

Influence of Teacher's Classroom Feedback on University Students' English Speaking Anxiety

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Abstract

Previous studies have figured out the level of students' English speaking anxiety in college and the general function of teachers' in-class feedback in the lesson. However, these studies did not focus on specific aspects of speaking anxiety and there were few research about how teachers' feedback in class working on students' anxiety in oral English. Therefore, this quantitative study was designed to investigate the influence of teacher's classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. Data from 245 students at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies were collected through a dual-scale questionnaire adapted from Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and Liu Xiaofeng's Feedback Perception Inventory. Major findings show that most of the university students suffered from moderate level of English speaking anxiety and teachers' classroom feedback does influence this kind of anxiety. According to the results, certain implications were also put forward to better help students and educators.

Keywords

English speaking anxiety, teachers' classroom feedback, anxiety reduction, quantitative method

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Context

English speaking anxiety is one of the roots for EFL learners' language anxiety (Hortwiz et al., 1986). For students who learned English in Chinese context, issues including "Mute English" and "Deaf English" have bothered many learners as well (Guan Qun, 2014). It was also reported that Chinese university students showed great anxiety to oral tasks on English class and they suffered from the negative impacts caused by this anxiety (Long Sirui, 2024). However, According to *The College English Teaching Guide* revised in 2020, university students are required to facilitate themselves with the ability to have fluent communication in English no matter in what field. University students are expected to fluently and precisely use English to discuss common topics in specific fields. What's more, students need to be capable enough to perform their opinions in international conferences, business trade and product promotion (He, 2020). Due to the reality requirement, it is necessary to find out some ways to help university students relief their anxiety in English speaking in classroom, so that they may be less likely to be anxious in authentic context.

According to Chaudron (1988), teachers' classroom feedback belonged to part of students' second language input, which was also effective in promoting language output. The function of teachers' classroom feedback were also investigated in Chinese university English class. Yang Yinli and Wang Qin (2015) pointed out that in language class, teachers' feedback can assist students in better constructing knowledge structure, comprehending knowledge and applying. Xue Haining (2022) figured out that teachers' in-class feedback contributed to students' senses of achievement and learning motivation. To some extent, teachers' classroom feedback can help students relieve anxiety in oral English.

1.2 Problem Statement

Even though many studies have investigated the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' language acquisition, most scholars drew the conclusion from a macro perspective instead of focusing on a certain micro-level analysis, which means that most of the previous studies about teachers' in-class feedback regarded language learning as a whole, instead of separating it as several parts including speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, the studies focusing on English speaking emphasized more about speaking skills and language points rather than researching students' anxiety in oral English. Therefore, this study aims to study the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aims to investigate the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. In order to figure out this kind of influence, first the current situation of university students' English speaking anxiety should be investigated. That's because if students suffer from low anxiety level, it is difficult to figure out the influence of teachers' classroom feedback. And then the influence of teachers' in-class feedback on students' oral English anxiety is analyzed. This research also studies what kind of the influence can teachers' feedback in class bring to students' English speaking anxiety.

1.4 Research Questions

According to the research objectives, the research questions are as follow.

- (1) What is the current level of university students' English speaking anxiety?
- (2) Is there any influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety? If there exists this kind of influence, how can it impact students' anxiety in oral English?
- (3) Are there any other factor that may impact students' English speaking anxiety when teachers provide feedback in class?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Speaking Anxiety

The concept of foreign language was first defined as part of language learning process featured by learner's self-belief, self perception, behavior and feeling and it was also relevant with learner's performance in second language acquisition (Hortwiz et al., 1986). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) put forward the definition that foreign language anxiety belong to a kind of mindset where learners are overwhelmed with tension and apprehension beyond second language context, such as speaking, listening and learning. In order to tackle with more specific issues related to language anxiety, among which English speaking anxiety is emphasized. It was estimated that nearly half of the university students were bothered by great level of speaking anxiety in English (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). Undergraduate students were reported that they were lack of sufficient confidence when speaking English, especially in authentic communication context due to the fear of making mistakes (Boonkit, 2010). Suleimenova (2013) reported that many students in Kazakhstan experienced anxious mindset in English speaking. Akkakoson (2016) discovered that EFL university students in Thai suffered from moderate level of speaking anxiety in English and this kind of anxiety was composed by test anxiety, communication

apprehension and the fear of negative evaluation. Currently, English speaking anxiety was defined as a kind of fear and upset expressed by learners when they used English in oral context (Xu Jingfen, 2024).

