

Chinese Students' Anxiety in Speaking English at a Thai University : A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study aims to explore Chinese students' anxiety in speaking English at a private university in Thailand. It provides understanding into anxiety challenges that students experience when communicating with foreign teachers and peers, the causes of the challenges, their reactions and their coping strategies. The subjects of the study are 94 students, randomly selected from the Chinese students studying in international programs. This research project employed a mixed method combining both quantitative and qualitative inquiries. Data collection contains two types: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews conducted online. The questionnaire was analyzed by using descriptive statistics while the interviews were triangulated through content analysis. The findings show that the causes of Chinese students' speaking anxiety are moderate level of motivation and willingness to communicate, fear of negative evaluation, excessive comparison, lack of confidence and dissatisfaction with low level of speaking proficiency. Additionally, advanced preparations and practices seem to be good strategies for reducing participants' speaking anxiety.

Keywords :*Chinese students, anxiety, speaking English, causes, coping strategies.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Nowadays, young people around the world would like to seek a quality education while enjoying diverse cultures. Cebolla-Boado et al. (2018) point out in their study that Chinese students regard studying abroad as one of the best ways for them to acquire global skills, expand their horizons and get advantages in the job market. According to Statistics on Chinese learners studying abroad in 2019 (2020), the total number of Chinese nationals studying abroad has been increasing during the last few years. Besides, the western countries being the preferred choices, Thailand has become one of the most popular countries for Chinese students to study because of the culture, travel distance and cooperation between China and Thailand. There are a lot of factors that motivate

Chinese students to decide to study in Thailand such as beautiful scenery, and the innovative education system (Zhongcheng, 2013). Since the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road policy (The Belt and Road) started and the development of the partnership between China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, more and more Chinese companies have been established in Thailand creating increasing working opportunities (Yin, Ruangkanjanases, & Chen, 2015). Studying abroad, therefore, helps students to seek better jobs with their international experiences.

What is more, for Chinese students, it is hard for them to learn speak English in China where their classmates speak the same mother tongue. Wen (2018) summaries the mainstream in English teaching classrooms in Mainland China were text-centered and input-based. That is to say, English teachers focus more on the reading and listening parts and pay little attention to the speaking part, which produces “Dumb English” (Dai, 2001). Chinese learners are taught to take mistakes more seriously and anxiously and afraid of “losing face”. Similarly to Liu (2002), Yashima (2002), and Liu (2007), the fear of losing face makes many learners anxious when speaking English in class. These are the reasons why they tend to be overly sensitive to the judgement of others and turn to silence.

Based on these, Chinese students’ English language ability is interfered with foreign language anxiety when they study overseas which is also the case of my participants in this study.

1.2 Significance of the Study

With the development of globalization, English as an international language is a good tool for communication with all kinds of purposes like gaining knowledge, seeking jobs. Especially for Chinese students studying abroad, having good speaking competence enables them to assess more achievements in further study and get more job opportunities. Nowadays, more and more companies need employees who can communicate effortlessly with international partners and clients. People who cannot speak English are at a real disadvantage.

What is more, anxiety is one of the affective factors which plays an important role in students learning to speak a foreign language. Previous research has shown that affective factors correlate with language learning. Affect dominates human emotions and behaviors. Saito and Iida (2015) say that English language learners often experience a feeling of anxiety, nervousness, or stress while speaking the English language, causing a mental block that impedes them to speak. Liu and Jackson (2008) and Savaşçı (2014) show that quite a few students are reluctant to speak English due to language anxiety, lack of confidence, their fear of making mistakes, and some cultural factors.

