A Study on the Second Language Learning Anxiety of English Major Students at Panzhihua University

Deng Huilin[1] Chang Wei[2] Zhou Congping[3]

[123]*School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Panzhihua University, Sichuan province, China*
[13]*Student* [2] *Lecturer*
Corresponding Author: Chang Wei

Abstract: *This study focuses on the second foreign language (Japanese) learning anxiety of 46 third-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Panzhihua University. Given the significant impact of anxiety on second language learning outcomes, this research aims to investigate the current status and causes of students' anxiety through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and to propose teaching strategies. Data were analyzed using SPSS statistics. The results indicate that the students generally experience a certain degree of anxiety in learning their second foreign language. Specifically, among the three dimensions of anxiety— communication anxiety, course anxiety, and examination anxiety—communication anxiety is the most prominent. Moreover, female students exhibit higher mean anxiety levels across all dimensions compared to male students. There is a strong correlation between communication anxiety, classroom anxiety, and examination anxiety. Although these three dimensions of anxiety are positively correlated with academic performance, the correlation is not statistically significant, suggesting that the level of anxiety is relatively mild and does not exert a negative inhibitory effect on academic performance. The main sources of anxiety include insufficient language skills, examination pressure, inadequate teaching methods and means, and insufficient awareness of the importance of language learning. Based on these findings, this study recommends that teachers create a relaxed learning environment, enhance students' awareness of the importance of language learning, provide personalized guidance, and establish a positive evaluation mechanism. However, the study is limited by the small number of male participants. Future research should expand the sample size and include more institutions and majors to deepen the understanding of second foreign language learning anxiety and provide stronger support for improving teaching quality.*
Keywords: *English major, Second language learning, Learning anxiety, Panzhihua University*

I. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the context of the accelerating globalization process, mastering one or more foreign languages has become an essential skill and a common necessity in contemporary society. Foreign language learning not only facilitates individual career advancement but also enhances cross-cultural communication abilities and improves overall personal quality. However, in the process of foreign language learning, particularly in second language acquisition, students often experience varying degrees of anxiety. According to psychological theories, anxiety, as an emotional response, originates from an individual's uncertainty and worries about future events. This emotion is particularly evident in language learning, as it involves complex cognitive processes and emotional factors. [1] Additionally, learners may face evaluation pressures from peers and teachers, as well as concerns about their own learning outcomes, all of which can easily trigger anxiety.

At Panzhihua University, students majoring in English are similarly affected by anxiety during their learning process. Panzhihua University is a local applied undergraduate institution located in Panzhihua City, Sichuan Province, southwestern China. Its English major aims to cultivate versatile talents with a solid foundation in the English language and strong cross-cultural communication skills. However, due to various reasons such as limited language environments, monotonous teaching methods, and individual differences among students, anxiety is a common experience in their English learning. [2] This anxiety not only affects students' learning outcomes but may also have negative impacts on their physical and mental health.

Therefore, it is both necessary and urgent to conduct an in-depth investigation into the current status of second language learning anxiety among English major students at Panzhihua University and to explore effective teaching strategies. This research will not only help improve the quality of English learning and promote the comprehensive development of students but also provide valuable references for the reform of English teaching in local universities.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to systematically investigate and analyze the anxiety experienced by English major students at Panzhihua University during their second language learning process, identify the main causes of anxiety, and propose targeted teaching strategies and recommendations. Specifically, the research objectives include the following aspects: First, to understand the level of anxiety and its manifestations among English major students at Panzhihua University through questionnaires and interviews. Second, to explore the primary factors contributing to students' anxiety, including curriculum design, teaching methods, learning environment, and individual psychology. Third, based on the research findings, to propose effective teaching strategies and recommendations to help students alleviate anxiety and improve learning outcomes. Fourth, to provide references and insights for English teaching in other similar institutions, thereby promoting the development and reform of foreign language education.

Through these objectives, this study aims to offer beneficial guidance for the teaching practice of the English major at Panzhihua University and contribute to the broader field of foreign language teaching research.

