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An Exploration of Chinese Postgraduate Students' Online EMI Course Anxiety

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to explore the extents of foreign language anxiety and technological anxiety experienced by Chinese postgraduate students from a university in Hong Kong in the online EMI (English Mediated Instruction) courses. 31 participants finished the questionnaires related to anxiety and answer the open-ended questions about their feelings of online EMI courses. The findings demonstrate that foreign language anxiety and technological anxiety have a negative effect on students' online EMI learning experience. Furthermore, although learners indicates that they consequently experience anxiety, they also tend to overcome foreign language anxiety by practicing English as much as possible, and they hope the universities and teachers can arrange more technological guidance before classes helping to reduce the technological anxiety. Based on these main findings, the implications are provided regarding technological use guidance and awarenes

1. Introduction

As the online learning gradually becomes a common medium to let people learn knowledge, previous studies recognize that online learning helps to "accelerate the global competition and remove situational barriers" (Anderson, 2011, p.91). Furthermore, to meet the increasing need for lifelong education, a growing number of universities in Hong Kong are offering online courses for postgraduate students to allow more convenient and flexible places and times for learning (Appana, 2008). Moreover, the implementation of EMI in Hong Kong is another method for the universities to achieve greater internationalization and globalization (Tamtam, Gallagher, Olabi & Naher, 2012). Under the rapid development of online learning and EMI, the combination of the two elements is an inevitable learning trend in Hong Kong. This study, therefore, chooses universities in Hong Kong as the research context.

Leaving aside the popularity and benefits of online EMI courses, the current situation of online EMI course delivery indicates that the technology use and foreign language teaching lead to some negative feedback. Among the previous studies researching on online courses, students in online courses generate technological anxiety in online classes (Saadé & Kira, 2007; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). Additionally, in offline EMI courses, foreign language anxiety is a problem faced by learners (Dewaele & Ip, 2013; Yan, 1999). However, present research lacks the investigation of combining the online courses and the EMI courses. Furthermore, the class anxiety experienced by students has

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not been researched sufficiently in online EMI courses. This study therefore addresses these gaps and investigate students' online course anxiety in online EMI courses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online EMI Courses

Online EMI courses usually involve teachers delivering academic content knowledge online via the means of English instruction. In Hong Kong, universities are encouraged to use EMI to perform well in world rankings (Corrigan, 2015). However, the actual use of English in Hong Kong's synchronous EMI programmes is not as expected. Although the Minister of Education in Hong Kong requires to use entire English in the whole EMI courses, Wannagat (2007) observed that the teachers usually use mix-coding in the EMI classes, and they only conduct around 50% of the class instruction in English. Moreover, the local learners in EMI courses intent to communicate with group members by speaking Cantonese in pair and group work while they only speak English to interact with their teachers (Evans, 2002). On the contrary, the international students whose mother tongue is not English in the Hong Kong's EMI courses tend to pay more attention to practicing English skills, resulting in the neglect of academic content (Lo & Lo, 2014). Chen (2014) holds a different view that despite some students' English proficiency levels are lower, they perform better during online interactions, which is because such individuals do not have excessive self-correction tendencies. In contrast, most of the students faced some interactional problems in both online and EMI classes, who feel "discomfort speaking before the teachers and peers, lack of English speaking confidence and the inability to express proper meanings in English" (Evans & Morrison, 2011, p. 153). Therefore, foreign language use anxiety is one of the main problems of online EMI synchronous courses.

In addition, many computer applications are implemented in Hong Kong's distance learning programmes. For example, some online platforms are used to display asynchronous online courses as web pages that combine hypertext with downloadable files, animations, audio and video (Kekkonen-Moneta & Moneta, 2002), and students feel anxious when using these applications that are not familiar with.

2.2. Anxiety in Online EMI Course

Initially, the online learning seems to successfully brings the engagement of fluid exchanges with classmates and instructors for adult learners (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). However, students, especially for the elder learners, usually feel anxious about their computer usage. Saadé and Kira (2007) point out that one's previous experience of using other technology-enhanced applications significantly links with learners' online learning anxiety. Stiller and Köster (2016) also agree with this view, who state that the technological anxiety gives additional burdens to online learning, because students need to manage the tasks from learned content and solve the learning difficulties while coping with the negative emotions about computer.

