

# On Reading Anxiety and Reading Proficiency of Non-English Majors in China

Rangcao Tang \*

Graduate School PhD in English Language Studies, Lyceum of the Philippines University - Batangas, Batangas 4200, Philippines

\* Corresponding author Email: trc\_kk@163.com

---

**Abstract:** College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) emphasizes the use of English as a basis for acquiring the most up-to-date science and technology in one's specialty and understanding foreign societies and cultures, as well as for cultivating cross-cultural communicative competence, and reading is the most direct and effective way to do so. However, there are numerous factors affecting reading, and related research needs to be deepened continuously. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between reading anxiety and reading ability among Chinese non-English majors. It is found that lexical-grammatical anxiety, chapter genre anxiety, emotional anxiety and cultural anxiety affect college English reading ability. The purpose of this article is to propose an enhancement program to develop college English reading teaching from the perspective of teachers and students.

**Keywords:** Reading Anxiety; Read Proficiency; College English Teaching Guide.

---

## 1. Introduction

College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) makes it clear that English is an important tool for international communication and scientific, technological and cultural exchange. The goal of college English reading teaching is to enable non-English majors to enable students to read and comprehend English literature and materials related to their majors, to comprehend the main idea and details and logical structure, to analyze reading materials of different genres and types in a comprehensive way, and to use certain reading skills. However, reading comprehension is a complex process (Septiyana & Aminatun, 2021). Although in recent years, reading in college English has received more and more attention. In Chinese national exams, such as the College English Tests for Level 4 and 6 (CET-4/6), reading is one of the compulsory exams, and the level of reading ability directly affects English performance. However, many related studies have mainly focused on the relationship between reading anxiety and reading ability among middle school and high school students.

Therefore, this study focuses on the effect of reading anxiety on reading ability in college English for non-English majors.

## 2. Impact of Reading Anxiety on Reading Ability

Foreign language reading anxiety is a negative emotion expressed in foreign language learning (Shi, et al. 2006). In other words, foreign language reading anxiety is a series of psychological changes that may hinder learners' foreign language learning during foreign language reading. The highly stressful psychological state during foreign language reading can prevent learners from focusing on learning and memorizing the text during the process of processing the information in the read text, thus affecting the input of new information.

In brief, the higher the learners' reading anxiety is, their reading comprehension and reading speed as well as their

reading efficiency will be greatly reduced. Therefore, only when students are able to effectively recognize and regulate their self-anxiety can they contribute to improving their reading proficiency.

### 2.1. Lexico-grammatical Anxiety

An important factor that triggers reading anxiety in English reading is vocabulary and grammar. Words, phrases and sentences together with knowledge of grammar are the basis of reading, which constrains students' English reading effectiveness and reading speed. Neglecting the accumulation of vocabulary and poor mastery of grammar will lead to a great obstacle to vocabulary recognition and comprehension, and make it difficult to understand the author's intention (Suk, 2017; Zeng, 2020; Zhao and Wei, 2023).

In short, English words and sentences are the carriers of textual information. Insufficient accumulation of English letters and words will lead to difficulties and deviations in understanding sentence structure, while unfamiliarity with syntax will restrain reading speed and reading effect, which ultimately prevents learners from comprehending the content of the text they are reading, and makes them unable to conduct discourse analysis, thus inevitably generating reading anxiety.

### 2.2. Structure and Genre Anxiety

Hu (2018) believes that discourse is a coherent, continuous and natural language without grammatical constraints, which is a process of logical deconstruction and reorganization of central ideas. Discourse analysis focuses on analyzing the coherence and logic between texts, paragraphs and statements as well as summarizing the main idea and central idea of the whole text (Pan, 2020). In English reading, the difficulty of the text material is reflected in the topic, genre and style, while the lack of systematic knowledge teaching and ability training will make college students encounter difficulties in English reading comprehension, which will lead to reading anxiety.

Specifically, the body of a research article contains an argument and ends with a summary. Through the chapter structure and paragraph layout, learners can find key

information and clues, so as to grasp the theme and viewpoint of the article. While, the discourse structure of news articles, on the other hand, is generally an "inverted pyramid" structure. The structure of an article in the news genre generally begins with important facts, and its focus on important details such as people, time, and place. Learners can quickly understand the content and information by using selective reading.

### 2.3. Emotional Anxiety

The first and most crucial task in helping students minimize anxiety in the classroom is to build confidence. A low-anxiety classroom environment can be effective in decreasing students' reading anxiety (Mohammadpur and Ghafournia, 2015).

The positive affirmation given by teachers and peers in class or after class can help students overcome negative emotions such as fear of English reading.

Further, organizing reading exchanges can encourage students to choose what to read outside the classroom on their own and share interesting vocabulary, beautiful sentences, attractive themes and genres in self-reading texts. Meanwhile, teachers and learning partners can create an English reading environment of equality, mutual support and appreciation by providing positive encouragement and comments to the students who share reading achievement, thus increasing their self-confidence.

### 2.4. Cultural Anxiety

Schema theory holds that the process of reading comprehension is a two-way process in which the background knowledge already in the reader's mind interacts with the content of the text (Buehl, 2017; Collins et al., 2020; Woolley & Woolley, 2011). The lack of schematic knowledge is an essential cause of comprehension difficulties. Schema knowledge is formed in experience, and different cultural backgrounds create completely different experiences, so cultural diversity leads to the fact that foreign language learners are likely to have no schema that is compatible with the text, which creates obstacles in the reading comprehension process.

