



Exploring Foreign Language Anxiety

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Abstract. Students' foreign language (FL) acquisition is closely related to foreign language anxiety (FLA). With the foreign language classroom scale (FLCAS), this paper analyzes four aspects of FLA and finds some factors that cause and affect anxiety, such as the input's characteristics, process-associated issues, instructional factors, insufficient self-confidence, etc. Finally, some feasible solutions and methods are summarized and put forward to help students enjoy their further foreign language learning. On this basis, this paper improves the practical significance of reducing learners' FLA in foreign language teaching.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety · FLCAS · Related experiments · Influence · Pedagogy

1 Introduction

Anxiety is linked to the autonomic nervous system's arousal, which includes not only plentiful physiological responses (e.g., muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, sweating) but also abundant psychological reactions (e.g., subjective feelings of helplessness, nervousness, and worry) [1]. Researchers have been looking into the problem of anxiety related to learning FL due to the unique nature of language acquisition. A complex of self-awareness, emotions, and behaviors connected to language acquisition in a classroom is referred to as FLA [1, 2]. Whether listening, reading, writing, or speaking, FLA will arise in a certain situation, not only by personal knowledge experience, maturity level, and personality characteristics but also by family, school, social environment and other factors.

2 Foreign Language Anxiety Category

According to Horwitz et al., FLCAS encompasses three different aspects: 1) dread or anxiety about communicating with others, 2) anxiety over exams, and 3) fear of receiving

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poor feedback. Not all academics, nevertheless, have employed this three-dimensional structure, but have additional indicators of FLA [1]. The French Class Anxiety Scale (FCAS), the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale (SLWAS) are a few examples [3–6]. The FLCAS, however, is the scale that is most frequently used to measure FLA globally. Horwitz's results of this scale participated by 75 university students from 4 intact introductory Spanish classes uncovered that FLA is mostly classified as three aspects mentioned previously [2].

As stated by the writers, dread or anxiety about communicating with others is bashfulness mainly defined by a fear of social interaction, difficulties speaking in front of people, or anxiety about hearing or learning a spoken language [1, 2]. When learning a foreign language, if students cannot control the communication situation, they will form a strong anxiety response.

Anxiety over exams is arguably equivalent to the fear of failure [1, 2]. It is inevitable for students to take part in a test when they are engaging in FL learning. It is common for them to make mistakes. However, students who are easily influenced will cause test anxiety, they will worry, fear and escape the examination.

The definition of fear of receiving poor feedback is the concern about assessments from other people, the evasion of assessment-related events, as well as the anticipation that instructors or peers would hold him or her in low regard. The generation of this fear is detrimental to FL learning. Adults usually think of themselves as smart and sociable, but when they communicate in a new foreign language that is different from their mother tongue, they face many challenges, such as ethnic cultural differences, thinking differences, etc. These factors can lead to distress, silence, fear, and even resistance to communicating with others [1, 2].

Anxiety can have a profound effect on foreign language learning, if students can control their emotions well and calmly analyze various situations, they can reduce or overcome their anxiety. Often students will not be aware of negative self-awareness, because this fear of negative evaluation has become a habitual thing. A negative evaluation can produce some small physiological changes in someone, such as facial muscle tension, nausea and so on. In such a situation, do not escape, but learn to deal with it. Students can first write their anxiety problems on paper, and then for these un-reasonable components of the debate, point out the unnecessary ones, and write down their attitude in the future, through such an exercise, students can to some extent alleviate anxiety when learning foreign languages, and enhance the confidence and interest in learning foreign languages.

3 Related Experiments on Anxiety and Language Learning

3.1 Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

When listeners are confronted with difficult or unfamiliar foreign listening materials, they may feel helpless, anxious, or frustrated. This condition is known as foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA). Listening is a competence requirement that relatively provokes more anxiety in FL learning [2]. This competence is particularly essential in the course

of communications as an effective conversation cannot proceed if there is a lack of understanding between interlocutors.

Considering the importance of listening, various experiments with mainly FLCAS and FLLAS have been conducted on this specific skill to uncover the relationship between FLLA and FL learning. For example, through a study participated by 140 students learning Spanish as FL, Vogely demonstrated that FLLA was mainly about the characteristics of the input (51% rated), including the speaker's speed and difficulty level [7]. In addition to being supported by Kim, this result could be seen in Hidayati et al.'s survey in an Indonesian tertiary class [6, 8]. Followed by (1) process-associated issues of listening comprehension, including wrong listening techniques and insufficient processing time (30%), (2) instructional factors, such as lack of listening comprehension practice and uncomfortable environment (13%), (3) students' and teachers' personalities (13%) [7].