Based on the above reasons, English speaking competence is really essential for Chinese students especially when they study abroad. Anxiety seems to be a great challenge that can influence students in speaking English. Though a lot of researchers contribute a number of investigations in the field of anxiety and language learning, the studies on the Chinese students studying in international programs in universities in Thailand still allow more rooms to be explored. This motivates me to conduct a study to find out the causes of anxiety that Chinese students

experience while they are speaking English, and what their coping strategies are toward the negative influence of anxiety. This study focuses on anxiety and the English speaking of Chinese students who study in a private university in Thailand to provide insights into their anxiety so that the students, future students to Thailand as well as interested educators globally can benefit from this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theories on Anxiety

Spielberger (2010) states, generally speaking, anxiety is the human subjective feeling of nervousness, apprehension, fear, worry and tension which relates to the nervous system of the human body. He (2013) makes a conclusion that anxiety is a special character of unpleasantness which distinguishes it from other unpleasant affective states such as anger, grief and sorrow. It is mainly covered by the word nervousness. Levitt (2015) refers to anxiety as a vague fear, the cause of which was unknown to the person involved. He (2013) defines anxiety as a state of anxiety or tension caused by worrying about misfortune, danger or that may occur in the future.

As for foreign language anxiety, it seems that Horwitz et al. (1986) are the first to emphasize the significance of treating foreign language anxiety as a specific form of anxiety. They define foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” which frequently appears in listening and speaking activities, overstudying, testing circumstances, and so on. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) refer to foreign language anxiety as the fear that occurs when a learner uses the language. MacIntyre (1999) regards it as the worry and negative emotional response caused by learning or using a second language. Kasbi and Elahi Shirvan (2017) regard speaking anxiety as a significant emotional reaction to learning a second language.

According to the above studies, speaking anxiety in this research can be summed up as the fear and the worry of getting negative evaluations or emotional responses when language learners are speaking a foreign language. In brief, speaking anxiety is the threat of using a language orally.

2.2. Facilitating Anxiety in Language Learning

Anxiety, when it is at an appropriate level, can stimulate better language output as they play a key role in developing language skills. Matsuda and Gobel (2004) point out that anxiety can facilitate learners' speaking proficiency. Language learners would prepare more in advance resulting in better language proficiency when they encounter with anxiety. According to Sanaei, Zafarghandi, and Sabet (2015), language proficiency and anxiety levels have a relative relationship and the low level of anxiety could be correlated positively with speech proficiency. Wimolmas (2013) agrees that anxiety is good in language learning in the case where it is at a low level. Wang (2009) concludes that facilitating anxiety, which is the right, optimal degree of anxiety, can inspire students to work more and practice more to achieve better competence. This facilitating anxiety

can lead to excellent accomplishment, whereas extreme anxiety hinders students from achieving well.

2.3 Debilitating Anxiety in Language Learning

Much research shows that anxiety has a negative relationship between learner's speaking performance (Woodrow, 2006). The consequences may be direct, such as decreased class engagement, or indirect, such as fear, frustration, and stress. According to the previous research (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), anxiety brings avoidance behaviors in the classroom. Anxious students have the tendency to avoid attending courses, giving voluntary answers and participating in speech activities. Eysenck (1979) found that anxious learners focus more often on the task-irrelevant process than the non-anxious learners in language learning. These task-irrelevant processing activities take away some of the available effort and working memory capacity. That is to say, anxious learners are usually more easily distracted and focus on the irrelevant things which can hinder their working memory capacity in the language learning process. Similar to Sellers's (2000) study that highly anxious readers are more distracted by unrelated thoughts such as how their friends behave or how bad they are. In contrast, their counterparts who are less anxious focus more on the task at hand.

