

The influence of academic emotions on the oral English scores of college students majoring in English

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Abstract:

Academic emotions have consistently been a prominent topic in educational psychology. Academic emotions are closely associated with students' academic achievements and performance. The level of oral proficiency is an important indicator for evaluating the English proficiency of English major students. However, its acquisition process highly depends on interaction and immediate output, which can easily trigger complex academic emotions among students. Although current research has recognized the role of emotions in language learning, there is still a need for further exploration into the specific academic emotions that arise during the oral language learning process among English major students and how they affect their oral language performance. Therefore, in order to address this issue, this study takes academic emotions as the independent variable and the oral English scores of English major college students as the dependent variable. It uses the literature analysis method to investigate how academic emotions affect the oral English scores of English major college students. This study confirms that academic emotions are a key non-intellectual factor influencing oral English performance among English majors. Positive emotions (especially enjoyment) are facilitators of oral learning, while negative emotions (especially anxiety) are the most significant obstacle and inhibitor.

Keywords: Academic emotions; English major college student; Oral English achievement

1. Introduction

In the context of the deepening of the globalization wave and the internationalization process of China's higher education, oral English proficiency has

become one of the core indicators for measuring the comprehensive quality of English professionals. The assessment of the abilities of English major students covers many aspects. Among them, the oral examination is an effective method for evaluating the out-

put ability of English learners. Academic emotions refer to various emotional experiences that students generate during the learning process and are directly related to academic activities. They not only include negative emotions such as anxiety and boredom but also encompass positive emotions like pleasure, hope, and pride. Academic emotions have always been a hot topic in educational psychology. They can have an impact on various aspects of students' academic performance. Academic emotions have been proven to have an impact on students' academic performance in numerous studies, for instance, the role of academic emotions in the learning of international students [1]. Moreover, college students suffer from severe difficulties in emotion regulation and need to undergo intensified emotion regulation training [2]. Students in oral language acquisition are highly dependent on interaction and timely output, which can easily trigger complex academic emotions. In the field of second language acquisition, emotional factors have long been regarded as one of the key variables influencing learning outcomes. From „Emotional Filter Hypothesis“ to the in-depth studies in modern educational psychology, scholars generally agree that the academic emotions of learners can significantly facilitate or hinder their language learning process [3]. Positive emotions may promote practice engagement and enhance learning initiative, while negative emotions may suppress the willingness to express and even generate a sense of rejection, directly affecting the assessment of oral language proficiency. Although current research has recognized the role of emotions in language learning, studies specifically targeting English major college students are still insufficient. However, selecting English major students as the research subjects is not a random choice. Instead, it is based on their inherent uniqueness and typicality. For instance, the pressure stemming from high investment and high expectations makes English majors experience far greater stress when learning oral English than non-English majors. Among all the skills of English majors, oral English is the most intuitive and easily evaluable external ability. It often serves as the primary criterion for gauging whether an English major student is „professional“. Therefore, the quality of oral English performance can directly and rapidly trigger intense emotional responses (such as pride, anxiety, and shame). Consequently, researching the oral English performance and grades of English major undergraduates is most likely associated with academic emotions. Further exploration is needed to understand the specific academic emotions that English major students experience during their oral language learning process and how these emotions affect their oral performance. To provide scientific evidence and effective strategies for improving the quality of English

interpretation teaching and promoting the comprehensive development of students' oral language skills, this study takes academic emotions as the independent variable and the oral language scores of English major students as the dependent variable. Using the literature analysis method, it explores how academic emotions affect the oral language scores of English major students. This study aims to systematically review and analyze relevant domestic and foreign literature. From aspects such as theoretical basis, the specific impacts of emotional types, the mechanism of action, and the shortcomings of existing research, it deeply examines the influence of academic emotions on the oral performance scores of English major college students, thereby establishing a solid theoretical framework for this study. The enlightenment lies in the fact that educators should go beyond the mere teaching of language skills and attach great importance to students' emotional ecology. Creating a low-anxiety and highly supportive classroom environment can cultivate students' positive learning emotions, thereby fundamentally improving the quality of English major talent cultivation.

2. Literature Review: Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Academic Emotions on the Oral Proficiency of English Major College Students

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1 Academic emotions

The term „academic emotions“ was first proposed by German researchers and was defined as various emotions that students experience in the school context, including not only those related to success and failure, but also multiple emotions arising during teaching and learning [4]. Academic emotions can be mainly classified into positive high-arousal emotions (such as hope, pride, and joy), positive low-arousal emotions (such as satisfaction and relaxation), extremely negative high-arousal emotions (such as anxiety and anger), and negative low-arousal emotions (such as boredom and helplessness) [5]. These various academic emotions are closely related to students' academic performance and achievements. For instance, research has found that when students face learning pressure, the more they experience emotional breakdown or avoid problems, the more likely their academic performance will deteriorate [6]. Pekrun's four-category classification method [4] for academic emotions can precisely capture the complex emotional experiences in oral language learning and is

highly consistent with the process and performance of oral language learning. Pekrun's four-category classification method [4] is not isolated; it is rooted in the control-value theory. This theory posits that emotions stem from students' sense of control over tasks (e.g., „Can I do it well?“) and value assessment (e.g., „Is this important to me?“). This provides a robust theoretical approach for explaining why and how emotions influence oral language performance.

