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Research on Chinese Language Learning Anxiety of International Students in China

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Abstract: China's growing international influence has attracted more and more international students to study in China. International students are more or less accompanied by language anxiety in the process of learning Chinese. This research analyzes the Chinese language learning anxiety of international students in China through a questionnaire survey, including social processes and affective processes, and attempts to propose strategies to reduce the Chinese language learning anxiety of international students through the research results.

Keywords: International students; Chinese language learning; anxiety; Strategy

Introduction

Anxiety is a very common psychological phenomenon, and it has been a focus of attention and research in the Western educational psychology community since the 1950s. Scholars in the fields of psychology, linguistics and education at home and abroad have studied it in various aspects. Anxiety causes psychological and physiological discomfort in individuals, mainly in the form of nervousness, fear, disappointment, and apprehension, and has a negative impact on individuals. Language researchers have also begun to focus on the impact of emotional factors, including anxiety, on language acquisition. Horwitz defined language anxiety as a complex self-awareness, belief, feeling and behavior. He believes that language anxiety is related to classroom language learning and arises in the process of special language learning. In order to measure the impact of language anxiety on classroom language learning, he and other scholars developed the "Foreign Language Anxiety Classroom Scale"(FLCAS) as a tool to measure the negative effects of foreign language anxiety. They believed that language anxiety can be generally divided into communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

In learning Chinese as a second language, changes in the educational environment, lectures and assessment methods are likely to cause them anxiety. Since the 1970s, the focus of research on second language acquisition has gradually shifted from how teachers teach to student-centered learning, and more and more researchers have realized that the success of foreign language learning depends largely on the learners themselves. Studies on learners have been increasingly focused on cognitive, affective, and individual factors, with Ellis pointing out that affective state is the most critical factor in determining individual differences in learners' performance. Krashen's "the Affective Filter Hypothesis" argues that learners are influenced by various emotional factors in the process of learning a foreign language, with motivation, self-confidence and anxiety as the three main emotional variables. He believes that it is not enought to provide students with comprehensible input, but that students must be emotionally "open" to the input. In language acquisition, the input is only the cause, the affective factor is the most critical condition. Many scholars believe that anxiety is the affective factor that best predicts the effectiveness of learners' learning, and therefore anxiety is an important element of second language acquisition research.

Arnold pointed out that among the affective factors influencing language learning, anxiety plays an important role regardless of whether the learning environment is formal (learning a language inside the classroom) or informal (learning a language outside the classroom). Learners' performance in second language learning challenges their self-perception of themselves as competent communicators and leads to feelings of silence, shyness, worry, and even fear. Foreign language anxiety is "a distinct anxiety about the learner's sense of self, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom that arises from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz & J. Cope, 1986)[1]. MacIntyre (1998)[2] further defines language anxiety as "the worry and negative emotions that arise when learning a second foreign language." Most international students experience a certain degree of anxiety in the process of learning Chinese. This anxiety affects their academic performance and daily life. This phenomenon requires further research. There are various reasons for international students' anxiety in learning Chinese, among which the difficulty in learning Chinese due to the characteristics of the language itself is the factor that most easily makes international students feel anxious. Learners are confronted with four core difficulties: tone and pronunciation, the structure of Chinese characters, rich vocabulary and complex grammatical patterns— all of which stem from the uniqueness of Chinese typology. For European and American students, the unique writing system of Chinese characters makes it difficult for them to learn and remember a large number of Chinese characters in a short period of time. For Japanese and Korean students, the pronunciation system of Chinese is different from that of their native language, and it is not easy to pronounce the four tones well. In addition, the grammar system of Chinese, some parts of which are similar to English and some parts of which are similar to Japanese and Korean, makes Chinese grammar less easy for both European and American students, as well as for Japanese and Korean students. Therefore, oral expression and examinations in Chinese classrooms are common concerns for international students. Fears including making mistakes, being ridiculed and failing exams jointly contribute to students' language anxiety. In addition, the teacher, as the main determinant of the classroom learning environment, plays an important role in controlling classroom learning anxiety (Chen, J., 1996)[3]. Students' errors about a particular problem, which the teacher corrects in inappropriate way, and the students still cannot understand correctly, will increase psychological stress and will feel anxious because they are worried about the teacher's anger and their peers' ridicule.

It is estimated that about 50% of the world's population speaks a foreign language (De Houwer,1998), and foreign language anxiety is a frequently mentioned psychological phenomenon that affects about one-third of foreign language learners (Worder, 1998), which shows that foreign language anxiety is a common phenomenon, and anxiety is also common in learning Chinese as a second language. It is important to understand and solve foreign language anxiety in internationality Chinese language education.