Many studies reveal that anxiety, rather than playing a role in language learning independently, is related to language learners' other personal characteristics (Chao, 2003; Fachtmann et al., 2001; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). In the field of motivation and language learning, Zheng (2008) draws a conclusion from others' studies that high proficiency language learners are less anxious and have good balance between emotion and language learning. Wimolmas (2013) focuses on the role of motivation in language learning and finds that motivation is beneficial for language acquisition and it can increase or decrease depending on the language context. It means students who have high motivation are more desired to learn a foreign language or use it to serve their purposes. In the field of willingness to communicate and language learning, Liu and Jackson (2008) find that there is a vital relationship between anxiety and EFL learners' willingness to communicate. In Horwitz's (2001) study, learners with anxiety are less willing to participate in learning activities than those without anxiety. In brief, students with a high willingness to communicate are more ready to communicate and less anxious. In the field of self-confidence and language learning, Young (1990) suggests that students with low self-confidence tend to be more anxious than those with high self-confidence. Similarly, Oxford (1999) discovers that language learners with high self-confidence may cope better with their anxiety than learners with low self-confidence, resulting in good performance. Asadifard and Biria (2013) carry out a study about the relationship between self-confidence and language learning. Its finding reveals that the students with learning strategies and good self-confidence knew their potential better. Minghe and Yuan (2013) say that high self-confidence encourages students to practice more, which leads to better language proficiency.

2.4 Conclusion

This brief review of the literature can adopt a historical perspective. As numerous studies have identified anxiety as a factor that lowers language learning success, many researchers share the similar views that study abroad could increase language proficiency and reduce the negative influence of language anxiety in language learning (Allen & Herron, 2003; Archangeli, 1999; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Freed, 1998; Martinsen, 2010; Saito & Iida, 2015). Kondo and YingLing (2004) gather coping strategies on reducing anxiety from students, including: preparation, such as studying hard, taking good notes in class; relaxation, such as taking deep breaths to relax; positive thinking, such as imagining oneself performing well; peer seeking, such as finding conversational companions.

There are studies exploring the influence of anxiety on Chinese students when they speak English with non-Chinese speakers in Thai university contexts. As more and more Chinese students are planning to further their study in Thailand, studies focusing on anxiety are significant because they showcase evidence that students may learn and better prepare themselves for a fruitful academic success. This study, however, focuses on three elements: English speaking anxiety, Chinese students' reactions and strategies in a Thai university context. It mainly aims to identify the causes of Chinese students' anxiety in speaking English, explore the reactions that Chinese students have while experiencing anxiety and find out the coping strategies they manage to reduce the negative influence of anxiety. It can be a springboard for studies with more details and different angles to explore.

3. Methodology

This part provides methodology employed to conduct this study. Then the research design, research questions, and data collection procedures, including the instruments are explained.

3.1 Context of the Study

This study was conducted in a private university in Thailand. The total number of the student's population in this university is more than twenty thousand. Among thousands of international students here, about 20 percent of them are Chinese students. Based on the enrollment in 2020, the number of Chinese students in these international programs was 136. In 2021, the enrollment was up to 195. In other words, the number of Chinese students studying in Thailand is increasing.

3.2 Research Method

The study employed mixed methods: firstly, a questionnaire is used as the quantitative method design of this research. In order to find out the Chinese students' nature of anxiety when they speak English with non-Chinese counterparts, a set of questionnaires of anxiety items is used as the instrument of a quantitative method. Questionnaires are considered as one of the good ways of gathering data on attitudes from a large group of participants.

Secondly, five semi-interviews are data of qualitative method design of this study. A qualitative method is followed to give a more subjective justification on the results of the quantitative method. Semi- structured interviews are employed to get more details and explore understanding more in depth.

3.3 Research Participants

In this study, 94 participants are Chinese sophomores and juniors who learned English as a foreign language. They have been studying at the same private university in Thailand for more than six months. All of them are undergraduate students, majoring in international business, communication arts, and the hospitality industry which are taught in English. Among 94 questionnaire participants, 5 volunteers agreed to do the semi-structured interviews. These 5 interviewees have different time lengths of studying in Thailand (e.g. some have studied in Thailand for a year, two, three, or even more).

The number of participants was calculated by using Taro Yamane formula with 95% confidence level (Adam, 2020). According to the enrollment of the university, in 2020, the enrollment of Chinese students in undergraduate programs was 44. In 2021, the enrollment had increased to 73. Based on the Taro Yamane formula, the minimum number of the sample size should be 90.5. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, the researcher increased the questionnaire sample size to 94.

