

THE CORRELATION AMONG EFL LEARNERS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY, TEST ANXIETY AND TEST PERFORMANCE-A CASE OF MONGOLIAN EFL STUDENTS OF GENDER, LENGTH OF STUDY

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety; Test anxiety; Language learning; EFL students

ABSTRACT

Foreign language anxiety plays a crucial role in language learning, and it has been widely studied in the field of foreign language education. Luo (2012) suggested that foreign language anxiety is connected to the classroom environment, the characteristics of the language learner, the target language, and the foreign language learning process. This paper firstly provides an exhaustive review of the studies focused on foreign language anxiety over the past few decades. In the second section, the paper aims to investigate the correlation among foreign language classroom anxiety, test anxiety and test performance as well as the gender differences and age of previous studying experience among EFL Mongolian students through SPSS. The findings of the quantitative data showed that only foreign language anxiety and test anxiety show a significant correlation with each other. They also revealed that length of study is not a factor in anxiety. The effect of gender on test anxiety is significant, and it is clearly concluded that this anxiety would be higher in females than in males.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, foreign language anxiety has been widely studied in the field of foreign language education. Anxiety is regarded as one of the psychological factors in the success or failure of language learners; then, it has become the foci of language research. Interest in this field has grown steadily since the 1990s and it has raised researchers' motivations. There are two general definitions of anxiety in language learning. One of them is called trait anxiety, and the other one is called state anxiety. Phillips (1992) indicated that trait anxiety is a relatively stable tendency to exhibit anxiety in various circumstances, while state anxiety is a kind of trait anxiety that appears in a specific situation. However, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) revealed that trait anxiety had not been proved as vital in developing second language learning. Then Horwitz et al. (1986) considered language anxiety as distinct a distinct complexity of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with classroom language learning due to the uniqueness. They developed a foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) to test the degree of language anxiety. Robust studies have focused on investigating the effect of language anxiety in EFL students' language learning. However, it must be investigated at greater depth to find out its causes and potential solutions (Al-Sibai, 2005). Foreign language anxiety is an important issue that can not be ignored to ensure successful language education. Therefore, the current paper sheds light on English learning anxiety among Mongolian EFL students from a middle-high school in inner Mongolia. It also investigates the impact of gender and learning time on foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. It aims to help teachers understand students' foreign language anxiety and test anxiety level, improve teaching methods, and help students improve their grades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a distinct complexity of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with classroom language learning due to the uniqueness. Researchers believe that foreign language anxiety is an important factor in foreign language learning and should be taken seriously (Luo, 2013). There are four theoretical models of foreign language anxiety in the existing literature. Horwitz (2001) put forward the three-component model, which divided the foreign language anxiety into communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Kim (2002) proposed that foreign language anxiety consists of Production Anxiety, literary Anxiety, and Aural and Evaluation Anxiety. Based on the theories of Horwitz, Luo (2012) suggested that foreign language anxiety is connected to the classroom environment, the characteristics of the language learner, the target language, and the foreign language learning process. In addition, Luo (2012) proposed that foreign language anxiety consists of listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, reading anxiety and writing anxiety. The measurement of foreign language anxiety includes the processing and output anxiety scale proposed by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) and Kim (2000) foreign language performance anxiety scale. The most common questionnaire is the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It mainly focuses on oral Language anxiety, including learners' anxiety level, subjective feeling, perception, and negative attitude and avoidance behavior in the foreign language classroom.

Compared with foreign language anxiety, there are few studies on test anxiety in the literature. Sieber (1980) indicated that test anxiety is a particular case of general anxiety, including phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses related to fear of failure and experience with evaluation or testing. Joy (2013) pointed out that test anxiety is most intense during the testing phase, followed by the pre-test phase. Anxiety was lowest after the test. Most scholars think that test anxiety and foreign language learning anxiety are essentially related, so it is difficult to distinguish the causal relationship between them. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) argued that poor test scores lead to higher anxiety. In'nami (2006) examined the effect of test anxiety on listening test performance. The results indicated that none of the factors of test anxiety (i.e., general test anxiety, test-irrelevant thinking and mood) affected listening test performance; that is in line with the findings of Aida (1994) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), who argued that test anxiety is a general anxiety problem

that is not explicitly related to the foreign language learning environment.