English speaking anxiety is also a widespread phenomenon in China. Zhuang Fan (2010) found that social environment and financial development were sources of English speaking anxiety for university students. Pang Huiying (2016) noted that university students were anxious about the assessment results, which was a significant factor contributing to anxiety in oral English. The research of Long Sirui (2023) demonstrated that most of the new students encountered biological and psychological fluctuation when they were finishing oral tasks in English class. Chen Youzhu (2024) found that university students, especially those who did not learn English-related major, lost their direction in English speaking because of inadequate vocabulary storage and grammatical knowledge.

Researchers have investigated the influence of English speaking anxiety for Chinese university students. English speaking anxiety not only influenced students' oral English ability, but also set obstacles for students' reading comprehension, listening performance and other aspects (Wang Yinquan & Wang Yushu, 2010). Compounding the issue, students were less likely to be motivated if they were overwhelmed by English speaking anxiety, which contributed to worse performance in English learning (Yang Lihen & Zhang Shan, 2017). Zhang Ruiyu (2024) pointed out that students who suffered from English speaking anxiety would escape all the oral practice thus leaving themselves behind with other students. Since English speaking anxiety does bother university students and it might influence students' English learning performance in a negative manner, it is necessary to investigate deeper about English speaking anxiety for university students.

2.2 Teacher's Classroom Feedback

The definition of teachers' classroom feedback was firstly put forward by Sinclair and Cloulthard in 1975. The IRF model was discovered in their research, in which feedback was the last section in this model. It referred to the evaluation made by teachers according to students' performance in class. Stemler (1977) defined it as teachers' assessment of students' behaviors. Zhou Xin and Zhou Yun (2002) considered teachers' classroom feedback as a significant source of language input besides a teaching method. Wang Qiaoping (2013) thought that it should be specific guidance and suggestions that can influence students' learning performance. Wang Yuhong (2021) considered this kind of feedback as a way to maintain the interaction between teachers and students and a kind of response to students' behaviors.

The effects of teachers' classroom feedback have been studied by many researchers as well. Liu Weiqun (2016) found that not only can it enhance students' confidence and inspire their interest, but also it can promote students' language output. It was also found that teachers' classroom feedback can maintain the communication and interaction between teachers and students (Chen Bihai & Zhou Rong, 2012). Positive teacher's feedback in class can encourage students to behave better as well (Nazmillah, 2022). Teachers' classroom feedback may increase the likelihood to help students overcome their anxiety in English speaking, thus it is worth discussing.

2.3 Influence of Teachers' Classroom Feedback on Students' English Speaking Anxiety

According to the current research, there are few studies which really investigate the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. Both domestic and foreign researchers pay more attention on the influence of teachers' classroom feedback from a general perspective.

Ashwell (2000) figured out that teachers' feedback in class can enhance students' self-reflection ability. Steel and Holbeck (2018) put forward that the effectiveness and efficiency of language acquisition can be improved with the assistance of qualitative feedback. Zheng Ningning (2022) considered that effective teachers' feedback contributed to efficient language input and higher learning motivation. Luo Manyun (2024) also discovered that interactions on English class can be improved with sufficient classroom feedback from teachers. Li Yue (2024) investigated that superficial teachers' in-class feedback worked as an environmental factor in influencing students' oral English anxiety. However, these studies only focus on the broad field of English learning instead of emphasizing certain areas of language acquisition. Even though Long (1983) emphasized the importance of teachers' classroom feedback to students' language skills acquisition, still the study did not analyze specific sections of acquisition process. Xiang Guohua et al. (2024) figured out that the teacher-centered oral English class might contribute to students' increasing anxiety in speaking, while this study did

not specifically analyzed what kind of the teachers' classroom responses influenced students' anxiety in oral English.

