

English Speaking Anxiety in Chinese International High School Students

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Abstract: Speaking anxiety has a wide range of effects on students, notably speaking anxiety in a foreign language, which has a negative impact on students' foreign language learning, but there are fewer investigations on speaking anxiety among Chinese international high school students. This study was completed by the "Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS)". A survey of students in an international high school in Hubei Province found that students had moderate speaking anxiety, there is no significant correlation between gender and speaking anxiety, not having enough time to reflect before speaking in English and lack of vocabulary are the main causes of speaking anxiety. The article offers recommendations on the causes of speaking anxiety for students, teachers, and school.

Keywords: English speaking anxiety, international high school, gender, insufficient thinking time, vocabulary

1. Introduction

The English curriculum standards for general high schools released by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2020 set specific language competency goals for students, requiring them to communicate effectively with others using oral language [1]. International high school students must improve their English speaking abilities because they will eventually reside in and attend university in English-speaking countries. However, students' anxiety has an impact on how individuals learn to communicate.

According to Spielberger, anxiety is a negative attitude that makes people feel uncomfortable, fearful, and worried [2]. Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), according to von Wörde, is the type of anxiety most often regarded to be distinct from other types of anxiety and anxiety related to language skills [3]. He gives a more detailed view of speaking anxiety in classroom anxiety [4], he claims that worry or apprehension associated with actual or anticipated oral communication in a foreign language with another person or people is known as foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). Moreover, the uniqueness of the language learning process has resulted in the development of a specific complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours known as foreign language anxiety [5].

Chinese high school pupils, as Zhao noted, were more anxious about learning English [6]. Scholars have identified different factors that influence student anxiety in previous studies. Speaking anxiety was observed by Çagatay to be higher in females than in males and to rise when

students engaged with native speakers [7]. Wang and Ding also examined the relationship between speaking anxiety and gender, they state that male students experienced higher levels of language anxiety than female students [8]. There are also studies that have found no significant relationship between gender and speaking anxiety [9]. Apart from the gender factor, some studies discovered that when a teacher asks a question without having had time to prepare or when a student does not comprehend it, the anxiety level of the learner rises [10]. He made a similar discovery that when they were randomly selected by the teacher to respond to questions [4], the majority of pupils became more apprehensive and that they lost track of words they were familiar with. Speaking anxiety and vocabulary impacts are mutual. In the same way that anxiety can lead students to forget common words, a lack of vocabulary might make them more anxious when speaking. Sadighi & Dastpak identified the lack of vocabulary knowledge as one of the main factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety [11].

This paper conducted a questionnaire survey on students at an international high school in Hubei Province to understand speaking anxiety in this group. A questionnaire was used to examine their level of anxiety and the causes of students' speaking anxiety in English. Finally, give recommendations to schools, teachers, and students to improve students' learning, reduce their speaking anxiety, and assist them in better adjusting to their study abroad experience in advance.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In this study, a total of 86 students in grades 10 and 11 participated in the questionnaire, and 81 valid questionnaires were returned, including 40 for males and 41 for females. The recall rate of the questionnaire was 94.19%.

2.2. Materials and Data Collection

This study made use of He's Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS), all foreign language in this survey refer to English [4]. The scale was translated into Chinese, the national language of the students' country, to reduce worry among the students. The questionnaire was administered online, with the classroom teacher sending the QR code to the students and then collecting the completed screenshots from the students. The questionnaire was split into two parts: the first part was a survey of demographic factors, such as gender, current grade, English learning background, and self-assessment of English learning; the second part has 33 questions, it was a more accurate and suitable scale to measure Chinese students' anxiety about speaking a foreign language. All the questions are rated on a 5-point Likert-type, with 1 denoting a strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The scores for all positive choices were to be reversed, the total score of the questionnaire ranged from 33 to 165 and was divided into three anxiety levels based on the scores, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety.

2.3. Data Analysis

This paper use JASP (Jeffreys 's Amazing Statistics Program) to analyze data [12], the scores on the student questionnaire were used to analyze the student's anxiety levels and to identify the factors that caused them the most anxiety.

3. Results

3.1. Anxiety Level

Table 1: FLSA levels.

	Valid	Missing	Median	Mean	Std.Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
SUM	81	0	111.000	109.605	10.908	74.000	132.000

The mean score of the participants was 109.605, the median score was 111, the lowest score was 74, and the highest score was 132, which indicates that the participants generally had moderate speaking anxiety.

3.2. Anxiety and Gender

Table 2: Results of comparing FLSA with gender.

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE
SUM	Female	41	110.171	10.351	1.617
	Male	40	109.025	11.555	1.827

Table 3: FLSA and gender in T-Test.

	t	df	p	Mean difference	SD difference	Cohen's d
SUM	0.470	77.598	0.680	1.146	2.439	0.104

From table 2 and 3, the anxiety level of female students ($M = 110.171$, $SE = 1.617$) was greater than that of male students ($M = 109.025$, $SE = 1.827$), however, according to the Independent Samples T-Test, the p-value is 0.680, which $p > 0.05$ indicate that there is no significant difference between English speaking anxiety and gender.

