Proceedings of ICEIPI 2025 Symposium: Reimagining Society: AI's Role in Cultural Transformation and Learning Environments
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

The Impact of Classroom Environment on Students' Foreign Language Anxiety

Di Xu

College of Foreign Language, Anqing Normal University, Anqing, China
020923024@stu.aqnu.edu.cn

Abstract: In recent years, students' foreign language anxiety has attracted wide attention from scholars. Foreign language anxiety, as an emotional reaction of students in the process of foreign language acquisition, greatly impacts the effect of foreign language acquisition. At this stage, to promote more learners to overcome this obstacle, scholars have designed many experiments to explore the impact of various factors on students' foreign language anxiety. Therefore, this article focuses on the classroom environment and summarizes its impact on students' foreign language anxiety based on the research on factors affecting students' foreign language anxiety. Moreover, it also points out the shortcomings of the emergent stage research and provides some suggestions for future research. Students may now focus on studying with a more positive attitude and enhance their language proficiency, establishing a strong basis for future communication, education, and employment in the context of globalization. They also have more self-confidence and excitement for learning.

Keywords: Students, Foreign language anxiety, Classroom environment

1. Introduction

Anxiety is a multidimensional concept that contains many aspects that psychologists have classified into trait anxiety, state anxiety, achievement anxiety, and facilitative-debilitative anxiety [1]. Anxiety does not occur in all situations, but is often directed to a specific situation. For example, some people may feel anxious during public speaking, exams, or social occasions. During the foreign language learning process, many learners will also experience a special anxiety, which is foreign language learning anxiety (FLA). Similarly, this is also a very complex concept. MacIntyre and Gardner define it as a sensation of tension and apprehension commonly experienced in second language situations, such as speaking, listening, and learning [2]. For example, when communicating with others in foreign languages, someone feels nervous and finds it difficult to organize their thoughts. As for foreign language learners, anxiety is an unavoidable situation in the learning process, which is most obviously demonstrated in the classroom. According to Horwitz, anxiety in classroom learning is mainly manifested in communication, exams, and negative evaluation [3]. This is a very important theory; almost all empirical studies are based on this theory or scale. The impact of this anxiety on students is multifaceted. Some scholars believe that moderate anxiety may stimulate students' motivation to learn, but excessive anxiety can have a negative impact on learning [4]. For example, excessive anxiety can lead to poor academic performance [5], reduced willingness to communicate [6], and inability to make rational decisions [7]. Therefore, understanding the factors that affect

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

students' foreign language anxiety is crucial so that effective strategies can be implemented to reduce their anxiety level.

This study focuses on Second Language Acquisition and aims to explore how classroom environments affect students' FLA levels in this teaching environment. The classroom is the main place for learners to connect with the target language and a key channel for acquiring language skills. The classroom environment greatly promotes the process of language acquisition by providing rich knowledge. However, FLA is a major factor affecting students' learning outcomes. How to effectively solve this problem will promote students' language ability. Therefore, this article will adopt the literature review research method to examine relevant theories comprehensively. Finally, corresponding conclusions will be drawn based on the research results, and strategies will be proposed for reference.

This paper integrates the online course fields that have emerged in recent years and further sorts out how the classroom environment affects students' FLA level. It helps to build a more complete theoretical framework. At the same time, it also helps teachers to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between foreign language anxiety and the classroom environment, provides strategies for adjusting teaching methods, and helps more foreign language learners achieve their goals.

