

科技大學學生英文學習焦慮之研究

English as a Foreign Language Learning Anxiety among Technical University Students

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摘要

本研究的目的是在於探討台灣科技大學不同性別、不同學系的學生在英文學習上所產生的焦慮。研究樣本以隨機抽樣方式選出一所位於台灣的科技大學之 245 名學生。資料的蒐集採用一份「英文學習焦慮問卷」的填答。研究結果顯示：害怕開口說英語，擔心考試結果，缺乏學習動機和興趣，和老師個人的因素，皆是導致學生產生學習焦慮的原因。此外，研究結果顯示：男生的英文學習焦慮較女性強烈，非應外系學生的英文學習焦慮較應外系的學生強烈。本研究建議，英文老師應儘量營造輕鬆的學習情境並減少以考試為導向的教學方式。

關鍵字：英語學習焦慮、性別、主修、科技大學學生

Abstract

This study aims to explore the gender differences in the majors' of students who experienced English language learning anxiety at a University of Technology in Taiwan. The participants were 245 randomly selected students at this university in Taiwan. A questionnaire about English language learning anxiety was adopted as data collection. The results show that students attributed the cause of anxiety to the fear of speaking, the fear of exam consequences, a lack of both learning motivation and self-confidence, as well as the teacher's influence. Also, the finding of this study indicates that male students have stronger feelings of English learning anxiety than female students, and non-English majors have stronger feelings of English learning anxiety than English majors. The findings of this study suggest that EFL teachers in Taiwan should strive towards making classrooms more relaxing with a less formal atmosphere, and move away from the exam paradigm.

Key words: EFL learning anxiety, gender, majors, the technical university students



I. Introduction

A topic of increasing research attention in the study of foreign and second language learning is the role of language anxiety. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) define language anxiety as “the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient” (p.5). Aida (1994) and Young (1999) both stated that language anxiety in second and foreign language learning is relevant to the psychological tension that a language learner experiences in completing a learning task and situation. Some of the obvious symptoms include nervousness, tension, apprehension, introversion, as well as others. There is no denying that learning a second or foreign language in the classroom is not always an anxiety-free learning situation and environment for language learners. Some research results have shown that language anxiety has a great impact on the communication strategies of learners participating in a class. For example, Ely (1986) mentions that anxious learners are not prone to taking risks in the language class. Besides this, some researchers also state that anxious learners generally speak, write, and participate less in the language classroom than relaxed students (Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1999). According to the above findings, it is obvious that language learning anxiety plays an important role in language learning outcomes. To our best knowledge, there have not been many studies on the EFL learning anxiety of Taiwanese learners at universities of technology and technical institutes. Therefore, the present study aims to expand this body of research by seeking to more specifically identify whether or not English language learning is significantly more apparent in males and females as well as the majors of students who experienced English language learning anxiety at a University of Technology in Taiwan. Specifically, the following questions are addressed:

1. What are the top three English learning anxieties most frequently faced by male and female students ?
2. What are the top three English learning anxieties most frequently faced by English-majoring and non-English-majoring students?
3. Are there gender differences in their perceptions of English language learning anxiety?
4. Are there significant differences between English-majoring and non-English-majoring students in their perceptions of English language learning anxiety?

II. Literature Review

1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Research has examined various variables of foreign language learning anxiety. In general, these variables are divided into two main categories: situational variables and learners’ variables. Situational variables include, for instance, course contents, course level, course activities, teacher behavior and attitudes, and social interaction among peer group learners (Jackson, 2002; Radnofsky, 2001). Learners’



variables include, for example, gender, personality, attitude, motivation, belief, culture, ability, and age (Brown, Robson, & Rosenkjar, 2001; Campbell, 1999; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). These above variables interact in complicated ways that cause learning anxiety for many students. Recently, the identification of foreign learning classroom anxiety has attracted a lot of attention from researchers. Learners may show different anxiety-related behaviors and reactions unique to the foreign language classroom setting, such as trying to avoid difficult linguistic structures, getting nervous during learning activities, an unwillingness to volunteer answers and participate in oral activities, coming unprepared to class, avoiding speaking in the foreign language in class, being less willing to communicate and express themselves compared to more relaxed learners, etc. (MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre, et al., 1997).

In terms of the causes of language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) theorized that foreign language anxiety in the classroom can be attributed to the three main performance anxieties: communication apprehension, social evaluation, and test anxiety. Besides this, Young (1991) identifies six potential interrelated sources of language anxiety which may be attributed to the foreign language classroom environment: personal and interpersonal anxieties, which could be related to the fear of the real or anticipated act of speaking; learner beliefs as to language learning; teacher beliefs about language instruction; interaction between instructor and learners, classroom procedures and language exams. Therefore, the influence of anxiety on the language learning process and product makes the identification of language anxiety a significant component of foreign language research to language learners. Because language anxiety is complicated and multidimensional, it manifests itself differently from person to person.