In addition, Kim investigated 253 Korean college English foreign language (EFL) learners with quantitative and qualitative methods [6]. According to Kim's correlation analysis, FLLA was considerably related to general FLA and listening proficiency. The latter was negatively correlated with FLLA and impeded by students' lack of self-confidence [6]. Similarly, Elkhafaifi's study with 233 postsecondary Arabic learners showed a negative link between FLLA and listening performance and that FLLA was distinct from but connected to FLA [9]. This negative correlation has also been supported by the studies conducted by Zhang, Golchi, Kimura, Chang, and Wang [10, 11]. Additionally, Zhang reported that poor listening performance at a particular time did not necessarily exacerbate FLLA as it was a situation-specific trait that developed over time [10].

Moreover, there were findings about relationships between FLLA and other factors. To illustrate, the results obtained by Chang, Gonen, and Golchi showed listening and learning strategies (social and metacognitive strategies) were helpful [11].

Elkhafaifi, Chang, Wang, and Kimura revealed that learners' listening anxieties vary according to their listening competence levels [9, 11]. Concerning the effect of gender, Golchi discovered that women had greater anxiety than men whereas previous results reported by Campbell, Elkhafaifi, and Ko showed no gender difference in listening anxiety [11]. Further research into the connection between gender and FLLA may be necessary.

3.2 Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Readers' disability to understand a text can cause annoyance and worry known as foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA). FL reading is commonly regarded as being less anxiety-provoking. This possibly is because it can be improved in a relatively shorter time by practicing and is a comparatively personal and individual act as no others are awaiting immediate responses like speaking, allowing for seemingly unlimited reflections and reconsiderations [4]. However, it still exists as a threat for some foreign language learners.

Initially, Saito et al. argued that FLRA was related to, but still separate from, FLA [4]. This is because, in the survey with 383 students in French, Japanese, and Russian courses (using FLRAS and FLCAS), they found that reading Japanese was more anxious than reading French and Russian [4]. That is, FLRA levels varied according to specific

target language whereas general FLA appeared to be independent of language. It was verified by Wu's survey of 91 undergraduates learning English as FL and also stated by Zhao et al. [12, 13].

On top of this, Saito et al. pointed out that unfamiliarity with the writing system and materials of other cultures considerably affected students' FLRA levels [4]. This was supported by recent researchers including Zhao et al., Tsai et al., Alsaleh, and Rahmat et al. [13]. The findings of these researchers revealed other factors affecting FLRA, such as unfamiliarity with topics, vocabulary, and sentence structures as well as fear of making mistakes [13]. Additionally, a series of surveys demonstrated that FLRA is negatively associated with reading performance. Sellers revealed that Spanish students who were extremely anxious remembered less of the passage's details and were interfered greater with by thoughts irrelevant to reading material [14]. Therefore, high FLRA levels can negatively impact students' reading achievement.

Other revelations are as follows. Ghonsooly revealed that students with higher self-efficacy experience less FLRA and have better reading performance (vice versa) by surveying 150 English literature majors at 3 Iran universities [15]. Huang concluded from the research results that reading performance was negatively influenced by reading anxiety, but FLRA can to some extent promote reading performance of those scoring below 50 on FLRAS [16]. Data analysis about Chinese as FL in America from Zhao et al. indicated that FLRA was associated with course level (adversely affecting low-intermediate students' performance) and experience with China [13].

3.3 Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

Students who strive to achieve a high writing standard frequently experience writing anxiety. These students' high anticipations for their writing throughout the courses can cause this anxiety to worsen, which lowers their incentive and willingness to enroll in the class [17]. Students' performance on writing assignments and in careers that demand writing is similarly impacted by writing anxiety [5]. Thus, teachers pay particular attention to the issue of writing anxiety.

Different strategies exist for students to convey their writing anxieties. Writing anxiety, according to Riffe and Stacks, is made up of "situational attitudes relevant to certain activities, as well as dispositional attitudes enduring over time and context" [18]. Students may express their writing concerns through nervous tension, obsession, or escape. Students that struggle with writing anxiety are classified by Barwick as non-starters, non-completers, and non-exhibitors. Nonstarters avoid the anxiety that results from failing or refusing, non-completers restrain their aggressive tendencies to avoid being upset and disappointed, and non-exhibitors intellectualize or become fixated on dissecting and reconstructing essays to soothe their loss and sorrow [19]. According to Barwick's research, students' nervousness can be seen in their refusal to complete and correct their schoolwork.

