*Research Article*

# A Study on Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Among English Major Students in Online Environments

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning anxiety is a common phenomenon among students, impacting their language acquisition and proficiency levels. English major students, particularly in an online setting, face unique challenges that can exacerbate anxiety levels. Understanding the factors contributing to this anxiety is crucial for designing effective language learning strategies and support systems. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to gather data on English major students' experiences with foreign language learning anxiety in an online environment. Participants were selected from various English programs, and data collection involved self-report measures and in-depth interviews to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the prevalence and impact of foreign language learning anxiety on English major students in an online setting. By examining the factors contributing to anxiety and its effects on language learning outcomes, the study aimed to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers to enhance online language learning experiences for students. Findings: The study revealed that while online English learning can reduce overall anxiety levels and improve listening and reading skills, it also leads to increased anxiety in communication tasks. Factors such as technology-related challenges, lack of face-to-face interaction, and performance pressure contribute to students' anxiety levels. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms to help students navigate and overcome language learning anxiety in online environments.

## Introduction

Since the 1970s, many second language researchers have discovered that language anxiety will have an impact on second language learning, and the emotional problems of foreign language learners in the language acquisition process have gradually been paid attention to (Wu, 2023). Because Chinese students mainly play the role of Therefore, many studies have pointed out that foreign language learning anxiety is common among students in traditional classroom environments (Robinson, 2001). In 2010, the "National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)" clearly required education information. Subsequently, flipped classrooms using information technology sprung up across the country. Quantity appears. As a new teaching model, the flipped classroom successfully combines online learning with offline physical classes closely and effectively and can effectively alleviate or reduce students' foreign language learning anxiety (He, 2017; Kuimova et al., 2018). At the end of 2019, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out around the world. Chinese universities responded to the Ministry of Education's call to "suspend classes without stopping learning." Many universities foreign language teachers transformed online and offline flipped classrooms into online flipped classrooms, and students in online flipped classrooms foreign language learning anxiety is worth exploring.

## literature review

Foreign language learning anxiety was first defined as "a unique complex of complex self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that are related to and arise from the language learning process in the classroom". Related research on foreign language learning anxiety has found that foreign language learning anxiety commonly affects students' listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation (Anandari, 2015; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985).There is a significant negative correlation between L2 self, learning strategies, learning attitude, self-efficacy (Robinson, 2001). Foreign language learning anxiety is also closely related to the foreign language learning environment (Filipović, 2022) and the network environment. Foreign language teaching in context can reduce foreign language learning anxiety. Flipped classrooms can also effectively reduce foreign language learning anxiety (Robinson, 2001). The flipped classroom was originally proposed (Lamb & Arisandy, 2019). which generally refers to "the asynchronous

completion of knowledge memorization and understanding online by individuals (traditionally done by groups in class)."The group uses knowledge simultaneously offline to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create (traditionally done by individuals after class)," so named because the flipped class is underclass and underclass is on class (Robinson, 2001). and under the influence of the global COVID-19 epidemic, many teachers have begun to build online flipped classrooms, that is, offline group synchronous learning becomes synchronous learning in online classes. Currently, research on flipped classrooms at home and abroad mainly focuses on traditional online and offline classes. Combining the teaching model of the flipped classroom, reflection on the essence of the flipped classroom, students' learning performance, student readiness (Robinson, 2001). Research on students' foreign language learning anxiety in flipped classrooms mainly focuses on group synchronous learning classes, ignoring individual asynchronous learning outside of class. Moreover, there is little research on the changes in foreign language learning anxiety during the flipped classroom process. Therefore, focusing on online the impact of the whole process of flipping the classroom on foreign language learning anxiety is of great significance.

## Research methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to gather data on English major students' experiences with foreign language learning anxiety in an online environment. Participants were selected from various English programs, and data collection involved self-report measures and in-depth interviews to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights.

### 3.1   Research objects

The provided sources focus on foreign language learning anxiety in online environments. They highlight how online English learning can reduce anxiety but also increase it in English communication. The study explores how anxiety affects students' ability to learn a language, focusing on elements such as communication anxiety and fear of receiving a poor grade. In general, these investigations illuminated the intricate connection between anxiety and virtual language acquisition. offering insights into how it affects students' performance and perceptions.

### 3.2   Research questions

This study aims to explore foreign language learning under the online flipped classroom model.

