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Chinese International Students' Speaking Anxiety in Online Classes and Face-to-Face Classes in a Hybrid Learning Context

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety is considered one of the factors that affect language learning. However, studies that focus on learners from China under hybrid learning are severely limited and need to be further explored. This study sought to compare the difference in speaking anxiety levels of Chinese students who were taking online classes and those who were taking face-to-face classes under hybrid learning at a public University in Malaysia. The anxiety-provoking factors were also investigated through an explanatory case study. The quantitative phase employed a 17-item Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) adopted from Yaikhong and Usaha to examine the levels of Chinese students' speaking anxiety. The qualitative phase was conducted through semi-structured interviews to examine the sources of Chinese learners' speaking anxiety. The results demonstrated that different studying settings contribute to a significant difference in Chinese students' speaking anxiety levels. Chinese students taking face-to-face classes generally experienced a higher level of speaking anxiety than those who were taking online classes. Apart from that, Classroom atmosphere and interaction, technical issues, environmental implications, psychological factors, and dynamic changing factors are considered anxiety-provoking sources by Chinese students.

Keywords

Speaking Anxiety, Online Classes, Face-to-Face Classes, Hybrid Learning, Language Learning

1. Introduction

Research on foreign language anxiety has been receiving consistent attention over the past few decades. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales

(FLCAS) devised by Horwitz et al. (1986) remains its popularity and authority today among linguistic studies and has been widely used to measure foreign language learners' anxiety levels and other relevant aspects in classrooms. In Alrabai's (2015) study, the FLCAS was adopted to identify the main reasons for students' speaking anxiety. The result showed that worrying about negative judgment, lacking advanced preparation, and a pessimistic mindset can be the primary sources behind language anxiety. To estimate Chinese students' foreign language anxiety levels, He (2015) managed a quantitative study with the use of the FLCAS. Female participants turned out to experience an average low level of anxiety than male participants. Apart from that, the anxiety level of Chinese college students is significantly lower than that of foreign college students because of their long-term foreign language learning experience.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 around the world in 2020, normal teaching work in schools was affected to a large extent (Hasibuan et al., 2022). For the health and safety of students, teachers, and other staffat universities across the world had to respond quickly to this unexpected situation with practical solutions (Rajhans et al., 2020). As a consequence, the traditional face-to-face teaching model saw a new transformation (Li et al., 2021). In an effort to maintain social distancing and reduce the spread of the virus, some countries closed schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. A technology-based teaching approach was adopted to promote continuous teaching (Mahaye, 2020). According to Tarkar (2020), Universities in India, for example, switched from face-to-face lectures to online ones entirely. On the other hand, some governments adopted a combination of face-to-face and online delivery which is called hybrid learning as a new teaching model (Mahaye, 2020). Considering the consistent influence of COVID-19, a growing number of schools in Malaysia also applied hybrid learning to respond to this unexpected situation (Mohamed Nafrees & Rahfath Aara, 2021).

Today, hybrid learning is still applied by some lecturers. To ensure that every student has access to their courses, some lecturers offer online classes through online conferencing software for students who are unable to attend face-to-face classes due to COVID-19 diagnosis or other reasons. Students who are able to return to school attend face-to-face classes in classrooms. In the context of this new normal, students are facing new challenges (Bryson & Andres, 2020). Meanwhile, the speaking anxiety level of students attending classes face-to-face and those who are attending classes online in hybrid learning can also differ. In Campbell's (2015) study, for example, the results demonstrated that online presentations can be more anxiety-provoking compared with face-to-face presentations. Given the fact that students need to consider additional conditions such as technical problems and connection with the audience, they can be more worried about the smooth delivery of the presentation. Nonetheless, face-to-face classrooms can also be a highly anxiety-provoking environment due to factors such as students' fear of speaking on the spot (Laachir et al., 2022). However, studies regarding speaking anxiety under hybrid learning can hardly be found

enrolling Chinese students as participants. Consequently, studies on speaking anxiety levels and inducements under this new model will contribute to the improvement of teaching work and teaching environment in the future.

Essentially, Ghorbandordinejad and Nourizade (2015) identified that students with high levels of anxiety are more likely to have trouble improving their English-speaking skills. This result finds consonance with what Nilsson (2019) asserted that anxiety-prone students intend to be more passive in English classes. They normally withdraw from activities that are beneficial to their oral skills or even avoid participating in class activities completely (Diao & Paramasivam, 2013).