2. The impact of classroom environment on students' foreign language anxiety

2.1. Teachers behavior

In recent research, many scholars argue that teacher behavior is a key factor affecting students' FLA level. The scholar Alrabai, F used the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale to select 596 English learners and 12 teachers from Saudi Arabia. By testing students' anxiety levels before and after teachers showed behaviors to relieve foreign language anxiety, they found that appropriate teacher behaviors can effectively slow down students' foreign language anxiety levels. [8]. Therefore, the specific teacher behavior will be listed below. In 2009, Scholars found that teachers' timely and indirect behaviors to encourage students can slow down their FLA levels, which is more effective than providing direct praise. It also encourages them to participate actively in the classroom [9]. Furthermore, experiments have proven that teachers demonstrating personal academic care, such as providing vocabulary help, can reduce students' FLA levels [10]. Over time, teachers' teaching methods have also been improving. A 2022 study showed that when the course is mainly for students, there is a significant impact on reducing student communication and exam anxiety, but no significant impact on fear of negative evaluations [11]. Student-oriented courses include using task-based teaching methods and negotiating the Syllabus with students [11,12]. For example, negotiating the syllabus slows their FLA levels by engaging students in curriculum design and aligning the course content with students' needs.

In contrast, strict and serious teachers may increase students' FLA [4]. When teachers use threatening discourse in the classroom, students will have negative views on teachers, which leads to an increase in their foreign language anxiety levels [13]. At the same time, some factors do not affect students' FAL level, such as the frequency of teachers' use of foreign languages and telling jokes [14]. The results of this study show that students' foreign language anxiety level may not be directly related to teacher behavior. Many scholars agree with this statement, but more research is needed.

Therefore, the author thinks these studies provide teachers with much behavioral guidance. For example, teachers should always pay attention to students' learning states and provide appropriate academic guidance and personal care. In addition, teachers should take students as the main body in the teaching process and give students better learning goals. Lastly, timely encouragement and positive reinforcement should be consistently implemented to enhance students' self-confidence and reduce anxiety.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

2.2. Students performance

Although many experiments have shown that teachers have a profound impact on learning to speak a foreign language, there are other scholars who argue that FLA is mainly predicted by learners' internal variables (such as relative status among peers, English proficiency, and attitudes toward English). The predictive effect of the teacher is relatively small [15]. Fujii proposed that collaborative learning and the development of self-confidence can effectively reduce students' FLA levels. This study's findings emphasize the relationship between collaboration and self-confidence and the importance of these two learning elements.[16]. Moreover, Djafri, F., and Wimbarti, S. found that students' negative perceptions of teachers can aggravate their level of FLA in 2018 [13]. This confirms the Dewaele, J. M., Saito, K., and Halimi, F. view that students' FLA level is related to themselves. However, students' FLA levels have no significant correlation with how long they use foreign languages in class [17]. These two studies show that students' foreign language anxiety levels are closely related to their intrinsic motivation. Therefore, students should learn to manage their emotions and not treat foreign language learning negatively. Additionally, they can actively communicate, cooperate with their classmates, and learn from each other.

2.3. Classroom atmosphere

The classroom environment includes teachers and students, and the atmosphere is also important. In this paper, the classroom atmosphere specifically refers to the emotional atmosphere formed by the surrounding environment during class or the interaction between teachers and students during class. Meanwhile, research shows that a positive and relaxed classroom atmosphere can reduce students' FLA in class [18]. Consequently, creating a good classroom atmosphere is a challenge for teachers. In Toyama, M. and Yamazaki, Y.'s literature review, classroom interventions and their effects on foreign language learning anxiety were systematically sorted out. They found that emotional strategy teaching effectively reduces FLA, such as teaching through music, games, etc. [19]. At the same time, Dolean, D.D.'s experiments have indeed demonstrated that teaching songs in foreign language classes is a useful strategy to reduce students' FLA levels [20]. In addition, with the changes of the times, technology has gradually been applied to the field of education, such as online classrooms. In 2021, Yaniafari, R. P., and Rihardini, A. A. designed a comparative experiment to compare the FLA levels of students in face-to-face classes and online classes. The conclusion was that online classes can make anxious students more comfortable. This environment reduced anxiety may be due to the non-threatening environment that online speaking classes provide, especially for introverted or less socially capable learners who are more likely to feel more confident in online speaking classes [21]. This is a very novel experiment, providing new ideas for teachers' teaching strategies. Obviously, teachers should create a positive classroom atmosphere to allow students to participate actively.

