
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFL Classroom Presentation Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety Among Chinese College Students: Based on Tobias' Model

Zeyu Chen

School of Foreign Languages, UCASS, Beijing 102401, China

Corresponding Author: Zeyu Chen, **E-mail:** 1935561630@qq.com

| ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore Chinese college students' anxiety when conducting English presentations and its correlation with anxiety in the three stages of English learning. Using a questionnaire survey, this study collected data on college students' anxiety when performing English presentations and analyzed the relationship between these data and anxiety in the three stages of Tobias' Model. This study is the first to correlate and analyse presentation anxiety with Tobias' Model, which fills the research gap in the related field. The findings show that college students generally have high presentation anxiety and feel anxious at different stages, including input, process and output. In addition, it is found that presentation anxiety is closely related to all stages, with the strongest link to the output stage. Based on the results of the study, this paper puts forward suggestions for the presentation session in the English classroom for college students.

| KEYWORDS

Foreign language anxiety; presentation; Tobias' Model of FL anxiety

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 22 March 2024

PUBLISHED: 08 April 2024

DOI: 10.32996/jeltal.2024.6.2.3

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 Definition of Foreign Language Anxiety and FLCAS

Research on affective factors in foreign language teaching began in the 1970s. Influenced by Krashen's theory (Krashen, 1982), it has gradually received increasing attention. Horwitz and Cope defined FLA as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" and "Feelings of nervousness, apprehension and uneasiness related to learning a foreign language" (Horwitz, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986). Additionally, students with high levels of foreign language anxiety are fearful of learning a foreign language and may even avoid learning a foreign language (Zhang & Yuan, 2004).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), has become one of the most used and authoritative scales in foreign language anxiety research, with an internal consistency reliability of 0.89 and good predictive validity. A short form of it was presented by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Botes et al. (2022) named it S-FLCAS in 2022. The results show that S-FLCAS is internally consistent, convergent and discriminative, and it has also passed the invariance testing (Botes et al., 2022). Other scholars have adapted the FLCAS scale somewhat for listening, reading, and writing, such as Kim's (2000) Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), Saito et al.'s (1999) Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), and Cheng's (2004) Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale (FLWAS), for targeted research on foreign language learning anxiety.

1.1.2 A Theoretical Study of Foreign Language Anxiety - Tobias' Model

Most scholars view foreign language anxiety as a unidimensional construct; however, Tobias (2013) breaks down language anxiety into three stages from a cognitive psychology perspective: the input stage, the processing stage, and the output stage. In his view, the process of learning is a continuum in which anxiety develops, which affects the effectiveness of learning. {MacIntyre, 1989 #11763@@author-year} are careful to note that "The use of the term stages in Tobias' (2013) model should not be taken to mean that learning occurs in discrete sections" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). However, they still believe that this segmentation approach can be applied to study the roots of the effects of language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

The Input stage refers to the process of presenting knowledge to students. Anxiety in this stage is manifested in the student's uneasiness and irritation in dealing with new knowledge in a foreign language, such as vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. This anxiety may distract the student's attention and lead to decoding less information, thus requiring constant exposure to that information in order to overcome the anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The Processing stage involves the cognitive operations performed on the subject matter: organization, storage, and assimilation of the material. Tobias argues that anxiety affects the cognitive processing of more difficult, more memory-dependent and less organized learning tasks, increasing demands on processing time (Tobias, 2013). In the Output stage, the foreign language is presented in spoken or written form. Anxiety at this stage makes it difficult for students to retrieve vocabulary effectively, apply grammar rules appropriately, or even respond effectively to a foreign language.

1.1.3 Presentation

Based on the requirement of quality improvement in foreign language learning, presentation is very common in Chinese college English courses. It is defined as "a teaching practice in which a student explains a topic to the class, or gives a speech or demonstration that introduces or describes something, with the help of spoken language, body language and other tools" (Xu, 2013), which helps to guide students towards self-directed and discovery learning, mobilize learning, and enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Shen, 2014).

