

# How to Help English Learners Reduce Speaking Anxiety

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**Abstract:** With the implementation of NECS, the focus of English teaching has shifted from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness. Students' individual factors especially affection are emphasized. Among these, learning anxiety, as one of the most significant affective factors, has great impact on foreign language learning. Since English is seen as a tool for communication, it's necessary to cultivate students' oral English and communicative competence. However, it is inevitable that they will feel anxious when confronted with problems in the process of language learning. Thereby, some negative emotions such as tension and fear occur. These debilitating anxieties deemed as one of the most challenging problems in foreign language teaching and learning have adverse impact on their English learning. Therefore, this paper aims to have an in-depth research on the factors causing students' speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the author hopes to seek for appropriate methods to relieve students' speaking anxiety to some degree so that their expression ability of oral English and communicative competence can be improved eventually, the implication of this paper will be discussed as well.

**Keywords:** Speaking anxiety; Oral English learning; Methods.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Formulating question

In the era of economic globalization and social informatization, English has become an essential tool to cope with many activities such as politics, economy and culture among different countries. Therefore, it is necessary to develop EFL learners' comprehensive language ability. In traditional English teaching, many researchers put their focus on cognitive level. After 1970s, a great number of scholars attach much importance to the role of affective factor in SLA with the rise of humanistic psychology. Stern(1983) finds out that affective factors may have greater impact on EFL learners' learning than cognitive factors. In other words, learners' affection has close connection with their foreign language learning outcome.

In China, English is a compulsory subject. Many students started to learn English even in primary school. On the contrary, there is an ubiquitous phenomenon among these students. That is, many students get high scores in written test, but when it comes to oral communication, they are afraid to talk, make mistakes, thus most of them feel anxious in various ways while speaking in English. Which is called dumb English. With the implementation of NECS for senior high school in 2017, it is advised that students in middle school should learn to think and express their own views using English and their key competence need to be cultivated. Thus, it's indispensable to study EFL learners' speaking anxiety and find out suitable methods to deal with such anxiety. In this way, students will use English to communicate in a pleasant atmosphere and their comprehensive language ability can be improved.

### 1.2. Purpose and significance of the study

The study aims to find out the reasons that cause students' speaking anxiety and accordingly offer some proper suggestions to relieve such anxiety in language learning so that students' comprehensive language ability can be improved and the requirements of NECS will be carried out

efficiently.

The study hopes to better conform to the requirements and goals of NECS in 2017 through an in-depth study on students' speaking anxiety. Besides, the author hopes that more English teachers can pay attention to the phenomenon about students' anxiety in oral classroom, thus, they can adjust their own teaching methods to relieve students' anxiety effectively and change students' negative reactions in speaking activities. Finally, this paper has a positive significance for improve students' oral English and carrying out the ideas of NECS in 2017.

## 2. Problem Identification

### 2.1. Foreign language anxiety

With the deepening of research on foreign language anxiety, scholars gradually realized that they can never ignore the role anxiety plays on SLA. MacIntyre and Gardner(1993) Noted that foreign language anxiety is a feeling of fear, tension and uneasiness connected with the listening and speaking of SLA. According to Horwitz(1986), foreign language anxiety is a series of belief, cognition and feeling towards foreign language learning, it can divided into three kinds: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Wang Yinquan and Wan Yushu(2001) reported that this kind of anxiety belongs to the area of psychology, which means one will feel stressful and discouraged after failing to achieve certain goals. Many studies have shown that foreign language anxiety has negative effect on second language acquisition and learners' sense of achievement.

#### 2.1.1. Speaking anxiety

There are many researches which show that English anxiety has negative impact on many aspects of English learning. English speaking is a typical example, many scholars find out that speaking has the closest connect with anxiety among all the English skills. Which refers to such feelings as tension, anxiety, fear and worry when learners are speaking English in different contexts. Besides, according to Jiang Hongxia and Wang Ruijun(2004), most of the teaching theories and practice suggest that many students will be

anxious more or less in their oral English learning such as anxiety for oral communication, not understanding, making mistake, bad evaluation and test.