II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Definition and Measurement of Second Language Learning Anxiety

Second language learning anxiety refers to the emotional states of tension, unease, and fear that learners experience during the process of learning and using a second language. This anxiety primarily stems from the pressures associated with language use, such as concerns about inaccurate pronunciation, fear of grammatical errors, and worries about being ridiculed by others. According to psychological research, anxiety can be categorized into facilitative anxiety and debilitative anxiety. Facilitative anxiety can motivate learners to study harder by stimulating their drive to learn, while debilitative anxiety may hinder learners' cognitive processes and negatively impact their learning outcomes. [3]

To scientifically measure second language learning anxiety, researchers have developed various tools. Among them, the most widely used is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. in 1986. The FLCAS consists of 33 items covering three main dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. [4] The FLCAS employs a Likert 5-point scale, with scores ranging from 33 to 165, where higher scores indicate a higher level of anxiety. This scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity and has been extensively applied in research on foreign language learning anxiety.

2.2 Review of Domestic and International Research

Extensive research both domestically and internationally has shown a significant negative correlation between second language learning anxiety and learning outcomes. For example, Gardner et al. (1976) found in their study of Canadian high school students that French classroom anxiety was negatively correlated with oral proficiency, indicating that higher levels of anxiety were associated with poorer oral performance. Koch and Terrell (1991) discovered that public speaking in classroom activities induced varying degrees of anxiety in most learners. Price (1991) conducted a questionnaire survey on students' anxiety factors and found that almost all respondents reported the greatest anxiety when speaking a foreign language in front of peers, fearing pronunciation errors and ridicule.

In China, Xue Lifang investigated the relationship between language anxiety and the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and found that anxiety had a negative impact on all these skills. [5] Zeng Xiaoshan et al. compared the levels of English learning anxiety among college students in traditional classroom settings and in network multimedia environments. Their analysis showed that the latter environment indeed helped reduce foreign language learning anxiety, but anxiety still persisted. [6] Xiong Suchun argued that language anxiety is related to individual learners, competition among peers, and the immaturity of network technology. [7]

These studies demonstrate that anxiety is an important emotional factor in foreign language learning that significantly impacts learners' language abilities and learning outcomes. Therefore, an in-depth investigation into the causes of anxiety and strategies for its alleviation is of great significance for improving the effectiveness of foreign language teaching.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Research Participants

This study focused on third-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Panzhihua University. The selection of participants was based on the following principles: First, English major students, as direct participants in second foreign language learning, represent a population whose anxiety experiences are both typical and of significant research value. Second, as a local applied undergraduate institution, Panzhihua University has unique characteristics in terms of language learning environment and resources, providing a rich empirical basis for this study. Specifically, 46 third-year English major students were selected for this study,

comprising three males and 43 females, with the aim of gaining an authentic understanding of their anxiety levels and trends during English learning.

3.2 Research Instruments

To comprehensively understand the anxiety levels of English major students at Panzhihua University, this study employed two data collection tools: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaire Survey The questionnaire was the primary data collection instrument in this study. It consisted of two main sections: The first section collected basic demographic information, including gender, age, grade level, and duration of English study. The second section utilized a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. to measure students' anxiety levels. Given the specific teaching context of the university, the original scale was adapted to include 24 items. Specifically, one item was related to gender, while the remaining 18 items covered three dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and classroom anxiety. Additionally, five items were included to assess students' coping strategies for anxiety, self-regulation strategies, learning purposes, perceived value of learning, and suggestions for teaching. The questionnaire employed a Likert 5-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5 points) to "strongly disagree" (1 point), with higher scores indicating higher levels of anxiety.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed and collected via an online survey platform, resulting in 46 valid responses, achieving a 100% response rate. The data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS, which included descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of students' anxiety levels, including mean scores and standard deviations. Correlation analysis was employed to explore the relationship between anxiety levels and academic performance.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Current Status of Second Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Based on the questionnaire results, the average score on the FLCAS was 3.28, with a standard deviation of 0.05. This indicates that the overall level of second foreign language learning anxiety among English major students at Panzhihua University is moderate. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that anxiety levels are relatively uniform across the group, with no significant individual differences. Specifically, the average scores for communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation were 3.33, 3.28, and 3.22, respectively. This suggests that among the three types of anxiety, communication apprehension is the most pronounced, while fear of negative evaluation has the least impact on classroom anxiety. In terms of individual differences, communication apprehension exhibited the greatest variability, test anxiety showed the least variability, and classroom anxiety had intermediate variability.