III. Method

1. Participants

The participants were 245 randomly selected students at a University of Technology in Taiwan. All were freshmen enrolled in a general English course, comprising 132 non-English majoring students and 113 English majoring students. Among these participants, there were 131 males and 114 females. The amount of exposure to English outside of the classroom was not assessed; however, English was a required course on the university's entrance exam, and these participants had typically studied English in junior and senior high school for a total of six years.

2. Instrument

The questionnaire adopted in this study consists of 31 items on the Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neutral), 2 (disagree), to 1 (strongly disagree) to show the degree of their agreement to each statement. This questionnaire was adapted from Horwitz's et al (1986) which has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .94. In addition, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese.

3. Data Collection and Analysis



All participants completed the questionnaire during class time midway through the first semester. The survey questionnaires took around 15 minutes to complete. The students were informed that the survey would have no effect on their grades. The data were analyzed to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics, the results of which are reported below.

IV. Results

Descriptive statistics showed that the participants demonstrated a wide range of average levels, ranging from 1.08 to 4.67. The overall mean was 3.54 (SD=1.47), which indicated an overall moderate rating of anxiety levels. The top three anxiety statements in the male group are the following: “I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class (M=4.67, SD=1.33)”; “ I often do not feel like attending English class(M=4.32, SD=1.52)”; “In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know (M=4.23 SD=1.47)” (See Table 1). The top three anxiety statements in the female group are the following: “I keep thinking that the other students are better in English than I am” (M=4.43, SD=1.07); “I worry about the consequences of failing English” (M=4.32, SD=.94); “I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English (M=4.11, SD=1.06)” (See Table 2).

Table 1. The top-three anxiety statements in the male group

Anxiety statements	M(SD)	Rank
27. I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class	4.67(1.33)	1
17. I often do not feel like attending English class	4.32(1.52)	2
12. In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know	4.23(1.47)	3

Table 2. The top-three anxiety statements in the female group

Anxiety statements	M(SD)	Rank
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better in English than I am	4.43(1.07)	1
10. I worry about the consequences of failing English	4.32(0.94)	2
30. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English	4.11(1.06)	3

The top three anxiety statements in the English-majoring group, which all had mean value exceeding 3: ” I worry about the consequences of failing English” (M=3.29, SD=1.55); “ I get nervous when I don’t understand what the English teacher says (M=3.27, SD=1.47)”; “I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions for which I have not prepared (M=3.11, SD=.90)” (See Table 3).The top three anxiety statements in the non-English-majoring group, which all had mean value exceeding 4: “I feel more tense



and nervous in my English class than in the other classes ($M=4.54$, $SD=1.46$); “I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class ($M=4.32$, $SD=1.03$)”; “ I worry about the consequences of failing English ($M=4.12$, $SD=.86$)” (See Table 4).

Table 3. The top-three anxiety statements in the English-majoring group

Anxiety statements	M(SD)	Rank
10. I worry about the consequences of failing English	3.29(1.55)	1
4. I get nervous when I don't understand what the English teacher say	3.27(1.47)	2
32. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions for which I have not prepared	3.11(0.90)	3

Table 4. The top-three anxiety statements in the non-English-majoring group

Anxiety statements	M(SD)	Rank
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in the other classes	4.54(1.46)	1
27. I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class	4.32(1.03)	2
10. I worry about the consequences of failing English	4.12(0.86)	3

An independent t-test was used to explore whether the perceptions of English learning anxiety differed greatly between the males and females due to $t(243)=-0.912$, $p=.033$ with alpha set as .05. On the average, male students ($M=4.00$, $SD=.64$) had higher English learning anxieties than female students ($M=3.47$, $SD=.91$) based on statistical analysis. Also, an independent t-test was used to explore whether there were differences between English-majoring and non-English-majoring students in their perceptions of English language learning anxiety and the results showed there was a significant difference between English-majoring and non- English-majoring students in terms of their English learning anxieties due to $t(243)=2.153$, $p=.026$ with alpha set as .05. On the average, non- English-majoring students ($M=4.12$, $SD=.87$) had higher English learning anxieties than English-majoring students ($M=3.36$, $SD=.92$) based on the statistical analysis.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