Leaving aside the technological anxiety, the foreign language anxiety also obstacle content and language learning. A lack of confidence in relation to speaking English, speech anxiety, and the fear of the teachers' feedback are the most common reasons for having language anxiety in the EMI context, and the anxiety usually shows a negative correlation with academic content learning (Chou, 2018). Dewaele and Ip (2013) supplement this view and state that learners often cannot certain the associated meaning in English which results in the foreign language anxiety.

Although the online courses become even compulsory for students due to the Covid-19, online EMI courses still pose problems. Thus, the present research investigates two variables (foreign language anxiety and technological anxiety) of online EMI courses and try to find out what kind of class behaviour increase students' anxiety.

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3. Research Questions

1. To what extent do students experience foreign language anxiety in online EMI courses?
2. To what extent do students experience technological anxiety in online EMI courses?

4. Methodology

4.1. Sampling

This research uses a nonrandom technique, convenience sampling, to select participants, which selects "members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria" (Etikan, Alkassim & Musa, 2016, p. 2). 31 participants from CUHK completed the questionnaires. All participants engaged in the questionnaires on a voluntary basis.

4.2. Instrumentation

4.2.1. Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale

The foreign language class anxiety scale (FLCAS) was selected from Horwitz et al. (1986)'s research. In this study, some items are modified from the original version to better fit the online EMI learning environment. The FLCAS analyzed students' foreign language anxiety from four factors, which are communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and other elements (Horwitz et al., 1986).

4.2.2. Technological Anxiety Questionnaire

9 items were designed in this questionnaire. The items concern about the experiences of using computer, the attitudes towards using some computer applications and the internet, and the experience of online activities in the online EMI courses. Some items were modified according to Zhang, Perris & Yeung (2005)'s research.

4.3. Data Analysis

The two questionnaires both use a 5 Likert Scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. 5 points were given to the responses that choose Strongly Agree, and for the responses that choose Strongly Disagree would only get 1 point. JASP is used to calculate the two scales' standard deviation, mean, median, mode and range.

5. Results

5.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

Table 1 (See Appendix 1) displays the participants' response to FLCAS. Four dimensions of the FLCAS - FOE, CA, TA, and other elements - are also calculated. The mean of the FLCAS was 76.74, the median and the mode was 74 and 58 respectively, all of which were below 81. This means that low-level foreign language anxiety is the main feelings for at least half of the participants. However, the modes scores of the four factors signified moderate anxiety. Above all, the participants generally feel low-level anxiety, but they all had different anxiety degree ratings for different factors. In the open-ended questions, most of the students mentioned the class group discussion and the interaction with teachers bring them much foreign language anxiety.

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5.2. Technological Anxiety Questionnaire

The results of students' response to this questionnaire are shown in Table 2 (See Appendix 2). The general tendency and the sub-scales' tendencies are also calculated. Most of the responses are "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree". This indicates that students do not have much trouble in using these online learning applications. Half of the students stated that leading a presentation through Zoom always challenges them, and they desire to have some guidance and practice by using Zoom before the presentation.

6. Discussion

The data from FLCAS in this study was higher than the data in Liu and Jackson's (2008) research and the results in Liu and Lu's (2011) research. The students' English proficiency levels in these studies were all advanced level, and so the main difference of the results is generated from the differences between online and offline English classes. This indicates that students have more foreign language class anxiety in online courses. Another reason was inferred that students from the university in mainland China are not required to use English except for some specific EMI programmes, while Chinese students in Hong Kong need to use nearly entire English in the courses. Thus, learners in Liu and Lu's (2011)'s research study faced less difficulties of foreign language anxiety compared with the Chinese postgraduate students from CUHK in this study.

The results of FLCAS are also have different compared with the results of Chou's (2018) study, in which two-thirds of the Taiwanese undergraduate students experience the high level of foreign language anxiety under the EMI learning context. Different learning aims is the first reason considered to cause the differences between the two studies. The Taiwanese undergraduate students were all from an ESP programme, which aims to specifically practice and learning of the English-speaking skill. With the aim of gaining higher scores in this ESP programme, learners would have more negative feelings and emotions when they were tested, and influenced more while they get the test results and evaluation. However, in this study, the learners' speaking abilities were not tested and evaluated. On the contrary, the instructors encourage students to express their thoughts without considering grammatical mistakes. Therefore, the general tendency of learners' foreign language anxiety in this research was lower than that of the Taiwanese undergraduate students in the ESP programme under EMI.