Anxiety mainly solves the following three problems:

- Students' foreign language learning before and after a semester of online flipped classroom
  What is the difference between learning anxiety and?
- Students' foreign language performance during a semester of online flipped classroom
  What specific changes have occurred in study anxiety?
- What are the influencing factors for foreign language learning anxiety in online flipped classes?

### 3.3   Participant

This study took 61 first-year English major students as the research subjects, including 9 boys and 52 girls. At the same time, the researcher selected 12 students for semi structured interviews based on the principles of purposive sampling and convenience sampling, including 2 boys and 10 girls.
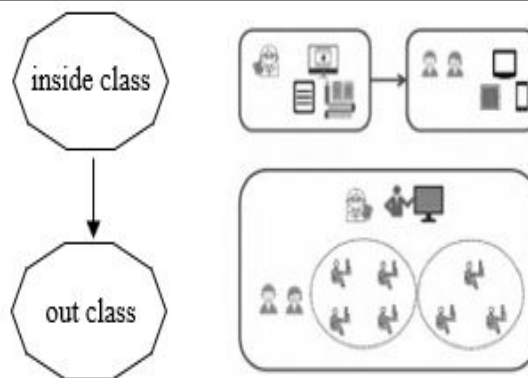


Teachers will conduct targeted teaching based on the big data statistics results of online learning before class, for example, using voice, text interaction and other methods to test and consolidate basic knowledge, and spend more time organizing online cooperation, collaboration, discussion and other groups. Activities guide students to develop higher-order cognitive thinking such as application, analysis, evaluation, and creation based on memorization and understanding.

### 3.4   A   Comprehensive   Scale   Development   and Assessment Approach

In order to fully reflect the foreign language learning anxiety of students in online flipped classrooms, attention needs to be paid to both periods inside and outside the flipped classroom. Therefore, the researcher first conducted a pilot interview and designed an extracurricular foreign language learning anxiety scale based on the interviews. It has three dimensions, namely "attitude", "completion status" and "effectiveness". "Results", a total of 26 items. After testing, the scale has good internal consistency and high reliability (Alpha = 0.827>0.8). Then the validity of the questionnaire was tested, "Extracurricular Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale" "Bartlett's sphere test reached a significant level (p≤0.05), KMO=0.722>0.6, and factor analysis can be performed. By excluding factors with weak loadings and those that cannot be classified, 5 items were deleted and 21 were retained. item. In addition, this study adopted (Lamb & Arisandy, 2020). Students' anxiety related to studying a foreign language in the classroom can be measured using a foreign language learning anxiety scale. Numerous research both domestically and internationally have verified the good reliability and validity of this scale, which has been used extensively (Diener et al., 2013). In order to ensure the accuracy and validity of the items, they were reviewed by the researcher and two other experts. After translation and proofreading, it will be put into use. The foreign language classroom learning anxiety scale is divided into four dimensions, namely "communication fear, "fear of negative evaluation," "test anxiety," and "general anxiety." It includes a total of 33 items. The questionnaire has good reliability and validity. (KMO= 0.705>0.6). In addition to using scales to measure the difference in students' foreign language learning anxiety inside and outside the flipped classroom, the study also used learning logs to focus on the changes in students' foreign language learning anxiety during the online flipped classroom process. Therefore, the researchers asked students to write learning logs every two weeks to record the three stages of pre-class preview, classroom study, and after-class study, as well as the overall learning experience of the course. In addition, the researcher developed an interview outline by conducting pilot interviews with students who had experienced Teacher C's flipped classroom. At the end of the semester, after analyzing the scale and diary, the researcher selected 12 students with different questionnaire scores and large differences in diary content based on the principles of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Conduct semi-

structured interviews to explore factors affecting foreign language learning anxiety in online flipped classrooms.

## 3.5 Data collection and analysis

Before and after this semester, two questionnaire surveys were distributed with the help of Questionnaire Star, and the effective response rate reached 100%. Moreover, starting from weeks 3 to 15, logs will be collected every two weeks with the help of Questionnaire Star, for a total of six times. By counting the keywords and sentences related to anxiety expressed by students,

frequency of occurrence, and observe the changes in students' foreign language learning anxiety during the online flipped classroom learning process. At the end of the semester, the researcher conducted online, semi-structured interviews with 12 students. By coding the interview content, the researchers analyzed the reasons that affect students' foreign language learning anxiety.