To provide detailed information, the general demographic information of the participants is provided in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

Table 3.1 Demographic information of 94 participants (*Question = Q, Number = N*)

| Demographic information | | Number (N = 94) | Percent |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Q1. Gender | Male | 23 | 24.5 |
| | Female | 71 | 75.5 |
| Q2. Age | Less than 21 years old | 21 | 22.3 |
| | 21 years old | 25 | 26.6 |
| | 22 years old | 17 | 18.1 |
| | 23 years old | 10 | 10.6 |
| | 24 years old | 6 | 6.4 |
| | 25 years old | 9 | 9.6 |
| | More than 25 years old | 6 | 6.4 |
| Q3. Major | International Business | 9 | 9.6 |
| | Communication Arts | 9 | 9.6 |
| | Hospitality Industry | 4 | 4.3 |
| | Design | 37 | 39.4 |
| | Other | 35 | 37.2 |
| Q4. How long have | Less than 3 years | 12 | 12.8 |
| | 3 to 6 years | 18 | 19.1 |

| Demographic information | | Number (N = 94) | Percent |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|---------|
| you learnt English? | 7 to 9 years | 18 | 19.1 |
| | More than 9 years | 46 | 48.9 |
| Q5. How long have you studied in Thailand? | Less than 6 months | 0 | 0 |
| | 6 months to 1 year | 33 | 35.1 |
| | 1 to 2 years | 39 | 41.5 |
| | 2 to 3 years | 11 | 11.7 |
| | More than 3 years | 11 | 11.7 |
| Q6. How often do you use English in daily life now in Thailand? | Rarely | 18 | 19.1 |
| | Occasionally | 24 | 25.5 |
| | Sometimes | 30 | 31.9 |
| | Usually | 11 | 11.7 |
| | Frequently | 11 | 11.7 |

Table 3.2 Basic information for 5 interviewees

| Interviewee | Gender | Major | Years of studying English | Years of studying in Thailand |
|-------------|--------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A | Female | Design | More than 9 years | 6 months-1 year |
| B | Female | Communication Arts | More than 9 years | 1 year |
| C | Male | Design | More than 9 years | 1-2 years |
| D | Female | Education | More than 9 years | 2-3 years |
| E | Female | Design | More than 9 years | 3 years |

From Table 3.1, there are more female participants (75.5%) than male participants (24.5%) and the majority of the participants in this study are approximately 22 years old (67%). Regarding the duration of learning English before joining the university in Thailand, from Table 4.1, 48.9% of the participants had learned English for more than 9 years. Regarding the duration of studying in Thailand, 76.1% of the participants had studied in Thailand about 6 months to 2 years. In terms of frequency of English use in daily life, while 23.4% of the Chinese students said that they usually or frequently used English, a sizable number of the participants or 38.2% rarely or occasionally used English, and 31.9% sometimes used English daily.

In general, the findings of this study, perhaps can more fit to the opinions of young Chinese female university students. Additionally, even when the Chinese students are in foreign countries most students do not often use English.

3.3 Research Questions

In this research, there are three questions: 1. What are the causes of anxiety that Chinese students experience while speaking English? 2. What are the reactions caused by anxiety that

Chinese students have when they have to speak English? 3. What strategies do they use to reduce the negative influence of anxiety?

3.4 Instruments

This research applied a mix-methods methodology. A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are used to collect data for the study.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

In this study, the questionnaire is adapted from the previous studies based on the research questions and research participants (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 2000; Saito & Iida, 2015; Sheen, 2008; Tallon, 2009). The questionnaire format consists of three parts.

Part 1: Demographic information of the participants: gender, age, major, and the length of learning English.

This part is multiple choice questions about demographic information. Participants can select the option that best suits their situation.

Part 2: Participants' attitudes and feelings toward speaking English.

