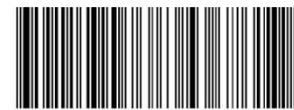




## RESEARCH ARTICLE



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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY AMONG CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

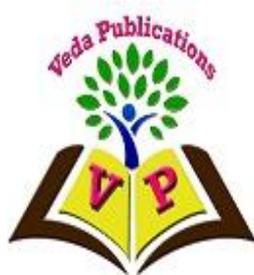
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### ABSTRACT



The study investigates the general state of foreign language learning anxiety and the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and foreign language learning achievement among international Chinese students in Universiti Utara Malaysia. The results showed that there exists a negative relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and the level of communication apprehension of Chinese international students. Some suggestions were put forward for pedagogical implications, such as creating relaxing and enjoyable learning atmosphere in English class, offering comprehensible input and guiding students to change views about language learning so as to help students to enhance English proficiency.

**Keywords:** *Anxiety, Chinese International Students, foreign Language Learning, Learning Achievement, Teachers.*



## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, research on second language acquisition has progressed, and foreign language teaching has also changed, which is from "how to teach" to "how to learn". The focus of research in the second or foreign language teaching and learning areas has shifted from teaching methods to learner characteristics and their potential impact on language acquisition processes. Learners are of a significant role in second language acquisition theory. Among these individual factors of learners, which influence the second language acquisition, affective factors are components in this field.

Among the affective variables, language learning anxiety (LLA) is regarded as an affective factor for language learning. Shao and Zhang (2008) state that a growing number of researches aim at determining the impact of anxiety in the classroom suggests that anxiety is common among students. In addition, recent literature suggests that high levels of foreign language anxiety can interfere with foreign language learning. Hu (2005) proposed that, anxiety is a factor which affects language learning in formal setting and informal setting, and it ranks higher than some other factors. Given its powerful influence on foreign language acquisition, efforts need to be made to explore language learning anxiety.

As Li (2012) assumed, for Chinese international students, language learning anxiety may be a common problem in English learning. This study aims to figure out the correlation between English learning anxiety and English learning achievement, and the differences between male learners and female learners in English learning anxiety and the sources of language learning anxiety in the English language learning among Chinese international students in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).

The subjects are 200 international students from China. All of them enrolled in the Intensive English Course and they are willing to take part in this activity because they hope to know something about their language learning anxiety and find ways to overcome it and improve their English through this investigation. This study is not meant to generalize all the Chinese international students in UUM. It will just

focus on the Chinese international students who enrolled in the Intensive English Course.

It is hoped that the study will reveal some ideas and form a full picture about language learning anxiety. As the saying goes, if you know both sides, you will win a hundred times in one hundred battles. So, we can reduce the negative aspects it brings to Chinese international students who enrolled in the Intensive English Course, only when we are completely familiar with all aspects about English learning anxiety. It is expected that results of the investigation throw new light on the language learning anxiety and have pedagogical implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Liu and Zhang (2011) illustrated three distinct forms of foreign language anxiety (FLA): (a) interpersonal-based FLA, (b) intrapersonal-based FLA, and (c) Skill-based FLA. Interpersonal-based FLA stems from learners' concern about real or perceived negative judgment of learners' performance in foreign language by the learning group or native speakers. In the classroom, this form of FLA is reflected as the learner's fear that performance will be subject to negative evaluation or even ridiculed by the teacher or by peer students.

Intrapersonal-based FLA stems from learners' unrealistic expectations about learning the foreign language or performance in using the foreign language. Students with intrapersonal-based anxiety become frustrated by their incapability to express in foreign language in sophisticated manner as they are accustomed in their mother tongue. They aim for such a high degree of perfection that they become overly critical of their performance, thereby setting the stage for failure.

Skill-based foreign language anxiety stems from a specific skill or set of skills that the student has not yet learned. For example, the /r/ phoneme in English is difficult for speakers of Korean to make correctly. Making the sound properly requires first being able to differentiate between the /r/ and the /l/ sounds and then learning to use a different set of muscles to produce the correct sound. First, not being able to hear the difference between the sounds and then being frustrated by being unable to



produce the sounds may lead to anxiety in the part of the student.

In this study, it conducted based on Horwitz's (1986) classification. Horwitz (1986) attributed three associated anxieties to the conceptualization of FLA: (1) communication apprehension; (2) test anxiety; (3) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension in foreign language learning is related to communication in target language in real situation or just predicted situation. Test anxiety, which means the fear of academic evaluation, is a tendency to be concerned about the consequences of failing to perform exams or other evaluations, whether the fear is real or not. Fear of negative evaluation is the apprehension of others' evaluation and appears as avoidance of the context of the evaluation and the expectations of others' negative evaluation.

#### METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted quantitative research method and the subjects of were 200 international students from China who studied in the intensive English Course. The instrument is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, 1986). So as to analyze FLA, Horwitz (1986) advanced a measurement, called FLCAS. It is a general model to measure the FLL anxiety of learners in the classroom. FLCAS (1986) is today's most widely used scale which is a standard measure to examine FLA in foreign language classroom. In most of quantitative researches of FLA, FLCAS has always been a common research tool for measuring individual responses to foreign language learning and is regarded as an effective and reliable measurement tool.

There are three aspects which are composed in FLCAS. Firstly, it focuses on communication apprehension (item 1 to item 17). Secondly, it aims to analyze the fear of negative evaluation (item 18 to item 30). Lastly, the investment of test anxiety is also included in this scale (item 31 to item 33).

The questionnaire contains 33 five-point Likert-scale items. There is no correct answer or wrong answer. Participants choose the one which reflects their real personal feeling. There is only an answer to every question. Neither more answers nor no answer is valid. To be specific, "A" stands for

"totally disagree," 1 point. "B" stands for "generally disagree," 2 points. "C" stands for "not clear," 3 points. "D" stands for "generally agree," 4 points. Moreover, the last one, "E" stands for "strongly agree," 5 points. It counts the average scale finally. Higher total points stand for a higher-level anxiety faced by students.

Correlation analysis is adopted as a statistical analysis method. It aims to study the relationships of two variables or among more variables with equal status. Based on Sekaran (2007), correlation analysis is applied to testify the significance and strength of correlation between variables. In this study, a correlation study was used as the measurement method whereby the students' actions and feedback of learning anxiety were examined as degrees of relationship with learning achievement during the English learning process.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is used in the correlation analysis, to show a linear correlation between independent variables (English learning anxiety) with the dependent variable (English Learning Achievement). A positive correlation ( $r > 0$ ) means that one variable increase and then another variable increases. Conversely, a negative correlation ( $r < 0$ ) indicates that one variable increase and then the other variable decreases. The values of this correlation range between -1 and +1. It describes that the linear relationship is positive if two variables value of  $r$  close to +1. If the two variables value of  $r$  close to -1, the linear relationship is negative. However, if it close to 0, no linear relationship exists, or correlation between two variables is weak (Creswell, 2009).

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The respondents of the study comprised 200 Chinese students taking intensive English course. To get information about the respondents, demographic questions on their gender, ELPT overall band of the Intensive English Course entrance examination, age, major, years of English learning were asked.



Table 4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Freq uency	Percentage
Gender	Male	104	52%
	Female	96	48%
Age	17	14	7%
	18	90	45%
	19	73	36.5%
	20	11	5.5%
	24	3	1.5%
	30	3	1.5%
	31	3	1.5%
	33	3	1.5%
Major	Education Management	29	14.5%
	Tourism Management	38	19%
	Finance	42	21%
	Accounting	35	17.5%
	Human Resource Management	38	19%
	International Business	18	9%
Years of English learning	8	14	6.7%
	9	90	45%
	10	70	35%
	11	16	8.3%
	15	10	5%

RQ1: What is the relationship between FLA and English learning achievement among UUM Chinese international students?

FLCAS which includes three basic aspects, which is a particularly convenient and reliable

instrument for assessing FLA. The investigation was carried out on three aspects separately so as to determine the relationship between English learning achievement and FLA (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Correlations of midterm scores and Foreign Language Learning Anxiety (N=200)

	Test anxiety	fear of negative evaluation	Communication apprehension
scores	-0.271*	-0.350**	-0.103



From the 2-tailed correlation analysis as illustrated in Table 4.1, we can find that the Pearson Correlation of test anxiety is -0.271. In other words, this shows that test anxiety is negatively related with learning achievement; the Pearson Correlation of the aspect of fear of negative evaluation is -0.350 which illustrates that there is a negative relation between fear of negative evaluation and learning achievement; At last we can see that the Pearson Correlation of communication apprehension is -0.103. This can be explained that there has a negative relationship between communication apprehension and learning achievement.

