Mini Research Project Proposal

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1. Title

A Comparative Study on **English Classroom Anxiety** between Flipped Classroom and Traditional Classroom for Non-English Major Students in a Chinese University

2. The aims of the investigation

2.1 To conduct an unbiased and comprehensive comparison of learner anxiety levels between the flipped and traditional English classroom models;

2.2 To compare and analyze similarities and differences in anxiety levels among students in both classroom models;

2.3 To provide insights that will lead to the development of effective teaching methods and the promotion of positive emotions in foreign language learning.

3. The rationale and main conceptual themes for the investigation

3.1 Why this topic?

This study utilized CiteSpace software to analyze the co-citation relationships extracted from literature in China, grouping keywords and noun phrases from the cited literature to form clusters and determine the research focus. When processing the time period from 1991 to 2023, “language anxiety” emerged as the largest time node in the graph, surrounded by “foreign language learning”. The hotspots of the research area of language anxiety can be determined based on its citation frequency. Other important nodes include “foreign language learning”, “affective factors”, “English learning”, “language learning anxiety”, and “learning anxiety”. In addition, the analysis through the software showed that there have been numerous studies conducted in China on the factors that contribute to anxiety in foreign language classrooms, including learners’ proficiency, motivation, and gender. Among these factors, language proficiency and motivation have been extensively researched and are known to have a significant impact on anxiety levels.

However, there is a lack of relevant research on flipped classrooms, especially empirical studies that compare them to traditional classrooms. Conducting such research would not only provide an objective and effective understanding of the localization process of flipped classrooms in China but also enable the comparison and analysis of anxiety levels between students in English flipped classrooms and traditional classrooms. This would facilitate the improvement and enhancement of flipped classroom design and enable the stimulation of positive emotions among language learners during their English language learning process.

Currently, in most universities in China, college English is typically only taught for two 45-minute periods per week. As a result, effective English language learning poses a significant challenge for both students and teachers, requiring additional self-study and practice. In this context, flipped classroom pedagogy can facilitate English language learning, especially when considering the practical and motivational needs of students, such as preparing for employment and graduate school entrance English exam.

Furthermore, from a macro perspective, the 2020 version of the Guidelines for College English Teaching in China specifies specific requirements for English language teaching in universities, emphasizing the importance of balancing classroom teaching and self-directed learning, implementing personalized learning strategies, incorporating various forms of formative evaluation, and emphasizing the integration of online and offline courses.

Based on my literature review, teaching experience, and consideration of both macro and micro perspectives, I strongly believe that investigating the effectiveness of flipped classroom pedagogy in college-level English teaching is a crucial research area that has the potential to enhance pedagogical practices and promote positive emotions in English language learning.

3.2 Main conceptual strands and EFL theory

3.2.1 Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is a theory in second language acquisition that suggests that language learning is impacted by learners' emotions and attitudes. It

is closely related to the study of anxiety in the English language classroom. The hypothesis suggests that language acquisition is most successful when learners are in a low-anxiety, relaxed state, as opposed to a high-anxiety, stressed state. In other words, anxiety can act as a "filter" that hinders language acquisition by blocking the input from reaching the language acquisition device in the brain.

This research area on anxiety in the English language classroom has explored various factors that contribute to anxiety, including language proficiency, motivation, and so on. Many of these factors have been studied extensively in relation to Krashen's hypothesis. For example, research has shown that learners with higher levels of language proficiency and motivation are less likely to experience anxiety, which supports Krashen's hypothesis.

In brief, the study of anxiety in the English language classroom can help to shed light on how to create a low-anxiety learning environment that promotes language learning. By understanding the factors that contribute to anxiety and how they relate to Krashen's hypothesis, educators can design more effective language teaching strategies that support learners' emotional well-being and linguistic development.

