

The Impact of English Anxiety and Learning Motivation on English Achievement

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, English, as one of the most widely used languages in the world, plays a significant role in international communication, business, education, science and technology, and other fields. This study focuses on the influence of English anxiety and learning motivation on English achievement. Through the integration and analysis of existing research results, the literature research method is used to sort out relevant theories and empirical research. The results show that English anxiety is more negatively related to performance, and learning motivation plays a positive role in promoting performance. High anxiety can weaken the positive effect of motivation on performance, while strong motivation can alleviate the negative effect of anxiety. Based on this conclusion, educators should create a good classroom atmosphere and stimulate students' learning interest, and learners should adjust their mentality and enhance their learning motivation. At the same time, it is pointed out that research on special groups and longitudinal studies can be carried out in the future to provide a theoretical basis for the improvement of English teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the education systems of numerous countries, English is a mandatory subject. Academically, it serves as a crucial bridge for international scholarly exchanges. In today's globalized academic environment, many cutting-edge research findings across various disciplines are published in English, and numerous international research conferences are conducted in this language. From an employment perspective, job seekers proficient in English can access more opportunities in multinational corporations and foreign trade enterprises, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the job market. Consequently, English is an indispensable tool for international communication, and mastering it is of paramount importance.

The process of learning English is influenced by multiple factors, among which the psychological state of individual learners—particularly English anxiety and learning motivation—has garnered significant attention within the educational community. Foreign language anxiety is not merely a simple emotional response but involves learners' self-perception, belief systems, and other aspects, forming a complex structure closely intertwined with classroom language learning (Horwitz, 2001). Moreover,

learning motivation plays a central role in second language acquisition, serving as a key determinant of learning efficiency and the fundamental driving force that initiates and sustains long-term language learning (Gardner, 1985). Currently, most scholars have investigated the current status of English anxiety and learning motivation, focusing primarily on the correlation between English anxiety and English scores, as well as learning motivation and English scores. However, there is limited literature exploring the relationship between English anxiety, learning motivation, and English learning achievement. This review aims to integrate and analyze existing research findings to examine the influence of English anxiety and learning motivation on English achievement. It will explore both the independent mechanisms of action and their interactive relationship, elucidating how these factors collectively impact English achievement. The objective is to provide more targeted and effective guidance for English teaching practices, thereby enhancing learners' English proficiency and promoting the development of English education.

2 KEY CONCEPTS

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

The concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA) was proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (Horwitz et al, 1986). It stems from the sense of risk and problem that learners experience when they attempt to communicate in an immature second language, as their communication efforts are evaluated against uncertain or unknown linguistic and sociocultural standards, thereby challenging their self-concept as competent communicators and leading to emotions such as silence, heightened self-awareness, fear, and even panic (Horwitz, 2001). It is not merely an emotional state but also involves self-perception, beliefs, and other aspects, constituting a unique complex related to classroom language learning.

Individual ability, the types of English activities participated in, and cultural differences all contribute to FLA. Students need to constantly engage in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities in a foreign language that they have not yet mastered proficiently in the classroom, worrying about making mistakes and being evaluated, and their classroom performance is continuously monitored, all of which increase anxiety. Moreover, when learning a foreign language, an individual's communication attempts are evaluated against uncertain linguistic and sociocultural standards, which contrast sharply with the ease of understanding and being understood in the native language environment, making learners become silent, self-aware, and even experience fear or panic (Horwitz et al, 1986).

FLA can affect students' classroom performance and language belief. Anxious students may experience "freezing" in the classroom, such as blanking out when asked questions by the teacher and being unable to answer; they may be more nervous in oral activities (such as role-playing) than in their native language environment; they may forget knowledge during tests, make careless mistakes, and the number of mistakes may increase due to anxiety; they may overstudy or avoid studying, such as skipping classes, delaying homework, choosing to sit at the back of the classroom; they may also have problems such as inattention and forgetfulness, accompanied by physical symptoms such as tension, trembling, sweating, palpitations, and sleep disorders. Some students hold unreasonable beliefs, such as believing that they must speak a foreign language perfectly before opening their mouths, and not guessing the meaning of new words, which contradicts the need to communicate before fluency

is achieved in actual learning, thereby exacerbating anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope also developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure this anxiety, showing a moderate negative correlation between anxiety and performance (Horwitz et al, 1986). Previous research on FLA can roughly be divided into three stages: the first is the confounded research approach, which mainly refers to the early period when FLA was mixed with other types of anxiety; the second is the specialized research approach, which defines FLA as anxiety in a specific context, that is, anxiety unique to language learning and use situations; the third is the dynamic research approach, a relatively new trend that focuses on considering FLA within the context of numerous potential learner, situational, or other factors that may influence language learning (MacIntyre, 2017).