3. Literature evaluation

3.1. Theoretical foundation: FLA models and measurement tools

Most of the studies reviewed in this article are based on Horwitz et al.'s foreign language anxiety theory. Horwitz et al. believe that students' foreign language anxiety mainly comes from communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, they also developed a scale of students' FLA levels, which academics have widely recognized. Teachers can use the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale proposed by Horwitz et al. to identify students with foreign language anxiety and adjust their teaching strategies in a timely manner to assist. Anxious students can actively seek help from teachers or psychological counselors based on strategies provided by the literature. Not only is the research mentioned in this article, but Horwitz's foreign language anxiety

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

scale is also widely used in the field of second language acquisition, indicating the reliability of this theoretical basis. Foreign language learning anxiety is a common phenomenon and is not limited to a specific culture. However, his FLA theory does not clearly explore the differences between different cultural groups, so its applicability may need to be considered in accordance with the specific cultural background. In addition, its research focuses on the specific foreign language learning field. Therefore, the study does not cover all types of classroom anxiety, but only focuses on anxiety issues in the foreign language learning situation.

3.2. Research consensus: key factors influencing FLA

Most scholars believe that students' FLA levels are related to students' and teachers' behaviors, and very few believe that it is related to students. Generally speaking, both teachers' and students' positive attitudes can effectively reduce students' FLA levels, while negative attitudes will improve them. For example, teachers provide academic help and emotional value during the students' learning process, while students can learn spontaneously and actively seek cooperation with others. Each can help students reduce FLA levels [9,10,16]. In addition, a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere can also reduce students' FLA levels, such as teaching music in class and online classroom learning [20,21]. However, negative attitudes will aggravate students' foreign language anxiety levels, such as teachers' threats and orders, and students' pessimistic attitude towards learning [13]. Most importantly, these factors are highly repetitive in different studies, indicating that there is already some consensus in the academic community on influencing factors.

3.3. Limitations and future research irections

These studies continue to innovate, explore more strategies that can effectively alleviate students' foreign language anxiety in foreign language classes, and provide experience for practical teaching. However, these studies still have flaws. Most studies are subject to geographical restrictions. For example, in the experiments of Wang Jie and Wang Beilei, the research targets were only students from a university in Shanghai. While Djafri, F., and Wimbarti, S.'s research focuses on a public university in Indonesia. Consequently, the research results may be affected by regional culture and cannot be generalized to a larger educational background, nor can they summarize the commonalities of the impact of classroom environment on students' FLA levels in a larger context. Additionally, the research largely could not reflect the common characteristics of all second language learners. Furthermore, the experiment cycle is short. Basically, all experiments only conducted two foreign language anxiety tests on students, and the experimenter only observed one cycle (Measure students' initial FLA levels, record a specific behavior, and test it again), which can only reflect short-term changes and cannot summarize the trend of long-term changes. Lastly, some studies have a small sample size. In Tsiplakides, I. and Keramida, A.'s study, only 15 students participated. Therefore, they are not completely representative.

Therefore, based on the shortcomings of the above research, future research should observe the changes in students' FLA levels with different behaviors over a long time, and perhaps more specific rules can be drawn. If there is sufficient financial support, researchers can expand their research to all parts of the world, so that they can not only summarize more general rules, but also compare data between countries and propose targeted solutions.

4. Conclusion

The review study found that the classroom environment greatly impacts students' foreign language anxiety, mainly reflected in teacher behavior, student performance, and classroom atmosphere. Among these three aspects, many factors impact students' foreign language anxiety level, among

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

which the two major classroom subjects, teachers and students, are the main factors that affect. Based on the above analysis, the study proposes a series of strategies that can effectively slow down students' foreign language anxiety. In addition, these research results are of great significance not only for improving the theory of Second Language Acquisition, but also can promote students' language learning. It is mainly reflected in people who will better understand the laws of language learning from the perspective of the environment and emotions. At the same time, teachers and schools can obtain references from research and adjust classroom factors to reduce students' foreign language anxiety levels. Ultimately, Students' self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning have been improved, and they can devote themselves to learning with a better attitude and improve their language skills, laying a solid language foundation for future communication, study, and work in the context of globalization. However, there are still problems in the current research, such as severe geographical restrictions and short experimental periods. Future research can try to track changes in anxiety levels of subjects under certain specific conditions for a long time, or expand the scope of the research and promote experimental results. These experiments require sufficient financial and manpower support.

