

HOW TO OVERCOME PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY OF EFL COLLEGE

ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINA

Approved:

Date: May 1, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Cieślak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'D' and a distinct 'C' for the last name.

HOW TO OVERCOME PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY OF EFL COLLEGE
ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINA

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Prof. Dennis Ciesielski, PhD

Based on the literary review on the topic of How to overcome public speaking anxiety of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) college English majors in China. This thesis demonstrates the discussion of ways to overcome public speaking anxiety. In this research program, the key objective is to investigate the effective ways to help EFL college students to overcome public speaking anxiety. In China, college students still have the problem with public speaking. What's worse, some of them don't even have the courage and method to overcome public speaking anxiety. By following the problems that are imposed upon in the process of public speaking, this paper is prepared in an attempt to the ways of helping students to overcome public speaking anxiety.

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Chapter I Introduction

Public speaking anxiety is a common problem nowadays for many college students, especially the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) college English major. This is because most of the time they need to use the second language to deliver the speech in front of the public. Compared to American students, characteristics of Chinese students are always too shy to share their opinions with others in the public. However, the ability of public speaking is one of the most important skills for college students not only during the time of their study but also in their long-term career. Therefore, the reasons behind the anxiety of public speaking should be analyzed and avoided to help the college English major of EFL. This paper will focus on the reasons of the anxiety and how to overcome the anxiety.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is, what are the ways of avoiding public speaking anxiety?
Is practicing an effective way to overcome anxiety?

Definition of Terms

The definitions of terms in the paper as follows:

EFL: English as a Foreign Language (Dubovičienė, T., & Gulbinskienė, D. ,2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to provide several ways of overcoming the anxiety of public speaking related to the college EFL English majors.

It's known that public speaking ability is one of the most important skills for college students not only during the time of their study but also in their long-term career. However,

colleges in China usually doesn't pay much attention to it. They often ignore the needs of the students and the importance of public speaking ability. Therefore, the problem is that many college students actually want to overcome public speaking anxiety but they do not know how to overcome public speaking anxiety. The purpose of this paper will try to analyze the reasons of public speaking anxiety and try to help with the ideas of overcoming the public speaking anxiety. Moreover, some exact and effective ways of overcoming public speaking anxiety will also found in this paper.

Significance of the Study

In China, all college students are required to take and pass the CET-4, which stands for the college English Test. It is because so many students spend so much time and energy on the tests. However, the ability to pass tests is not the most important ability for the English majors. Public speaking skill should be the first priority for the students.

There are many students have problems with public speaking ability, so it is more important to pay more attention on the aspect which may help students in a long-run. No matter what their future will be like, public speaking is a skill that will help college students in their career. By introducing college students to public speaking with effective ways, they can gain variety of experiences and confidence.

Delimitation of the Study

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. Basic searches will be conducted through EBSCO host with ERIC and Wilson, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. The main part

of the research goes through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. MINDS@UW Platteville is also available during the whole process of research.

Methodology

The methodology is based on the research conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. What's more, EBSCO host with ERIC and Wilson, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar will be used as the primary sources. The main part of the research goes through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

Chapter II Review of Literature

Public speaking is one of the most important skills for college students to communicate with the world. With the globalization trend and China's membership of the WTO, more and more English majors with public speaking skill are needed to become a wider part of the conversation with the world. Nowadays, college students in China are regarded as the future of the country, they are required to be overall talents in different fields. Among all skills, public speaking is one of the most important. Not only because it's a skill that helps to get involved in big events but also because it's an essential way of communication. With public speaking skills, students are more likely to have advantages in job hunting or in their career. However, many English majors in China are afraid of delivering the speech in public because colleges don't offer a course or training related to public speaking. Therefore, it's urgent and important for college students to know the reasons behind the anxiety of public speaking and overcome it successfully. In this part of paper, four aspects of public speaking will be taken into consideration. First, we need to know that public speaking anxiety is common for people. Then the reasons of public speaking anxiety are needed to be discussed. After that, the paper may move to the importance to overcome public speaking anxiety. At the end of this part of paper, effective ways of how to overcome public speaking anxiety will be pointed out.

What is public speaking anxiety?

Public speaking anxiety is the number one fear of people. One out of every three people rate public speaking anxiety as their number one fear - above death, divorce and job loss. According to Kelly (2002), anxiety is a complex psychological term covering many variables. Individuals with public speaking anxiety most often experience a variety of symptoms in a public

speaking situation, including palpitations, sweating, gastrointestinal discomfort, diarrhea, muscle tension, and confusion. In its simplest form, anxiety can be defined as “a general feeling of apprehension including hyper-vigilance, increased sympathetic nervous system activity, and difficulty concentrating” (Kelly, 2002, p. 54).