Therefore, this study was designed to figure out the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. It aims to find out the function of classroom feedback on students' speaking, which specify the importance of feedback in certain field. Simultaneously, this study may help to better understand how teachers' feedback in class improve students' language acquisition ability from a psychological view.

3. Method

3.1 Participant

There were totally 256 participants in this research. After eliminating the invalid responses, a total of 245 pieces of valid questionnaires were collected. All of them are students in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. There were 121 female and 124 male in total. Students in this school are always required to perform presentations in their English courses and answer teachers' questions in class, which means that students from this school have enough exposure to speaking practice and application and they have access to receive teachers' classroom feedback on their speaking performance. Simultaneously, teachers in this school always set the presentations as part of mid-term or final examination and take students' classroom response as one component of students' informal assessment, which indicates that teachers' feedback in classroom is objective since it must meet with the assessment standard. Pupils from this university were also required to pass CEM-4 in their four years learning periods and all the participants have passed this exam. Therefore, participants have sufficient experience of receiving feedback and their response to speaking anxiety is worth discussing since they are compelled to encounter various challenge in speaking. Their English level is intermediate. The participants in this research experienced adequate exposure to oral English practice, which indicates that their responses are worth discussing.

3.2 Instrument

This research applied quantitative method by utilizing a questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed by two scales. The first scale focuses on students' oral anxiety. It was based on the FCLAS of Horwitz (1986) and the Chinese version of FCLAS of Wang (2003). There were totally 33 items in this scale and all of them were translated into Chinese in advance. Four aspects of speaking anxiety could be examined in this scale. This scale contained 33 items, which employed a five-point Likert scale and required participants judge their anxiety level in oral English on a scale of 1 to 5. The number "1" represents "strongly disagree". The number "2" represents "disagree". The number "3" means "neither disagree nor agree". The number "4" stands for "agree" and the number "5" indicates "strongly agree". In this scale, item 26-33 were reversed score. The higher score students had, the higher level of anxiety in oral English.

The second scale is related to the impact of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. It is based on the questionnaire produced by Liu Xiaofen (2011). Likert's scale was also applied in the scale, in which 1-5 respectively represented "never", "seldom", "uncertain", "usually", "always". Both verbal and nonverbal teachers' classroom feedback were included in this scale so that different types of the feedback can be investigated and figured out whether student would reflect different level of anxiety when they were exposed to different teachers' feedback.

Table 1. The corresponding items in each aspect of speaking anxiety

Aspects of Speaking Anxiety	Corresponding items
Communication Apprehension	2,4,8,11,16,20,21,22,24,25,29,32,33
Test Anxiety	3,4,14,30
The Fear of Negative Evaluation	7,15,18,19,26
General Anxiety	1,5,6,10,12,13,17,23,27,28,31

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Two scales were arranged in one questionnaire and it was spread in the community of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies from July 24th to July 27th. In order to allow more students to have access to this questionnaire, it was published on Wenjuanxing platform, by which students' choices could be clearly recorded and the time of finishing the questionnaire was recorded so that some ineffective answer could be excluded.

All the collected data were downloaded in SPSS statistical software to have a better understanding of students' current oral English anxiety and the relevance between teachers' classroom feedback and students' anxiety in speaking. To access the size and the direction of linear relationship between teachers' classroom feedback and university students' English speaking anxiety, a Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. Prior to calculating r , the descriptive statistics of two scales were analyzed in order to know the basic information about participants' responses.

4. Results

4.1 Current Situation of College Students' English Speaking Anxiety

In order to answer the first research question, a questionnaire was delivered to investigate the current status of college students' English speaking anxiety. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the FCLAS was .93 and the KMO value was .94, indicating the reliability and validity of this scale. As shown in the Table 2, the lowest score of the anxiety level is 43 for 245 students, which is much higher than the theoretical value of 33. The highest score of the anxiety level is 160 and this score is close with the highest theoretical value of 165. The mean of this research is 109.79 and the standard deviation is 20.02.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Total Anxiety Score

	Number	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	245	160	43	109.79	20.02
Valid	245				

As mentioned above, students from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies experienced different degree of English speaking anxiety, with the average score of 109.79 and a standard deviation of 20.02. In order to better investigate students' oral anxiety, all the participants were divided into three groups according to the score reflected on the questionnaire. Subjects who scored below 89.77 ($109.79 - 20.02$) were in low anxiety level. Participants who scored higher 129.81 ($109.79 + 20.02$) were classified into the group of high anxiety level. Students who scored between 89.77 and 129.81 were put into moderate anxiety level.

