

A Review of Research on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Anxiety

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Abstract: Teaching is a profession characterized by an emotional burden. Anxiety, as a considerable emotion experienced, was found experienced not only frequently by in-service EFL teachers but also by pre-service EFL teachers. A high level of anxiety may cause problems in pre-service EFL teachers' academic and teaching performance. However, the study on pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety has been long marginalized within the field of EFL teachers in China. Reviewing the previous academic research results, the purpose of this study is to synthesize the primary research studies on pre-service EFL teachers' anxieties at home and abroad. For this purpose, academic papers published in journals that were recorded in Google Scholar, WOS (Web of Science), Elsevier, and JSTOR in foreign countries, and CNKI in mainland China were analyzed through content analysis. The findings showed that EFL teacher candidates experience high-level anxiety; the sources of anxiety can be categorized into social-cultural, affective factors, cognitive factors, and personal factors; it has physiological and psychological effects on their academic and teaching performance; studies on intervention measures indeed functioned well. As a result of the study, problems in research on pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety are identified. Recommendations and enlightenments to future research in China are discussed as well. At the end of this study, it also states the existing limitations and proposes a solution.

Keywords: Anxiety, Pre-service EFL teachers, Teacher education.

1. Introduction

Anxiety was among the most frequently reported problems among pre-service EFL teachers during teaching practicum (Merç, 2004). Lemarchand-Chauvin and Tardieu (2018, as cited in Kış, 2021) contend that "pre-service teachers have looked for support to address the emotional aspects of their work without really being heard by the educational authorities". Pre-service EFL teachers need not only to have a high proficiency in English but also to learn to recognize and manage the emotional aspects of teaching, which are no doubt a great challenge that they have to face. Emotions can do good or harm to their interpersonal communication, teaching practice, professional learning, job satisfaction, etc.

Studies on EFL student teachers have focused on pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety levels, causes of anxiety, the effects of anxiety on pre-service EFL teachers, etc. While in China, the issue of pre-service EFL teachers has remained a research area that has been marginalized because most scholars focus more on college students who major in English (Yang, 2000; Yan, 2010; Chang, 2020). But students majoring English does not totally equal to pre-service EFL students. This is not beneficial to the promotion of teacher education programs and helping pre-service EFL teachers prepare for their teaching career in a Chinese context.

To put it in a nutshell, this paper aims to identify and synthesize primary research studies on pre-service EFL teachers' anxieties at home and abroad to do a systematic review of the following four aspects: its incidence, sources, effects, and related intervening measures. Meanwhile, research problems, recommendations, and enlightenments to future research are presented as well.

2. Anxiety, Teachers' Anxiety, and Pre-service EFL Teachers' Anxiety

2.1. Anxiety

The study and analysis of anxiety originated in the Classical Greek period and it was Freud who first attempted to explicate the meaning of anxiety within the context of psychological theory (Spielberger, 1966). Freud (1924) regarded anxiety as "something felt," an unpleasant affective state or condition. This state, as observed in patients with anxiety-neurosis, was characterized by "all that is covered by the word 'nervousness,'" apprehension or anxious expectation, and efferent discharge phenomena (Spielberger, 1966). Zeidner and Gerald (2011) stated that anxiety is considered to be a basic negative emotion, referring to general feelings of uneasiness and distress about an unspecified, diffuse, uncertain, and often formless form of threat or danger. The two main types of anxiety are labeled trait anxiety (A-trait) and state anxiety (A-state), namely, the trait-state theory of anxiety proposed by Spielberger (1966).

2.2. Teacher Anxiety

The discussion on the definition and types of anxiety has provided direction for the study on the definition of teacher anxiety. Sinclair, Heys, and Kemmis (1974) used the trait-state conceptualization for the study of teacher anxiety. Bernstein (1983) described teaching anxiety as a specific case of speech anxiety encountered by teachers in the classroom. Gardner and Leak (1994) conceptualized teaching anxiety as anxiety experienced about teaching activities that involve the preparation and execution of classroom activities.

2.3. Pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety

Pre-service EFL teachers will also experience anxious feelings in teaching practicum and language learning contexts. During university coursework and practicum, pre-service

teachers experience various feelings such as anger, anxiety, disappointment, doubt, irritation, fear, love, enthusiasm, satisfaction, pride, and so on (Teng, 2017). Yetkin and Alagözlü (2022) conceptualized student teacher anxiety (STA) as a unique type of anxiety attached to student teachers' tensions, doubts, and worries, especially during their teaching practicum carried out in real classrooms before students.

Based on the above literature review, it can be concluded that pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety refers to the stressful emotions experienced by student teachers who are receiving professional teacher education programs in a long-term or short-term during university coursework, teaching practicum, or in the process of interacting with their supervisors, fellow pre-service teachers and peer classmates.

3. Review of Research on Pre-service EFL teachers' Anxiety

3.1. The Incidence of Anxiety among Pre-service EFL Teachers

The incidence of anxiety among pre-service EFL teachers has received considerable attention from scholars.

Most research results showed that would-be EFL teachers experienced a rather high or moderate level of anxiety during teaching practicum and university coursework (Zerey, 2013; Pasaibu and Harendita, 2018; Yetkin and Alagözlü, 2022). However, there are some exceptions among the research results. Evidence from empirical studies showed that pre-service EFL teachers experience relatively low-level anxiety (Hismanoglu, 2013).

It can be concluded that most EFL teacher candidates are highly or moderately anxious about English learning and teaching.