There have been many studies on English-speaking anxiety over the past decades, but most of them were conducted in a pure face-to-face teaching environment (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Gao, 2016; Liu, 2018; Liu, 2007; Melouah, 2013; Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). Although studies that compared students' speaking anxiety in online classes and face-to-face classes exist, they are relatively limited and inconsistency can be seen (Campbell, 2015; Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020; Yaniafari & Rihardini, 2021). In addition, it can hardly find studies that addressed Chinese students' speaking anxiety from the perspective of hybrid learning. Since this teaching model has gradually come into the sight and experience of more language learners in recent years (Raes et al., 2020), it is necessary to examine the English-speaking anxiety of international students from China in depth from the viewpoint of current trending to fill this gap of English-speaking anxiety (Liu & Yuan, 2021).

Objectives, Research Questions, and Null Hypothesis

Against this background of the application of hybrid learning, this study sought to investigate the levels and factors of English-speaking anxiety of Chinese international students who were taking online classes and those who were taking face-to-face classes at a public university in Malaysia to help them mitigate their anxious emotions under hybrid learning.

The following research questions were put forth:

1) Is there any significant difference between the speaking anxiety scores of Chinese students taking online classes and Chinese students taking face-to-face classes in settings of hybrid learning?

H0: There is no significant difference between the speaking anxiety scores of Chinese students taking online classes and Chinese students taking face-to-face classes in settings of hybrid learning.

2) What are the sources of speaking anxiety among Chinese students' taking online classes and Chinese students taking face-to-face classes in terms of different study settings?

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have been investigating in the field of speaking anxiety. In

this section, we review studies related to speaking anxiety in language learning over the past 4 decades. The section covers topics like speaking anxiety and language learning, factors provoking speaking anxiety, and speaking anxiety in online and face-to-face classes.

2.1. Speaking Anxiety

Balemir (2009) defines speaking anxiety as an apprehension about speaking a target language. According to Hammad and Ghali (2015), speaking anxiety refers to a negative feeling followed by passive action, changes in physical appearance, and impaired thinking abilities. Breakey (2005) argued speaking anxiety is a universal fear. Fear is normally triggered by cognitive influences, emotional influences, and performance influences (Hanifa, 2018).

2.2. Hybrid Learning

Hariadi et al. (2019) stated that hybrid learning refers to the incorporation of both face-to-face classes and online classes. For Bonakdarian et al. (2010), hybrid learning means conducting online classes and face-to-face classes simultaneously with the assistance of the internet. Online students are not necessarily on campus during the class. In other words, students who take face-to-face classes are attending the same class synchronously with those who are online.

2.3. Speaking Anxiety and Language Learning

Foreign language anxiety in language learning was discussed by Horwitz et al., (1986) in an early stage. In order to identify foreign language learners' levels and sources of anxiety, he and his team (1986) devised a Likert questionnaire called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales (FLCAS), which was mainly used to measure learners' anxiety about speaking (Aida, 1994). By looking at the results from the FLCAS, Horwitz et al. (1986) reported that failing to grasp everything they learned in the language class, making mistaking, and peer pressure are typical concerns by anxious learners. Hence, being anxious in foreign language study is a non-negligible phenomenon. This type of affective factor remains a large obstacle to improving learners' language proficiency.

2.4. Factors Provoking Speaking Anxiety

Before the 21st century, anxiety in language study was treated as a general trait. Researchers universally described it to be a stable property within anxious language learners (Gregersen, 2020).

To identify English-speaking anxiety among Chinese EFL learners, Liu (2007) applied the FLCAS to collect data from 27 first-year non-English major students at a Chinese university in Beijing. The results indicated one main reason for speaking anxiety is the pressure from classmates, which finds consonance with what Coelho and Balaban (2015) found in their study. They mentioned that students with speaking anxiety are afraid of being laughed at by others or receiving

