

# Study on Anxiety of English Oral Expression in Senior High Schools in the context of the new General Senior High School Curriculum Standards

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**Abstract:** In the context of the promulgation of the new General Senior High School Curriculum Standards, English teaching pays more attention to the training of students' oral expression ability. Oral expression anxiety has long been an obstacle in students' oral communication. Based on the analysis of the current situation and causes of oral expression anxiety of high school students, the thesis puts forward targeted teaching strategies to alleviate oral expression anxiety and enhance oral expression ability.

**Keywords:** The New General Senior High School Curriculum Standards; Senior High School English; Oral Expression Anxiety; Improvement Strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

The new General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standards) suggests that language skills are an important part of the ability to use language. Comprehension skills and expressive skills complement and promote each other in the process of language learning. Students should develop language skills through a large number of specialized and comprehensive language practice activities to lay the foundation for authentic language communication (New Curriculum, 2020:35). In recent years, with the deepening of the English teaching reform, schools paid more and more attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive use of language skills, especially the cultivation of oral communication skills, and oral teaching occupies a more and more important position in English teaching, which is also paid more and more attention to by students, parents, teachers and the education reform. However, in the practice of oral English teaching, it is found that teachers do not pay attention to the cultivation of students' oral ability, which suppresses students' desire to express themselves orally and their oral ability is not practiced; at the same time, due to the lack of authenticity of the language materials, students' communicative ability can not be effectively cultivated, and students are timid to speak English and are afraid of expressing and communicating in English. Therefore, although students try hard to participate in the class, due to nervousness and other reasons, some of them have trembling voices when they express themselves, they cannot say English words and sentences normally, and their voices and rhythms are not correct, and they cannot even say complete sentences. It can be seen that foreign language learning anxiety brings a lot of psychological pressure to students, which affects their oral learning results in serious cases.

The thesis focuses on discussing the causes of students' anxiety in high school English-speaking classrooms and proposing corresponding improvement strategies.

## 2. Foreign Language Anxiety

### 2.1. Implications and Classification of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Research on Foreign Language Anxiety began in the early 1970s with the study of foreign language learning themes. A more authoritative definition is proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986:128), that is, "learners' unique and complex self-consciousness, beliefs, emotions and behaviors related to classroom foreign language learning due to the uniqueness of the foreign language learning process", which consists of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. It consists of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. In order to identify anxious students and measure their anxiety levels, Horwitz et al. designed an anxiety measurement tool, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), marking the quantifiable stage of foreign language anxiety research.

Communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are the three important aspects of foreign language learning anxiety according to Horwitz. Communicative fear is the nervousness that arises in the process of communicating with others, which is because foreign language learners' foreign language reserve fails to match their ideas and what they want to express, and this expressive deficiency makes them unable to express themselves or clearly understand and agree with what others express, which in turn leads to anxiety and frustration. For oral expression anxiety, communicative fear and negative appraisal fear are more significant effects than test anxiety. In the English oral communication classroom, when students do not have a clear enough understanding of what they express and what others express, communication anxiety is likely to trigger students' negative evaluative fear of themselves.

### 2.2. The Current Situation of Oral Expression Anxiety in the English Classroom

First of all, students' oral expression anxiety is prevalent in high school English classrooms. It is specifically manifested

in the phenomena of students' fear, nervousness, and trembling when they face the teacher's classroom random questions because they are not fully prepared; students will feel more nervous or anxious when they are in front of others, especially when they are presenting their English in the classroom. When students are in a state of anxiety, their speed of thinking will become slower, the language they express will be incoherent, and they themselves will feel stronger learning pressure, in the long run, such an anxiety situation will give students a physiological and psychological resistance to oral teaching, which is not conducive to students' oral learning. Secondly, lack of self-confidence is the most common psychological problem among students in foreign language-speaking classrooms. "Fear of speaking English" is the emotional state of most students in the speaking classroom. Students' oral expression anxiety is manifested in their eagerness to figure out the meaning of each word of the interlocutor instead of making reasonable guesses based on the context, and their extreme lack of self-confidence in understanding the content of the conversation, which affects the quality and experience of the conversation. Third, anxious students are more afraid of making mistakes in their oral expressions. In order to avoid making mistakes, they would rather not open their mouths to express themselves. However, teaching practice shows that the more afraid students are of having problems, the more they will lack practice, the less skillful their expressions will be, and the more likely they are to make mistakes, the more they will withdraw, which will form a vicious circle in the long run. Students' anxiety will make them reject the spoken English class, and in serious cases, they will lose interest in the English classroom, which will lead to negative emotions toward English learning itself.

