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Oral English Learning Strategies and Anxiety Among Chinese Students at Higher Vocational College

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Abstract

Aim: This study investigated the relationship between anxiety and oral English learning practices among 418 upper vocational college students in Guangzhou, China who did not major in English.

Methodology: This study used a descriptive and quantitative research approach with the goal of methodically outlining how these variables interact to affect students' oral English competency and suggesting useful treatments to improve learning outcomes. Surveys measuring students' levels of language anxiety and their usage of different learning tactics were used to gather data.

Results: The study provided useful insights into the anxiety levels and methods of learning employed by vocational college students enrolled in oral English courses. It demonstrated how sex substantially affected anxiety and learning methods. The relationships between anxiety and learning strategies highlighted how these elements are intertwined with language acquisition.

Conclusion: The study highlights a strong relationship between learning strategies and language anxiety, with better strategies and reduced anxiety correlating with higher English proficiency. As learning increases, anxiety decreases, leading to improved learning strategies.

Keywords: *Oral English, Learning Strategies, Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world since only humans can communicate through language. The English language has gained popularity among Chinese people in recent decades. It is a prevalent misconception that language knowledge leads to language ability (Carvajal & Sanchez, 2023; Carvajal & Sanchez, 2024; Dizon & Sanchez, 2020; Muñoz & Sanchez, 2023). Facilitating communication and information sharing is the main objective of learning a foreign language (Mahripah, 2014). Chinese students, especially those enrolled in higher vocational colleges, find it challenging to speak English properly since some people still prioritize reading and writing over creating a healthy learning environment. Communication should be the main objective of studying English (Amihan & Sanchez, 2023; Bation & Nambatac, 2024; Bation, et al., 2024; Sanchez, 2022; Sanchez, 2020; Sanchez, 2023a). English language learners must become proficient in speaking, writing, listening, and reading as their four core language skills. The most crucial of these for effective communication is speaking. It is essential to good communication and is covered in great detail in the language acquisition curriculum (El-Sakka, 2016; Paraiso, et al., 2024; Salendab & Sanchez, 2023; Salendab, Ocariza-Salendab & Sanchez, 2023; Sanchez, et al., 2024a; Sanchez & Sarmiento, 2020; Sanchez, et al., 2022). To solve this issue, educators and scholars now consider the demands of their pupils. Students' affective requirements are among their most critical demands. The significance increases when one learns a language.

On the other side, learning strategies are the things language learners do to improve their learning process. Oral English learning tactics are methods and approaches used by students to improve their spoken English ability. The development and practice of oral abilities are aided by a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social



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methods. Repetition, feedback-seeking, mnemonic devices, and conversing with fluent speakers are all examples of effective tactics (Oxford, 1990). Language learning method research has been ongoing for a while (Amihan, Sanchez & Carvajal, 2023; Cabling-Ramos, et al., 2024; Carvajal, et al., 2024a; Salendab, et al., 2024a; Sanchez, 2023b; Sanchez, et al., 2024b). Nonetheless, they are not widely used in Chinese teaching and learning, and the results obtained in this area are not very noteworthy. The English proficiency of students in higher vocational colleges is poor. They are prepared to accomplish tremendous success in English in order to pursue higher education. In actuality, though, they invest more in their English language education while just marginally benefiting. For them, this can be an inexplicable issue. They should be able to solve this issue. However, there is a better solution to this issue with language learning techniques.

The term "language learning anxiety" describes the stress, anxiety, and uneasiness people feel when they are learning or utilizing a second language. This kind of anxiety, which frequently takes the shape of a fear of making mistakes, speaking in front of people, or receiving a poor grade from peers and teachers, can have a substantial impact on language learning and performance. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), it is regarded as one of the main affective variables that can impede the learning process. One of the most common negative emotions that affects oral English proficiency is anxiety. Language anxiety is one significant affective factor that is recognized to play a significant impact in the acquisition of a second language. Anxiety related to oral English is prevalent in Chinese higher vocational colleges. Many Chinese students attending higher vocational colleges are reluctant or terrified to speak English, and this unfavorable emotional experience of oral English instruction will severely impede their ability to acquire and use the language.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the oral English learning strategies, and anxiety among Chinese students in Higher Vocational Colleges in Guangzhou city, China, as basis for a proposed intervention to further enhance English teaching and learning.