unfriendly judgments. Moreover, Liu suggested that getting stressed about receiving others' attention is also the reason behind speaking anxiety. This was also emphasized by Russell (2020) that some online learners can barely enjoy being the focus of others' attention. The next factor that provokes speaking anxiety can be insufficient preparation. Students can barely feel confident about speaking in class without advanced preparation. Goberman et al. (2011) made the same discovery: inadequate oral practice, inefficient grasp of target issues, and negative self-concept are parts of sources of speaking anxiety, he concluded. The third reason has something to do with Chinese students' linguistic abilities such as limited stock of words and a lack of ability to convey thoughts in English. Wu (2019) drew the same conclusion in a mixed-method study as well. It was believed that English proficiency contributes to Chinese learners' speaking anxiety. Lastly, Liu (2007) also mentioned students can get anxious when they can hardly recall what they had previously studied or prepared. Moreover, Tien (2018) believed that making language mistakes is one primary source provoking anxiety. This finding echoes what Ahmed (2016) asserted that making grammar and pronunciation mistakes is one reason behind speaking anxiety. Tien also found that the fear of not being understood by others is another concern of anxious students. Apart from that, Rossi and Seiler (1989) mentioned outside appearance can also cause speaking anxiety in public.

On the other hand, learners' anxiety keeps changing, anxiety studying experiencing has been shifting a paradigm in recent two decades. More researchers are intended to treat anxiety through a dynamic perspective instead of seeing it as a static phenomenon. As MacIntyre (2017) suggested, speaking anxiety is not necessarily a static attribute. It may vary or change due to different learning environments, students' personalities, and learning time. For example, Wu (2019) believed that an introvert is more likely to experience speaking-anxiety than an extrovert. Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) claimed that learners' anxiety levels subside as they increase their exposure to English study. Additionally, speaking anxiety is related to different genders. Based on Tien's (2018) finding, females feel more anxious than males. Liu and Yuan (2021) also declared that because of changes in different variables, learners' anxious emotions are not monotonous in their study on Chinese learners' speaking anxiety. These variables include the time of exposure to English, time spent with fellows, inspiration, self-affirmation, and belief. Gregersen (2020) developed a general overview of previous research, in which he also acknowledged that anxiety is more a situation-specific phenomenon. It is found differently in different contexts.

To find out the correlation between learner-internal variables and teacher/classroom-specific variables and foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety, Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) conducted a study among 189 secondary school students in London. The study revealed that the influence of different variables appeared in a dynamic form. For example, a student's anxiety may change over time and with learning outcomes. They may feel

anxious because of their lack of ability and low self-esteem when they are in the primary stage of foreign language learning. As they become more familiar with the target language, their level of anxiety may gradually decrease. Tien (2018) revealed the same result in his study, in which Chinese learners' anxious emotions are found to be distinct from the growing of time they spend studying English.

From the review of the past study, it can be seen that the factors raising speaking anxiety are assorted. As Pribyl et al. (2001) said, both outside contributors and inner factors can affect one's speaking anxiety. Plenty of studies over the last four decades have suggested that linguistic abilities, individual differences, learning environment, and so forth can be the reasons behind speaking anxiety.

2.5. Speaking Anxiety in Online and Face-to-Face Settings

Other dynamic features of anxiety can be found in the shift of the teaching model from traditional face-to-face teaching to online or hybrid teaching. However, studies focusing on learners from China under hybrid learning are severely limited and needed to be conducted based on current trending. This section provides a few studies that compared students' speaking anxiety in online settings and face-to-face settings.

Campbell (2015) conducted a study in which 50 students were enrolled to give two speeches through online conference software and a face-to-face model respectively. The results showed students felt less anxious when they delivered a face-to-face speech than an online speech. The reasons for this result are 1) face-to-face presentations are more familiar for students in contrast to online ones; 2) students feel more connected to the audiences when doing face-to-face classes; 3) students are concerned about unexpected technical problems during online speech.

Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) devised a Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety scale (FLVCAS) to examine the influence of virtual classrooms on learners' speaking anxiety among 104 students from 6 Bangladeshi universities. Additionally, they conducted in-depth interviews among 18 participants and a focus group discussion among 6 participants from the questionnaire survey. The result of the questionnaire survey showed that face-to-face classrooms are preferable to online classes. This finding echoes what Campbell (2015) asserted, but on the other hand, it is different from Yaniafari and Rihardini's (2021) research result. Based on in-depth interviews, the majority of students suggested that the lack of interactions in online classes makes language learning even more mundane and provokes them to feel uncomfortable. As for group discussion, students reported that they feel less connected with their fellows and teachers in an online class. In a similar vein, participants from Campbell's (2015) study indicated this problem as well.

