

A study on foreign language anxiety among international students from China

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Abstract: In the era marked by heightened cross-border educational pursuits, this research endeavors to scrutinize the prevalence and repercussions of foreign language anxiety (FLA) among international students from China. These students face the dual challenge of attaining linguistic proficiency and adapting to a foreign culture as they pursue academic opportunities on a global scale. To thoroughly investigate these issues, this research employs a questionnaire survey methodology to collect data pertaining to FLA, language proficiency, and self-confidence perceptions among Chinese international students. The findings underscore the importance of language self-confidence in mitigating the adverse effects of FLA.

Key words: foreign language; anxiety; international student; quantitative research

1 Introduction

Amidst the backdrop of globalization, the growing need for Chinese students to achieve fluency in foreign languages has surged. This demand arises from their enthusiastic pursuit of educational opportunities abroad and active involvement in the global arena. However, the pursuit of international education offers not only promising opportunities but also a unique set of challenges, particularly in the process of adapting to new linguistic and cultural environments [1]. This condition has been observed to exert a substantial influence on their academic achievements [2]. Extensive research has consistently pointed out that students grappling with anxiety often encounter formidable obstacles, ultimately impeding their overall performance.

While existing research has delved into the phenomenon of FLA within a general context, a notable gap persists in my understanding of how this issue specifically affects Chinese international students [3]. This study will employ the English skills scale, language self-confidence scale, and foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) as a guiding tool for the analysis of quantitative survey data collected from Chinese international students. The findings hold the potential to greatly enhance the support provided to this population during a crucial phase of their personal and academic development. The subsequent sections of this paper will provide a comprehensive analysis of FLA among international students from China.

Hypothesis: the level of language self-confidence among Chinese international students will exert a moderating influence on their English proficiency and FLA.

2 Literature review

2.1 The definition of FLA

FLA, as defined by Horwitz, encompasses self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that arise within the context of classroom language learning. It differs from general anxiety and is characterized by its situational specificity, as noted by Dewaele [4]. This definition indicated that anxiety is pervasive in all aspects of foreign language (FL) learning. However, it is noteworthy that the bulk of existing literature predominantly focuses on speaking anxiety and its profound influence on second and foreign language learning outcomes [5]. Studies among Chinese English as foreign language (EFL) learners, Bai (2023) reveals that factors such as immersion settings, unfamiliar teaching methods, and diverse social interactions can heighten anxiety levels.

Numerous studies have investigated the causes of FLA, revealing that various factors contribute to its emergence. These factors encompass a wide range of aspects, including the need for error correction, peer competitiveness, personality traits, and the compatibility between teachers and students (Bai, 2023). Moreover, learners' self-perception of their foreign language proficiency plays a pivotal role in determining the levels of anxiety experienced [6]. A comprehensive review of the literature on FLA reveals that these causes encompass learners' perceived inadequacy and various classroom-related variables [7]. Therefore, despite numerous studies on FLA, there is a need for diverse research approaches to deepen our understanding.

2.2 Measures of FLA in classroom

Horwitz et al. introduced the FLA theory and subsequently developed the FLCAS. This scale has gained wide acceptance in the research community due to its demonstrated validity and reliability. While FLCAS has shown validity and high reliability after item selection in previous studies, it has also uncovered common issues [8]. Notably, it excels in assessing speaking anxiety, focusing on anxiety related to oral communication in the foreign language classroom. Recognizing that the FLCAS primarily addresses anxiety in speaking as well as listening situations, Liu and Dong (2023) developed the 29-item foreign language reading anxiety scale (FLRAS), to examine the impact of reading-related language learning processes on FLA in China [9].

2.3 Study of FLA in international student contexts

As the number of students engaging in international education continues to grow, research on LA has also expanded its focus to study abroad (SA) contexts [10]. This extension of research is crucial for understanding the dynamics of language anxiety in diverse learning environments. Liu made a significant contribution by shedding light on the phenomenon of stranger anxiety commonly experienced by international students in SA settings [11]. In Allen and Herron's study of 25 college students studying French abroad, linguistic insecurity and cultural disparities emerged as the primary sources of language anxiety during their overseas study experiences [12]. Linguistic insecurity stems from learners' concerns about their language proficiency in the host country, while cultural differences can create anxiety due to unfamiliar social norms and behaviors. Notwithstanding these valuable insights, it is imperative to acknowledge the need for further research on anxiety within SA contexts.

