

University Student Perspectives on English Language Classroom Anxiety: Majors, Gender Differences, and Changes

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In the present study we investigated English language learning anxiety of university students, focusing on differences in their majors and genders, and related factors such as motivation and self-assessment of English ability. We also examined whether or not anxiety changed after one year of learning English and how students tried to relieve anxiety. A total of 103 English majors and 114 non-English majors were provided with a questionnaire composed of 55 items adapted by Hojo (1996) and Gardner (2004). The results indicated non-English majors had significantly higher anxiety than English majors who showed, however, stronger reasons for anxiety. There was a strong rank order correlation between English majors and non-English majors for anxiety-related activities in class. The highest anxiety was induced for “being appointed to speak in English suddenly” and “speaking English in front of the class.” Both groups showed that the most frequent reason for anxiety was losing face, saying “I don’t want to be embarrassed by making mistakes or saying something strange.” Some students indicated in the open-ended question that they felt anxiety about the difficulty of learning grammar and vocabulary, saying “I don’t know how to learn it.” There were no significant gender differences, but male students (n=110) showed a negative correlation between anxiety and their self-assessed English ability. After one year of learning, anxiety of non-English majors significantly decreased, but motivation remained and self-assessment of English ability partly increased. The preferred way to lessen anxiety was “taking English proficiency tests,” and many students also responded by saying, “I study English hard.” It is worthy to note that anxiety also encourages students to study more. Some pedagogical implications are made based on the findings.