However, Chen (2018) had different findings. To help improve Chinese students' English oral skills, Chen used a mixed method by conducting oral tasks,

questionnaires, and a focused group interview to examine the effects of synchronous voice chats (SVC) on their anxious emotions. The results revealed that the channel of communication contributes to a significant difference in participants' speaking anxiety scores. Participants feel more anxious when they spoke English in face-to-face settings compared with online settings.

Besides that, to compare levels of speaking anxiety in online classes under COVID-19 and face-to-face classes they attended before the outbreak of COVID-19, Yaniafari and Rihardini (2021) carried out a study among 120 English major students in Indonesia by applying the FLCAS with an open question added. The results demonstrated that Indonesian learners experience less anxious emotions in online classes. Learners stated that they are concerned about mistakes they may make when attending face-to-face classes, which is awkward. They feel more comfortable in online classes because they will not see teachers' and fellows' faces.

It can be seen that speaking anxiety has received extensive attention these years in foreign language settings. However, it can barely find research on Chinese students' speaking anxiety in settings of hybrid learning. Aside from this, it has seen an inconsistency among these studies. Therefore, more studies are expected under this context.

3. Methodology

This study is a comparison and explanatory case study which examined Chinese international students' speaking anxiety. The study design, participants, instruments, method of data collection, and method of data analysis will be presented in this section.

3.1. Study Design

This is a comparison and explanatory case study in which both quantitative method and qualitative method were applied to collect and analyze data.

In the quantitative session, a cross-sectional design was utilized to identify and compare the levels of speaking anxiety of Chinese international students taking online and face-to-face classes. As for the qualitative session, we conducted an explanatory case study to identify the sources of speaking anxiety of Chinese international students. The participant selection model is employed in this study. Participants with high anxiety (scores higher than 68) evaluated through the questionnaire in the quantitative session were invited to engage in our semi-structured interview.

3.2. Participants

This study used purposive sampling to invite 50 Chinese international students from a public university in Malaysia as the participants of the questionnaire survey. The participants were between 19 and 22 years old and started learning English in elementary school. To ensure their homogeneity, the participants

were all selected from the faculty of languages and communication with similar study backgrounds. In addition, they also had similar English proficiency levels as they had obtained a total score of band 6 in IELTS before entering university. Moreover, 25 of them were attending face-to-face classes in the first semester of study from 2022 to 2023, and they were 12 males and 13 females. Another 25 participants were 11 male and 14 female respectively. They participated in online classes simultaneously with those who took face-to-face classes.

As for participants in the qualitative phrase, we applied for critical case sampling to select interviewees. According to Yaikhong and Usaha (2012), scores higher than 68 were considered as highly anxious. In this study, 9 Participants with high speaking anxiety were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview in order to address the second research question.

3.3. Instruments

In terms of the instruments used in this study, we applied consecutive and interrelated questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

To address the first research questions, the questionnaire employed in this study was devised by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) called Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS). It is developed by combination and modification of past scales, which cover the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986); Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) and Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) (McCroskey, 1970); and Speaker Anxiety Scale (SA) (Clevenger & Halvorson, 1992). The internal reliability of the preliminary PSCAS has been tested reliably with a Cronbach's alpha Reliability value of .84 to measure learners' speaking anxiety. The final version of the 17-item PSCAS was established to contribute to the measurement of learners' speaking anxiety in language learning after a series of adjustments (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). To facilitate data analysis, certain positive or negative expressions from the original scale were reversed in this study. For example, item No.4 was adjusted to "I do not feel confident while I am speaking English".

To address the second question that related to the sources of speaking anxiety in different studying settings, the following interview question was adopted from Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014):

What kinds of situations or reasons cause stress or anxiety on you in terms of the study settings [*online setting or face-to-face setting*] *that you are currently in while speaking English*?

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect data was made through Google Forms. The Google form included three parts. The first part illustrated the instruction needed to be read before answering this questionnaire; the second part was designed to collect participants' personal information; and the third part was the

17-item Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) adopted from Yaikhong and Usaha (2012). The revised form was distributed to 50 participants through a Chinese social application called WeChat. Participants were given 24 hours to finish their responses and submit them.

