

# An Investigation on English Classroom Anxiety (ECA) of Non-English Major Freshmen in Junior Colleges and Their Achievement

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**Abstract:** With the development of humanistic psychology, affective factors like anxiety have gained increasing attention in second language acquisition. This study explores the types, causes of English Classroom Anxiety (ECA) among non-English major freshmen in junior colleges and proposes targeted reduction strategies. Using Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affective Filtering Hypothesis as theoretical frameworks, 211 freshmen from Hetao University were surveyed with questionnaires and interviewed semi-structuredly. Results show moderate ECA among participants, with communication anxiety being the highest, followed by test anxiety and negative evaluation anxiety. Learner factors are the primary cause, followed by teacher factors, other factors, and peer factors. Eight strategies are proposed, including adopting appropriate teaching methods and constructing reasonable evaluation systems. This study provides practical guidance for junior college English teaching.

**Keywords:** Non-English Major Freshmen, Junior Colleges, English Classroom Anxiety, Influencing Factors, Reduction Strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

The Teaching Requirements for English Language Programmes in Universities (2024) emphasize cultivating learners' communicative competence, yet Chinese second language teaching has long prioritized knowledge input, leading to "deaf and dumb English" among many students. As positive psychology gains traction in second language acquisition research, scholars have highlighted the impact of emotions on learning outcomes [7]. Anxiety, as a key negative affective factor, significantly influences students' English learning processes and achievements.

Existing research on foreign language anxiety has covered various learner groups, but studies on non-English major freshmen in junior colleges remain insufficient. Junior college students often face unique challenges such as relatively weak academic foundations and unclear learning motivations, making them more prone to anxiety in English learning. This research gap hinders the improvement of English teaching quality for this specific group.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the types and causes of ECA among junior college non-English major freshmen and proposing effective reduction strategies. It helps enrich the empirical research on foreign language anxiety and provides practical references for junior college English teachers to optimize teaching practices. The subsequent sections are organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature, Section 3 details the research methodology, Section 4 presents the findings, Section 5 discusses the results and implications, and Section 6 concludes the study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz et al. [3] defined foreign language anxiety as "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and

worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system" and categorized it into three types: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Recent studies have further verified this classification in diverse educational contexts. For instance, research on Indonesian university students confirmed that speaking ability remains a primary trigger for anxiety, aligning with the core dimensions of foreign language anxiety [9].

Numerous recent studies have reaffirmed the negative impact of foreign language anxiety on learning. A study on Chinese non-English major students found that anxiety level is significantly negatively correlated with language input effect, with high-anxiety groups showing lower information retention in listening tasks and higher error rates in reading tasks [6]. In the Malaysian ESL context, communication apprehension and test anxiety were identified as significant predictors of classroom speaking anxiety [5].

### 2.2. Influencing Factors of Foreign Language Anxiety

Influencing factors of foreign language anxiety can be divided into internal and external categories. Recent research has refined these classifications, with internal factors including self-efficacy, learning strategies, vocabulary proficiency, and confidence [9]. External factors now encompass perceived social support, teaching environment, classroom evaluation systems, and peer interactions [5].

Learner factors remain crucial internal determinants. Modern studies highlight that insufficient learning strategies and lack of self-confidence are key contributors to anxiety, as learners struggle to cope with learning challenges [10]. Teacher factors, particularly teaching methods and classroom interaction patterns, significantly impact anxiety levels. Rigid teaching models and inappropriate error correction can elevate anxiety, while supportive and interactive teaching approaches mitigate it [2]. Additionally, perceived social support-including emotional, informational, and instrumental

support-has emerged as a critical moderator that buffers the negative effects of anxiety-related factors [5].

### 2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Krashen's[4]Input Hypothesis and Affective Filtering Hypothesis as theoretical frameworks. Recent empirical research in the Chinese context has verified the applicability of the Affective Filtering Hypothesis, revealing that the affective filtering mechanism inhibits language processing efficiency by occupying working memory resources[6]. This effect becomes significantly stronger when the anxiety value exceeds a threshold of 3.5/5, emphasizing the need to control anxiety levels for effective language acquisition. The Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current level, remains relevant as recent studies confirm that high anxiety impairs learners' ability to absorb such input [2].

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires to identify the types and influencing factors of ECA. Qualitative data were obtained via semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into the causes and potential reduction strategies. This dual approach aligns with recent trends in foreign language anxiety research, which emphasize the complementarity of quantitative and qualitative data [6].

### 3.2. Participants

The participants were 211 non-English major freshmen from Hetao University, majoring in Agriculture, Physical Education, Accounting, Nursing, and Food Safety. Among them, 106 were male (50.24%) and 105 were female (49.76%). For the semi-structured interviews, 5 students from different majors were selected to ensure sample diversity. The sample size and composition are consistent with recent similar studies on college students' foreign language anxiety [2].

### 3.3. Research Instruments

#### 3.3.1. Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were used: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Influencing Factors of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale. The FLCAS, adapted from Horwitz et al.[3] and validated in recent Chinese studies[9], consists of 33 items measuring communication anxiety, test anxiety, and negative evaluation anxiety, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The Influencing Factors Scale, revised based on recent research findings[2], includes 16 items covering learner, teacher, peer, and other factors (including perceived social support), also using a 5-point Likert scale.

#### 3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Five interview questions were designed based on the research objectives, focusing on learners' perceptions of ECA causes and effective reduction strategies. The interviews lasted 15-20 minutes each and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol referenced recent qualitative research on foreign language anxiety [8] to ensure relevance and depth.

