

The Effect of Anxiety and Tension Induced in Foreign Language Learners by Public Speaking and Classroom Presentations on Foreign Language Learning Outcomes

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Abstract: Public speaking and classroom presentations are essential elements and forms of language learning for foreign language learners, which require learners to have the ability to think in a foreign language, to think logically, and to organize their language. The article analyzes the causes of anxiety and nervousness in such learning situations, the anxiety manifestations, reactions, and negative effects on final foreign language performance, as well as the positive coping strategies that can be adopted.

Keywords: Public Speaking; Classroom Presentations; Foreign Language Learning Anxiety (FLA); Learning Outcomes; Positive Coping Strategies.

1. Introduction:

1.1. Research Background

Language learning is never a quick fix; language is a bridge for communication, but also a process of active participation in the expression of the foreign language learnt. For second language learners, speaking is the most difficult and anxiety-inducing part of the language acquisition process (among listening, speaking, reading and writing), because of the shift in thinking about the foreign language and the "separation of learning and use" that occurs in the average Chinese student.

1.2. Literature Review

About two-thirds of students report feeling anxious when expressing themselves in a foreign language in a specific teaching environment and format (Liu and Wu, 2021). Since the 20th century, many colleges and universities have offered public speaking as a mandatory or elective course for L2 learners, and classroom presentation has been the main form of teaching to promote active expression in the foreign language classroom, which has caused many students to be anxious when outputting. Krashen argues that in such an anxious and tense environment, an affective filter is formed, which ultimately affects students' foreign language performance (Horwits, 1995; Matthews, 1996; Onwuegbuzie, 1998).

1.3. Problem Statement and Objectives

For this reason, also as a foreign language learner, the authors believe that this problem plagues most foreign language learners, making many foreign language students gradually lose interest in language learning, and even produce strong resistance, resistance, and in the long run, the learner's grades will fall into self-negation and suspicion, and enter a vicious circle. Therefore, the authors feel that it is very important to explore the causes of learner anxiety in public speaking and classroom presentations, the (negative) impact of performance on final grades and presentation results, and to provide corresponding positive countermeasures to help

foreign language learners to face similar or the same situation with ease. This paper is based on the study of situational anxiety in foreign language learning anxiety.

2. Analysing the Causes of Anxiety and Nervousness During Speeches and Presentations.

2.1. Foreign Language Learners' Self-Perceptions are Biased

Self-perception bias refers to the phenomenon of perceiving oneself, others, or the external environment in such a way that the results of the perception are distorted due to oneself or the situation. When second language learners perform relevant activities in a foreign language, they often worry excessively about the outcome and fantasise about their mistakes and missteps because they are worried about failing to meet the classroom or credit requirements. As a result, they fall into excessive negative self-doubt and self-perception, and develop resistance, anxiety and intimidation. In addition, many students, due to their introversion and timidity in public presentation, coupled with their lack of self-confidence in their perception of foreign language speaking, are afraid of being ridiculed by the audience, criticized, imitated, and receiving negative comments on their presentations or speeches. The combination of these factors leads to a vicious circle of negative emotions.

2.2. Lack of Attention and Preparation on the Part of Foreign Language Learners Themselves

Foreign language students tend to accept relevant tasks and lessons passively, e.g., out of concern for their grades or credits, or as a result of a teacher's mandatory requirements. According to Yerkes-Dodson's law, learning effectiveness and motivation constrain each other. Thus negative resistance can force learners to delay completion, resulting in poor quality completion, insufficient preparation time, and lack of

familiarity with the content of their speeches and presentations. This, coupled with the natural nervousness of facing an audience, results in a poor presentation. Repeated frustration in this way deepens the behavioral and psychological cues of hopelessness and helplessness in the face of the same task in the future, which is also known as "learned helplessness".(Li Le, Sun Xiaohan, 2014).

