Review Research on Foreign Language Anxiety and Foreign Language Self-Efficacy

Shanshan Wang [1, *], Xinran Yue [2]

[1] College of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Harbin Guangsha University, Harbin, Heilongjiang, 150001, China

[2] Department of Linguistics and Translation, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, 999077, China

* Corresponding Author Email: xinranyue3-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

Abstract. Stephen Krashen points out emotional factors are of vital importance in second language acquisition (SLA) in the affective filter hypothesis, and the humanistic educational ideas represented by Carl Rogers also emphasize the important role of it. Anxiety and self-efficacy are two major factors that have greatly affected students' foreign language learning (FLL) and their performance. This paper mainly reviews the concepts, development, and influencing factors of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and foreign language (FL) self-efficacy, concluding their relationship that the two factors are interactive which are in accordance with the cyclical relationship between anxiety, motivation, confidence and behavior. Pedagogically, figuring out the correlation between FL self-efficacy and FLA can improve learners' SLA performance. In the end, the paper proposes feasible intervention measures for teaching from the relationship between FLA and FL self-efficacy. Teachers are expected to adjust FLA and enhance students' FL self-efficacy of SLA, for students, maintaining an energetic and active study state is of vital importance.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Language Learning Anxiety, Self-Efficacy.

1. Introduction

Beginning in the 1970s, researchers gradually realized that it was not enough to focus on cognitive factors such as intelligence and linguistic competence in second language acquisition (SLA), but also on the impacts of affective elements. Krashen points out the importance of affective factors in SLA. Since then, research on foreign language teaching (FLT) has shifted from studying "how to teach" to "how to learn", and SLA has received more and more attention from the perspective of students' emotions. With the influence of humanistic psychology, the emphasis on affective factors in teaching and learning has greatly contributed to the exploration of affective factors as individual differences in learners. Anxiety and self-efficacy are two vital elements that have a greater impact on foreign language learning (FLL). One of the biggest barriers to language learning (LL) is anxiety. Therefore, studying the influence of the two on SLA, and scientifically analyzing certain problems arising in the practice of foreign language teaching in China are of great revelation and practical guidance significance.

The paper mainly focuses on exploring the current conditions, general trends and the interrelationships of FLA and foreign language (FL) self-efficacy, aiming to help learners identify the problems that arise in FLL practice, and provide important insights and practical guidance for FLT in universities.

This paper is composed of five parts. Part, one introduces the research background, purpose and significance and the overall structure of this study. Part two reviews the previous literature related to FLA and FL self-efficacy. Part three demonstrates the relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and FL self-efficacy. Part four shows the suggestions about raising students' FL self-efficacy and the ways to regulate FLA. Part five draws the conclusion.

2. Literature Review of FLA and FL Self-efficacy

2.1. The Definition of FLA

For more than 50 years, one of the major emotional variables influencing students of languages, anxiety, has been the focus of research on SLA. The psychological concept of anxiety was defined as an unfavorable mental state brought on by the autonomic nervousness system and characterized by sensations of anxiety, dread, and concern that are experienced personally [1]. In 1986, Horwitz and his colleague's work the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) generated more interest in the FLA area. According to the study, FLA is a particular form of anxiety that combines self-perceptions, convictions, emotions, and behaviors when students trying to master a foreign language (FL) [2]. McIntyre and Gardner defined FLA as an anxious and fearful emotion generated by the need to employ an unknown FL [3]. Aida believes that FLA is a separate process of gradually mastering an FL in which worry and tension in self-awareness, convictions, mindsets, as well as actions of those learning a language in the classroom [4]. Relevant studies have found that FLA generally exists in students' listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation and other aspects [5]. Using a dynamic approach in the research, FLA is seen to be a multidimensional emotion that fluctuates over time, and this fluctuation is influenced by situational conditions [6].

2.2. FLA and FL Performance

During the past several decades, researchers have held different views on the impact of FLA. Some people think that FLA is good for LL, while others think that it hinders FLL. Some experts, however, argue that the relationship between FLA and FL performance is not a simple linear relationship. For example, Brown believes that moderate anxiety is a good thing for FLL, but too much or too little anxiety will hinder it [7]. According to Spielberger (1970), the link between anxiety and learning is an inverted "U" shaped curve, and FLA has different arousal levels: when the arousal level is low, the performance is not good; when it is increased, the performance will be enhanced, and when the level is too high, the performance will even drop to 0 [8]. Spielberger (1983) studies the effect of anxiety on FLL and believes that if anxiety occurs frequently in the learning process, pupils may adopt a rejection or indifference attitude to alleviate their anxieties. Because anxiety takes up the "intellectual space" essential to thinking activities, which restricts the level and range of information processing, cognition will become frozen if anxiety levels are too elevated [9]. Anxiety is a source of motivation. In the process of striving for success, or in the face of academic requirements that they attach great importance to, individuals will have anxiety, such as failing to appropriately respond to inquiries from the instructor or scoring poorly on the midterm and final tests. Of course, anxiety may also translate into a high level of learning motivation, which needs to be consciously guided by teachers [10]. Hence, the inhibition of learners' FL efficacy by FLA is not always observed, also, its influence on FLL is intricate. Additionally, a variety of community or individual variables may have an impact on FLA. Consequently, in order to understand FLA more thoroughly, it is crucial to take into account a variety of factors.