To be specific, it can be expounded in the following aspects:

1. determine the respondent's English learning strategies as to memory, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.
2. identify the oral English anxiety as to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.
3. test the difference of responses on oral English learning strategies, and anxiety when grouped according to Profile.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in oral English anxiety based on the students' age, years of English study, or major.

Hypothesis 2: There is a strong relationship between oral English learning strategies and language learning anxiety.

Hypothesis 3: Improved learning strategies and reduced anxiety are correlated with higher proficiency in the English language.

METHODS

Research Design

Using descriptive research methodologies, this quantitative study examined anxiety and oral English learning tactics. Descriptive research is a technique that gives a precise description of the traits of a certain person, event, or group in actual circumstances (Loeb et al., 2017; Salendab, et al., 2024b; Sanchez, et al., 2024c; Sanchez, Sanchez & Sanchez, 2023). Through the methodical description of an event or phenomena, descriptive research allows researchers to accurately record and convey a profile of participant experiences and perspectives. By collecting information and presenting it in a way that accurately represents their experiences, attitudes, or actions, descriptive research seeks to systematically describe a scenario, phenomena, or group of individuals. It focuses on presenting a thorough picture of the subjects being studied rather than testing theories. By closely examining the participants' experiences, this study was able to gather important details on their anxiety levels and learning preferences in language-learning settings.



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Population and Sampling

In Guangzhou, China, a higher vocational college served as the study's location. These were freshmen majoring in subjects other than English. By using random sampling, the author gave out questionnaires to freshmen using the "Question Star" app; in the end, 418 samples were gathered.

Instrument

Three Likert-type scale questionnaires were given out in this study to gather information about the learning strategies and anxiety levels of Chinese students attending higher vocational colleges. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: questions about participants' personal information, questions on learning strategies, and questions about anxiety.

For speakers of other languages learning English Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL), the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Version for R.L. The language learning techniques questionnaire utilized in this study was Oxford, (1989). Memory, cognitive, compensatory, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies were all explored. In addition, the questionnaire was scored using the Likert four-point scale. Anxiety Concerning Oral English in Higher Vocational College Students:

The oral English anxiety questionnaire used in this study was based on the Horwitz E. K. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale results. (1983), which addressed anxiety related to tests, communication, and fear of getting a bad grade. In addition, the questionnaire was scored using the Likert four-point scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of worry related to oral English.

In this study's three Likert four-point scoring methods, 1 indicating Strongly Disagree, 2 indicates Disagree, 3 Agree, and 4 Strongly agree.

Data Collection

The "Questionnaire Star" web tool was used to select the data for this study. The respondents were emailed the questionnaire link directly by the author, and they responded with their responses. To confirm the validity and reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot test with thirty participants was conducted prior to data collection. Subsequently, 418 participants participated in a large-scale questionnaire study, and the author examined the information gathered.

Treatment of Data

For statistical analysis, SPSS was utilized as the statistical software program. Frequencies, percentages, weighted means, rankings, descriptive statistics analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were the principal statistical tools. Using frequencies, percentages, weighted means, and ranking distributions, the current situation of oral English learning strategies and anxiety was described. The relationships between them were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. To determine whether there was a significant association between the three variables, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed. Ultimately, inferences were made based on how the evidence was interpreted. An improvement program was proposed to raise the oral English proficiency of vocational college students while lowering their oral English anxiety through oral English learning techniques.

Ethical Considerations

Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the entire study. Personal identities were replaced with unique codes, and all information was safely stored. The results were presented in a way that concealed the identities of specific participants. Participants were guaranteed no danger or pain according to the study's design. Participants were assured that the information they provided would be kept confidential and used solely for research. The highest levels of integrity and transparency were used in the conduct of this study. The investigation was conducted impartially, and all possible conflicts of interest were declared.