In order to get a better understanding of what anxiety is, Beatty, M. J., & Andriate, G. S. (1985) associated anxiety with the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry consisted of an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety refers to an emotional state that can have both positive and negative influences. Sometimes, anxiety may stimulate and facilitate or disturb the effectiveness of public speaking. Likewise, Oxford (1999) gave a clearer definition of the negative type of anxiety which called as “debilitating anxiety” harms students’ performance in many ways such as not participating in the activities or not using the language in public front situations. In contrast, anxiety sometimes can be regarded as helpful and facilitating in some ways, such as keeping students alert. For example, it has been observed that anxious students listen to the instructions of the learning activities more carefully than the others in order to make the necessary preparations beforehand. Another point posted by Sharifi, M. E., & Ahour, T. (2014) was public speaking anxiety. Public speaking anxiety has been regarded as one of the factors that influences language learning. Anxiety at a certain degree may produce positive effects on learners’ performance, but too much anxiety may cause a poor performance.

Compared to Beatty’s opinion, Safir, M. P., Wallach, H. S., & Bar-Zvi, M. (2012) noted that public speaking anxiety is just a common social phobia. As is known, social phobia and anxiety always comes because of shyness. Kearney, C. A. (2005) showed the opinion that shyness is often conceptualized as a general tendency toward social withdrawal or intense individuation motivated by concerns or worry about evaluations from others. As such, shyness is

often associated with behavioral, cognitive, and emotional features. The construct is sometimes seen as a type of temperament or trait that is similar in ways to introversion. Indeed, shyness and introversion share characteristics such as social reticence, retreat, and disconnectedness. Public speaking anxiety is related to the experience of speaking in the public. However, students usually don't have the chance to speak in the public. Safir, M. P., Wallach, H. S., & Bar-Zvi, M. (2012) hold the opinion that there are two types of speaker, high-anxious speaker and low-anxious speaker. The result is the more anxious the students are, the less frequently they use strategies. Moreover, the result also showed that among students with high anxiety often have problem with public speaking anxiety. On the other hand, less anxious students often use social strategies during public speaking. In this certain field, McCullough, S. C., Russell, S. G., Behnke, R. R., Sawyer, C. R., & Witt, P. L. (2006) started the research with a study to examine the relationships among a public speaker's body sensations, state of mind, and anticipatory public speaking state anxiety. A negative relationship was found to exist between speaker state of mind and anticipatory public speaking anxiety, and a positive relationship was found between speaker body sensations and anticipatory public speaking anxiety. Besides, speaker state of mind and body sensations combined to predict anticipatory public speaking anxiety.

Seim, R. W., Waller, S. A., & Spates, C. R. (2010) noted the result of his experiment that public speaking anxiety is a psychological problem when people speak in public. Seim, R. W., Waller, S. A., & Spates, C. R. (2010) also noted that public speaking anxiety often occurs when someone got the idea of getting in front of an unfamiliar audience or a new topic. It's easy for people to get nervous or turn into some genuine physical symptoms. Besides, people who lack the experience of public speaking always have problem with speaking in the public. Two types of people are more likely to feel anxious about public speaking when they are required to deliver

a speech. The first type of people are those who have never got a chance to speak in public before. The second type of people are those who have experienced a failure of public speaking. For both types, public speaking anxiety is quite common because it's natural nerves for speaking in public. Feeling nervous in public speaking is quite normal biologically and mentally.

The reasons of public speaking anxiety

Many researches have been done in order to analyze the reasons behind public speaking anxiety. Bippus, A. M., & Daly, J. A. (1999) had started the research on the reasons why students have public speaking anxiety. In the paper, public speaking anxiety comes from those who lack the experience on the stage. Many other factors also contributes to public speaking anxiety. According to J. C., Carmon, A. F., Child, J. T., & Semlak, J. L. (2008), many other factors have been taken into consideration as well. In order to get a better understanding of the reasons behind public speaking anxiety, Bippus, A. M., & Daly, J. A. (1999) decided to use a questionnaire to seek for the reasons of public speaking anxiety. With the help of the questionnaire, mistakes, unfamiliar role, humiliation, negative results, rigid rules, personality traits, preparation, audience interest, and physical appearance are the factors that behind public speaking anxiety. There are some other aspects also contribute to the public speaking anxiety, such as lack of practice, lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and lower English speaking proficiency. Everyone makes mistakes, there is no need to worry about the mistakes during speaking. Among them, all these conditions may lead to anxiety when the speaker delivering the speech in the public. For example, preparation is one of the most important factor in the author's eyes.