2.3. Influencing Factors on FLA

FLA is inextricably linked to several personal and societal components as a private and personal psychological sensation. According to researchers, the main causes influencing FLA involve students' age, sexuality, individuality, learning strategies, learning motivation, self-efficacy, subject background, native language level, overseas study experience, foreign language communication willingness, teacher features, approaches to language teaching and classroom conditions [11]. Specifically, learners who are extroverted tend to have a stronger inclination towards participating in communication within the FL classroom, while their levels of anxiety related to the FL process are generally lower. On the other hand, learners with negative attitudes towards learning are more possibly to suffer from a higher level of FLA [12]. Some scholars have also found that overseas study experience can reduce the level of FLA [13]. Moreover, studies reveal that FLA is significantly

inversely correlated with the ideal second language self, supposed second language self, learning strategy, etc. [14]. The deviation observed could be ascribed to variances in social cultural norms across regions, diverse perspectives on gender roles, and variations in the research methodologies employed by different researchers. However, these disparities somewhat impede the progress of FLA further research, causing it challenging to efficiently accomplish certain suggestions proposed by scholars, for instance, instructional approaches like collaborative instruction and hierarchical instructional techniques. Thus, further inquiry is necessary to deepen our understanding of the factors influencing FLA and its underlying mechanisms.

2.4. The Definition of FL Self-efficacy

In 1977, Bandura who is an American cognitive psychologist first put forward the concept of self-efficacy [15]. After that, large amounts of research about self-efficacy started to be carried out by plenty of sociology scholars and precise psychologists.

Generated in the process of people's accomplishing different goals during the years in the 1980s, self-efficacy was considered to be a form of self-belief, which can perceive and judge self-ability and was defined as a self-generating ability. From the 1990s to the 20th century, self-efficacy was defined as an ability to have a life in a specific field, with which individuals can constantly pursue their specific goals, cope effectively with heavy stress, engage in healthy behaviors and have a better state of mind. Keeping high self-efficacy is beneficial to strengthen the immune system and promote good fitness.

Self-efficacy is an ability to carry out the courses of actions which can produce attainments. In addition, Self-efficacy was defined as a positive psychological state based on an internal sense of success by Luthans, including willpower, which is a targeted directed energy [16]. Self-efficacy is one of the four major elements of hope theory put forward by Luthans who gave a more comprehensive and wider definition: "Self-efficacy is people's specific belief to confidently finish a specific task in a specific context." After obtaining some information about their talents as well as capabilities through a wide range of sources, individuals can finally form beliefs of self-efficacy.

Bandura believes that there are four main factors influencing self-efficacy: direct experience, substitute experience, verbal persuasion as well as emotional arousal. Direct experience means learners have an experience in person, which causes the deepest effects on their self-efficacy [17]. Successful experiences could add to a person's confidence and motivation, whereas constant failures always lower a person's aggression. Secondly, substitute experience has to be referred to. It is an evaluation of student's abilities obtained by using comparable abilities to become conscious of behavior of individuals. Verbal persuasion is the third one. Verbal persuasion is broadly spread because of its briefness and availability. Emotional arousal is the last one. When confused by aversion, students are bound to gain achievements, but when meeting with a kind of challenging task, individuals' behavior are always blocked by their psychosomatic reactions, which causes the reduction of their self-efficacy.

2.5. Influencing Factors on FL Self-efficacy

A large number of influencing factors have been studied by researchers, such as grade, gender, major, and so on. The results, nevertheless, were not consistent more or less [18].

A campus survey of junior high school students showed that FL self-efficacy turns out to be a trend "v" with the progress of grades [19]. That is to say, during the time in senior high school, students' FL self-efficacy was the highest while junior high school students were the lowest. However, the FL self-efficacy was slightly improved in the third grade.

The FL self-efficacy of girls has been proven to be more obvious than that of boys [20]. Nevertheless, some researchers had totally opposite findings. The study showed that girls' FL self-efficacy was apparently lower than that of boys [21]. However, some studies showed that the FL self-efficacy between boys and girls turned out to have no apparent differences [22]. By now, there has not been a more specific and authoritative finding.