## Results

### 4.1 Differences in students' foreign language learning anxiety inside and outside the online flipped classroom

**Table 4.1** Paired sample t-test before and after flipped classroom

| | | Total people | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-test – Post-test | | | | |
| Extra-curricular | manner | 61 | 0.696 | 0. 000 |
| | Completion | 61 | 0.398 | 0. 002 |
| | Effect | 61 | 0.483 | 0. 000 |
| | Overall result | 61 | 0.613 | 0. 000 |
| Classroom | Relationship anxiety | 61 | 0.774 | 0. 000 |
| | fear of negative evaluation | 61 | 0.609 | 0. 000 |
| | test anxiety | 61 | 0.334 | 0. 008 |
| | general anxiety | 61 | －0.234 | 0. 072 |
| | Overall result | 61 | 0.747 | 0. 000 |

**Table 4.1** reflects that there are significant differences in students' foreign language learning anxiety, whether in an online flipped classroom or in-class, and both have decreased significantly (P = 0. 001＜0. 05). Then, through the paired test results, it was found that there are significant differences in the three dimensions of attitude, completion, and effect in foreign language learning anxiety outside the classroom [P = 0. 000 (<0. 05)], but foreign language learning anxiety in the classroom There is no significant difference in the pre- and post-test results for "general anxiety." This may be because it is the first time for all students to experience an online flipped classroom, which is separated from the physical classroom and very different from the traditional classroom model. Therefore, online Students in the classroom also have foreign language learning anxiety.

### 4.2 Anxiety during Foreign language learning

Students' foreign language anxiety generally shows a downward trend during the overall learning process of online flipped classes. It can be clearly seen from Figure 3.1 below that in the first log about the overall feelings of the course, the

frequency of related words and phrases expressing learning anxiety reached 55. According to the specific statistics of the researcher, almost 90% of the students mentioned relevant vocabulary, which means that almost all students have foreign language learning anxiety. Only a few students mentioned, "I don't care what happens; they are all in class anyway," which proves that they will not have anxiety due to changes in course formats. Changes in mentality. As can be seen in Figure 3.1, students' foreign language learning anxiety increased in two stages throughout the semester. In the diary at this stage, some students complained, "There are too many words to remember, and I haven't memorized many words, so the pressure is great." Some students also said, "I sometimes skip classes in class, and the teacher asks me to answer questions. I am very nervous because the questions are all explained in the video, and sometimes I can't answer them without watching them." On the one hand, because the teaching content based on British literary works poses huge cognitive challenges to students' vocabulary, sentence analysis, and even chapters, the difficulty of the texts in some units challenges students' cognitive load and leads to foreign language learning anxiety; on the other hand, when they first start an online flipped classroom, they feel confused and stressed, lack self-control, are afraid to interact with teachers and speak in class, and sometimes are unable to complete homework assignments in (Robinson, 2001).
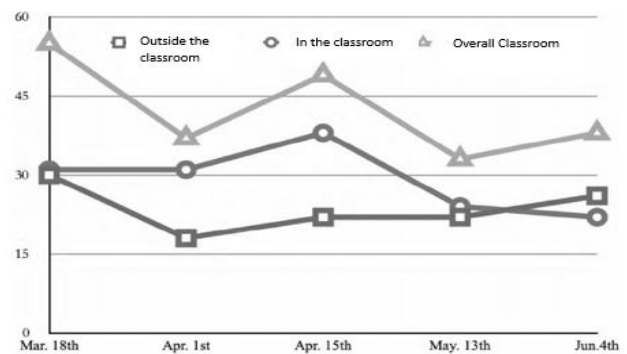


As shown in the figure above, students' foreign language learning anxiety outside the classroom changes in waves but is generally on a downward trend. The first learning diary reflects the highest level of students' foreign language learning anxiety. In the first diary, some students said, "I have to spend a lot of time watching the videos left by the teacher before class, and I am more tired than before when I preview," or "If I don't preview and watch the videos, I won't be able to answer the teacher's questions in class.". Students need to spend more time and energy in order to better participate in the flipped classroom, but in fact, they are not used to spending more extra time on homework in extracurricular learning (Robinson, 2001). In the second diary, it can be found that the overall level of foreign language learning anxiety has dropped. In the diary, some students mentioned that "I have gradually gotten used to it in the past two weeks" and "gradually got used to this method of previewing now." This may be because the students themselves have the ability to adapt to changes (Robinson, 2001). gradually become accustomed to extracurricular tasks. But despite this, there has been a slight upward trend since the second log. In the logs, students expressed an attitude of irritability and resistance. For example, some students said "a little annoyed, "the content is a bit too much, "the video speed is a bit fast, "Although it is substantial, the preview content is too much, etc. After verification with Teacher C, it may be related to the content of the unit studied. Compared with the first chapter of a non-story article such as "Life in Utopia," the second chapter of the text is "Robinson Crusoe," which has long sentences and difficult language and grammar content, so more content needs to be

