Correlations between Classroom Participation and Emotional Anxiety of English Learners

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Abstract

The classroom participation is a key indicator of the successfulness of English teaching. The effect of English teaching might be affected by the emotional anxiety of the learners, which is a psychological activity of self-perception and emotional changes in the learning process. To evaluate the correlations between emotional anxiety and classroom participation, this paper carries out questionnaire surveys and interviews among 100 non-English major freshmen from a university in Beijing, China. The emotional anxiety and classroom participation of the respondents were tested, and analyzed in details on SPSS 17.0. The results show that emotional anxiety, if falling in a suitable range, can boost the classroom participation; if it is excessively low or high, emotional anxiety will have a negative influence on classroom participation in English teaching; emotional anxiety should be controlled properly to improve the learning enthusiasm and the teaching quality of college English. The research results propose a new direction for improving the effect of English teaching in China.

Key words: *Classroom Participation, Emotional Anxiety, English Teaching.*

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INTRODUCTION

The three elements of English learning are teachers, teaching materials and learners. After many years of teaching reform, the English teaching in China has gradually realized that in addition to improving the teaching level of teachers and the quality of teaching materials, learners are playing a decisive role in the teaching effects. The process of teaching is critical and the process of learning is even more critical (Mohammadi, 2014). The English learning process is also a process for the cognition of new things. In this process, students are subject to the requirements such as the sense of accomplishment and competitiveness, so they will generate emotional anxiety during the English teaching activities, which is a kind of psychological behavior influenced by several

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aspects such as teaching environment, the mutual concern of learners, and the learning concepts, etc., and it is closely related to the effect of English teaching (Beuzen & Belzung, 1995) (Lee, Bertoglio, Guimarães et al., 2017).

Influenced by Western teaching thoughts and ideas, the English teaching in China has gradually increased the emphasis on learners' psychological and emotional factors, and conducted related researches on emotional anxiety, English learning and classroom participation: through questionnaire survey and student interviews, some scholars have concluded that English learning is not only a simple process of knowledge input - absorption - output, but a process related to learners' emotions and their psychological cognition level; some literatures summarized that classroom links such as classroom Q&A, group speeches, and English tests are the links in which students' emotional anxiety increases sharply; under the background of new English teaching reform, in order to improve the students' participation in

the classroom, it's recommended that the students should be taken as the main body of the teaching activities, so as to improve the learners' initiative in English learning. Researches related to the reform of English classroom in China and the emotions have reached a few achievements and promoted the improvement of English teaching quality in China to a certain extent, however, there are relatively few empirical studies on classroom participation and emotional anxiety, therefore, this paper takes this as the starting point to carry out corresponding experimental studies (Alkozei, Cooper, & Creswell, 2014) (Westra, 2007).

To evaluate the correlation between English learners' classroom participation and emotional anxiety more scientifically, this paper takes 100 non-English major freshman students from a common undergraduate university in Beijing as the subjects and combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to conduct an empirical experiment, then it analyzes the experimental results and obtains the experimental conclusions. In terms of the structure, this paper first introduces the scientific knowledge of the basic theories concerning the emotional anxiety

and classroom participation, then it explains the objectives of the experiment and designs the experimental process in detail, at last, it calculates the experimental results (Rhees, 2013). The research in this paper is of great significance for guiding English learners and teachers to effectively control the emotions toward English learning, and at the same time, it also indirectly proposes a new direction for improving the effect of English teaching in China.

CLASSROOM PSYCHOLOGY EMOTIONAL ANXIETY AND CLASS PARTICIPATION DEGREE

Classroom psychology emotional anxiety
Definition and control of classroom emotional anxiety

In classroom psychology, emotional anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon unique to students when participating in classroom activities. Psychological anxiety in English classroom is one of the learners' concerns for whether their expression of the target language is correct or not, is the classmates' and teachers' evaluation is high or not, and whether the

