A study of college students' openness personality and English learning anxiety

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Abstract The present situation of college students' English learning is one of the key research topics. Some studies have found that different personality traits have a great impact on the English learning effect of college students. However, there is still a lack of detailed analysis and summary on the impact of a specific personality on the degree of English learning anxiety. Therefore, the questionnaire that the thesis uses is developed according to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), conducts random surveys for college students from different regions, majors, and ages, and makes statistical analysis of the collected data using SPSS to explore the relationship between openness personality traits and the English-learning anxiety level of college students. After discussion and analysis, the results of this study can be divided into two aspects. Firstly, from the anxiety of the subjects, 60% of the 408 subjects have low anxiety about English learning, and their scores were very close to the medium anxiety level (99≤b≤132), while almost only a few respondents were at the high anxiety level. Secondly, there is a linear relationship between openness personality and English learning anxiety. According to the total score, the correlation was 0.338, showing a moderate correlation, and the significance level is 0.01. According to the research results, teachers can improve the teacher-student relationship and relieve students' anxiety by innovating teaching methods and evaluation systems. However, the results may vary due to confounding factors such as major, gender and age.

1. Introduction

Under the influence of the international environment, English education teaching has become more and more important in China. As a main subject in the college entrance examination, most students contact and learn English in the environment of exam-oriented education. Therefore, many students have English learning anxiety after entering college due to their weak foundation or improper learning methods, which is mainly manifested in a lack of confidence, self-doubt, and even self-denial. Under the pressure of various English-level exams, college students' English learning anxiety is more obvious, which is also a problem that more and more experts have begun to pay attention to [1]. They are more interested in studying different personality traits in this field. In recent years, researchers have formed a consensus on the model of personality description. They classify personality traits into five main categories with the help of lexicology, namely Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism [2]. From the research on personality factors of domestic and foreign scholars, these results mainly focus on the influence of different personality traits on academic achievement. For example, Amiri and Ghonosooly used two separate instruments to collect data on the relationship between students’ learning anxiety in English class and their test scores. The data showed that high anxiety did affect students' grades, and the level of English classroom anxiety of the subjects was significantly higher than that of other anxiety-causing factors [3]. However, there are few studies analyzing the relationship between personality factors and learning, especially in the field of English teaching. Researchers seldom pay enough attention to the English learning anxiety of college students from the aspect of personality, ignoring the psychological changes of students with different personality traits in the process of learning English [4]. Although several experimental studies have found that personality traits can affect college students' English learning anxiety, there is still a lack of a systematic study to summarize it. Besides, the differences in some research results also need further analysis. According to previous research, conscientiousness and extraversion can positively predict English performance, but they ignore Openness [5]. Discussion of these questions is of great significance in promoting China's English education.

Based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) compiled by Horwitz and Cope, this thesis conducted a questionnaire survey to analyze the relationship between college students’ openness personality and their English learning anxiety in an attempt to help students get out of difficulties and propose appropriate countermeasures to teachers [6]. This study conducted a random survey of college students in different regions and majors and used SPSS to sort out the

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data. Based on the Horwitz & Cope (1988) Foreign Language Survey Scale, this study replaced the word "foreign language" with "English" and used a five-point Likert scale for scoring, with 5 points from 1 to 5. The design of questions includes forward questions and reverse questions. The reverse questions are 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 and 32, and the score of them is 5-1. The foreign language classroom anxiety scale has four dimensions, namely, communication anxiety, test anxiety, negative evaluation anxiety and general anxiety. Among them, communicative anxiety includes 12 questions: 1, 3, 4, 9, 13, 14, 18, 20, 24, 27, 29, 33; test anxiety includes 3 questions: 8, 10, 21; negative evaluation anxiety includes 6 questions: 2, 7, 15, 19, 23, 31; General anxiety includes 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 30, 32 questions in total.

2. Objects and Methods

2.1 Objects

This study covered a total of 408 college students from 20 regions, including Fujian, Henan, Sichuan and Hebei, including 91 male and 317 female students. The ages ranged from 17 to 24, with an average age of 20. Of these subjects, 49 are in their first year of college, 251 are sophomores, 91 are currently in their third year of college, and only 17 are in their senior year or higher.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCAS

In this study, the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz and Cope [7] was used to measure the anxiety level of English language learning among college students on a five-point scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". The higher the test score, the higher the anxiety level of the subject. The scale consists of 33 items and classifies foreign language classroom anxiety into four dimensions mentioned above.

2.2.2 Chinese Big Five Personality Inventory Brief Version, CBF-PI-B

Developed by Wang, Mengcheng, this version has 40 items and contains 5 dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism. A 6-point scale was used from 1 (very non-conforming) to 6 (very conforming). In this study, 8 questions related to "openness" were selected[8].