previewed. And the difficulty increases. "Less, but forced to complete the pre-class preview tasks," so foreign language learning anxiety shows an upward trend. In the classroom, students' anxiety about learning a foreign language increased at first and gradually reduced.  but the overall trend still showed a downward trend. And students' foreign language learning anxiety initially the reason for the continuous increase is that the change in teaching mode has caused students' discomfort. Because teachers will "randomly select" questions in the preview video and review the basic knowledge of the text in the chapter, students are describing their anxiety about learning a foreign language in the classroom. The word "nervous" is often mentioned when reading. According to the content of students' diaries, this is all related to classroom questions. For example, some students complained that "I feel nervous when the teacher calls me" or "The teacher randomly selects people to answer questions." or "I am particularly afraid of choosing me" because language learners have pressure to speak in public and are afraid of making mistakes (Robinson, 2001). The most obvious one is in the third diary. The students' foreign language learning anxiety has significantly increased compared to the previous two times. According to statements such as "We need to give a speech in class" in the log, it is known that the increase in anxiety is because, according to the overall arrangement of the college, every student needs to make a speech in class this week. For keynote speeches, a student is selected to participate in a grade-level speech competition. Another reason why students have higher anxiety about public speaking is that pre-class preparation supports classroom learning; that is, students are fully prepared in class before class. But gradually some students said that "online classes are easier, "I don't have to face the teacher, I am not as nervous as offline, "I don't have to socialize, I feel happy physically and mentally," etc., and after students gradually adapt, they are faced with the online flip. Resistance in the classroom is reduced, so foreign language learning anxiety is also gradually reduced. The sixth diary is mainly used to understand the changes in students' overall anxiety this semester (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). After sorting out the data, more than two-thirds of the students (43 students) said that they have gradually adapted to the online flipped classroom teaching model, and their foreign language learning anxiety has generally decreased. As shown in the above research results, in the flipped classroom, students' foreign language learning anxiety generally decreases on a fluctuating curve.

## 4.3 Factors influencing students' anxiety related to learning a foreign language in online flipped classrooms Using data from learning logs and interviews, this study investigates the primary elements influencing anxiety related to learning a foreign language in online flipped classrooms:

### 4.3.1 *The contribution of the flipped learning environment to value perception*

Although the preview link outside the classroom in the flipped classroom seemingly increases learning to "Preview videos can help us find key points and thinking directions, and reduce anxiety caused by lack of learning ideas." This result shows that pre-class activities in flipped classroom can help reduce cognitive load (Bahir & Huanghe, 2021). However, after experiencing the "flipped classroom" for the first time, students were unable to get rid of their dependence on the teacher and generated anxiety. However, after adapting, their independent learning motivation gradually increased, and students would take the initiative to complete tasks to alleviate the problem of not completing the tasks. The pressure brought by previewing tasks increases their self-confidence in academic performance (Robinson, 2001). For example, some interviewees said, "It was

hard to get used to at first, but it got better gradually." "If I didn't complete the pre-study homework, I would feel guilty before class. On the contrary, after I finished it, I could answer the teacher's questions, and I would be very happy in class." I am confident and hope the teacher will ask me questions." This is because students who adapt to the traditional classroom teaching model lack the motivation to actively learn, and students who are accustomed to teacher-centered teaching are not accustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning (Robinson, 2001).

