken English. Academic anxiety can hinder students' fluency, pronunciation accuracy, self-expression, and overall confidence in oral communication. The study identifies various factors that contribute to academic anxiety, including personal, external, socio-cultural, and psychological factors. It explores the negative consequences of academic anxiety on students' spoken English learning outcomes. Coping mechanisms and strategies, such as creating a supportive learning environment, teaching stress management techniques, and promoting self-reflection and self-assessment, are proposed to address academic anxiety. The paper emphasizes the practical implications for educators, institutions, and policymakers, including teacher training, curriculum design, peer interaction, counseling services, and assessment practices. Implementing these recommendations can create a supportive and empowering learning environment, mitigating the impact of academic anxiety. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of recognizing and addressing academic anxiety to enhance college students' spoken English skills and prepare them for success in a globalized world.

Keywords: academic anxiety, college students, English speaking learning, impact

1. Introduction

English, as the most widely used language, holds a significant position in the context of continuous globalization. Proficiency in spoken English is crucial for practical application. However, many college students often face the challenge of academic anxiety during their process of learning spoken English. Chen Yao and Li Changjiang's study found that in the process of college students' foreign language learning, anxiety produces the strongest effect on speaking and there are obvious individual differences [1]. This means that different students will have different degrees of speaking learning difficulties when facing academic pressure and self-doubt [1]. Gao Xianli's study found that there was a negative correlation between anxiety generated in college students' classroom English learning and fluency in oral expression. This suggests that academic anxiety may affect students' oral expression and make them feel troubled and unconfident in oral communication [2]. Foreign language anxiety is the nervousness and fear that learners feel when using another language, they are not yet familiar with [3]. Oxford proposed that in the learning environment, anxiety has a significant impact on students' academic performance and is the main reason affecting the emotional factors of second language learners [4]. Academic anxiety can impact college students' fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and overall oral expression abilities, leading to a lack of confidence in spoken

communication. An increasing number of students experience anxiety when learning spoken English, and the consequences of English-speaking anxiety can have detrimental effects on students' willingness to speak English and their future academic and professional endeavors.

Academic anxiety refers to a psychological state in an academic environment where individuals feel uneasy or anxious about their academic performance and achievements. Its influencing factors are complex, encompassing personal, external, socio-cultural, and psychological factors, among others. Understanding the concept of academic anxiety and its influencing factors is crucial for assessing its impact on college students' English-speaking learning. Various factors affect college students' English-speaking learning, with academic anxiety being a significant contributing factor. Factors such as high academic pressure, intense academic competition, ineffective teaching methods, lack of effective speaking training and practice opportunities, and an unfavorable learning environment with limited exposure to English language and practical language use can impede the development of students' English-speaking skills. These factors have negative consequences on college students' English-speaking learning, hindering their progress in oral proficiency.

This study aims to explore the effects of academic anxiety on college students' English-speaking learning and propose measures and suggestions to address academic anxiety, providing reference and guidance for the academic and educational communities.

2. Literature Review

Academic anxiety is a phenomenon that students always feel nervous, worried, and uneasy about academic activities. It involves aspects such as students' doubts about their level of competence, fear of failure and criticism, and pressure to perform. Academic anxiety could affect individuals' second language learning performance [4].

Academic anxiety is a psychological state that is prevalent in college students. It is mainly influenced by personal, environmental and educational reasons. First of all, individual factor is one of the important factors which affect academic anxiety. Academic anxiety is related to students' character, self-awareness, self-confidence and learning motivation. In addition, environmental factors also have a significant impact on academic anxiety, for example, the academic environment, academic pressures, and social relationship.

Academic anxiety has a great impact on college students' oral English learning. First, academic anxiety can lead students to exhibit avoidance, silence, and escapism when learning English. Academic anxiety will reduce their motivation of speaking and will hinder the improvement of their speaking skills. Second, students will pay more attention on their own performance and the comments of others, instead of communication and understanding of language. They are so concerned with others' evaluation of their oral expression that they lose sight of the purpose of real communication [2].

Understanding the concept of academic anxiety and its various types is crucial in recognizing its impact on college students' learning of spoken English. By identifying the specific manifestations and underlying causes of academic anxiety, educators and researchers can develop targeted strategies to alleviate anxiety and promote a more conducive learning environment for students.

3. Methods

Prior research design involved both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The questionnaire used Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, which is divided into 33 questions about anxiety of learning English, questions are about anxiety of communication, anxiety about tests and fear of negative judgment, and

each question is categorized into five options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree [5,6].

Quantitative Data Collection: A survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of college students to collect quantitative data. The survey included items that assessed students' levels of academic anxiety, their perceived fluency in spoken English, and their confidence in oral communication. The questionnaire was distributed among a diverse group of college students from various academic disciplines and English proficiency levels. The sample size was determined using a power analysis to ensure statistical validity.