2.2 Learning Motivation

The motivation for learning a second language is usually defined as a combination of effort, the desire to achieve language learning goals, and a positive attitude towards learning the language (Brown, 1988). Motivation is a key factor in the efficiency of second language learning, a prerequisite for initiating second language learning, and a driving force for maintaining long-term language learning goals. It determines the degree of student participation in second language learning, their persistence, and is crucial to the success of second language learning (Shirvan & Alamer, 2022). Learning motivation is classified into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation based on its source. Intrinsic motivation is the natural desire for learning that arises within an individual, stemming from their curiosity and thirst for knowledge about the learning content itself. The learning activity itself can stimulate and sustain this motivation without relying on external stimuli. Students with intrinsic motivation typically have good self-directed learning abilities, can drive their own learning without external supervision or coercion, and are passionate about the learning content, which can be maintained for a long time. Their learning behavior is continuous. Such students focus on the process of knowledge acquisition and enjoy the pleasure of exploring and understanding knowledge. The satisfaction of learning comes from the mastery and understanding of knowledge. When the learning content meets the individual's psychological needs, such as self-actualization and cognitive development needs, intrinsic motivation

can be maintained and enhanced. In addition, the pursuit of new knowledge is also an important driving force for intrinsic motivation, prompting individuals to actively participate in learning activities. Extrinsic motivation is the learning drive triggered by external environmental factors, which is not entirely consistent with the learner's internal needs. It is a response to external rewards or the avoidance of punishment. Students' learning behaviors are mainly aimed at obtaining external recognition or avoiding negative consequences, such as good grades, praise, rewards, or avoiding criticism and punishment. Such students focus on the results of learning rather than the process, viewing learning as a means to achieve external goals (such as gaining others' appreciation or meeting others' expectations) rather than pursuing knowledge itself. Once external rewards or pressure disappear, the learning motivation may weaken because the maintenance of learning behavior depends on the existence of external conditions. Common types of extrinsic motivation include appreciation motivation and avoidance of punishment motivation. Appreciation motivation refers to the fact that many students strive to learn in order to gain the appreciation and recognition of parents, teachers, or classmates. They regard others' praise as an important source of learning motivation and strive to win others' praise by achieving good grades or performing well in class. Avoidance of punishment motivation refers to the fact that some students strive to learn in order to avoid punishment for poor learning performance. Punishment includes teachers' criticism, parents' scolding, and classmates' ridicule (Zou, 2023).

3 THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH ANXIETY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Yang selected 230 ninth-grade students from three junior high schools in Xingqing District, Yinchuan City as the research subjects and distributed 230 questionnaires, of which 221 were valid (Yang & Zhang, 2017). The study used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz, revised by Wang Cai Kang (Wang, 2003) in 2003, to measure the level of English anxiety. The scale consists of 33 items, divided into four dimensions: worry, tension, communication anxiety, and classroom questioning anxiety. It uses a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 indicates "strongly agree". The higher the score, the higher the

anxiety level of the subjects. Items 11, 18, 24, and 28 are reverse scored. The Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale is 0.890, indicating good reliability. Through the correlation analysis between junior high school students' English anxiety and their English scores, it was found that there is a significant negative correlation between these two variables. Specifically, English academic achievement exhibits a significant negative correlation with overall English anxiety, as well as with specific dimensions such as general anxiety, communication anxiety, and classroom questioning anxiety. This indicates that higher levels of English learning anxiety are likely to have an adverse effect on academic performance. Furthermore, this study categorized students into three groups—high, medium, and low anxiety—based on their scores from the English anxiety scale. One-way ANOVA and LSD tests were conducted, using English academic achievement as the dependent variable and English anxiety level as the independent variable. The results revealed that students in the low anxiety group achieved significantly higher English scores compared to those in the high anxiety group. These findings further substantiate the detrimental impact of high levels of English anxiety on academic performance. The limitations of this study include the selection of samples only from three junior high schools in Xingqing District, Yinchuan City, which is relatively small in scope and limited to a specific area, possibly affecting the generalizability and representativeness of the research results. Additionally, the study only used the English scores of the high school entrance examination as the measure of English academic performance, which may not be comprehensive enough to fully reflect students' comprehensive English learning abilities and actual levels.