This part is to investigate the causes of anxiety which brings communication apprehension, focusing on lack of self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation and comparison with others. In this part, the questionnaire used five scale Likert scales for each item. Participants could specify their level of agreement typically in five points: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. The choices have numerical values from 1-5, which show the participants' degree of preference for or tendency toward the items of the questionnaire.

Part 3: Participants' reactions and coping strategies while experiencing anxiety

This part is to investigate participants' reactions while they are experiencing anxiety in speaking English. In addition, the strategies which the participants use to manage anxiety are also collected in this part.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

In order to get more detailed information about participants' opinions and reactions, semi-structured individual interviews are designed. There are 5 volunteers to answer these interview questions.

3.4.3 Pilot questionnaire

Before running the main study, a pilot questionnaire was carried out in order to ensure its validity and reliability. According to Lackey and Wingate (1997), about 10% of the total participant size with the ultimate choice is determined by the size and variability of the population as well as financial and time restraints. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, here, 42 Chinese English learners did this pilot questionnaire.

Before the pilot questionnaire, the questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were evaluated by three professional experts with doctoral degrees in language teaching, using Item Objective Congruence (IOC) form. The results turned out that the validity of the questionnaire was 0.83. The validity of the semi-structured interview was 0.97. Next the result of the pilot questionnaire, analyzed by SPSS, revealed that the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.92.

3.5 Data Collection

Owing to the pandemic (COVID-19), the data were collected by using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews through online platforms.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by quantitative and qualitative methods. Generally, descriptive statistics of questionnaires are used to demonstrate frequencies, means, percentages, and the range of scores by using IBM SPSS. In order to identify the patterns, the data of the interviews are analyzed by the following steps, using content analysis adopted from Mayring (2014) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

4. Research Results

Research results are presented below. Causes of anxiety, students' reactions and coping strategies are shown to briefly explain the findings.

4.1 Causes of Anxiety

To answer RQ 1, "what are the causes of anxiety that Chinese students experience while speaking English?", the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data are presented.

Findings from the Questionnaire

In this part, the findings from questionnaire are described.

Anxiety in speaking English

Table 4.3 (Question = Q; Mean = M; Standard Deviation = SD) illustrates the mean scores of the participants toward their motivations when they spoke English.

Table 4.1 *Motivation to speak English*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| Q7. I love talking in English. | 3.39 | 1.23 |
| Q8. I always take an active part in activities such as group work by using English. | 3.18 | 1.17 |
| Q9. I would enjoy myself while speaking English. | 3.33 | 1.12 |
| Q10. I try to speak English as much as possible in my day-to-day life. | 3.34 | 1.21 |

The above Table shows the mean score representing the level of motivation, all of which are 3.39, 3.18, 3.33 and 3.34 respectively. This shows that the Chinese students' level of motivation is moderate. In other words, the causes of this group of students' anxiety can be the moderate level of motivation. When taking a look at Q8, which has the lowest mean score (M=3.18, SD=1.173), it can be inferred that students experience more anxiety when taking part in activities.

Willingness to speak English

Table 4.2 introduces the answers of the participants toward their willingness when they speak English.

Table 4.2 *Willingness to speak English*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Q11. I am willing to speak English with native English speaking friends. | 3.64 | 1.08 |
| Q12. I am willing to speak English with non-native English speaking friends. | 3.47 | 1.10 |
| Q13. I am willing to speak English with native English speaking teachers. | 3.57 | 1.14 |
| Q14. I am willing to speak English with non-native English speaking teachers. | 3.46 | 1.09 |
| Q15. I am willing to speak English with native English speaking strangers. | 3.53 | 1.18 |
| Q16. I am willing to speak English with non-native English speaking strangers. | 3.38 | 1.12 |

Table 4.2, the mean score of Q14 (M=3.46, SD=1.09) is lower than Q13 (M=3.57, SD=1.14). It can be interpreted that Chinese students are more willing to speak English with native teachers than to non-native. The mean score of Q16 (M=3.38, SD=1.12) is lower than Q15 (M=3.53, SD=1.18). It can be interpreted that compared with non-native English speaking strangers, Chinese students are more willing to speak English with natives.

