

Overview of The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Students' Second Language Acquisition Performance

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Abstract: Although researchers have focused on receiving a significant amount of attention on the emotional aspects of second language acquisition, there are still gaps in the literature on anxiety related to foreign languages because of the way times are changing and how learners' cognitive processes and learning styles are evolving. This article analyzes the effects of negative emotions, mainly anxiety, on students' second language acquisition and concludes the anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language has a serious negative impact on the process and outcomes of foreign language learning. Based on this, this article proposes that anxiety factors should be fully emphasized in foreign language teaching, and relevant measures should be proposed from the aspects of students themselves, teachers, and evaluation methods to help learners minimize the stress that comes with learning a foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

With globalization's development becoming more profound, second language acquisition has become a research hotspot in multiple fields such as education, psychology, and linguistics, and more and more learners are learning a second language outside their mother tongue due to the fact that the process of second language acquisition is a dynamic information-processing process. During the learning process, learners' psychological factors, such as emotional factors, exhibit a dynamic development trend. To promote the influence of learners on second language acquisition, it is necessary to consider emotional factors (Li & Wei, 2023). In this complex cognitive and emotional learning process, anxiety, as a common psychological state among learners, cannot be ignored in its impact on second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). With the continuous development of the times, there is still room for improvement in the research on emotions, as both cognitive and learning methods have undergone certain improvements and changes. From the standpoint of anxiety, this article will review the literature on the effects of negative emotions on the acquisition of a second language, highlight key theories, pinpoint and assess issues, and offer pertinent recommendations.

2 CLASSIFICATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ITS IMPACT

Two aspects have been the primary focus of research on anxiety related to foreign language learning in recent years: correlation research and comprehensive research (Li & Li, 2016). This article will delve into the definition, classification, and impact of the viewpoint on the anxiety that comes with learning a foreign language of correlation research.

2.1 Definition and Classification of Foreign Language Anxiety

There is a particular kind of anxiety in a certain circumstance; foreign language anxiety is a common ailment of negative feelings that learners of a foreign language may experience, including tension, uneasiness, and self-doubt. The distinct combination of behaviors, emotions, attitudes, and self-perceptions that students produce when learning a second language (Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

In research on foreign language anxiety, classroom foreign language anxiety can be roughly classified into three categories: communication anxiety, negative evaluation anxiety, and exam anxiety (Guo & Liu, 2007).

Communication fear refers to the anxiety that arises during foreign language communication due to difficulties in fully understanding the meaning of others' expressions or inaccurate pronunciation, leading to difficulties in expressing one's thoughts. For example, students who worry about their English speaking skills, feel nervous and are afraid of making mistakes are all manifestations of communication fear.

Negative evaluation fear is the emotion that learners feel worried and fearful about negative evaluations given by others. Some educators believe that the self-evaluation of second language learners is closely related to the anxiety they experience (Guo & Liu, 2007). Low self-evaluators are concerned about receiving negative evaluations in foreign language learning, which can have a significant negative impact. Therefore, distrust of one's abilities and fear of making mistakes are concrete manifestations of low self-evaluation.

Exam anxiety is partly caused by learners' lack of proficiency and mastery of foreign language knowledge, which leads to excessive tension and blank minds due to concerns about not being able to achieve good results through exams. On the other hand, learners may bring their past exam failures into a new exam environment, creating a vicious cycle. These learners have a mistaken understanding of language acquisition and place excessive emphasis on exam scores, making them more susceptible to foreign language anxiety.

2.2 The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Students' Academic Performance

Foreign language anxiety can, to some extent, affect students' academic performance. Anxiety levels in foreign languages differ significantly between the passing and failing groups, with the passing group experiencing significantly less anxiety than the failing group, according to a survey that some scholars conducted on students' CET4 scores and anxiety levels (Zhang & Yuan, 2004).

Research has shown a connection between students' anxiety over learning a foreign language and their scores in that language. Students who experience less anxiety are generally more confident in their ability to learn a foreign language, which enhances their comprehension of the material and helps them handle tests. Its source of anxiety is more stable, usually coming from high demands for grades and oneself.

The academic performance of students with higher levels of anxiety is inferior. Furthermore, students with poor academic performance often encounter more difficulties in their studies, such as insufficient vocabulary and difficulty understanding reading. These problems lead to poor performance in exams, resulting in strong anxiety and a vicious cycle of anxiety and grades. This type of student is prone to self-doubt and fear while learning foreign languages, feeling the pressure brought by the learning environment, which further exacerbates anxiety.

The presence of anxiety in foreign languages can be observed to directly affect students' foreign language grades, and excessive anxiety is not conducive to students achieving good foreign language grades. The attitude of students towards anxiety is directly related to their strategies for coping with foreign language learning, which in turn affects their foreign language grades.

