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## MANAGING FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY: A CASE STUDY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EFL STUDENTS

*(Research article)*

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# MANAGING FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY: A CASE STUDY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EFL STUDENTS

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## Abstract

This case study was conducted in an American university between two international students from China Mainland in an effort to contribute insights into the sources of managing foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Data was collected through qualitative techniques in a period of 16 weeks. The *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)* was first utilized as a screening tool to measure anxiety and later as a method to categorize causes of FLCA. The results showed that students were able to manage, or at least reduce most of the anxieties but unable to manage all of them. The results also showed the methods that the students utilized, among which included enlarging vocabulary, seeking help after class, previewing the chapters, going to office hours, participating group discussion, doing positive thinking, preparing for class, gathering study group, discussing questions with good students, rehearsing oral activities, practicing speaking skills by talking to oneself, speaking slowly, going to teaching assistants, and studying for tests. The study suggested that joint effort of teachers and students should be made to better help students manage classroom anxiety.

*Keywords:* foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), manage, case study, EFL students

## 1. Introduction

*“My nervousness goes up extremely high when my teacher calls on me to answer a question that I’m not prepared for.”*

*“I always keep silent in class to hide my anxiety. If I do not speak, nobody will know I’m anxious.”*

*“Most times I don’t know what to do when I get anxious in class, and I can only feel the pains by myself.”*

*“I wish there was help when I experienced language anxiety in classroom.”<sup>1</sup>*

Statements listed above have been commonly heard from EFL students in classroom, especially English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classroom. Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is foreign language anxiety (FLA) in classroom settings. Students who experience FLCA find it a hindrance to their productive class performance. For the purpose of helping students with classroom anxiety and increasing their confidence in language learning, it is important to explore how to manage anxiety.

Psychologically, anxiety was considered as the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1983). Defined by Horwitz and others (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) in their landmark publication towards classroom anxiety, it is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. Although it is possible that anxiety and performance have nonlinear relationship (Scovel, 1978), and stated by Skehan (1989) that some anxiety such as a nice amount of stimulation for activity may be beneficial and energizing, FLA is generally considered as a negative emotion based on research in psychology and second language acquisition. Dörnyei, a leading figure in the area of individual differences, admitted that anxiety undoubtedly affects second language performance – ‘most of us will have had the experience that in an anxiety-provoking climate our L2 knowledge often deteriorates: we forget things we otherwise know and also make silly mistakes’ (Dörnyei, 2005, p.198). According to Gregerson and MacIntyre (2014), as a result of its interference with acquisition, retention, and production of the target language, FLA is described as largely debilitating. Consequently, language anxiety studies have been mainly concentrating on the negative impact (for example, Ely, 1986; Prince, 1991; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Saito and Samimy, 1996). In classroom situations particularly, some anxiety reactions or behaviors caused by FLA may lead to unproductive class performance (Horwitz, Horwitz & cope, 1986; Horwitz, 1986). It becomes worse if teachers speak fast or have accents. Excessive anxious feelings spring from not fully understanding the lecturing or catching up with their peers may lead to deleterious influence not only on classroom performance, probably even academic performance. With evidence of the detrimental effects of anxiety on foreign language learning, it is highly demanded to find and develop methods to manage it, and therefore help learners feel increasingly positive about their language learning and have better classroom performance.

In addition to the negative effects of FLA, there have been studies showing that FLA was not only correlated with language proficiency levels but also existed in the stages of input, processing, and output. In Zhang’s (2019) study investigating FLA and foreign language performance, the findings showed FLA had a moderate correlation coefficient with foreign language performance, and the anxiety–performance correlation remained stable across groups with different foreign language proficiency levels, suggesting that the role of FLA should not be ignored regardless of the learners’ proficiency level. In the study investigating the relationship between achievement and anxiety at each of the three stages of input, processing, and output in foreign language learning, Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999) found that FLA existed at all the three stages. They suggested that teacher educators should consider anxiety at all three stages of learning in foreign language classes.

