

A Multidimensional Analysis of Foreign Language Anxiety among Students: Implications for Academic

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Abstract: Inside the realm of second language acquisition, Chinese university students encounter significant subjective challenges, particularly Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which is widely recognized for its broad impact. As globalization and foreign language instruction intensify, FLA has become a key research area in education and psychology. A wealth of literature has delved into FLA's influence on learners' psychological well-being, cognition, and behavior. This study systematically reviews the literature to explore the role and effects of FLA in Chinese students' second language learning. It reveals that FLA impacts emotional states and cognitive processing, leading to heightened emotional filtering that impedes language acquisition. This anxiety can result in psychological, cognitive, and behavioral stress, negatively affecting language development and academic success. Employing a literature analysis approach, the study compiles and analyzes both domestic and international sources, identifying the ubiquity of FLA among Chinese university students and its detrimental effects on academic performance, mental health, and physical well-being. The research aims to inform educational practices and guide the development of teaching strategies to mitigate FLA, thereby enhancing the second language acquisition of Chinese university students.

Keywords: Second language anxiety, Chinese student, Literature analysis.

1. Introduction

Anxiety is often considered a situational emotion that arises when individuals set overly ambitious expectations for themselves but are unable to meet these goals or overcome the barriers that impede their progress. This leads to a sense of failure and guilt, damaging their self-esteem and confidence, causing a sense of tension, and so on.

For Chinese college students, there are many subjective factors that can affect their second language achievement, and in this field, FLA is the most widely concerned and socially popular subjective factor. As foreign language education continues to advance, a growing number of educational and psychological scholars are focusing their research on the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety. A substantial body of literature on this topic has emerged in academia, and it is generally found that foreign language anxiety has an undeniable impact on college students and other populations.

The emergence of anxiety inevitably affects the cycle of FLA. Anxiety can also increase the affective filter of language learners, imposing psychological, cognitive, and behavioral pressures on

them. This makes foreign language anxiety a significant factor affecting the second language acquisition of Chinese college students [1].

Therefore, research on anxiety emotions and their impact on second language acquisition plays a big role, as it is close to the foreign language learning of student populations. Building on this foundation, the present paper reviews and synthesizes previous research on foreign language anxiety, utilizing a literature analysis approach to examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and Chinese college students from multiple perspectives. This study examines the relationship between foreign language anxiety and Chinese students. It explores the underlying causes and definitions of foreign language anxiety, emphasizing its significant impact on student learning. Additionally, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of foreign language anxiety for the broader student population in China. It also aims to make learning and research institutions and teachers aware of the prevalence and impact of foreign language anxiety on students. This paper will start with the connotative definition of foreign language anxiety, lead into the classification and causes of FLA, and finally prove the impact of foreign language anxiety on students through empirical research.

2. Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning

2.1. The Connotative Definition of Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the significant topics in the study of emotions. The first to provide a definition of FLA was the American psychologist Horwitz [2].

Unlike general anxiety, foreign language learning anxiety is a distinct phenomenon that emerges specifically during the process of learning a new language. It involves a unique set of personal perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that are closely tied to the language acquisition experience. These factors are directly influenced by the challenges and interactions encountered within the educational environment, making foreign language anxiety fundamentally different from other forms of anxiety. From this point on, scholars and researchers have begun to articulate their own understanding of the connotation of foreign language learning anxiety, greatly enriching the definitional connotations of foreign language anxiety. Even though many scholars have their own definitions and descriptions of foreign language anxiety, it is not difficult to find from their understanding of the connotation of FLA that they all have an obvious commonality, which is the specificity of the situation.

This is mainly manifested as learners' self-evaluation of their second language acquisition abilities being too low during the acquisition process, leading to various fears or phobias.

The current widely accepted definition of anxiety, as stated by Jiang Dong Xia, is that learning anxiety is a psychological state of unease, restlessness, frustration, and fear of making mistakes that learners experience during the learning process [3].

