The Analysis of the Undergraduates' English Classroom Anxiety Based on FLCAS

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Abstract—**Language anxiety is assumed to be the most pervasive hindrance in second/foreign language learning. This paper explores the undergraduates' English classroom anxiety, the relationship between English classroom anxiety and final examination achievements, individual differences in respect of English classroom anxiety and the causes of anxiety.**

Keywords—*English classroom anxiety; undergraduates; FLCAS*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, second (foreign) language acquisition has gradually become the focus of attention and many researchers hold the similar opinions on the relationship between affective variables and foreign language learning (Young 1992; Gardner 1985; Steinberg & Horwitz 1986). Anxiety is considered to be one of the most important affective variables and language anxiety is a kind of complicated mental phenomenon specific to language learning.

Most studies have disclosed negative effects of language anxiety on speaking, reading, speaking and writing (Philips, 1992; Saito, Garza & Horwitz, 1999; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999). In late 1980s, Horwitz et al. (1986) put forward the definition of foreign language anxiety and designed the FLCAS (foreign language classroom anxiety scale).

The present study chooses the undergraduates as subjects whose classroom anxiety is compared within the framework of FLCAS' theoretical model.

II. FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY SCALE

Horwitz (1986) points out that research in the relationship of anxiety to achievement in a language has been hampered by the absence of a validated measure of anxiety specific to language learning. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been developed to provide investigators with a standard instrument for this purpose.

Horwitz (1986) did a preliminary test for the reliability and validity of this scale and found that the thirty-three items in the FLCAS have significant part-whole correlation with the total scale.

Ever since Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), there has been a considerable amount of research done by scholars from different countries of the world (Aida 1994; Ganschow & Sparks 1996).

III. FINDINGS OF THE FLCAS

A. Levels of Anxiety

For the purpose of knowing the general situation of the undergraduates' English classroom anxiety, some analyses are conducted. It is easy to find that most students experience language anxiety. Among communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and general anxiety, communication apprehension is more inclined to cause the students' anxiety. According to some researchers like Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), anxiety may decrease with increased experience and proficiency.

B. Correlation of English Classroom Anxiety and Its Four Aspects

In order to find the relationship between the students' English classroom anxiety and its four aspects (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and general anxiety), some analyses are made. It turns out that the students' English classroom anxiety is positively related to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and general anxiety.

C. Correlation of English Classroom Anxiety and Achievements in Final Examination

In the following section, the relationship between the students' English classroom anxiety and their achievements in final English examination is investigated, so as to see what extent anxiety factors reflect language proficiency. The result shows that the students' English classroom anxiety is significantly correlated with their final examination achievements in a negative manner according to correlation coefficient.

D. Gender Difference in English Classroom Anxiety

Is there gender difference in respect of English classroom anxiety? The results partly correspond with some previous studies (Horwitz && Young 1991; Saito, Garza & Horwitz

1999; Bailey & Onwuegbuzie 1998; Hao Mei & Hao Ruoping 2001), which find females perceived higher level of anxiety than males or there was no significant difference between males and females in their language anxiety. In communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, there is no significant difference between male and female students. But in general anxiety, some male students experience higher anxiety than the females in this study.

E. Regional Difference in English Classroom Anxiety

The results indicate that there is no significant difference in English classroom anxiety in respect to regional difference. In communication apprehension, some students from countryside experience higher anxiety than the ones from city. Perhaps this is because of their different economic backgrounds and learning experiences. In fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and general anxiety, there is no significant difference between the students from countryside and cities.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE INTERVIEWS

Besides FLCAS questionnaire, interviews are designed to make further illustration and supplement. During the interviews, all the participants reported their English-learning experiences and comments on their English class.

A. Existence of English Classroom Anxiety

According to the interviewees' answers, it is found that every participant is more or less interfered with English classroom anxiety. Some students worry about being asked to answer a question, giving a presentation in front of other classmates and being unable to understand what the teacher said; some are concerned about being laughed at by classmates, making some silly questions; some feel worried in learning grammar rules, new words, long and difficult sentences; some are afraid of being tested.

B. Factors Contributing to English Classroom Anxiety

As far as this study is concerned, there are several main factors leading to English classroom anxiety: teacher-student interaction, teaching materials and tests. As to teacher-student interaction, the majority of the participants mention that they would be extremely nervous and anxious if they are required to answer questions without preparation. Some of them do not like reading aloud the text in class for fear that the others might laugh at their improper tones and pronunciations. Some interviewees are afraid of being called on to speak in front of the whole class as in this way they would be the focus of attention and their errors would be exposed. In respect to teaching materials, the majority of interviewees complained that their English textbooks contain too many new words and they do not have enough time to learn all these words by heart. Some participants said the existence of long and difficult sentences depressed them. In addition, some interviewees reported that some passages relate to professional fields and many new technical terms. When it comes to tests, every participant acknowledged they are afraid of being tested and especially worried about the consequence of being failed in the final exam.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions for pedagogical practice are put forward. To help students reduce foreign language anxiety, teachers may adopt some measures to understand students' anxiety such as face-to-face communication with students in a relaxing atmosphere, writing E-mail, chatting online and taking part in games or sports or amusements, which will narrow the gap and can create a comfortable atmosphere in class or out of class. In teacher-students interaction, proper and effective feedback will become great motive to students and stimulate their interest in learning. Compared to competitive or individualistic situations, cooperative learning situations bring less anxiety and promote greater achievement motivation. Learners in pairs and groups may feel no anxiety but strongly feel that they belong to the learning community. During instruction in the ESL classroom, it is impractical to use target language all the time. Classroom expressions should be carefully chosen and the mother tongue may be used to a certain extent, especially for difficult points and interesting topics. In order to increase students' interest in language learning, teachers are expected to touch upon not only the course contents, also such related knowledge as western culture, history, current affairs or learning method.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper explores the undergraduates' English classroom anxiety, the relationship between English classroom anxiety and final examination achievements, individual differences in respect of English classroom anxiety and the causes of anxiety. Through this study, it is hoped to offer some useful suggestions for English teaching.

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