Original Paper

The Influence Mechanism of Language Anxiety on College English Classroom Engagement and Intervention Strategies

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Abstract

This paper explores the influence mechanism of language anxiety on college English classroom engagement, and through literature review and empirical research, it reveals how language anxiety acts on students' classroom behaviors, cognitive processes and affective states, which in turn affects their classroom engagement. At the same time, this paper proposes targeted intervention strategies, aiming to effectively reduce students' language anxiety and enhance their classroom engagement by creating a safe learning environment, enhancing students' self-confidence, and adopting diversified teaching methods.

Keywords

language anxiety, college English classroom, classroom engagement, intervention strategies

1. Introduction

Under the background of globalization, the importance of English as an international common language is becoming more and more prominent. As an important way to cultivate students' English communicative competence, the quality of teaching in college English courses is directly related to students' future career development and international communication ability. However, in actual teaching, many students show obvious language anxiety, which not only affects their learning effectiveness, but also significantly reduces class participation. Therefore, it is of great significance to explore the mechanism of language anxiety's influence on college English classroom engagement and propose effective intervention strategies to improve the quality of college English teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Classification of Language Anxiety

Language Anxiety (LANGUAGE ANXIETY) refers to the negative emotions such as tension, fear and

uneasiness that learners experience when communicating in the target language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), Language Anxiety can be categorized into three types, namely, Communicative Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Communication Apprehension refers to individuals' fear or uneasiness when communicating with others; Test Anxiety refers to individuals' nervousness and fear when facing a language test; and Fear of Negative Evaluation refers to individuals' fear that others will give negative evaluations to their language performance.

2.2 The Effect of Language Anxiety on Classroom Participation

Numerous studies have shown that language anxiety has a significant effect on students' classroom participation.MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) pointed out that language anxiety inhibits students' classroom speech and reduces their willingness to participate.Young (1991) further found that language anxiety not only affects students' oral expression, but also affects their listening comprehension and reading comprehension. comprehension. In China, some scholars have also conducted in-depth studies on the relationship between language anxiety and classroom participation. For example, Li Jiongying (2004) found through a questionnaire survey that language anxiety is negatively correlated with college students' English classroom participation.

2.3 Current Research on Intervention Strategies

Aiming at the impact of language anxiety on classroom engagement, scholars at home and abroad have proposed a variety of intervention strategies. Among them, measures such as creating a safe learning environment, enhancing students' self-confidence, and adopting diversified teaching methods are widely recognized as effective interventions. For example, Woodrow (2006) suggested that teachers can create a safe learning environment by providing positive feedback and encouraging students to express their opinions, thus reducing students' language anxiety. In China, Wang Yinquan and Wan Yushu (2001) also emphasized the importance of enhancing students' self-confidence, and they believed that teachers can enhance students' self-confidence by designing tasks that are appropriate for students' level, and by giving timely encouragement and affirmation.

3. Research

3.1 Research on the Correlation between Language Anxiety and Classroom Engagement

This study explores in depth the intrinsic connection between students' language anxiety level and classroom engagement in college English classes through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The results of the study show that there is a significant negative correlation between students' language anxiety level and their classroom engagement. Specifically, those students with higher levels of language anxiety showed a significant lack of participation in the classroom interaction sessions. They tended to speak sparsely, were less enthusiastic about participating in classroom discussions, and preferred to remain silent and avoid taking the initiative to express ideas or answer questions. This phenomenon was visually confirmed in classroom observations: students with high levels of language anxiety were often passive in classroom discussions, lacked the willingness to communicate actively,

and even showed an obvious avoidance attitude when the teacher asked them questions by name.

In contrast, students with lower levels of language anxiety showed higher levels of classroom participation. They not only actively participated in classroom discussions and expressed their personal opinions, but also showed greater adaptability and initiative when facing classroom challenges. This difference is not only reflected in the number of speeches and enthusiasm for participation, but also in the students' attitudes toward learning, classroom performance, and post-class feedback.

3.2 In-depth Analysis of the Causes of Language Anxiety

In order to comprehensively and systematically understand the causes of students' language anxiety in college English classes, this study comprehensively utilizes a variety of research methods such as questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews and classroom observation, and combines quantitative and qualitative analyses in an effort to reveal the deep-seated mechanisms behind language anxiety. The results of the study show that the causes of language anxiety are complex and diverse, and the factors are intertwined and interact with each other, mainly including the following aspects.