### **2.3. Causes of Oral Expression Anxiety in English Classroom**

The generation of anxiety in students' oral expression in English classrooms is a complex process, that is affected by various factors, and different students will have different degrees of anxiety for different reasons. The generation of anxiety is affected by various factors, which can be categorized into student factors, teacher factors, and school factors.

#### **2.3.1. Students' Factors**

Students' own self-confidence is an important factor contributing to the development of anxiety. Krashen emphasizes that competence in language use is acquired naturally by learners over time after exposure to a large amount of comprehensible corpus. The importance of linguistic input for acquiring a second language is emphasized. For students to acquire language use competence. They need to accumulate a large amount of language materials while studying and consolidate their language foundation in order to be able to speak when using the language. Most of the students do not have enough language input, and the language materials they have acquired in high school are not enough to support their effective language expression, which leads to the student's inability to output successfully. Swain et al. found that the second language learning classroom is more inclined to be teacher-centered, and the students act as listeners in the classroom, spending most of their time on note-taking, and lack of communicative practice, and the speaking ability still remains at the mediated language level. remain at the level of mediated language and show great weakness in language output. The students did not practice

oral expression, so they were timid and anxious when they were asked to produce language.

#### **2.3.2. Teachers' Factors**

Teachers' personal qualities and character are important factors that affect students' learning. In daily teaching, there are cases where students do not take the class seriously because they do not like a particular teacher. Teachers' personality has an impact on education and teaching. Teachers who are funny, friendly, and "both teacher and friend" are more likely to be liked by students, and such teachers can better deal with students and classroom situations and can promote students' psychological health while taking into account the improvement of students' learning ability. On the one hand, students in high school have a strong sense of self-esteem and are committed to maintaining their own good image, fearing making mistakes and making a fool of themselves in front of the whole class; on the other hand, teachers have a high degree of authority, and most of the students are afraid to speak or make mistakes because of the teachers' criticisms and accusations. In the long run, students will be more timid in oral expression, which will affect the fluency and self-confidence of expression and slowly reduce the motivation for oral expression.

In addition, the traditional teaching method is another important reason for students' anxiety in oral expression in English. The English classroom under test-oriented education emphasizes the training of listening, reading, and writing skills and neglects the teaching of oral expression, teachers do not create a good communication environment for students, which leads to a lack of communication and expression opportunities. The time and opportunities for students to practice and utilize their oral language are compressed, resulting in a sense of discomfort and uneasiness when they occasionally speak English, which leads to the emergence and deterioration of oral expression anxiety.

#### **2.3.3. Environmental Factors**

Although English is the world's common language and more and more schools are advocating all-English teaching, we have been living in a Chinese communication environment, especially in the inland areas, where the use of English is even narrower. In most English teaching classrooms, teachers use Chinese too much for teaching in order to improve teaching efficiency and accomplish teaching goals, resulting in a serious lack of English input materials received by students in the classroom. Many students only use English in the English classroom and there is no good environment for students to use English to communicate after class. As a result, the lack of a good English communication environment leads to nowhere for students to show their English speaking ability and too few opportunities to open their mouths to express themselves so when the school or the teacher asks students to express themselves in English it is inevitable that they will not be anxious and worried about making a mistake.

## **3. Strategies for Improvement of Oral Expression Anxiety**

English oral expression occupies an increasingly important position in English learning, and the education reform has put forward new requirements for the learning of English oral expression, which requires students not only to be able to speak English in the English classroom but also to be able to

use English to communicate with others in daily life and to express their own opinions accurately. Aiming at the existing status quo of oral expression anxiety among high school students, as well as combining the three factors that produce oral expression anxiety, this paper proposes the following four teaching improvement strategies.

