Foreign Language Anxiety Among International Students in the U.S.: Practices and Methodology

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• How did I get here?
What is a foreign language anxiety?

As Zhao (2013, p.3) noted, “some common phenomenon involving language anxiety in the classrooms reported in the research include having difficulty in concentrating, feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable to speak English, and feeling afraid to be laughed at by peers or corrected by teachers. Several researchers have substantiated that there is an anxiety particular to language learning and that this anxiety has a debilitating effect on learning and achievement (Gardner, Smythe, & Lalonde, 1984; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Trylong, 1987; Young, 1991).
Components

- Communication Comprehension Anxiety
- Fear of Negative Evaluation
- Test Anxiety
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Schlossberg’s Transition Model is incorporated into this presentation since it expresses the need of an individual and their transition process (Schlossberg, 2011; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). International students go through the process of transition every time they encounter a new, either social or academic environment which can directly affect the anxiety. This model fits within the purpose of determining what causes the anxiety and how do students react to stress and or how/if they move to another stage.
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Schlossberg Transition Model

- The Four S’s
  - Situation
  - Self
  - Support
  - Strategies
Horwitz et al. (1986) has suggested that foreign language anxiety differs from other learning anxieties because it is directly related to speaking a foreign language, which would not occur if students were able to speak in their first language. Since international students must speak a foreign language in their academic classes, they may experience stress due to “difficulties with linguistic, academic, interpersonal, financial, and intrapersonal problems” (Mori, 2000, p. 137). Additionally, students whose English is not strong are more likely to be negatively affected in social development (Mori, 2000).
In Toth’s 2011 qualitative study, all five participants were female ranging from the ages of 18 to 22. All of them studied English before majoring in it at the university for an average of 8.6 years. Additionally, none of them had ever visited an English-speaking country. The findings of the study demonstrated students struggling with different kinds of anxiety reactions - emotional, bodily, and behavioral. One of the students stated: “In an English class you have to prove that you have a firm knowledge of grammar, and a wide range of vocabulary, and that your English is at the required level” (Toth, 2011, p. 46). Another participant mentioned that, “I never been so anxious before, so I don't like attending these classes, no, I don't, it's so unpleasant; it doesn't feel good attending them” (Toth, 2011, p. 44). This finding suggests that students who do suffer from foreign language anxiety might be inclined to skip class if it makes them feel uncomfortable.
Research

As Trice (2003) found, faculty noticed that international students face different obstacles, such as foreign language anxiety, than students from the United States. Based on the studies, faculty admitted that foreign language anxiety had negative effects on the international students’ performance and that they needed the help of faculty members (Young, 1990).
Despite numerous studies on foreign language anxiety, there has been a limited amount of qualitative research conducted on international students who experience foreign language anxiety while studying in the United States.
• What does your institution do in order to address foreign language anxiety? How do you ensure that international students enter a “comfortable” learning environment?
How to decrease a foreign language anxiety in an academic setting

• Be an advocate. Listen to their story.
• Reassurance-accent
• Public speaking events
• Decreasing jargon
• Avoiding jokes and metaphors in an online environment
• Recognizing that repetition of information does not equal lack of listening
• Encouraging to stay on track to achieve their goal
It is only through future inquiry, collaboration and engagement that an institution and administrative offices will gain a better understanding of the barriers and struggles of international students who experience foreign language anxiety.
Thank you!

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