## 3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed and collected online, with 211 valid responses obtained. SPSS 23.0 was used for descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis [1]to identify key themes related to ECA causes and strategies. This analytical approach is widely adopted in recent anxiety research due to its flexibility in handling mixed data types [5].

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Types of English Classroom Anxiety

Descriptive statistical results (Table 1) show that the overall average ECA score of the participants was 2.85, indicating a moderate level of anxiety. Among the three types of anxiety, communication anxiety had the highest average score (2.96), followed by test anxiety (2.89) and negative evaluation anxiety (2.70). This finding is consistent with recent studies that identify communication anxiety as the most prominent type among non-English major students [6][9].

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistical Results of ECA Types

Anxiety Type	Composite Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Anxiety	2.96	0.95
Test Anxiety	2.89	0.93
Negative Evaluation Anxiety	2.70	0.97
Overall ECA	2.85	0.92

### 4.2. Causes of English Classroom Anxiety

#### 4.2.1. Quantitative Findings

The statistical results (Table 2) indicate that learner factors had the highest average score (3.18), followed by teacher factors (3.11), other factors (3.03), and peer factors (2.98). Among learner factors, learning strategies (3.23) and self-efficacy (3.21) had the most significant impacts. For teacher factors, teaching methods (3.20) were the primary cause. Peer competition (3.04) was the most influential peer factor, while social needs (3.17) ranked highest among other factors. These results align with recent research highlighting learner and teacher factors as the main drivers of foreign language anxiety [2] [9].

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistical Results of ECA Causes

Factor Category	Composite Mean	Std. Deviation
Learner Factors	3.18	0.90
Teacher Factors	3.11	0.88
Other Factors	3.03	0.87
Peer Factors	2.98	0.89

#### 4.2.2. Qualitative Findings

Interview results confirmed the quantitative findings. Participants reported that learner factors (e.g., insufficient learning strategies and lack of self-confidence) and teacher factors (e.g., outdated teaching methods and frequent questioning) were the main causes of their anxiety. Peer competition and social needs (e.g., graduation requirements linked to English proficiency) also contributed to anxiety.

These qualitative insights are consistent with recent studies on the contextual causes of foreign language anxiety [5][8].

### 4.3. Strategies to Reduce English Classroom Anxiety

Based on the findings and recent research evidence [2][6], eight strategies were proposed:

1) Adopt appropriate teaching methods (e.g., communicative teaching and task-based learning) to enhance interaction and participation.

2) Fully consider students' individual differences (e.g., academic foundation and learning style) to provide personalized support.

3) Create a relaxed and pleasant classroom environment (e.g., cooperative learning activities and fault-tolerant interaction norms).

4) Design a reasonable foreign language curriculum (e.g., balancing general and professional English to improve practicality).

5) Strengthen emotional communication with students to enhance perceived social support and build harmonious teacher-student relationships.

6) Construct a reasonable learning evaluation system (e.g., combining formative and summative assessment to reduce test pressure).

7) Reduce anxiety through collaborative learning (e.g., group discussions and role-plays to increase speaking opportunities).

8) Train students in English learning strategies (e.g., cognitive and metacognitive strategies to improve self-efficacy).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Types of ECA

The finding that communication anxiety is the most prominent among junior college non-English major freshmen is consistent with recent research [6][9]. This may be attributed to limited oral practice opportunities, insufficient vocabulary, and lack of confidence in speaking English-factors highlighted in contemporary studies. Test anxiety ranks second, reflecting students' pressure to pass exams such as CET-4, which remains a key concern in recent educational contexts [2]. Negative evaluation anxiety is relatively low, possibly because freshmen are still adapting to the college environment and less concerned about peer evaluations, a trend also observed in Wang and Zhang's [10] study.

### 5.2. Causes of ECA

Learner factors being the primary cause highlights the importance of students' internal psychological states and learning capabilities, consistent with recent research [10]. Many students lack effective learning strategies and self-confidence, leading to anxiety when facing learning difficulties. Teacher factors, especially teaching methods, significantly impact students' anxiety levels-outdated and rigid teaching methods increase anxiety, while flexible and interactive methods reduce it [2]. Notably, perceived social support emerged as a potential moderator in recent studies [5], suggesting that enhancing emotional, informational, and instrumental support could buffer the negative effects of these causes. Peer factors have the least impact, which may be due to the lack of intense academic competition among freshmen in non-English majors, a finding aligned with Liang's [6].

research on similar student groups.

### 5.3. Implications for Teaching

The proposed strategies provide practical guidance for junior college English teachers, integrating recent research insights [2][6]. Adopting appropriate teaching methods and creating a relaxed classroom environment can reduce students' communication anxiety. Considering individual differences and training learning strategies helps address learner-related anxiety causes. A reasonable curriculum and evaluation system alleviate test anxiety, while strengthening emotional communication and promoting collaborative learning fosters supportive social environments-consistent with the moderating role of social support identified in recent studies [5]. Additionally, incorporating psychological intervention methods such as Lozanoff's psychological suggestion method [10] can further address self-efficacy-related anxiety.

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigates the types, causes, and reduction strategies of ECA among non-English major freshmen in junior colleges. The results show a moderate level of ECA, with communication anxiety being the most prominent. Learner factors and teacher factors are the main causes of anxiety, while peer factors have a relatively minor impact. The proposed eight strategies, integrated with recent research findings, offer effective ways to reduce ECA and improve teaching quality.

Limitations of this study include a relatively small sample size and limited geographical scope. Future research could expand the sample to include students from different regions and conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in ECA over time. Additionally, experimental research could be conducted to verify the effectiveness of the proposed reduction strategies, particularly the moderating role of social support in the Chinese junior college context. Future studies could also explore the threshold effect of anxiety identified in recent research to provide more targeted intervention guidelines.

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