3.4 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Research on students' anxiety about speaking another language is surprisingly scant. When concerned FL students asked for assistance, listening was the most commonly

mentioned issue, according to Horwitz's study skills center counselors [20]. According to the same study, students with high anxiety levels in class expressed a fear of speaking in English. This incident is also mentioned by Koch [21].

Speaking language anxiety, according to Xiong, is caused by student personalities, subject matter, and assessment techniques [22]. According to research by Cheng, Horwitz, and Schlallert, speaking in a second language might cause some language learners to feel particularly uncomfortable [23]. Listening exercises can also cause varying degrees of anxiety in second language learners.

Suleimenova, Z. highlighted that it is crucial for teachers to support their students in overcoming the effects of anxiety as well as the fact that anxiety can be a significant factor in why students struggle to speak English [24]. Therefore, the question of how to get over speaking fear becomes one that needs to be resolved. Kushner discovered some straightforward yet very efficient techniques for overcoming presenting anxiety, including excellent delivery techniques, clever metaphor use, and an examination of the audience's listening motivations [25].

4 Pedagogical Implication

According to previous content, there are various effective methods to alleviate types of anxiety.

To ease students' FLLA, according to Vogely, instructors are better to make input comprehensible; properly use students' background information, visual materials (like posters and models), clear and concise structured exercises; introduce Listening Comprehension (LC) tactics to students; show knowledge and pay attention to students' concerns about learning FL and LC, and understand the LC process's nature [4]. In addition, because a positive correlation between FLLA and general FLA was verified by a series of researchers, methods used for general FLA may be suitable for FLLA. That is, educators can help students learn to deal with situations that can trigger anxiety and lessen the tension in the learning environment [2]. To promote students' confidence in class, educators can create a relatively relaxed atmosphere in class, telling them making mistakes is a step towards progress and encouraging them; for listening proficiency in tests, educators can teach students listening and learning strategies and help them appropriately use these strategies to alleviate anxiety, especially in those test that the listening part only plays once, like IELTS and TOEFL [11]. As mentioned before, because several researches showed that FLLA adversely affects listening performance and revealed that learners' listening anxieties vary according to their listening competence levels, it can be found that the essence of FLLA alleviation is to improve the listening competence, which cannot reach in a short time and requires a long-term endeavor with correct guidance.

Regarding FLRA, although it seems that students may feel less anxious about it, teachers still need to pay attention to its existence as it is indeed troubling some students. As mentioned before, FLRA levels changed depending on the respective language, but there are suggestions likely suitable for all FL reading instruction. Teachers can offer assistance to their students in these ways: acknowledge the target language's unique features and culture; carefully choose materials to exercise students; ensure teaching objectives are proper and achievable; design the course step by step and avoid making

students feel cognitively overloaded; teach useful strategies (like how to speculate a new word's meaning according to passage context); arrange a relatively greater class time to pre-reading exercises for topic familiarity [4, 13]. In addition, teachers are advised to encourage more rather than criticize, guide them to improve self-efficacy and promote self-confidence for anxiety alleviation.

Teachers are advised to make deliberate adjustments to their instructional strategies to lower writing anxiety. According to Cheng, writing instructors may need to place just as much emphasis on assisting their students in developing a favorable and realistic perception of their writing ability as on assisting them in honing their writing abilities. [26].

Teachers are urged by Lam & Lee to think carefully before making writing assignments available to the public. Students are understandably uneasy knowing that their mistakes have been shared because writing errors frequently remain uncorrected [27]. While Bandura illustrated that when forced to depend on their spontaneousness, students with a higher self-efficacy are prepared to educate themselves better," Cheng believed that teachers should teach pupils how to handle challenges or even failures without losing confidence [26]. Therefore, it would be crucial to consider the motivating elements in the learning environment for writing students to boost learning effectiveness while preserving students' self-assurance and self-esteem.

5 Conclusion

Through comparing and analyzing previous research on 4 FL competencies, some important points, as well as feasible teaching implications, are summarized and put forward to aid students with FLA alleviation and further language learning. Specifically, it is significant for educators to acknowledge and be sensitive to these Anxieties, especially those less anxiety-provoking Anxieties like Reading and Writing Anxiety. However, there are limitations, e.g., some researchers have ignored the influence of teachers' levels on students' anxiety. Therefore, for future research, apart from teachers' level, researchers can include teachers' level, the more detailed influence of gender, a greater age range, and students with extensive foreign travel experience to present FL learning students better.

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