2.2. Classification of Foreign Language Anxiety

As researchers delve deeper into their studies, the classification of foreign language anxiety has become increasingly diversified. Broadly speaking, foreign language anxiety can be categorized into:

Situation-specific anxiety, foreign language speaking anxiety, foreign class anxiety, Foreign empty Anxiety related to reading and listening activities, and Writing.

Wang Yinquan and Wan Yushu further classify it into three major categories based on manifestations: The external manifestations of learning anxiety often mirror general anxiety symptoms, such as sweating in the palms, abdominal discomfort, and an elevated heart rate and pulse [4]. These physical reactions are common indicators of anxiety experienced by students in learning environments. Further reactions to foreign language learning anxiety may be displayed through

behaviors such as "voice modulation; inability to produce the phonetics and rhythm of the language normally; feeling 'frozen' when standing up to answer questions." Extreme symptoms, such as behaviors like missing classes or shunning eye contact with instructors. Avoid eye contact with teachers, come to class without preparation, and so on. In addition, there are classifications based on the functional perspective of foreign language learning anxiety. For instance, someone classifies anxiety based on its function, dividing it into Facilitative anxiety or beneficial anxiety, debilitating anxiety, or hindering anxiety.

However, regardless of how anxiety is classified, it is undeniable that language anxiety is negatively correlated with language course grades and teachers' assessments of student achievement. This also leads to subsequent discussions on the impact of this correlation and the causes of anxiety.

3. Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

As Cao Ling Jing found, students are primarily concerned with:

The fear of not being able to provide the correct answers to teachers' questions or not performing well enough [5]. The belief is that they lack the necessary abilities or preparation to handle teachers' questions, which may reduce their self-efficacy and thus increase anxiety.

A lack of flexibility in thinking and problem-solving in Thai and a weaker ability to transform similar Thai phrases. Students place significant emphasis on how they are perceived by Thai teachers and peers. They often experience pressure and anxiety when confronted with unexpected questions, fearing that their performance may negatively impact their image. It is evident that students commonly experience anxiety during the learning process, characterized by a lack of self-assurance and an obsessive preoccupation with achievement, which fosters the emergence of FLA.. suggests that anxiety stems from the fear of communication, the apprehension surrounding examinations, coupled with concerns over possible adverse judgments.

Therefore, the reason for those mentioned can be broadly categorized into the following elements: Foreign language learning challenges students' self-esteem, and for some scholars, learning a new language is seen as a challenge and threat to their self-esteem [6]. They believe that influenced by traditional Chinese culture, students have excessively high expectations for themselves, value face, and always want to understand every word the teacher says and express themselves accurately without error. However, they are overly concerned about negative evaluations and fear being laughed at by teachers and classmates for not being well-prepared.

Learners additionally exhibit a diminished capacity to deal with the uncertainties inherent in knowledge acquisition., and the ambiguity in FLA, whether in meaning or in the words used, can cause anxiety.

A reluctance to embrace challenges can impede the development of linguistic skills, as effective language learning demands consistent practice, which inevitably involves risk-taking and experimentation. Without a willingness to engage in these efforts, progress in language acquisition may be significantly slowed. Fear of the unknown and challenges can put significant mental pressure on students, suppressing their learning efficacy.

These three points are all internal student factors. Students often experience anxiety due to the influence of non-native languages, unfamiliarity with the language, lack of understanding of the culture, fear of failure, and a lack of communication space.

However, apart from internal factors, research has also found that other elements can lead to anxiety among learners. Cultural disparities also have an impact on anxiety formation. If students find it difficult to relate to the values and mental models of the culture associated with the target language or if they cannot grasp its traditions and colloquial expressions, they might experience reluctance and a sense of insecurity in learning and utilizing the foreign tongue. This, in turn, can make it emerge. Some believe that students' strong desire to integrate into the target language culture

can often lead to a sense of frustration and anxiety when their abilities do not meet their expectations, thereby affecting their self-esteem. Beyond cultural factors, the classroom environment and teaching methods can also contribute to anxiety in foreign language learning. For instance, exam-oriented approaches, an emphasis on communicative activities, and competitive classroom dynamics can all provoke anxiety in learners, affecting their ability to engage fully in the learning process. The correlation between FLA and the scholarly outcomes of students.