Table 3. Distribution of Participants' English Speaking Anxiety Degree

	Range	Number	Percentage
Low Anxiety	43-89	29	11.84%
Moderate Anxiety	90-129	176	71.84%
High Anxiety	130-160	40	16.33%
Total	43-160	245	100.0%

Table 3 displayed the distribution of university students' English speaking anxiety degree after they finished the FCLAS. According to the data, moderate group included 176 participants. There

were 11.84% students categorized into low anxiety group and 16.33% subjects classified into high anxiety group. It is evident that oral speaking anxiety is a common mindset in the learning process of students from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and most of the students in this research showed moderate anxiety. Simultaneously, the high anxiety group is slightly larger than low anxiety group.

4.2 Different Factors of Students' English Speaking Anxiety

In order to investigate students' anxiety in oral English, In the first scale of the questionnaire, four factors of students' English speaking anxiety were studied as well. Descriptive statistics were performed by Table 4.

Table 4 .Descriptive Statistics of Four Factors

Factor	Mean	Rank of order	Number of the item
General Anxiety	3.41	1	11
Test Anxiety	3.38	2	4
The fear of Negative Evaluation	3.32	3	5
Communication Apprehension	3.19	4	13

For students who studied in Guangdong University of Foreign studies, factors such as General Anxiety (Mean=3.41) and Test Anxiety (Mean=3.38) posed great challenge for them. Participants also suffered from the fear of Negative Evaluation (Mean=3.32). Even though students from this school were required to speak English in classroom in most cases, Communication Apprehension (Mean=3.19) also worried them a lot. It was statistically showed that all these four aspects influenced participants' mindset in English speaking.

4.3 Influence of Teachers' Classroom Feedback on Students' English Speaking Anxiety

The second scale in the questionnaire were designed to learn the influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' oral English anxiety. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the FCLAS was .88 and the KMO value was .91, indicating the reliability and validity of this scale. Participants' attitudes toward classroom feedback can be discovered after they filled in the scale, which was first step in order to find out the influence.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Classroom Feedback

	Number	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	245	65	13	42.68	9.84
Valid	245				

According to the table, participants held different opinions toward teachers' classroom feedback. With the purpose of facilitating the research, participants were divided into high effected level, moderate effected level and low effected level according to the mean and standard deviation. Students who scored lower than 32.84 (42.68-9.84) were classified into low effected level. Subjects who scored higher than 52.52 (42.68+9.84) belonged to high effected level. Participants who scored between 32.84 and 52.52 were categorized into moderate effected level. Table 6 presented the distribution of different level.

Table 6. Distribution of Effect of Teachers' Classroom Feedback on Participants' English Speaking Anxiety

	Range	Number	Percentage
Low Effected	13-32	25	10.20%
Moderate Effected	33-52	191	77.96%
High Effected	53-65	29	11.84%
Total	13-65	245	100.0%

According to the data, it was shown that only 25 students were slightly affected by teachers' feedback in class, which means that teacher's classroom feedback had an impact on students' anxiety in oral English and the degree of this impact was so wide that more than 200 participants were influenced.

Table 7. Correlation Analysis of Students' English Speaking Anxiety and Teachers' Classroom Feedback

Teachers' Classroom Feedback	Students' English Speaking Anxiety	
	Pearson Correlation	.501** (r)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	245

Table 7 presented a strong and positive correlation between Teachers' Classroom Feedback and Students' English Speaking Anxiety ($r=.50^{**}$, $p<0.01$). It is evident that teachers' classroom feedback does influence students' anxiety in oral English, which indicated that teachers' more positive feedback in class may contribute to students' less anxiety in English speaking.

