

A Review of the Factors of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

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Abstract: Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is an important psychological disorder that affects language learners' performance and motivation. This article reviews the key factors that lead to FLCA, including fear of negative evaluation communication anxiety. Research highlights how individual differences, such as self-esteem and language level, interact with classroom dynamics to exacerbate or alleviate anxiety. At the same time, the effects of teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and peer interaction are discussed, and the importance of a supportive learning environment is highlighted. By synthesizing existing research, this review aims to provide insights into effective strategies for reducing FLCA at the source, such as creating a positive classroom atmosphere, introducing collaborative activities, and leveraging technology to enhance engagement. Understanding these factors is critical for educators to design interventions that promote language acquisition and focus on learners' emotional well-being.

1 INTRODUCTION

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is a significant emotional factor that impacts the effectiveness of foreign language learning. The theoretical foundation for research in this area is provided by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) proposed by Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., and Cope. Domestic research has primarily focused on the factors that induce anxiety and the regulatory strategies for anxiety in the areas of foreign language listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Studies have shown that there is a significant negative correlation between foreign language learning anxiety and academic performance, affecting students' abilities in speaking, listening, writing, and other areas.

Starting from the classroom, this study investigates the causes of foreign language learning anxiety in second language classrooms, guiding second language teaching practice. It reveals the impact of emotional factors in the language learning process and offers targeted teaching strategies for teachers to improve the learning environment and enhance language learning efficiency.

2 MANIFESTATIONS AND EFFECTS OF ANXIETY

2.1 Anxiety and Fear

Anxiety is a widespread negative emotion. Anxiety can be thought of as a fear that is amplified by one's perception and imagination. This feeling prevents him from taking action in any field (Duan, 2023). Of all academic programs, foreign language study is more likely to cause anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). This specific anxiety not only manifests itself in the somatic reactions common to other phobias, for example, behaviors such as fear, sweating, palpitations, ringing in the ears, and forgetfulness, but also in the inhibition of learning strategies, learning ability, and academic performance (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Anxiety first manifests itself in physical symptoms, especially psychological phenomena such as blankness of the mind, forgetting what has been learned, or even simply forgetting how to speak. In more severe cases, anxious learners even show traumatic reactions (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). This leads to the fact that no matter how much effort they put in, they just cannot achieve satisfactory learning outcomes. This frustration deepens the feeling of anxiety, which in

turn affects all aspects of the learner's learning process.

2.2 Effects of Anxiety

Anxiety affects learning attitudes. Research has shown that FLCA hurts learner's attitudes toward foreign language learning. Anxious learners tend towards avoidance behaviors. Their classroom performance includes fewer attempts to explain, write, and communicate in the target language, as well as avoidance of lessons, tests, and homework (Horwitz et al., 1986). These behaviors often arise from fear, such as the fear that poor performance will bring ridicule from classmates, criticism from the teacher, and the fear of tests and grades. Even if these poor outcomes do not happen, they are overwhelmed by their imaginations.

According to Krashen, these negative emotions mentioned above form a filter that reduces the input of foreign language knowledge, which in turn reduces foreign language learning ability and affects learning potential (Krashen, 1982). Excessive FLCA can even cause organic damage to learners, disrupting the normal functioning of the prefrontal lobes of the brain and affecting memory (Arnold & Brown, 1999). This will inevitably have an impact on the learner's academic performance. Poor grades, in turn, will exacerbate learner's anxiety, which creates a vicious circle that makes it difficult for learners to achieve desired outcomes.

It follows that FLCA has the most significant impact on academic achievement (Dewaele et al., 2022). It is now generally accepted that FLCA is negatively correlated with language learning levels and achievement. Unlike how high anxiety learners are deeply involved in the vicious circle above, learners with low anxiety levels have a more positive mindset during the learning process and are more likely to achieve satisfactory academic results. As a result, it's easier for them to receive positive feedback, thus creating a virtuous circle (Botes et al., 2020).

FLCA acts on multiple aspects of learning strategies, learning abilities, and academic performance. It is, therefore, important to understand the sources of their anxiety from various aspects to keep it within reasonable limits.

3 THE CAUSES OF FLCA

3.1 Lerner's Personal Factors

Much research has found that language personal may cause anxiety. Anxiety regarding personal performance assessment and unease about social judgment could cause internally-driven perturbations.