3.1. Theoretical Exploration of The Influence of Anxiety on Students' Educational Achievements

In the studies. In China, the early research on FLA was hindered by the lack of a clear definition, leading to a slow progression and a divergence of conclusions among scholars regarding the relationship between FLA and academic performance [7]. This ambiguity has left Chinese university students without a clear understanding of their own learning progress, making it difficult for them to effectively address the confusion and challenges it creates. As a result, they often experience significant fluctuations in academic performance.

A significant breakthrough in addressing this issue is attributed to the introduction of the FLCAS. The introduction of this scale has marked a pivotal point in FLA research, with a multitude of studies utilizing it to demonstrate a pronounced link between the severity of learners' FLA and their success in foreign language coursework. Following the introduction of this scale, Chinese scholars have also developed anxiety scales targeted at different language skills, such as the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale and scales for reading anxiety and writing anxiety. These scholars have generally identified significant correlations between different types of anxiety and corresponding foreign language skills [8-10]. However, there is still some uncertainty about the precise extent of these relationships. The development and application of these scales have not only provided more accurate tools for measuring FLA but also introduced new perspectives on its impact on the learning process. These tools have enhanced our understanding of how FLA influences learners' performance and engagement in language acquisition. Through these scales, researchers have been able to delve deeper into the internal structure of FLA and how it impacts learners' performance in different language skills. However, despite the valuable information these studies provide for understanding FLA, there are still many questions that need further exploration, which is also the next step for empirical research on the specific correlations.

3.2. An Empirical Study On The Correlation Between Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Students' Academic Performance

Regarding Chinese English learners, some scholars have indicated a high negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic performance, while others have found a moderate negative correlation [10,11]. There are also scholars who believe that the negative correlation between the two is quite low [12]. However, due to limitations in research methods and tools, the debate over the "anxiety-performance" relationship in foreign language learning has persisted for a considerable time without being effectively resolved.

As more diverse research analysis methods have been employed, such as meta-analysis, the field has seen a shift in approach. Dong Lianqi utilized meta-analytic tools to explore the relationship between foreign language "anxiety performance" and its moderating variables among Chinese English learners. Teimouri was among the pioneers in applying meta-analytic tools to the examination of the "anxiety-performance" dynamic in the acquisition of foreign languages [7,13]. Subsequently, scholars such as Zhang and Botes have also conducted research in this area [14,15].

These three studies all employed meta-analytic techniques to synthesize the findings from the exploration of the “anxiety performance,” discovering that foreign language anxiety is moderately and negatively correlated with foreign language achievement.

4. Conclusion

This study delves into the multidimensional characteristics of FLA, revealing its nature as a complex phenomenon. FLA encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses associated with specific language learning contexts, which, through enhanced emotional filtering mechanisms, impede students’ cognitive processing and language acquisition. Empirical research findings indicate a moderate negative correlation between FLA and academic performance, suggesting that FLA may severely disrupt students’ language development.

FLA is intimately connected to learners’ experiences in acquiring language skills., and its negative impacts cannot be overlooked. The findings of this study highlight the potential detrimental effects of FLA on academic achievement, particularly in the field of language learning.

These findings are significant for educators, who must recognize that FLA could be a factor hindering students’ language learning. By understanding the nature of FLA, educators can devise more effective teaching strategies, such as creating a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to take risks in trying out new language skills, and providing ample opportunities for low-stakes practice. Educational institutions should consider implementing interventions to enhance students’ self-efficacy and psychological resilience, such as stress management workshops and peer mentoring programs.

As awareness of FLA increases, it is anticipated that students will develop more mature psychological qualities and coping strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of FLA. In the future, ongoing research will help deepen our understanding of FLA and guide educational practices to improve students’ language learning outcomes. The author believes that as the understanding evolves, in-depth research on FLA will promote the refinement of educational practices and ultimately enhance students’ academic performance.

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