## **2.2. The causes of speaking anxiety**

There are many reasons for foreign language anxiety based on the scholars' in-depth studies. On the one hand, there are some subjective reasons for the anxiety. such anxiety has something to do with the students' different personality traits, motivations or goals for learning. Firstly, for some students, they are born to be shy and lack confidence. which will hinder their oral communication. Besides, the comparison among students will also increase the anxiety.

When some of them find out their oral English is not as fluent as other students. In the long run, which, if not guided, can contribute to growing feelings of anxiety about speaking English for students. Second, motivation is the inner impetus for students' learning. Some take English learning just as a task to pass exams. Thus, when confronted with obstacles in oral English learning, they tend to give up.

Gradually, such ordinary task becomes a mental burden for them. Thirdly, some ambitious students who are confident tend to set a high goal that is far beyond their current ability. However, in the end, due to underestimating the difficulties encountered in English learning, they feel anxious after failing to reach the original goals. On the other hand, there are some objective reasons for students' foreign language anxiety. To begin with, English teachers lead the whole classroom all the time in traditional language teaching, and students are passively involved in the class without the chance to say something of their own. Nowadays, some improvements in teaching speaking surely have been achieved with the reform and development of English teaching, there are still a lot of work to do. For instance, a teacher without sufficient knowledge cannot be able to teach students oral English.

Also, some teachers will criticize students for the oral mistake they made critically. which can increase students' anxiety. Second, in traditional English classroom in China, there is no chance that the teacher focus on every student. They often just finish their teaching task as required, and impart certain knowledge points. Students have little time to speak on their own, thus, they feel anxious.

## **3. Measures Taken to Reduce Speaking Anxiety**

Due to these negative effects cause by students' anxiety for speaking English, some necessary methods need to be figured out to reduce and eliminate their anxiety so that a better efficient English speaking classroom can be built.

### **3.1. Create a relaxed atmosphere to increase students' confidence to speak English.**

If we encourage students usually to give them confidence, then the students can feel that their teacher is caring about them, they will be more motivated to behave better to satisfy their teacher's expectation. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis(1981), the reason why English learners are willing to put all the energy into English learning lies in that they are emotionally, affectively involved. Based on this theory, Yu bifang(2010) noted that an English teacher need to create a relaxed atmosphere to offer students much comprehensive input so that a better output of oral English can be reached.

### **3.2. Guide students into mastering correct learning method and attitude**

Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis(i+1) and Vigotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the teacher should offer language input a little higher than students' current proficiency to challenge so that progress will be attained in language learning. Yang Lihong noted that the English teachers should adopt step-by-step method to guide students to master phased approach for oral English practice instead of setting much higher learning goals in a short period.

### **3.3. Increase the teachers' professional competence and improve the techniques of correcting oral mistakes**

Whether the teachers use appropriate teaching methods will affect students' interest and efficiency of study. According to Wang Sujuan(2011),while designing oral activities, the teachers should select topics or materials related to students' interest and real life and create a context close to the their daily life, leaving much more valuable time for students to practice. Besides, part of the reason for some students' anxiety lies in that they lack sufficient language knowledge about phonetics, vocabulary or grammar. Thus, the teachers need to carry out sufficient practices to increase students' basic language knowledge and encourage students to reflect and review what they have learned outside class on a regular basis. The teachers also need to be tolerant and encourage students for students' oral mistakes and choose different ways of correcting and evaluation accordingly. Which help to cultivate student's confidence to speak English bravely.

### **3.4. Adopt cooperative and autonomous learning to optimize learning environment**

Jiang Dongmei and Li Hongjun(2013) reported that cooperative learning is an effective way to get rid of students' anxiety for speaking English. Every member of group can be given enough chances to speak on their own. What's more, cooperation in groups gives students better chances to discuss, think with other members. Which is also a convenient way to learn from their classmates. Since learning exists both inside and outside the class, the teachers can guide students to seek more chances to practice their oral English from the internet as abundant learning materials exist with the advance of information and technology.

## **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, students' anxiety for oral English is an important issue that the teachers should focus on in the process of foreign language learning. As English teachers, they need to respect and pay attention to students' individual differences especially in affection. In oral English classroom, Only when students are in a good mental state, can they feel interested and motivated to learning. The teacher need to analysis various reasons why students are anxious, try to stimulate their interest and confidence to speak English by establishing an relaxed and harmonious learning environment. Which can better improve students' oral English and carry out the educational ideas of NECS.

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