

Analysis of Phenotypic Factors and Research on Countermeasures of Chinese Secondary School Students' Anxiety in Oral Learning

Shantong Liu^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of English, Qingdao City College, Qingdao, Shandong Province, 266000, China*
a. garci109@nwfsc.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In an environment where English is becoming a second language for most people, studying English has become a major subject for Chinese secondary school students. However, factors such as students' own communication abilities and the external teaching environment contribute to spoken English being a weakness for most learners. This issue is particularly evident and widespread among secondary school students. The purpose of this study is to further explore the triggering factors behind this phenomenon and to uncover teachers' strategies to alleviate Chinese secondary school students' speaking anxiety. The study will employ semi-structured interviews with current secondary school students and analyze the data using thematic analysis. The findings aim to demonstrate that Chinese secondary school students' speaking anxiety is influenced by factors such as their personalities and the external environment. Teachers can effectively alleviate students' speaking anxiety by encouraging teaching, diversified teaching modes, and classroom interaction. The study's findings may be effective in alleviating the speaking anxiety of secondary school students and assisting teachers in teaching speaking. The significance of this study lies in identifying the causes of speaking anxiety among Chinese secondary school students and offering strategies to help alleviate this issue. It also provides valuable insights for secondary school English teachers in improving their speaking instruction and reducing anxiety. Furthermore, the study aims to raise awareness within the education community about the prevalence of speaking anxiety among students.

Keywords: Oral Anxiety, Oral Teaching Strategies, Representational Factor Analysis, Secondary School Students' Oral Learning.

1. Introduction

With the advancement of globalization, the demand for English-speaking talents within the country is steadily increasing. As a result, the development of all aspects of English proficiency, particularly speaking skills, has become crucial for Chinese secondary school students. Cross-cultural communication not only broadens their horizons but also facilitates their integration into the global environment, enhancing their ability to engage in international contexts. Oral language is an indispensable competence for today's internationalization. It has a significant influence on students' future. For example, by playing a role in diversifying career choices and operating in cross-cultural

assignments. According to research data, junior high school students tend to prioritize the development of 'test-taking' skills, often at the expense of improving their speaking abilities. This neglect contributes to negative emotions, such as speaking anxiety, during English listening and speaking classes [1]. Existing research says that anxiety hurts verbal interaction [2]. Among the four key areas of English—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is the weakest for Chinese secondary school students. Over half of these students experience anxiety when speaking English. This phenomenon also leads to the poor comprehensive application of English and practical skills of some secondary school students, which in the long run will affect their motivation to learn English and their future career development. The theme of this research is to explore the causes and countermeasures for Chinese secondary school students' anxiety. This study will explore the manifestations, triggers, and countermeasures of anxiety in secondary school students' speaking learning. The theme of the research is to explore the reasons and countermeasures for Chinese secondary school students' 'speaking anxiety'. The study will explore the manifestations, triggers, and countermeasures of anxiety in secondary school students' speaking learning. The study will use semi-structured interviews with current secondary school students. This study was conducted with secondary school students with speaking anxiety. By summarizing and analyzing the students' responses through thematic analysis, we will explore the root causes of anxiety and coping strategies of Chinese secondary school students in speaking learning to help more secondary school students alleviate their speaking anxiety effectively. In addition, this phenomenon should be taken seriously by the education public, and secondary school English teachers should also focus more on teaching students to speak and so on.