3.4.2. Semi-Structured Interview

The qualitative phase of this study was conducted through a semi-structured interview, which was a single session. The semi-structured interview is of flexibility and versatility (Kallio et al., 2016), which allowed us to expand the range of possible interpretations for the experience of speaking anxiety to participants from a comprehensive perspective.

A web conferencing software called Zoom was used in the interview. This was a one-shot, one-off event, lasting about eight minutes with each participant. During interviews, the interviewer acted with patience to build rapport with the interviewees (Rabionet, 2011). The language used throughout the interviews was Chinese. Hadjichristidis et al. (2019) argued people may act differently when they speak in non-native languages. The use of language influences the way people think and how they feel about something.

3.5. Data Analysis

To test the hypothesis from the first research question, independent samples T-Test was performed via a statistical software called SPSS to compare the levels of speaking anxiety between students taking online and face-to-face classes (at .05 level of significance). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were noted to analyze the difference in anxiety levels under different study settings.

To deal with the second research question, the contents of interviews were transformed through recordings into a textual form. Thematic analysis was adopted to find out the reasons for speaking anxiety. By using thematic analysis, the data is presented through systematic themes after being coded. It offers researchers a flexible way to understand the responses from interviewees and more opportunities to emerge advanced ideas (Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire and from the interviews. The results will be reported in the order of the research questions and discussed based on the related theories and past studies.

4.1. Comparison of Student's Speaking Anxiety in Different Study Settings (RQ1)

The first research question aimed to reveal if there is any significant difference between the speaking anxiety scores of Chinese students taking online and face-to-face classes in settings of hybrid learning. Before carrying out the t-test, a Cronbach's alpha of .862 was achieved to indicate good internal reliability of the

data collected. Therefore, test items were homogeneous to run a t-test. Please refer to Table 1 for the reliability statistics.

An Independent samples t-test was used by looking at both descriptive and inferential statistics. Please refer to the following two tables for the descriptive statistics for speaking anxiety and studying settings (Table 2) and independent samples t-test results (Table 3).

According to the results demonstrated in Table 2, the mean score of speaking anxiety for Chinese students taking online classes in settings of hybrid learning was 47.04, and the standard deviation was 15.616. The mean score of speaking anxiety for Chinese students taking face-to-face classes in settings of hybrid learning was 59.64, and the standard deviation was 9.806. It can be seen from the mean score that Chinese students taking online classes experience a low level of speaking anxiety. On the other hand, the mean score among Chinese students taking face-to-face classes indicates a medium level of speaking anxiety. To synthesize, Chinese students taking face-to-face classes experience a higher level of speaking anxiety than Chinese students taking online classes.

The null hypothesis from the first research question was tested by looking at the inferential statistics from independent samples t-test results. According to the results presented in Table 3, it can be seen that studying settings contribute to a significant difference in Chinese students' speaking anxiety scores.

Overall, Chinese students taking face-to-face classes (M = 59.64, SD = 9.806) in settings of hybrid learning scored higher than Chinese students taking online classes (M = 47.04, SD = 15.616) in settings of hybrid learning. Based on the results of the independent samples t-test, $t(48) = -3.417$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [−20.052, −5.148], since the significant value was smaller than alpha at 0.05 level of significance, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the speaking anxiety scores of Chinese students taking online classes and Chinese students taking face-to-face classes in settings of hybrid learning.

The above results are consistent with the study which was conducted by Chen and Chew (2021) and Yaniafari and Rihardini (2021). They claimed that students experience less speaking anxiety when they speak English in online settings in comparison to face-to-face settings. It may be because students feel more

Table 1. Reliability statistics.

Cronbach's alpha	N of Items
0.862	17

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for speaking anxiety and study settings.

Studying settings	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Online	25	47.04	15.616	3.123
Face-to-face	25	59.64	9.806	1.961

Table 3. Independent samples t-test results.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
15.555	0.000	−3.417	40.379	0.001	−12.600	3.688	−20.052	−5.148

nervous to look at the audience's faces while talking. It could also make them stuck in a more embarrassing situation when they make mistakes in a face-to-face speech.

4.2. The Sources of Students' Speaking Anxiety in Different Study Settings (RQ2)

The purpose of the second research question is to investigate the sources of Chinese international students' speaking anxiety under hybrid learning.

