

# *A Study on Senior High School Students' Speaking Anxiety in English Classes*

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**Abstract:** Foreign language classroom anxiety is one of the emotional factors that hinder the foreign language learning process. This study takes 246 students from three ordinary high schools in Wuzhou. It adopts quantitative research and qualitative research methods to investigate the present status of their speaking anxiety. The results of the questionnaire were calculated using the statistical software SPSS19.0 for data analysis. The main finding shows that the overall level of English speaking anxiety of senior high school students is a little bit high. Among these anxieties, classroom anxiety has the highest average, followed by fear of negative evaluation anxiety, and communication apprehension anxiety. Finally, the author comes up with some suggestions on how to reduce the English-speaking anxiety of senior high school students. The research findings in this paper show that oral English teaching needs to be improved in relieving students' anxiety. This paper hopes to explore the causes of anxiety and propose countermeasures to reduce students' oral English anxiety.

**Keywords:** Senior high school students, Oral English anxiety, English class.

## 1. Introduction

In 2003, the Ministry of Education issued the "Standards of English Curriculum for Senior High Schools", which pointed out that it is necessary to study foreign language anxiety in foreign language learning. However, many students still can not speak fluently in English after they have been studying English for many years [1]. When they practice oral English in English classes, they generally feel anxiety, nervousness, and insufficient concentration [2]. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to study the degree of oral anxiety in students' classrooms to improve students' oral English.

The purpose of this study is to understand the basic situation of high school students' oral English anxiety in English classrooms and to understand the main reasons for high school students' oral English anxiety in English classrooms. As the main subject of domestic English learning, high school students are under tremendous pressure from the English college entrance examination. In English learning, oral expression is the most likely factor in English learning in addition to listening[3]. Therefore, it is essential to research oral English anxiety in high school students' English classes. To investigate the oral English anxiety of high school students in the English classroom is beneficial to foreign language education teachers to improve the teaching and help the high school students improve the effectiveness of the English classroom, to better cope with the English college entrance examination.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Related Research of English Speaking Anxiety Abroad**

In 1986, Horwitz [3] and his colleague made a great contribution to foreign language anxiety. They designed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which is composed of 33 items. This scale mainly covers three aspects of foreign language learning anxiety, namely, communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

After many experiments, Horwitz [3] found that students had a sense of classroom anxiety at the beginning of the semester, and there was a high degree of anxiety. In response to this result, teachers should help students how to handle the existing classroom anxiety properly, and teachers should create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment for learners. Afterward, some studies were tested to prove the scale had high reliability, validity, and internal consistency, which marked the maturity of foreign language learning anxiety. In terms of oral learning, Phillips [4] found that the degree of anxiety generated by foreign language learners was negatively correlated with oral speaking performance. That is, students with higher levels of anxiety were worse in oral expression than those with lower anxiety.

Ellis [5] also agrees that facilitating anxiety can motivate learners to challenge new learning tasks. Because of this, high-anxiety students may avoid participating in oral classroom activities and keep silent in answering questions or tasks. Mak and White [6] did research on ESL secondary school students in New Zealand. They found that the essential sources of communication apprehension for students in oral English class were insufficient preparation for speaking and fear of negative evaluation. It can be seen that foreign scholars have a lot of research results on foreign language learning anxiety. At present, the conclusions about the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and oral achievements tend to be consistent, that is, they are negatively correlated.

### **2.2. Related Research of English Speaking Anxiety in China**

In recent years, domestic research on English learning anxiety mainly concentrates on the macro-study of English. Researchers, in our country, have begun to pay more attention to English learning anxiety since the 1990s. Researchers usually proposed that English classroom anxiety plays a negative role in students' English learning [7-8]. They found that high-anxiety students are afraid to speak English in the classroom or feel nervous when answering questions. In 1988, Wen Weiping and Zhu Yuming [9] surveyed language learning anxiety in several universities in Hunan province. This research shows that students have poor performance when they have higher anxiety levels, and hold a negative feeling in oral English class. In English class, the students who are highly anxious present a negative attitude toward the oral speaking activities and answering questions. On the other hand, they always avoid keeping eye contact with the English teachers, which may lead to some students with high anxiety too nervous to acquire more knowledge.

Chen Jie [10] also found that language learning anxiety is significantly associated with oral proficiency. Zhang Yuanrong [11] did research on non-English major postgraduates. He investigated the relationship between language anxiety and oral activities in the classroom. The result shows that most of students would like to take part in pair work and group work which makes students feel relaxed and talk freely, thus their anxiety are relieved. In China, although there have been studies on the foreign language spoken language of students with anxiety, there are few studies on the English classroom environment of senior high schools in inland underdeveloped areas. This study is based on previous studies to analyze the situation of English classroom anxiety, mainly to explore the causes and influencing factors of the English classroom anxiety of senior high school students in Wuzhou, Guangxi.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The subjects of this investigation are 246 grade two high school students from three ordinary high schools in Wuzhou. According to the needs of research questions, some students were selected for different genders, arts and sciences, and different levels of achievement. Among the subjects, there are 89 males, accounting for 36.18%, and 157 females, accounting for 63.82%.