3. Results

3.1 The study participants' total anxiety

From Table 1, it is obtained that the English learning anxiety level of the 408 study participants was calculated according to a score of less than 99 as a low anxiety level, a score between 99 and 132 as a medium anxiety level, and a score greater than 132 as high anxiety level. The number and percentage of each level are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety level</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number (%)</th>
<th>Average score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low anxiety level</td>
<td>b&lt;99</td>
<td>245 (60%)</td>
<td>81.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium anxiety level</td>
<td>99≤b≤132</td>
<td>158 (39%)</td>
<td>107.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety level</td>
<td>b&gt;132</td>
<td>5 (1%)</td>
<td>143.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lowest Score: 36  
Highest score: 161

3.2 Correlation of four anxiety dimensions with Openness personality

The four anxiety dimensions in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale were investigated for their correlation with Openness personality respectively.

According to Table 2, General anxiety and open personality have a strong relationship with a correlation of 0.225. Their correlation was extremely low and significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Openness personality</th>
<th>General anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.225**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (Double Tail)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, Exam anxiety and Openness personality have a positive link with each other, as seen in Table 3, with a correlation of 0.265. At the 0.01 threshold of significance, their association is extremely weak and significant.
According to Table 4, it is evident that there exists a positive correlation between Negative evaluation anxiety and Openness personality with a correlation of 0.373. At the 0.01 level of significance, there is a weak link between the two that is present.

According to Table 5, there is a 0.335 positive association between Interaction anxiety and Openness personality, indicating that these two research factors are related. However, only under the significance threshold of 0.01, the correlation is significant.

According to Table 6, it is shown that there was a correlation between the total score of English learning anxiety and the total score of Openness Personality, which was 0.338. It showed a moderate correlation, significant at the 0.01 level of significance, and the more pronounced it was on Openness Personality, the higher the degree of English anxiety level.

3.4 Overall results

The research shows that English-learning anxiety exists among college students. However, the results are not as expected — most college students tend to appear a higher level of English-learning anxiety (b > 132, b is the mark students get from the questionnaire). On the contrary, most college students are in a low level of English-learning anxiety (99 < b < 132). Moreover, most low anxiety level students’ marks are getting close to the middle level, attracting attention.

4. Discussion

It is still necessary to take some actions to deal with it as a precaution [9]. Firstly, as the indispensable guide to English teaching activity — teachers should find ways to improve the relationship with students. Otherwise, a sense of strangeness and fear in students may create a high-stress atmosphere around the class, which directly affects the performance of students. Secondly, using a proper evaluation system that makes students feel respected. The mental state of college students is in a critical formative period since most college students are eager to gain attention from others, hoping they will get a positive evaluation from others, which means that college students have grown a strong self-awareness. Accordingly, it would be better for teachers to use compliments to motivate the students, allowing students to make mistakes in class and avoiding overly harsh rebukes and criticism. Thirdly, students can cooperate in order to achieve the tasks in class. Students can be divided into several groups and play certain roles in the groups, which will ensure that every student takes a certain amount of responsibility, making them complete the task. On the one hand, students with high marks find it simpler to assist others who do not. On the other hand, by dividing into groups, allowing shy students to practice their spoken English with their teammates. Lastly, to lessen the unpleasant emotions that students experience, it is relevant to consider constructing a new final examination. Currently, the examination accounts for 70% or 80% of the student's grades. As for those who cannot get higher marks in examinations,
things can be a little tough. Thus, modifying the existing assessment method will assist students who are not good at the test but work extremely hard and do well in normal times to minimize negative feelings, thereby reducing English learning anxiety.

There are some differences when it comes to comparing similar research written by Meng Lan and Wu Man [10]. In their essay, art majors are mainly targeted. Thus, all 45 research subjects they choose are art majors. Moreover, the subjects are from the same college, which is quite different from this essay. Since this essay chose 405 subjects from different colleges and various majors around the nation, another thing is that the data they get is quite different from this essay. Two essays use the same kind of questionnaire, but it seems that their subjects get higher marks from the questionnaire than the subjects of this essay. One possible reason for that is probably because art majors cannot perform as well as other majors when it comes to English learning.

5. Conclusion

Anxiety of English learning dose exist among most college students; as the research demonstrated, most of them are in the state of low level anxiety. To prevent the anxiety level from getting worse, the research has shown several plausible measures: strengthening the relationships between teachers and students, using a proper evaluation system, dividing students into groups to make them collaborate, and drawing up a new kind of final test.

Due to the limited number of questionnaire subjects, it is not easy to make the research more specific. Hence, this research collected all college students no matter what majors they are learning or what grade they are in. Moreover, gender is also an influential variable in this study. One concern is what happens to students who are already on the edge of low anxiety; finding out whether their anxiety level will go up or down takes a lot of time and effort. As a result, it is only possible to collect the most recent data from them. It is possible to do further research when the subjects are enough. We will be able to find out the relationship between different majors and English learning anxiety, and the impact gender has on English learning anxiety.

References