



## Chinese Learning Anxiety on Foreign Students

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the level of anxiety in learning Chinese, discover the dominant factors of anxiety in learning Chinese language and analyze differences in Chinese language anxiety based on gender, year of study and HSK in foreign students in Wuhan, China. The research method used was quantitative using a survey approach. There are 250 foreign students as the samples, consisting of 108 male and 142 female students. The data collection technique used is questionnaire called CLAS (Chinese Learning Anxiety Survey) adapted from FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey). The data were analyzed using SPSS with descriptive statistical techniques and Multivariate Analysis. The results showed that Chinese language anxiety among foreign students is on a moderate level, with communication anxiety as the most dominant aspect. The male and female students have the same anxiety level in learning Chinese. The foreign students who had longer duration of learning Chinese and had higher HSK tend to have lower level of anxiety in learning Chinese. This showed that years of study and HSK were two factors that determine the high or low level of anxiety in learning Chinese for foreign students.

**Keywords:** Chinese learning, anxiety, foreign students.

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### Introduction

Learning a language is not easy, especially if it is a foreign one that has different constructions than the mother tongue. Besides English, the foreign language that attracts the world's attention most is Chinese. This is because China plays an important role in world economics, so learning Chinese can make it easier to expand the economic networks. However, Chinese is not an easy language, because it has unique writing system based on characters and tones. In addition, individuals who learn Chinese must understand some factors that can hamper their success in learning the language, so that it can be anticipated quickly and accurately. Among the factors that can significantly hinder a person from learning a foreign language is anxiety, which is an effective variable and negatively influences one's success in learning a foreign language (Aydin, 2008; Ewald, 2007; Khattaq et al., 2011; Liu & Huang, 2011; Tanveer, 2007; Williams & Andrade, 2008; Young, 1991). Many researchers have found that one-third of foreign language learners experience at least a moderate level of anxiety during learning (Horwitz, 2001). Foreign language anxiety is a universal phenomenon that is not only found in English classes (Kondo, 2005; Sila, 2010), but also in other languages such as Chinese (Luo, 2014), Spanish (Noels, 2001) or French (Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003), and among languages that are rarely taught, including Arabic and Japanese (Elkhafaifi, 2005; William & Andrade, 2008).

In general, anxiety is a state of tension in an individual as a result of an unpleasant external stimulus that is felt to threaten him, which can then cause a feeling that something bad will happen so that he prepares appropriate adaptive reactions (Basith & Ichwanto, 2019). Then Spielberger and Vagg (2004) defined anxiety as a subjective feeling of tension, fear, and worry related to arousals of the automatic nervous system. If it is related to learning a foreign language, anxiety is a feeling of tension and specifically associated with foreign language difficulties (Gardener, 2003), because anxiety has a specific nature, so that if there is language anxiety, it will occur only in foreign language learning situations and tend not to affect other activities.

Next, Wolman and Stricker (1994) defined foreign language anxiety as worries or negative emotional reactions that arise when learning or speaking a certain foreign language. This negative emotional reaction makes it difficult for a person to learn a foreign language because he has a deep concern for failure. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (2010) argued

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that foreign language anxiety is related to the discomfort that some people feel when their language skills are limited so that it limits them from becoming themselves when using a foreign language. Sanchez-Herrero & Sanchez (1992) have found that there is a relationship between language anxiety and performance where high levels of anxiety will negatively affect the students' performance. From some of these definitions, it can be understood that language anxiety is a state of tension caused by a negative reaction to a foreign language that causes a feeling of oppression.

