

# Survey on English Speaking Anxiety of English Majors and Analysis of Teaching Countermeasures

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## Abstract

This study examines the anxiety encountered by English major students during English speaking practice and explores effective pedagogical strategies to address it. A questionnaire survey was conducted among first-year English major students at a university in Chengdu, Sichuan, and data analysis was performed using SPSS 28.0 to evaluate the students' self-efficacy in English speaking. Findings indicate that a majority of students experience moderate levels of anxiety in spoken English expression, primarily due to fear of errors, non-conformity to language contexts, and self-imposed pressure. Such anxiety negatively impacts learning outcomes, manifesting as diminished confidence and interest.

To counter these issues, a range of pedagogical strategies are suggested, including the transformation of teaching philosophies, enhancement of instructional methods, guidance for students in embracing mistakes as part of the learning process, and support in adjusting learning expectations. The study highlights the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment through active student participation and cooperative learning to alleviate anxiety. Additionally, timely feedback from educators is emphasized to foster students' confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

The conclusion suggests that the implementation of targeted teaching strategies can significantly mitigate students' anxiety in English speaking and enhance their proficiency. This research offers actionable insights for improving English speaking instruction, with the potential to boost students' learning efficiency and motivation(Liu, M., & Xiangming, L., 2019).

## Keywords

English speaking anxiety, pedagogical strategies, student self-efficacy, survey methodology, educational enhancement

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## 1. Introduction

Today, English has become one of the most important languages in the world. However, even for those learning English, various issues arise during the process for different reasons(Xiang, Guohua, Wan, Huan, & Yan, Li, 2020).For instance, some students struggle to speak fluently, use correct language, or accurately convey their intentions. This is often due to a lack of confidence and the presence of anxiety towards English teaching. Anxiety is a common emotion, a mental state of unease about potential adverse situations or outcomes for oneself or others. Oral teaching in English major education is a critical teaching skill, requiring a solid foundation in foreign languages, certain listening and speaking skills, and the ability to communicate and perform effectively. Therefore, exploring the causes of anxiety in students' English speaking and proposing corresponding strategies is essential.

## 2. Literature Review

In China, the concept of foreign language learning anxiety was first introduced by Little in 1982. According to Little, the tension that arises in English teaching is a psychological issue that is bound to occur in language

learning. However, in many cases, the existence of tension leads to negative consequences in English teaching. For instance, students may develop contradictory emotions, self-doubt, excessive nervousness, and a lack of concentration. Kim & Sarah (1991) defined anxiety as "the fear of the uncertain or uncontrollable in terms of expectations," characterized by "tension and worry caused by concern, lack of confidence, and apprehension about certain matters." This definition provides a theoretical basis for learning strategies in English learning, which helps to further understand the learning motivation in English learning and its impact on English learning. Many scholars have also agreed with Mr. Kim's concept. Jerry (1995) believed that "worry is a kind of mental pressure caused in special circumstances." Jennifer (1996) defined anxiety as "tension, unease, and worry caused by unknown or uncontrollable things." Horwitz and Schwartz (2000) once pointed out that "a certain level of anxiety exists in language learning, but it is within a certain range." The above views all highlight the characteristic of "unease," distinguishing it from "mental pressure," and considering it a "special and universal emotion" that plays an important role in every aspect of students' academic performance, thus necessitating in-depth and detailed research. Therefore, it is essential to explore the causes of anxiety in students' English speaking and propose corresponding strategies.

### **3. Anxiety Overview**

#### **3.1. Definition of Anxiety**

Anxiety is defined by anxiety theory as a widespread interpersonal phenomenon that can have detrimental consequences for individuals (Horwitz & Schwartz, 2000). Tension in English teaching is a common psychological issue. To improve the oral English proficiency of English major college students, proactive surveys are needed to identify the causes of anxiety and to take effective educational measures targeted at different categories and levels of students.

#### **3.2. Causes of Anxiety**

Students experience tension in English learning because their main goal is "expression" rather than "practical use," which is the ultimate goal of English teaching (Guan, Haifang, 2018; Zou, Cuiwei, 2020).