3.1.1 Personal Character

According to the former study, it showed that a fixed L2 mindset can be a source of L2 anxiety (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). One personality predictor of second language anxiety is neuroticism. Language learners who score higher on neuroticism may experience more language anxiety. Through the research, introverts suffered more FLCA than extroverts in their L3. Neuroticism is strongly positively correlated with FLCA (Dewaele, 2013).

3.1.2 Personal Mentality Factor

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., and Cope posit that L2 communication inherently demands controlled cognitive processing, as learners must consciously manipulate linguistic structures rather than rely on automatic responses. This cognitive dissonance between desired and actual performance can destabilize speakers' perceived communicative competence, potentially manifesting as avoidance behaviors, hyperawareness of linguistic limitations, or acute anxiety during target language use. First, self-esteem may affect learners' anxiety levels. Low self-esteem makes language learners express concern regarding other's judgments and makes them want to please others, which may increase their anxiety (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). Furthermore, perfectionism could be another factor related to language anxiety. Research has found that language learners who are more perfectionistic may be more affected by anxiety. Some, especially those showing perfectionistic tendencies, responded that if they were unable to finish the assignments to their satisfaction, they would be uncomfortable. (Dewey et al., 2018).

Horwitz suggests that one of the contributing factors to FLCA is communication fear, which is closely related to the construct of social anxiety disorder (Horwitz et al., 1986). Individuals with social anxiety disorder tend to avoid scrutiny from others and worry that their words and actions will lead to embarrassment or humiliation. In foreign language learning (FLL) classrooms, this concern stems primarily from the frustrations and challenges

encountered. Researchers have found that oral learners exhibit higher levels of anxiety (Paul & Jun, 2022). Respondents in several experiments have reported that speaking and making mistakes in class make them feel anxious. Foreign language learners who are afraid to speak in public tend to exhibit stronger oral anxiety in FLL classrooms than others (Aziz et al., 2022).

3.1.3 Personal Emotional Intelligence (EI) Factor

Another factor that is a significant predictor of FLCA is trait EI. Mayer and Salovey define EI as a person's ability to perceive emotions and feelings of themselves and their surroundings and the ability to regulate their activities with what they perceive. When perceiving negative emotions, such as embarrassment, tension, and fear, learners with higher EI can control and even exploit them and relieve stress, thus maintaining a favorable attitude (Han et al., 2022). Studies show that students who perform better on the EI test have less experience with FLCA (Resnik & Dewaele, 2023).

3.1.4 Personal Ability Factor

When the learners' language ability is insufficient, it may also cause language anxiety. For example, during the early stages of language development, learners' low proficiency interacts with their self-abasement of ability. That may make them feel very uneasy when speaking in front of others. Due to the immaturity of the second language relative to the first language, it can also present problems in real communication in the second language. The most common problem for anxious foreign language students seeking help in class may be difficulty speaking in class (Horwitz et al., 1986).

3.2 Classroom Teaching Factors

This part categorizes teaching environment factors into classroom intervention factors and teacher style factors. Classroom intervention factors refer to the conscious measures taken by teachers during the teaching process to improve students' learning outcomes. Teacher style factors refer to the emotional attitudes demonstrated by teachers during the teaching process, which can affect students' psychological states and thereby significantly influence their levels of FLCA.

3.2.1 Classroom Environment Factors

Classroom interventions are categorized as student-student interactions, student-teacher interactions, self-management, and mood boosters (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). In terms of student-student interactions, through group collaboration, students can learn in a supportive environment. Positive feedback and encouragement among students help enhance learners' self-confidence and reduce anxiety caused by loneliness. Regarding student-teacher interactions, teachers create an inclusive classroom atmosphere and provide positive feedback and encouragement to students, making them feel accepted and understood, which can significantly reduce students' anxiety. As for self-management, teaching students effective learning strategies and skills, such as time management and note-taking techniques, can help them better cope with learning tasks and reduce anxiety caused by learning difficulties. In terms of mood boosters, interesting classroom activities and a relaxed learning environment can stimulate students' positive emotions.

However, the design of classroom activities by teachers needs to be within a reasonable range. Overly competitive activities or environments lacking cooperation and support may intensify learners' anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Therefore, creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment is crucial for reducing FLCA.

