A Study on the Effect of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety on Language Learning Effectiveness

Zhixuan Xiang

Tan Kah Kee College, Xiamen University, Zhangzhou, Fujian, China

1714010104@stu.hrbust.edu.cn

Abstract:

The problem of students' anxiety in foreign language learning has received widespread attention, but the effectiveness of the strategies against anxiety needs to be explored. Further research is needed to determine whether anxiety has a positive or negative effect on performance. This paper reviews domestic and international studies on anxiety and analyzes the consequences and internal and external causes. The paper analyzes that language anxiety mainly comes from personal and interpersonal anxieties, learners' beliefs about language learning, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. Finally, the paper proposes strategies for the student's learning and the teacher's teaching mode based on this. Research on anxiety can positively guide students to reduce anxiety in second language acquisition in terms of motivation, self-esteem, social skills, etc., and also help teachers to give correct feedback to students and change the classroom organization and test format to create a low-anxiety foreign language learning classroom.

Keywords: Foreign language learning; learning anxiety; language learning effectiveness

1. Introduction

Currently, there is a growing concern about students' anxiety in second language acquisition, and foreign language learning anxiety is considered a common psychological phenomenon in foreign language learning. Second language acquisition is the conscious mastery of knowledge by learners, which involves learning motivation, learning results, and other aspects of the problem, from which anxiety can easily arise. Educational researchers have conducted a great deal of research on the motivation, learning strategies, and learning styles of learners' foreign language anxiety. Most researchers used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwits as an instrument. And most of the researchers have utilized factor analysis. The negative correlation between FLCA and academic performance found by many researchers in meta-analysis confirms that anxiety and low achievement can have negative parallel occurrences in language learning classrooms [1]. In this paper, based on research findings and literature, anxiety has been categorized into two main groups: internal and external factors. Exploring the causes and results of anxiety can provide a basis for finding strategies that can help learners reduce anxiety as well as provide insights for teachers' teaching.

2. Connotations and Consequences of Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz states that anxiety is a confusing state that can prevent people from engaging in a variety of activities and, in some cases, can jeopardize the stability of their lives [2]. The following are the causes of high-frequency anxiety summarized by researchers. After reviewing previous studies on anxiety, Young summarized six potential sources that lead to anxiety: personal and interpersonal anxieties, learners' beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests [3]. According to MacIntyre's research, the effects of FLA can be categorized into three main groups: academic, cognitive, and social effects [4]. Onwuegbuzie believes that academic effects include lower performance in second language learning and that overstudying may lead to increased effort and lower-than-expected grades [5]. As a result, learners may have a reduced self-perception of their proficiency level and perform poorly on subsequent tests. In terms of cognitive effects, MacIntyre mentions that one of the most detrimental effects that can be inflicted on a language learner is the idea of failing in the use of a second language. It runs through all stages of learning, from input to output. Information is not allowed to enter

the cognitive processing system during the input stage. In the processing stage, FLA may adversely affect the speed and accuracy of information processing [4]. Finally, in the output stage, learners may be influenced by information previously stored in long-term and short-term memory. On a social level, FLA may negatively affect the way learners communicate with others. In environments where the target language is the primary language, learners may experience a decrease in linguistic self-confidence, which may lead to higher levels of anxiety.

3. Causes

3.1 Internal Causes

3.1.1 Personal and interpersonal anxieties

The internal causes of foreign language learning anxiety stem from individual differences, reflected in learning motivation, students' self-esteem, and comparison with others. Differences in learners' motivation may lead to anxiety. Liu and Huang pointed out that foreign language anxiety significantly correlates negatively with English learning motivation. They learn the target language mainly for specific purposes, such as school requirements and finding a better job in the future. When using the language, they often become upset, nervous, or even panicked due to lack of practice [6]. For example, a more anxious respondent tended to be less intrinsically motivated and more motivated by the demands of the language. Instrumental motivation refers to learning to fulfill language requirements and functional needs. Integratively motivated learners are more concerned with the future implications of what they are learning. Instrumentally motivated learners want to learn English for future practical or other financial benefits, and anxiety arises when the results are unsatisfactory and goals are not achieved. Students' self-esteem contributes significantly to their foreign language speaking anxiety. Self-esteem also belongs to the individual difference factors of learners. According to Li's sample-based empirical analysis shows that self-esteem is a significant predictor and a significant source of anxiety. Thus, it can also be known that foreign language learning anxiety and self-esteem are negatively correlated. The lower the self-esteem, the higher the anxiety level. The higher the self-esteem, the lower the level of anxiety [7]. Anxiety also arises between the individual student and others. Palacios, in his investigation of the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and the classroom environment, found that when students compare themselves to others or their ideal self-image, this sense of competition is likely to cause anxiety [8]. Individuals with communicative fear appear more reluctant to intervene in conversations with others and pursue socialization than those without fear.

3.1.2 Learners beliefs about language learning

Learners' beliefs about language learning include self-perception, self-efficacy, and tolerance for ambiguity. If learners believe that phonetics is very important in foreign language learning and that learners of a foreign language should be as fluent in their spoken language as native speakers, however, if they do not reach the perceived level, they feel anxious. Ganschow found that students with high levels of anxiety perceived that their language course was difficult, while those with low levels of anxiety perceived that their language course was easy [9]. This is related to students' self-efficacy. Gkonou's study concluded that some students who also have low tolerance for complexity and ambiguity experience higher levels of anxiety when confronted with high levels of ambiguity [10].