- (1) Non-conformity of Language Context: As English is not the mother tongue of many students, the process of learning English is often tense because they have not well integrated it into their lives. The main reason is the worry about inaccurate pronunciation and grammar. This mindset makes them feel nervous in speeches and causes anxiety in some individuals.
- (2) Fear of Mistakes: English and speaking cannot be separated. However, in real life, many students make mistakes and the fear of others discovering their problems makes them feel even more terrified. This mentality leads to tension and mistakes in English language practice, creating a "cycle."
- (3) Excessive Self-Demand: Some students have high expectations for their oral English, hoping to speak the language fluently. But in reality, students encounter many difficulties in practice, making it hard to achieve their expected goals, leading to anxiety. Such emotions can cause them to focus excessively on their grades, neglecting the progress and benefits in their studies.
- (4) Therefore, in English teaching, students feel not only a simple language application skill but also a lot of mental tension. There are multiple factors causing tension psychology in English major oral English teaching, among which the most important are: first, unclear teaching objectives; second, overestimation of their oral English ability by the students; third, lack of understanding and guidance from teachers. Thus, if students cannot correctly address their anxiety, their mastery of English will face a fundamental obstacle.

#### **3.1. Negative Effects of Anxiety in English Speaking Teaching**

Speaking of English teaching, students' nervous emotions have a negative impact on their learning outcomes. For example, when speaking English in class, an anxious mental state appears, and students lose confidence and interest in English. If a psychological state is affected during the English learning process, it will negatively impact language fluency and logical ability (Jin, Jing, & Bao, Fang, 2020; Shi, Ying, 2018). Overall, English learners face certain psychological barriers in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are detrimental to the improvement of their English speaking skills.

In English learning, a lack of confidence and even fear due to reasons such as the learning environment and self-ability is a common emotion in English learning. Some scholars regard it as a psychological state, a positive emotional experience. Anxiety in English teaching does not have a negative effect on the use of foreign languages; instead, it plays a positive role in foreign language teaching.

#### 4. Research Methods and Participants

Research indicates that a certain level of tension exists in the process of learning English, which is a psychological barrier in the learning process (Little, 1982). Some scholars believe that the fear of learning English can have a certain impact on pronunciation, fluency, voice, and intonation. This study conducted a questionnaire survey among first-year English major students at a university in Chengdu, Sichuan, to understand their experiences of anxiety when learning to speak English and to study the problems they face and solutions. The aim is to propose corresponding strategies for college English teachers to effectively address the tension in language learning and to promote the improvement of their speaking skills.

##### 4.1. Research Tools and Data Collection

To better grasp the learning anxiety of English major college students, this study conducted a questionnaire survey among 174 first-year English major students. "The 'Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance" was used to collect data, ensuring the reliability of the survey with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.776 (Li, Chuanyi, 2015).and conclusions were drawn. The questionnaire was designed using a convenient sampling method, 100 questionnaires were distributed, and 80 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective recovery rate of 80%. This study used SPSS 28.0 as a tool to organize the questionnaire data. First, the reliability of the collected survey data was tested, and the reliability coefficient value was 0.798, greater than 0.7, indicating that the quality of the research data is very good, indicating that the questionnaire is highly reliable (see Table 1); second, this study used the questionnaire method to investigate and study the anxiety status of English speaking learning among the surveyed subjects; the third part studied the causes of English learning anxiety that appeared in the subjects' English speaking learning. Based on this, through the collation of relevant research materials, corresponding solutions were proposed for the problems existing in foreign language learning among English major students.