Table 1. **Content of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale**

1. I have no confidence in speaking English in a foreign language class.	2. I worry that I will make mistakes in foreign language classes.
3. When the teacher calls me in a foreign language class, I will tremble.	4. I didn't understand what the teacher said in a foreign language class.
5. I was troubled by the foreign language class.	6. I was thinking about something unrelated to the content of the class when I was in a foreign language class.
7. I have been thinking that other students' foreign languages are better than themselves.	8. I am nervous about some quizzes in foreign language classes.
9. Panic when doing unprepared speeches in foreign language classes	10. Worried about the consequences of failing foreign languages
11. I don't understand why some people are so afraid of foreign language classes.	12. The foreign language class was so nervous that I forgot everything I knew.
13. I don't want to speak voluntarily in foreign language classes.	14. I am nervous when I speak English with people who are learning English.
15. I don't understand what the teacher said, it's very uncomfortable.	16. Foreign language is well prepared, still feeling anxious
17. I hope it is best not to go to a foreign language class.	18. Speaking confidently in a foreign language class
19. Foreign language teacher is afraid to correct my mistakes.	20. The teacher felt very heartbeat when he got the name.
21. The more foreign language exams are prepared, the more they feel that they are not bottomless.	22. Preparing for a foreign language class feels pressured
23. I feel that other students' English is better than themselves.	24. Saying English in front of other students is very confident
25. The progress of the foreign language class is very fast; I am afraid that I can't keep up.	26. I was nervous and upset when I was in a foreign language class.
27. Feeling nervous when speaking in a foreign language class	28. It's easy to go to a foreign language class.
29. It's easy to go to a foreign language class.	30. It's easy to go to a foreign language class.
31. Worried about other students making fun when speaking a foreign language	32. People who learn English at the same time say that English is not so nervous
33. The teacher was nervous when asked questions that were not prepared in advance.	

academic performance is qualified, etc., it is a transient psychological activity of learners generated due to the stimulation of external teaching activities (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). From the definition of classroom psychology emotional anxiety, it can be seen that the anxiety state not only has the effect of inhibiting English learning, but also has a promoting effect.

The control of classroom anxiety is mainly from two levels: teachers and students. Teachers are the designer and leader of the teaching activities, the foreign language classroom needs the teachers' active guidance and knowledge transmission, by creating a relaxed teaching environment, teachers can effectively reduce the learners' emotional anxiety; students are the main body of emotional anxiety, in the cognitive process, anxiety state can affect students' classroom behaviors. By improving learning confidence, strengthening self-awareness, setting learning goals and other methods, the classroom emotional anxiety of students can be adjusted effectively (Jeong, Sugiura, Suzuki et al., 2016).

Classroom emotional anxiety measurement

At present, classroom emotional anxiety is mainly measured by the foreign language classroom anxiety scale proposed by scholar Horwitz et al. (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2011). Table 1 shows the content of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale.

The subjects in the table selected the options according to their own conditions, the options include very consistent, consistent, average, not consistent, and not consistent at all. The five options correspond to the emotional anxiety scores 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. Table 1 contains 11 English classroom anxiety questions, 8 social anxiety questions, 9 test anxiety questions, and 5 negative evaluation anxiety questions. The highest score of the foreign language learning anxiety scale is 165, and the lowest score is 33. Higher score indicates higher level of emotional anxiety (Obari, Kojima, Oomura et al., 2006; Kelly & Noonan, 2008).

Classroom participation

Classroom participation is the quantified degree of students' physical and mental state during the learning activities in the classroom. The degree of classroom participation plays a

decisive role in learning progress and teaching effectiveness (Shao, Yu, & Ji, 2013). Classroom participation has two categories: explicit participation and implicit participation. Explicit participation includes students' participation in classroom questioning, group discussions, notes, etc.; implicit participation mainly refers to the attitude and seriousness of students' psychological participation.

Due to the lack of real English learning context in the traditional English teaching method in China, most of the time, students just follow the teacher and read aloud repeatedly, they lack of oral practice, interaction with others, and contextual communication between teachers and students. In the long run, students would lose their interest in participating in English classroom learning, and present a "non-participating" phenomenon. Stimulated by the educational reform policies of English classroom, China's English education gradually began to pay attention to the teaching process and improve students' classroom participation (Meihua & Huiliuqian, 2015; Han, Tanriöver, & Sahan, 2016).

The main body of classroom participation is the students, but it is also influenced by multiple factors such as teacher-student relationship, relationship between students, teacher's emotional concern and psychological counseling for students, etc. Under the background of foreign language classroom reform in China, students have been paid more attention as the main body of the teaching process, students' interest in learning and their subjective initiative are further advocated during the teaching, so that their psychological state of "want me to learn" would gradually transform to the state of "I want to learn" (Bensalem, 2018).