Qualitative Data Collection: In addition to the survey, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviews aimed to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in coping with academic anxiety in relation to spoken English learning. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who exhibited varying levels of academic anxiety and oral proficiency. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Data Analysis: The quantitative data collected from the survey were analyzed using statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, to examine the relationships between academic anxiety, fluency in spoken English, and confidence in oral communication. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to academic anxiety and spoken English learning.

4. Presentation of Data

The presentation of data includes the discussion and analysis of relevant research findings related to academic anxiety and the learning of spoken English. Key methodologies, sample sizes, and significant results are highlighted to support the arguments presented throughout the essay.

Several studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between academic anxiety and spoken English learning. For instance, Kondo and Yang found a negative relationship between anxiety levels and English-speaking proficiency among college students [7]. Their study utilized a large sample size and employed quantitative measures to assess students' anxiety and oral skills.

Similarly, Matsuda and Gobel conducted a study that explored the relationship between anxiety and performance in the foreign language classroom [8]. Their findings revealed that higher levels of anxiety were associated with lower speaking proficiency levels. The study employed both quantitative measures and classroom observations to gather data.

These research findings align with the main arguments presented in earlier sections of this essay, emphasizing the impact of academic anxiety on fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and overall oral expression abilities in spoken English learning.

Through the analysis of these studies and the data collected in this research, it becomes evident that academic anxiety significantly hampers college students' ability to learn and develop proficiency in spoken English. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the validity and comprehensiveness of the research findings.

5. Impact Factors for Language Learning

Various types of anxiety can affect college students on their language learning journey. One common type is performance anxiety, which arises when students feel pressured to perform well in academic settings. Students may fear making mistakes or receiving negative evaluations from instructors or peers, leading to anxiety that inhibits their willingness to engage in spoken English activities. Another type is communication apprehension, characterized by a fear or discomfort when interacting with others in English. This anxiety can stem from concerns about one's language proficiency, being judged by others, or facing communication challenges.

Moreover, students may experience test anxiety specifically related to English speaking assessments. The fear of performing poorly in oral exams or presentations can trigger anxiety symptoms, such as nervousness, a rapid heartbeat, or mental blocks, all of which affect their ability to effectively express themselves in spoken English [5].

6. Factors Influencing Academic Anxiety in Language Learning

Academic anxiety in language learning is influenced by various factors that contribute to students' uneasiness and distress. These factors can be categorized into personal, external, socio-cultural, and psychological factors, each playing a significant role in shaping students' experience with academic anxiety.

Personal Factors: Individual characteristics and experiences can contribute to academic anxiety. For example, students with low self-esteem or a history of negative language learning experiences may be more prone to developing academic anxiety. Additionally, students who possess high perfectionistic tendencies or have a strong desire for social approval may experience heightened anxiety due to the fear of making mistakes or being judged by others.

External Factors: External factors, such as the learning environment, instructional methods, and assessment practices, can significantly impact students' academic anxiety. Inadequate support from teachers, limited opportunities for speaking practice, and a lack of constructive feedback can exacerbate anxiety levels. Similarly, high-stakes exams or overly competitive classroom environments that prioritize performance over learning may contribute to heightened anxiety among language learners.

Socio-cultural Factors: Socio-cultural factors, including cultural norms and societal expectations, can influence students' anxiety in language learning. Cultural attitudes towards language proficiency, fear of losing face, or concerns about conforming to linguistic and social norms can create additional pressure and anxiety for language learners. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds may experience acculturative stress, further contributing to their academic anxiety.

Psychological Factors: Psychological factors, such as language learning motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, and fear of negative evaluation, play a crucial role in academic anxiety. Students who doubt their language abilities or perceive themselves as lacking competence may experience heightened anxiety when it comes to speaking English. Similarly, a fear of being negatively evaluated by peers or instructors can trigger anxiety symptoms and hinder students' willingness to engage in oral communication.

By understanding the complex interplay of these factors, educators and institutions can implement strategies to alleviate academic anxiety in language learning. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, providing opportunities for meaningful interaction, and fostering a growth mindset can help mitigate anxiety and enhance students' confidence and language learning outcomes.

7. Impact of Academic Anxiety on Spoken English Learning

Academic anxiety has a significant impact on college students' ability to learn and develop proficiency in spoken English. The effects of academic anxiety can be observed in several aspects of students' spoken English learning process, including fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and overall oral expression abilities.

Decreased Fluency: Academic anxiety can hinder students' ability to speak English fluently. The fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by others can lead to hesitations, pauses, and speech disruptions. Consequently, students may experience difficulty maintaining a smooth flow of conversation, which can impede effective communication and hinder their confidence in using spoken English.