From the table, the mean scores are at a moderate level which can be interpreted that this group of Chinese students tend to have low level of willingness and high level of anxiety. Additionally, they prefer to speak English with native speakers whether the talking objects are friends, teachers, or strangers.

The lack of self-confidence

Table 4.3 introduces the answers of the participants toward their self-feelings when they spoke English.

Table 4.3 *The lack of self-confidence*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| Q17. I am afraid of expressing myself in English. | 2.78 | 1.23 |
| Q18. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English. | 3.29 | 1.17 |
| Q19. I feel bad if I don't express myself well in English. | 3.56 | 1.16 |
| Q20. I feel at ease while speaking English with my native English speaking friends. | 3.15 | 1.01 |
| Q21. I feel relaxed while speaking English with my non-native English speaking friends. | 3.20 | 0.98 |
| Q22. I feel comfortable while speaking English with native English speaking teachers. | 3.15 | 1.08 |
| Q23. I find it easy while speaking English with non-native English speaking teachers. | 3.18 | 1.08 |
| Q24. I feel confident while speaking English with native English speaking strangers. | 3.00 | 1.13 |
| Q25. I feel easy while speaking English with non-native English speaking strangers. | 3.05 | 1.12 |
| Q26. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English in class. | 3.66 | 1.18 |

From the Table, Q20 (M=3.15, SD=1.01) as well as Q21 (M=3.20, SD=0.98), it can be assumed that most of the students do not feel easy or relaxed when they speak English with their friends, no matter whether their friends are native or non-native. The data in Q22 and Q 23 concerning the participants' feeling when speaking English with native or non-native English teachers are not substantially different, meaning that neither native speakers nor non-native speakers different, which is similar with the finding of Q24 and Q25. As a result, it can be concluded that anxiety is caused by a moderately low level of self-confidence.

In all, Chinese students lack self-confidence which causes anxiety when speaking English. Also, they are more anxious or less confident when they talk with native English speaking speakers than with non-natives.

Fear of negative evaluations

Table 4.4 summarizes the responses of participants about fear of negative evaluation.

Table 4.4 *Fear of negative evaluation*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| Q27. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me if I make mistakes in speaking English. | 3.17 | 1.33 |

| | | |
|---|------|------|
| Q28. I am worried that my teachers will be ready to correct every mistake I make. | 2.70 | 1.28 |
| Q29. I am worried about the bad evaluation from others. | 3.26 | 1.35 |

Table 4.4 shows the mean score representing the level of fear of negative evaluation, all of which are 3.17, 2.70 and 3.26 respectively. This shows that the cause of anxiety can be a moderate level of fear of negative evaluation. Of the three answers, Q28 concerning teachers' correction has the lowest mean scores, meaning that fear of being over-corrected causes the most anxiety.

Comparison with others

Table 4.5 shows the mean and standard deviation in the descriptive data for participants about comparison with others.

Table 4.5 *Comparison with others*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Q30. I always feel that other students speak better English than I do. | 3.40 | 1.16 |
| Q31. I am afraid of getting left behind. | 3.67 | 1.18 |

From Table 4.5, the mean scores are representing students' moderately high level of caring about comparisons. From the results of Q30 and Q31, it can be interpreted that the majority of the participants feel that they are not good enough and afraid of getting left behind.

Findings from semi-structured interviews (SSI)

There are several situations showing anxiety in this study. First, some of the participants stated in interviews that they felt easy when talking with friends in English. Because friends were at the same age, they shared similar experiences and interesting topics. While the others stated that they found it easy to speak English with teachers because teachers were knowledgeable and willing to teach them. Second, when comparing native speakers and non-native speakers, some of the participants stated that they felt easy talking with natives in English because their pronunciations were clear and easy to understand while some of the non-native speakers had a strong local accent. The others stated that they felt relaxed when speaking English with non-native speakers. Because they were afraid of native speakers' high speech speed and the dialect or slang which they did not understand. Third, participants mentioned that their English competence was bad and they would be anxious when talking with someone whose English was much better than they were. It was like a psychological pressure that brought anxiety. What's more, if they got negative evaluations, they would be more anxious.