In this study, the degree of classroom participation was measured by the scale shown in Table 2. The main statistics are the degree of students' willingness to participate in the English classroom and the frequency of classroom participation. The 12 questions in the statistical table are divided into 3 categories of group discussion, whole-class interaction, and teacher guidance. According to their own conditions, students can choose from: 1. Never, 2. Seldom, 3. Sometimes, and 4. Often, and the scores of the four options are: 1, 2, 3, 4 points, respectively. Therefore, the score of the classroom participation is between 12 and 48.

Table 2. **Score of classroom participation**

1. When the teacher asks you to discuss with the table, you are willing to discuss	2. When the teacher asks you to have a conversation with the same table, you are willing to do
3. When the teacher asks you to prepare for the group activity, you are willing to prepare	4. When the teacher asks you to tell a story at the same table, you are willing to talk
5. When you show your strengths to everyone, express them in English in front of everyone.	6. Participation group English debate
7. Participate in classroom activities such as role reading	8. Willing to state what you think about something or opinion
9. Willing to state what you think about something or opinion	10. Listen carefully when the teacher explains the vocabulary sentences that appear in the text.
11. Listen carefully when the teacher explains the vocabulary sentences that appear in the text.	12. When the teacher asks some open questions, he is willing to answer

EMPIRICAL EXPERIMENT DESIGN

Emotional anxiety and classroom participation are the key variables affecting the quality of English teaching. The correlation between the two is very important for improving the English level of English learners. This section describes the experimental objects, experimental purpose, and experimental method, and completes the collection and collation of the experimental data.

Experimental purpose

In order to solve the problems of low classroom participation and high emotional anxiety of English learners in China, this empirical experiment aims to study: 1. What is the relationship between English classroom anxiety level and classroom participation? 2. Does the level of promotive emotional anxiety have a positive effect on the degree of classroom participation? 3. How to control learners' emotional anxiety and improve their English classroom participation?

Experimental objects

This paper takes 100 non-English major freshman students from a common undergraduate university in Beijing as the experimental objects, the male to female ratio of the subjects is 1:1, so the influence of the gender difference has been excluded. The freshman students are selected as the subjects because their psychological level has already been formed basically, and meanwhile their emotional anxiety of other aspects is not high.

Experimental methods and tools

The experiment mainly adopts the questionnaire survey method (see Table 1 and Table 2) and the interview method to study the classroom participation and the emotional anxiety. The subjects were subject to the emotional anxiety test and the classroom participation test one by one, Excel and SPSS17.0 were used to record the test data of the subjects.

In the interview, 5 male and 5 female students were randomly selected as representatives, and they were asked about which process in the English classroom would make them produce anxiety, and will the anxiety have a positive influence on their English learning. The popularity degree of the three teaching methods of group discussion, whole-class interaction and teacher guidance was calculated at the same time.

Figure 1. **Emotional anxiety of subjects**
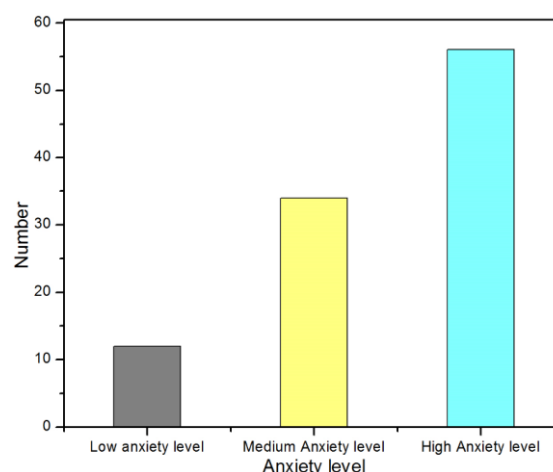
Statistics of experimental results
Statistical results of emotional anxiety

100 emotional anxiety questionnaires were collected. Test results that are more than 110 points were classified as high anxiety level, 110-90 points were classified as medium anxiety

level, less than 90 points were classified as low anxiety level. The emotional anxiety of the subjects is shown in Figure 1.

The emotional anxiety of the subjects presents an upward trend from a lower level to a higher level. Among the 100 subjects, 12 have a low anxiety level, while 56 have a high anxiety level. In random interviews, students believe that they do have emotional anxiety more or less, in most cases, the anxious state will cause trouble to their English learning.

Statistical results of classroom participation

Figure 2 show the statistics of the classroom participation of the subjects, in the English classroom, the frequency of group discussion of the learners is the lowest, followed by the frequency of whole-class interaction, relatively speaking, in the classroom teaching activities guided by the teachers, the participation degree of the learners is the highest. In the interview survey, 80% of the students think that due to the lack of unified guidance in the group discussion and the whole-class interaction, they are quite confused during the participation process, while in the teacher guidance link, the teachers' guidance has a positive effect on the frequency and degree of classroom participation.

