

College Students' English-Speaking Anxiety at the Foreign Language Corner

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ABSTRACT

English speaking has been perceived as an important professional skill in Taiwan. Many students look for opportunities to immerse themselves in English learning although they may more or less experience foreign language anxiety in English speaking. Given that language anxiety can affect learners' performance and language acquisition, we are intrigued to investigate the phenomenon of English-speaking anxiety in a particular context of English Corner at a national university of science and technology to see how it influences language learning. The results of our questionnaire had covered the factors, effects, and symptoms of English-speaking anxiety. There were audience factors as well as language-related factors which led to English-speaking anxiety. With respect to audience factors, higher percentage of students felt anxious when speaking English with people of opposite sex (89%, M=4.45) and strangers (83%, M=4.4) as opposed to their classmates (79%, M=4.23) and teachers (64%, M=4.00). As for language-related factors, 89% of the students felt pressure when they perceived their English ability to be inferior to others' (M=4.4); 81% of students got anxiety because they were worried about making grammatical mistakes (M=4.36), and 79% worried about pronunciation (M=4.32) in speaking English. Furthermore, English-speaking anxiety was found to bring about both positive and negative effects. For instance, 79% of the participants trained their oral skill in order to overcome English-speaking anxiety (M=4.06), whereas 89% of students indicated that nervousness led to their unnatural performance (M=4.15). Interestingly, the most common physical symptom of English-speaking anxiety for these students was 'laughing' (20%), followed by 'stammering' (17%) and 'avoiding eye contact' (14%). The students at English Corner seemed to use laughing to hide their anxiety of English speaking and might thus develop a habitual pattern of laughing in reaction to English-speaking anxiety. Implications drawn from this study will help teachers to understand the impact of foreign language anxiety and to create a more secure learning environment for English learning.

Key words: foreign language anxiety, English Corner, anxiety's symptoms and effects.

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