3.2 External Causes

3.2.1 Instructor-learner interactions

Teacher-student status gaps, teachers' assessment styles, and teaching beliefs can affect students' foreign language anxiety. The results of the current study suggest that speakers' feelings of inferiority when talking to people of higher status may cause them stress or anxiety. There are generally affirmative and negative evaluation methods of teaching and learning. There is a huge difference between students' and teachers' foreign language proficiency. Zhang suggests that students feel anxious when they do not understand the task of learning in the English classroom and the teachers' instructions. This phenomenon is caused by students not understanding the content of the teacher's instruction and, simultaneously, being fearful of the teacher [11]. Students always worry that they will lose face if their language is wrong or not fluent, incurring the teacher's negativity and their classmates' ridicule, thus producing nervousness and anxiety.

3.2.2 Classroom procedures

For many language learners, the formal language classroom environment is a major source of stress and anxiety because it requires more correct and clearer use of the target language. The friendlier and more informal the language classroom environment, the less likely it is to trigger anxiety. Differences in the form of classroom organization can also come to bring anxiety. A common reason why people face anxiety during speaking events is because of stage fright. Stage fear is mainly caused in individuals based on the requirement to speak or perform in front of a classroom or an audience. Students feel anxious when they are asked to perform without preparation. This

fear is exacerbated because they feel they are not speaking skillfully enough and worry that their language deficiencies will be exposed in front of others [12].

3.2.3 Language testing

learners' anxiety about language tests probably stems from the content of the test and performance measures. Some language test items and test formats are particularly anxiety-provoking for students. Students also feel anxious when the test content differs from what they usually learn. This is caused by their low level of mastery of the test content. Aida's survey found that students experience anxiety when foreign language tests involve performance measures [13]. Anxiety about grades is also a major cause of language test anxiety.

4. Responses

4.1 Response to Internal Factors

To address internal factors, considerations are based on students' motivation, self-esteem, perceptions of learning, and social anxiety. Teachers need to minimize the recognition of control motivation among students. For example, they can remind students of the intrinsic reasons for learning and that future access to rewards or jobs should not be their primary motivation for learning but rather a by-product, as this form of motivation can make them more vulnerable to language anxiety [14]. Students reducing anxiety also need to develop confidence. Students with higher self-esteem tend to study harder, and better grades are accompanied by increasing self-confidence, reducing anxiety. Thus, it can be seen that developing confidence to reduce anxiety also needs to be based on one's efforts. Lack of language knowledge can lead to anxiety, so students should be exposed to more foreign language input and increase their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and other languages. Malik believes that no matter whether college students' foreign language anxiety is at a high, medium, or low level, they should try a variety of self-regulation strategies to alleviate their anxiety. Firstly, they can improve their English by watching English movies, memorizing famous books, and giving impromptu speeches, etc. Secondly, they can read psychology books to understand their psychological problems, master certain self-regulation strategies, and choose them according to their situation [15]. The last is that group activities can reduce social anxiety. Teachers allow every student to participate in the classroom, for example, by clarifying the division of responsibilities as students engage in small group discussions. Let introverted students act as recorders and let extroverted students present the discussion results [16]. In this way, a model of mutual support learning

is formed. In this way, foreign language learning anxiety can be reduced. The researchers also found that some of the students who were good at dealing with anxiety followed a social strategy, trying to improve themselves by talking to friends, colleagues, or peers. Others overcome these factors by talking to their siblings at home, listening to others speak English, speaking English in the mirror, etc [16].

4.2 Response to External Factors

To solve problems caused by external factors, teacher's feedback mode, classroom organization, and test assessment have better strategies. Teachers' improved perception and attitude towards teaching can reduce students' anxiety. Khouni suggested that teachers' correction and feedback are the main factors emphasized by the respondents in their answers. One of the major barriers to communication and speaking is the fear of negative evaluation. Learners hesitate to participate or speak because they fear being intimidated by the teacher's correction [17]. The way the teacher gives feedback and the timing is very important. Learners are afraid of being corrected for every mistake or in an impolite way. Teachers' affirmative assessment in the process of English language learning can largely reduce the learners' language anxiety level and help students express their language accurately and fluently. It is also important for the teacher to create the classroom environment and organize the teaching activities. Computerized media will make students feel comfortable and create a low-anxiety learning environment.Maican&Cocorada Based on survey responses, it has been argued that online learning methods make the language learning process more flexible and may lead to higher levels of participation and increased attendance [18]. Finally, regarding the examination and assessment, the type and difficulty of the questions should be moderate, and the evaluation methods should be diversified. The last important factor in reducing and eliminating students' anxiety in foreign language learning is examination.

5. Conclusion

The above studies indicate that the causes of students' foreign language anxiety are complex and have more emotional factors. This paper reviews national and international research on foreign language anxiety in terms of personal and interpersonal anxieties, learners' beliefs about language learning, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. The current study seems to show that the effect of anxiety on grades is not prominent and divergent, and anxiety needs to be further explored. More empirical studies should be conducted in the future to explore the anxiety factors and to

reduce foreign language learning anxiety for learners to confirm the validity of the findings.

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