3.3. Causes of Speaking Anxiety

Table 4 shows the main causes of students' anxiety, with having little time to think before speaking in English and lack of vocabulary being the two most significant causes. More than half of the participants agreed that these two reasons caused them to feel anxious.

Table 4: Causes of speaking anxiety.

Reasons	Students' supporting rates (%)	Students' means
Insufficient preparation time	52	3.53
Lack of vocabulary	51	3.57
Worry about the fluency of speaking in a FL	48	3.31
Worry about having to give important information orally in a FL	46	3.43
Fear of the FL speaking test	40	3.26
Fear of speaking a FL	40	3.21

Table 4: (continued).

Speaking a FL on an unfamiliar topic	35	3.28
Fear of speaking a FL on the phone	33	3.14
Fear of speaking a FL in public	27	3.24

Note. The percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note. The means are taken to two decimal places.

3.4. Strategies for Coping with FLSA

Table 5 shows the strategies that students thought would help them reduce their anxiety. 74% of the students thought that language games would help them reduce their anxiety, while more than half of the students thought that a patient teacher, relaxation exercises, and speaking English in a friendly environment would reduce their speaking anxiety.

Table 5: Effective strategies coping with speaking anxiety.

Strategies	Students' supporting rates (%)	Students' means
Playing language games	74	3.90
Teacher being patient	56	3.72
Doing relaxation exercises	56	3.69
Speaking a FL in a friendly environment	54	3.64
Correcting mistakes indirectly	47	3.58
Not focusing on accuracy while speaking a FL	47	3.42
Teacher being encouraging	46	3.47
Participation in school activities	44	3.48
Use of group discussion format in the classroom	38	3.35

Note. The percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note. The means are taken to two decimal places.

4. Discussion

4.1. Speaking Anxiety Levels of High School Students

According to the findings of the study, the majority of students experienced moderate speaking anxiety. Few students exhibited high levels of anxiety when speaking, and only a very small percentage of students had low levels. This result is consistent with some previous studies, Sadighi & Dastpak discovery that English language learners experience speaking anxiety [11]. Teachers must therefore be conscious of their pupils' anxiety in the English classroom. In order to reduce their fear, students should look for appropriate learning strategies.

4.2. Main Factors Affecting Student's Anxiety

4.2.1. Gender and Speaking Anxiety

This study found there is no significant difference between gender and FLSA, while some previous studies have shown there is no significant difference between gender and speaking anxiety [9, 13].

As a result, teachers can treat every student equally in the classroom and should not establish different standards for different gender groups.

4.2.2. Thinking Time and Speaking Anxiety

In this study, the most important variable that affected students' anxiety was whether they had enough time to consider before speaking in English. Students who do not have adequate preparation time before responding questions feel more anxious [10]. More than half of the students in this research agreed that this was the case. He pointed out that students often forget the words they are familiar with because they have little time to consider before saying a FL [4]. In this instance, teachers should provide students with appropriate time to think in class since, as shown by the data in *Table 5*, a friendly environment reduces students' anxiety level and a patient teacher reduces students' stress levels. Teachers should encourage learners more than directly correct them when they commit mistakes in their responses because the latter can intimidate them. Additionally, students should read relevant textbooks or articles before class in order to become more familiar with the subject and reduce thinking time.

4.2.3. Vocabulary and Speaking Anxiety

Similar to earlier studies, more than half of the students reported feeling uncomfortable when speaking because they lacked extensive vocabulary [11]. Vocabulary development is a crucial component of learning a foreign language for non-native speakers [14]. As a result, teachers must stress the value of vocabulary learning to their students and can use a variety of teaching resources to support vocabulary development. Simulation games, for instance, assist students in learning English vocabulary and reduce anxiety [15]. From *Table 5*, the most efficient method for students to cope with FLSA is to play language games. Additionally, half of the students have noticed that vocabulary problems prevent oral language growth and that students need to focus more on vocabulary problems. More than half of the students feel that doing relaxation exercises before class can help them feel less anxious since it gives them the opportunity to become familiar with word and phrase patterns. In order to help students improve their speaking abilities, schools might also plan activities where English is the only language used.

5. Conclusion

According to this study, in most case, the students surveyed from international schools reported having a moderate anxiety about speaking. There is no significant difference between speaking anxiety and gender. Insufficient time and vocabulary were the major concerns of students when it came to speaking anxiety. The study does have certain restrictions. First, the sample size was insufficient; second, because all the samples were from students at the same school, they could not be generalized. Future research should therefore keep looking for factors that influence students' speaking anxiety over a wide sample.

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