Foreign language anxiety can bring about many negative manifestations for learners. Horwitz (1991) found that foreign language anxiety had the most significant impact on listening and speaking. Dua and Price (1993) indicated that many students were reluctant to speak a foreign language in class, even in front of their peers. Many students experience sweating and rapid heartbeat, and abdominal pain in the foreign language speaking classroom. In addition, learners show high levels of anxiety in listening exams when they have difficulty with the listening material.

Scholars disagree on the relationship between gender and learners' foreign language learner anxiety. Rabia (2004) found that female learners experience more foreign language anxiety than male students. However, others have argued while others have argued that male students have significantly higher foreign language anxiety than female students (Hasan & Fatimah, 2014). Although many studies agreed that the age at which foreign language learning begins is an important factor influencing second language acquisition, few articles have examined its effect on foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. This study aims to investigate the relationship between foreign language anxiety test anxiety and test scores. It also investigates the impact of gender and learning time on foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. It is helpful for teachers to understand students' foreign language anxiety and test anxiety level, improve teaching methods, and help students improve their grades. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. Is there any relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and foreign language test anxiety, foreign language classroom anxiety and test scores, test anxiety and test scores?

RQ2. Is there any relationship between student's length of studying English and foreign language classroom anxiety, length of studying English and test anxiety?

RQ3. Is there any difference between foreign language learning anxiety and test anxiety across categories of gender?

RQ4. Do foreign language learning anxiety and test anxiety scores differ across categories of gender and age of the previous study?

Method

2.1 Participants

The participants of this test are third-grade students in senior high school in China. We distributed 42 questionnaires, and 41 valid questionnaires were

returned. The researchers conducted the experiment in the classroom, and the test was agreed upon by the teacher and the students. The participants' first language is all Mandarin, with English being the second language. Of the total number of participants, 18 were female and 23 were male.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Respondents (N=41)

Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	23	56
	Female	18	43
Length of Studying English	5 Years	2	4
	7 Years	2	4
	8 Years	11	26
	9 Years	26	63

2.2 Instrumentation

This study used two questionnaires to measure the anxiety level of the participants.

The first one is the FLCAS, developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It consists of 33 questions that test learners' foreign language learning anxiety on a five-point scale. The study made changes to the reverse questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 and 32 in the original questionnaire to facilitate the calculation. All the reverse questions were changed to positive. The research set the rating according to Chinese people's habits, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Another questionnaire is the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) created by Sarason (1975). This questionnaire is a five-measure scale questionnaire containing 37 questions. The study made changes to the reverse questions 3, 15, 26, 27, 29 and 33 in the original questionnaire to facilitate the calculation. All reverse questions were changed to positive. The response continuum was 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaires were presented in both English and Chinese to avoid participants not understanding or misunderstanding the questions, as they were not native English speakers.

2.3 Procedures and data collection

42 questionnaires (FLCAS and TAS) were distributed in this study, and 41 valid questionnaires were returned. The researchers sought the consent of all participants and used the mid-term exam results of 41 participants as a reference. We also conducted some background checks in the questionnaire, in-

cluding the gender of the participants and the age at which they started learning English.

For the ELA test, we used the results of the participants' latest mid-term exam. The questionnaire is the 2019 Chinese College Entrance Examination, the most authoritative English test in China. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, subjective and objective questions. The objective questions are scored according to standard answers. The subjective section consisted of two essays, and two experienced teachers marked the tests.

The research used Pearson's r to test the correlation between participants' foreign language anxiety and test anxiety and the correlation between the two types of anxiety scores and test scores separately to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the study adopted the t-test to examine the difference between males and females for foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. In order to investigate the relationship between gender and the age of starting to learn English and anxiety, the two-way ANOVA test was administered to examine the association of these two factors with foreign language anxiety scores and test anxiety scores. The two-way ANOVA use to investigate simultaneous effects of two or more variables on the dependent variable. Therefore, this method is applicable to the current research.