2.3 The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on The Performance of Various Foreign Language Skills

Since learning a second language is a complicated process, there are numerous categories into which learning perspectives can be separated, including speaking, listening, and so on. Learning a second language can be negatively affected by foreign language anxiety, which will be analyzed from four aspects: speaking, reading, listening, and writing.

One significant advancement in the research of anxiety related to foreign languages is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, 1986). Based on this scale, a plethora of studies have demonstrated that the level of foreign language anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with learners' learning willingness, which in turn affects learners' learning status and process in specific directions (Shi & Fan, 2013; Goetz et al., 2013). In subsequent studies, researchers developed anxiety scales corresponding to the definition of various language and foreign language anxiety emotions and found that learners' foreign language speaking anxiety, reading anxiety, and listening anxiety, writing anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with corresponding foreign language skill scores (Tsiplakides & KerAmida, 2009; Ghonsoly&Elahi, 2010).

2.3.1 The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Foreign Language Oral Performance

Foreign language oral anxiety mainly originates from external evaluation anxiety (Xu et al., 2023), that is, negative evaluation fear is an important factor causing foreign language oral anxiety (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Anxiety can cause learners to be influenced by negative thinking and other irrelevant information, leading to thinking unrelated to foreign language oral tasks and ultimately resulting in learners' inability to achieve ideal results in foreign language oral performance.

Overall, when learners are in an environment with evaluative factors, once they know that their foreign language performance will be evaluated, they are likely to trigger a fear of negative emotions in their hearts, which in turn can lead to stronger anxiety.

2.3.2 The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Foreign Language Reading Scores

Compared to length and structural complexity, the main cause of reading anxiety is second language vocabulary, which second language learners experience when attempting to interpret a text but are unable to understand it (Ghonsoly et al., 2010). For example, learners may find it difficult to concentrate under foreign language anxiety and content that could have been understood may become elusive due to the anxiety. This can lead to resistance to foreign language reading materials, reduce reading volume, and ultimately affect the improvement of foreign language reading ability and grades.

Therefore, learners who suffer from reading anxiety for a long time are easily disrupted in their cognitive process of reading, hindering their second language acquisition performance and progress.

2.3.3 The Effect of Anxiety Related times Learning a Foreign Language on Hearing Scores

Listening anxiety refers to the emotional state of foreign language learners who, after listening comprehension and cognitive evaluation, have a premonition that they will not understand or are worried about receiving negative evaluations, resulting in tension, unease, worry, fear, and other emotions related to second language acquisition (Zhan & Wang, 2010). This type of emotion may

cause learners to interrupt listening comprehension or decrease listening comprehension effectiveness.

For many learners, the process of foreign language listening is a passive absorption process. Learners need to quickly extract the required information in unfamiliar language environments, and most of the received information is difficult to understand. Therefore, they bear that people with greater psychological pressure are more likely to experience negative emotions like tension and panic. This anxiety often leads to learners' inability to concentrate, which in turn affects their oral performance in foreign languages.

2.3.4 The Effect of Anxiety Related times Learning a Foreign Language on Writing Performance

Writing anxiety is the term used to describe a range of nervous behaviors that students display when writing, such as avoiding writing assignments or worrying about other people's opinions of their work (Daly & Miller, 1975). Writing anxiety hinders the writing process, leading to difficulties in writing and causing learners to experience negative and painful emotions, resulting in a loss of expectations for successful writing (Ma & Dong, 2018).

Learners with high levels of writing anxiety worry about their writing skills and negative evaluations, which are unrelated to the writing task and excessively affect their writing ability. In contrast, learners with low anxiety levels are less affected by irrelevant thoughts and are better able to concentrate on completing writing tasks, achieving relatively good results in foreign language writing.

It can be seen that excessive anxiety can indeed interfere with the process of foreign language writing, affect the quality of writing, and lower writing scores.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Many researchers have been dedicated to identifying the causes of foreign language anxiety in recent years to find ways to mitigate or completely eradicate the impact of anxiety in foreign languages on foreign language learners, given the substantial impact that anxiety has on foreign language acquisition. McIntyre and Gardner found in their study that learners may experience anxiety in the early stages of foreign language learning due to difficulties in grammar

patterns, language comprehension, and other aspects (MaIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Various reasons can lead to foreign language anxiety; some have to do with the learner, some with the teacher, and some with classroom situations and tests. This article categorizes common reasons into roughly five types:

3.1 Anxiety Caused by Individuals and Between Individuals and Others

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the primary cause of anxiety related to learning a foreign language is anxiety that arises between persons and between individuals. Strong feelings of competition or low self-esteem are the primary causes of this anxiety (Gu & Li, 2010). This competitive mindset can make students anxious when they evaluate themselves against others or their desired self-image. However, students who have poor self-esteem are more likely to worry excessively about what other people think of them, fearing unfavorable assessments, and as a result, refrain from engaging in activities that help them learn a foreign language. Therefore, the likelihood of acquiring foreign language anxiety will significantly increase if learners of foreign languages consider that they are not capable of mastering the language in the early stages of learning.

