

# ***Causes and Effects of Second Language Classroom Anxiety among College Students***

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**Abstract:** Anxiety as a negative influence on the effectiveness of foreign language learning has been confirmed by research. As one of the current mandatory courses for college students in China, foreign language has become an indispensable learning tool and relevant pathway in multiple disciplines. However, a growing body of research suggests that the original foreign language teaching model of most universities is not effective in alleviating their students' foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Based on this, The purpose of this paper is to examine the specific causes of anxiety in the foreign language classroom and its impact on student learning outcomes. In foreign language classroom anxiety. This study will go through the methods of literature review and case study to focus on understanding, exploring, and summarizing the factors that have been influencing second language classroom anxiety. It has been found that the main causes of anxiety in the foreign language classroom include students' foreign language anxiety, the way the teacher gives feedback, and the stress of the classroom environment. Anxiety not only affects students' performance in the classroom but also hinders their process of learning the language, leading to unsatisfactory learning outcomes. In order to effectively alleviate students' anxiety in the second foreign language classroom, future research should also continue to focus on students' anxiety experiences in different cultural contexts to promote further optimization of foreign language education.

**Keywords:** Foreign language teaching for university students, Second language learning, Classroom anxiety.

## **1. Introduction**

Anxiety, as a negatively correlated factor that can affect learning outcomes, has been confirmed by research. In *Analysis of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Problems and Mitigation Strategies for College Students* [1], it is emphasized that classroom anxiety is an important factor affecting the learning effectiveness of college students. However, as foreign language courses are a crucial part of the university curriculum, the traditional teaching methods in most schools fail to effectively reduce students' foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Consequently, finding timely interventions for managing classroom anxiety has become a significant challenge. Given this, based on the theory of positive psychology and the theoretical cornerstone of the POA output-oriented method proposed by Prof. Wen Qiufang. This study will go through the methods of literature review and case study to

understand, explore, and summarize the existing influencing factors of second language classroom anxiety, comprehensively analyze the combination of related research theories and practical conclusions, and draw specific conclusions from the study accordingly. For university second language learners, the focus is on the causes and effects of classroom anxiety, which provides relevant insights for better integrating positive education into foreign language teaching [2]. To increase the “blessed flow experience” of classroom emotions for domestic and foreign second language learners, to further guide the good output of negative emotions. To alleviate second language classroom anxiety, comprehensively analyze the relevant research theories and practical conclusions and draw specific conclusions accordingly.

## **2. Literature Review**

In 2020, Dewaele suggested in his study that the presence of emotions in foreign language learning is not necessarily denied and that emotions play a fundamental role in language learning [1]. Among them, anxiety, as the most extensive affective disorder in language learning, is also different in nature from generalized anxiety. Among them, foreign language classroom anxiety is one of the most studied emotions by scholars at home and abroad and has been receiving attention from researchers and foreign language educators for nearly four decades. Qiangfu Yu argued that various negative emotions felt by foreign language learners affect their optimal learning potential and weaken their learning ability [3]. This suggests that when students experience negative emotions while learning a second language, their learning efficiency is likely to decrease, leading to the development of further negative emotions. This can create a vicious cycle, where negative emotions and reduced language learning performance reinforce each other. The phenomenon of classroom anxiety can be extended to any second foreign language in conjunction with the original model of foreign language teaching in most schools mentioned in the introduction. This is one of the major reasons why most Chinese second language learners develop anxiety about foreign languages. Several studies have demonstrated that negative and positive emotions are inextricably linked to learning L2 [3]. There are differences in students' enjoyment of foreign language learning in different cultures [4]. When students learn something that meets their needs in the classroom, they may experience satisfaction and growth in self-confidence [5]. Therefore, teaching strategies should be tailored to students' individual differences throughout the learning process to increase their enjoyment of studying a second foreign language. By fostering a positive learning experience, this approach can lead to more effective language acquisition. Therefore, a combination of these and other relevant influences can better help to alleviate classroom anxiety in a second language and thus gradually overcome this emotion.

## **3. Personal Factor**

### **3.1. Emotional Factor**

Outside the field of foreign languages, there has been a relevant manifestation of the value aspect of the study of anxiety in educational psychology. Theories of the genesis of individual learner emotions are mentioned in [6]. Among them, the control-value theory states that academic emotions are broadly influenced by two dimensions: individual control appraisal and value appraisal. A related study in 2022 showed that the control value doctrine is flawed in evaluating individual plurality and negative value. A two-dimensional assessment alone is insufficient for an in-depth exploration of the underlying causes of academic mood. More comprehensive evaluation methods are needed to fully understand the factors contributing to students' emotional experiences in academic settings. Subsequent studies of this kind have found that anxiety in the foreign language classroom interferes with learners' information processing modules in the foreign language, thereby constraining the capacity of learning memory and negatively affecting individual foreign language performance. On

