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Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Foreign Language Learning Speaking among Chinese Students

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between speaking anxiety and self-efficacy among Chinese students preparing for language proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, in the context of increasing globalization and the widespread use of English. Drawing from the literature on second language acquisition and Bandura's self-efficacy theory, we investigate how Chinese students' beliefs in their ability to speak a second language influence their anxiety levels. A questionnaire comprising self-efficacy and anxiety scales was administered to 51 English language students in an intermediate IELTS or TOEFL program in China. The findings reveal a weak negative correlation between self-efficacy and speaking anxiety, indicating that as speaking anxiety decreases, students' self-efficacy in learning to speak a second language increases. Conversely, heightened anxiety levels tend to deter students from engaging in spoken language learning. These results align with previous research highlighting the detrimental impact of anxiety on language performance and learners' willingness to engage in language learning. This study underscores the importance of addressing speaking anxiety among Chinese students and its implications for their second language proficiency. It also offers valuable insights for educators, enabling them to better understand and address the root causes and consequences of speaking anxiety, thereby fostering a more conducive learning environment. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader conversation on language learning strategies and provides practical guidance for both students and educators aiming to enhance the effectiveness of second language acquisition.

Keywords: second language acquisition, self-efficacy, speaking anxiety

1. Introduction

Globalization has led to the widespread spread of languages, and in order to cope with globalization, many languages, especially English, the first widely spoken language, have long been compulsory for students in China's needy schools. Many Chinese students choose to go to English-speaking countries for further studies, which often requires them to pass language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. This paper examines the relationship between speaking anxiety and self-efficacy of such students in the process of studying for language tests, in order to help Chinese students and language teachers to address the problem of speaking anxiety of Chinese students in the process of studying for language tests in a more targeted way.

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2. Literature Review

In the realm of second language acquisition, a captivating phenomenon emerges as individuals engage with a secondary language, especially in Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs) such as China, Korea, and Japan [1]. This captivating phenomenon, termed as second language speaking anxiety, has been the subject of extensive exploration due to its considerable impact on oral performance. As Horwitz's research underscores, this anxiety often manifests more prominently in CHCs, where cultural underpinnings rooted in Confucian principles play a pivotal role [1]. Despite the debilitating nature of this anxiety, proficiency in spoken communication remains a pivotal pursuit within second language education [2], thus accentuating the relevance of scrutinizing speaking anxiety within the domain of second language learning.

2.1. Self-efficacy and the Classification of Anxiety

At the heart of this exploration lies Bandura's self-efficacy theory, positing that diverse forms of psychological growth and behavioral transformation emanate from a fundamental shift in an individual's expectations of personal mastery and accomplishment. This theory reverberates across various domains of personal development, including language acquisition. In 1982, Mark and James took a pivotal step in operationalizing self-efficacy by formulating and validating a self-efficacy scale, thereby furnishing a tangible instrument for assessing self-efficacy beliefs. This scholarly contribution laid the groundwork for subsequent investigations into the intricate interplay between self-efficacy and anxiety.

In addition, anxiety can be categorized into two types: state anxiety and trait anxiety [3]. Anxiety felt while participating in an oral classroom can be determined as state anxiety.

2.2. Previous Studies of Anxiety and Self-efficacy

A critical examination of Horwitz's seminal work in 1986 discerns that the intricate interplay between second language speaking anxiety and overall classroom performance is closely tied to language proficiency rather than test anxiety. The primary catalyst for this anxiety, as established, revolves around an inadequacy in linguistic prowess. However, delving deeper into this realm, the research conducted by Liu Meihua and colleagues in 2011 unraveled a multifaceted spectrum of determinants that influence learners' confidence and proactive engagement. Variables such as language proficiency, self-efficacy, motivation, and others intricately weave a tapestry that shapes an individual's disposition towards speaking in a secondary language [4]. The pronounced impact of these variables on learners' experiences underscores the significance of dissecting speaking anxiety in Chinese students. In this context, elucidating the relationship between Chinese students' self-efficacy and their anxiety regarding spoken language proficiency, particularly when preparing for language proficiency tests like IELTS and TOEFL, emerges as a paramount endeavor.

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To delve deeply into this intricate relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety, the present study aims to embrace Mark and James's self-efficacy scale (FLCAS) [5] and Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) [6]. The study's focal point revolves around Chinese students

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who are immersed in the journey of language proficiency through assessments such as IELTS and TOEFL. Through the utilization of this scale, the researchers aspire to probe the nuances of how Chinese students' self-efficacy beliefs relationships with their anxieties surrounding spoken language performance. This study attempts to ask the following questions:

A) Is there a relationship between self-efficacy and Chinese second language learners' level of speaking anxiety?

