

The Relationship Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-Efficacy: A Study in Chinese College Students' English Learning

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Abstract: In the process of foreign language learning, learners will encounter various psychological phenomena, among which anxiety and self-efficacy are two psychological variables that have received much attention. Foreign language anxiety refers to the emotional states of tension, unease, and worry that learners experience during the process of learning a foreign language. This emotional state can have a negative impact on learners' learning outcomes. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's judgment of their ability to perform a specific task, directly affecting their behavioral motivation and level of effort. This study will analyze the impact of foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy on the effectiveness of foreign language learning among Chinese college students and emphasize the use of multidimensional analysis methods, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to analyze and summarize previous literature. Foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy show a negative correlation and together influence the effectiveness of college students' foreign language learning. In China, the anxiety subjects of college students are ranked from high to low as follows: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. This article will also summarize and analyze ways to improve foreign language anxiety and enhance self-efficacy from the perspectives of student self-regulation and teacher assistance.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, Self-efficacy, Chinese college students.

1. Introduction

The concept of self-efficacy was first introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977. According to Bandura, individuals hold expectations of their effectiveness in completing a task. Unlike outcome expectations, efficacy expectations refer to an individual's estimation of their ability to accomplish a specific task, reflecting their confidence level in a particular task environment. The level of self-efficacy influences an individual's motivation to complete tasks and their ability to recover quickly after encountering setbacks [1].

Numerous researchers have found that self-efficacy frequently significantly impacts learning outcomes during the learning process [2]. Similarly, self-efficacy affects students' learning confidence and willingness in foreign language learning. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to believe they possess the ability and skills to master a foreign language, whereas those with

low self-efficacy lack such confidence, leading to anxiety in foreign language learning. This anxiety, in turn, further weakens their self-efficacy, creating a vicious cycle.

Current domestic and international research often utilizes relevant scales to study various age groups, such as middle school students, college students, and students from different countries. Studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety [3]. This study primarily adopts a literature analysis method, collecting and organizing relevant literature data to comprehensively and systematically summarize the relationship between foreign language learning, foreign language anxiety, and self-efficacy, mainly focusing on the current status of Chinese college students' foreign language learning. The proposed recommendations aim to help students adjust their learning strategies, enhance their learning motivation, and assist teachers in developing more effective teaching strategies.

The research focuses on the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety?
2. How do foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy jointly influence college students' English learning outcomes?
3. How can self-efficacy be improved and foreign language anxiety reduced?

This study primarily explores the intrinsic connection between foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy in foreign language learning, as well as their combined impact on foreign language learning outcomes. It provides relevant learning and teaching suggestions for foreign language learners to reduce anxiety, enhance self-efficacy during the learning process, and for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies and guide students' self-learning.

2. The Influence of Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning

2.1. Definition of Self-Efficacy and Its Impact on Behavior

Self-efficacy, a psychological concept introduced by Albert Bandura, refers to "an individual's subjective judgment or belief in their ability to successfully execute a particular behavior and achieve the desired outcome" [1]. When facing tasks or challenges, people often have a certain level of cognition and estimation of their professional competence, such as knowledge reserves and professional skill levels. This assessment significantly influences their psychological state during task completion and relates to their strategy selection, energy investment, and potential stimulation. In foreign language learning, learners have varying levels of self-efficacy across different learning dimensions, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation.

Specifically, learners with high self-efficacy may set more ambitious learning goals and demonstrate more substantial expectations and motivation towards achieving them. When facing challenges, they can maintain calm analysis, flexibly adjust strategies, and exhibit high resilience and adaptability. Driven by a positive attitude, learners can consistently invest effort and persevere even when encountering difficulties, ultimately achieving their goals. Furthermore, high self-efficacy promotes potential stimulation, enabling learners to perform at or even exceed their expected levels in a positive mindset. In summary, learners with high self-efficacy can further enhance their self-efficacy through self-motivation, creating a positive feedback loop.

In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy often lack confidence when facing tasks, easily doubting their abilities, and may develop avoidance or giving-up tendencies. They may shy away from challenges due to fear of failure or quickly lose motivation when encountering difficulties, exhibiting low persistence and resilience. This negative psychological state not only limits their behavioral performance but may also exacerbate anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions, further weakening their self-efficacy, and creating a vicious cycle.