Results

Table 2 Descriptive Statistic

Variable	M	SD	Range
FLCAS	89.95	17.20	49-126
TAS	111.02	16.02	77-142
Test Scores	87.71	17.30	50-123
Length of studying English	8.44	0.98	5-9

Note. FLCAS= Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale; TAS= Test Anxiety Scale

Before trying to answer the research questions, descriptive statistics are provided for the different variables in Table 2. The total scores in this study on FLCAS ranged from 49-126 with a mean of 89.95 (SD =17.20). For TAS, the total scores varied widely, from 77-142 with a mean of 111.02 (SD =16.02), which shows a high level of anxiety among students on test anxiety. The test scores for each student served as an overall index of performance, which ranged from 50-123, with a mean of 87.71. The amount of time that students spent previously studying English centered on the 5-9 scale. According to the Mean, a standard deviation of 0.98 confirms this slight difference in length of studying English, indicating that most students had studied English 8-9 years. However, the results standard deviation of FLCAS, TAS and test scores are 17.20, 16.02 and 17.30, respectively, suggesting that there is a significant difference in the

distribution of individuals scores in these three parts.
Question 1

Is there any relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and foreign language test anxiety, foreign language classroom anxiety and test scores, test anxiety and test scores?

Table 3. Pearson Correlation (N = 41)

Variable	FLCAS	TAS	Test Score
FLCAS	1.00		
TAS	.448*	1.00	
	Sig.	.03	
Test Score	-.302	-.301	1.00
	Sig.	.055	.894

Note. FLLAS = Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale; FLCAS = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The index of the relationship between the FLCAS and TAS was a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The Pearson r (see Table 3) indicated a significant positive relationship between the two scales ($r = .448$, $p < .01$). The finding of the positive relationship suggests that the two scales are related constructs and are not independent of each other. That means students with higher levels of FLCAS tended to have a higher level of TAS and vice versa.

The results in Table 3 show a negative correlation between test scores and TAS; however, it was not statistically significant ($r = -.301$, $p > .05$). There is a negative relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and test scores, but no statistically significant relationship was found between them ($r = -.302$, $p > .05$).

Question 2

Is there a significant relationship between student's length of studying English and foreign language classroom anxiety, length of studying English and test anxiety?

Table 4. Correlation between FLCAS and length of studying English (N = 41)

		Length of studying English	Sig
FLCAS	Spearman's rho	.160	.317
	Kendall's tau-b	.131	.301

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 5. Correlation between TAS and length of studying English (N = 41)

		Length of studying English	Sig
TAS	Spearman's rho	.136	.396
	Kendall's tau-b	.111	.382

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The charts show there is no linear relationship between FLCAS and the length of studying English. Hence, this study uses Spearman's rho and Kendall's tau to evaluate whether there is a significant monotonic relationship between them. Table 4 and Table 5 show no statistically significant correlation between

students' length of studying English and foreign language classroom anxiety, length of studying English, and test anxiety, which suggests they are not related constructs and independent of each other.

Question 3

Is there any difference between foreign language learning anxiety and test anxiety across categories of gender?

Table 6 Independent t-test results for gender and FLCAS

		N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
FLCAS	Males	23	87.48	19.057	39	-1.042	.304
	Females	18	93.11	14.397			

In Table 6, the Mean of foreign language classroom anxiety for females ($M = 93.11$) is greater than that of the males ($M = 87.48$). The independent T-test results indicate that this difference is not statistically significant ($p > .05$). Based on this finding, we could report that female students didn't show any difference from male counterparts on FLCAS.

Table 7. Independent t-test results for gender and TAS

		N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
TAS	Males	23	106.04	16.319	39	-2.378	.022*
	Females	18	117.39	13.522			

* $p < .05$

Comparing the Mean of test anxiety between females ($M = 117.39$) and males ($M = 106.04$), it is observed that the test anxiety for the female is higher than that of the males. The data in Table 7 revealed a statistically significant difference between females and males on TAS performance ($p < .05$). In other words, female students are significantly more anxious than the male counterparts.