Essentially, every individual surely experiences anxiety, but the anxiety experienced by each individual has different levels depending on how they make a reaction to the stimulus that is coming up. Stuart (2009) classified anxiety in several categories. The first one is mild anxiety, where on this level, people are alert and their conceptual fields increase. The people are able to see, hear and reach more than ever before. The second is a moderate one, where people only focus on immediate concerns, involves narrowing their field of perception. The third is severe anxiety, characterized by a significant reduction in the field of perception. They tend to focus on certain details and not think about anything else. Fourth is the level of panic, associated with admiration, fear, and terror, and they feel unable to do things even with complete direction. The panic involves personality disorganization and can be a life-threatening matter. Panic people cannot communicate or function effectively. From the classification above, it can be understood that anxiety can be an incentive for individuals to learn and master foreign languages well if they are in the normal category, and will have the effect of failure in learning process and even more negative impacts if the anxiety is at the level of panic. The anxious students generally show the same indications. In several studies, the results show that foreign language learners who are most anxious experience anxiety and even fear within the classroom (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). They further point out that in engaging with learning activities, these students could also have difficulty in concentrating, being unconscious, sweating, and experiencing an increased and irregular heartbeat. In line with this, Daubney (n.d.) argued that physical reactions exhibited by anxious learners are generated from negative energy (anxiety) that specifically affects their short-term memories. As a major impact of such anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that the anxious students will perform escape behaviors such as skipping the class or delaying homework.

There are various factors that cause a person to experience anxiety in learning a foreign language. Luo (2014) revealed that one of the causes of anxiety in learning Chinese is the difficulty level of the language. Unlike English, Chinese has a very strong language construction. There are many things that need to be considered, starting from the need to pay attention to the tones when speaking until the writing which is so complicated that can cause high feelings of anxiety. In addition, other things that can also cause higher anxiety are the uniqueness in the formal learning process of foreign languages themselves, especially the existence of low students' self-perception and self-confidence, low level of teachers' confidence in teaching, students' negative feelings and behavior and procedures, and ineffective testing that causes difficulties in learning foreign languages (Horwitz et al., 1986; Rodriguez & Abreu, 2003; Young, 1991). This is like a low expectation of their foreign language skill, so they tend to have a low level of foreign language achievement (Bailey, Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1999).

Foreign language anxiety can be explained in detail by analyzing the aspects that construct it. Horwitz et al. (1986) classified the foreign language anxiety into three, namely communication anxiety, test anxiety and anxiety about negative judgment. Horwitz et al. (1986) asserted that one of the situations that most triggers the anxiety for most students is communication, because it includes many language learning processes such as pronunciation of words, word recognition, meaning, and grammar rules, so it becomes difficult for someone to master it (Fielding, 2007). Suleimenova (2013) noted that in the last few years, foreign language students have experienced deep concern about their communication skills, with an indication of feeling stressed, nervous, and anxious when they try to speak. This is then referred to as a mental barrier in language learning. Yoshida (2010) stated that the students often come to the foreign language classes with anxiety. Based on research conducted by Kleinmann, Steinberg, and Horwitz (in Horwitz et al., 1986), it is shown that the anxiety experienced by the students when they join in the class can affect the communication strategies used by them in the language classes.

Meanwhile, Tsipakides and Keramida (2009) found that the students who experience anxiety in the class tend not to want to participate in speaking activities because they believe that they are not good at it and are afraid that their classmates will evaluate them negatively. This shows that there is a relationship between communication anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluations is a concern for the assessment of others against someone, feeling afraid of the bad evaluation of others, and the existence of an expectation that others will judge negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969). In addition, the fear of negative judgment can also be caused by high or low self-esteem (Krashen, 2003). Someone who has low self-esteem tends to always think of other people's assessment of himself, so the concentration is mostly on others, not on himself. Then, the next type of anxiety is the test anxiety which is also the performance anxiety. It is a concern about the low academic judgment during foreign language learning or fear of failure (Horwitz & Young, 1991). The test anxiety will make a person's performance in learning is getting worse because he only focuses on his lack of ability in learning a foreign language, not on the effort that will be made to achieve good academic grades.