3 Methodology

This paper employs a quantitative methodology to analyze the interplay between the English proficiency, FLA, and language self-confidence of Chinese international students. The research utilizes the online platform "Wenjuanxing" and leverages popular social media applications such as Weibo, WeChat, and Instagram to disseminate the questionnaire. Table 1 provides demographic statistics for the sample of 545 respondents, offering insights into the distribution of gender, age, and education level.

Table 1. Characteristics of the study sample

Variable		Characteristics	Percent (%)
Gender (N=545)	Male	305	56.0
	Female	240	44.0
Age (N=545)	Under 18 years old	17	3.1
	18-25	133	24.4
	26-30	213	39.1
	31-35	162	29.7
	36-40	17	3.1
	Above 40 years old	3	0.6
Degree (N=545)	Bachelor	94	17.2
	Master	201	36.9
	Doctor	199	36.5
	Research fellow	41	7.5
	Others	10	1.8

4 Result

According to the theory, students' English proficiency may influence FLA, with the nature of this relationship being subject to variations based on students' levels of language confidence. In essence, the level of language self-confidence may modulate the association between Chinese international students' English proficiency and FLA. This theoretical relationship is depicted in the following Fig. 1.

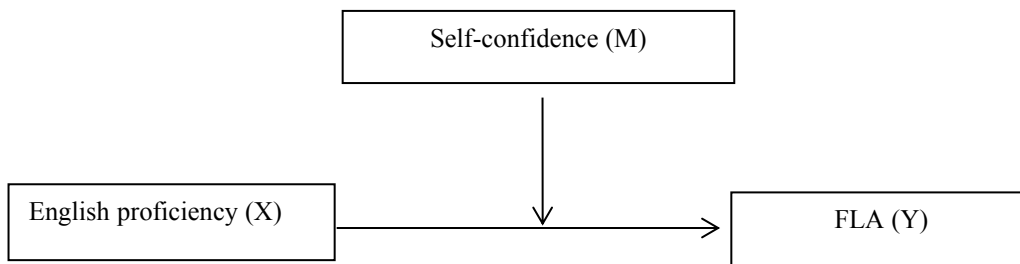


Fig. 1. Moderating model

Table 2. Moderator analysis

Model	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	P	R ²	ΔR ²
Model 1	Constant1	2.592	0.132		19.653	<0.001	0.039	
	X	0.190	0.077	0.265	2.480	0.013		
	M	-0.057	0.093	-0.066	-0.614	0.539		
Model 2	Constant2	0.699	0.379		1.844	0.066	0.085	0.046 (P<0.001)
	X	0.827	0.141	1.150	5.851	<0.001		
	M	0.539	0.144	0.619	3.736	<0.001		
	XM	-0.188	0.035	-1.553	-5.312	<0.001		
Dependent Variable: FLA (Y)								

From the data presented in Table 2, the following conclusions can be drawn: ΔR² (Model 2-Model 1) is statistically significant (P<0.05), indicating that adding the interaction term XM (English proficiency * language confidence) significantly improves the model's fit. The regression coefficient of XM is -0.188 (P<0.05), confirming that language confidence significantly negatively moderates the relationship between X and Y.

$$Y1=0.699+0.827*X+0.539*M-0.188*X*M$$

$$=(0.827-0.188*M)*X+0.699+0.539*M$$

From the equation above, it is evident that the coefficient representing the moderating effect is (0.827-0.188*M). When M is below 4.399, X positively influences Y, with the strength of this influence decreasing as M increases. When M exceeds 4.399, X negatively influences Y. This suggests that, the impact of language proficiency on the students with high language self-confidence decreases, which means that students who are confident in their language abilities are less affected by their language proficiency regarding FLA. Therefore, language self-confidence significantly negatively moderates the relationship between language proficiency and FLA.

5 Conclusion

Considering the diverse backgrounds of Chinese students embarking on international educational journeys, it is evident that FLA may manifest differently among individuals. This study is dedicated to offering nuanced insights into the intricate interplay between FLA and language proficiency within the unique cultural and educational experiences of Chinese international students. The results demonstrate that an increase in students' language self-confidence significantly moderates the relationship between language proficiency and FLA. By conducting a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon of FLA within the context of Chinese international students, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes and outcomes associated with FLA. This paper also suggests future research, such as using mixed methods analysis, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this intricate issue.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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