To sum up, in SSI, the data show that low willingness to speak, language proficiency, comparison with others, the lack of self-confidence and negative evaluation cause anxiety.

4.3 Students' reactions toward anxiety

In this part, the data analysis exhibits the answers to RQ 2: What are the reactions caused by anxiety that Chinese students have when they have to speak English?

Findings from the questionnaire

Table 4.6 illustrates the participants' reactions while experiencing anxiety.

Table 4.6 *Reactions toward anxiety*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Q32. When I get anxious, I forget things I know. | 3.45 | 1.33 |
| Q33. When I get anxious, I speak in broken English. | 3.66 | 1.09 |
| Q34. When I get anxious, I stop speaking and turn to silence. | 3.56 | 1.28 |
| Q35. When I get anxious, I avoid having eye contact with anyone. | 3.47 | 1.32 |
| Q36. When I get anxious, I start to shake. | 2.94 | 1.37 |
| Q37. When I get anxious, I start to sweat. | 2.64 | 1.25 |
| Q38. When I get anxious, my heart beats fast. | 3.39 | 1.22 |

From the data analysis of the questionnaire, most of the participants would forget things, speak in broken English, stop talking, avoid having eye contact and experience a faster heart beat when they were anxious in speaking English. Some of them would start to shake or sweat when they were anxious when speaking English.

Findings from SSI

The reactions to anxiety are diverse, including verbal to non-verbal reactions.

The verbal reactions include speaking broken English or speaking faster. Some participants mentioned that they would stop talking or speak in broken English. Some of them would ask the other for help or ask for repetition. One of them mentioned that she would speak faster than before because she wanted to end the conversation as soon as possible. For the nonverbal reactions, when interviewees were experiencing anxiety in speaking English, some of them would sweat and keep smiling. Their bodies were stiff with a distracted mind. Some of them would blush with embarrassment.

Students' strategies toward anxiety

In this part, the data analysis exhibits the answers to RQ 3: What strategies do they use to reduce the negative influence of anxiety?

Findings from the questionnaire

In the following Table, the data analysis shows the answers in the questionnaire.

Table 4.7 *Strategies toward anxiety*

| Question | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| Q39. When I feel uneasy in speaking English, I will pretend to be calm and take a deep breath. | 3.05 | 1.27 |
| Q40. When I feel uneasy in speaking English, I will speak more slowly than before. | 3.59 | 1.06 |
| Q41. When I feel uneasy in speaking English, I will use more fillers, namely well..., as you can see... | 3.67 | 1.22 |
| Q42. When I feel uneasy speaking English, I will add more gestures. | 3.45 | 1.29 |

From the data analysis of the questionnaire, it can be interpreted that when experiencing anxiety in speaking English, most of the students pretend to be calm, take a deep breath to reduce the anxiety. When they feel uneasy in English speaking, they speak more slowly than before and add more gestures to make the speech continue fluently.

Findings from SSI

All interviewees have different ways of managing their anxiety. Besides the similar findings with questionnaire, interviewees give more strategies to cope with anxiety in SSI.

Chinese students (Interviewee D) tend to do advanced preparation and practice before giving a speech to reduce the negative influence of anxiety. One interviewee finds a way to reduce their anxiety by drinking water and be calm. One interviewee says she uses a lot of colloquial language or conjunctions. What is more, some of them mention that they will listen to English music and watch English videos to relax and make a list of everyday conversations.

5. Conclusion and Discussions

In this part, the conclusion and discussions of this research based on the three research questions are presented.

5.1 Conclusion

This section identifies the causes of anxiety that Chinese students experience when they speak English, their reactions toward anxiety, and strategies they use to cope with the negative influence of anxiety. The findings are summarized below.