## 2. Literature Review

In 1986, Horwitz and other scholars conceptualized the construct of situation-specific anxiety which they call foreign language anxiety, that is, anxiety limited to language learning situation, springing from internal linguistic deficit of second language learners. In the paper, they discussed the ego-threatening nature of language learning and included *The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)* – a 33-item, 5-point Likert-scale type instrument, which has become the standard measure of FLA, utilized or adapted by plenty of studies researching FLA. The authors identified three types of relevant situation-specific FLA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The intention was to help language teachers and scholars understand the anxiety-provoking potential of language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Ever since the study of Horwitz and other scholars

in 1986, FLA has been considered as a uniquely L2-related variable not simply a transfer of anxiety from other domains such as test anxiety or communication apprehension.

## 2.1 Negative Effects of FLA

Young (1986) examined the relationship between anxiety and oral performance in the aim of providing an assessment of how anxiety might influence scores on an oral proficiency test – the OPI (the Oral Proficiency Interview). The study involved sixty students' participation from three universities at Texas utilizing a self-appraisal of speaking proficiency and a dictation test. It was found that there was a significant negative correlation between the OPI and anxiety, evidently leading to the conclusion that as anxiety increased, oral proficiency decreased. Zhang (2013) explored possible causal relations between English listening anxiety and English listening performance. Three hundred EFL learners completed the foreign language listening anxiety scale (FLLAS), and IELTS test twice with an interval of three and a half months. Exploratory causal models indicated that listening anxiety could affect listening performance. Saito, Horwitz & Garza (1999) discussed the possibility of anxiety in response to foreign language reading, which introduced the construct of foreign language reading anxiety, offered a scale for its measurement, and reported on a preliminary study of reading anxiety in 30 intact first-semester classes of Spanish, Russian, and Japanese. The study found that reading in a foreign language can be anxiety provoking to some students; students' reading anxiety levels increased with their perceptions of the difficulty of reading in their foreign language, and their grades decreased in conjunction with their levels of reading anxiety and general foreign language anxiety.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) examined some of the more specific cognitive processes that may be involved in language acquisition in terms of a three-stage model of learning: input, processing and output. Seventy-nine students were recruited in a Canadian university; they were first surveyed by a questionnaire with the measures of FLA and tested by a French Achievement Test. Appointments were made for individual testing sessions afterwards. The results showed that the combined effects of language anxiety at all three stages may be that, compared with relaxed students, anxious students had a smaller base of second language knowledge and had more difficulty demonstrating the knowledge that they did possess. Aida (1994) replicated Horwitz and others' study (1986) with Japanese participants. They concerned how language anxiety was pertained to Japanese language learning. Data was collected from ninety-six students at the University of Texas at Austin utilizing the FLCAS and background questionnaires. Results indicated that although students having a high anxiety level were more likely to receive a lower grade, those with a low level of anxiety were more likely to get a higher grade.

Previous studies have shown that negative effects of FLA can be influential in different aspects of language learning. Von Wörde (1998) noted that FLA was a problem experienced probably by one-third to half of language learners. Thus, exploring how to manage FLA is of great importance. It can widely help students improve class performance and be confident in their language learning.

## 2.2. Management of FLA

Tran and Moni (2015) investigated the perspectives of EFL teachers and students and their experiences of managing FLA. They gathered data from 49 student autobiographies, 18 student interviews, 8 teacher interviews and 351 student responses to an open-ended question

through utilizing content analysis. The results showed that both students and teachers recommended a dual-task approach to manage FLA. In other words, efforts in managing FLA should not only focus on reducing its negative effects but also work towards making the most of its positive effects. With regard to their management of student FLA in action, the analysis of students' and teachers' report revealed a positive picture of how FLA had been managed, yet challenges were found to exist.

Foss and Reitzel (1988) discussed ways of handling communication anxiety, which was a more specific kind of FLA in foreign/second language classrooms and proposed that a relational model of communication competence developed by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) could be used as a foundation for understanding and working with students experiencing anxiety in using a second language. In this model, competence is not an objective performance but a matter of perception that varies across interactions. It is not something intrinsic to a person's nature or behavior; it is an impression that a person has of self or other. The model includes five fundamental components or processes: motivation, knowledge, skills, criteria outcomes, and context. They claimed that self-perceptions of competence were crucial in the management of anxiety for students. Thus, they suggested specific exercises for each of the competence model to help students manage their perceptions of their communication. These specific exercises included rational emotive therapy, anxiety graph, role playing, drama, oral presentation, writing journals, case studies, and cultural artifact exercise.