3.2.1 Limitations of Language Proficiency: The Double Dilemma of Cognitive Load and Fear of Error

Many students reflect that their own limited English proficiency is one of the important causes of language anxiety. Specifically, language proficiency limitations are reflected in the following aspects.

Grammatical errors and accuracy of expression. Students worry about being ridiculed or negatively evaluated by others in the classroom due to grammatical errors (e.g., tense confusion, subject-verb inconsistency, etc.). This concern makes them need to deliberate repeatedly when expressing themselves, which increases the cognitive load.

Inaccurate Pronunciation and Phonological Recognition, Pronunciation problems (e.g., substandard pronunciation of vowels and consonants, improper use of intonation and stress) lead students to worry that others will have difficulty in understanding their expressions, which in turn creates anxiety.

Inappropriate use of vocabulary versus expressive richness, insufficient vocabulary or inappropriate use of vocabulary (e.g., incorrect collocations, confusing word meanings) limited students' expressive abilities, making them appear hesitant to express themselves, or even choosing to avoid communicating altogether.

This excessive worry about language errors puts students under great psychological pressure during language output, forming a vicious circle of "lack of ability - increased anxiety - worsened performance".

3.2.2 Pressure in the Classroom Environment: The Double Squeeze of Teachers' Expectations and Peer Competition

Some students think that the university English classroom environment is relatively serious, and teachers have high expectations and requirements for students' language performance and classroom participation. This sense of pressure is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

Teachers' expectations and evaluation standards. Teachers' high standards and strict requirements make students feel nervous and uneasy in the classroom, worrying that their performance will not be able to

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meet the teacher's standards, and thus they will be criticized or denied.

Peer competition and social pressure, peer competition in the classroom (e.g., group discussions, classroom presentations, etc.) also increases students' anxiety. They worry that they will not perform as well as others and thus lose status or be ostracized among their peers.

Classroom atmosphere and interaction mode, some classroom atmosphere is more depressing and the interaction mode is single, which makes students lack the opportunity and security to express themselves, further aggravating language anxiety.

This classroom environment pressure makes students walk on thin ice in the classroom, making it difficult for them to relax their minds and actively participate in language practice.

3.2.3 Lack of Self-confidence: The Double Effect of Self-efficacy and Psychological Defense

Lack of self-confidence is another important factor leading to language anxiety. Specifically, the lack of self-confidence is reflected in the following aspects:

Low self-efficacy, some students are reluctant to express themselves in the classroom due to lack of confidence in their own language ability, believing that they have no talent or ability in language learning.

Psychological defense mechanisms, in order to protect their self-esteem, students may choose to avoid participating in language activities in order to reduce the chances of exposing their inadequacies. This psychological defense mechanism, although it can alleviate anxiety in the short term, hinders the improvement of language proficiency in the long term.

Influence of Past Failure Experiences, some students may have had failures in language learning (e.g., failing in exams, being ridiculed for their oral expressions, etc.), which have left a deep mark in their minds, making them feel more anxious and uneasy when facing new language learning tasks.

The lack of self-confidence makes students lack of motivation and courage in language learning, and it is difficult for them to overcome the obstacles brought by language anxiety.

3.2.4 Impact of Cultural Differences: The Double Challenge of Intercultural Communication and Identity

For students from different cultural backgrounds, differences in language habits, ways of thinking and values may also lead to language anxiety in the classroom. Specifically, the impact of cultural differences is reflected in the following aspects.

Language habits and expressions, there are differences in language habits and expressions in different cultures, and students may worry that their expressions do not conform to the norms of the English culture and thus be misunderstood or rejected.

Thinking styles and logical structures, there are also differences in thinking styles and logical structures in different cultures, and students may have difficulty adapting to the thinking styles of the English-speaking culture, leading to confusion and uneasiness when expressing themselves.

Values and identity, cultural differences may also trigger students' value conflicts and identity crisis. They may fear that misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences will damage their

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image and identity, and thus choose to avoid using English for expression.

This cultural difference influence makes students face great challenges in cross-cultural communication and increases the level of language anxiety.