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RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of the Respondents Profile

Age	Frequency	Percentage %
16 years old and below	1	.2
17-18 years old	238	56.9
19 years old and above	179	42.8
Sex		
Male	238	56.9
Female	180	43.1
Years of language learning		
6 years and below	61	14.6
7 years	39	9.3
8 years	38	9.1
9 years and above	280	67.0
Major		
Liberal Arts	146	34.9
Science	173	41.4
Engineering	99	23.7

The survey participants' basic information is displayed in Table 1. Out of all the respondents questioned, 238 students, or 56.9% of the total, were between the ages of 17 and 18, which is also the average age of typical Chinese college freshman. Of the total respondents, 179 were 19 years of age or older, making up 42.8 percent. The age of only one respondent was sixteen. In this study, there are more male respondents than female respondents. The majority of the students in this study studied English for nine years or longer. In China, elementary school pupils usually start studying English in grade three. As a result, they have studied English for more than ten years when they enroll in a college or university. The authors' study was conducted in a comprehensive vocational college, thus the respondents' majors ranged widely, from engineering to science to liberal arts.

Table 2
Summary Table on Learning Strategies

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Memory	2.74	Agree	
Cognitive	2.68	Agree	
Compensation Learning	2.73	Agree	
Metacognitive Strategies	2.78	Agree	
Affective Strategies	2.77	Agree	
Social Strategies	2.76	Agree	
Composite Mean	2.74	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The summary table on learning styles used by Chinese students attending higher vocational colleges is shown in Table 2. The respondents agreed on all six items, including memory, cognition, compensatory learning, metacognitive methods, affective strategies, and social strategies, as indicated by the composite mean of 2.74. Metacognitive methods scored the highest (2.78) out of the six items, followed by affective strategies (2.77). Cognitive learning strategies received the lowest score (2.68), followed by compensatory learning strategies (2.73).

The fact that metacognitive strategies came in first place across all categories suggests that respondents thought these techniques were especially useful for language learning. Planning, observing, and assessing one's learning process are examples of metacognitive methods, which show a deliberate and introspective approach to learning (Carvajal, et al., 2024b; Carvajal, Sanchez & Amihan, 2023; Sanchez, et al., 2024d). After metacognitive



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tactics, affective strategies come in second. These techniques concentrate on controlling incentives, attitudes, and feelings related to language acquisition. The high ranking implies that students understand the significance of motivation and emotional control in language learning. Social techniques come in third place, demonstrating how highly valued they are seen to be in language acquisition. Social strategies are ways to practice and enhance language skills through social interaction with others, like classmates or native speakers. This shows that students are aware of the advantages of social contact and teamwork when learning a language. Metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are ranked higher than memory, compensatory learning, and cognitive strategies. They are not as highly valued by respondents, even though they are still thought to be effective. Memory strategies encompass methods for retaining and remembering; compensatory learning strategies deal with ways to get around learning challenges; and cognitive strategies deal with mental operations like understanding and organization. All categories have a composite mean of 2.74, which is within the agree range. This suggests that, despite differences in perceived efficacy, respondents generally agree that all categories of language learning procedures are important for language acquisition.

The findings of the analysis indicate that language learners place the highest value on metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, with memory, compensating learning, and cognitive methods coming in second and third. These results highlight the value of a comprehensive strategy for language learning that includes social contact, emotional control, memory exercises, and cognitive processes.

Table 3
Summary Table on Anxiety

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Communication Apprehension	2.32	Disagree	
Test Anxiety	2.29	Disagree	
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.31	Disagree	
Composite Mean	2.31	Disagree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The summary of spoken English anxiety at higher vocational colleges in China is shown in Table 3. With a composite mean of 2.31, it was evident that the respondents disagreed on all three items—communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Test anxiety scored the highest (2.29) out of the three categories, followed by communication anxiety (2.32) and fear of receiving a poor grade (2.31).

Test Anxiety ranked 1, suggesting that students usually disagreed with experiencing significant levels of test-related anxiety in language learning environments. Test anxiety also obtained the lowest mean score. This implies that among the three types of anxiety examined, test anxiety was the least common. Ranking 2 for communication apprehension indicates that while test anxiety is still in the low range, communication apprehension—the fear or worry related to speaking a language—is marginally more prevalent. This suggests that most students do not experience a great deal of communication anxiety. Fear of Negative Evaluation was ranked number three, indicating that while it had the highest mean score of the three anxiety kinds, it was still in the moderate range. This shows that even while the pupils are afraid, it does not have a significant effect on them. The total composite averages of 2.31 show that students generally don't agree with the claims made about these fears. This is indicative of relatively low anxiety levels in situations involving language learning.