According to the results of the first research question, nine participants with high levels of speaking anxiety scores were invited to participate in the interview. Among the nine interviewees, four of them were students taking online classes, and the other five of them were students taking face-to-face classes. The responses fell under five themes, they were classroom atmosphere and interaction, technical issues, environmental implications, psychological factors, and dynamic changing factors. Please refer to Table 4 and Table 5 illustrated below for the five main anxiety-provoking factors.

4.2.1. Classroom Atmosphere and Interaction

The first theme concerning the source of speaking anxiety that emerged from interviewees' responses was associated with classroom atmosphere and interaction. It is apparent from Table 4 that this factor was the most frequently alluded to by interviewees. For those who were taking online classes, four reasons emerged according to their responses. The one with the highest frequency (f = 4) was the code "Being required to turn on the camera". One of the interviewees described that:

I can hear my heart pounding when I was required to switch on my camera while I am speaking English in class. I get so nervous when others can see my face on the screen. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Sophia; gender: female; age: 20; and study setting: online]

It can be synthesized that showing faces through cameras is one primary cause for Chinese students taking online classes. Their anxious emotions are provoked when everyone is watching them. This finding also accords with LeRoy and Kaufmann's (2022) earlier observations, which showed that students do not feel comfortable with their cameras on and being the center of attention.

Furthermore, three out of four interviewees mentioned that they interacted with professors less frequently in online classes compared with face-to-face

Table 4. Factors causing speaking anxiety among Chinese international students taking online classes.

Themes	Repeating ideas (*f*)	Frequency
1. Classroom atmosphere and interaction	• Being required to turn on the camera (4) • The decline of motivations in online classes (3) • Silence in online classes (1)	8
2. Technical issues	• Being afraid of getting disconnected while speaking (2) • Missing some contents of lectures due to network congestion (1) • Equipment problems (1)	4
3. Environmental implications	• Distractions from online environments (2) • Noise from physical environments (2)	4

Table 5. Factors causing speaking anxiety among Chinese international students taking face-to-face classes.

Themes	Repeating ideas (*f*)	Frequency
1. Psychological factors	• Fear of face-to-face communication and presentation (3) • Peer pressure (3)	6
2. Dynamic changing factors	• A sudden shift of study settings (3) • Change of space in the classroom (1)	4

classes. They needed to turn on their microphones first before talking, which was not as convenient and time-saving as communicating in face-to-face classes. In addition, some students chose to stay silent from their sides to avoid problems brought on by internet delays or weak signals when professors encouraged students to speak. Esra and Sevilen (2021) identified the same problem in their study, in which their informant demonstrated they barely speak naturally and straightforwardly through online classes as they did in face-to-face classes. Overall, it can be seen that the inconvenience of online teaching reduces students' motivation to speak up. It also reduces students' opportunities to practice their oral skills and impairs their ability to deal with the situation of speaking on the spot. As a result, anxiety can be more easily provoked due to fewer experiences of speaking English. This conclusion is alighted with the finding of Tridinanti (2018), who asserted the positive correlation between speaking anxiety and insufficient practice.

Apart from that, the code "silence in online classes" was put forward by one interviewee. She emphasized that:

I have no idea what is going on when the class suddenly gets quiet right after I am done talking. I get so anxious and suspect I have lost connection during speaking or said something wrong because I do not get any response from anyone in the class. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Mila; gender: female; age: 21; and study setting: online]

According to the response, it makes her feel disconnected from lecturers and fellows when the class became silent right after talking. This finding echoes what Campbell (2015) asserted that students feel more connected in face-to-face presentations. As a speaker, it is significant for him or her to receive positive

responses or confirmation from the audience. The exchange of nonverbal communication such as eye contact and nodding is as important as verbal communication in an interaction (Pearson et al., 2017). However, students attending classes through online meeting rooms have no access to their classmates' faces and voices. In other words, they can barely know the reaction of their audience, which can increase their worries and anxiety.

4.2.2. Technical Issues

The next factor is recognized as technical issues. The results indicated that the code "Being afraid of getting disconnected while speaking" had the highest frequency under this theme (f = 2) as an anxiety-provoking factor. One of the interviewees holding this concern stated:

The internet connection gets really unstable sometimes. There was one time I got kicked out when I was called by the lecturer. Therefore, I can get so nervous because of worrying about the poor connection while I am speaking in class. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Mila; gender: female; age: 21; and study setting: online]

It can be seen that an unstable internet connection is one of the main concerns among Chinese students taking online classes.