Table 1: Cronbach's reliability analysis

name (of a thing)	Correction Item Total Correlation (CITC)	Deleted alpha coefficients for item	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Your gender:	-0.1	0.809	
1. I rarely feel anxious when I am speaking English.	0.5	0.778	
2. my confidence in speaking English suffers when I feel nervous	-0.211	0.846	0.798
3. I can express myself fluently and accurately when speaking in English.	0.722	0.757	
4. I am able to organize my words logically when speaking in English.	0.744	0.753	

5. I can use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures when speaking in English.	0.601	0.767
6. When I am speaking in English, my English pronunciation is standard.	0.643	0.76
7. I can find ways to cope even when I encounter unfamiliar or difficult topics.	0.623	0.767
8. I can flexibly use different methods and techniques to accomplish speaking tasks when I am speaking.	0.644	0.762
9. I will be more confident in my spoken English if my teacher often praises and affirms my speaking ability.	0.358	0.795
10. I believe that occasional failures in speaking are not due to my lack of ability, but to my lack of effort	0.416	0.788

Standardized Cronbach alpha coefficient: 0.776

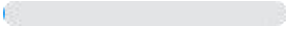
Source: *(Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)*

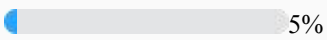
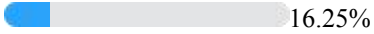
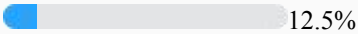
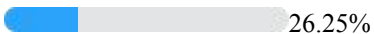
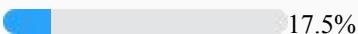
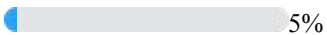
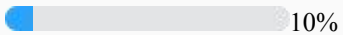

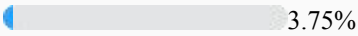
#### 4.2. Conclusions and Discussion

Through the questionnaire research, some problems existing in English speaking teaching can be understood. The survey found that the overall level of English language learning anxiety among English major students is moderate to high (You, Yajing, 2020; Li, Yang, 2020). As shown in Table 2, most English major college students (about 57.5%) feel a certain degree of anxiety when expressing themselves in English speaking, as they choose options between 3-6. 26.25% of people chose option 5, that is, they feel "less" anxiety when expressing themselves in English speaking, which may indicate that this part of the population has stronger self-confidence in English speaking. 30% of people chose option 4 and below, that is, they feel a lower degree of anxiety when expressing themselves in English speaking, which may indicate that this part of the population has stronger expressive ability and self-confidence in English speaking. Only about 7.5% of people chose options 1 or 9, that is, completely inconsistent or completely consistent, indicating that most people's anxiety levels for English speaking are concentrated at a moderate level.

Table 2:1. *I rarely feel anxious when speaking in English.* [Scale question]

**Average score for this question: 5.21**

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	1	 1.25%

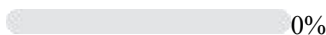
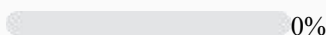
2	4	 5%
3	13	 16.25%
4	10	 12.5%
5	21	 26.25%
6	14	 17.5%
7	4	 5%
8	8	 10%
9	2	 2.5%
fully in line with	3	 3.75%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

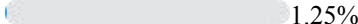
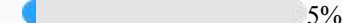
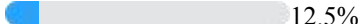
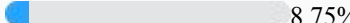
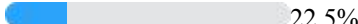
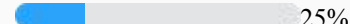
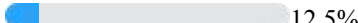
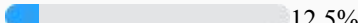
Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

According to Table 3, it can be concluded that the number of validly filled in this question is 80 times. Among them, "7" and "8" were chosen by the largest number of people, accounting for 22.5% and 25% respectively. In addition, "5" and "9" were also selected by a larger number of people, accounting for 12.5% respectively. On the contrary, the number of people choosing "0" and "2" is the lowest, both accounting for 0%. Taken together, most people's confidence in speaking English will be affected to some extent when they feel nervous, but some will not be affected.