In the aim of identifying the language anxiety level of students who studied at a Turkish state university and investigated the role of creative drama in reducing language anxiety in speaking classes, Saglamel and Kayaoglu (2013) administrated an adapted version of the FLCAS with 565 students. A one-group pre-test/posttest study was carried out with 22 randomly selected students who attended a 6-week creative drama program run by a researcher who had received creative drama and leadership training for 123 hours. The results showed that creative drama was found to be positive in reducing FLA. Students came up with favorable attitudes towards the creative drama use especially on the way to feel more confident and overcome stage fright.

Tsiplakides(2009) contributed to the literature on FLA, and provided teachers with strategies for reducing FLA stemming from students' fear of negative evaluation from their peers and perception of low ability. Using qualitative research, it presented a classroom-based case study which aimed at examining the characteristics of anxious students with a view to implementing classroom interventions to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety. It was concluded that teachers should identify anxious learners and make interventions to help them overcome FLA. The interventions involved incorporating project work, creating a friendly classroom atmosphere, and assuming the role of the researcher in their own classrooms.

Rose (2015) indicated that a quantitative approach might be a good fit to investigate what strategies are deployed, and a qualitative approach might be a better fit to answer how strategies are deployed. Previous studies tend to use quantitative designs in research of FLA. There have been calls for utilizing more qualitative techniques for richer data collection. In response to the calls, this study was designed to present a longitudinal qualitative case study in the aim of exploring FLA from a different angle. Other than simple presenting a list of ways to go about FLA, this study also strives for shedding light on *how* FLA is managed in classroom settings over time.

This study aims to seek answers for the research question: *“How do students manage foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) over time?”*

### 3. Methodology

In applied linguistics, a case study can look closely at contexts, people, and change over time (Van Lier, 2005). This study can be better termed as an interpretive case study, which is used for the benefits of empirically studying a single phenomenon in depth (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011). Similar to most case studies, the purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of a phenomenon, process, person or group, not to experiment and generalize to other populations in the tradition of larger-scale survey research (Platridge & Phakiti, 2015). However, as Stake (1995) says, even if we cannot generalize to a larger population, people can learn much that is general from single cases (Stake, 1995). Differently from many previous FLA studies, this design used a longitudinal qualitative case study to examine FLA and hoped to contributing to FLA research by learning from a single case.

#### 3.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted at a university in the United States. Participants were carefully chosen in two different sessions of a classroom-based course, which was a 16-week English-Medium instruction class for first-year international students. The FLCAS (see appendix) was distributed to thirty students in the two sessions. This study used purposeful sampling, namely, the researcher intended to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select samples from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). According to the FLCAS score, six students were identified as experiencing a high level of anxiety. Finally, two of them who ranked the highest scores were selected as participants. Considering their similar cultural background and language proficiency level, they were regarded as a group in this case study. To protect the students' identifying information, pseudonyms were assigned.

The two students were Ming and Lin (pseudonyms). Ming, male, was a first-year student majoring in Marketing. Lin, female, was a first-year Political Science student. They both were born and raised in China Mainland, and newly started their study abroad campus life. They both spoke Chinese as their native language and learned English in China Mainland before they entered the university. Based on their TOEFL score, their English proficiency was considered to be on a similar intermediate level.

#### 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

To assure data triangulation, this study utilized a questionnaire – the FLCAS, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The FLCAS was distributed and collected at the beginning of the semester with the help of the class instructor. Two class observations also took place at the beginning of the semester. As for the four interviews, two were conducted at the beginning of the semester, and two at the end of the semester.