### 4.3.2 *Output-oriented activities*

In interviews and learning logs, it was found that students were under greater pressure when facing classroom speaking production activities and critical thinking problems. This is mainly because students feel nervous when teachers "randomly select" people to answer questions. In addition, insufficient preparation for pre-study tasks can also lead to fear of being asked questions. In addition, some students said, "I'm afraid of being laughed at, so I'm afraid to answer class questions." But some students thought, "I don't have to face classmates and teachers online like in traditional classes, so I'm not as nervous." In the final analysis, it shows that students are afraid of public speaking and negative evaluation from teachers and classmates (Robinson, 2001). However, on the contrary, some students believe that online flipped classroom can reduce their anxiety and fear of negative evaluation when speaking publicly. In addition, because most students lack critical thinking skills, they will also feel anxious when facing tasks that test their critical thinking ability. Most students lack critical thinking skills and therefore cannot actively complete certain tasks or activities in class. Some students expressed that "sometimes they feel unable to start when faced with written writing tasks that exercise critical thinking." Several interviewees said, "I have never experienced some problems, and I really don't know how to write about them." "I don't think I can think critically about problems as the teacher said."

### 4.3.3 *Learner differences*

Research has found that students' subjective beliefs are also one of the important factors leading to anxiety in foreign language learning. Because students always complain in interviews and diaries that "there are too many videos to watch" and "too many words to memorize", but some students regard the videos as "helpers to help preview" and thus face the situation with a positive attitude. Preview video. When students think that extra-curricular preparation time is more than expected, their satisfaction with the flipped classroom will decrease(Robinson, 2001), because the additional extra-curricular learning time can cause foreign language learning anxiety. This result is also consistent with Brint & Cantwell (2010) are consistent, that is, students regard schoolwork as a part-time job and believe that it is not worth spending too much of their spare time. In addition, some students' worries about exam performance are also an important factor. Some interviewees said, "I'm worried that there is too much content in the exam, and if I don't prepare carefully, I won't be able to achieve the desired results." More importantly, "I don't want my scores to be lower than those of other students." Because of the problems caused by online classes, studying in different spaces makes it difficult to keep track of the learning progress and situation of other students and worry about falling behind. However, students with a good attitude said they are not worried about this. According to the interview results, it is not related to the level of academic performance, but simply because of the reason. Factors in learners' subjective beliefs. This result

shows that second language test scores are negatively related to language anxiety and test anxiety (Robinson, 2001), and some students' subjective attitudes towards test activities lead to an increase in foreign language learning anxiety.

### 4.3.4  Environmental factors

It is worth mentioning that the online learning environment, that is, both the physical environment and the social environment, have an important impact on students' learning anxiety. Students most often mentioned that "my self-discipline ability is somewhat insufficient in the online virtual environment, "it is easy for me to just skim through the details in online classes, "I miss key points. "Or they complain that "online classes do not have a real and vivid classroom atmosphere" and "the unstable network will affect the effectiveness of the class." Compared with physical classrooms, online virtual classrooms lack actual supervision and guidance from teachers. Students do not have the ability to learn independently and are easily distracted, which increases students "unrecognized" "I really feel guilty about listening to lectures," which is consistent with the research results (Palinkašević & Brkić, 2020).In addition, according to some interviewees, "Studying at home does not guarantee that I can have a quiet and suitable learning environment." These situations It shows that external environmental factors that are often ignored can cause students to have learning anxiety. This is contrary to the research results(Robinson, 2001). who found that the online environment can reduce foreign language learning anxiety? However, this may be attributed to the fact that all classes are affected by the new coronavirus epidemic. Online teaching causes students to feel tired, resulting in a decrease in learning effectiveness and an increase in "general anxiety." However, it can be found in interviews and diaries that the online environment can alleviate students' communication anxiety because students "don't have to" when answering questions. Stand up, and you don't have to face the gaze of teachers and classmates," thereby reducing students' stress and anxiety (Robinson, 2001; Daymiel, 2022).

### Conclusion

This study focuses on the anxiety of foreign language learning in online flipped classes. The study found that pre-class preview in online flipped classes can effectively reduce students' foreign language learning anxiety, and the factors that affect students' foreign language learning anxiety include output-oriented classrooms. Activity patterns, individual factors, and online classroom environments. Therefore, during the teaching process, teachers can use a variety of interactive methods to reduce students' anxiety about pre-class preview and classroom learning in the flipped classroom. However, future research can expand the number of research subjects, shorten the interview time interval to ensure data reliability, and accurately define the words that express anxiety to make up for the shortcomings of this study. This study hopes to contribute to the implementation and development of flipped classroom teaching in my country and strive to develop a flipped classroom that is more suitable for my country's teaching situation and student conditions.

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