Another factor put forward by an interviewee (f = 1) was the code "Missing some contents of lectures due to network congestion". One of the interviewees expressed that:

Lecturers' voice can become quite lagging on my side. I am afraid I would miss something important taught in the class when it gets stuck. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Harper; gender: female; age: 19; and study setting: online]

The results demonstrated that network delays or instability are regarded as another anxiety-provoking factor. Although students are attending the same class as those who seating in the physical classroom, their classroom experience could be quite different. Chances are certain important points they have missed in the online meeting room could appear in the answers to the questions asked by the lecturer later. They may fail to cover them when they are called to give responses.

Besides that, the code "equipment problems" was suggested by one interviewee as one source of speaking anxiety. Students' microphones or cameras may suddenly go wrong before or in the middle of their speech, which they are not able to handle immediately. The interviewee argued that:

I get so nervous when I speak in online classes and I have to check several times to ensure that my microphone works well. I always ask my lecturers and my fellows if they can hear me clearly from their sides before I talk. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Levi; gender: male; age: 19; and study setting: online]

Taken together, these results suggested that there is an association between technical issues and speaking anxiety of Chinese students taking online classes. This conclusion is supported by Crawford et al. (2014), who said that technical issues can cause stress on students and bring obstacles to students' academic

achievements.

4.2.3. Environmental Implications

Another reason behind speaking anxiety is distractions from online environments. This was agreed upon by two out of four interviewees taking online classes. One interviewee commented:

I am consistently distracted by all kinds of information from online. Sometimes I just curiously click into a push notification from Instagram which has nothing to do with my academic courses during a lecture and start to keep scrolling through unconsciously for minutes before I realize what is happening. Then I get so worried and regretful because I might not be able to interact with my fellows and lecturers later on because of the contents I have missed in the past few minutes. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Levi; gender: male; age: 19; and study setting: online]

One reason why students' concentration decline is that no one is there to supervise them when they use electronic devices attending classes. They are easily distracted by the push messages from various social media applications. This result finds consonance with what Esra and Sevilen (2021) classified as situational problems that it is difficult for students to be self-disciplined in an online learning environment. All in all, it can be concluded that diverse distractions from the internet can significantly increase speaking anxiety among students taking online classes.

Last of all, the code "noise from physical environments" emerged from two of the interviewees. One of them reported that:

I am feeling so nervous when I turn on my microphone. Sometimes my parents talk so loudly while I am talking, it embarrasses me when my classmates and lecturers hear them talking from my side. It can also interrupt me and I forget the ideas I was going to present. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Sophia; gender: female; age: 20; and study setting: online]

Interviewees' responses indicated that they were worried about the noise from their surroundings when attending online classes. Unlike face-to-face classes, which provide all the students with a unified environment for them to gather together, students taking online classes are required to find a fairly appropriate place by themselves (Esra & Sevilen, 2021). However, the potential possibilities of inference from their surroundings are not always under control. This finding is partly aligned with what Castelli and Sarvary (2021) discovered in their study that students can hardly keep their attention throughout a lecture because of the outside noise.

4.2.4. Psychological Factors

According to descriptions from Chinese students taking face-to-face classes, concerns were mainly about "psychological factors" and "dynamic changing factors".

The first code that emerged from the interview was the "fear of face-to-face

communication and presentation", which was reported by three out of five interviewees. One interviewee commented:

It embarrasses me to speak a non-native language under face-to-face conditions. I can hardly control my facial expressions and my body language. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Leo; gender: male; age: 19; and study setting: face-to-face]

This view was echoed by another interviewee who suggested that:

I felt less anxious when I took online classes because I could switch off my camera. Sometimes I could also just run away by simply muting myself or even leaving the meeting room directly. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Ava; gender: female; age: 19; and study setting: face-to-face]

The responses showed that a face-to-face communication model can embarrass speakers and make them feel uncomfortable, which is more of an anxiety-provoking condition compared with online classes.

On top of that, peer pressure is recognized as another factor. Some interviewees demonstrated that they were afraid of being judged or ridiculed by their peers. Therefore, they tended to perform better when they were required to physically present with classmates. This condition can essentially increase their stress and anxious emotions.