Causes of anxiety

The findings from SSI are in line with those from the questionnaire.

From the results of the questionnaire, first, moderate levels of motivation and willingness to communicate are the causes of anxiety. The participants also mentioned in SSI, the fast-speaking speed of the native English speakers, the heavy local accent of the non-native English speakers and cultural differences all contribute to their low level of motivation and unwillingness to speak English which led to Chinese students' English-speaking anxiety. Second, lack of self-confidence is one of the causes of English-speaking anxiety. A large number of participants stated that they never felt sure of themselves, they kept thinking that other's language competence was better than theirs. When they did not express themselves clearly in English conversations or presentations, they felt anxious and stressed. Third, fear of negative evaluations is one of the causes of English-speaking anxiety. Nearly half of the participants demonstrated their agreement with the statement that they were afraid of being laughed at by others or getting negative evaluations when they had to speak English. Fourth, excessive focus on comparison is also a cause of anxiety. More than half of the participants always compared themselves with other students and were afraid of getting left behind.

What's more, lack of English language proficiency causes anxiety. As presented in SSI, interviewees mentioned that vocabulary, grammar and Chinese thinking disturbed them to learn or speak English. They are afraid that they cannot express themselves well in English and are misunderstood by others. They are anxious about their lack of English proficiency.

Reactions toward anxiety

With regards to the reactions while experiencing anxiety in speaking English, most of the participants stated that they would feel blank, avoid having eye contact with others, heart beat faster, speak in broken English or even stop talking and turn to silence when they experienced anxiety in English speaking. A small number of participants reported that they would start to sweat or shake. Some of them would speak more slowly so that they would have more time to think or add more gestures and fillers to make the conversations flow, while some of them tended to speak more quickly to end the conversation.

Coping strategies toward anxiety

Regarding the strategies the participants used to cope with the negative influence caused by anxiety in speaking English, the findings show that advanced preparations and practices seem to be a good strategy for reducing participants' speaking anxiety. Participants responded that they need to gather information on topics and practice the scripts in English before class. Through extensive practices, they could have a sufficient level of language proficiency and preparation. As a result, they could feel safe and confident and avoid making mistakes in speaking English. Ahmed (2016) explains in his study that preparation and practice can give speakers more confidence so that their language output is increased in the classroom.

5.2 Discussion

In this section, the findings of this research are discussed below.

From the findings of the questionnaire, Chinese students' level of motivation and willingness to speak is moderately low, while the level of lack of self-confidence is high. In the SSIs, interviewees express their own reasons for each factor of anxiety. Students' answers differ from each other when asked about their willingness to speak English with different talking objects. However, it is inferred from their answers that they prefer to speak English with people who don't have strong accents, speak slowly, and pronounce clearly. They also prefer to speak English with well-learned people who gently correct their mistakes and do not give them negative evaluations. When asked about their reactions toward anxiety and the strategies used to cope with anxiety, most of the participants take advanced preparation and practice strategies, self-encouragement and positive self-talk to reduce anxiety. They tend to be self-directed learners. Take Interviewee D as an example, he would prepare by himself in advance and review the conversation again to make up for the language deficiency.

As many studies (Horwitz, 2001; Von Worde, 2003; Zheng, 2008) have given support to the statements that anxiety has a negative influence on language learning experience in numerous ways and reducing anxiety could enhance learners' language proficiency. This study focuses on identifying the causes of Chinese students speaking anxiety, Chinese students' reactions while speaking English and their coping strategies toward anxiety. Possible factors resulting in speaking anxiety basically are being afraid of negative evaluation, excessive focus on comparison, lack of opportunities to practice, lack of confidence to speak and dissatisfaction of low level of speaking proficiency. Interestingly, the qualitative findings in this study point out that in Thailand, learning Thai, the local language, is also one of the ways for students to relieve English speaking anxiety.

8. References

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