2.3. Lack of Relevant Experience and Exposure to Public Speaking and Classroom Presentation

Public speaking and classroom presentations require not only the basic language skills of foreign language learners, their ability to use the language, and their ability to think in a second language, but also relevant speaking and presentation skills and the ability to overcome psychological barriers. Our exam-oriented education model makes many students lack the opportunity to express their ideas on stage, and related research shows that the final effect of speech presentation is usually directly proportional to the students' practical experience.(Changying Zhang, 2019) For this lack of occasions and experiences, leading to the aggravation of students' anxiety and nervousness, relying on the theory learned in the usual classroom and taught by the teacher, the teaching of skills is not enough to support the completion of foreign language speeches and presentations. In addition, there is a disconnect between the two important aspects of input and output, because students rarely have the opportunity to output, but always input. Therefore, they are unable to put the theoretical skills they have learnt into practice, which leads to stronger negative emotions and a tendency to fall into self-denial and doubt. Public speaking and classroom presentations also require on-the-spot reactions, and students' lack of relevant experience and fear of mistakes, forgetfulness, poor pronunciation and other problems that they don't know how to remedy aggravate their internal burden.

2.4. Impact of Cultural Factors

The social environment is a big classroom, and students need to explore and learn more comprehensive and rich knowledge of language and culture. In particular, foreign language learning and use need to create a certain language environment, students often do not have a relevant cross-cultural communication context, coupled with the speaking class time is not much, the length of the course is limited and not every student has the opportunity to show and express, so some of the language use errors and inappropriate expression did not get timely attention and correction led to the students in the future related to the speech demonstration activities do not dare to speak, unsure, doubtful unclear. These factors can also lead to anxiety and nervousness.

3. Manifestations of Anxiety and Tension

Anxiety (foreign language anxiety) is one of the more subjective emotions of tension, moreover, it is a psychological structure that has long been valued by many psychologists being commonly expressed as a state of worry.(Carrie Cheng, 2016) According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994a: 5) measurements that foreign language learners in this situation (situation-specific anxiety) anxiety manifests itself in the form of negative self-assessment, fear, rapid heartbeat and other physiological responses. There are

also behaviours that reflect students' anxiety, such as avoidance of complex information in the target language, rigidity, forgetting vocabulary and grammar that they have learned and the content of the speech or presentation they have prepared.(Gregerson & Horwitz, 2002) In addition, there are some common manifestations: sweating in the head, sudden pain in a part of the body, muscle cramps, shaking, regurgitation, dazed eyes, dizziness, avoidance of eye contact with the audience, sudden urge to go to the toilet, swaying and swaying of the body, trembling of the voice, change in pitch, silence, hands going nowhere, snapping of the fingernails, scratching of ears Silent sighing, gagging, shortness of breath, habitual use of onomatopoeia to help recall content, e.g., um, hiss, ah, and a host of other obvious external manifestations of anxiety.

4. Effects on Foreign Language Learning Outcomes

"Foreign Language Learning Outcomes" refers to learners' overall performance in language acquisition, encompassing both internal (e.g., emotional and psychological states) and external (e.g., actual language use) aspects. This section explores the effects of anxiety and nervousness through a more systematic approach.

4.1. Impact on Learner's Internal Performance

4.1.1. The Effect of Anxiety on Cognitive Processing

Anxiety not only affects language output, but also interferes with cognitive processing. Eysenck et al.'s cognitive interference theory states that anxiety takes up an individual's cognitive resources and reduces information processing ability[15]. In public speaking and classroom presentations, anxiety can make it difficult for students to concentrate, and prevent them from effective information processing and memory extraction, which in turn affects their performance and grades.

4.1.2. The Effect of Anxiety on Self-confidence

Anxiety can also weaken students' self-confidence and make them doubt their own language ability, and Horwitz et al. found that language learners' anxiety is negatively correlated with their self-efficacy[16]. In public speaking and classroom presentations, students who lack self-efficacy are more likely to experience nervousness, which affects their performance and achievement. This vicious cycle of emotions further exacerbates students' anxiety, leading to persistent low performance.

4.2. Impact on Learner's External Performance

4.2.1. Effects of Anxiety on Long-Term Academic Achievement

Anxiety triggered by public speaking and classroom presentations not only has an impact on short-term performance, but may also affect students' long-term academic achievement. Sustained high levels of anxiety can lead to negative feelings about language learning and reduce motivation and interest in learning[16]. Long-term anxiety may cause students to gradually lose confidence in language learning and even give up continuing learning, thus affecting their overall academic achievement.

4.2.2. Effects of Anxiety on the Selection and Use of Learning Strategies

Anxiety also affects students' ability to select and use

learning strategies. Oxford and Crookall found that students with high anxiety levels tend to avoid learning strategies that require high cognitive input, such as fine processing strategies, and rely more on mechanical memorization and simple repetition[17]. This bias in strategy selection can lead to a decrease in learning effectiveness, which in turn affects students' performance.