2.1.2 Oral English performance

Oral proficiency usually refers to the level of English oral communication ability measured through formal examinations (such as TEM-4/8 oral tests, IELTS, TOEFL oral tests) or course evaluations (such as classroom presentations, group discussions, one-on-one interviews). The evaluation dimensions generally include fluency, accuracy, complexity, and communicative effectiveness. The interpreting scores of English major college students can also be assessed based on the content in the Chinese English Proficiency Levels Scale that corresponds to the level of college students, namely the oral expression ability from level 4 to level 6. Since English is the second foreign language for Chinese English learners, studies have shown that Chinese learners are not good at expressing lexical chunks with pragmatic functions or with oral style features in their oral communication, which affects the interactivity, cooperation, and politeness of the discourse [7]. This indicates that in learning a second foreign language, the daily expression ability of Chinese learners is relatively weak. Therefore, during the process of oral language acquisition, academic emotions have a more significant impact on students' oral performance and academic achievements.

2.2 Theoretical Basis

2.2.1 Control-value theory

The control-value theory proposed by Pekrun is the core framework for understanding academic emotions [5]. According to this theory, students' sense of control over learning activities and outcomes (such as „Can I successfully complete this oral exam?“) and their value assessment (such as „How important is this oral exam to me?“) are the cognitive prerequisites for generating specific academic emotions. High sense of control and high sense of value: Likely to trigger positive emotions (such as pleasure in learning, hope). However, low sense of control and high sense of value: Likely to trigger negative emotions (such as anxiety, despair). This theory provides a crucial perspective for this study: The oral anxiety of English major students may stem from the combination of „low

control“ (such as fear of making mistakes and fear of poor communication) and „high value“ (such as the importance of grades and the importance of reputation) in their oral performance.

2.2.2 Broaden-and-build theory

Fredrickson's expanded-construction theory explains the functions of positive emotions. Positive emotions (such as joy and enjoyment) can expand the individual's thinking-action scope (such as being more willing to try new words and complex sentence structures or expressing intentions more strongly) and construct lasting personal resources (such as psychological resilience and social networks) [8]. Conversely, negative emotions narrow the individual's momentary thinking-action scope (such as anxiety, causing students to focus only on avoiding mistakes rather than fluent communication, thereby inhibiting expression of intentions and even generating negative attitudes), which provides a theoretical basis for explaining how different emotions affect the quality and strategies of oral output.

2.2.3 Self-determination theory

Self-Determination Theory is a macro theory concerning human motivation and personality [9]. The core proposition of this theory is that when an individual's three fundamental psychological needs are met, it will stimulate high-quality intrinsic motivation, generate positive emotions, and lead to better performance and a greater sense of well-being. These three fundamental psychological needs are the need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. Need for autonomy: It refers to an individual's desire to experience a sense of free will and the right to choose activities, acting according to one's own will and interests rather than being controlled by external pressures. In English oral learning, the „need for autonomy“ manifests in whether students feel that they have something to say rather than having nothing to say, and whether they can choose topics of their interest for expression. The need for competence refers to an individual's aspiration to feel effective in interacting with the environment, being capable of meeting challenges, and achieving expected outcomes. In the context of English oral language learning, the „need for competence“ is manifested in whether students complete oral language tasks. The need for belonging refers to an individual's longing to establish stable and positive emotional connections and a sense of belonging with others, and to feel accepted and cared for by them. The „need for belonging“ is manifested in both oral English classes and after-class settings. It is reflected in whether students feel psychologically safe and are not afraid of making mistakes, and whether a network

of peer and teacher-student relationships is characterized by support and cooperation rather than competition and ridicule. The three fundamental psychological needs offer robust theoretical support for interpreting the emotional and cognitive interactions in the oral language learning process.

2.3 The Specific Impact of Academic Emotions on Oral Performance Scores: A Literature-Based Analysis

2.3.1 The Inhibitory effect of negative emotions

Negative academic emotions, particularly foreign-language anxiety and unease, have a significant negative impact on oral performance and academic achievements. The „Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)“ proposed by Horwitz et al. is widely used. Research has found that high levels of anxiety can lead to a series of negative outcomes [10]. For example, from a cognitive perspective, high levels of anxiety will occupy working memory resources, resulting in „blanking out“, difficulty in vocabulary retrieval, and a decline in syntactic organization ability [11]. Additionally, from the behavioral and physiological perspectives, high levels of anxiety can cause speakers to slow down their speech rate, increase silence and pauses, reduce language output, and experience a series of physiological reactions such as nervousness and accelerated heartbeat, which will further exacerbate performance disorders. For English major students, their anxiety sources may include: fear of negative evaluations or making mistakes, exam pressure, and peer comparison. Furthermore, Pekrun et al. conducted a study that indicated that prolonged monotonous teaching methods or insufficient challenges could lead to learning boredom. In the oral language classroom, boredom would reduce students' participation and practice motivation, thereby indirectly affecting their learning interest and willingness [12].