References

[1] *Horwitz, E. K. (2010). Foreign and second language anxiety. Language teaching, 43(2), 154-167.*

[2] *MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1989). Anxiety and second-language learning: Toward a theoretical clarification. Language learning, 39(2), 251-275.)*

[3] *Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern language journal, 70(2), 125-132.*

[4] *Subekti, A. S. (2018). AN EXPLORATION OF LEARNERS'FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: LEARNERS'AND TEACHERS'VOICES. TEFLIN Journal: A Publication on the Teaching & Learning of English, 29(2).*

[5] *Botes, E., Dewaele, J. M., & Greiff, S. (2020). The foreign language classroom anxiety scale and academic achievement: An overview of the prevailing literature and a meta-analysis. The Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning, 2(1), 26-56*

[6] *Li, C., Dewaele, J. M., Pawlak, M., & Kruk, M. (2022). Classroom environment and willingness to communicate in English: The mediating role of emotions experienced by university students in China. Language Teaching Research, 13621688221111623.*

[7] *Demir, A. N., & Zaimoglu, S. (2021). The relationship between foreign language anxiety and decision-making strategies among university students. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17(S1), 18-32.*

[8] *Alrabai, F. (2015). The influence of teachers' anxiety-reducing strategies on learners' foreign language anxiety. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 9(2), 163-190.*

[9] *Tsiplakides, I., & Keramida, A. (2009). Hel** students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom: theoretical issues and practical recommendations. International Education Studies, 2(4), 39-44.*

[10] *Huang, S., Eslami, Z., & Hu, R. J. S. (2010). The Relationship between Teacher and Peer Support and English-Language Learners' Anxiety. English Language Teaching, 3(1), 32-40.*

[11] *Pakdaman, A., Alibakhshi, G., & Baradaran, A. (2022). The impact of negotiated syllabus on foreign language Learners' language anxiety and learning motivation. Teaching English Language, 16(1), 35-63.*

[12] *Wang Jie & Wang Beilei. (2014). A Study on the Effect of Curriculum Design Based on Needs Analysis in Reducing Foreign Language Anxiety of Non-English Major College Students: An Empirical Study Based on College English Speech Course. Foreign Languages in China, 30(03), 157-162.*

[13] *Djafri, F., & Wimbarti, S. (2018). Measuring foreign language anxiety among learners of different foreign languages: In relation to motivation and perception of teacher's behaviors. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 3(1), 17.*

[14] *Dewaele, J. M., Saito, K., & Halimi, F. (2022). How teacher behaviour shapes foreign language learners' enjoyment, anxiety and attitudes/motivation: A mixed modelling longitudinal investigation. Language Teaching Research, 13621688221089601.*

[15] *Jiang, Y., & Dewaele, J. M. (2019). How unique is the foreign language classroom enjoyment and anxiety of Chinese EFL learners?. System, 82, 13-25.*

[16] *Fujii, S. (2016). A conceptualization of strategies for reducing students' language anxiety. Heles Journal, 15, 3-19.*

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO23943

[17] Dewaele, J. M., Witney, J., Saito, K., & Dewaele, L. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. Language teaching research, 22(6), 676-697.

[18] Li, C., Huang, J., & Li, B. (2021). The predictive effects of classroom environment and trait emotional intelligence on foreign language enjoyment and anxiety. System, 96, 102393.

[19] Toyama, M., & Yamazaki, Y. (2021). Classroom interventions and foreign language anxiety: A systematic review with narrative approach. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 614184.)

[20] Dolean, D. D. (2016). The effects of teaching songs during foreign language classes on students' foreign language anxiety. Language teaching research, 20(5), 638-653.)

[21] Yaniafari, R. P., & Rihardini, A. A. (2021). Face-to-face or online speaking practice: A comparison of students' foreign language classroom anxiety level. JEELS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies), 8(1), 49-67.