1.Research design

This paper uses quantitative analysis to collect relevant information by sending questionnaires and analyze students' level of foreign language classroom anxiety, and participator's challenge/problems in Chinese as foreign language classroom(CFL) anxiety.

1.1 Participants of the research

The participants of this questionnaire survey are 160 international students from three universities in Guizhou province, namely Guizhou University for Nationalityities which has 199 international students, Qiannan Normal College for Nationalityities which has 42 international students and Zunyi Normal College which has 81 international students.

1.2 Instrumentation

Survey questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three parts:

The first part is the basic information of the survey object. The content includes nationality, gender,age, school,major, duration of learning Chinese, and HSK Chinese Proficiency test grade. HSK Chinese Proficiency Test is the most authoritative tool to reflect Chinese proficiency, and the scores of foreign students in HSK test are used as reference.

The second part is the content of foreign language classroom anxiety. Foreign language Classroom anxiety survey contents refer to Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). There are 33 questions in this part, include social processes and affective processes. Respondents make comments based on their own situation.

The third part is open question and answer, about participator's challenges in foreign language classroom anxiety.

1.3 Data analysis

Data obtained through the use of questionnaire will be treated and analyzed using the following tools:

Frequency and Percentage Distribution. This shall be used to describe the profile of the participants.

Mean. This shall be employed to determine the level of cross-cultural communicative adaptability of students.

To interpret the means, the given scales will be used:

Table 1. Scale for interpreting level of cross-cultural communicative adaptability of students

Score Range	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25-4.00	Very High (VH)
2.50-3.24	High (H)
1.75-2.49	moderate (M)
1.00-1.74	Low (L)

Analysis of variance. This shall be used to determine the significant differences on the students' level of cross-cultural communicative adaptability in their CFL classes when grouped according to profile variables.

2. Statistical analysis

This part presents the analysis and interpretation of the study and its corresponding interpretation. Statistical analysis was done on the obtained data to answer the basic problems in this research.

2.1 Profile of the participants

2.1.1 Nationality

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to Nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Laos	65	40.60
Vietnam	38	23.80
Cambodia	57	35.60
Total	160	100

Table 2 shows that 65 or 40.6% of the participants come from Laos, 38 or 23.8% from Vietnam, and 57 or 35.6% from Cambodia. This finding reveals that the majority of the participants come from Laos and the least come from Vietnam.

2.1.2 Gender

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	96	60.00
Female	64	40.00
Total	160	100

As revealed in Table 3, 96 or 60.0% of the participants are male while 64 or 40.0% are female. This indicates that the majority of the participants are male.

2.1.3 School

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to School

School	Frequency	Percentage	
Qiannan Normal College for	25	15.60	
Nationalities	25		
Guizhou University for Nationalities	94	58.80	
Zunyi Normal College	41	25.60	
Total	160	100	

Table 4 showed that 25 or 15.60% of the participants come from Qiannan Normal College for Nationalities while 94 or 58.80% come from Guizhou University for Nationalities .41 or 25.60% of the participants come from Zunyi Normal College. This suggests that the majority of the participants come from Guizhou University for Nationalities.

2.1.4 Major

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to Major

Major	Frequency	Percentage
Business Administration	35	21.90
Tourism Management	39	24.40
Chinese Language and Literature	86	53.80
Total	160	100.00

As revealed in Table 5, 35 or 21.90% are taking Business Administration, 39 or 24.40% of them are taking Tourism Management and 86 or 53.80% are taking Chinese Language and Literature. This signifies that the majority of the participants come from Chinese Language and Literature.

2.1.5 Chinese Learning Duration

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to Chinese Learning Duration

Chinese learning duration	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	28	17.50
1-2 years	75	46.90
3 years and above	57	35.60
Total	160	100

Table 6 unveils that out of 160 participants, there are 28 or 17.50% of them spent their years of learning Chinese for less than a year, followed by 75 or 46.90% for 1-2 years, and 57 or 35.60 % for 3 years and above. This result reveals that majority of the participants have spent 1-2 years of learning Chinese.

2.1.6 HSK grade

Table 7. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Participants According to HSK Grade

HSK Grade	Frequency	Percentage
3	36	22.50
4	83	51.90
5	27	16.90
6	14	8.80
Total	160	100.00

As revealed in Table 7, that out of 160 participants, there are 36 or 22.50% passed the HSK Level 3 examination,83 or 51.90% passed the HSK Level 4 examination,27 or 16.90% passed the HSK Level 5 examination, and 14 or 8.80% passed the HSK Level 6 examination. This result reveals that majority of the participants have passed the HSK Level 4 examination.