Li selected students from two junior high schools in Tiexi District, Shenyang City as the research subjects, covering different grades from grade 7 to grade 9, and clearly provided the specific numbers of male and female students (159 males and 116 females) (Li, 2016). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was used to measure English classroom anxiety, and the most recent English test scores of the students were used as the measure of English academic performance. The results show that English classroom anxiety is negatively correlated with English academic achievement. In addition, the study also found that there is a close relationship between English self-concept, English anxiety and English learning performance. Self-concept refers to a person's self-perception, which is formed from the experience of

one's surroundings and the understanding and judgment of the experience (Wang, 2004). Academic self-concept is learners' perception and evaluation of their own academic aspects, which affects students' choice of learning behavior and ultimately affects their academic performance. It is found that the average values of female students in the overall English self-concept and most sub-items are higher than that of male students, and the differences are significant in some items. In the three grades, except that the mean value of English grammar self-concept increases year by year, more English self-concept items decrease year by year. Students with high English self-concept have positive self-evaluation, strong learning motivation, weak anxiety and better performance. On the contrary, negative evaluation can easily cause anxiety, weaken learning motivation and affect performance.

Feng selected third-year English major students from Zhejiang Normal University as the research subjects (Feng, 2004). She used a self-designed "English Communication Anxiety Questionnaire for Undergraduate English Majors" to measure English communication anxiety, covering listening, speaking and reading skills, with a total of 27 questions. Data was obtained through self-assessment by the students, and anxiety values were calculated to measure the degree of communication anxiety. The National English Proficiency Test for English Majors (Level 4) scores of the students were used as the evaluation index for English performance, including sub-scores such as writing, grammar and vocabulary, reading, dictation, listening and cloze test, which could comprehensively reflect the students' overall English proficiency. The study found that the influence of different types of communication anxiety on English performance was complex and not a simple linear relationship. Moreover, moderate communication anxiety can promote English learning performance. This conclusion differs from the previous two studies and expands the understanding of the relationship between English anxiety and academic performance from the specific dimensions of communication anxiety. Although anxiety is generally thought to negatively affect academic performance, the relationship between variables can change in specific contexts. Future research needs to further study the specific mechanism of its influence.

All three studies found that there is a certain correlation between English anxiety and academic performance, and anxiety has an impact on academic performance. What is more, there are other factors at play between English anxiety and academic performance, and the influencing mechanism

between the two is complex. The third study also found that anxiety manifestations may have a promoting effect on performance under specific conditions. Therefore, how to control the negative effects of anxiety and play its positive role in specific situations is the research direction that future researchers can pay attention to.

4 THE IMPACT OF LEARNING MOTIVATION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Taking students from a junior high school in Changchun as subjects, Wang conducted an in-depth investigation into gender differences in English learning motivation and their relationship with academic achievement through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Wang, 2022). The study involved 400 students from a single junior high school in Changchun City, yielding a valid sample of 388 participants (197 males and 191 females), spanning six classes across three grades. Age differences were considered during the sampling process. All students are native Chinese speakers for whom English is a compulsory course, with limited exposure to native English speakers or English-speaking cultures outside of class. The questionnaire adapted Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), consisting of 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale to measure integrative and instrumental motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to learners' desire to acquire a new language as a means to achieve practical goals (Brown, 1994). Integrative motivation involves learning a language to integrate into the target language community, characterized by positive attitudes towards the target language group, its people, and culture (Ellis, 1997). This section achieved a Cronbach's α reliability coefficient of 0.8643. In addition, the questionnaire also utilized Gardner's (Gardner, 1985) Motivation Intensity Scale, a 20-item scale written in Chinese, requiring students to select statements reflecting their actual learning behaviors to gauge motivation intensity. Higher scores indicated greater effort invested in learning. Additionally, Wang conducted face-to-face interviews with 18 students (three males and three females from each grade) lasting 3-5 minutes (Wang, 2022). Interview questions covered attitudes toward English, study efforts, and perceptions of English proficiency or performance. Responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Mid-term English test results from the 2020-