There are three purposes of this study. First, this research tries to investigate the level of anxiety in learning Chinese in foreign students. Second, it would like to find dominant factors related to the Chinese language anxiety in foreign

students. Third, it will analyze some differences in the Chinese language anxiety based on gender, years of study, and HSK. From this third question, there are some hypotheses that can be proposed: 1) there are significant differences in Chinese language anxiety based on gender; 2) there are significant differences in Chinese language anxiety based on the years of study; 3) there are significant differences in Chinese language anxiety based on HSK. Therefore, based on the purposes of this research, the main research problems are: 1) how is the level of anxiety in learning Chinese in foreign students? What is the dominant factor of Chinese language anxiety experienced by foreign students? Are there significant differences in Chinese language anxiety among foreign students based on gender, years of study, and HSK?

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The research design used was quantitative with the survey approach. This approach was carried out to obtain quantitative or numerical data, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population (Creswell, 2014).

### *Population and Sample*

The population in this study was all foreign students taking a Chinese language course in each class in the 2018/2019 academic year in Wuhan, China. The population in this study involved three universities in Wuhan, China. The samples were taken randomly as many as 250 people (108 men and 142 women) using a random sampling technique.

### *Method and Instrument Data Collection*

The data were collected using the questionnaire with support from the Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, namely demographic information (Gender, Year of Study and HSK) and Chinese anxiety. The research instrument adopted the instrument developed by Ling Lee (2011) called ELAS (English Language Anxiety Survey) which was later modified to CLAS (China Language Anxiety Survey). This instrument consisted of 32 items, consisting of 13 items of communication anxiety, 9 items of test anxiety, and 10 items of negative assessment anxiety. The Likert scale used was a four-point type, starting from strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), agree (3 points) and strongly agree (4 points). The questionnaire was written in used two languages English and Chinese. It aimed to avoid mistakes in understanding the meaning contained in the questionnaire because it was feared that many foreign students did not really yet understand Chinese. To test the validity and reliability of the instrument to be used, the researchers first conducted a pilot study by spreading the instrument to 50 students majoring in Chinese who were not included in the research sample. The results of the pilot study show that all statement items are valid and reliable, with a Cronbach alpha value of .917. It means the instrument is feasible for use in this study.

### *Procedure and Data Analyze*

The modified questionnaire was directly distributed using social media through WeChat by using Wenjuan application. This application was used to facilitate the reach of the faraway location of the respondents. After the data were collected, they were then analyzed using SPSS version 23.0. To test the first and second research questions, the data analysis technique used was descriptive statistics, namely mean, standard deviation, missing value, frequency, and percentage. For the third question, the analysis technique used was a multivariate analysis of variance (Manova), with a significance level of 5%.

## **Results**

### *Description of participants by gender, years of study and HSK of the returned questionnaires*

The results of the questionnaire that have been filled out by the respondents showed that none of them has missing data. There are 108 male (43.2%) and 142 female (56.8%) respondents filling out the questionnaire. The respondents who learn Chinese less than one year are 51 people (20.4%), one to two years are 72 people (28.8%), three to four years are 56 people (22.4%) and those who have been learning more than four years are 71 people (28.4%). Then the respondents who do not have HSK are 13 people (5.2%), there are no respondents who are at HSK level 1, HSK level 2 are 3 people (1.2%), HSK level 3 are 7 people (1.8%), HSK level 4 as many as 80 people (32%), HSK level 5 as many as 88 people (35.2%), and HSK level 6 as many as 59 people (23.6%).

*Table 1. Description of participants by gender, years of study and HSK*

<b>Variable</b>		<b>Missing Data</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	Male	0	108	43.2
	Female	0	142	56.8
Years of Study	<1	0	51	20.4
	1-2	0	72	28.8
	3-4	0	56	22.4
	>4	0	71	28.4
HSK	Non HSK	0	13	5.2
	HSK 1	0	0	0
	HSK 2	0	3	1.2
	HSK 3	0	7	1.8
	HSK 4	0	80	32.0
	HSK 5	0	88	35.2
	HSK 6	0	59	23.6

*Level of Foreign Language Anxiety*

The descriptive statistics are used to determine the level of anxiety of Chinese learning on foreign students. The results in table 1 show that in the communication apprehension variable, there are 63 people who are at a high level, 177 at a moderate level and 10 people who are at low level. Then, in the test anxiety variable, there are 104 people who are at a high level, 136 at moderate level, 10 people are at a low level. While in the fear of negative evaluation variable, there are 66 people who are at high level, 169 at moderate level, and 15 people at the low level.