Limited Vocabulary Usage: Academic anxiety can restrict students' use of vocabulary during oral communication. Students may avoid using unfamiliar or advanced vocabulary words due to the fear of mispronunciation or using them incorrectly. This limited vocabulary usage can impact the depth and richness of their spoken English expression, restricting their ability to convey their ideas effectively.

Inhibited Self-Expression: Academic anxiety can inhibit students' ability to express themselves freely in spoken English. The fear of being judged or negatively evaluated may lead students to self-monitor their language use excessively, resulting in self-consciousness and self-censorship. This can limit their spontaneity and creativity in verbal expression, preventing them from fully engaging in meaningful conversations.

Lack of Confidence: Academic anxiety can erode students' confidence in their spoken English abilities. Students may doubt their language skills and feel insecure about their proficiency level. This lack of confidence can manifest in avoidance behaviors, such as refraining from participating in discussions or avoiding opportunities for English conversation. Consequently, students may miss out on valuable learning experiences that would contribute to their oral proficiency development.

As academic anxiety in spoken English learning becomes more prevalent, its consequences can have long-term effects on students. The reluctance to speak English due to anxiety can hinder students' progress in oral proficiency, limit their intercultural communication skills, and impact their future academic and professional pursuits.

Educational institutions and teachers play a vital role in addressing and mitigating the impact of academic anxiety on spoken English learning. By creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, promoting a growth mindset, and providing opportunities for guided practice and constructive feedback, educators can help alleviate anxiety and enhance students' confidence in spoken English communication.

8. Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

To mitigate the impact of academic anxiety on college students' learning of spoken English, various coping mechanisms and strategies can be employed. These approaches aim to help students manage and reduce their anxiety, build confidence, and improve their oral communication skills.

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment: Establishing a supportive and inclusive classroom environment plays a crucial role in reducing academic anxiety. Encouraging open communication, active listening, and mutual respect among students fosters a sense of psychological safety, allowing students to express themselves without fear of judgment or negative evaluation. Teachers can also create opportunities for collaborative activities, peer support, and constructive feedback to alleviate anxiety and promote a positive learning atmosphere.

Providing Clear Expectations and Guidelines: Clearly communicating expectations and guidelines for spoken English activities can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Students benefit from knowing what is expected of them and how their performance will be evaluated. Providing clear criteria for assessment and offering constructive feedback can guide students' learning and alleviate anxiety related to uncertainty.

Promoting Gradual Exposure and Practice: Gradually exposing students to spoken English situations and providing ample opportunities for practice can help build their confidence and reduce anxiety. Kathleen proposed that teachers should focus on students' independent discussion. Teachers can record some explanation videos before class so that students can learn in advance [9]. Starting with low-pressure activities, such as pair work or small group discussions, allows students to gain experience and gradually increase the complexity of tasks. Providing structured speaking activities and supportive feedback helps students develop their oral communication skills while managing their anxiety.

Teaching Stress Management Techniques: According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, due to the influence of emotional anxiety in language learning, learners will not fully devote themselves to understanding and absorbing language information [10]. Practice has proved that teaching students how to release stress has positive effect on overcoming students' anxiety in oral expression. Teaching students stress management techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, positive self-talk, and mindfulness strategies, can help them cope with anxiety during spoken English activities. These techniques can help students regulate their emotions, reduce physiological symptoms of anxiety, and enhance their overall well-being in language learning contexts.

Encouraging Peer Support and Collaboration: Peer support and collaboration can play a significant role in reducing academic anxiety. Creating opportunities for students to work together, engage in language exchanges, and provide constructive feedback to one another fosters a supportive learning community. Peer support can help alleviate anxiety by providing a safe and understanding space for practice and learning.

Promoting Guided Practice and Gradual Exposure: Gradual exposure to spoken English situations can help students gradually overcome their anxiety. Teachers can design activities that start with low-pressure speaking tasks and gradually increase in complexity and challenge. Providing clear guidelines, modeling effective communication, and offering structured practice opportunities can build students' confidence and help them gradually develop their speaking skills.

Teaching Stress and Anxiety Management Techniques: Equipping students with stress and anxiety management techniques empowers them to cope with academic anxiety effectively. Strategies such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, positive self-talk, and visualization can help students regulate their emotions and reduce anxiety during English speaking activities. Teachers can incorporate these techniques into regular classroom routines or provide resources for students to practice on their own.