2021 academic year served as the measurement index for academic achievement, with gender as the independent variable and mid-term English test scores as the dependent variable. An independent samples t-test was employed to analyze performance differences and multivariate Pearson relationship was used for analysis. Findings revealed that boys' integrative motivation significantly positively correlated with English achievement, while the correlation between instrumental motivation and achievement was weak. Girls' integrative motivation positively correlated with their grades, but instrumental motivation negatively correlated with their grades. This suggests that integrative motivation positively impacts student achievement, whereas instrumental motivation has differential effects on boys' and girls' achievement. In terms of motivation intensity, there was a significant positive correlation between boys' motivation intensity and their English scores. Interviews also indicated that boys' scores correlated with after-school learning time for several boys said that the reason for their poor English scores was that they spent too much time on non-English subjects after class. For girls, motivation intensity positively correlated with their grades, and their English grades were directly proportional to their after-class efforts, although some experienced exam anxiety. These results indicate that motivation intensity positively affects both male and female students' achievement, but its influence on boys' achievement is more pronounced than on girls'. However, this study's sample was limited to one middle school, potentially affecting generalizability. Future research should include multiple schools to enhance persuasiveness. Additionally, using mid-term test scores alone to measure language ability and the absence of oral tests limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. Moreover, motivation is influenced by various factors such as personal background, emotional factors, and attitudes, which need further exploration in future studies.

There are many different ways to divide learning motivation. Zhu examined 355 sophomore students at a middle school in Zhangzhou City, including 175 males and 180 females (Zhu, 2023). Sophomores were chosen because they have adapted to high school learning, possess a certain understanding of their own motivation and involvement in English learning, and exhibit relatively stable motivation and learning engagement levels. The study used Bao's high school students' learning motivation questionnaire, divided into five dimensions: learning value, effort level, external need, learning situation, and intrinsic interest (Bao, 2005). Each dimension

was scored on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger motivation. English scores were obtained from the school's integrated educational administration system, averaging October's second monthly examination and November's mid-term examination scores. Results showed a significant positive correlation between English learning motivation and English scores, with all five sub-dimensions significantly positively correlated with English scores. Learning situation motivation had the highest positive correlation, while intrinsic interest motivation had the lowest. For high school students, the learning environment is extremely important. For example, in a learning situation where teachers and classmates communicate in English in teaching and daily life, students are more willing to join the team of daily English communication, which will naturally increase their interest and motivation in learning English.

Gao investigated undergraduate students from 53 majors at a university in Guangdong, selecting one class per major and grade (totaling 285 classes, including specialized classes), with a total of 6648 students participating (Gao, 2020). After data collection, the valid sample comprised 6600 participants (4211 males and 2389 females). A self-designed learning motivation questionnaire included five dimensions: autonomous need, goal pursuit, social orientation, effectiveness expectation, and factor induction, totaling 30 items scored on a four-point Likert scale. Final examination scores were used as the record content, obtained from the school's comprehensive educational administration management system. The average score of the class with the lowest average score is taken as the benchmark value, and the average score of other classes is subtracted from the benchmark value to obtain the adjusted value of each class; The adjustment value is used to adjust the grades of each student, so that individual academic results are comparable. Findings indicated that contemporary college students' learning motivation positively impacted academic performance, but it was not the sole determinant. Other intellectual and non-intellectual factors also influenced academic outcomes.

Wang, Zhu, and Gao explored the relationship between learning motivation and academic achievement among junior high school, senior high school, and college students, respectively (Wang, 2022, Zhu, 2023, Gao, 2020). These studies share limitations of single-sample bias and incomplete performance measurement. Future research should improve methodologies, expand sample sizes, and

integrate various factors to deeply explore the complex relationship between learning motivation and academic achievement, providing targeted guidance for teaching at different educational stages. Middle school studies could add oral tests, high school studies could optimize samples and explore causal relationships, and college studies could analyze other influencing factors and mechanisms.