3.2 Learners' Perspectives on Foreign Language Learning

The second major factor causing anxiety among foreign language learners is their perspective on foreign language learning. Horwitz's study showed that learners have a great interest in the correctness of foreign language phonetics, and some learners believe that they only need two years of study to master a foreign language (Horwitz, 1986). However, when learners discover that this is not the case during the learning process, foreign language anxiety can arise. Foreign language anxiety will surface when there is a discrepancy between the learners' conceptions and the real circumstances of learning a foreign language.

3.3 Teachers' Views on Foreign Language Teaching

One of the things that makes pupils anxious about learning a foreign language is the opinions of their teachers. According to research, the majority of foreign language instructors think that they should be at the forefront of their students' foreign language

education. These teachers believe that when students make mistakes during the foreign language learning process, teachers should immediately correct them to avoid students forming incorrect memories and habits (Gu & Li, 2010). And the views held by teachers are precisely the reasons that cause learners' foreign language anxiety.

3.4 Classroom Teaching Atmosphere

The relationship that exists between teachers and students is the main factor in creating a classroom teaching atmosphere and also has a significant impact on the development of foreign language anxiety. Palacios analyzed the different effects of different teacher-student relationships on foreign language anxiety in his research (Palacios, 1998). The experiment shows that if teachers fully trust and encourage students in foreign language teaching classrooms and are good at helping them, students' anxiety about foreign language learning will be greatly reduced. On the contrary, if teachers are too serious and demanding, it will arouse students' anxiety.

3.5 Foreign Language Evaluation Methods

Currently, the evaluation of foreign language learning effectiveness mainly relies on foreign language exams. Exams for foreign languages are an essential component of learning a foreign language, and they are also a major contributor to learners' anxiety. The more grades are involved in foreign language exams, the more likely learners are to experience anxiety. Recalling one's own failed experiences during exams can increase anxiety levels, leading to negative and irrelevant thoughts during the exam process.

4 SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING AND ELIMINATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY

Based on research and analysis of anxiety about learning a foreign language, suggestions for reducing and eliminating foreign language learning anxiety can be divided into the following points:

4.1 Cultivate Learners' Confidence and Improve Their Self-Awareness Evaluation

Learners should have a correct understanding of the anxiety that arises in foreign language learning so that they can use more scientific methods to cope with foreign language anxiety. For example, Crookall and Oxford suggested that students alleviate foreign language anxiety through group discussions. The specific measure is to have students write about their anxiety situation and discuss solutions in groups. In addition, teachers can also set some easily achievable small goals to cultivate students' confidence.

4.2 Improve Teachers' Understanding of Foreign Language Anxiety and Create a Good Classroom Atmosphere

Teachers should be guides and helpers in the classroom, not authorities or evaluators. Their responsibility is to provide more input and opportunities for real materials to be exchanged in a real environment for foreign language learning students (Gu & Li, 2010). Teachers should try to understand students' foreign language anxiety as much as possible and adjust teaching methods appropriately according to students' learning status to create a good teaching atmosphere. Young suggested that teachers improve their teaching methods through classroom teaching videos or peer evaluations between teachers, acquire knowledge from each other's strengths and weaknesses, update teaching concepts to keep up with the times, and at the same time, teachers should also take care of students' emotions, understand their psychology and emotions, create a relaxed and friendly classroom teaching atmosphere that does not make students feel pressure, to alleviate students' anxiety in foreign language classrooms.

4.3 Foreign Language Evaluation Methods Need Times Be Diversified

There are various ways to evaluate foreign languages, but at present, the most effective and intuitive way is through foreign language exams. One of the significant factors in reducing and eliminating foreign language anxiety is foreign language exams. Familiarizing students with exam question types before exams can greatly reduce their anxiety and unease about exams. Simultaneously, teachers need

to be attentive to the difficulty level of the exam when setting questions. If the questions are too simple, students will become disinterested in learning a foreign language. Conversely, if the questions are too difficult, students' anxiety will deepen, they will lose interest in learning a foreign language, develop self-doubt, and lose confidence.

5 CONCLUSION

Foreign language anxiety is a complex and multidimensional anxiety phenomenon that is influenced by multiple factors. This article studies its concept and measurement tools, analyzes its causes and impact on foreign language performance, and proposes some strategies on how to alleviate and eliminate foreign language anxiety, further enabling researchers to have a more thorough comprehension of anxiety related to foreign languages. The process and results of learning foreign languages are significantly harmed by foreign language anxiety, per the aforementioned research. As a result, anxiety aspects should be thoroughly considered while teaching foreign languages, and effective strategies should be implemented to assist students in lowering their anxiety levels and increasing the efficacy of their language acquisition.

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