2.2 Assessment of Participants on the Level of Foreign Language Anxiety Table 8. Assessment of Participants' Degree of Social Processes in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Category		Descriptive
		Interpretation
Social processes		
I feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign	2.58	High
language class.	2.38	Extent
It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is	2.49	Moderate
saying in foreign language.	2.49	Extent
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in	2.56	High
language class.	2.30	Extent
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	1.64	Low
	1.04	extent
I would be nervous speaking the foreign language with native	1.79	Moderate
speakers.	1./9	Extent
I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is	2.43	Moderate
correcting.	2.43	Extent
I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	2.63	High
	2.03	Extent

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Table 8 displays the mean assessment of participants' level of social processes in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The means range from 1.64 to 2.63, eight items signifying "Moderate Extent", three items signifying "High Extent" and two items signifying "Low Extent". The item that is rated highest by the participants is "I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class." which has the highest mean score of 2.63 and a descriptive interpretation of "High Extent". In contrast, the items which rated lowest are "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class." getting a mean of 1.64, descriptive interpretation of "Low Extent". Moreover, the table shows that the category mean is 2.22 described as "Moderate Extent". This implies that the participants' level of social processes in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is rated to a "Moderate Extent".

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991)^[4], language anxiety is "the learner's apprehension and worry about using the second language in real-life situations". The results of the study show that anxiety is a prevalent factor in foreign language learning, as seen in the high mean scores for feeling frightened, starting to panic, and getting upset when speaking in class.

In another study, Horwitz and Cope (1986) found that "anxiety is a major factor that interferes with foreign language learning". This is supported by the current study, which found that learners' anxiety levels varied across the items, with some items showing higher mean scores than others.

Additionally, Gardner and Lambert (1972)^[5] proposed the socio-educational model of second language acquisition, which suggests that the learner's attitudes, motivation, and personality are key factors in their success in learning a second language. The current study's findings align with this model, as learners' self-confidence and comfort levels in speaking in class were important factors affecting their social processes.

Table 9. Assessment of Participants' Degree of Affective Processes in Foreign Language Classroom
Anxiety

Category	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Affective processes		
I worry about making mistakes in language class.	2.07	Moderate Extent
I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.09	Moderate Extent
It bothers me at all to take more foreign language classes.	1.65	Low
During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.33	Moderate Extent
I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am.	2.27	Moderate Extent
I am usually at ease during my tests in my language class.	2.51	High Extent
I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	2.57	High Extent
I understand why some people get so upset over foreign language class.	2.24	Moderate Extent
In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.24	Moderate Extent
Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	2.31	Moderate Extent
I often feel like going to my language class.		High Extent
I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	1.43	Low
I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called	2.34	Moderate

on in language class.		Extent
The more I study for a language test, the more confused I 2.31		Moderate
get.	2.31	Extent
I feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.32	Moderate
r reer pressure to prepare very wen for language class.	2.32	Extent
I always feel that the other students speak the foreign	2.22	Moderate
language better than I do.	2.22	Extent
Language class moves so quickly,so I worry about getting	2.48	Moderate
left behind.	2.46	Extent
I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in	2.28	Moderate
my other classes.	2.20	Extent
When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and		Moderate
relaxed.		Extent
I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.		Moderate
		Extent
Category Mean		Moderate
		Extent

Table 9 shows the mean assessment of participants' level of affective processes in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The means range from 1.43 to 2.62, fifteen items signifying "Moderate Extent", three items signifying "High Extent" and two items signifying "Low Extent". The item that is rated highest by the participants is "I often feel like going to my language class." which has the highest mean score of 2.62 and a descriptive interpretation of "High Extent". In contrast, the items which rated lowest are "I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make." getting a mean of 1.43, descriptive interpretation of "Low Extent". Moreover, the table shows that the category mean is 2.25 described as "Moderate Extent". This implies that the participants' level of affective processes in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is rated to a "Moderate Extent".

The results suggest that students experience moderate levels of anxiety, worry, and self-doubt in their language classes. They often feel nervous about speaking in class, worry about making mistakes, and feel pressure to prepare well for language class. According to Dewaele (2013)^[6], anxiety in language learning is a complex phenomenon that can be influenced by various factors, such as individual differences, learning context, and language proficiency. In addition, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) argue that language anxiety can have negative effects on language learning and performance, such as interfering with cognitive processing, reducing self-confidence, and inhibiting participation in class.

Furthermore, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993)^[7] propose that motivation is a crucial factor in language learning and can affect affective processes. They suggest that learners with a high level of intrinsic motivation are more likely to have positive affective experiences and engage in successful language learning.