4.2.3. Effects of Anxiety on Classroom Engagement

Anxiety causes students to become passive and withdrawn in the classroom and reduces classroom participation. A study by Horwitz et al. pointed out that students with high levels of anxiety are more inclined to remain silent in the classroom and to avoid participating in classroom discussions and activities[16]. This negative attitude toward classroom participation not only affects students' opportunities for language practice, but also affects the teacher's evaluation of students' performance, which in turn affects students' grades.

4.2.4. Effects of Anxiety on Listening Comprehension

Anxiety also affects students' listening comprehension. Macintyre and Gardner's study showed that high levels of anxiety cause students to perform poorly on listening tests[13][1]. Anxiety makes it difficult for students to concentrate and easy to ignore important information, which in turn affects the accuracy and completeness of listening comprehension and leads to lower performance.

4.2.5. Effects of Anxiety on Language Output

Anxiety significantly affects language learners' oral expression. Macintyre and Gardner's study pointed out that high levels of anxiety can lead to problems such as vocabulary forgetfulness, an increase in grammatical errors, and a decrease in expressive fluency in language learners' oral expression [13]. These problems are particularly evident in public speaking and classroom presentations, where students are required to organize their language, think clearly and express themselves accurately in a short period of time. Anxiety-induced impairments in verbal output prevent students from fully demonstrating their linguistic abilities, thus affecting performance.

5. Case Study: The Impact of Public Speaking Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning Outcomes

5.1. Speaking Anxiety among University English Majors

A study conducted by Xie and colleagues at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) [18] explored the impact of public speaking anxiety on the performance of English major students. The study involved 120 undergraduate students in their second and third years, all enrolled in a public speaking course that was a required component of their degree program.

5.1.1. Methodology

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was administered to measure the anxiety levels of students before, during, and after their public speaking engagements. Additionally, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 students to gain insights into their personal experiences with anxiety during public speaking tasks. The students' final course grades, which were heavily influenced by their public

speaking performance, were used to assess the impact of anxiety on their academic outcomes.

5.1.2. Findings

The findings revealed that 70% of the students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety, which negatively correlated with their performance scores. Students with higher anxiety levels tended to score lower on their final presentations, with the average grade for highly anxious students being 8% lower than that of their less anxious peers. The qualitative data suggested that fear of negative evaluation and perfectionism were the primary contributors to their anxiety.

5.1.3. Implications

This case study highlights the significant impact that public speaking anxiety can have on academic performance, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. It underscores the need for educators to provide students with strategies to manage their anxiety, such as cognitive-behavioral techniques and practice opportunities in low-stakes environments.

5.2. Negative Evaluation Anxiety in Foreign Language Classes

What students fear most in class presentations is negative comments from peers and teachers. One respondent stated, "I don't like the way everyone looks at me when I speak English, especially if I don't speak well enough." This anxiety of negative comments caused students to perform poorly in public speaking and classroom presentations, and their grades suffered. To cope with this anxiety, some students chose to try to avoid giving personal opinions in classroom presentations and instead read from a script, further limiting the development of their language skills.

6. Positive Response Measures

6.1. Flexible Intervention in Cognition

In order to better cope with the anxiety and anxiety behaviors caused by the public display of English learning, we should pay attention to flexible cognitive intervention and positive guidance to learners. Anxiety is often a bad emotion caused by excessive tension or excessive worry caused by the lack of certainty in the cognition of one's own behavior. We should correctly view anxiety. It is just a normal functional response of the human body and the perception of the external environment. Stephen E. Lucas (2009) believes that "Nervousness is normal" and experience stage fright even before a great speech, which is a normal signal. Anxiety also shows the attention and respect of the subject for this speech, so as to maintain the secretion of high-intensity adrenal hormones in order to play the best level.