Some other researchers tried different ways to work out the reasons. Safir, M. P.,

Wallach, H. S., & Bar-Zvi, M. (2012) noted that symptoms of anxiety include hypervigilance, increased sympathetic nervous system activity, and difficulty concentrating. A low or moderate degree of anxiety has been found to increase alertness and improve learning and problem solving. Control has been associated with the experience of anxiety. Individuals experiencing less internal control often experience heightened anxiety. Furthermore, individuals often experience increased anxiety when they believe that they are not in control of their future or cannot cope with situations. Bippus, A. M., & Daly, J. A. (1999) believed that the key reason of public speaking anxiety is lack of preparation. Without a sound preparation, the speaker can hardly get rid of public speaking anxiety because the speaker doesn't get a whole picture of the topic and it's easy to forget the content of the speech. Therefore, not being well-prepared is one of the key reason for public speaking.

Based on Pearson, J. C., Carmon, A. F., Child, J. T., & Sendlak, J. L. (2008), lacking of motivation to overcome public speaking anxiety is also a reason which can't be ignored. The purpose of his study focuses on factors that influence students' motivation and their unwillingness to communicate in the public. The hypothesis also noted the role that the biological sex played in public speaking. In order to get a clearer view about this, Adams, S. (2012) also pointed out the importance of knowing the material and the audience. It's common to have public speaking anxiety especially when you know little about your topic and the audience. Public speaking anxiety has a close relationship with one's fear and uncertainty to the audience and topic.

How to overcome public speaking anxiety

When it comes to the way to overcome public speaking anxiety, Mowbray, R., & Perry,

L. B. (2015) noted that public speaking is an instructional way of lecturing skills. The importance of public speaking is one of the way of public communication. In order to overcome the anxiety of public speaking, training in public places is one of the effective way of improving the quality of the lecture. The result of his research among twelve university lecturers in Malaysia told us that training with a short course in public speaking skills can be very useful to overcome public speaking anxiety.

Apart from the short courses, many other methods can be used as well. Kearney, C. A. (2005) noted another way to overcome public speaking anxiety which is cognitive therapy. Cognitive therapy is particularly designed to help students recognize and modify irrational cognitions instigate or maintain anxiety in a given situation. Furthermore, social skills training is specifically designed to teach a child to interact with, or perform before, others in more effective ways and increase the frequency of already skilled behaviors (Kearney, 2005, p. 139). Besides, Cognitive therapy includes a variety of procedures that can be tailored to the needs of a particular student. Indeed, many students are especially responsive to one or two specific cognitive therapy techniques than several in combination. Other youths, however, do require a more comprehensive cognitive therapy approach and still others do not respond at all to this approach. Cognitive procedures for students with social phobia and public speaking anxiety remain controversial and may produce changes in irrational thoughts but not necessarily changes in anxious behaviors. It is a relatively short-term, focused psychotherapy for a wide range of psychological problems including depression, anxiety, anger, panic, fears and personality problems. In order to combat these destructive thoughts and behaviors, a cognitive therapy begins by helping students to identify the problematic beliefs. This stage, known as functional analysis, is important for learning how thoughts, feelings, and situations can contribute to

maladaptive behaviors. The process can be difficult, especially for students who struggle with introspection, but it can ultimately lead to self-discovery and insights that are an essential part of the process. The focus of therapy is on how you are thinking, behaving, and communicating today rather than on your early experiences. Therefore, cognitive therapy for this population may be effective for students who have public speaking anxiety. Cognitive therapy techniques that are applicable to socially anxious children include psychoeducation, examining evidence for and against specific thoughts, decatastrophizing, cognitive self-control, decentering, reattribution training, reframing, behavioral experiments, self-instructional training, and cognitive rehearsal.

Actually, some hi-tech ways are also helpful to overcome public speaking anxiety. Stiles, D. J., & Skarupski, K. A. (2014) suggested a very effective way for junior faculty to overcome their public speaking anxiety which is “PowerPoint karaoke”. PowerPoint karaoke is one of the visual aids that can be used during the public speaking. Make good use of visual aids such as PowerPoint karaoke can help reducing public speaking anxiety. As noted, many colleges and universities do not provide training in public speaking. Presenters can have access to appear the audience of the topic. Consequently, they must monitor and adjust their mannerisms and speech to meet this end. This allows presenters to identify some of the strategies upon which they may be relying when they present. Similarly, the audience members are able to identify strategies used by a series of presenters that they may later choose to adopt themselves. The more times a person participates in PowerPoint karaoke, the more facility they develop in adopting these presentation skills. Gutgold, N. D., & Grodziak, E. M. (2013) suggested another way of overcoming public speaking anxiety which is smartphone. Using smart phone to record speeches is one of the effective ways to help students to improve their speech ability. To help students to review their performances has been a method employed for decades by public speaking