the other hand, pleasurable emotions can effectively stimulate foreign language learning motivation and prompt students to concentrate more on foreign language learning, thus enhancing individual foreign language performance. In the study of anxiety and pleasure factors in the foreign language classroom, it was also pointed out that learners' internal emotional factors more drive anxiety in the foreign language classroom. However, whether foreign language pleasure and other emotions are influenced by their surroundings needs further examination. In the research, it was found that: Different foreign language proficiency levels lead to greater differences in foreign language learning control and value evaluation, and that more value-driven efforts are needed to create a greater sense of identification and engagement with the foreign language among learners. At the time, learners differ in the importance they place on the foreign language: external and internal evaluations also become a source of classroom anxiety, including daily classroom quizzes and exams that bring competitive anxiety. Different traits in learners also affect their anxiety level to a certain extent: for example, a person's resilience, bravery, perseverance, and inner strength or lack thereof will affect whether or not learners are willing to devote themselves to learning a foreign language despite difficulties [6]. Thus, a foreign language learner with good foreign language performance and a strong inner core is better able to utilize his or her pleasurable emotions and is less affected by classroom state-type [7] anxiety. On the contrary, state-based anxiety rises, further leading to the formation of personality-based anxiety. It can be seen that continuously improving one's foreign language ability can be one of the effective strategies and goals to alleviate foreign language classroom emotional anxiety, which is conducive to preventing the persistent impact on classroom mindset after the formation of character-based anxiety and the impediment to foreign language learning.

Individual emotional anxiety is associated with both classroom and environmental factors, and the presence of occasions leads to multiple situational influences. Studies have shown that anxiety can be categorized into three types: personality-based anxiety, classroom-based anxiety, and situational anxiety. From the perspective of individual factors, different learners have different receptivity to foreign languages and different learning sensitivities, which, to a certain extent, objectively affects the interest in language learning. Personal emotions are also related to their own foreign language experience. Students who have received a good foreign language education and atmosphere since childhood tend to have higher values of learning sensitivity. They are better able to process relatively difficult foreign language problems and have higher psychological acceptance. In terms of individual foreign language experience, for example, students who have had many speaking experiences and are good at active expression are better able to integrate into the classroom environment. Compared with students who lack foreign language experience, learners are more able to absorb classroom content actively rather than just passive input, which affects the process of self-reflection and digestion. At the same time, there are other complex external factors, such as the emergence of transient emotional fluctuations in the situation, affecting the current learning mindset and the degree of absorption. In this regard, individuals should make appropriate adjustments in their mindset and consider appropriate ways to alleviate the degree of stress and anxiety. In foreign language learning, learners should pay attention to self-emotional factors and make timely adjustments to emotional control. In addition, classroom teaching strategies should be more planned and systematic to reduce the negative effects of learners' affective factors in the classroom so as to gradually improve language acceptance and self-efficacy and enable them to participate deeply in all parts of the classroom so as to avoid secondary anxiety caused by confusing thinking.

### **3.2. Professional Difference Factor**

There are some differences in the level of mastery of foreign languages among foreign language learners of different majors. In the research interview, it can be concluded that the anxiety of non-English majors is more significant than their English majors [1]. As the second language in the

Chinese education system, English is more familiar than other languages. For example, students majoring in other languages need to learn a different system of language, and the anxiety and uncertainty brought about by a brand-new learning experience will increase the learners' own anxiety level. In order to cope well with the problems caused by professional differences, scholars propose the following strategies: Setting reasonable learning goals and own expectations. Continuously improve the individual's ability to adapt to the foreign language classroom and actively cultivate positive emotions. Emphasize communication sessions with teachers to get good feedback on specific anxiety-producing issues.

Learners' uneasiness and uncertainty in a new exposure to a new language can lead to anxiety. In the survey interviews, the anxiety caused by professional differences directly affects learners' classroom participation, resulting in a decrease in concentration ability. In the long run, learners become more resistant to the language, leading to a decline in academic performance. For example, fear of communicating and speaking in similar social situations in classroom group activities, maintaining a silent state in most situations and constantly suppressing the vicious cycle of expressing one's own emotions. At the same time, the long-term accumulation of bad emotional input in the classroom will also act on other occasions outside the classroom. It creates obstacles and blockages to individual self-development and good output of emotions. In this regard, in addition to the mindset adjustment strategies mentioned above, a change in the concept of learning is particularly important. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the individual-centered approach, make timely goal adjustments, actively accept the continuous incorporation of relevant language knowledge, and gradually reduce the sense of difference in the learning environment brought about by professional differences.