After conducting a literature review and using Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis as a theoretical basis, I have identified the primary conceptual themes, and narrowed them down to three research questions as follows:

Main conceptual strands:

1) Traditional classroom and college English learning
2) Flipped classroom and college English learning
3) Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning (Definition & Classification)
4) Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Proficiency
5) Foreign Language Anxiety and learning motivation

Research questions:

RQ1. Do variations in classroom type, language proficiency, and learning motivation contribute to differences in classroom anxiety levels among learners?

RQ2. How does the level of anxiety of learners in flipped English classroom compare to that of the traditional classroom in a university setting?

RQ3. What are the main sources of classroom anxiety in flipped and traditional college English classrooms?

4. A description of the evidence you intend to collect.

The study aims to collect evidence from both students and teachers. To measure anxiety levels and sources among students in both traditional and flipped English classrooms, the study will use a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which will be scored and classified into five levels ranging from "low anxiety" to "high anxiety" according to Krinis' five-level classification system. The study will also gather information on students' motivational preferences, including instrumental and integrative motivation, as well as conduct a 30-minute semi-structured interview to explore areas that need further discussion, such as the review and evaluation of classroom learning activities based on the FLCAS, students' emotional experiences and changes during classroom learning, adaptation to flipped classroom learning, and recommendations and opinions. Additionally, the study will collect data on students' performance on the College English Test- Band 4.

To gather information from teachers, the study will use seminar-style interviews with selected teachers from the experimental group. The goal of the interviews is to gain insight into the effectiveness of flipped classroom pedagogy and identify areas that require improvement.

Overall, the evidence collected from students and teachers will offer a comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective on the similarities and differences in anxiety levels between flipped and traditional classroom models.

5. The methods you plan to use to collect your evidence

5.1 Why do the selected research methods match the aims and research questions of the project?

RQ 1:

The methods chosen for this study are appropriate for addressing the first research question because they allow for the exploration of how variations in classroom type, language proficiency, and learning motivation contribute to differences in classroom

anxiety levels among learners. The modified FLCAS questionnaire is a widely used tool for assessing anxiety in language learners, and the semi-structured interviews with selected teachers and structured interviews with selected students provide additional insights into the factors that contribute to anxiety in different classroom settings. The College English Test-Band 4 is an objective measure of language proficiency, and the assessment of motivational preferences (instrumental motivation and integrative motivation) can help to identify how different types of motivation may influence anxiety levels. Overall, the combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research question and is well-suited for addressing the aims of the project.

RQ 2:

To answer the second question, a modified Foreign Language Class Room Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire with a five-level classification system will be used to measure the anxiety levels of the learners. The chosen methodology is appropriate for the research question as it allows for a standardized measure of anxiety levels, provides a clear way to differentiate between low and high levels of anxiety, and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the data collected.

RQ 3:

Based on the 33 items of the modified FLCAS questionnaire, the sources of anxiety in both flipped and traditional college English classrooms can be identified and classified. Additionally, structured and semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected teachers and students from the experimental group to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the sources of classroom anxiety. These interviews will provide open-ended responses and personal experiences, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the sources of anxiety. Combining these two methods will provide a comprehensive view of the main sources of anxiety in both classroom settings.

5.2 Why choose the FLCAS of Horwitz (1986) as the questionnaire?

The most widely used tool for measuring foreign language classroom anxiety is the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This scale consists of 33 items that

assess various sources of anxiety in language learning, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Some scholars in China and abroad have validated its factor structure and validity, such as Wang (2003), Zhang and Guo (2018). Although the scale has shown some validity and high reliability in these studies after item screening, it also reveals many common problems, such as low loading of some items, low explained variance of the entire scale, and unclear dimensions and item allocation. Some Chinese scholars have proposed or attempted to develop scales suitable for Chinese learning contexts, but so far, the total explained variance of the reconstructed FLCAS remains relatively low, below 50%. Besides, some scholars have also used the Short-Form Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, a shortened version of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale proposed by Botes et al. (2020), to measure participants' anxiety levels in foreign language classrooms. This scale consists of 8 items and is characterized by its brevity and efficiency.