2.3 Significant Difference Analysis of Participants' Assessment in the Extent to Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Learning Chinese as a Foreign Languages when Grouped According to Profile

Variables

Table 10. Test for Significant Difference in the Extent of Participants' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Social Processes) When Grouped According to Profile Variables

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Social Processes VS. Profile variables	MEAN	SD	P-VALUE	Decision	REMARKS
D.Social Processes	2.22	0.795			
Social Processes and Nationality			0.017	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
Nationality	1.95	0.875			
Social Processes and Gender			0.118	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Gender	1.40	0.491			
Social Processes and School			0.060	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
School	2.10	0.636			
Social Processes and Major			0.055	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Major	2.32	0.812			
Social Processes and Chinese learning duration			0.263	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Chinese learning duration	2.18	0.708			
Social Processes and HSK grade			0.000	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
HSK grade	4.12	0.857			

Table 10 shows the significant differences on the extent of participants' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety along Social Processes when grouped according to profile variables.

On Social Processes, the obtained P-values 0.017 and 0.000 for nationality and HSK grade respectively are less than the level of significance,0.05. Hence, there are significant differences on the extent to social processes when grouped according to nationality and HSK grade. This implies that the extent to social processes vary when grouped according to the above-mentioned profiles. However, the obtained P-value,0.118,0.060,0.055 and 0.263 for gender, school, major and

Chinese learning duration are greater than the level of significance, 0.05. Thus, there are no significant differences on the extent to social processes when grouped according to gender, school, major and Chinese learning duration. This implies that the extent to social processes do not vary when grouped according to the above-mentioned profiles.

According to literature, the socialization process is an important aspect of adaptation for internationality students, and nationality background has been identified as a critical factor in this process (Ward & Kennedy, 1999)^[8]. The significant relationship between social processes and nationality background found in this study is consistent with this view. Additionally, the significant relationship between social processes and HSK grade may indicate that Chinese language proficiency plays a role in the socialization process of internationality students (Chen & Wang, 2011)^[9].

Table 11. Test for Significant Difference in the Extent of Participants' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety
(Affective Processes)When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Affective Processes VS. Profile variables	MEAN	SD	P-VALUE	Decision	REMARKS
E.Affective Processes	2.25	0.682			
Affective Processes and Nationality			0.055	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Nationality	1.95	0.875			
Affective Processes and Gender			0.016	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
Gender	1.40	0.491			
Affective Processes and School			0.047	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
School	2.10	0.636			
Affective Processes and Major			0.783	Accept Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Major	2.32	0.812			
Affective Processes and Chinese learning duration			0.014	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
Chinese learning duration	2.18	0.708			
Affective Processes and HSK grade			0.000	Reject Ho	SIGNIFICANT
HSK grade	4.12	0.857			

Table 11 presents the significant differences on the extent of participants' foreign language classroom anxiety along

affective processes when grouped according to profile variables.

On affective Processes, the obtained P-values 0.016,0.047,0.014 and 0.000 for gender,school, Chinese learning duration and HSK grade respectively are less than the level of significance,0.05. Hence, there are significant differences on the extent to affective processes when grouped according to gender, school, Chinese learning duration and HSK grade. This implies that the extent to affective processes vary when grouped according to the above-mentioned profiles. However, the obtained P-value, 0.055 and 0.783 for nationality and major are greater than the level of significance, 0.05. Thus, there are no significant differences on the extent to affective processes when grouped according to nationality and major. This implies that the extent to affective processes do not vary when grouped according to the above-mentioned profiles.

According to some literature, affective factors are crucial in language learning as they affect motivation, attitude, and emotional state, which in turn affect learning outcomes (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011)^[10]. Gender has also been shown to affect motivation in language learning, with females generally having a higher level of motivation (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014)^[11]. Moreover, previous research has indicated that the learning environment and school type can influence language learning outcomes (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008)^[12].

2.4 Summary of Finds

On the basis of the analysis of the data gathered, the following findings were established:

2.4.1 Profile of the Participants

Majority of the participants come from Laos and least come from Vietnam. In terms of gender, majority of the participants are male. Majority of the participants study in Guizhou University for Nationalities. As to the major, the majority of the participants study Chinese language and literature major. Majority of the participants have spent 1-2 years of learning Chinese. As to HSK grade test, the majority of the participants passed HSK 4 grade.

2.4.2 The extent of participants of social processes of Chinese classroom anxiety in CFL classes.

The extent of social processes of Chinese classroom anxiety in CFL classes is to a "Moderate Extent". The extent of affective processes of Chinese classroom anxiety in CFL classes is to a "Moderate Extent".