2. Literature Review

Early in the 1970s, researchers started looking at linguistic anxiety. Anxiety is one of the primary affective elements impacting individual second language learners, according to Brown's proposal regarding the link between affective components and successful second language learning. The term "foreign language anxiety" was initially used by Horvitz et al. [2] to describe the learner's distinct and complicated self-consciousness, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors connected to learning a foreign language in the classroom because of the process' distinctiveness. Because of the unique nature of the foreign language learning process, it is characterized as "the learner's unique and complex self-consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to foreign language learning in the classroom." [3]. Existing research indicates that anxiety negatively impacts verbal interaction [2]. It hinders students' ability to express themselves clearly, often leading to hesitations or avoidance of speaking altogether. This can create a barrier to language acquisition and limit opportunities for meaningful communication. The mother tongue, as the language initially learned by an individual, is acquired early and with high proficiency and is generally used as the primary language of communication. Still, when communicating cross-culturally, individuals also use a second language acquired late and with low proficiency. The quality of verbal interactions is often affected by negative emotions, such as anxiety [2]. The data show that there is currently a large difference in the English proficiency of secondary school students in China. Most students' basic language skills are relatively weak, and the limited vocabulary, as well as the knowledge base that students possess, makes it easy for speaking skills to be shortchanged because of anxiety. Most students' English learning primarily focuses on skills such as listening, reading, grammar, and so on, while teachers often overlook the development of students' oral communication abilities. As a result, speaking has become a noticeable weakness across all levels of schooling [4]. Despite students' proficiency in other areas of language learning, the fear of making mistakes or being judged often inhibits their willingness to engage in spoken communication, further exacerbating this issue. For foreign language learners, speaking is considered to be the most anxiety-provoking of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and

writing [5]. This study uses thematic analysis in semi-structured interviews to summarize and generalize the answers to the corresponding questions based on the online interview data. This study aims to further explore the factors behind secondary school students' speaking anxiety and to seek effective coping strategies. The researcher will conduct an in-depth study by interviewing three current students from different secondary schools online. The research value of this paper is mainly embodied in the fact that it can draw the causes of Chinese secondary school students speaking anxiety to help them alleviate this phenomenon and provide a good idea for secondary school English teachers' teaching of speaking to alleviate this phenomenon, to draw the attention of the educated public to the phenomenon of students' speaking anxiety, and so on.

3. Method

The interview for this study was conducted online by a single researcher on the morning of August 11, 2024. Three secondary school students identified as having high levels of speaking anxiety participated as respondents in the interview. The secondary school is a public school with an enrolment of over 3,000. The interview outline was used to ask the following main questions: i. What factors trigger your speaking anxiety? ii. What are the manifestations of anxiety when you are anxious in speaking studies? iii. What is the most significant difficulty in speaking learning? iv. What do teachers do to help you with anxiety when you are anxious in oral learning? (Three thousand words of interview data have been collected)

4. Data Collection

The following interview data is available to the general public as a reference for this interview. INTERVIEWER: 'May I ask what tends to happen when you feel anxious in your daily speaking studies?' Secondary School Student A: 'There are quite a lot of relatively unnatural and embarrassing behaviours, like not wanting to participate or acting out more and talking less often, and in the worst cases, even to the point of rejecting English as a subject.' Secondly, when the interviewer asked about the teachers' behaviour when they were feeling anxious, secondary school student C responded in the following way: 'Teachers sometimes find it difficult to detect their anxiety and assume that it is too difficult. When the teacher notices this, he/she will usually talk to you to calm you down and know your specific difficulty in treating the problem

5. Results and Discussion

During the course of the interviews, the researcher concluded that different students behaved in much the same way when dealing with speaking anxiety. Firstly, physiological responses such as sweating, speech difficulties, and stammering are commonly observed. English language learning is closely tied to learners' affective factors, with speaking anxiety being recognized as one of the key obstacles to enhancing English language learning performance [6]. Secondly, psychologically, there is excessive self-doubt, rejection of oral practice, and a chronic fear of making mistakes, and students' oral anxiety is a direct response to the need to enhance the relevance of school teachers' oral teaching. In the interviews, the researcher found that secondary school students often do not take the initiative to seek help from teachers or peers when experiencing speaking anxiety. Therefore, teachers should provide more robust guidance and motivation to support students in developing their oral communication skills. From a teacher's perspective, there are a variety of factors that contribute to students' speaking anxiety. For starters, students tend to be skeptical about their language ability and worry about expressing themselves inaccurately, thus affecting others' evaluations of them. It has been shown that student factors are also one of the critical causes of speaking anxiety [7]. This was also reflected in the interviews. INTERVIEWER: 'And what is it more because of in your daily public speaking