Table 3:2. my confidence in speaking English suffers when I feel nervous. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 7.34

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	0	 0%
2	0	 0%

3	1	 1.25%
4	4	 5%
5	10	 12.5%
6	7	 8.75%
7	18	 22.5%
8	20	 25%
9	10	 12.5%
fully in line with	10	 12.5%
Number of valid entries for this question		80

Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

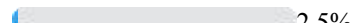
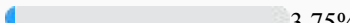
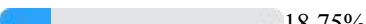
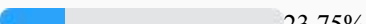
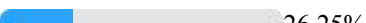
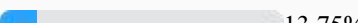
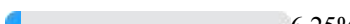
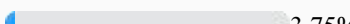
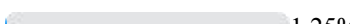
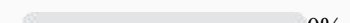
Based on Table 4, we can draw the following conclusions:

In terms of oral expression in English, most people were able to express themselves fluently and accurately. The option with the highest percentage is 5 points, accounting for 26.25% of the total number of valid entries. Only a few people have some difficulties in expressing themselves in spoken English. The option with the lowest proportion is Not at all, accounting for 2.5% of the total number of valid entries. The majority of people's ability to express themselves in spoken English was distributed between 3 and 6 points. The largest number of people scored 4 and 5, accounting for 23.75%-26.25% of the total number of valid entries respectively.

To summarize, most people have a good ability to express themselves in spoken English, but there is still a small group of people. Needs further upgrading.

Table 4:3. I can express myself fluently and accurately when speaking in English. [Scale question]

**Average score for this question: 4.6**

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	2	 2.5%
2	3	 3.75%
3	15	 18.75%
4	19	 23.75%
5	21	 26.25%
6	11	 13.75%
7	5	 6.25%
8	3	 3.75%
9	1	 1.25%
fully in line with	0	 0%

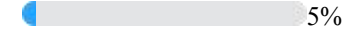
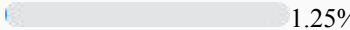

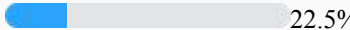
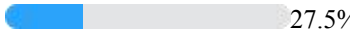
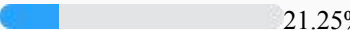
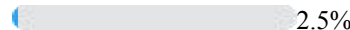
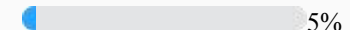
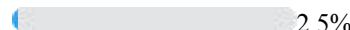
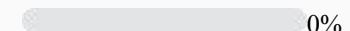
Number of valid entries for this question	80
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Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

According to Table 5, it can be seen that most of the people are able to organize their language logically when speaking in English, with the highest percentage of choices being "5" (27.5%), followed by "4" (22.5%). On the contrary, only a few chose "not at all" (5%) or "2" (1.25%). Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the people have some logical organization when they express themselves in spoken English.

Table 5:4. I am able to organize my words logically when speaking in English. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 4.8

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	4	 5%
2	1	 1.25%
3	10	 12.5%
4	18	 22.5%
5	22	 27.5%
6	17	 21.25%
7	2	 2.5%
8	4	 5%
9	2	 2.5%
fully in line with	0	 0%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

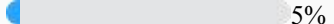
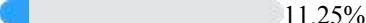
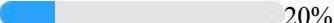
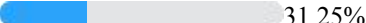
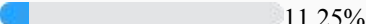
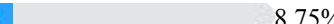
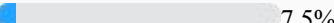
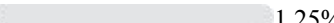
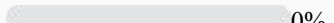
According to Table 6, it can be seen that most of the respondents (31.25%) are able to use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in their oral expressions in English and chose option 5, while a relatively small number of respondents (3.75%) do not conform to the use of appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures at all and chose the option "not conform to it at all". Some people (20%) chose option 4, indicating that they are able to use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in their spoken English, but there are still some openings for improvement. Some (11.25%) chose options 3 and 6, indicating that their ability to use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in spoken English could be improved. A small number (1.25%) chose option 9, indicating that they are fully compatible with the use of appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures.

To summarize, most of them are able to use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures when expressing themselves in spoken English, but there are still some who need to improve further.