300 undergraduate students, featuring students from English majors and non-English majors, had also been studied, which showed that students majoring in liberal arts had relatively higher FL self-efficacy than those who major in science students [23].

2.6. Affective Factors on FL Self-efficacy

The students who were in possession of a relatively higher self-efficacy turned out to have a stronger ability to control their personal complex emotions and remove the negative impacts. Individuals with strong self-efficacy in a certain area are more motivated to succeed in that area because they believe they can succeed and are therefore more willing to work towards it.

401 college students were investigated by Wang & Liu who adopted the General Self-Efficacy Scale. The study also implied that a high sense of self-efficacy enables individuals to improve their confidence in their learning ability and learning efficiency [24]. Individuals who have higher self-efficacy tend to be more positive when faced with challenges in order to achieve their specific goals. Also, individuals who had stronger academic self-efficacy were more likely to take more difficult courses because they were convinced that their efforts would pay off somehow. They were more passionate to be in the face with tougher problems and difficulties. Individuals who are in possession of higher self-efficacy are more active and motivated to over difficulties and are therefore more skilled at mobilizing their cognitive resources and making better choices in the face of barriers Thus, students with higher self-efficacy had less learning anxiety and fewer negative emotions.

Zhao found that individuals with higher negative emotions tend to have less learning self-efficacy [25]. More importantly, its impacts were more obvious than that of achievement motivation. Students with higher anxiety had a weak sense of competence and didn't believe in their own abilities, thinking that their efforts cannot achieve their goals. Thus, the students who cannot actively seek solutions always had low persistence in the face of difficulties and challenges, doubting their abilities and giving up easily.

English reading anxiety and reading performance has been studied by Pan. The study showed that anxiety and self-efficacy in students' reading are negatively correlated. 212 students who were non-English majors were investigated by Wang. The study found that self-efficacy, FLA and performance indeed had a complicated and flexible relationship whose modes were not affected by their skills and gender.

3. Relationship between FLA and FL Self-efficacy

Bandura's social cognitive learning theory further argues that self-efficacy beliefs are crucial for starting ways to cope and deciding the quantity and length of effort put into academic endeavors, which controls drive and conduct with regard to educational success [26]. Therefore, this study suggests that self-efficacy is a psychological factor that impacts how anxious we feel. In addition, he believes that persons initially grow a sense of capacity or efficacy when attending an event [27]. Theory and empirical research all show that emotion can affect efficacy, and this kind of belief affects emotion. Furthermore, it is the likelihood that students who have inadequate self-efficacy assume they are unable to attain their objectives and end up dejected, which contributes to the rise in adverse feelings. It may be claimed that self-efficacy is favorably connected to adaptive motivational concepts including interest, significance, usefulness, as well as pleasant emotional reactions and is poorly associated with distressing feelings. In their ID variable structure model, Tremblay and Gardner found an opposite link between FLA and FL self-efficacy, claiming that the former has a negative effect on the latter [28].

4. Suggestions for Improving Students' FL Performance

FL Self-efficacy and FLA interact in their association. Therefore, during teaching, FLA can be adjusted from the relationship between FL acquisition anxiety and self-efficacy.

4.1. Teachers Should Adjust Students' FLA

To improve learners' FL self-efficacy, it is necessary for teachers to pay attention to learners' emotions in teaching, and guide learners to manage anxiety in FLL. Teachers should examine the value of the FLT perspective and establish a student-centered classroom. Teachers need to learn how to change their own roles and become helpers for students' learning participants and collaborators. Creating a positive language learning environment is important. A democratic, relaxing, and harmonious teaching environment can help learners reduce anxiety and enhance confidence. Conducting activities such as performances and debates in a timely manner can help create a healthy and upward learning atmosphere, which can reduce FLA and enhance FL self-efficacy.

4.2. Teachers Need to Enhance Students' FL Self-efficacy

The key to adjusting to FLA is to enhance learners' sense of FL self-efficacy. Teachers need to give some humanistic care or direct emotional integration to learners, which can further strengthen learners' FL self-efficacy. First, positive attribution is important. During teaching, teachers should build a platform for students to experience success and happiness to improve their self-efficacy. Teachers need to guide learners to attribute failures to internal and controllable factors, such as insufficient efforts or weak foundation accumulation, avoiding attributing the failure to internal uncontrollable factors such as insufficient abilities or lack of language talent. Secondly, optimize assessment methods and focus on process assessment. Tests can be conducted through multiple perspectives of observation, and the process assessment can be evaluated through on-site records, oral reports, etc. Teachers should encourage learners to learn efficiently to get more confidence, which can improve their self-efficacy.