The results of technological anxiety questionnaire evidently show a low general anxious tendency when students use the technological tools, face internet problems, and have online class activities. The findings in Stiller et al. (2016)'s and Kira and Saadé (2007)'s studies are similar to this study, which also discuss that students' previous relevant experience of using technology help to reduce the technological anxiety. However, this study shows that technology still brings some additional difficulties and burdens to students compared with offline courses, especially when doing a presentation.

7. Conclusion & Implications

This study aims to explore the extent of foreign language anxiety and technological anxiety in online EMI courses. Two questionnaires with an open-ended question were utilised. 31 participants completed the scales and expressed their feelings about online EMI courses. In general, students in online EMI courses become more anxious compared with offline courses.

The pedagogical implications can be inferred from teacher-orientated and student-orientated. Firstly, the guidance of using technology should be introduced by teachers before conducting the courses, which helps to reduce students' technological anxiety. Moreover, the class interaction should be emphasized in the class, which is beneficial for raising students' awareness of participating in the

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class interaction. Furthermore, students in online EMI courses should cultivate an awareness of becoming effective learners, who need to practice their attention on online lessons, which reduces the anxiety from missing the course content. Additionally, students can utilize the internet to practice their spoken English, which can help them to speak English more confidently in the online EMI courses.

For future research studies, the relationship between the different types of the online course anxiety, and the investigation of the foreign language anxiety and technological anxiety combining with other students' influential elements, modulating, for example, students' interest level, and/or motivations traits can have more analysis.

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Appendix

Table 1: Foreign Language Class Anxiety (N=31)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my online EMI course.					
	4	10	12	4	1
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in the online EMI course.					
	3	9	12	6	1
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in the online EMI courses.					
	4	11	6	9	1
4. It frightens me when I know that I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.					
	1	11	6	11	2
5. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.					
	2	9	6	13	1
6. I am usually at ease during online English presentation and tests in my class.					
	3	7	10	10	1
7. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in the online EMI course.					
	0	11	4	13	3
8. In the online EMI course, I can get so nervous when I forget things I know.					
	3	10	7	9	2

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9. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my online EMI class.					
	2	9	12	7	1
10. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.					
	1	10	10	7	3
11. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting					
	1	6	11	11	2
12. Even if I am well prepared for the EMI course, I feel anxious about it.					
	4	9	10	7	1
13. I often feel like not going to my online EMI class.					
	7	10	10	4	0
14. I feel confident when I speak English in class.					
	1	10	10	9	1
15. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
	10	12	6	2	1
16. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.					
	6	7	7	9	2
17. The online EMI class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
	8	7	10	5	1
18. I feel more tense and nervous in my online EMI class than in my first language classes.					
	5	10	8	6	2
19. I get nervous and confused while I am speaking English in the course.					
	5	11	8	5	2

20. I feel very sure and relaxed before the online EMI class.					
	2	3	14	8	4
21. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the teacher says.					
	3	8	7	12	1
22. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.					
	5	13	9	4	0
23. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.					
	9	13	4	3	2
24. I would probably feel comfortable around English native speakers.					
	3	9	10	6	3
25. I get nervous when the teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.					
	0	5	11	15	0
26. I get tense and nervous when I have to discuss things unfamiliar to me in English.					
	2	4	8	14	3
27. I feel overwhelmed by the number of words I have to learn to speak in English.					
	1	9	13	6	2

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Table 2: Technological Anxiety (N=31)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am anxious about using computers to complete course assignments.					
	11	14	4	0	2
2. I am anxious about communicating via chat rooms.					
	13	12	3	3	0
3. I am anxious about communicating via email.					
	8	12	8	3	0
4. I am anxious about technological tools, such as Zoom, used in the online EMI course.					
	14	11	4	2	0
5. I am anxious to have interactions with teachers and other classmates on the online course.					
	14	11	3	3	0
6. I have difficulty typing in the language of instruction.					
	16	11	3	1	0
7. I feel anxious when I am required to search and use internet resources.					
	9	13	6	3	0
8. I feel anxious when I get teachers' online feedback and evaluation in a timely manner.					
	11	12	5	3	0