2.2. An In-Depth Exploration into the Influences of Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Anxiety on the Outcomes of Second Language Learning

In second language learning, the relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety has become a focus of attention for researchers. Numerous empirical studies have shown a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety [3]. In other words, the higher the self-efficacy of an individual, the lower their foreign language anxiety level tends to be. On the contrary, low self-efficacy is accompanied by higher foreign language anxiety.

Students with low self-efficacy tend to experience anxiety, such as nervousness and uneasiness, during the process of second language learning due to doubts about their language abilities. This anxiety not only disturbs their attention and reduces their learning efficiency but also may cause them to resist learning materials, affecting their overall learning motivation and effectiveness. In addition, anxiety may also trigger a series of physical and psychological reactions, such as accelerated heart rate, shortness of breath, and rigid thinking, further weakening their learning ability and self-efficacy.

In contrast, students with high self-efficacy show lower anxiety levels in foreign language learning. They can face the challenges and difficulties in second language learning with a more positive and confident attitude. This type of student believes in their learning ability, is willing to try new learning strategies and methods, and can quickly adjust their mentality even when faced with setbacks, maintaining their enthusiasm and motivation for learning. A positive mindset helps reduce anxiety and improves learning efficiency and quality, further enhancing self-efficacy and motivation to learn. This virtuous cycle has played a positive role in promoting their language learning process.

Next, the author will analyze how foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy affect the learning outcomes of college students from the perspectives of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Guo Yan and Xu Jinfen's research analysis, the ranking of Chinese college students' foreign language anxiety levels from high to low in multiple dimensions is as follows: speaking, listening, writing, and reading [4].

2.2.1. The Relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Oral English among Chinese College Students

Speaking is the factor that most easily causes anxiety [5]. From the education system and teaching mode perspective, China's education system focuses on reading and writing. For a long time in the past, whether in compulsory education or university studies, teachers mainly focused on cultivating reading and writing skills while paying insufficient attention to oral training. This imbalance leads to students' lack of self-efficacy and oral anxiety in oral expression.

From the perspective of language environment, Chinese students generally lack a natural or near-real language environment, which makes their oral English communication more dependent on grammatical rules and standardized oral expression. This learning method is different from the Western second language acquisition method, which further increases students' oral anxiety.

In addition, some special factors can also affect students' self-efficacy and oral anxiety. For example, suppose the feedback from teachers and peers during the learning process is tense. In that case, if the teacher's evaluation is too harsh or there is a contrast with the communication of classmates, it may deepen students' anxiety and reduce their sense of self-efficacy. The personality traits, learning motivation, learning drive, and choice of learning strategies of students will all have an impact. For example, introverted students may lack self-efficacy, manifested as a fear of speaking in front of a crowd. Students who lack a clear learning motivation may feel more confused and anxious in oral English learning.

2.2.2. The Relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Listening Comprehension among Chinese College Students

In terms of listening, although the level of anxiety is slightly lower than that of speaking, some scholars have found that college students still experience moderate to high levels of listening anxiety [6].

This is mainly because listening comprehension requires a fast reaction speed and a large amount of language input. Chinese college students often lack sufficient listening training in English learning, which leads to poor performance in listening tests, reduces self-efficacy, and generates anxiety. The speed of speech, accent, vocabulary difficulty, and cultural background knowledge in listening materials can all become obstacles to listening comprehension, leading to anxiety in the listening process for students.

In terms of information processing, listening requires students to capture and process a large amount of information in a short period, which places high demands on students' attention and information-processing abilities and is also a factor that is more likely to trigger anxiety and reduce self-efficacy. In addition, students may lack confidence in their listening ability and worry about not understanding the listening material. This self-doubt is also a manifestation of low self-efficacy and can also increase anxiety.

2.2.3. The Relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Writing among Chinese College Students

Research by scholars shows that college students' English writing anxiety is at a moderate level, lower than their oral and listening abilities [4].

Many college students lack confidence in writing in a foreign language, fearing that their language skills are insufficient to express their thoughts accurately. This kind of insecurity often stems from a lack of self-efficacy and a fear of negative evaluations from others. Students are afraid of making spelling, grammar, and other errors in their writing and are worried that these errors will expose their shortcomings and affect others' evaluations. During the writing process, students may feel wholly exposed to readers and have a strong fear of negative evaluation. They are worried that their works will be criticized or even ridiculed, and this expectation makes them even more nervous and uneasy when writing. In addition, students may compare themselves with others, especially those with higher proficiency in foreign languages, which can lead to feelings of inferiority and anxiety. This issue is also prevalent in many aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Regarding writing skills, many college students lack the skills and strategies to express their ideas clearly and accurately. This lack of skills increases the difficulty of their writing, which in turn reduces their self-efficacy and triggers anxiety. Although students are aware of their deficiencies in writing strategies, they often lack corresponding training and guidance, which makes them feel at a loss when faced with writing tasks.