4.2.5. Dynamic Changing Factors

A common view amongst interviewees was that the shift of studying models from online classes to face-to-face classes (f = 3) increases students' speaking anxiety. One interviewee explained that:

I am not used to speaking English with others in a face-to-face context. We barely use English in our daily communication in my country. It is like getting out of my comfort zone. I feel so nervous to use English again when I am back in Malaysia. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Olivia; gender: female; age: 21; and study setting: face-to-face]

Considering the fact that the participants had been taking online classes ever since the outbreak of COVID-19 back in 2020, the reopening of face-to-face classes had brought a new challenge to them. As Edmondson (2002) claimed, the change in new environments will create anxious emotions in people. Therefore, the shift in study settings can significantly arise Chinese students' speaking anxiety.

In addition, students' speaking anxiety can also vary depending on the change of space that students are in the classroom. One interviewee mentioned that:

I feel nervous when I stand on the platform and speak, but it gets better back to the seat. [Interviewee's pseudonym: Noah; gender: male; age: 20; and study setting: face-to-face]

It can be seen that students' anxiety can be affected by their positions when talking. Standing in front of the entire class and becoming the center of attention makes the speech more official and serious, which can cause a rise of students' speaking anxiety. On the other hand, sitting in their seat and talking is more relaxing.

Together these results indicate that different study settings will contribute to Chinese students' speaking anxiety.

5. Conclusion

In general, this study revealed that studying settings contribute to a significant difference in Chinese students' speaking anxiety levels. Chinese students taking face-to-face classes generally experience a higher level of speaking anxiety than those who were taking online classes. This result is inconsistent with some of the previous studies mentioned before. Besides that, there are five anxiety-provoking factors identified from interviews. They are classroom atmosphere and interaction, technical issues, environmental implications, psychological factors, and dynamic changing factors. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was that Chinese students taking online classes are mostly concerned about the classroom atmosphere and interaction when it comes to sources of speaking anxiety. All four interviewees who took online classes reported that being required to turn on the camera in class made them feel more anxious when speaking.

This research can help educational practitioners to understand the differences in students' anxiety under hybrid learning, and improve teaching policies and quality by paying attention to students' emotions and adjusting teaching methods, so as to help students achieve ideal academic results.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into the field of language learning. It emphasizes the importance of investigating FLA as a dynamic construct. It was found that different learning settings are also one of the factors affecting students' speaking anxiety. Besides that, special attention needs to be paid to Chinese students attending face-to-face classes. In view of the fact that they experience higher levels of speaking anxiety than those who are attending online classes, lecturers' concerns about students' speaking anxiety could help create a more relaxing communication environment and pay close attention to students' emotions in academic studies. On top of that, lectures are suggested to give students more tolerance considering inevitable technical issues and noise from outside environments and take certain strategies such as using a more innovative and interesting teaching style to help students focus when conducting lectures online. Lastly, it is advised to respect students' willingness to switch on their cameras or not during lectures, which can contribute to subside the possibility of the trigger of their speaking anxiety.

This work shed new light on speaking anxiety in settings of hybrid learning. It is important to note, however, that this study's results should be interpreted cautiously, since the lacking consideration regarding participants' individual personalities and different grades. Moreover, the scope of this study was limited in terms of the regional environment.

On the grounds of the inconsistency between the result of this study and certain previous studies in terms of the levels of students' speaking anxiety under

distinct learning settings, different nationalities may be one reason. Students from different countries may have different feelings and acceptance towards the use of electronic devices, especially during more tense occasions such as during lectures. Future research is needed to confirm this assumption.

Considering the fact that the change in students' English-speaking anxiety can also be affected by the learning time and familiarity with academic life (Gregersen, 2020), further research is needed to determine whether to consider different grades of university learners as a controlled variable to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. In addition, more information on speaking anxiety under hybrid learning of Chinese international students studying in other countries would help us to provide more definitive evidence.

This study does not include Chinese students studying at other universities in Malaysia or in other countries. Since the number of participants is limited, a generalization should not be made based on the results of this study. However, the study makes several contributions to the currently limited literature regarding to speaking anxiety in settings of hybrid learning. In general, English-speaking anxiety has a certain negative impact on learners' learning or oral ability and prevents them from achieving ideal academic performance in their studies and further developing in their future careers. Therefore, it is necessary and reasonable to explore speaking anxiety in different study settings.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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