Table 1. Overall Anxiety Levels

Item / value	Communication Anxiety	Test Anxiety	Classroom Anxiety
Mean Anxiety Score	3.33	3.28	3.22
Internal Standard Deviation	0.348	0.193	0.21
External Standard Deviation	0.05		

Further analysis revealed significant differences between female and male students in terms of communication anxiety, test anxiety, and classroom anxiety. Female students had the highest mean score in communication anxiety (3.33), indicating that they may experience relatively higher levels of anxiety in communicative situations, such as when interacting with others or participating in social activities, where they are more likely to feel nervous and uncomfortable. The mean score for test anxiety was the lowest among females (3.22), while classroom anxiety had an intermediate mean score (3.28). In contrast, male students had lower mean scores across all three dimensions of anxiety, with values of 2.93 for communication anxiety, 2.72 for test anxiety, and 2.61 for classroom anxiety, suggesting that their overall anxiety levels were relatively lower than those of female students.

Table 2. Gender Differences

Item / Gender	Mean Communication Anxiety	Mean Test Anxiety	Mean Classroom Anxiety
Female	3.33	3.22	3.28
Male	2.93	2.72	2.61
Gender Standard Deviation	0.2	0.25	0.34

Further analysis of the individual items under the three dimensions of communication anxiety, test anxiety, and classroom anxiety revealed the following findings:

For communication anxiety, which included five items, Item 4 ("I feel nervous when the teacher asks me questions") had the highest mean anxiety score (3.63), while Item 6 ("I lack confidence in class") had the lowest mean anxiety score (2.83). This suggests that the primary source of communication anxiety is related to students' perceived knowledge deficiencies rather than a lack of confidence.

Test anxiety included six items, with Item 13 ("I feel very nervous when an exam is approaching") having the highest mean anxiety score (3.58) and Item 17 ("I blame myself for a long time after making silly mistakes during exams") having the lowest mean anxiety score (3.04). The fact that students experience anxiety before exams but are less concerned about making mistakes during exams indicates a relatively positive mindset, which may have a facilitative effect on exam performance.

Classroom anxiety included seven items, with Item 12 ("One of the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, or writing—always makes me anxious") having the highest mean anxiety score (3.56) and Item 7 ("I worry that my classmates will laugh at me in class") having the lowest mean anxiety score (2.95). This suggests that students' anxiety is primarily related to their perceived inadequacies in language proficiency rather than concerns about being ridiculed by peers.

Table 3. Highest and Lowest Anxiety Scores

Anxiety Dimension	Number of Questions	Highest Mean Score	Corresponding Question	Lowest Mean Score	Corresponding Question
Communication Anxiety	5	3.63	Question 4	2.83	Question 6
Test Anxiety	6	3.58	Question 13	3.04	Question 17
Classroom Anxiety	7	3.56	Question 12	2.95	Question 7

The interview results also supported the findings from the questionnaire survey. Students generally reported feeling the most anxious when interacting with teachers, primarily due to a fear of making mistakes and a sense of inadequacy in their learning. For example, one student stated, "I get nervous every time the teacher asks me a question, even if it's a simple one." Another student remarked, "To be honest, I'm not short of confidence, and I don't really care if my classmates laugh at me—especially since that rarely happens nowadays. But I just feel like I haven't learned enough, and I'm not good at this subject, which makes me anxious whenever I think about it." These comments reflect that the anxiety experienced by students in the three dimensions is primarily due to their perceived failure to meet their own expectations in learning the subject.

4.2 Analysis of the Correlation between Anxiety and Academic Performance

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test is a method used to determine whether a single sample is derived from a specific distribution. When using the K-S test to check if the overall learning anxiety follows a normal distribution, the null hypothesis (H0) is that the overall learning anxiety follows a normal distribution, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is that it does not. The results of the single-sample K-S test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Single-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Overall Mean
N		46
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	3.2780
	Standard Deviation	.73158
Most Extreme Difference	Absolute	.164
	Positive	.164
	Negative	-.135
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.114
Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed)		.167

a. The test distribution is normal.
b. Calculated based on the data.

The asymptotic significance (2-tailed) P-value is 0.167. In typical research, the significance level is often set at 0.05. Since P > 0.05, we cannot reject the null hypothesis, indicating that the data set follows a normal distribution to some extent, allowing for correlation analysis.