Promoting Self-Reflection and Self-Assessment: Encouraging students to reflect on their language learning progress and set realistic goals can foster a sense of control and self-efficacy. Self-assessment tools, such as recording and reviewing their own speaking performances, can help students identify areas for improvement and track their progress. By engaging in self-reflection, students can develop a growth mindset and view mistakes as opportunities for learning and improvement, reducing anxiety related to performance.

Providing Supportive Feedback and Encouragement: Offering constructive feedback and praise can positively impact students' confidence and motivation. Teachers can provide specific feedback on students' strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting their progress and achievements. Encouraging students to celebrate their successes and providing guidance on how to address challenges can help reduce anxiety and foster a growth-oriented mindset.

Implementing these coping mechanisms and strategies requires collaboration between educators, students, and institutions. By creating a supportive and nurturing environment, implementing effective teaching practices, and empowering students with stress management techniques, educators can help students navigate and overcome academic anxiety, leading to enhanced spoken English learning outcomes.

9. Practical Implications and Recommendations

Understanding the effects of academic anxiety on college students' learning of spoken English has important practical implications for educators, institutions, and policymakers. To address and mitigate the impact of academic anxiety, the following recommendations can be implemented:

Teacher Training and Professional Development: Providing training and professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial in equipping them with strategies to effectively address academic anxiety in the language learning classroom. Teachers can benefit from workshops and courses that

focus on creating a supportive learning environment, implementing learner-centered approaches, and incorporating stress management techniques. By enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills, institutions can foster an environment that supports students' well-being and facilitates their spoken English learning.

Curriculum Design and Materials: Developing language learning curricula and materials that take into account the impact of academic anxiety is essential. Curriculum designers should aim to create balanced and learner-friendly materials that provide opportunities for meaningful spoken English practice, build confidence, and alleviate anxiety. Integrating real-life communicative tasks, authentic listening and speaking activities, and culturally diverse content can enhance students' engagement and reduce anxiety levels.

Promoting Peer Interaction and Support: Encouraging peer interaction and support can have a positive impact on reducing academic anxiety. Incorporating collaborative learning activities, group discussions, and language exchange programs can create a sense of community among students. Peer feedback and encouragement foster a supportive environment, allowing students to practice and improve their spoken English skills with the guidance and support of their peers.

Counseling and Support Services: Institutions can establish counseling and support services dedicated to addressing academic anxiety in language learning. Trained counselors can provide individual or group counseling sessions, workshops on stress management, and resources for self-help. These services can help students better understand and manage their anxiety, as well as provide them with the necessary support to navigate their spoken English learning journey effectively.

Assessment Practices: Rethinking assessment practices can contribute to reducing academic anxiety. Incorporating a variety of assessment methods, such as formative assessments, self-assessment, and portfolio-based assessments, allows students to showcase their progress and development over time. By focusing on growth and improvement rather than solely on grades, students are encouraged to take risks and engage more actively in spoken English activities.

By implementing these practical implications and recommendations, institutions can create a supportive and empowering learning environment that fosters students' spoken English learning while addressing and mitigating the impact of academic anxiety.

10. Conclusion

Academic anxiety significantly influences college students' learning of spoken English, impacting their fluency, pronunciation accuracy, self-expression, and overall confidence in oral communication. As globalization continues to advance, English proficiency, particularly in spoken form, plays a vital role in students' academic and professional success.

This study has shed light on the effects of academic anxiety on college students' learning of spoken English. It has highlighted the various factors that contribute to academic anxiety, including personal, external, socio-cultural, and psychological factors. Additionally, the study has demonstrated the negative consequences of academic anxiety on students' spoken English learning outcomes.

To address the impact of academic anxiety, several coping mechanisms and strategies have been proposed. These include creating a supportive learning environment, promoting guided practice and gradual exposure, teaching stress and anxiety management techniques, encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment, and providing supportive feedback and encouragement. Implementing these strategies requires collaboration between educators, students, and institutions to foster an environment that supports students' well-being and facilitates their spoken English learning.

The practical implications of this study highlight the importance of teacher training and professional development, curriculum design and materials, promoting peer interaction and support, counseling and support services, and rethinking assessment practices. By implementing these

recommendations, institutions can create a supportive and empowering learning environment that addresses and mitigates academic anxiety in language learning.

It is essential for educators, institutions, and policymakers to recognize the significance of academic anxiety in spoken English learning and take proactive measures to support students in overcoming their anxieties. By promoting a positive learning environment and implementing effective strategies, educators can enhance students' confidence, reduce anxiety levels, and facilitate their development of spoken English proficiency.

Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms and strategies in different educational contexts and diverse student populations. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of reducing academic anxiety on students' overall language learning outcomes would provide valuable insights.

By addressing academic anxiety and nurturing students' spoken English skills, the educators can equip college students with the necessary linguistic tools and confidence to thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

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