### **3.1. Accumulate Rich Basic Knowledge to Improve Input Effectiveness**

In any learning, the accumulation of knowledge is the most basic and important part. The knowledge base of English oral expression includes the accumulation of vocabulary, the use of grammatical knowledge, and the rules of pronunciation. As far as high school students are concerned, the main problem students have with oral expression is that they don't have enough vocabulary and grammar accumulation, which leads to their inability to express themselves accurately. For those students who have difficulty in accurate expression due to insufficient basic knowledge, teachers should provide students with correct learning strategies so that they can master the learning methods and improve their learning efficiency. One is memorization. Students with poor foundations, need a lot of knowledge input if they want to accumulate a amount of knowledge. Memorizing words and functional sentences is one of the more efficient ways to increase basic knowledge. Teachers can provide students with memorization strategies to help students improve the efficiency of memorization, for example, teachers teach students to memorize words through the method of roots and affixes; they can also let students repeat the words in context. Teachers can also develop word contests and other competition activities, which can effectively urge students to memorize words, test the memorization situation, and make timely adjustments. Secondly, teachers provide students with various ways of input in the classroom. Each student has his or her own learning style, and teachers should adopt different teaching methods for different types of students. In addition to using the content of the textbook to teach, teachers can also provide students with audio and video resources related to the teaching topic, so that students can develop listening skills while watching, and comprehension skills and expressive skills can be developed at the same time.

### **3.2. Using Various Forms of Oral Expression Activities to Improve Output Accuracy**

Oral expression is a difficult language skill for students and requires strong comprehensive ability. Some students are unable to “speak” English even though they have solid basic knowledge. Therefore, teachers need to take students as the main body of the activity and play the role of a guide to guide students to master the ability of oral expression on the basis of taking students’ actual learning situation into full consideration. First of all, in classroom teaching, teachers can encourage students to express themselves through peer cooperation, group discussion, role-playing and other types of activities. Cooperative-type activities have many advantages as a form of classroom speaking activities. Cooperative discussions provide students with a simulated communicative context so that they can develop communicative strategies in the process of cooperative discussions. Cooperative discussion can also effectively relieve students’ anxiety in practicing speaking, reduce students’ cost of making mistakes, and enable students to express themselves more boldly. Secondly, according to the new curriculum standard high

school English academic quality level three “Choose formal or informal, direct or euphemistic forms of language to appropriately communicate and express attitudes, emotions, and opinions, reflect cultural understanding, and achieve the desired communicative effect.” (The New Curriculum Standards, 2020:50) Students can adopt indirect expression strategies, such as using facial expressions, body language, pauses, repetition, and other forms to assist communication when there are barriers to language output.

### **3.3. Construct a Harmonious Teacher-Student Relationship and Create a Harmonious Learning Atmosphere**

English teachers should establish correct values and outlook on life, have a strong sense of professional responsibility, and establish a good image of teachers. In oral teaching, teachers should always adhere to the educational concept of “student-centered”, not punish or belittle students, do not look down on students because they do not have a standard accent or do not express themselves fluently, but rather create a democratic and positive atmosphere for students to learn in the oral classroom. Part of the reason for students’ oral expression anxiety comes from the fear of the teacher, the fear of not being able to answer the teacher’s questions or the fear of not being able to reach the standard required by the teacher. In this case, teachers should encourage students to try to express themselves, showing them that trying is a successful behavior and that it is not about being right or wrong. Teachers should also pay more attention to students who are afraid to express themselves in English in speaking class and can use different teaching strategies to stimulate their desire to express themselves. For example, they can let students who can express themselves in English be their role models and learn from them; they can gradually guide students to express themselves in English and give them positive comments to get them out of the “circle” of fear.

### **3.4. Choose Appropriate Evaluation Methods to Promote the Development of Students' Core Literacy**

“Teaching evaluation based on the core literacy of the English discipline should be dominated by formative evaluation and supplemented by summative evaluation, combining quantitative and qualitative evaluation, focusing on the diversification of evaluation subjects, the diversification of evaluation forms, the comprehensiveness of evaluation contents and the multidimensionalization of evaluation objectives.” (The New Curriculum Standards, 2020:80) In the teaching process, teachers should choose reasonable evaluation methods according to the psychological characteristics and cognitive levels of students at different learning stages, and realize the combination of formative and summative evaluation. In daily oral teaching, teachers should emphasize the students’ main position in teaching evaluation and provide more positive and active evaluations to students. The purpose of evaluation is not to discourage students, but to let them have further improvement on this basis. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the way of evaluation, encouragement-based, not hit the students’ self-confidence, and play a role in promoting teaching.

## 4. Summary

Oral expression ability occupies an increasingly important position in education reform, but students still have more obvious oral anxiety when they express themselves orally. Teachers should continue to improve the teaching method, adopt a variety of teaching strategies to help students accumulate a wealth of basic knowledge, enhance students' self-confidence, create a real language situation in the teaching process, stimulate students' interest in expression, cultivate students' awareness of cross-cultural communication, and Enhance the accuracy of oral expression, so as to effectively improve students' oral expression ability.

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