practice that you are afraid to speak boldly?’ Secondary School Student B: ‘Well, I sometimes don't want to participate because I don't have a strong will, mainly because I am too introverted’ Secondary School Student C: ‘Sometimes I get carried away, but more often than not it's because I'm not so adept at what I do or I think about hesitating too much. Secondly, there is the pressure of the classroom environment, where students tend to feel nervous in the presence of their peers and teachers. In addition, the pressure of exams and assessments can increase anxiety, as speaking skills often have a direct impact on academic performance. The data shows that speaking anxiety may negatively contribute to the overall students' speaking performance accomplishment [8]. Moreover, English learning at the secondary school level is predominantly exam-oriented, resulting in a lack of focus on oral training and an insufficient environment for practicing speaking skills. Additionally, students at this stage often face personal challenges, such as limited vocabulary and low self-confidence, which further contribute to their speaking anxiety. The researcher also elicited the question of the most significant difficulty in secondary school students oral English learning, and the three students consistently reported that the most incredible difficulty in secondary school students' oral learning was usually a lack of self-confidence, especially in terms of fluency and accuracy of expression. In addition, students may have fewer opportunities for authentic speaking practice, and their ability to adapt to different language environments needs to be improved. Finally, the researcher also derived effective ways for teachers to effectively guide secondary school students to alleviate their speaking anxiety through interview questions.

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to help secondary school students debug and alleviate the anxiety that occurs in oral language learning. First of all, create a relaxed, open, and inclusive classroom environment, make clear the necessity of oral practice, design more situational practice activities that can help to improve oral skills, stimulate students' interest, encourage students to overcome the inner obstacle of “not daring to speak,” and listen more, speak more and practice more, to make progress practically. An assessment and reward mechanism for online or extracurricular speaking practice should be established, utilizing extrinsic motivation (such as rewards and assessments) to encourage students to engage in regular speaking practice. By fostering the development and stabilization of this system, it can effectively promote the formation of students' positive habits of actively learning and improving their speaking skills [9]. Encouraging students to talk actively rather than punishing mistakes. Using multimodal teaching can effectively reduce speaking anxiety [10]. Secondly, interesting learning methods such as role-playing and simulated dialogue allow students to practice speaking in a relaxed atmosphere. Studies indicate that teachers should make full use of live classrooms to promote students' participation in classroom responding, alleviating speaking anxiety, and leveraging peer effects [11]. In addition, teachers also teach tips to cope with anxiety, such as deep breathing and positive self-suggestion, to help students enhance their self-confidence. By gradually increasing the difficulty of the exercises, students can enhance their sense of accomplishment and hence reduce anxiety.