Other factors that are not fixed, such as the topic of writing, can also affect students' level of writing anxiety. Students' familiarity with the topic directly affects their writing quality and psychological state. If students lack sufficient understanding or background knowledge of a topic, they may find it difficult to start and thus experience anxiety. In cross-cultural communication, cultural differences may also be one of the reasons that lead to students' writing anxiety. Students may need to adapt to different writing styles and expression methods, which increases their writing difficulty and anxiety and reduces their self-efficacy.

2.2.4. The Relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Reading among Chinese College Students

In the research of scholars Guo Yan and Xu Jinfen, the anxiety level of reading is significantly lower than the other three. Due to the significant proportion of reading comprehension and cloze questions in important exams such as the college entrance examination, students will pay special attention to training in these areas during their preparation process, further improving their reading ability. From primary school to high school and even university, students are required to read a large number of textbooks, exercise books and extracurricular reading materials. This long-term training makes students relatively strong in reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery. This will improve students' self-efficacy to a certain extent and reduce foreign language anxiety.

Despite being good at reading, students may worry about their accuracy and efficiency when understanding complex texts or reading quickly. Especially in the academic field, the professionalism and depth of articles may increase the difficulty of understanding, leading to anxiety. If students encounter some foreign language reading materials involving foreign culture, history, and social background, it may be unfamiliar to non-native speakers. Understanding and adapting to these cultural differences takes time and effort, and the uncertainty in the process can trigger anxiety.

Moreover, even if students excel in reading compared to listening, speaking, and writing, they still feel stressed when faced with important exams or tests. Worries about performing poorly on exams and not achieving good grades can trigger anxiety.

In terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, Chinese college students are more likely to experience foreign language anxiety in speaking, listening, and writing. This is mainly due to the high language input and output abilities required in these areas, in which Chinese students often lack sufficient practice and training. Therefore, when facing oral, listening and writing tasks, they lack self-efficacy and are prone to feeling uneasy and nervous. This anxiety not only affects their learning performance but also may further hinder the development of their language skills. Self-efficacy, as an important component of individual psychological traits, profoundly impacts the effectiveness of second language learning. Therefore, in educational practice, teachers should focus on cultivating students' self-efficacy, helping them build confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve learning effectiveness by providing positive feedback, setting reasonable learning goals, and guiding students to adopt effective learning strategies.

3. Suggestions for Students and Teachers

3.1. Suggestions for Reducing Foreign Language Anxiety Among Students

When setting learning goals, it is essential to first break down the big goal into a series of small goals and gradually achieve them. Avoid setting overly ambitious goals simultaneously to avoid difficulties in the completion process. This can effectively reduce stress and anxiety, ensuring the feasibility of the goal.

During the learning process, if students feel anxious, they should learn to accept and formalize it. Anxiety is a normal emotional response during the learning process, which reflects the expectation and pursuit of the desired outcome. However, excessive worry and anxiety may further exacerbate anxiety. During the learning process, an effective method to control anxiety is through self-regulation, which can turn anxiety into a driving force for learning. When feeling anxious, it is crucial to promptly self-suggest that it is a normal reaction and quickly engage in the task before the anxiety intensifies. Combining the strategy of "achieving goals to enhance self-fulfillment" can effectively alleviate anxiety [7].

If students find that self-regulation still cannot effectively alleviate anxiety, they can choose to seek help and support from those around them. By sharing their learning experience with teachers, classmates, or family members, they can seek their encouragement and support and gain positive emotional value through the affirmation of others, thereby reducing anxiety.

Besides relying on friends and relatives daily, students can also meet new study partners or join study communities to share experiences and supervise each other with people who have similar experiences. This interaction not only helps to alleviate emotions but also enhances a sense of identity. Moreover, this approach can also improve students learning efficiency and avoid wasting time and deepening anxiety.

When facing different types of learning, adopt diversified learning methods and try different learning methods for different learning requirements and goals. For the weaker areas, students can focus on practicing and strengthening them, while for the advantageous parts, students can reduce the frequency of practice and plan students time reasonably. Specifically, multimedia resources and online platforms can enrich learning content and improve learning efficiency.