#### 3.2. Questionnaires

To collect test scores that can reflect students' English proficiency levels truthfully and objectively, this study has made statistics on students' final examination scores. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale is designed by Horwitz et al.[3] to measure learners' level of anxiety, which is a valid and reliable measurement. FLCAS contains 33 items and designs 27 items to meet the practical needs of the research. The author conducted a pretest by using SPSS 19.0. The results indicate that the questionnaire is valid.

These 27 items contain fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, overall classroom anxiety and test anxiety. Each item on the scale is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1. strongly disagree", "2. disagree", "3. neither agree nor disagree", "4. agree" to "5. strongly disagree". Generally speaking, the higher the score reflects the higher the anxiety level of the subject; on the contrary, the lower the score, the lower the anxiety level of the subject.

#### 3.3. Data Collection

In June, the author distributed questionnaires on oral English anxiety to 246 high school sophomores from three ordinary high schools in Wuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The requirements and purpose of the study were explained clearly to all the subjects before distributing the questionnaires. 253 questionnaires are distributed to the subjects and 253 questionnaires are collected. The return rate is 100%. Except for 7 invalid copies, 246 copies are used in data analysis. Then all the dates were processed by SPSS.

### 4. Results and discussion

The results of the FLCAS consist of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation. The highest score on this questionnaire is 135 and the lowest is 27. It is obvious that higher scores indicate higher foreign language anxiety. After entering the data of the questionnaire into SPSS19.0 the specific details could be illustrated in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: The Overall Level of English Speaking Anxiety

	No.of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
TLCAS	246	33	132	75.4837	18.62996

The above table reveals that the lowest anxiety scores of the participants in this study are also higher than the theoretical lowest score of 27. The results of the anxiety level of the whole subjects have a final score between 33 and 132, with a mean score being 75.4837 and a stand deviation being 18.62996. The lowest score is higher than 27 points, and the highest score is also lower than the theoretical value of 135 points, indicating that no anxiety or a state of high anxiety exists in the actual

speaking class. The standard deviations of 18.62996 suggest that there would be a significant distinction between different subjects.

To get further information about the subjects' anxiety levels, the author divided the anxiety into the high anxiety level, the middle anxiety level and the low anxiety level based on the value of mean score and the standard deviation. According to the scores presented in Table 4.1, the mean value of the anxiety score is 75.4837, while the standard deviation is 18.62996. Therefore, the high anxiety level refers to the total scores above 94 ( $= 75.4837 + 18.62996$ ), which manifests the subjects have a high level of English speaking anxiety. The low level presents the total scores below 57 ( $= 75.4837 - 18.62996$ ), indicating a low anxiety level of subjects. And the scores of 58 to 93 suggested a middle-level anxiety in the students. They are classified in Table 2 below:

Table 2: The Classification of Participants' Anxiety Level

Anxiety Scale Number	Anxiety Level	Students Number	Percentage	Mean
94 to 132	High Anxiety Level	37	15.04%	105.2432
58 to 93	Middle Anxiety Level	176	71.54%	74.6818
33 to 57	Low Anxiety Level	33	13.41%	46.3939

Table 2 indicates that 37 students with a high level of anxiety, accounting for 15.04% of the total, with an average score of 105.24. And 71.54% of students have anxious feelings at an average level. 15.04% of subjects are highly anxious and 13.41% feel less nervous. As a result, most students are in a state of moderate anxiety, and a small number of students are in a state of extreme or low oral anxiety. 86.58% of students have a higher level of anxiety in the English classroom, while only a minimal number of students have low levels of anxiety in the English classroom. It can be seen that in the English classroom of the students of grade 2 in senior high school, students generally have a high sense of oral anxiety.

In summary, the classroom anxiety of the students of grade two in senior high school in English class is as follows. Due to the particularity of oral output, most of the students of grade two in senior high school have a moderately high level of anxiety in the English class, only a few classmates have a low level of anxiety. Some important reasons for sophomores to have a higher average anxiety level in English class. Such as, most of them get nervous when speaking without preparation. Students are afraid to communicate with classmates and English teachers and afraid to have a negative evaluation in English class. And last factor concerns test anxiety, it may be because the performance in English class will influence the final English test, so they feel anxious.

## 5. Conclusion

By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative studies, this research conducts an investigation among 246 senior high school students in three senior high schools of Wuzhou, aiming to probe into the current situation of students' speaking anxiety in English class. Through the investigation, we can see that most senior high school students have a moderately high anxiety level. Besides, the majority of senior high school suffer from classroom anxiety most and communication apprehension least. However, there are still some limitations in the sampling range and the research results are not representative of the whole country. Based on the limitations of this study, it is necessary to enlarge the sample to improve its universality. Finally, further researchers, by teaching practice in the future, can verify the methods of reducing English speaking anxiety.

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