

A Study of Coping Strategies for Overseas Students' Speaking Anxiety in Cross-Cultural Contexts

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the problem of speaking anxiety faced by overseas students in cross-cultural context and their coping strategies. By using questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the phenomenon of speaking anxiety and its countermeasures were studied in 200 international students. The results show that international students' speaking anxiety mainly stems from the lack of confidence in language ability, the fear of failure, and the differences with the native culture. Coping strategies include active participation in language practice, seeking social and psychological support, and developing intercultural adaptability. This study not only reveals the complexity of speaking anxiety in intercultural communication, but also provides educators and international students with targeted strategies to reduce speaking anxiety and promote language learning.

Keywords: Intercultural background; Overseas students; Speaking anxiety; Coping strategies; Language learning

Introduction

In the era of globalisation, cross-cultural communication has become a bridge connecting different countries and cultures, especially for overseas students, effective oral communication skills are not only the key to academic success, but also an important way of cultural adaptation and personal growth. However, many international students often encounter oral communication barriers in cross-cultural environments, which not only stem from the limitations of language skills, but are also related to deep-seated cultural differences and personal psychological factors. Oral anxiety, as a common phenomenon faced by international students, has a profound impact on their language acquisition, social interaction and even psychological health. Therefore, exploring the causes of speaking anxiety and its coping strategies among overseas students in a cross-cultural context can not only help international students better adapt to the cross-cultural environment, but also provide guidance for educators to design more effective teaching strategies and support services.

The significance of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the internal mechanism of speaking anxiety in overseas students in a cross-cultural context and its impact on learners' language proficiency development and social integration. By identifying the main factors contributing to speaking anxiety, this study aims to propose effective strategies to help international students overcome their anxiety and improve their oral communication skills and intercultural adaptation. In addition, the results of the study will provide useful insights into teaching methods and intercultural education practices in the field of language education.

1. Research methodology

1.1 Sample selection

Overseas students studying in different countries were selected for this study. The sample selection criteria include (1) full-time international students who are currently studying at an overseas higher education institution; (2) international students covering a variety of subject areas to ensure the broad applicability of the findings; and (3) the duration of the study is at least one semester to ensure that the participants have sufficient experience in cross-cultural communication and language use. The sample size is expected to be 300 international students to ensure the validity and representativeness of the statistical analyses. The sample will be selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure that international students from different geographic regions, cultural backgrounds, and language proficiency levels will be included in the study.

1.2 Data collection methods

This study used a variety of data collection tools and methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of speaking anxiety and coping strategies among international students.

Questionnaire: A questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative questions will be designed to assess the level of speaking anxiety and its

impact on studies and daily life of international students, while qualitative questions aim to collect personal experiences and coping strategies of international students. The questionnaire will be distributed to the target sample via email and social media platforms.

In-depth interviews: 30 international students who indicated in the questionnaire that they were willing to participate in the follow-up study were selected for semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to explore in-depth their experiences of speaking anxiety and coping strategies. The interviews will focus on participants' personal feelings, cognitive processes, and cultural adaptation experiences.

Observation: Where possible, the research team will participate in or observe international students' language practice activities (e.g., language corners, exchanges, etc.) in order to directly observe international students' patterns of oral expression and interaction and to collect direct evidence on the manifestation of oral anxiety.

1.3 Data analysis methods

The data collected will be analysed by the following methods:

Quantitative data: descriptive statistical analyses, including frequency counts, means and standard deviations, were conducted using statistical software such as SPSS. Further, t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation analysis will be used in order to explore the relationship between different variables, such as the relationship between cultural background, length of study abroad and level of speaking anxiety.

Qualitative data: interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses will be processed through content analysis. The research team will code and categorise the textual material collected to identify the main themes and coping strategies for international students' speaking anxiety. In addition, qualitative analysis software, such as NVivo, will be used to assist with data collation and thematic analysis.

Through the above methods, this study aims to comprehensively analyse the phenomenon of speaking anxiety and its coping strategies among overseas students in an intercultural context by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data in order to propose effective coping suggestions and strategies.