4.3. Students are Expected to Maintain an Energetic and Active Study State

Students should also actively cooperate with teachers in class. It is beneficial to maintain energetic and active with full passion and keep a humble learning attitude to strengthen communication and interaction with teachers during the process of learning. Students are expected to know the fact that it is not the learning result but the process that counts. Only by doing so will students improve their self-efficacy, reducing study anxiety.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, anxiety and self-efficacy are considered to be two major affective factors affecting FLL. SLA is negatively related to FL self-efficacy. Researchers differ on the issue of causality between the two factors. Indeed, self-efficacy contains a cognitive component and an affective component, and there may be an interacting correlation between FL self-efficacy and FLA related to SLA, in accordance with the recursive or cyclical relationship between anxiety, cognition, and behavior. Pedagogically, dealing with FL self-efficacy and FLA can improve SLA.

Authors Contribution

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

References

[1] Spielberger, C. D. Anxiety: current trends in theory and research. Oxford, England: Academic Press. 1972.

[2] HORWITZ, E.K., HORWITZ, M.B. and COPE, J. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 1986,70: 125-132.

[3] MacIntyre, P.D. and Gardner, R.C. The Subtle Effects of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processing in the Second Language. Language Learning, 1994, 44: 283-305.

[4] Aida, Y. Examination of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students of Japanese. Mod. Lang. J. 1994, 2, 155–168.

[5] Li, C. On the relationship between emotional intelligence and English academic achievement: the multiple mediating effects of enjoyment, anxiety and burnout. Foreign Lang. World 1, 2020, 69–78.

[6] Gregersen, T., Macintyre, P.D. and Meza, M.D. The Motion of Emotion: Idiodynamic Case Studies of Learners' Foreign Language Anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 2014, 98: 574-588.

[7] Brown, H. Douglas. Principles of Language Learning And Teaching. TESOL Quarterly. 2000, 14. 10.2307/3586319.

[8] Spielberger, C. D., Gorsuch, R. L., & Lushene, R. E. Manual for the state-trait anxiety inventory. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. 1970.

[9] Spielberger, C.D. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory STAI. Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto. 1983.

[10] Plonsky, Luke & Sudina, Ekaterina & Teimouri, Yasser. Language learning and emotion. Language Teaching. First View. 2022. 1-17. 10.1017/S0261444821000434.

[11] KRASHEN, S.D. ACQUIRING A SECOND LANGUAGE. World Englishes, 1982, 1: 97-101.

[12] MacIntyre, P.D. and Gardner, R.C. The Subtle Effects of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processing in the Second Language. Language Learning, 1994, 44: 283-305.

[13] Coleman, Priscilla & Karraker, Katherine. Self-Efficacy and Parenting Quality: Findings and Future Applications. Developmental Review - DEVELOP REV. 1998, 18. 47-85. 10.1006/drev.1997.0448.

[14] Sinay, Erhan. ACADEMIC RESILIENCE: STUDENTS BEATING THE ODDS. 2018.

[15] Bandura, A. Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change [J]. Psychological Review, 1977, 84(2), 191-215.

[16] Luthans, Psychological Capital Appreciation. 2008.

[17] Bandura. The Relationship of Career-related Self-efficacy Expectations to Perceived Career Options in College Women and Men [J]. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1981, 28, 5.

[18] Pajares, F., & Miller, M. D. The role of self-efficacy and self-concept beliefs in mathematical problem solving: A path analysis [J]. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1994, 86,193-203.

[19] Shi Changxiu, 2006, The relationship between learning adaptability, learning self-efficacy and academic performance of junior high school students [D], Nanjing Normal School.

[20] Pajares, F., & Johnson, M. J. 1996. Self-efficacy beliefs and the writing performance of entering high school students [J]. Psychology in the Schools, 33, 165-175.

[21] Wang Caikang, 2002, Research on the development characteristics of general self-efficacy in middle school students[J], Chinese Journal of Behavioral Medicine (22):98-99.

[22] Qian Zhen, 2008, A study on the relationship between parenting style, academic attribution, academic self-efficacy and academic performance of junior high school students [D], master's thesis, Central China Normal University.

[23] Zhang Jing & Zhang Luxi. Explore on Comparison of Study Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Independent College Liberal Arts and Science. Jiamusi Vocational Science: 2015, 218-219.

[24] Wang Caikang and Liu Yong, 2000, Correlation between general self-efficacy and trait anxiety, state anxiety and test anxiety [J].

[25] Zhao Haiping, 2012, An empirical study on English self-efficacy in non-English majors [J], Yunnan Agriculture Journal of the University (28): 56-58.

[26] Bandura, A. Perceived Self-Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning. Educational Psychologist, 1993, 28.

[27] Bandura, A. Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co. 1997.

[28] Tremblay, P.F. and Gardner, R.C. Expanding the Motivation Construct in Language Learning. Modern Language Journal, 1995, 79, 505-518.