Table 8. Correlation Analysis of Students' English Speaking Anxiety and Teachers' Classroom Verbal and Nonverbal Feedback

Students' English Speaking Anxiety		
Teachers' Classroom Verbal Feedback	Pearson Correlation	.574** (r)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	245
Teachers' Classroom Nonverbal Feedback	Pearson Correlation	.573** (r)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	245

Table 8 demonstrated that both verbal and nonverbal feedback influenced students' anxiety in oral English. This kind of impact was strong and positive, which implied that both verbal and nonverbal classroom feedback played equal roles in students' anxious mindset of oral English. Moreover, data showed that students' fear of negative evaluation was positively related to both verbal feedback ($r=0.546$, $p<0.01$) and nonverbal feedback ($r=0.519$, $p<0.01$).

5. Conclusion

The research revealed that numerous university students experience a moderate level of anxiety when required to speak English in class, with a notable proportion reporting high anxiety. This finding aligns with previous one by Akkakoson (2016), indicating that English speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue toward students. Among specific anxiety factors, general anxiety bothered students most, which indicated that students might be unwilling to have oral English class and encountered numerous difficulties when they met with oral tasks. Simultaneously, test anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation contributed substantially. This may because participants in this research spoke English more frequently when they performed presentation or worked on mid-term and final examination. The evaluation system itself caused this anxiety since their oral English performance was related to their score, which may also influence their further study plan in the future. Even though the communication apprehension ranked the lowest in all the aspects of anxiety, it still reflected that university students feel stressed when engaging in spontaneous communication. Secondly, this study also demonstrated a distinguished influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. The majority of students reported moderately to highly affected by teachers' feedback in terms of oral English anxiety. Those who performed higher score in the second scale also showed higher level of anxiety in oral English as well. Since general anxiety ranked first in all four aspects of anxiety, it was known that teachers' feedback in class might be the source of general anxiety because the feedback from teachers might influence students' attitude toward oral English tasks. Even though classroom feedback only takes tiny percentage of the whole class, but it has the potential to influence students' mindset. Both verbal and nonverbal feedback were shown to have significant impacts. Previous studies, such as the research of Wang Xiaoping (2013) defined teachers' classroom feedback as the specific and targeted suggestions and evaluation which can influence students' effectiveness in learning. However, this research extended previous research by showing that even general and brief feedback can affect students' anxiety, not only detailed and specific evaluations.

Despite these insights, there still existed some limitations. Participants were all from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, the statistics might not be comprehensive enough because they can have more exposure to oral English, potentially affecting the anxiety and feedback perception levels reported. Moreover, the reliance on quantitative data without qualitative methods may limited the depth of understanding students' true feeling to the feedback. The two categories of feedback in this research only focused on the form of it, but there are

still other ways to classify the feedback. According to the limitation, some adjustment should be implemented. For example, the questionnaire should be delivered to students from other universities in different cities or even different provinces. Interview should be added as part of the research to learn more subjective ideas. At the same time, there should be a more diverse classification about teachers' feedback in classroom, such as formative versus summative feedback.

The research findings implied that university students' anxiety in English speaking should be emphasized. Otherwise in all likelihood more students feel anxious about English speaking and avoid practising it. Teachers should shoulder the responsibility to help students overcome obstacles in speaking, such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation and complex grammar rules. Also, teachers need to adjust teaching arrangement, which means that the opportunities for students to speak English should not always link with examination or final assessment. Students need to have a less nervous context so that they won't be too anxious to improve themselves. Another point that needs to be focused is teachers' feedback. Teachers should pay attention to their face expression and teaching manner because all of these factors can deliver information to students, which may also raise their anxiety about their performance in English speaking.

In conclusion, university students are reported to suffer from moderate level of anxiety in oral English. Also, there is a positive and strong influence of teachers' classroom feedback on students' English speaking anxiety. Teachers should pay attention to students' anxiety in the process of teaching oral English. Teaching arrangement should be adjusted as well so that students can have the scaffolding to overcome setback in speaking English and be brave to practice speaking in a more friendly and relaxing environment.

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