The presentation involves FL anxiety, similar to Speaking Anxiety and Public Speech Anxiety, which have been extensively researched. There are three components of FL anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Among them, communication apprehension means a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people, which plays a major role in FL anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Public speaking anxiety is a branch of communicative apprehension that involves a speaker's level of fear or anxiety about speaking in front of an audience (McCroskey, 1970). Speakers often feel physically ill from speaking in front of an audience. However, presentation is different from mere speaking; it is a personal oral expression (non-dialogue) in a task-specific situation (public speech) and a kind of practical activity integrating a variety of foreign language skills such as English speaking, English public speaking, English writing, etc., which is of high pedagogical significance. Liu has also found that more than one-third of the students felt anxious in their English language classrooms, feared being negatively evaluated, and were apprehensive about public speaking and tests (Liu & Jackson, 2008). This suggests that students' emotions while performing English presentations are closely related to FL anxiety and are worthy of a correlation study.

1.2 Literature Review

In recent years, research on foreign language anxiety has focused on willingness to communicate, writing anxiety, foreign language enjoyment and corrective feedback. The first two aspects have received extensive attention from scholars. Among these studies, a large number of studies are overwhelmingly empirical, and most of them have used the FLCAS scale for their research (Bielak, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2021). According to the research, FL anxiety is negatively correlated with language scores (Hao & Hao, 2001; Zhang & Yuan, 2004), "Foreign language learning anxiety is a factor that significantly influences learners' foreign and second language acquisition" (Wang & Wan, 2001), and FL anxiety has a negative effect on FL achievement (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Therefore, as English is one of the most widely spoken international languages in the world, the study of foreign language anxiety has a crucial role to play in English education and learning.

A number of scholars have studied anxiety in various performance aspects of the foreign language classroom, such as writing, speaking, and public speaking. For example, Barley found that speaking-in-class anxiety is related to speech anxiety, and this study also used the FLCAS scale to support it, which is worth learning from! (Mak, 2011). Many studies have shown that writing anxiety is negatively correlated with student achievement (Daud et al., 2016; Saedpanah & Mahmoodi, 2020; Zabihi et al., 2020). However, there are also studies that did not find a significant correlation (Choi, 2013). Some studies have also found that moderate writing anxiety has a positive impact on writing performance (Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012); foreign language speaking anxiety as a mediator between motivation to learn and willingness to communicate (speaking, reading, writing, listening) (Chung & Leung, 2016); Students' foreign language performance decreases with their level of reading anxiety and general language anxiety levels (Saito et al., 1999). Jun Xie mentioned that one of the anxieties that students have in generating English public speaking is weak English writing skills (Xie, 2019), which is closely related to English proficiency and English language learning. Speaking in the target

language, i.e. oral expression in a foreign language, is seen as the most “threatening” aspect of foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). There are even fewer studies on presentation anxiety, of which Chinese scholar Ao Dun's 2017 study (Ao, 2017) is worth learning, but it targets secondary school students within one school and does not involve college students.

1.3 Problem Statement and Objectives

Based on the theory of foreign language anxiety and the existing studies, it is known that the study of foreign language anxiety plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. However, there are not many studies on foreign language learning anxiety based on the Tobias model. Lu Junying's “Study on the Chinese Language Learning Anxiety of International Students in China—Taking Six Universities in Chengdu as Examples” (Lu, 2022) mentions it as a theoretical background and explores the causes and current situation of international students' anxiety in learning Chinese. Bailey et al. attempted to identify a combination of variables that might be related to the three types of anxiety in Tobias' model, including age, academic achievement, experience abroad, and so on, and comprehensively explored what kinds of factors might affect the anxiety in these three stages, but did not compare the three stages themselves.

Meanwhile, there is little academic research related to presentation, a classroom task, and foreign language anxiety. Inspired by the prevalence and importance of English presentation in college students' English courses, this study combines the two to fill the research gap and chooses to investigate the relationship between it and foreign language learning anxiety.