These figures show that the three aspects of FLCAS about language learning anxiety have a distinct correlation between learning achievements respectively. Therefore, we can make conclusion that

the test anxiety is negatively related with learning achievement. The fear of negative evaluation has a negative relation with learning achievement and the correlation between communication apprehension and learning achievement is not significant.

RQ 2: Among communication apprehension, tests anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, which part is significant in producing FLA among UUM Chinese International Students?

In this part factors causing language learning anxiety were examined. After we obtained scores from each aspect, results were analyzed as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for the Sources of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
test anxiety	3.061	0.669	1.54	4.31
fear of negative evaluation	3.007	0.727	1.94	4.47
communication apprehension	3.208	0.583	1.67	4.33

From the diagram above we know that the mean of test anxiety is 3.061, 3.007 is the mean of the fear of negative evaluation and the mean of communication apprehension is 3.208. According to the result of investigation, we can get a general view that communication apprehension makes a great contribution to the production of language learning anxiety and the test anxiety also plays a major part in producing language learning anxiety. Last but not least, the fear of negative evaluation cannot be ignored concerning the sources of language learning anxiety. The fear of negative evaluation is relatively not significant in comparison with other two factors.

According to the data collected in the present study, it provides some implications for English teaching and learning. We should treat the three aspects of FLCAS about anxiety differently in the

course of teaching and learning. First of all, the test anxiety is negatively related with learning achievement which shows the test anxiety will be harmful for learning and stimulate learners' learning performance. This discovery is opposite to some people's intuition that test will play a harmful role on learners' learning that it must be abolished. Since the test anxiety can facilitate learners' learning, we should hold the teaching notion of making tests as a vehicle of evaluating students' performance in classroom rather than abandon it. Secondly, the fear of negative evaluation negatively relates to learning achievement, which will debilitate learners' learning so that we should avoid this aspect in learning.

The following suggestions for pedagogical practice to English teachers are put forward in order



to help students achieve higher achievement in English learning.

(1) Create relaxing and enjoyable English learning environment

In order to decrease FLA in English class, it is significant to create a relatively lively learning atmosphere, which make students feel less anxious in the course of learning. The researcher discovered that students are ready to answer questions and use the language they acquired when they feel relaxed and comfortable in a learning atmosphere. Therefore, it is vital that teachers should create such a learning environment as much as possible.

In English classes, it is crucial that teachers let learners understand that making errors is completely acceptable, so as to encourage students to venture in using target language. Therefore, teacher's frequent praise plays a major role in this context. When students are shy to speak, teachers should encourage learners to speak. If they make errors in English learning, teachers should not blame them, but guide them patiently. It is crucial for teachers to respond with interest. Learners will try again. Otherwise, students will become quiet and atmosphere is dull.

(2) Offer comprehensible input

According to Krashen's input hypothesis, teachers should avoid incomprehensible input at the same time. The reason is that the learners will always have difficulty in deriving meaning from the portion they do not know rather than understand the sentence entirely.

(3) Guide students to change views about language learning

There exist improper beliefs about FLA, for instance some learners hold the view that making errors in English class is shameful. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to help students to change some wrong point of views about language learning. Discussing the nature of English learning will reduce students' points of anxiety-inducing sources. For example, teachers can make students aware that language learning is a long journey, so making mistakes cannot be avoided in the course of language learning. And students should also learn not to be afraid of losing face and meeting setbacks which are

important in getting higher achievement in language learning.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigated FLA and the relationship between FLA and English learning achievement among UUM international Chinese students. On the basis of above investigation, some suggestions are put forward for pedagogical implications, such as creating relaxing and enjoyable learning atmosphere in English class, offering comprehensible input and guiding students to change views about language learning so as to help students to enhance English proficiency.

Since affective factors as anxiety go through English learning from beginning to end, every English teacher should learn to make full use of the relevant theories about affective factors and try to eliminate the affective barriers in language learning so as to get the more efficient teaching and learning effect. Horwitz (1986) suggests two approaches to alleviate foreign language anxiety. Firstly, educators ought to help students solve anxiety-producing situation. Secondly, it is significant for lectures to make students' learning context suits to their language level and make them less stressful.

Students should view anxiety correctly. They should understand that almost all the students experience English learning anxiety, and this is natural and common, besides, it may block their English achievement, students can take lots of measures to control and reduce their anxiety. They are allowed to make mistakes. It is also necessary for students to view mistakes positively. Most of the students are worried when they make mistakes, in fact, they should learn something from their mistakes and figure out how to avoid it next time with the help of teachers.

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