Instructors should guide and help students, and adjust their own mentality through positive psychological hints, such as fully believe in personal speech ability, reduce audience expectations, take deep breaths, and gradually adjust breathing to minimize the impact of anxiety, so that the tension of the influencer is not easily perceived by the audience. Instructors should pay attention to teaching according to their aptitude, and take corresponding measures according to the atmosphere of the classroom and the students' own performance. Students are divided into different temperament types. For example, depressed students need to be patient and enlightened, actively encouraged, praised, etc.

to give students more confidence, so that students dare to speak and have more opportunities to perform; while for multi-blooded students need to guard against arrogance and impatience, and can use exposure therapy, anti-pressure training, etc. Let students gain more experience in practice and form an anti-sensitivity reaction to overcome anxiety.

6.2. Take a Reasonable View of Foreign Language Learning and Increase Learning Motivation

According to Jecks Dodson's law, learning effects and learning motivations are mutually restricted. When the learning motivation is too low or too high, it is not conducive to the performance of the learning effect. If the learner himself does not pay attention to or over-pays attention to the allocation of learning tasks, it will cause anxiety. For students' negative or positive reactions to English, teachers should guide them correctly and pay attention to the needs of students at different levels. For example, students with weak ability should give simple and interesting teaching content to cultivate interest in learning, and middle-sized students should stimulate learning motivation and increase the sense of learning achievement. Students with strong learning ability will be rewarded in time to continuously increase their learning confidence. In English teaching, teachers constantly strengthen students' sense of learning goals and actively increase their sense of achievement, including: praise for excellent homework, name encouragement in class, and timely affirmation of progressive behavior.

6.3. Enrich Classroom Display Activities and Accumulate Speech Experience

The language input hypothesis proposed by American linguist S Krashen is also of great significance in the teaching and learning of speech. He put forward the "i+1" theory, which is the current level of learners. He believes that the language that learners are exposed to should be slightly higher than their current level. In the release of classroom tasks, a variety of display activities are launched, such as dividing students into different levels according to classroom tasks, so that students can go from easy to difficult. First of all, select a number of classic clips for classroom guidance, and students practice in groups and give feedback to each other. First, it is displayed in the group, and then the whole class is displayed. To set up tasks with different gradients, first give a speech on the topic, and then continue to give a speech. Encourage students to constantly challenge themselves so that they can have the opportunity to train and at the same time stimulate their potential.

6.4. Create a Real Context and Create a Foreign Language Environment

The anxiety and tension generated by the demonstration process of second-language learners are actually not familiar with the foreign language environment. In order to solve this problem, in daily teaching, strengthen the application of real situations, cultivate students' language learning ability, and promote the formation of students' core literacy. For example, when practicing oral English, you can have a real communication and dialogue on individual topics. At the same time, you can set up different scenarios and create different roles, so as to enrich the dialogue content and accumulate daily expression. In the case of talking more,

learners will be more familiar with foreign language communication, and they will also become open-mouthed, bold and confident. If you can train foreign language thinking well, create real situations, and communicate dialogues, then you can respond flexibly in the public display despite anxiety and forgetting words. Build suitable textbooks, life-oriented and inter-intercourse scenarios for students, so that students can gain a sense of achievement and self-confidence in language communication, so as to improve their enthusiasm for English learning.

7. Conclusion

Through the discussion of this article, we can see that second language acquirers with different cognitive abilities will affect their speech effect to a certain extent. At the same time, learners' lack of attention and inadequate preparation causes tension. In addition, learners usually lack practice opportunities and practical experience, and English speech lacks integrity and coherence. Moreover, the inadequacy of the social environment makes learners lack communication about the real situation, which also makes learners afraid to speak in relevant speech display activities and cause anxiety. In order to better cope with these anxiety in English speech, learners need to have an objective self-awareness of themselves, choose learning tasks that are slightly higher than their existing learning level, and formulate corresponding learning strategies. Create a foreign language environment and keep practicing, accumulate speech experience, and make adequate preparations. In addition, teachers should guide flexibly according to the different cognitive characteristics of learners, so as to teach according to their aptitude. For speakers with different cultural backgrounds and personality characteristics, they should adopt different methods and guide them in a targeted manner, so as to effectively tap the potential of each speaker and show the most shining side of the speaker. For the anxiety and tension of second language learners caused by public speeches and classroom presentations, we should take the right attitude, rather than fear and escape, learn to face anxiety, understand the existence and impact of anxiety, and actively play its beneficial role.

Author Contributions

This paper was jointly completed by Du Yunyi, Hu Yiyang, Qi Kexin. All the authors have contributed the equal efforts to the paper research and writing. It is hereby explained.

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