To explore the relationship between anxiety levels and students' academic performance, this study conducted a correlation analysis between the overall anxiety scores of the three dimensions of the FLCAS and the final exam scores. Specifically, the Pearson correlation coefficient between scores and communication anxiety is 0.271. The Pearson correlation coefficient between scores and classroom anxiety is 0.206. The Pearson correlation coefficient between scores and test anxiety is 0.197. The significance (2-tailed) P > 0.05 for all three dimensions

of anxiety, indicating that there is a certain degree of positive correlation between scores and communication anxiety, classroom anxiety, and test anxiety, but this correlation is not statistically significant. This suggests that anxiety does not have a negative impact on students' grades.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis

		Scores	Communication Anxiety	Classroom Anxiety	Test Anxiety
Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.271	.206	.197
	Significance (2-tailed)		.069	.170	.190
	N	46	46	46	46
Communication Anxiety		Pearson Correlation	.271	1	.797**	.780**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.069		.000	.000
	N	46	46	46	46
Classroom Anxiety		Pearson Correlation	.206	.797**	1	.825**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.170	.000		.000
	N	46	46	46	46
Test Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.197	.780**	.825**	1
	Significance (2-tailed)	.190	.000	.000	
	N	46	46	46	46

. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Further analysis revealed that the Pearson correlation analysis showed a very strong correlation between the different dimensions of anxiety. The Pearson correlation coefficient between communication anxiety and classroom anxiety is 0.797, which is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a P-value of 0.000, much less than the significance level of 0.01. This indicates a strong positive correlation between communication anxiety and classroom anxiety. That is, when the level of communication anxiety increases by one unit, the level of classroom anxiety will also increase significantly, assuming all other conditions remain unchanged.

In terms of communication anxiety and test anxiety, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.780, which is also highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a P-value of 0.000, meeting the conditions for statistical significance. This suggests a close positive correlation between communication anxiety and test anxiety, with a highly consistent trend in changes between the two.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between classroom anxiety and test anxiety is 0.825, which is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a P-value of 0.000. This indicates a very strong positive correlation between classroom anxiety and test anxiety. The changes in classroom anxiety levels are almost synchronous with changes in test anxiety levels, and this synchronous change is highly reliable and significant in statistical terms.

V. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Sources of Anxiety

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey and interviews, the anxiety experienced by English major students at Panzhihua University primarily originates from the following aspects:

1). Insufficient Language Skills

According to the data analysis in Table 1, students exhibit significant anxiety in communication (mean anxiety score of 3.33). In Table 3, the highest anxiety score for a specific item related to communication anxiety reaches 3.63, highlighting substantial challenges in the application, presentation, and interaction of the second foreign language. Additionally, 59% of students perceive second language learning as time-consuming and labor-intensive, with a general dissatisfaction regarding their language proficiency. The relatively high internal standard deviation for communication anxiety suggests that it is largely associated with individual personality traits and language ability levels.

2). Exam Pressure

During interviews, students widely expressed concerns that failing exams could lead to numerous adverse consequences, such as losing eligibility for academic awards, failing to meet grade point requirements, or even risking delayed graduation. As shown in Table 1, the mean exam anxiety score is 3.28, indicating that students do care about exam outcomes. However, according to Table 3, pre-exam anxiety is the highest (3.58), while anxiety related to exam results drops to 3.09, suggesting that students generally maintain a positive mindset towards exams.

3). Teaching Methods and Means

Based on the questionnaire responses, 56.52% of students reported that the teaching methods in second language classes are monotonous and traditional, failing to create a relaxed learning atmosphere, which contributes to anxiety. Moreover, 65.21% of students indicated that the teaching pace is unreasonable, making it difficult for them to keep up and increasing the perceived difficulty of learning. However, despite the high level of dissatisfaction with teaching methods, classroom anxiety is relatively low and uniform across students (as shown in Table 1), indicating that while students are unhappy with the teaching methods, it does not significantly increase

their anxiety. According to Table 3, the primary cause of classroom anxiety is still related to students' perceived language deficiencies.

4). Perception of the Importance of Language Learning

When asked about the importance of second language learning in the survey, only 10.86% of students rated it as "very important." This lack of perceived importance directly leads to insufficient time and effort invested in second language learning, which may be the root cause of the various anxieties mentioned earlier.

5.2 Teaching Strategies and Recommendations

Based on the research findings and literature review, the following teaching strategies and recommendations are proposed to help students alleviate anxiety and improve learning outcomes:

1). Creating a Relaxing Learning Environment

Teachers should strive to create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment to reduce students' tension and stress. For example, incorporating games, role-playing, and other interactive activities can enhance the fun and engagement of the classroom. Given that 56.52% of students reported dissatisfaction with the monotonous and traditional teaching methods, it is crucial to make learning more engaging. When students are interested, they will be more willing to communicate and apply their knowledge without fear of difficulties in interaction.