3.2. Ways for College Students to Improve Their Self-efficacy

After completing a task or successfully achieving a challenging goal, recording successful experiences is an excellent way to improve self-efficacy. Regular review, especially when feeling confused or uneasy after completing other tasks, can enhance self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Reviewing records helps to consolidate one's progress and achievements, enhancing self-efficacy. When students are unsure of their learning goals or methods, they can improve themselves by finding role models and learning from their experiences. draw strength and inspiration from role models to motivate themselves to continuously progress.

At the same time, adolescents should also give themselves positive feedback promptly after completing task challenges. Positive self-affirmation and self-recognition can enhance self-efficacy. In addition, adolescents should focus on their progress and strengths rather than being overly concerned about their shortcomings and mistakes to avoid falling into a cycle of persistent anxiety.

In short, foreign language anxiety can be reduced by setting reasonable learning goals, creating a relaxed learning environment, accepting and facing anxiety, actively seeking support, and adopting diverse learning methods. At the same time, adolescents can improve their self-efficacy by recording successful experiences, setting challenges and completing tasks, finding role models and learning from their experiences, and giving themselves positive feedback. The two are not completely separated from each other but are mutually combined and promoted. Positive guidance helps learners achieve better results and progress in foreign language learning.

3.3. Suggestions for Teachers to Reduce Students' Foreign Language Anxiety and Enhance Their Self-efficacy

Teachers should strive to create a warm, friendly, and non-threatening learning environment, ensuring students feel accepted and supported. This can be achieved through encouraging words, smiles, and positive body language. Through innovative methods such as group discussions, role-playing, and debates, students are given more opportunities to participate and interact, alleviating their fear of oral expression.

When designing teaching content, teachers should control the difficulty and amount of teaching according to the students' actual level, to avoid putting too much pressure on students. Gradually guide students to master foreign language knowledge from simple to complex, from easy to difficult, and let students constantly gain a sense of accomplishment during the learning process.

Teachers should pay attention to the individual differences of each student, understand their learning needs and difficulties, and provide personalized guidance and support. For students who have difficulty with oral expression, teachers can give more encouragement and patience to help them gradually overcome anxiety. At the same time, teachers should provide timely and specific positive feedback to students, affirm their efforts and progress, and let students feel their own growth and changes. Positive feedback can enhance students' self-confidence and self-efficacy, thereby reducing anxiety[8].

Helping students set specific and achievable learning goals can help them clarify their learning direction and direction of effort. By gradually achieving these goals, students can accumulate successful experiences and enhance their self-efficacy. Sharing their or others' success stories can help students see what others can do and believe they can do it too. These successful examples can inspire students to build confidence and enhance their self-efficacy [9].

Encouraging students to learn independently can cultivate their ability to think independently and solve problems. Through self-directed learning, students can better master foreign language knowledge and improve their oral expression ability, enhancing their self-efficacy. Help students learn to attribute success to their abilities and efforts rather than external factors. This can enhance students' self-efficacy and make them more confident in facing challenges and difficulties. Students should be guided to establish a positive mindset and view failure and setbacks. Let students learn from their failures and constantly improve themselves. This positive mindset helps to enhance students' self-efficacy[10].

4. Conclusion

Foreign language anxiety is negatively correlated with self-efficacy. Among Chinese college students, foreign language anxiety manifests in varying degrees across different dimensions. The order of anxiety levels from high to low is speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Compared to the first three, college students have relatively low reading anxiety. The main reason is that reading is an integral part of Chinese college students' exam preparation, and students have more reading practice. In the other three aspects, college students lack a natural communication environment, worry about making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, and are affected by cultural differences. Therefore, students often lack confidence, show lower self-efficacy, and have more obvious anxiety levels. Students can set reasonable learning goals, create a relaxed learning environment, accept and face anxiety, actively seek support, and adopt diverse learning methods. Teachers can help students increase their self-efficacy and reduce anxiety by actively giving positive feedback to students, creating a relaxed learning atmosphere, and setting reasonable course schedules. There have been many studies on the relationship between self-efficacy and learning outcomes, as well as the relationship between foreign language anxiety and learning outcomes, both at home and abroad. However, few studies analyze the joint effects of both on different dimensions of foreign language learning. This article mainly analyzes the anxiety level and self-efficacy level of Chinese college students in learning foreign languages from listening, speaking, reading, and writing perspectives, discusses and analyzes the reasons in detail, and finally provides suggestions. The deficiency is a lack of suggestions from various dimensions when analyzing how to enhance self-efficacy and reduce foreign language anxiety. In future research, researchers can continue to delve into multi-perspective methods.

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