Due to the lack of consensus on the measurement of language anxiety, the comprehensiveness, high reliability, and validity of Horwitz's FLCAS questionnaire, it was chosen over the simplified Botes et al. (2020) scale for this study, as the former provides specific suggestions for effective teaching.

In addition, to ensure the accuracy of comprehension and translation of the English questionnaire, the original questionnaire was translated into Chinese by two English teachers and the word "foreign language" was translated as "English" throughout the entire questionnaire. The translated questionnaire was then validated and maintained good reliability and validity (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.911$) in this study.

6. A description of the settings in which you plan to collect your evidence.

The study surveyed around 400 second-year students from different non-English majors at a university in China who had passed the National College English Test Band 4 in the second semester of their first year. In their second year, these students will take College English as a compulsory course and an elective course such as Advanced English Reading and Writing, Business English, or Children's Literature. These courses all have a duration of 18 weeks, with 2 hours of classes per week. Only

the Advanced English Reading and Writing course implemented a flipped classroom teaching experiment. Eight teachers with extensive experience in public English language teaching participated in the study, with four to eight teachers teaching the flipped class and the remaining teachers teaching the traditional class.

7. The ethical issues you need to consider

There are several ethical issues to consider when conducting the study:

Informed Consent: The participants, both students and teachers, need to be fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. They should be given the option to participate voluntarily, without any coercion or pressure.

Confidentiality: The participants' personal and sensitive information, including anxiety levels, motivational preferences, emotional experiences, and opinions, should be kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access or disclosure. The study should also ensure that the data is stored securely and destroyed appropriately after the study.

Privacy: The participants have the right to privacy, and the study should not invade their privacy by asking intrusive or inappropriate questions or conducting observation without their consent.

Minimization of harm: The study should avoid causing any harm, distress, or discomfort to the participants, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as anxiety levels and emotional experiences. If any harm occurs, the study should provide support and appropriate interventions.

Fairness and Equality: The study should ensure that all participants are treated fairly and equally, regardless of their gender, ethnic group, or social status. The study should also avoid any biases or discrimination in data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Responsible Conduct: The researchers should conduct the study with the highest standards of responsible conduct, including honesty, integrity, and transparency.

8. The methods you expect to use to analyse the evidence you collect.

Based on the above analysis, some potential methods for analyzing the evidence collected could include:

Quantitative analysis: Analyzing the distribution of anxiety levels in flipped and traditional classrooms using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, etc.), correlation analysis, and regression analysis to identify any significant relationships between anxiety levels and other variables such as motivation types and English proficiency levels.

Qualitative analysis: Analyzing the data collected from structured interviews using thematic analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis to identify sources of classroom anxiety.

Comparative analysis: Comparing the anxiety levels and objects of anxiety between flipped and traditional classrooms based on the data collected from the FLACS questionnaire, and identifying any differences and similarities between the two types of classrooms.

9. The timetable for the proposed project

The study is expected to take approximately **one year**.

Planning （3 months）

1) Analyzing literature, identifying research gaps, determining research topics and objectives（based on research interests and teaching practice）;

2) Developing research plans and timelines;

3) Discussing research questions and hypotheses;

4) Identifying research participants;

5) Developing data analysis plans (data collection, research methods, data analysis).

Data Collection （2 months）

1）Preparing for the investigation (obtaining consent from participants, collecting data);

2) Organizing the data.

Data Analysis （2 months）

SPSS Statistics 28 & Nvivo

Results and Discussion （1 month）

1）Summarizing and interpreting the results;

2）Discussing the results, findings, and conclusions.

Writing （2 months）

1) Writing the article (Introduction, methods, results, and discussion) ;

2) Editing and proofreading the article.

Submission（2 weeks）

Preparing submission materials and submitting the paper.

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