instructors in order to allow students to see themselves in action as public speakers. However, arranging for the presence of recording equipment and the technology to play back speeches has required considerable effort on the part of the instructor. Besides, during a long time, technology is not that supportive in the past. But now we are in the age of Facebook and Skype, students need to master skills to improve their on-camera speaking skills and smart phones provide a ubiquitous, effective way for public speaking students to have their speeches recorded. Since practice is a key to improvement, the use of smart phones may boost student performance and improve their increasingly important on-camera abilities.

Besides the use of technology, traditional ways can also be used. Kearney, C. A. (2005) showed the opinion that reattribution training may also be helpful for some students with social phobia. This technique, often used for students with depression, initially involves identifying attributions of failure in a given situation that are internal, global, and stable in nature. A student may perform poorly during an oral presentation. Alternative, more optimistic attributions can then be developed. Specifically, a student could be encouraged to identify evidence that fits external, specific, and unstable attributions. Regarding the above, a student could recognize external factors that contributed to the problem, evidence of specificity, and the possibility or likelihood of instability. Of course, reattributions should only be encouraged when evidence truly warrants them. (Kearney, 2005, p. 143)

For EFL students, Cheng-Chang, T. (2014) showed the opinion that teachers should be aware of the existence of public speaking anxiety among EFL learners in class in order to help reduce learner anxiety. What's more, teachers may create a nonthreatening and relaxed atmosphere for students in the speech and conversation classroom, because the mood dimension of trait anxiety is an influential factor on public speaking anxiety. In the state of good mood, the

students are less likely to experience speaking anxiety. It is also useful for teachers to design various classroom activities to help students to get rid of their speaking pressure such as ice-breakers and conversation partners. On the other hand, teachers should develop the suitable and effective strategies to help learners reduce or eliminate their public speaking anxiety in English classes based on various speaking proficiency levels.

In order to make a comparison of different ways, Gutgold, N. D., & Grodziak, E. M. (2013) suggested many ways of overcoming public speaking anxiety. Among them, one of the best ways to improve speaking skills is to practice. Students need instructors to guide them and train them. Equipment and technology can also be used to help students with their public speaking ability. For example, Facebook and Skype are effective ways to help students to practice their public speaking ability. To practice public speaking skills with smart phone and other visual aids are better and effective ways for public speaking students to record their speech. Moreover, their own performance can be used to help them to improve their public speaking ability. Scott, N. (2014) believed that public speaking reflects people's leadership and authority and offered tips on improving one's public speaking skills and overcoming one's public speaking anxiety. The author believed that public speaking reflects people's leadership and authority. In the question and answer part, public speaking anxiety usually comes more often and strong. What the speaker needs to do is to encourage participation from the audience and calm down.

To offer some tips, Robinson, M. W. (2014) also stated how to overcome anxiety in public speaking. The subject and material are highlighted as well as the sense of direction and information in delivering the speech. Moreover, practicing in front of someone or in front of a mirror is also an effective way. Robinson, M. W. (2014) pointed out the importance of the need of proper introduction by others before public speaking.

According to Adams, S. (2012), some standard advice can be used to overcome public speaking anxiety. The speaker should be very familiar with the material and the audience at the very beginning. Moreover, many relaxation exercises such as deep breathing can also help to reduce the anxiety. One more thing to do is to check out the room in advance in order to know the place.

Summary

Nowadays, many college students in China suffer the problem of public speaking anxiety, which may occur when oral presentations are required, some of the students have never got the chance to speak in class. However, students should have the ability of occasional speaking in front of a group. Students who are very anxious about public speaking in class may sometimes also avoid social events they would like to attend or may not talk to classmates they would like to get to know.

Public speaking anxiety includes feeling sick, sweating, dry mouth, and forgetting their words. It is suggested to find somewhere peaceful and concentrate on relaxation before speaking. Sometimes, a simple warm up routine may also help to control nerves, reduce the anxiety and increase confidence.