3.2. The Sources of Anxiety in Pre-service EFL teachers

Most scholars studied teacher candidates' language teaching anxiety and language learning anxiety. According to Tüfekçi-Can (2018), language teaching anxiety can be defined as the feeling of being inadequate in teaching and practicing a foreign language as well as of being incompetent in performing the language acceptably with real students in a real teaching context. It also includes anxiety before, during, and after teaching practicum (Agustiana, 2014; Aydın, 2016; Mosaddaq, 2016; Han & Tulgar, 2019) and micro-teaching (Yetkin & Alagözlü, 2022).

Language learning anxiety is responsible for pre-service EFL teachers' negative and apprehensive emotions and reactions to English learning. Some studies were concerned with writing anxiety, testing anxiety, etc. (Zerey, 2013; Kılıçkaya, 2022). What's more, some scholars tend to focus on both anxieties and studied their sources (Merç, 2011; Tum, 2015; Pasaribu & Harendita, 2018).

EFL Student teachers reported that the relationships with their cooperating teachers and students were a major source of anxiety (Merç, 2011). Other potential anxiety-provoking factors might include the way being evaluated and observed (Agustiana, 2014; Tum, 2015), pedagogy skills (Paker, 2011), lack of teaching experience (Agustiana, 2014, Aydın, 2016), language skills and proficiency (Maulimora, 2019), and personality (Aydın, 2016; Pasaribu & Harendita, 2018), etc., are also the sources of their anxiety. Merç (2010) summarized six causing factors of foreign language anxiety: students and class profiles, classroom management, teaching procedures,

being observed, mentors, and miscellaneous.

Except for exploring the sources of anxiety as much as possible, some studies have indicated that the anxiety-provoking factor has a statistical relationship with variables like gender, age, grade level, self-efficacy, etc (Hismanoglu, 2013, 2015; Merç, 2015; Paker, 2011). While some results contradicted the above findings about the relationship between pre-service teachers' anxiety and gender. Yetkin and Alagözlü (2022) argued that there is no statistical difference regarding their conception of anxiety-provoking situations, which follows the findings of the study conducted by (Abrar et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the study results of the sources of pre-service teachers' anxiety are considerably abundant and constructive.

3.3. The Effects of Pre-service EFL Teachers' anxiety

The effects of anxiety on pre-service EFL teachers reflect their physiological discomfort and abnormality. Bernstein (1983) stated that teaching anxiety has a great influence on pre-service teachers' behaviors and leads to manifestations, such as physical illness. Kılıçkaya (2022) reported that sweating is a main symptom of foreign language anxiety.

In regards to the psychological effects, Han and Tulgar's (2019) reported that EFL student teachers' confidence decreased after receiving negative feedback from mentors. Kış (2021) stated that negative emotions will influence would-be teachers' expectations of the teaching profession, and the relations with educational stakeholders. Meanwhile, anxiety may lead to EFL teacher candidates' academic performance and foreign language classroom instruction (Tum, 2015; Maulimora, 2019).

However, there seems to lack a universal conclusion of how and to what extent anxiety has influenced students. What's more, since anxiety can do both good and harm to EFL student teachers, positive effects may also need attention from scholars.

3.4. The Intervening Measures to Reduce Pre-service EFL Teachers' Anxiety

Some scholars designed specific intervening measures based on student teachers' sources of anxiety. In the aspect of foreign language learning, Vibulphol (2004) designed a series of podcast-intertwined collaborative tasks and used them to help student teachers reduce their oral production anxiety in class and out of class. Kralova et al. (2017) designed psycho-social training as an intervening strategy and combined it with 12-week English pronunciation training to apply them to a group of EFL student teachers (experimental group) to reduce their language pronunciation anxiety.

Self-intervention also got scholars' attention. In a study by Pasaribu and Harendita (2018), several student teachers reported their coping strategies (personal, professional, social, and institutional coping strategies) to reduce teaching anxiety. Chang (2020) conducted a longitudinal study and found that anxiety elimination strategies include meta-affective and affective strategies.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The studies reviewed warrant the following conclusions: (1) There is a high incidence of anxiety among pre-service EFL teachers. (2) Anxiety-provoking factors can be classified into four types: social-cultural factors, affective factors, cognitive

factors, and personal factors. (3) The effects of pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety are manifested physiologically and psychologically. High levels of anxiety also influence their academic and teaching performance. (4) Some evidence states that specific intervening measures decrease EFL student teachers' anxiety.

Some problems still exist in the research on pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety. The following discussion and recommendations may provide some reference.

At first, compared with the research on anxiety's sources and effects, the empirical studies on intervention measures to reduce teachers' anxiety should be more explored.

Moreover, the research methods of these intervention studies are limited to questionnaires, tests, and reflective diaries. It should be noted that pre-service EFL teachers' changes are not only reflected in the paper-and-pencil reports but also in their subsequent behaviors. Observing their subsequent behaviors and reactions are also of great value.

Lastly, studies on the effects of EFL student teachers' anxiety more focused on its negative effects. Since anxiety can be both detrimental and positive, additional research could be directed to explore the positive effects of anxiety other than the negative ones.

The fruitful results of foreign studies enlighten research in the field of pre-service EFL teachers' anxiety in China.

First, future research may draw a lesson from the abundant results of foreign studies and explore China's EFL student teachers' anxiety status quo. Secondly, regional differences should be taken into consideration. The adoption of questionnaires, interviews, and tests should meet the needs of domestic research. Last, it is necessary to combine the research on pre-service EFL student teachers' anxiety with in-service EFL teachers' anxiety to form a comprehensive research direction in the field of EFL teachers.

The limitations of this study should be mentioned as well. The most limitation lies in the fact that this study took content analysis as its basic research method but not a visualization analysis. The inclusion of demographical trends and topic trends might have yielded a more comprehensive review. Therefore, there is a need for future work to use visualization analysis.

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