The purpose of adopting the FLCAS was twofold. One was as a screening tool to measure anxiety. The FLCAS was distributed to thirty students for the purpose of targeting ideal participants for the semester-long study. By ‘ideal’, it meant students who were experiencing FLA the most. Another was to category causes of FLA. This was a different way of using the FLCAS, which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, was not seen before. After the FLCAS was collected and two ideal participants were selected, the 33 items in the

questionnaire were then categorized into five general causes of their classroom anxiety. The items that indicated a high level of anxiety were identified (for example, if students choose “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on items like *“It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language”*, then they are considered as a high-anxiety items). Items that indicated no anxiety or low anxiety were excluded, such as “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree” on items like *“I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class”*. The identified items were selected and classified into five causes of students’ classroom anxiety. The five causes were categorized by key words (such as “preparation” “prepare for class” “confident” “better than me” “understand the teacher” “speak in class” “volunteer answers” “nervous” “tests” “fail”, etc.) in the selected items; they were (1) class preparation, (2) feeling inferior to others, (3) not understanding the teachers, (4) speaking up in class, and (5) text anxiety. These categories were afterwards used to create questions for interviews, in other words, they were used to interact with participants to explore how they managed these anxieties in classroom.

Classroom observations were conducted after the six participants were initially selected. The goal of observing the students in classrooms was to reexamine their anxious behaviors, just in case the questionnaire was skimmed through so as to be done with it. Observations allow researchers to collect comprehensive information about type of language, activities, interactions, instruction and other notable events, most importantly, at close range (Mackey and Glass, 2005). Combining students’ behaviors and performances in class with the FLCAS score, two students were finally selected.

All the four interviews were audio-taped, translated and transcribed for analysis. The transcription was commented, and the comments were converted on each piece of data to key words, phrases, or sentences such as “overcome”, “deal with”, “what I do is...”, “I don’t know how to deal with...”. The concrete practices students described to reduce their FLA were considered as themes. The themes were then used as headings and subheadings for extracting data that had high relevance to the research questions. Data which was irrelevant to the interview questions was excluded—for example, students sometimes digressed from the subject, and talked about their campus life and discussed academic questions that they came across in their study. The research question was broken down into four guiding questions in the interviews, which included (1) how do you deal with anxieties caused by class preparation? (2) how do you deal with anxieties caused by feeling inferior to others? (3) how do you deal with anxieties caused by not understanding the teachers? (4) how do you deal with anxieties caused by speaking up in class? and (5) how do you deal with anxieties caused by text anxiety?

#### 4. Results

The results of analyzing the selected items in the FLCAS showed that the two students’ classroom anxieties were mainly caused by five sources which included (1) class preparation such as *“I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class”*, *“I feel pressure to prepare very well for language class”*, *“Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it”*, and *“I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven’t prepared in advance”*; (2) feeling inferior to others such as *“I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am”*, *“I worry about making mistakes in language class”*, *“I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do”*, and *“I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language”*; (3) not understanding the teachers such as *“It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language”*, *“I get upset when I don’t understand what*

*the teacher is correcting*”, and *“I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says”*; (4) speaking up in class such as *“It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class”*, *“I don't feel confident when I speak in foreign language class”*, and *“I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class”*; (5) test anxiety such as *“I am usually not at ease during tests in my language class”*, *“The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get”*, and

*“I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class”*.

**Class Preparation.** The two students were suffering anxiety in relation to class preparation at the beginning of the semester. As newcomers in a U.S. university, especially immersing in EMI classes for the first time, they felt overwhelmed facing all the class materials and textbooks in English. A direct consequence of not understanding the class materials and textbooks resulted to the failure of well understanding the teachers in class. Therefore, class preparation became necessary. As a matter of fact, preparing for the class could be time-consuming, because they had to constantly look up new words, and stop to figure out some certain concepts. Anxiety emerged when feeling that they had to do so.

On the question of how they go about anxiety caused by class preparation, Ming and Lin voiced their thoughts at the beginning of the semester (interview 1), and the end of semester (interview 2):

I never thought about how to deal with this kind of anxiety. So currently, I have no idea how exactly should do. I didn't prepare for my classes when I was studying in China, because classes were taught in Chinese, and it was not a problem understanding what the teacher was saying. But now it is different. Everything is in English, and my English is not good enough. I have to spend lots of time preparing for my classes. I feel like most of my after-class time has been spent on things like previewing the chapters, because there are just too many new words! While I was reading, I had to stop again and again to look them up in dictionary. Besides, sometimes I need to find some online tutorials to help me understand better. It took me a lot of time to do those things. They are becoming a drudgery and make me tired and stressed. I admit I feel annoyed and anxious when I think about doing class preparation. I just wish I could get rid of the negative feelings for preparing a class (Ming, interview 1).