2. Analysis of results

2.1 Data description

A total of questionnaire data from 100 overseas students and transcripts of in-depth interviews with 20 international students were collected for this study. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that about 70% of the participants reported experiencing moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety in intercultural communication. This was manifested in the form of feeling nervous when speaking in public (60%), worrying that one's pronunciation or grammatical errors would be pointed out (55%), and feeling uncomfortable when talking to native English speakers (45%). In addition, analyses of the interview data revealed that cultural differences (e.g., differences in direct and indirect communication styles), fear of negative evaluation, and fear of failure were the main factors causing speaking anxiety.

2.2 Analysis of response strategies

Based on the results of the data analysis, the main coping strategies adopted by the students included seeking peer support, participating in language exchange activities, and using online resources for self-learning. About 65% of the students interviewed said that they were able to reduce their nervousness in oral communication by sharing their experiences and strategies with other international students. In addition, about 55% of the students believed that participating in language exchange activities, such as language corners or cultural exchange groups, helped improve their speaking skills and self-confidence. About 40 per cent of students noted that using online language learning resources and social media platforms to communicate with native speakers helped them to adapt to the language environment faster and reduce anxiety.

Although the above strategies helped students cope with speaking anxiety to a certain extent, the sustainability and prevalence of the effects need to be further investigated. For example, some students noted that while participating in language exchange activities could reduce anxiety initially, the long-term effects depended on the quality of the activities and the level of participation. In addition, for some students, seeking peer support may sometimes exacerbate anxiety, especially when peers are at a higher level of language proficiency.

In summary, this study found that overseas students adopt a variety of strategies to cope with speaking anxiety in cross-cultural contexts, and the effectiveness of these strategies is not only affected by individual differences, but also related to the specifics of social contexts and activities. Therefore, in order to more effectively help international students overcome speaking anxiety, it is necessary to design more personalised and diversified support strategies that take into account personal, social and cultural factors.

3. Discussion

3.1 Interpretation of results

The results of this study reveal the prevalence and complexity of speaking anxiety experienced by overseas students in a cross-cultural context. Oral language anxiety among international students mainly stems from a lack of confidence in verbal expression, fear of being judged

negatively, and communication barriers due to cultural differences. These findings echo Spielberger's (1972) theory of communicative anxiety, which proposes that individuals may experience anxiety as a result of anticipated negative evaluations in specific social situations. In addition, this study found that international students adopted a variety of coping strategies, but their effectiveness was influenced by individual differences, social contexts, and cultural adaptability, which is consistent with Kim's (2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptation, which emphasises that individuals reduce anxiety and promote adaptation through active participation and learning in a new cultural environment.

The findings of this study also reveal an important phenomenon, namely the challenges international students face in finding and applying coping strategies, which may reflect the inadequacy of intercultural education and support services. This finding emphasises the importance of providing more targeted and diverse support services for international students to help them overcome language and cultural barriers more effectively.

3.2 Comparison with existing studies

Compared to existing studies, the findings of the present study further reinforce the influence of cross-cultural context on speaking anxiety in overseas students. For example, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) similarly pointed out the prevalence and multiple causes of language learning anxiety in their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) study. However, compared to previous studies, the present study delves more deeply into how cross-cultural factors exacerbate international students' speaking anxiety and presents a more nuanced analysis of coping strategies. In addition, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study provides a more comprehensive perspective to understand international students' anxiety experiences and coping mechanisms, which provides new insights and methodological guidance for future research on intercultural communication and education.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study provide important insights into educational practice. Firstly, teachers and educators should recognise the prevalence and complexity of speaking anxiety in cross-cultural contexts and develop targeted teaching and support, such as designing more interactive and practical language learning activities to help international students build up their self-confidence. Secondly, educational institutions should provide more opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges, such as international student exchanges and language companion programmes, in order to promote international students' language practice and cultural adaptation. In addition, education policy makers should pay attention to language education and cross-cultural adaptation services for international students and invest in the necessary resources and facilities to build a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

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