4. Mechanisms of Language Anxiety's Influence on College English Classroom Engagement

4.1 The Shaping Role of Language Anxiety on Classroom Behavior Patterns

As a complex psychological state, language anxiety has a significant impact on students' classroom behavior patterns. Specifically, students with high levels of language anxiety tend to show obvious avoidance behavior characteristics in the classroom environment. They tend to remain silent and avoid taking the initiative to speak or participate in classroom interactions, a behavioral pattern that directly contributes to their reduced classroom engagement. Students are concerned about being negatively evaluated by others for inaccurate language expression or immature viewpoints, and this concern prompts them to choose to be risk-averse and reduce the opportunities to expose their language skills in public. This avoidance behavior not only limits their opportunities for language practice, but may also further exacerbate their language anxiety, creating a vicious cycle.

On the contrary, students with lower levels of language anxiety displayed more positive patterns of classroom behavior. They were willing to take the initiative to answer questions, participate in discussions, and actively demonstrate their English proficiency. This positive behavior pattern not only enhanced their classroom participation, but also promoted the practical use and development of their language skills. Through frequent language practice, these students are able to gradually increase their self-confidence and reduce their level of language anxiety, forming a virtuous cycle.

4.2 Interference Effect of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processes

Language anxiety not only affects students' classroom behavior, but also has a significant interference effect on their cognitive processes. Specifically, students with high language anxiety levels often face problems such as uneven distribution of attention and memory extraction difficulties in classroom learning. When they feel nervous and uneasy in the classroom, their attention tends to be difficult to focus on the content, but is more distracted by evaluations of their own performance and others. This distraction not only reduces students' learning efficiency, but may also lead to deviations or omissions in their understanding of the content.

In addition, language anxiety may also affect students' memory extraction process. In a state of high anxiety, students may have difficulty effectively recalling previously learned knowledge or skills, which further exacerbates their learning difficulties. This cognitive interference effect not only limits students' language learning effectiveness, but may also negatively affect their long-term language proficiency development.

4.3 The Negative Effects of Language Anxiety on Affective States and Regulatory Mechanisms

Language anxiety has a significant negative impact on students' affective state. Specifically, students with high language anxiety levels tend to feel negative emotions such as frustration, low self-esteem

and anxiety. These negative emotions not only reduce their interest and motivation in learning, but also may have adverse effects on their physical and mental health. Being in this negative emotional state for a long time, students may gradually lose their confidence and motivation in language learning, leading to a decline in learning outcomes.

On the contrary, when students are in low language anxiety levels, they tend to feel positive affective states such as self-confidence, pleasure and satisfaction. These positive affective states not only enhance students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning, but also help them to better cope with learning challenges and pressures. Through the positive emotion regulation mechanism, students are able to focus more on the learning content and improve their learning efficiency and effectiveness.

5. Intervention Strategies

5.1 Create a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment and Build a Strong Psychological Defense

In order to effectively reduce students' language anxiety, teachers need to build a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment, with the following specific strategies.

Construct immediate feedback and encouragement mechanisms. Teachers should establish a set of immediate, specific and personalized feedback systems to give students positive evaluations on their classroom speeches, homework completion and participation. For example, in classroom discussions, teachers can praise students' creative ideas or progress immediately, and enhance students' self-confidence and sense of belonging through specific feedback (e.g., "Your viewpoints provide new perspectives for the discussion" or "Pronunciation has improved significantly") to alleviate the anxiety caused by the fear of negative evaluations. Reduce anxiety about negative comments.

Teachers should advocate the concept of "trial and error is growth" and encourage students to freely express their views by setting up classroom activities such as "viewpoint incubators" and "error analysis corners". The students should be encouraged to express their views freely by setting up classroom activities such as "viewpoint incubator" and "error analysis corner". For example, in the incubator, students can submit ideas anonymously, and the teacher guides the class to discuss their feasibility, avoiding direct evaluation of right and wrong; in the error analysis corner, the teacher transforms typical errors into learning resources, and discusses improvement methods with students, helping students to regard making mistakes as a learning process. In the "Error Analysis Corner", the teacher turns typical errors into learning resources and discusses with students ways to improve them, thus helping students to regard making mistakes as part of the learning process and reducing language anxiety.