Question 4

Do foreign language learning anxiety and test anxiety scores differ across categories of gender and age of the previous study?

Table 8. Results of ANOVA for FLCAS

Dependent Variable: FLCAS

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Intercept	135146.419	1	135146.419	485.181	<.001
Gender	2.186	1	2.186	.008	.930
Length of Studying English	1360.453	3	453.484	1.628	.200
Gender x Length of studying English	559.585	1	559.585	2.009	.165
Error	9749.187	35	278.548		

Table 9. Results of ANOVA for TAS

Dependent Variable: TAS

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Intercept	220291.565	1	220291.565	1025.409	<.001
Gender	445.519	1	445.519	2.074	.159
Length of Studying English	1242.716	3	414.239	1.928	.143
Gender x Length of studying English	262.760	1	262.760	1.223	.276
Error	7519.149	35	214.833		

Given the distinct nature of the two anxiety, group differences in Foreign language classroom anxiety and test anxiety were examined by two mean factorial analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA) models, of which gender, length of studying English served as independent variables.

Main effect 1: Gender

The ANOVA results presented in Table 8 and Table 9 reveal non-significant differences, $F(1, 35) = .008, p > .05$ and $F(1, 35) = 2.074, p > .05$, respectively. There are no significant differences between FLCAS as well as TAS based on gender.

Main effect 2: Length of studying English

The ANOVAs (see Tables 8 and 9) illustrate that there were no significant FLCAS, $F = 1.628, p > .05$, and TAS, $F = 1.928, p > .05$, differences attributable to different lengths of studying English (5, 7, 8, 9 years).

Interaction Effects

A non-significant interaction effect for FLCAS, $F = 2.009, p > .05$, emerged in Table 8. The same as Table 9, the interaction effect for TAS is statistically non-significant, $F = 1.223, p > .05$.

The above data revealed that neither gender nor length of studying English cause the difference for FLCAS and TAS, let alone the interaction effects.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We investigate the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and test anxiety. The results of the correlation analysis indicated that the two types of anxieties have a significant positive correlation ($r = .45, p = .003$), confirming the findings of Horwitz (1986) ($r = .53, p < .001$) that the correlation coefficients were very similar. The correlation coefficient is positive, which means that when the FLCAS or TAS score is higher, the other score is higher; this suggests that the two anxieties interact and are not independent. This result of the present study validates previous studies and is consistent with their findings (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997; Salehi & Marefat, 2014). Based on the experiment results, it can be found that when one type of anxiety was observed in the subjects, another type of anxiety was also apparent. That may be because when individuals are at high anxiety levels, they are sensitive to all situations that may cause anxiety (Zeidner & Matthews, 2005). Their anxiety appears in situations that they perceive to be threatening. Both foreign language classes and exams may cause anxiety in students; therefore, when foreign language classroom anxiety levels are high, there will be a correlative effect, making test anxiety levels elevated as well. However, another group of researchers do not see a relationship between the two (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). One possible reason for the results of the present study being contrary to

these studies is that they included a factor analysis of the FLCAS. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that test anxiety was a constituent of language anxiety. The test anxiety measure was included in the FLCAS; this resulted in a lower factor loading for these items. In contrast, no corresponding analysis was conducted in this study, allowing for discrepancies in their results.

The relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and test scores is considered in this study. Cubukcu (2008) and Liu (2006) both concluded that foreign language classroom anxiety has an impact on learning performance, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Horwitz 1986; McIntyre and Gardner 1991). Ganschow et al. (1994) claimed that anxiety levels are inversely proportional to the language ability demonstrated by students, meaning that the more anxious students are, the worse they perform in language. That was confirmed by Ganschow and Sparks (1996). They compared students' performance with different levels of anxiety, with students having high levels of anxiety performing worse than those with low levels of anxiety. However, in this study, the relationship between FLCAS and foreign language test scores is negative and not statistically significant ($r = -.3, p > .05$). The result of this study is the same as the findings of the previous study but is not statistically significant ($p = .055$), probably because the sample data in this experiment is small ($N = 41$) comparing to the other previous experiments. Another reason for this may be due to the FLCAS test itself. Cheng (2004) notes that the three areas - listening, reading and writing anxiety - are noticeably different from foreign language anxiety being measured by the FLCAS. Since the FLCAS focuses on the performance of speaking anxiety, whereas the paper test does not contain a speaking section, thus there is no significant correlation between the FLCAS and the test.