Figure 2. **Class participation statistics**
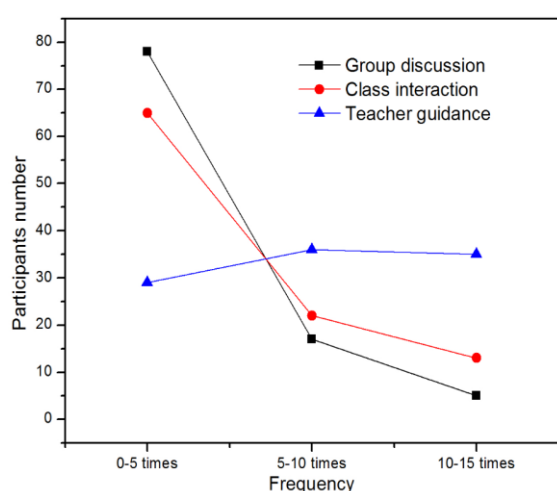
Correlation between classroom participation and emotional anxiety

The correlation between anxiety level and classroom participation was obtained by SPSS and shown in Table 3.

Table 3. **Correlation analysis of anxiety level and classroom participation**

Anxiety level	Correlation with Class Participation
Low anxiety level	-0.518*
Medium anxiety level	-0.071
High anxiety level	-0.327*

Note: *The coefficient of significance level is 0.05, the correlation coefficient r>0 is positive correlation, r<0 is negative correlation

From the correlation coefficients in the table we can see that, for the low and high anxiety levels, the negative correlations between anxiety level and classroom participation are significant, while for medium anxiety level, the correlation coefficient between the anxiety level and the classroom participation is smaller.

Table 4. **Correlation analysis of participation frequency and anxiety degree under different interaction modes**

Interaction level	Correlation with anxiety level
Group discussion	-0.212
Class interaction	-0.384
Teacher guidance	-0.638

Note: *The coefficient of significance level is 0.05, the correlation coefficient r>0 is positive correlation, r<0 is negative correlation

From the correlation coefficients in Table 4 we can see that the absolute value of the correlation coefficient between teacher guidance and anxiety level is the largest, indicating that teacher guidance can alleviate students' classroom anxiety, but there is no linear relationship between the anxiety level and the classroom interaction mode.

The promoting effect of emotional anxiety on classroom participation

After analyzing the statistics of the 16th and the 22nd options in the foreign language anxiety scale 1 we can find that, the number of subjects whose answers to these two options are "not consistent at all" accounted for more than 70%, and it's calculated that it has a positive correlation with the classroom participation, indicating that in most cases, emotional anxiety has a negative correlation with the classroom

participation, but the emotional anxiety still has a local promotion effect on classroom participation.

Control strategies for English classroom anxiety level

There is a complicated relationship between emotional anxiety and classroom participation. In order to better control the relationship between the two, in English teaching, we should note that the English teaching activity is neither the one-sided learning of the students, nor the one-sided output of the teachers, it should take students as the main body of the teaching activity and provide them with sufficient and free development space, and teachers need to act as a guide in the classroom. Teachers need to enhance students' self-confidence in English learning, pay attention to the classroom Q&A methods, and their way of evaluating the students; students need to discuss their own problems openly, face their anxiety, and balance their own classroom participation methods and preferred interaction methods.

CONCLUSIONS

The state of emotional anxiety has a two-way influence on the degree of classroom participation. To explore the correlation between the two, scholars in the industry have carried out related researches to improve the classroom teaching effects. Aiming at the problems of low classroom participation, low interest of students and the high degree of learning anxiety in the English teaching in China, this paper took the correlation between classroom participation and emotional anxiety as the research goal, and obtained corresponding conclusions through the design of empirical experiment and the analysis of experiment data:

(1) In most cases, there is a negative correlation between English classroom anxiety level and classroom participation, but within a certain and appropriate range, there is a positive correlation between the two. Excessive tension and excessive relaxation are not conducive to the English learning of the learners.

(2) The control of the learners' emotional anxiety requires the teachers and the students to exert their roles together, through the teacher's control and guidance, and the students' balance and correct understanding of the anxious state, a better English teaching effect could be achieved.

(3) The control of emotional anxiety can effectively improve the degree of classroom participation, and it has provided an effective reference for the English teaching reform in China.

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