During the interviews, the researcher discovered that the factors influencing Chinese secondary school students' speaking anxiety are complex and varied. These include parental pressure, peer comparisons, and individual personality traits, all of which contribute to the diverse experiences of speaking anxiety among students. Some studies have suggested that linguistic factors are demonstrated to be dominant in learners' oral performance [12]. English anxiety plays a dominant role in English learning [13]. As Secondary School Student A said in the interview, he wished that parents and teachers could give them more encouragement and hope that time and effort would make everyone's speaking situation better. Therefore, teachers and guardians should consider various factors when they notice students speaking anxiety, and caring for students' mental health will also promote the frequency of their boldness in speaking.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are as follows: firstly, Chinese secondary school students' anxiety in oral learning is manifested by their rejection of communicating in English, their fear of oral practice, and the negative cycle of letting the oral language become a shortcoming; secondly, from the teachers' point of view, the factors that trigger students' oral anxiety include their own personality, pronunciation problems, and the influence of external environments, such as communication and teaching; and the methods to effectively guide secondary school students in alleviating their oral anxiety are as follows: encouraging teaching and creating a good, relaxed and inclusive communication environment to increase oral interaction. Effective methods to help secondary school students alleviate their speaking anxiety include implementing encouraging teaching practices and fostering a relaxed, inclusive communication environment. This approach promotes increased oral interaction, helping students feel more comfortable and confident in practicing their speaking skills. Effective ways to guide secondary school students to alleviate their speaking anxiety are as follows: encouragement-based teaching, creating a favorable, relaxed, and tolerant communication environment, and diversifying teaching modes to increase speaking interactions. The impact of this study is to understand the causes of oral anxiety and effective strategies to alleviate it in Chinese secondary school students' oral learning. It can most directly inform and assist teachers in teaching speaking and indirectly enable parents and others to receive good feedback. It is hoped that students and teachers will co-operate with each other in the future learning and teaching of speaking. Teachers should endeavour to diversify their teaching, increase students' interest in speaking and pay equal attention to speaking and other test-taking skills; parents should not put too much pressure on their students or set too high a target but rather keep a natural attitude, and students should try to speak up and make speaking a daily routine and an interest in their learning. It is believed that both the giver and the recipient have more to gain from future oral education.

References

- [1] Xu Huiying. *A study of the effectiveness of task-based teaching in alleviating junior high school students' oral English anxiety*[J]. *Overseas English*,2023,(24):193-195.
- [2] XU Chuyan, ZHU Lin, WANG Yunping, et al. *The effect of foreign language speaking anxiety on the quality of verbal interaction: an fNIRS hyperscan study*[J]. *Journal of Psychology*,2023,55(12):1949-1965.
- [3] Li Jiongying,Li Qing. *Research on foreign language anxiety in China: Review and reflection--Statistical analysis based on papers in foreign language journals in the past ten years(2006-2015)* [J]. *Foreign language community*,2016, (04):58-65.
- [4] Sun Yihan. *Multimodality: an effective strategy to alleviate students' speaking anxiety phenomenon*[J]. *Shanghai Educational Research*,2022, (10):87-92.DOI:10.16194/j.cnki.31-1059/g4.2022.10.006.
- [5] Gao Luyao. *A review of research on foreign language speaking anxiety*[J].*EnglishSquare*,2023,(35):112-115.DOI:10.16723/j.cnki.yygc.2023.35.008.
- [6] Ye Shuqin. *Analysis of the Causes and Countermeasures of Students' Speaking Anxiety in Integrated English Classrooms*[J]. *Science Consultation (Educational Research)*,2024, (04):35-39.
- [7] Jing Xiaoqian, Li Jie. *Overcoming students' speaking anxiety to enhance secondary students' confidence*[J]. *China Vocational and Technical Education*,2014 ,(02):19-22.
- [8] Cucu Sutarsyah. (2017).*An Analysis of Student's Speaking Anxiety and its Effect on Speaking Performance*.IJELTAL (Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics) (2),143-152.
- [9] Yu Hanjing,Liu Tianqi. *A Study of Typical Dynamic Characteristics of Learners' Speaking Motivation - Based on Retrospective Paradigm Research Method*[J]. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*,2021, (04):68-78+149.DOI:10.13458/j.cnki.flatt.004792.
- [10] Rui Yanping,Ji Huijun. *The effects of multimodal listening and teaching on speaking anxiety and classroom silence*[J]. *Foreign language e-learning*,2017, (06):50-55.
- [11] Yin Ting. *Characteristics and causes of students' responding discourse development in online English classrooms*[J]. *Foreign language e-learning*,2020, (04):59-64+10.

- [12] Sarah Al Mukdad.(2021).*The Cause of Speaking Anxiety of Pre-intermediate EFL Learners and Its Effects on Their Oral Performance.Theory and Practice in Language Studies*(5),580-585.
- [13] Jing Zhou.(2024).*A Study of English Majors' Speaking Anxiety and Influencing Factors.Applied & Educational Psychology*(2),