This study aims to explore whether college students are affected by anxiety when making classroom presentations, to explore the interaction between college students' foreign language anxiety and making classroom presentations, to compare the differences between the three types of anxiety under Tobias' Model of foreign language anxiety among Chinese college students, and to make targeted suggestions based on this, so as to provide ideas for English language learning and teaching in Chinese universities and even in countries around the world.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

This study took college students from all over the country as the objects, and the questionnaires were distributed and collected through a WeChat applet. A total of 172 questionnaires were collected, excluding invalid questionnaires with obvious random answers and questions with omissions and multiple choices, and finally, 168 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of about 98%, among which there were 49 male students and 123 female students; 39 freshmen, 45 sophomores, 68 juniors, and 20 seniors; 76 majoring in English and related majors, and 96 majoring in other majors.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 Basic Status Questionnaire

In order to test the prevalence of the subjects and the validity of the data, the questionnaire was set up with several basic status questions, including the students' gender, grade, major, and college attended. The questionnaire also asked the subjects about the main form of classroom presentation in their college study programme.

2.2.2 EPAS—Adapted Scale of the S-FLCAS

The S-FLCAS scale was adapted, and the description of learning a foreign language was changed to “Giving English presentation”. The new scale was named EPAS (English Presentation Anxiety Scale), which was translated into English. The new scale was named EPAS (English Presentation Anxiety Scale), translated and set as the questionnaire, and the reliability test of SPSS software showed that the Cronbach's coefficient was 0.84. The scale was based on a five-point Likert scale, in which 1 stands for “Strongly Disagree” and 5 stands for “Strongly Agree”. Questions 4 and 5 were scored negatively, and the rest were scored positively and the total number of scores for each of the eight questions was calculated as the anxiety value (8-40), with higher scores indicating greater anxiety about doing English classroom presentations.

2.2.3 Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale, Output Anxiety Scale

Combining Tobias' model, MacIntyre and Gardner proposed three anxiety scales, the Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale, and Output Anxiety Scale, to measure anxiety at different stages (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), with reliability coefficients of 0.78, 0.72, and 0.78, respectively. The Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale, and Output Anxiety Scale are designed to measure the level of anxiety experienced at different stages (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), with reliability coefficients of 0.78, 0.72, and 0.78, respectively, on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree”. The reverse scoring questions were questions 4-6 on the Input Anxiety Scale, questions 2-4 on the Processing Anxiety Scale, and questions 3, 4, and 6 on the Output Anxiety Scale, while the rest of the questions were positively scored. Each of the three scales has 6 questions and the total number of scores for each scale is the anxiety value (6-30), the higher the score, the more severe the anxiety in learning English at that stage.

2.3 Statistical Methods

The data of this study was processed by SPSS Statistics 29.0.2.0.

3 Results

3.1 The Current Situation of Chinese College Students Giving Presentations

The questionnaire inquired about the main forms of classroom presentations in the subjects' college study programmes, of which 129 (76.79%) chose "ppt/pdf/picture/video aids + English presentation", 38 (22.62%) chose "English presentation alone", and 1 person chose other forms. It can be seen that the English presentation form adopted in the current college English classroom mostly requires additional content for assistance, which enriches the form of content accepted and learnt by the students before the presentation and greatly improves the difficulty of students' input and processing of foreign language knowledge.

Table 1. Giving English presentations

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Presentation Anxiety	13	40	27.04	6.755

Presentation anxiety values ranged from 8 to 40. The data showed that the subjects had a mean value of 27.04, which is on the high side, indicating that college students generally have high levels of presentation anxiety. The standard deviation was 6.755, which is a large value, indicating a large variation between individuals.

3.3 Anxiety Levels in Three Stages of English Learning

Table 2. Anxiety Levels of College Students in Three Stages of English Learning

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Input Anxiety	8	30	18.41	3.280
Processing Anxiety	11	30	18.48	3.244
Output Anxiety	12	30	19.67	3.508

The mean values of input, processing and output anxiety were 18.41, 18.48 and 19.67, respectively. It can be seen that the mean anxiety levels of the three stages are quite close to each other, and all of them are located in the middle of the measurement range; the values of the standard deviation of the data of the three stages were 3.280, 3.244 and 3.508 respectively, which are all relatively small, indicating that the data are distributed in a concentrated manner. This suggests that the state of anxiety is very common during speech or presentation. However, the standard deviation of output anxiety is slightly higher than that of input and processing anxiety, indicating that university students are more likely to have individual differences in the final output of their English knowledge.