### 3.3. Classroom Factors

Teaching methods have a full impact on students' anxiety levels, so there is a need to explore how to reduce students' anxiety by adapting teaching strategies, and rational teaching methods play a crucial role in alleviating anxiety in the foreign language classroom. Excessive critical feedback from teachers in the classroom can increase students' anxiety, while positive and helpful feedback helps students to overcome their fear of mistakes and encourages them to be bold in using the foreign language and even to enjoy it and feel the pleasure of language learning [8]. It was found that teacher feedback in the form of easy corrections of errors and encouragement of students' progress in the classroom significantly reduced students' levels of classroom anxiety. Gannoun and Deris stated that collaborative learning is an effective instructional strategy to reduce anxiety. Some students' classroom anxiety is provoked by specific tasks, such as oral classroom presentations [9]. Besides, a collaborative learning approach encourages student interaction through group discussions and cooperative tasks, enabling students to practice language in a supportive environment and avoid facing stress alone. Studies have shown that collaborative learning relieves students' tension in expressing themselves in class and helps them be more comfortable using a foreign language. Their test scores are significantly better than those of the individual study group [10,11]. This student-centered teaching method is gradually being widely used in foreign language classrooms. In addition, effective strategy teaching in language teaching likewise helps alleviate students' anxiety. Research data reveal the negative effects of language anxiety on students and that positive thinking exercises can help students regulate their emotions and reduce anxiety due to foreign language learning [11]. Through methods such as meditation and breath control, students are able to intervene with their anxiety in stressful learning environments to improve their learning experience. As a mental conditioning strategy, positive thinking exercises are particularly suitable for classes requiring frequent verbal output, such as speaking classes and presentation exercises. Nowadays, with the rapid development of technology, many studies have demonstrated and emphasized the importance of gamified and online learning in reducing students' anxiety. Its role in foreign language teaching is

emerging. Virtual learning platforms enhance students' interest in learning by allowing them to study the language at their own pace. These platforms also help reduce performance anxiety typically associated with traditional classrooms, as students can practice without the external pressures of the classroom environment. As a result, students' self-confidence improves, and their anxiety related to foreign language learning is alleviated [12].

Other studies have shown that students' secondary anxiety is often closely related to their social anxiety [13]. Students with social anxiety may find it difficult to face classroom communication or face-to-face communication and then turn their heads to communicate through and rely on some social software, such as WeChat and other apps, which leads to an inability to concentrate on learning and interferes with normal learning efficiency. Social anxiety can cause students to become passive in the classroom, and they have difficulty directly expressing their thoughts and opinions and actively participating in class discussions and group activities [14]. Social anxiety can also bring about resistance to the language and increase students' psychological burden. They can make students feel uneasy, worrying that they will make a fool of themselves or make a mistake in front of everyone, leading to their resistance to learning a foreign language. Therefore, during the teaching process, teachers can provide certain interventions to alleviate students' anxiety, such as cooperative learning and effective strategies for teaching, as mentioned above.

### 3.4. Environmental Factors

In addition to the personal and classroom factors mentioned above, assessment methods also have an impact on the development of foreign language anxiety. First and foremost, among these is the test in the foreign language classroom. As mentioned earlier, some students' classroom anxiety is provoked by specific tasks, such as oral classroom presentations [4]. Oral classroom presentations can be considered as a form of assessment. Speaking can be difficult for students learning a foreign language. It is evident in many studies that students tend to be more fearful of performing speaking exercises. This fear often ends up escalating into a fear of external evaluation, which can lead to constant foreign language classroom anxiety [15]. In addition, exams were the smallest anxiety mean of the three main influences, and communication barriers ranked second in anxiety mean. One of the communication disorders as a way of assessing foreign language learning stems from students' fear and lack of confidence in taking tests and communicating themselves, which leads to foreign language classroom anxiety and the formation of a closed loop of undesirable emotions. Meanwhile, the classroom may cause certain situational types of anxiety [7]. For example, some learners are prone to anxiety tendencies in response to some specific scenarios. Of course, the classroom environment also needs to provide the appropriate frequency of pressure to develop positive anxiety, such as facilitative anxiety. In the teacher module, it is necessary to pay attention to the teaching method and the rhythm of learning activities and actively consider the feedback mechanism of student evaluation so as to reduce foreign language classroom anxiety in multiple ways.

## 4. Conclusion

In modern second language learning, classroom anxiety is becoming more and more common as the weight of foreign language courses in universities increases; the formation of classroom anxiety involves a variety of factors: students' personality traits, classroom climate, and teachers' attitudes and behaviors are all factors that can cause classroom anxiety. Negative emotions not only affect their classroom performance but also hinder the actual process and efficiency of second language learning. Therefore, changes in teaching patterns and teacher interventions become important; teachers' teaching methods are also a key factor, and an appropriate teaching style can significantly reduce students' anxiety levels. This paper summarizes the specific factors related to the formation of second



language classroom anxiety through a review of existing literature and case studies, which include the influence of students' personalities, the classroom environment, and teachers' teaching methods. However, the main body of research in this paper mainly focuses on Chinese students, and there is a lack of actual examination of factors such as learning background and cultural differences. At the same time, there is a certain lack of research on the breadth of the range of professional differences between different university programs. Secondly, it may not be possible to cover all the factors that may affect anxiety in the second language classroom in the research case study, leading to incomplete conclusions. By expanding the scope of the study, we can develop more effective instructional interventions to reduce anxiety, enhance language acquisition, and develop effective instructional interventions for learners from diverse backgrounds to promote language proficiency development for students around the world.

### Authors Contribution

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

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