3.2.2 Teaching Factors

Teachers' emotional factors can significantly affect students' FLCA. Teachers' anxiety may be unintentionally transmitted to students (Gannoun & Diana Deris, 2023). If teachers exhibit nervousness or lack of confidence in the classroom, students may pick up on these emotions, thereby increasing their anxiety levels. This phenomenon is known as "emotional contagion". Teachers' emotional states can be conveyed to students through nonverbal hints, such as facial expressions, tone of speech, and body language. Negative emotions from teachers can affect the classroom atmosphere. At the same time, it leads to students developing a resistant attitude. At the same time, in English-medium instruction contexts, the extent of teachers' linguistic support and encouragement is an important factor affecting students' anxiety. By providing clear linguistic input and positive feedback, teachers can help students better understand and participate in classroom activities, thereby reducing their anxiety levels. Teachers' encouragement and praise can make

students feel joy and a sense of achievement in learning, enabling them to participate more actively in classroom activities and learning tasks.

4 SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Creating a Relaxed Classroom Atmosphere

When dealing with anxious students, teachers have two options: one option is to help students learn to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation. The other one is that teachers can make the learning context less stressful (Horwitz et al., 1986). So, creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere is significant for teachers. With the constant reform and innovation of education, foreign language teaching has gradually converted from pure consequentialism to more focusing on students' psychological factors, advocating the learning methods of experiencing, practicing, participating, exploring, communicating, and cooperating. Besides, strengthening the interaction between teachers and students is also necessary access, which can play the active role of learners and promote automatic and independent good language learning. Focus on students' participation, enhance the emotional interaction among teachers and students, and reduce students' FLCA. At the same time, it can also build a harmonious relationship between teachers and students and create a good Foreign language learning environment (He & Wang, 2020)

4.2 Personalized Education

Personalized education is a teaching strategy that adjusts teaching contents and methods according to student's interests, abilities, and learning styles (Fu, 2024). Liu and Deng emphasized the importance and necessity of personalized education. He believed that personalized teaching for university students was the fundamental way of cultivating innovative ability. In the course of foreign language acquisition, personalized education is a significant part. When learning spoken foreign languages which emphasize individual language sense, different FLL have different situations. So, it is more targeted to have one-on-one classes face-to-face. With the help of correct teaching methods, learners will make faster progress. In addition, the different foreign language learning habits of each person will have different effects on the learning situation. Some learners habitually increase their vocabulary by memorizing

words, while others habitually increase their vocabulary by reading a lot of literature. Some learners are used to discussing with group members to increase their proficiency in language application, while others are used to practicing on their own. This requires teachers to allocate teachers reasonably and assign different course tasks and learning tasks according to learners' learning habits so that they can learn foreign languages more efficiently.

Therefore, teachers should design personalized education activities according to students' differences in educational backgrounds, family backgrounds, FLCA levels, learning styles, and so on, and replace input teaching with guided teaching. Dynamically adjust educational resources and teaching strategies according to students' learning behaviors, abilities, and needs.

Besides personalized education can also It can be categorized into various types: based on different teaching approaches, it can be separated into in-person instruction and virtual teaching; based on different learning styles, it can be separated into tailored teaching and blended teaching. Differentiated teaching is a method of providing personalized learning tasks and allocating corresponding teaching resources according to students' different situations so that they can adapt to the learning content more quickly and reduce their FLCA. Mixed teaching combines the advantages of face-to-face teaching and online teaching. Through online courses and offline courses, students can flexibly adjust their learning time to meet their different needs, which can provide students with more diversified learning resources and reduce FLCA to a certain extent.

The research shows that teachers can achieve personalized education through the following seven points: First, the personalized design of teaching content; Second, the personalized arrangement of learning tasks. Third, personalization of feedback and evaluation; Fourth, role changing of the teachers. Fifth, personalized support for collaboration and social learning; Sixth, personalized management of emotional and motivational factors; and Seventh, data analysis and decision support (Liu & Deng, 2001). Teachers should provide students with real-time feedback to make students clear their current tasks so that they can better adjust their mentality. As the role of the teacher and the guide of students, they should understand the emotional dynamics of students and help students to match suitable partners to promote mutual learning. As a result, students will communicate more smoothly with peers. In the end, their FLCA will be reduced.

5 CONCLUSION

This review aims to explore the causes of FLCA. It is pointed out that learners' personality, psychology, ability, classroom environment, and teaching factors are important factors in the formation of FLA. It can help teachers deal with the students' language anxiety from the origin, optimizing teaching schemes and improving the teaching results. Future research should focus on exploring the unique causes of EFL classroom anxiety and effective coping strategies for learners at low learning levels. At the same time, it should strengthen the research on the causes of anxiety in the environment of online teaching and multimedia technology to adapt to the development trend of modern education.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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