According to the experimental results, there is no relationship between test anxiety and test performance ($r = -.03$), which confirms the findings of previous studies (Cheraghian et al., 2008). Goonan (2003) describes that «test anxiety does not have a direct impact on academic achievement, but it may manifest differently based on many factors, including familial background, level of achievement, motivation, and intellectual giftedness» (p. 7). Moreover, the outcome of this study is not statistically significant ($p > .05$); Aida (1994), as well as Birjandi and Alemi (2010), also concluded the same. Scovel (1991) and Horwitz (2001) argue that an appropriate level of anxiety has a positive effect on foreign language learning; Scovel (1991) explains that an appropriate level of anxiety can improve the thinking ability of an individual, who will be more focused and adjusted to their personal best. The sample in this study does not reflect that, perhaps because the test did not make

them feel threatened, and they did not fear the test, nor did they attach importance to the results.

This study reflects that gender does not affect foreign language anxiety (see Table 6), which means there is no significant difference between men and women in this area of foreign language anxiety ($p > .05$). In addition, in Table 8, the ANOVA shows the same conclusion. There is a large amount of research on the relationship between foreign language anxiety and gender, and their findings are consistent with the present study (Aida, 1994; Alshahrani, 2015). Yet another group of researchers disagrees with this point of view, stating that women are more emotionally stable than men, regardless of the circumstances (Cheng, 2002; Lien, 2011; Mesri, 2012; Shahnaz & Khatiti, 2014). In other words, male anxiety levels would be lower than that of females. However, the present study does not show that result, probably because of the small sample size. It could also be caused by the fact that the actual situation in the classroom did not match the items in the FLCAS, resulting in inaccurate results of the experiment. Overall, the relationship between foreign language anxiety and gender is still controversial without a definitive conclusion, and further research is needed in this area.

A significant relationship between test anxiety and gender can be observed in Table 7, and the TAS is higher in women than in men; this finding has likewise been concluded in almost all relevant studies (Spielberger, 1980; Hembree, 1988; Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Altermatt & Kim, 2004; Stober, 2004; Saedi & Khaliliagdam, 2013). Deffenbacher (1980) explained that females have higher levels of emotionality and are more likely to have higher levels of test anxiety. Also, in the current social environment, women have fewer opportunities to achieve success and are under more pressure compared to men. Therefore, women would be more fearful of failure and more susceptible to test anxiety. Mousavi, Haghshenas and Alishahi (2008) believed that males have lower test anxiety than females that they would figure out how to deal with their anxious state as these would make them appear more masculine.

In Table 8 and Table 9, the factor of the length of study has no influence ($p > .05$) on either foreign language anxiety or test anxiety, which agrees with the experimental result of Cheng (2002). However, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) noted that anxiety levels decrease with rising language competence and proficiency. Nevertheless, the present study does not reflect the same conclusion, and one possible reason is that a high level of English, which requires a higher level of English proficiency, such as vocabulary and advanced grammar, is more difficult for learners. That causes anxiety not to decline as a result of improved English proficiency. Since the length of study has no impact on anxiety, and gender does not significantly contribute to anxiety, their interaction also has no ef-

fect on anxiety.

In summary, for foreign language anxiety, test anxiety and test scores, only foreign language anxiety and test anxiety show a significant correlation with each other. Although test scores are negatively correlated with both types of anxieties, they are not statistically significant, further confirmed by increasing the sample. Length of study is not a factor in anxiety. The effect of gender on test anxiety is significant, and it is clearly concluded that this anxiety would be higher in females than in males. However, due to the small sample size of this study, the relationship between gender and foreign language anxiety cannot yet be concluded, requiring additional research.

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