I'm anxious, very anxious, anxious to death! But I don't have an effective way to deal with it. You may say doing preview before class is a good way, but it is not always the case. My classes are not easy to prepare. Take my politics class as an example, the PowerPoint the professor provides is so confusing. Even the professor himself admits that it is hard to understand. The fact is not only I, as a L2 user, don't understand the lecture, even native speakers have difficulty understanding it (Lin, interview 1).

I'm relieved compared to before. I think it is because my English is getting better. My reading is faster now. I've been trying to enlarge my vocabulary by learning new words. I use a vocabulary APP which is very convenient for me to memorize new words whenever I have time, even pieces of time. In addition to that, I'm now getting more familiar with the new environment, I don't feel as stressful as I first entered the university. Even I don't prepare the class very well, I wouldn't get panic. Because I know I can make up after class by asking others for help (Ming, interview 2).

I stopped my struggling on doing preview for my classes. I bit the bullet and did it. I preview my classes with the help of internet, like googling whatever confuses me.

Turning to teachers for help at office hours is another way. I have been to my professors' office hours very frequently. I have noticed that I can understand the books that I couldn't before (Lin, interview 2).

It can be seen that Ming and Lin both already had some knowledge on managing class preparation anxiety at the beginning of the semester. They felt anxious mostly because they found the strategies were not efficient and effective. At the end of the semester, Ming was able to manage the anxiety with new strategies such as enlarging his vocabulary and seeking for help after class; Lin's anxiety was reduced by carrying out the strategies she already knew such as doing preview, making use of the internet sources, and going to office hours.

**Feeling Inferior to Others.** When the language used in classroom somewhat hindered the students to clearly express themselves, students felt discouraged and anxious. Maybe even worse, they thought they were inferior to others despite the fact that they were not. For students with a shy personality or thick accent, the anxiety can be more serious. On the question of how they deal with anxiety caused by feeling inferior to others, Ming and Lin shared their opinions at the beginning of the semester (interview 1), and the end of semester (interview 2):

I worried too much about making mistakes in class, especially for a shy person like me. I'm not a guy with too many words. I have a strong accent, and I don't like it at all. I'm afraid other students would laugh at me. Sometimes I can't stop thinking that other students are better than me. I now have no idea how to get rid of the feelings (Ming, interview 1).

I'm not a person who often question herself, but I do occasionally have the feelings that other students may be better than me. My strategy to get rid of the anxiety is to find some "excuses" to comfort myself, for example, I would tell myself that English is my second language, and it is ok for me not to do as well as others in terms of the language. I will be getting better and better (Lin, interview 1).

I do not think any great progress has been made throughout this semester on deal with the anxiety. But one thing I want to bring up is that I'm now familiar with group discussion in class, and able to speak a little in the discussion. Most times when I shared my views, my group members were being nice and supportive. That made me feel better about myself (Ming, interview 2).

I'm actually excited to tell you how I overcame this anxiety. I keep doing some positive thinking, like not comparing myself to others, and thinking about my strengths. I tell myself that English is my second language, and it is ok to speak not as good as native speaker classmates. If I'm not understood in class, I would just patiently repeat and explain to my teacher and classmates. I do not compare myself to others because I tell myself that people learn things differently. Sometimes when I feel really down, I would talk to my teacher for advice (Lin, interview 2).

When the semester ended, Ming did not find any effective ways to manage the anxiety, but he felt better about himself as becoming accustomed to the learning environment. Participating group discussion in class gave him a chance to get to know his classmates. Lin was strategic, and she was able to find effective strategies to manage the anxious feelings. She opted for not comparing herself to others and having conversations with her teacher for advice. She thought this anxiety was no longer bothering her.