2.3.2 The promoting effect of positive emotions

The research conducted by Dewaele & MacIntyre revealed that the pleasure derived from foreign language learning is positively correlated with students' oral fluency, vocabulary richness, and overall academic performance [13]. A sense of pleasure can alleviate anxiety, enhance students' motivation to learn, and encourage them to actively participate in in-class oral interactions and after-class oral simulation communication exercises. Consequently, it creates more opportunities for language practice. The „hope“ of achieving good results and the „pride“ of completing tasks can enhance students' sense of learning efficacy, motivating them to set higher learning goals and making them more resilient when facing difficulties. This positive

cycle is of great help in improving long-term oral language skills.

2.3.3 The complexity and co-occurrence of emotions

The literature also indicates that the influence of emotions is not always black and white. Students may experience mixed emotions (for example, excitement and nervousness) in the same oral task. Moreover, the impact of emotions may vary depending on individual factors (such as personality, language proficiency), situational factors (such as classroom atmosphere, teacher support), and task factors (such as preparation time, topic familiarity). Additionally, research has shown that diverse forms of oral examinations also affect students' emotions; for instance, computer-assisted oral examinations can have an impact on the feelings of test-takers, especially for those with lower proficiency levels, thereby influencing their scores [14].

2.3.4 A review of research on teaching intervention

The research by Dewaele et al. conducted a more detailed analysis on how different teacher behaviors (such as feedback methods and classroom activity organization) influence students' emotions [15]. There are three key findings. Firstly, constructive and encouraging feedback from teachers is far more effective than severe error correction in reducing students' anxiety and boosting their confidence. Secondly, the relaxed, interesting, and inclusive classroom atmosphere that teachers create enables students to be unafraid of making mistakes and brave enough to speak up. Thirdly, the cooperative rather than competitive relationship among peers significantly promotes students' oral participation. Therefore, emotional factors are of utmost importance to create an efficient foreign language classroom. An effective approach to cultivating positive emotions lies in the social support and emotional value provided by teachers and peers.

2.4 Mechanism of Action: Emotional Influence on Oral Performance as A Mediator Path

Based on the literature, academic emotions mainly affect oral performance through four pathways: 1. Cognitive resource pathway: Negative emotions, such as anxiety, will occupy and consume the limited cognitive resources that should be used for language encoding and monitoring, resulting in a decline in performance. 2. Learning motivation pathway: Positive emotions enhance intrinsic and integrative motivation, prompting students to invest more time and effort in oral practice; negative emotions may weaken motivation and lead to a decrease in learning willingness. 3. Learning strategy pathway: Emotional states influence the choice of learning strategies. Students

with strong positive emotions are more likely to use deep strategies (such as active practice and communication with others), while anxious students may more often use avoidance strategies. 4. Social interaction pathway: Positive emotions make students more willing to participate in classroom cooperation and extracurricular communication, improving their oral communication skills in authentic contexts.

2.5 Literature Summary and Research Gaps

Existing research has established the connection between academic emotions and oral performance, laying a solid foundation for this study. However, most studies have focused on non-English major college students or a broad category of second language learners, with relatively insufficient in-depth research on the specific high-demand group of English major students. Their emotional experiences may be more unique due to the characteristics of their major (higher requirements, more opportunities, stronger peer pressure). Moreover, past research has overly focused on „anxiety“, with relatively insufficient exploration of other negative emotions (such as boredom, shame) and positive emotions (such as hope, pride), lacking a more comprehensive analysis of the emotional spectrum. Additionally, the mediating variables between emotions and performance (such as self-efficacy, learning strategies) and their interaction mechanisms still need further empirical verification. At the same time, classroom situational factors that generate emotions (such as teacher feedback methods, peer support) also need to be incorporated into the analytical framework.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, through literature analysis, it can be inferred that academic emotions are a key and complex factor influencing the oral English proficiency of college students majoring in English. Negative emotions, such as anxiety, mainly hinder the acquisition of oral English by consuming cognitive resources and triggering avoidance behaviors, while positive emotions, such as pleasure, enhance oral proficiency by expanding cognitive functions, strengthening motivation, and promoting social interaction. The control-value theory and the broaden-and-build theory provide powerful explanatory frameworks for understanding the generation and functions of emotions. However, existing research still has room for expansion in terms of its specificity to English major students and the comprehensiveness of the emotional categories. Therefore, this study will build upon the existing literature, employ more comprehensive emotional measurement tools, and delve into the unique and interactive effects of various

academic emotions on the oral English proficiency of English major students, while attempting to reveal their underlying mechanisms. The aim is to provide a more targeted theoretical basis and practical guidance for optimizing oral English teaching and promoting the healthy emotional development of students.

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