2.4.3 Significant differences in the participants' extent of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in their CFL classes when grouped according to profile variables.

There are significant differences on the extent to social processes of foreign language classroom anxiety in CFL classes when grouped according to nationality and HSK grade profile variables. However, there are no significant differences on the extent to social processes when grouped according to gender, school, major and Chinese learning duration profile variables.

There are significant differences on the extent to affective processes of foreign language classroom anxiety in CFL classes when grouped according to gender, school, Chinese learning duration and HSK grade. However, there are no significant differences on the extent to affective processes of foreign language classroom anxiety in CFL classes when grouped according to nationality and major.

3. Challenges and Problems Encountered by Participants in Social Interaction and Chinese Language Learning.

From the study, it can be found that international students from the familiar environment to the new environment, different ways of thinking and language, different cultural customs and living habits, as well as different learning management systems, will face some difficulties and challenges in study and life. The questionnaire and interview shows that some international students have anxiety in the process of communicating with Chinese people and learning Chinese. Learning Chinese, whether in class or after class, often using the target language, communicating with teachers, classmates and local people, will practice our oral expression and help us to become fluent in Chinese. However, in the process of Chinese communication, international students will encounter some problems and challenges. International students are afraid that they can't speak Chinese well or that others will laugh at them in CFL classes. In the process of answering questions in Chinese, they feel nervous and uncomfortable. When facing the Chinese exam, they feel anxious and so on.

4. Strategies to Reduce Chinese Learning and Social Anxiety among International Students

4.1 Strengthen Chinese Classroom Learning.

Learning Chinese is a key step in adapting to the Chinese classroom environment. Teachers can provide Chinese language classes or language support to help international students improve their language skills. This includes listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Encourage oral expression. Teachers can encourage international students to participate in oral expression more, such as through group discussion, role play and other ways, so that students have the opportunity to practice oral English and expression, reduce their Chinese learning anxiety.

4.2 Create Diverse Teaching Methods.

Teachers can provide relevant reading materials or videos before class, so that international students can understand relevant topics and cultural background in advance, so as to better participate in class. Teachers can adopt communicative teaching methods that emphasize the use of language in real life. This includes role-playing activities, group discussions and interactive games that require students to use their Chinese skills in a meaningful context. To make language learning more engaging and interesting for international students. In addition, multimedia resources such as music, film and art can be utilized to attract the interest and participation of international students and promote their learning.

4.3 Classroom Management.

Teachers can create a positive and inclusive classroom environment by setting clear expectations of behavior and communication. This can include establishing ground rules for classroom discussion and encouraging students to speak up and participate in class. Teachers can also be sensitive to cultural differences and adjust their teaching styles accordingly.

4.4 Assessment and feedback.

Teachers can provide regular feedback to international students to help them improve their language skills and cross-cultural communication skills. This can include providing written and oral feedback on assignments and assessments, as well as encouraging students to self-reflect on their progress.

4.5 Strengthen Extracurricular Chinese Language Practice.

Teachers can encourage international students to participate in language exchange programs, Chinese language clubs or volunteer activities so that they can practice Chinese and meet native speakers in real situations. Teachers can organize language exchange programs, and teachers can encourage international students to study with Chinese students in pairs or small groups. Allow international students to practice their Chinese language skills with native speakers. This will provide students with more opportunities to interact with Chinese speakers, learn about Chinese culture from different perspectives and reduce social anxiety.

4.6 Relieve Anxiety.

Many international students may experience anxiety related to acculturation and language learning. Teachers can provide support by addressing common anxiety triggers, such as homesickness or speech problems. This can include offering counseling services or organizing activities to help international students feel more comfortable and integrated into the classroom.

By implementing these strategies, teachers can create a supportive, inclusive and engaged learning environment for international students. The key is to flexibly adapt to students' needs and preferences, while providing them with the necessary support and guidance to adapt to cross-cultural communication, enable them to succeed in their language learning and acculturation journey.

5. Conclusion

International students are more or less anxious in the process of learning Chinese, in the process of development of Chinese learning, the importance of teachers' functions must be emphasized and their active role should be given full play. They should encourage students and mobilize their learning enthusiasm. In terms of teaching, teachers should strengthen classroom Chinese teaching, adjust teaching methods, adopt diversified teaching methods, pay attention to classroom management and timely feedback on learning. Strengthen extracurricular Chinese exchange programs to improve students' oral expression skills to reduce social anxiety. Conduct regular counseling services or organize activities

to relieve students' anxiety.

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