Table 6:5. I can use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures when speaking in English. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 4.84

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	3	 3.75%

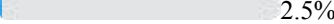
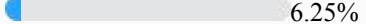
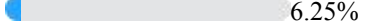
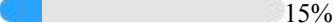
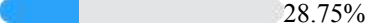
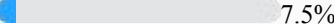
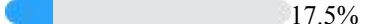
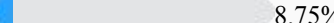
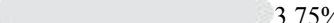
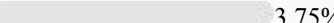
2	4	 5%
3	9	 11.25%
4	16	 20%
5	25	 31.25%
6	9	 11.25%
7	7	 8.75%
8	6	 7.5%
9	1	 1.25%
fully in line with	0	 0%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

According to Table 7, the number of valid fill-ins for this question is 80. Among them, the percentage of those who scored 5 and above in English pronunciation standard amounted to more than 65%, with the highest number of those who scored 5, accounting for 28.75%. In contrast, the number of people with scores of 2 and below was relatively small, accounting for only 8.75% of the total number of valid fill-ins. Thus, overall, the participants' English pronunciation standards were high.

Table 7:6. I pronounce English in a standardized way when I am speaking in English. [Scale question]

**Average score for this question: 5.46**

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	2	 2.5%
2	5	 6.25%
3	5	 6.25%
4	12	 15%
5	23	 28.75%
6	6	 7.5%
7	14	 17.5%
8	7	 8.75%
9	3	 3.75%
fully in line with	3	 3.75%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	


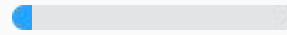
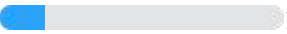
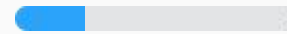
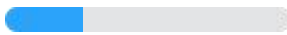
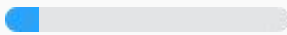
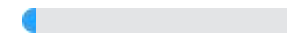
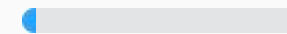
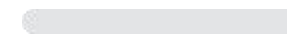
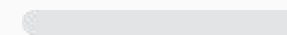


Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

Based on Table 8, the following conclusions can be drawn: the majority (75%) felt that they were able to cope with the unfamiliar or difficult topics, of which 25% felt they could cope fully. Only a small percentage (10%) felt they could not cope with unfamiliar or difficult topics.

Table 8:7. I can find ways to cope with unfamiliar or difficult topics even when they come up. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 4.53

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	1	 1.25%
2	6	 7.5%
3	13	 16.25%
4	20	 25%
5	22	 27.5%
6	10	 12.5%
7	4	 5%
8	4	 5%
9	0	 0%
fully in line with	0	 0%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

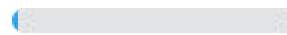
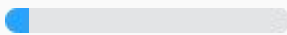
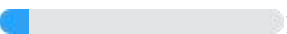
According to Table 9, the answer to the question, "I can flexibly use

The following conclusions can be drawn from the questions of the scale "Different methods and techniques to accomplish speaking tasks":

More than half (61.25%) chose the options 4 and 5, indicating that they are able to flexibly utilize different methods and techniques in their oral expressions. A relatively small number of people chose the options 1, 2 and 9, 2.5%, 8.75% and 1.25% respectively, indicating that only a few of them were not at all or fully compliant with the flexibility to use different methods and techniques in their oral expressions. Most of the choices were concentrated between 3 and 7, which may mean that most of the people are able to utilize different methods and techniques flexibly to some extent in their oral expressions, but there is still room for improvement.

Table 9:8. I can flexibly use different methods and techniques to accomplish oral tasks when speaking. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 4.73

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	2	 2.5%
2	7	 8.75%
3	9	 11.25%

4	19	23.75%
5	21	26.25%
6	8	10%
7	9	11.25%
8	3	3.75%
9	1	1.25%
fully in line with	1	1.25%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)

Table 10 Among them, more than 50% (51.25%) chose a high score of 7 and above, indicating that the teacher's frequent praise and affirmation of speaking ability has a positive effect on students' self-confidence. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who chose a score of 5 and above was as high as 67.5%, indicating that most of them had a positive attitude towards it. However, 15% still chose a low score of 4 and below, which needs to be further explored and improved.