Establishing an emotionally connected teacher-student relationship: Teachers should take the initiative to understand students' needs and psychological status through regular "one-on-one" communication, personalized learning portfolios and emotional support programs. For example, teachers can arrange a fixed time each week to have non-academic conversations with students, record their learning progress and emotional fluctuations, and provide customized advice for individual differences. Through this

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kind of in-depth interaction, students can feel respected and understood, thus reducing the anxiety caused by the estrangement of the teacher-student relationship.

5.2 Implement Self-confidence Enhancement Programs to Stimulate Inner Potentials

Enhancing students' self-confidence is the core of reducing language anxiety and improving learning effectiveness, and the specific strategies are as follows.

Design a step-by-step task challenge system. Teachers should design easy-to-difficult, progressive learning tasks according to students' actual level and ability differences. For example, in the teaching of English writing, teachers can divide the tasks into three stages, namely "basic expression", "argumentation" and "creative writing", and set specific objectives and evaluation standards for each stage. The teacher can divide the task into three stages. After completing the tasks in the previous stage, students can independently choose the challenges in the next stage, which will enhance their self-efficacy and self-confidence by breaking through the comfort zone step by step.

To build a platform for multiple incentives and achievement demonstration, teachers should combine material rewards with spiritual incentives and set up incentives such as "Progress Ladder" and "Creative Workshop". For example, in the "Progress Ladder", students can earn badges or points for each learning goal, which can be exchanged for personalized rewards (e.g., lunch with teachers, choice of classroom activity themes); in the "Creative Workshop", teachers regularly display students' excellent works and invite students to share their creations. In the "Creative Workshop", teachers regularly display students' outstanding works and invite them to share their experiences, stimulating students' intrinsic motivation through public recognition and peer learning.

Create immersive success scenarios. Teachers should simulate real-life scenarios and interdisciplinary projects to provide students with a variety of opportunities for success. For example, in the International Cultural Festival, students work in teams to plan and execute a cultural presentation covering language, art, technology, and other areas. In the process, students need to use English to communicate across cultures, coordinate resources and solve problems, and ultimately gain a sense of achievement through the presentation of results, forming a positive self-perception and emotional experience.

5.3 Implementing Diversified Teaching Methods to Improve Participation and Effectiveness

Adopting diversified teaching methods is the key to reducing language anxiety and improving classroom participation and learning effects. To deepen the group cooperative learning mode, teachers should dynamically group students according to their personality traits, ability levels and interests, and design open and challenging cooperative tasks. For example, in the "Global Issues Debate", teachers can divide students into positive and negative groups, and require each group to complete data collection, argument refinement and debate strategy development through collaboration. In this process, teachers need to guide students to carry out the role of division of labor (such as leader, recorder, spokesperson), and through the "peer assessment" mechanism to promote reflection and improvement, so as to enhance students' teamwork and critical thinking.

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Innovative role-playing and situational simulation teaching, teachers should combine virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies to create highly immersive language practice scenarios. For example, in "Business Negotiation Simulation", students can enter the virtual conference room through VR equipment and communicate with "clients" from different cultural backgrounds in real time. Teachers need to design role scripts and task objectives in advance, and guide students to review and analyze them after the simulation, so as to improve their language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills.

Integrating multimedia and interdisciplinary resources, teachers should make full use of multimedia tools and interdisciplinary resources to build an integrated learning model of "Language + X". For example, in the "English + Science and Technology" course, teachers can combine popular science videos, online experimental platforms and other resources to guide students to explore cutting-edge science and technology topics in English; in the "English + Art" course, teachers can organize students to create poems, paintings or musical works in English and use social media to communicate with students. In the "English + Art" course, teachers can organize students to create poems, paintings or musical works in English and communicate them cross-culturally through social media. Through this kind of interdisciplinary integration, students can not only improve their language skills, but also cultivate creative thinking and global vision.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals the mechanism of language anxiety's influence on college English classroom engagement through empirical analysis and proposes targeted intervention strategies. The findings show that language anxiety affects students' classroom engagement through three paths: cognitive load, affective filtering and behavioral inhibition, while intervention strategies such as creating a safe learning environment, enhancing students' self-confidence and adopting diversified teaching methods can effectively reduce the level of students' language anxiety and improve their classroom engagement. These findings provide useful references and insights for university English teachers, helping them to better understand and cope with students' language anxiety and improve teaching effectiveness and students' learning quality.

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