**Not Understanding the Teachers.** It can be frustrating when students could not well understand teachers' lectures in class. Some teachers may speak too fast, and some may have an accent. Consequently, they added difficulty for students to understand the lectures, especially in limited class time. Anxiety was inevitably aroused in this situation and became a common phenomenon among Ming and Lin's Chinese classmates. On the question of how they deal with anxiety caused by not understanding the teachers, Ming and Lin stated at the beginning of the semester (interview 1), and the end of semester (interview 2):

I've never had this anxiety before. All my lectures in China were given in Chinese, and I was able to understand my teachers very well. I don't know how to handle the current anxiety (Ming, interview 1).

I would review the in-class lecture of the teacher after class, and ask my classmates for help (Lin, interview 1).

I would prepare the class well. If I have difficulty understanding the materials by myself, I will gather a study group with my friends to preview or review the class. Besides, I sometimes ask those who are smart for help. Most times they are nice and willing to help (Ming, interview 2).

When I do not understand the teacher in class, I first try to calm myself down and temporarily ignore it, then go to the teacher's office hours after class. I usually carefully decide where I sit in class. I like sitting together with someone I can turn to for help such as good students. It helps me better understand what the teacher lectured in class. When the lecture is too difficult to digest, I don't hesitate to find myself a tutor (Lin, interview 2).

They both made progress manage the anxiety when the semester came to an end, though they had no clue what to do in the beginning. Ming joined study group and seek help from good students, which worked well for him. Lin made use of office hours, opted for sitting with good students and read their class notes, and finding herself a tutor if necessary.

**Speaking up in Class.** In western cultures speaking up in class is commonly encouraged but not the case in many Asian cultures. In Chinese culture, students are not allowed to speak up in class until asked for. When culture shock is reflected in classroom, it first takes time for students to get accommodated. Second it causes anxiety in situations when they have to speak up in class. On the question of how they deal with anxiety caused by speaking up in class, Ming and Lin utter their experience at the beginning of the semester (interview 1), and the end of semester (interview 2):

I think this anxiety so far is the most serious one. It bothers me very much. Unfortunately, there is no cure for it. What I can do is simply mute myself in class. I try to avoid responding to the teachers when they ask questions, and I only talk when I have to, like group discussion (Ming, interview 1).

I'm not nervous to speak up in class, but I'm very nervous when the teacher doesn't understand what I'm saying. Because sometimes culture differences make communication confusing. I think maybe things will get better when I'm more proficient in English (Lin, interview 1).

When I know I have to speak up in class in advance, like doing a presentation, I would prepare very hard before class. Sometimes I even recite and memorize all the contents.

If I do not know what to say, I would honestly tell that I don't know. It may be embarrassing but I have no choice. After class I do some practice to enhance braveness and my speaking ability such as talking to myself, hearing myself, and building my vocabulary. Additionally, I found slowing down when you speak is a good way to speak better. When you control the speed of your talk, you get yourself some time to think before the words are spoke out (Lin, interview 2).

When the semester finished up, Ming was still suffering the anxiety without finding any effective methods to cope with it. He kept silent and avoided interaction in class. Lin was able to reduce the anxiety with methods like well preparing incoming class activities, practicing a lot, and using speaking strategies.

**Test Anxiety.** In-class texts can be intimidating because they have to be completed within the time limit in a language the students are not yet proficient. A good grade means a lot to them. When they have high expectations in tests, the anxiety goes up. The two students showed different attitudes towards text anxiety. On the question of how they deal with text anxiety, Ming and Lin articulated their thoughts at the beginning of the semester (interview 1), and the end of semester (interview 2):

Well, compared to speaking up in class, having silent tests is a relief to a shy person like me. So, I don't think this anxiety bothers me that much (Ming, interview 1).

Test anxiety is my nightmare. It started when I took TOEFL in high school. I took TOEFL seventeen times to get a required score. Those days made me so overwhelmed and frustrated. I think I'm that kind of people who are innately not good at exams. Every time when I have a test, I will fall into excessive anxiety. I have tried different ways to reduce my anxious feelings such as doing some positive thinking and being well prepared, but those did not work very well. Only practical strategies worked. For instance, going to my teacher's office hours and clearing out all my questions, asking teaching assistants for help, and doing review very hard (Lin, interview 1 & 2).