Table10:9. I will be more confident in my spoken English if my teacher often praises and affirms my speaking ability. [Scale question]

Average score for this question: 7.4

options (as in computer software settings)	Subtotal	proportions
Not at all.	0	0%
2	1	1.25%
3	3	3.75%
4	3	3.75%
5	11	13.75%
6	4	5%
7	15	18.75%
8	16	20%
9	13	16.25%
fully in line with	14	17.5%
Number of valid entries for this question	80	

*Source: (Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for English Major College Students' English Speaking Performance)*

### **4.3. Research Findings and Analysis**

The questionnaire survey revealed varying levels of anxiety among English major college students in their English speaking studies. Anxiety manifests primarily in aspects of emotional expression and grammatical accuracy, with different types of anxiety exerting varying impacts on oral communication. English major students generally face the following psychological issues during foreign language learning:

- (1) Fear of speaking: Many students in English departments are extremely apprehensive about oral tests, fearing that they will not perform well enough to speak in front of teachers.
- (2) Concern about their level of oral expression: Some students feel their level of English expression is low and do not want to lose face in front of others, hence their reluctance to speak.
- (3) Lack of confidence: Some students are not confident in their English expression abilities, fearing they will not speak well enough, leading to a nervous mentality.
- (4) Insufficient self-confidence: Some students lack the confidence and courage to interact with others. For teachers, it is important to pay attention to the anxiety that students experience in learning English speaking, and to help students overcome and reduce anxiety in English speaking learning by creating a language environment.

### **5. Teaching Strategies**

The anxiety of English major students in speaking learning is mainly due to the lack of a good English environment and correct English learning methods in spoken English teaching. The emergence of anxiety can have a negative impact on learning English as a major, so it is necessary to take some measures to effectively eliminate anxiety when learning English language. Firstly, before learning English speaking, it is necessary to have a preliminary understanding of the content of English speaking, which can better eliminate students' anxiety in learning English speaking; secondly, students should correctly recognize their English level and not overestimate themselves, having an objective and comprehensive understanding of themselves; finally, students must control their mental state and emotions well during their studies. Students can listen, speak, read, and write, etc. This is a way to reduce and eliminate anxiety that appears in English learning. According to the characteristics of language research, teachers should emphasize the following aspects of the foreign language learning process to help students overcome and improve anxiety and improve their ability to speak foreign languages:

- (1) Shift in Teaching Philosophy: It is crucial for teachers to recognize the importance of students' learning motivation. During the English learning process, teachers must take a leading role and encourage students to engage with the language without fear. Utilizing modern teaching methods, such as multimedia, can provide ample speaking opportunities for students (Kim & Sarah, 1991).
- (2) Improvement of Teaching Methods: Reducing linguistic demands on students is vital. Teachers should employ communicative language teaching methods to foster a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Encouraging active participation in class activities and creating practical opportunities can support students who are hesitant to speak English. Providing timely feedback and praise can nurture students' confidence and sense of achievement (Horwitz & Schwartz, 2000).
- (3) Error Tolerance: Teachers should guide students to view mistakes as an integral part of the learning process. Helping students overcome the fear of not speaking well is essential. Teachers must offer prompt and effective feedback to bolster students' confidence in their English learning success. Cultivating a spirit of teamwork can also reduce anxiety, allowing students to learn from each other's mistakes (Jerry, 1995).
- (4) Adjustment of Educational Expectations: Teachers should assist students in shifting their focus from solely the outcome to the learning process itself. By setting achievable learning plans and goals, students can progressively enhance their English speaking skills. Sharing successful teaching strategies and methods to improve learning efficiency can also aid students in developing their own learning techniques (Jennifer, 1996).

### **6. Conclusion**

In summary, the anxiety experienced by English major college students in the process of learning English speaking is mainly due to poor cultural foundation, lack of confidence in English speaking learning, and inability to reasonably master the methods and skills of English speaking learning. Therefore, in order to let more English major students have a better understanding of English, they can strengthen their cultural foundation and increase their trust and interest in learning English, and strengthen the practice of learning English. In addition, through group cooperation learning, diverse learning modes, a good language environment can be created and other conditions.

In general, the vast number of English major college students want to better master and use the English language, they need to pay attention to the emergence of anxiety in the process of learning to speak, and take targeted measures to alleviate and eliminate the anxiety they produce, so as to promote the continuous improvement of their own English level.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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