According to Liu et al. (2021), language is a carrier of culture, customs and history. Therefore, the goal of college English reading is to discover and correctly understand the information in the material, which requires not only a certain knowledge of the English language, but also a certain understanding of the background of the events, ways of thinking, and cultural customs of the textual material. Chinese college students who are not majoring in English do not have corresponding courses on the overview of English-speaking countries. Hence, they are unfamiliar with the history, geography and customs of English-speaking countries, together with ways of thinking, religious beliefs, aesthetic interests, values and so on. And the lack of graphic knowledge of the cultural background of English-speaking makes college students often at a loss and anxious once they encounter cultural differences in reading.

## 3. Suggestions

To enhance the teaching quality of college English, teachers may apply effective teaching methods and strategies to guide students to understand reading anxiety and how to alleviate it so as to improve their reading proficiency.

### 3.1. Reduce Anxiety about Vocabulary and Grammar

In college English reading, teachers may follow the principles of language learning, utilize repetitive mechanical memory and coded cognitive memory (phonological association, visual coding, root words and suffixes, contextual coding, etc.). Furthermore, teachers guide students to carry out effective vocabulary memory to increase the number of words and phrases. Meanwhile, teachers adopt effective teaching modes to help students analyze the components of long and complicated sentences, grasp the connection between contexts, avoid ambiguities that can easily generated in the process of reading comprehension, so as to and thus boost the efficiency and competence of English reading.

### 3.2. Lower Anxiety about Essay Structure and Genres

Teachers may help students focus on the theory of discourse analysis in English reading teaching. During English reading, students are to analyze the logical structure and connection between the theme of the article, paragraphs and sentences, emphasizing on the explanation and guidance of the author's point of view, the genre of the text and the writing style of the knowledge. Simultaneously, teachers are to strengthen reading teaching activities outside the classroom so that college students can familiarize themselves with different reading texts, reduce reading anxiety, and promote reading comprehension.

### 3.3. Decrease Emotional Anxiety

Teachers may adhere to the educational concept of "student-oriented" to cultivate a cooperative and equal classroom atmosphere in college English classroom teaching. First of all, students are to be guided to judge and criticize their own perceptions from multiple perspectives during the reading process. Further, they are encouraged to make personalized evaluations of the theme, content and structure of the reading as well as the language. Second, group mutual evaluation and collaborative discussion can further clarify reading ideas and exercise students' reading critical thinking ability. Finally, teachers positively motivate students to share different views and increase students' self-confidence. Meanwhile, teachers instruct the students to conduct extracurricular reading activities in response to the hot issues discussed and promote the growth of students' reading proficiency.

### 3.4. Diminish Cultural Anxiety

In college English reading, teachers may instruct students to be familiar with the differences between Chinese and Western history and culture, ways of thinking, religious beliefs, manners and habits, etc., so as to stimulate students' curiosity and desire to explore the history and culture of English-speaking countries. While strengthening the English language knowledge and reading skills, students are to be provided with reading materials covering all aspects of the English-speaking society through the college English online reading platform, which can broaden students' horizons and cultural knowledge, thus reducing anxiety and promoting the development of reading ability.

## 4. Conclusion

The enhancement of college English reading proficiency

requires college students to overcome reading anxiety. First of all, teachers are to guide students to employ scientific means to accumulate vocabulary, consolidate grammatical knowledge and strengthen the understanding of chapter analysis. Secondly, teachers may establish mutually helpful, democratic and equal teacher-student and student-student relationships. With encouragement as the main means of evaluation, teachers help students experience success continuously in English reading.

The last point is that teachers should be adept at using reading resources and platforms inside and outside the classroom to promote the understanding of the cultures of English-speaking countries, so as to reduce reading anxiety and promote the advancement of reading proficiency.

## References

- [1] Buehl, D. (2017). *Classroom strategies for interactive learning*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- [2] Collins, A. A., Compton, D. L., Lindström, E. R., & Gilbert, J. K. (2020). Performance variations across reading comprehension assessments: Examining the unique contributions of text, activity, and reader. *Reading and Writing*, 33(3), 605-634.
- [3] Hu, Zhuanglin. (2018). *Textual Cohesion and Coherence* (new edition). Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.
- [4] Liu Xiaoya, Quan Shulian, Wu Yingjun & Liu Jing. (2021). The Application of Background Materials in English Reading Teaching. *University Education* (02), 143-145.
- [5] Mohammadpur, B., & Ghafournia, N. (2015). An elaboration on the effect of reading anxiety on reading achievement. *English Language Teaching*, 8(7), 206-215.
- [6] Pan Weihua. (2020). Research on College English Reading Strategies Based on Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Hubei Open Vocational College* (08), 186-187.
- [7] Septiyana, L., & Aminatun, D. (2021). THE CORRELATION BETWEEN EFL LEARNERS COHESION AND THEIR READING COMPREHENSION. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 2(2), 68-74.
- [8] Shi Yunzhang & Liu Zhenqian. (2006). The relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and English performance and gender. *Journal of PLA Foreign Language Institute* (02), 59-64.
- [9] Suk, N. (2017). The effects of extensive reading on reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. *Reading research quarterly*, 52(1), 73-89.
- [10] Woolley, G., & Woolley, G. (2011). *Reading comprehension* (pp. 15-34). Springer Netherlands.
- [11] Zeng Shuping. (2020). Application Research on the Teaching Mode of Scaffolding in College English Reading Teaching. *Journal of Xingtai University* (02), 121-125.
- [12] Zhao Songli & Wei Qiwei. (2023). Investigation on the Causes and Coping Strategies of English Reading Anxiety among Senior High School Students Based on Different Genders and Ethnicities. *Journal of Carey College* (02), 91-100.