Ming did not consider test anxiety as a problem. He preferred tests to speaking up in class. Lin suffered test anxiety on a great deal. When asked at the end of the semester, she stated how she worked on managing it but not completely effective. The methods she used included doing positive thinking, doing preparation, seeking help from teachers and teaching assistants, and doing review before tests.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

This case study investigated how two Chinese international students who studied in the United States managed foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) in a period of a 16-week semester. Relying on qualitative data collection techniques, this study hoped to contribute insights into the sources of managing FLCA and methods to help students feel increasingly positive about their foreign language learning. The results showed that the two students had experienced classroom anxiety throughout the semester, and also generally made progress on managing it. Ming was able to manage the anxiety caused by test anxiety and make progress on reducing anxieties caused by class preparation and not understanding the teachers. However, he did not find effective ways to manage or reduce anxieties caused by feeling inferior to others and speaking up in class. Lin was able to manage the anxiety caused by feeling inferior to others, and make progress on anxieties caused by class preparation, not understanding the teacher, speaking up in class, and test anxiety. Additionally, in the period of 16 weeks, the

methods they had practiced to manage or reduce FLCA included enlarging vocabulary, seeking help after class, previewing the chapters, going to office hours for help, participating group discussion, doing positive thinking, preparing for class, gathering study group, discussing questions with good students, practicing speaking up actives like presentation in advance, practicing speaking skills by talking to oneself, speaking slowly, asking teaching assistants for help, and studying for tests.

This study revealed that FLA had negative effects on SLA, which was in consistent with the study of Young's (1986), Zhang's (2013), Saito, Horwitz & Garza' (1999), MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994), and Aida's (1994). Previous studies suggested helping with students' FLA through joint effort of teachers and students (Tran and Moni, 2015). This study supports the suggestion and call for collaborative effort of teachers and students. The results of the study indicated that the students alone were not able to manage all the anxieties in classroom. Rather than leave them to suffer and struggle, effective methods of managing FLCA needs to be instructed and guided by teachers. This study evidently differs from previous studies with the use of the FLCAS. It was not only simply used as an initial screening tool, but also, the most importantly, a way to category anxieties in classroom. In addition, concrete methods that the students used to manage anxieties were provided for references to other students.

## **6. Limitations**

This study had its limitations. First, the period of time in the case study was only 16 weeks. The students were engaged with getting accommodated in the new learning environment. It might be a relatively short time to figure out sufficient and effective ways to manage anxieties in classroom. If given one academic year, the study would have collected richer data, and the results would have showed more insights on managing FLCA. Second, more sources of data collection are needed. Other sources like journals, dairies, and casual conversations should be taken into consideration to complement each other ensure data accuracy.

Journals and diaries allow the researcher to see the process of how the students manage FLCA, that is, how students manage FLCA step by step over time. Casual conversations are beneficial to the familiarity between researcher and students. It would be easier for student to open up and share more information with the researcher.

## **7. Implications**

The findings of this study led to implications for future studies. From the pedagogical perspective, the management of FLCA needs teachers to work together with students. Students may be able to manage or reduce the anxieties by themselves, but they also suffer and struggle. Even worse, it is likely that they are not able to find suitable and effective ways to well manage the anxieties. It is advised that future studies should focus on how teachers and students can work together to manage FLCA. With the help from teachers, students are possible to suffer less and find more effective ways to manage FLCA. Second, from the perspective of individual differences, learner variables such as personality, gender, age, identity, and others should be taken into consideration. These variables, together with anxiety, not only have influences on successful language learning, but also have interplay relationship among themselves.

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## Appendix

### Foreign Language Anxiety Scale

Please answer the following questions by providing the number correspondent to the option that best describe your opinion.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

- 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
- 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.
- 3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
- 4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.
- 5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
- 6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
- 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
- 8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.
- 9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.
- 10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.
- 11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
- 12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.
- 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.
- 14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.
- 15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
- 16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.
- 17. I often feel like not going to my language class.
- 18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.
- 19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.
- 20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.
- 21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.
- 22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.
- 23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.
- 24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.
- 25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
- 26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.
- 27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.
- 28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
- 29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
- 30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
- 31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.
- 32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.
- 33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.