Public speaking is not as scary as we thought. Here's another public speaking tip. Think positively instead of negatively about your public speaking. If you can make an improvement in your next speech that's something positive. Nobody starts as a perfect speaker. Much practice goes into becoming a good public speaker. It was something that they had to work hard and try hard to acquire. Public speaking anxiety is the most common of all phobias. It's a form of performance anxiety in which a person becomes very concerned about the speech. Most of time, people try to protect themselves by either avoiding public speaking. Some students choose to avoid public speaking. The fear of public speaking may even lead students to choose a career that doesn't require public speaking, rather than one they want.

One of the most important ways to get rid of the public speaking anxiety is to practice so that to get well-prepared. Some preparations can be done before speaking. First, determine the

audience's interests, motives, knowledge, attitudes, and values. Second, be aware of your credibility with the audience. Third, organize your information for understanding. Last but not least, prepare for questions from the audience.

There are both internal and external factors of public speaking anxiety. However, visual aids, cognitive therapy and general knowledge are the ways that can help to overcome public speaking anxiety. With the help of the three ways, students may have the chance to become a better public speaker.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

Anxiety of public speaking is a very common form of social phobia. Individuals who fear speaking in public may find their career choices limited and avenues for promotion closed to them, resulting in considerable personal distress, frustration, and depression. These individuals may underachieve at work or at school because of anxiety and often avoid speaking in classroom situations.

This research was to investigate if the use of affective strategies will reduce levels of public speaking anxiety and overcome it. Anxiety is typically understood as a physiological response. We can't make it go away, but we can help it work for us instead of against us.

Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. Public speaking anxiety is very common among college students.

Students with public speaking anxiety often avoid anxiety-producing social or performance situations. Also, anticipatory anxiety frequently occurs as an individual imagines the situation in advance of the actual experience. Many people who speak for a living, including actors, businesspeople, and politicians, experience public speaking anxiety. In fact, some of these experienced public speakers feel that a little nervousness before a performance or speaking engagement gives them the ability to perform at their best. However, for some people the anxiety becomes so intense that it interferes with the ability to perform at all.

In the case of students, this may lead to avoiding certain courses or even majors where oral presentations are required, never speaking in class, or deciding against certain careers because they would require occasional speaking in front of the public. Students who are very

anxious about public speaking in class may sometimes also avoid social events they would like to attend or may not talk to classmates they would like to get to know.

Major ways of overcoming public speaking anxiety can be divided into three parts: visual aids, cognitive therapy and general knowledge. A visual aid is any object that reinforces your point visually so that your audience can better understand it. As mentioned, visual aids such as smartphones, PPT and Karaoke are the effective ways for students to make their speech more clear and easy to understand. With the help of visual aids, students may feel less nervous and clearer about the outline of their own speech. Start by determining the most important pieces of information you want the audience to retain, then look for ways to present that information visually. Besides, well-placed visual aids can make your time on the podium a lot more interesting for any audience. Not only do visual aids capture the audience's attention, those charts, graphs or photos can also help viewers actually remember the information better. For speakers, it's easier to deliver the speech with visual aids.

Visual aid is an external way to reduce public anxiety. However, cognitive therapy is the way to help with internal factors. Cognitive therapy is particularly designed to help students recognize and modify irrational cognitions instigate or maintain anxiety in a given situation. Furthermore, social skills training is specifically designed to teach a child to interact with, or perform before, others in more effective ways and increase the frequency of already skilled behaviors. With the help of cognitive therapy, students may have the chance to find out what exactly they are afraid of. Then what they need to do is to improve your thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and actions. Only when students understand the essence of their anxiety, can they really overcome public speaking anxiety.

According to our general knowledge, the most common way for overcoming the anxiety is to practice. To raise the speaking and confidence in those abilities, students can also read out loud and emulate other speakers. What's more, practice speaking and poise is an effective way as well. Sometimes, practice speaking to a mirror record yourself speaking can help students to get a better understanding of the speech. Students can practice speaking with friends and family so that they can get the feedback of the audiences.

Based on the analyses and results in the previous section, it can be concluded that public speaking anxiety was provoked by a variety variables such as lack of practice, lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and lower English speaking proficiency, afraid of making mistakes, unfamiliar role, humiliation, negative results, rigid rules, personality traits, preparation, audience interest, and physical appearance. These factors are the causes of public speaking anxiety.

Obviously, most of the students seemed to be helpless and uncomfortable about being anxious when speaking in the public. It is the right time for the students to learn something to overcome the public speaking anxiety. To start with, students should be aware of the existence of public speaking anxiety. In addition to this, the study had to depend on learners' self-evaluated proficiency levels since no official assessment record on their speaking proficiencies was adopted. More research is required with more combination of data collecting methods to generalize the findings confidently. Future research needs to assess the nature of public speaking anxiety among college students.

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