Among them, the values of anxiety in the input and processing stages are close to each other, and the processing stage is slightly larger than the input anxiety; in contrast, the output stage has the highest mean value of anxiety. And the minimum value of output anxiety is also the highest among the three stages. It can be seen that college students are more anxious when they output their English knowledge (e.g., communicating and writing in English).

3.4 Analysis of the correlation

Table 3. Correlation between college students' anxiety in doing English presentations and anxiety in the three periods of Tobias' Model

		Input Anxiety	Processing Anxiety	Output anxiety
Presentation Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.212**	.471**	.607**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.006	<.001	<.001

Note: **. Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data indicates that the Pearson correlation coefficient between presentation anxiety and input anxiety is 0.212, with a significance level (two-tailed) of 0.006; the correlation coefficient between presentation anxiety and processing anxiety is 0.471, with a significance level (two-tailed) less than 0.001; and the correlation coefficient between presentation anxiety and output anxiety is 0.607, with a significance level (two-tailed) less than 0.001. These results suggest a significant positive correlation between presentation anxiety and input anxiety, processing anxiety, and output anxiety. In other words, an increase in presentation anxiety is associated with heightened levels of anxiety in the input, processing, and output of English knowledge. This demonstrates a close relationship between presentation anxiety and the three stages of English knowledge, indicating a strong emotional connection.

Comparing the correlation coefficients of presentation anxiety with the three stages, it is found that output anxiety is greater than processing anxiety, which is greater than input anxiety. This suggests that the relationship between anxiety in the three stages and presentation anxiety follows the pattern: output stage > processing stage > input stage. Therefore, students who exhibit higher anxiety levels during the output stage are more likely to experience anxiety during presentations. This analysis suggests that presentations require a higher level of English output ability, where students need to fully demonstrate their English proficiency in speech writing, language expression during presentations, and adaptability in English. In comparison, the correlations with the other two stages are lower than the output stage, implying that anxiety levels when preparing for presentations (utilizing input and processing abilities) are lower than during the actual presentation (requiring output ability), indicating that presentations place less emphasis on input and processing of English knowledge.

4 Conclusions and Discussion

This study adopted Tobias' model to divide English learning into three stages and measured students' anxiety levels in each stage. Simultaneously, the study explored the correlation between anxiety levels in these three stages and anxiety during a crucial teaching component in current Chinese university English courses—presentations. This research presents a new perspective on foreign language anxiety studies, which are closely integrated with the real situation of students and thus hold practical significance.

According to the research findings, university students experience anxiety at different stages of English learning (input, processing, and output), indicating that students generally feel a certain degree of anxiety in aspects such as listening, reading, grammar, vocabulary, as well as when expressing abilities in speaking and writing. Among these, anxiety during the output stage is the most prominent, followed by the processing stage, while anxiety during the input stage is relatively lower. When engaging in presentations, university students commonly experience varying degrees of anxiety, showing significant individual differences. There is a notable positive correlation between anxiety levels in different stages of English learning, with the highest correlation observed in the output stage.

Based on the analysis in this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the presentation component in university English classrooms: provide effective support and guidance measures to help students alleviate anxiety during the English learning process, such as specialized training courses, personal guidance, and psychological support; offer targeted training in the output stage of English knowledge, like learning confident body language and improvisational rhetoric, to assist students in expressing themselves confidently and fluently in English, showcasing substantial content. By implementing these suggestions and strategies, we can better understand and address students' anxiety during the English learning process, aiding in improving learning outcomes and English proficiency.

However, this study has some limitations: the relatively small sample size may not comprehensively represent the overall situation of the university student population; the survey results are limited to measuring anxiety levels and correlation, lacking an in-depth qualitative study on the causes and influencing factors of anxiety; and it did not investigate the grades of presentations.

To address these issues and enhance the feasibility of future research, the following recommendations are proposed: expand the sample size to cover a more diverse range of university student backgrounds and characteristics to increase the representativeness and reliability of the study; integrate qualitative research methods to delve deeper into the causes, influencing factors, and coping strategies of presentation anxiety, providing a more comprehensive solution; further research why presentation anxiety is closely related to output anxiety, exploring the underlying reasons to offer more practical advice for university students' English learning and teaching, thereby contributing to the improvement of Chinese university students' English proficiency.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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