B) What is the relationship between self-efficacy and Chinese second language learners' level of speaking anxiety?

3. Methodology

This study was conducted at an educational institution in a major city in China. Participants were English language students (N = 51, M = 10; F = 41) enrolled in intermediate IELTS or TOEFL classes at this educational institution. Students enrolled in the institution's IELTS and TOEFL intermediate classes were required to first achieve a score of 5.5-6 on the IELTS or a score of 70-80 on the TOEFL. As a result, there are no significant differences between students in terms of spoken English and other performance.

3.1. Instrumentation

The study designed a questionnaire to measure speaking anxiety and self-efficacy, which consisted of closed-ended questions measuring speaking anxiety and self-efficacy (Self-efficacy= 17, Anxiety= 26).

The self-efficacy and anxiety scales consisted of five-point Likert scales. For self-efficacy, the researcher followed Mark and James's (1982) self-efficacy scale (FLCAS) and adapted it appropriately to make it more accessible to Chinese students, with 1 representing that no such feeling exists at all, 3 representing uncertainty, and 5 representing that there is an extremely strong feeling that it has existed. For anxiety, the researcher followed Horwitz's Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire and adapted it appropriately, in which respondents rated their level of anxiety in completing a specific speaking classroom activity, with 1 being "not at all anxious" and 5 being "extremely anxious". At the same time, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Chinese to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the questions and explained the concepts of self-efficacy and speaking anxiety to the respondents.

4. Research Result

Descriptive analysis is used to study the quantitative data as a whole, what is the overall mean score etc. From the table 1, the mean value of anxiety is 3.219, which is higher than the median value of 2.5. the mean value of Self-efficacy is 3.404, which is higher than the median value of 2.5 and also higher than the value of anxiety.

Meanwhile, the standard deviation of anxiety is 1.014, which is much higher than the standard deviation value of self-efficacy of 0.741, which shows that the value of anxiety is more unstable.

Table 1: Base indicator.

Name	Sample size	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Median
Anxiety	51	1.064	4.948	3.219	1.014	3.333
Self-efficacy	51	2.134	5.016	3.404	0.741	3.428

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Table 2 shows the correlation between anxiety and self-efficacy using correlation analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient to show the strength of the correlation. Specific analyses show that the correlation coefficient between anxiety and self-efficacy is -0.340, which is within the level of 0.05, so there is a negative correlation between anxiety and self-efficacy. Meanwhile 0.2<0.340<0.6, which means the relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy is weakly correlated.

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient.

	Anxiety
Self-efficacy	-0.340*

*p<0.05**p<0.01.

Meanwhile, according to the analysis of linear regression in table3, it can be seen that the p-value is 0.015*, so anxiety is influential for self-efficacy. Combined with table2, we can see that when speaking anxiety decreases, self-efficacy to learn speaking will increase, and vice versa, when speaking anxiety increases, students will be more reluctant to learn speaking in a second language.

Table 3: Linear regression analysis results (n=51).

	Non-normalized coefficient		Normalize coefficient			Collinear diagnosis	
	B	Standard error	Beta	*t*	p		
Constant	4.205	0.331	-	12.696	0.000* *	-	-
Anxiety	0.249	0.098	-0.340	2.532	0.015*	1.000	1.000
R^2	0.116						
Adjust R^2	0.098						
F	F(1,49)=6.411,p=0.015						
D-W value	2.140						

Dependent variable: self-efficacy
p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

5. Conclusion

The results showed that self-efficacy and speaking anxiety were weakly negatively correlated, and that speaking anxiety in second foreign language learning had an inverse effect on self-efficacy, a finding that is consistent with Horwitz's observation that most language learning research tends to focus on the negative prediction of language performance by anxiety [7]. The results of the present study suggest that speaking anxiety has an impact on students' willingness to learn a second foreign language as well as their ability to learn it, and that anxiety may lead to reduced self-efficacy due to, for example, thoughts of possible failure.

The most important thing about the results of the study is that it can help students suffering from speaking anxiety to quickly get rid of their anxiety about speaking and increase their self-efficacy in speaking a second foreign language in English. It can also help teachers of second language teaching to understand more about the causes and consequences of Chinese students' speaking anxiety when learning a second foreign language and help them to better treat the symptoms [8][9][10].

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