2). Enhancing Students' Awareness of the Importance of Second Language Learning

In the globalized job market, proficiency in a second language is a significant advantage. Multinational corporations and international organizations often require language skills, which can help job seekers stand out in the employment market and access more opportunities. In fields such as foreign trade, translation, diplomacy, and tourism, a second language is essential for communicating with global clients and partners, expanding business, and even obtaining overseas assignments that can elevate career prospects. By recognizing the importance of second language learning, students are more likely to invest more time and effort, leading to better learning outcomes and reduced anxiety.

3). Providing Personalized Guidance

Teachers should pay attention to individual differences among students and offer personalized support. For example, individual tutoring or study groups can help address specific learning challenges. For students with higher anxiety levels, one-on-one counseling can help overcome psychological barriers and improve learning outcomes. As shown in Table 2, females generally exhibit higher anxiety levels across all dimensions, so teachers should focus more on their learning conditions. However, it is worth noting that the small number of male students in the class may limit the representativeness of the data for this group, which is a limitation of this study.

4). Establishing a Positive Evaluation Mechanism

Teachers and institutions should develop optimized evaluation systems to minimize the negative impact of poor exam results on students. Diversified assessment methods, such as positive feedback and reward mechanisms, can enhance students' confidence and motivation. By adopting a more relaxed attitude towards exams, students can focus more on improving their language skills rather than worrying about exam outcomes.

VI. Conclusion

This study focused on the second language learning anxiety of 46 third-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Panzhihua University. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using SPSS. The following conclusions were drawn:

In terms of anxiety status, English major students at this university exhibit a moderate level of second language learning anxiety, with relatively uniform anxiety levels across the group. The mean anxiety scores for communication anxiety, test anxiety, and classroom anxiety are 3.33, 3.28, and 3.22, respectively, with communication anxiety being the most prominent. Significant gender differences were observed, with females showing higher anxiety levels across all dimensions. While communication anxiety, test anxiety, and classroom anxiety are strongly correlated, their positive correlation with academic performance is not statistically significant. This suggests that while the stress associated with second language learning is continuous, it does not have a clear negative impact on academic performance.

The sources of anxiety are primarily attributed to insufficient language skills, exam pressure, teaching methods, and a lack of perceived importance of language learning. Students face significant challenges in language application and interaction, are concerned about exam outcomes, and are dissatisfied with teaching methods and pace. The root cause may be the insufficient time and effort invested in language learning due to a lack of perceived importance.

Based on these findings, this study proposes corresponding teaching strategies and recommendations. Teachers should create a relaxed learning environment, enhance students' awareness of the importance of second language learning, provide personalized guidance, pay special attention to female students with higher anxiety levels, and establish a positive evaluation mechanism with diversified assessment methods to reduce exam pressure.

However, this study has certain limitations, such as the small number of male participants, which may

affect the persuasiveness of the data. Future research should expand the sample size and include more institutions and majors to further explore the factors influencing second language learning anxiety and develop more effective intervention strategies, thereby providing stronger support for improving the quality of second language teaching.

References

[1]. Li Jing, Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Foreign Language Teaching. *Inner Mongolia Radio & TV University Journal*, 2007(5): pp. 92-93.

[2]. Liu Min, The Impact of Anxiety on Second Language Learning among Students in Chinese Vocational Colleges. *Overseas English*, 2021(16): pp. 84-85.

[3]. Zhao Ningxia, Strategies for Alleviating Foreign Language Learning Anxiety among Vocational Students in Blended Learning Contexts. *Science, Education, and Culture Review*, 2024(3): pp. 181-184.

[4]. Zhang Jiaqiang & Guo Li, Undergraduate Classroom Anxiety Research: A Re-examination of the Reliability and Validity of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). *Journal of North China University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2018. 18(1): pp. 105-112+119.

[5]. Wang Yaru, A Review of Second Language Learner Anxiety Research. *Modern Chinese Language (Language Research Edition)*, 2016(8): pp. 7-10.

[6]. Xu Huali & Wang Cui, English Major Students' Learning Anxiety in MOOC Environment. *Hubei Open Vocational College Journal*, 2018. 31(21): pp. 148-149.

[7]. Zeng Xiangfa & Wang Song, A Survey of Learning Anxiety and Countermeasures in College English Network Courses. *Higher Education Journal*, 2021. 7(14): pp. 191-196.