The study found that language learners usually show low levels of anxiety when it comes to communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of getting a bad mark. The least prevalent is test anxiety, which is closely followed by anxiety related to communication and fear of getting a bad grade.



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Table 4
Relationship Between Learning Strategies and Anxiety

Memory	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Communication Apprehension	-.401**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.418**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.415**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive			
Communication Apprehension	-.433**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.268**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.240**	0.000	Highly Significant
Compensation Learning			
Communication Apprehension	-.483**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.270**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.238**	0.000	Highly Significant
Metacognitive Strategies			
Communication Apprehension	-.420**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.357**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.322**	0.000	Highly Significant
Affective Strategies			
Communication Apprehension	-.501**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.259**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.208**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Strategies			
Communication Apprehension	-.531**	0.000	Highly Significant
Test Anxiety	-.353**	0.000	Highly Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.299**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p -value < 0.01

Table 4 investigates the relationship between different learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation learning, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) and three types of anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation). Correlation coefficients (rho-values) and p-values are used to determine significance. It demonstrates the connection between learning strategies and anxiety. The



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computed r-values indicate a moderate indirect relationship, and the p-values that were found were below the alpha level. The results show a significant relationship between anxiety levels and the efficiency of learning processes.

Regarding communication anxiety, all methods have a highly significant negative connection, with social strategies showing the largest association ($\rho = -.531$). When these tactics are applied well, especially the social ones, language learners' communication anxiety can be greatly reduced. While not as strong as for communication anxiety, all techniques show a highly significant negative connection with exam anxiety. Test anxiety can be reduced by using learning methods, with memory strategies having the biggest effect ($\rho = -.418$). The fear of receiving a poor grade also has a highly substantial negative link with all techniques, however these correlations are often less than those for test anxiety and communication phobia. Although the effect is less pronounced than for other types of anxiety, learning strategies can help reduce the dread of receiving a poor rating.

The relevance of selective learning in lowering anxiety is highlighted by the strong negative connections found between different learning strategies and anxiety types. We can assist students in more effectively managing their anxiety and enhancing their overall academic performance by incorporating these tactics into teaching practices, developing supportive settings, and changing educational regulations.

Conclusions

1. Most of the respondents were male freshmen, aged 17 to 18, majoring in liberal arts and science at a higher vocational college in Guangzhou, China, who had studied English for more than nine years.
2. Most respondents agreed on learning techniques, and the results indicated that metacognitive strategies were the most highly ranked, followed by affective, social, memory, and compensatory learning strategies. Cognitive strategies were ranked lowest.
3. Chinese students attending higher vocational colleges did not exhibit anxiety when speaking in oral English, despite disagreements on communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade.
4. Learning methodologies reveal that there was a significant difference on sex but not on age, years of English language study, or major. Anxiety indicates that there was a significant difference in terms of sex, but not in terms of age, years of learning English, or major.
5. The study demonstrates a strong relationship between learning strategies and language learning anxiety. Better learning strategies and reduced anxiety are correlated with higher proficiency in the English language. Thus, anxiety declines with increased learning, which results in better learning strategies.

Recommendations

1. To sustain and further lower students' anxiety levels, the college's office of academic affairs may offer helpful criticism and acknowledgement to students to encourage their dedication to practice oral English.
2. An English teacher can support students' confidence by encouraging open communication, providing constructive criticism to enhance language proficiency, and using a variety of evaluation methods to suit different learning preferences.
3. To control their anxiety triggers, stay focused in class, develop their language skills, and get help when they need it, students can reflect on their learning experiences.
4. Future studies may look at the relationship between anxiety and language acquisition over time, evaluate efficient strategies for reducing anxiety, and investigate anxiety characteristics in a range of student populations in order to provide individualized support.

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