Research findings in this study indicates that English learning anxieties are most often associated with the output and processing (in the stage of mental planning) stages of the learning process and the students attributed the causes of anxiety to the fear of speaking, the fear of exam consequences, a lack of



learning motivation, attitude, belief, and self-confidence, the teacher, and the instructional style. As mentioned above, these types of anxiety contribute to making formal foreign language learning a particularly unpleasant experience for many language learners. To deal with these sources of anxiety, situational intervention involving classroom activities, class atmosphere, and teacher behavior have been improved. Learning activities are related to the learners on a personal level and raise the learner's feeling of confidence by provoking less anxiety and causing less-pressure and creating more pleasant environment and atmosphere. Also, teachers should modify their lesson plans and teaching methods if anxiety appears to be a problem in their class. Besides this, there are various ways teachers can use to help reduce language anxiety in the classroom in practice. First, they can adopt activities that cause lower levels of anxiety (such as peer group work, pair work, role-play and so on) and gradually introduce activity types that may cause higher levels of anxiety (such as speech giving, speaking, and so on). In doing so, students can have more positive learning motivation and confidence in terms of learning English. Also, teachers could provide encouragement to help the students reduce learning anxiety in the classroom setting. More cooperative learning and alternative assessment methods such as self-evaluation and peer-evaluation rather than competitive activities might be more appropriate in these classroom settings. A learner-centered environment and teacher-student interaction can enhance students' language learning strategies and skills, and also facilitate effective instruction. These methods would give the students more confidence and hence reduce their anxieties in the process of learning the language.

The findings of this study show that male students have stronger feelings of anxiety than female students when learning English, and this result is consistent with Zhang's (2001) finding. The findings of this study also show that non-English-major students have stronger feelings of learning English anxiety than English-majoring students. It is possible that non-English-majoring students lack general English proficiencies and language learning motivation confidence compared to English-majoring students in the class. In terms of research limitation, it should be noted that the results of this study are based on questionnaire data rather than a direct observation of the students' and teacher's behavior in the classroom. Thus, we do not state that the English learning anxiety which the respondents attributed to the teachers was actually caused by what the teachers did or did not do in a specific learning situation.

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Appendix A: 英文學習焦慮問卷

問題	非常不同意	不同意	普通	同意	非常同意
	1	2	3	4	5
1.當我說英語時，我不確定自己所說的是否正確。	1	2	3	4	5
2.我不擔心在語言課程中犯錯。	1	2	3	4	5
3.當我知道在課堂上我即將被點名用英語回答問題時，我感到顫抖。	1	2	3	4	5
4.當聽不懂老師所說的英文時，我很害怕。	1	2	3	4	5
5.多修一些英文課程並不會讓我感到厭煩。	1	2	3	4	5
6.上英文課時，我的思緒常會遠飄，不夠專心。	1	2	3	4	5
7.我認為其他同學在英文課的表現比我好。	1	2	3	4	5
8.英文考試對我來說，輕鬆平常沒有壓力。	1	2	3	4	5
9.課堂上，在沒心理準備的情形下，被指定說英文，我會感到很驚慌。	1	2	3	4	5
10.我擔心英文會被當掉。	1	2	3	4	5
11.我不懂為甚麼有些人上英文課會覺得不悅。	1	2	3	4	5
12.上英文課，我會緊張到忘了原本知道的東西。	1	2	3	4	5
13.在英文課中，我羞於主動回答問題。	1	2	3	4	5
14.我可以從容的與外國人交談。	1	2	3	4	5
15.當我不懂老師的指正時，我感到懊惱。	1	2	3	4	5
16.即使我在語言課程中準備周全，我仍感到焦慮、緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
17.我常覺得不想上英文課。	1	2	3	4	5
18.當我在英文課的課堂上發言時，我感到有自信。	1	2	3	4	5
19.我害怕被英文老師糾正錯誤。	1	2	3	4	5
20.當我即將被點名發言時，我會忐忑不安。	1	2	3	4	5
21.愈學習英文愈感到困惑。	1	2	3	4	5
22.準備英文課程並不會令我感到有壓力。	1	2	3	4	5
23.我總覺得其他同學的英文說得比我好。	1	2	3	4	5
24.當我在其他同學面前說英文時，我感到害羞。	1	2	3	4	5
25.我會擔心趕不上其他同學的程度。	1	2	3	4	5
26.我覺得上英文課，比其他課程更緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
27.當我在英文課中發言時，我感到很困惑緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
28.學習英文的文法規則，讓我壓力很大。	1	2	3	4	5
29.當我說英文時，我擔心其他同學會取笑我。	1	2	3	4	5
30.當我跟老外交談時，我通常覺得很自在。	1	2	3	4	5
31.當英文老師問我問題，而我尚未準備好時，我感到很緊張。	1	2	3	4	5