5 DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Overall Conclusions of Current Research

Previous research has demonstrated that both English anxiety and learning motivation significantly influence English achievement, albeit through complex mechanisms. English anxiety is typically negatively correlated with English performance. As anxiety increases, students may experience phenomena such as "mental blanking" in class, make more mistakes during exams, and develop negative learning attitudes, all of which can impede performance improvement. Conversely, learning motivation serves as a proactive driving force for English learning. Intrinsic motivation encourages students to focus on the process of knowledge acquisition, fostering a spontaneous desire to explore and understand knowledge while maintaining long-term enthusiasm for learning. Extrinsic motivation, such as seeking praise or avoiding punishment, can also motivate students to engage in learning to some extent.

More importantly, there is a complex interplay between English anxiety and learning motivation. High levels of anxiety can diminish the positive impact of learning motivation on English performance. When students experience excessive anxiety, they may lose confidence and interest in English learning, thereby weakening the motivational drive. For instance, initially highly motivated students may suffer from performance decline due to excessive anxiety during test preparation. On the other hand, strong learning motivation can sometimes mitigate the adverse effects of anxiety. Students with clear and firm learning goals, robust motivation, and self-confidence may exhibit greater resilience in the face of anxiety, adjusting their learning strategies and actively seeking solutions to challenges.

5.2 Suggestions Based on the Conclusions

5.2.1 For Educators

Educators should create a relaxed and positive learning atmosphere to help students reduce English anxiety. In classroom teaching, various classroom activities can be set up, and various teaching methods such as group cooperation and game teaching can be used to increase the interest and interaction of English learning. When organizing group discussions, teachers encourage students to express their views freely in English to enhance their confidence in communication. At the same time, teachers should give more positive feedback to students after answering questions in English and reduce criticism for mistakes. Educators should focus on stimulating and cultivating students' learning motivation. Teachers can understand students' interests and needs through communication, and design matching teaching activities. For example, for students who are interested in English movies, teachers can organize relevant movie-watching and discussion activities to stimulate their intrinsic motivation. In addition, educators should also carry out class meetings on learning anxiety, guide students to correctly understand and cope with English learning anxiety, and help them establish a rational learning attitude and firm confidence in learning beliefs.

5.2.2 For Learners

Learners should actively adjust their mentality and strive to overcome English anxiety. They can take part in some sports after studying to increase the level of endorphins in their bodies; Daily positive self-talk, such as "I can do it"; Deep breathing training before the exam activates the parasympathetic nervous system and reduces the body's physiological stress response. At the same time, learners should strive to enhance their learning motivation, clear learning goals, and constantly explore their own interest in English learning. They can set short-term and long-term goals for yourself and make corresponding learning plans. Combine your extracurricular interests with your English studies.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Future research could focus on special education groups, such as students with learning disabilities or students from ethnic minority areas with limited English learning resources. Exploring the influence of

English anxiety and learning motivation on their English scores and the unique characteristics of their psychological factors can provide more targeted educational support and help. Longitudinal follow-up studies could also be carried out in the future. By tracking the changes of English anxiety and motivation in the whole learning process, educators can better understand their dynamic effects on English achievement at different stages and provide a basis for the choice of educational intervention timing. In addition, future studies can further explore the influence of cultural differences, teaching methods and other factors on the relationship between English anxiety, learning motivation and English achievement, and continue to expand and deepen the research in this field.

6 CONCLUSION

This study integrated and analyzed the influence of English anxiety and learning motivation on English achievement, explored both their individual mechanism of action and their interactive relationship, and how this relationship would affect English achievement together. Studies have shown that English anxiety is often negatively correlated with English performance. On the contrary, learning motivation plays an active role in English learning. Intrinsic motivation encourages students to focus on the process of knowledge acquisition, spontaneously produces a strong desire to explore and understand knowledge and maintain long-term enthusiasm; Although extrinsic motivation stems from external factors such as seeking praise or avoiding punishment, it can also motivate students to engage in learning to a certain extent. In addition, there is a complex interaction between English anxiety and learning motivation. High anxiety may weaken the positive influence of learning motivation on English performance, while strong learning motivation can alleviate the negative effect of anxiety to a certain extent. Based on the research results, relevant suggestions are put forward for teachers and students. Finally, the future research direction is pointed out. In the future, the society can pay attention to special education groups and carry out longitudinal follow-up research, so as to provide more targeted educational support and a more solid theoretical basis for improving English teaching.

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