*Dominant Aspect of Chinese Language Anxiety*

The descriptive statistics are also used to find out the most dominant factors related to Chinese learning anxiety. The first is the communication apprehension with the mean value of 31.00, then fear of negative evaluation with the mean value of 24.29 and the last is the test anxiety with the mean value of 23.35.

*Table 1. Descriptive Data of China Language Anxiety*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Communication Apprehension	31.00	7.16	High	63
			Medium	177
			Low	10
Test Anxiety	23.35	5.59	Medium	104
			Middle	136
			Low	10
Fear of Negative Evaluation	24.29	6.28	High	66
			Medium	169
			Low	15

*Differences in the Foreign Language Anxiety Based on Gender, Years of Study and HSK*

Multivariate analysis was used to determine differences in communication apprehension, anxiety test, and fear of negative evaluation based on gender, years of study and HSK. The researcher uses multivariate analysis because there are more than two variables to be analyzed for their differences, and among variables have a significant relationship, so the most suitable analysis for this research is multivariate. The results in table 2 show that in the gender variable, there are no significant differences between male and female respondents for each dependent variable,  $F(3, 218) = 1.41$ ,  $p > .05$ , Pillai's Trace = .019. This means that the hypothesis is rejected because the Chinese language anxiety level tends to be the same between the male and female respondents. Then in the year of study variable, there is a significant difference between the forces for each dependent variable,  $F(9, 660) = 2.59$ ,  $p < .01$ , Pillai's Trace = .010. This means that the hypothesis is accepted because the foreign students who have a longer duration of learning Chinese tend to have lower level of anxiety. Meanwhile, in the HSK variable, there is also a significant difference among the classes for each dependent variable,  $F(15, 660) = 4.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , Pillai's Trace = .031. This also shows that the hypothesis is accepted, because the foreign students who have higher HSK tend to have lower level of Chinese learning anxiety.

**Table 2. Multivariate Test of Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation by Gender, Years of Study and HSK**

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Pillai's Trace</b>	<b>F Ratio</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Error DF</b>	<b>Sig of F</b>
Gender	.019	1.41	3.00	218.00	.240
Years of Study	.10	2.59	9.00	660.00	.006
HSK	.31	4.97	15.00	660.00	000

## Discussion

The first aim of this study is to investigate the level of Chinese language anxiety on foreign students taking a Chinese language class in Wuhan, China. The CLAS results on aspects of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation tests indicate that the average score of each aspect is in a moderate position. These results are directly proportional to the findings of other researchers, including Afiqah (2015), Balemir (2009), Miskam and Saidalvi (2019). Although it is at an intermediate level of anxiety, this cannot be just ignored because it can make a negative contribution to someone who is learning Chinese. In general, Cagatay (2015) believed that a moderate level of anxiety can affect a person's performance in expressing his thoughts and opinions in speaking any language. It also can influence one's readiness to improve his ability to communicate using foreign languages (Wu & Lin, 2014).

The second objective in this study is to investigate the dominant aspects of Chinese language anxiety on the foreign students taking a Chinese language class in Wuhan, China. The CLAS results show that the most dominant aspect in Chinese language anxiety is communication apprehension (Mean = 31.00). This is consistent with McCroskey and Anderson's (1976) research which shows that most students experience communication fears when they speak in a formal atmosphere in front of a group of people, such as in the classroom. Communication is a very heavy aspect to be actualized after learning the language so that many students fail on this aspect. Based on the results of Suleimenova's (2013) research in the last few years, many students apparently have deep concerns about their communication skills and then undermine their ability to focus on what will be said in the communication process and even ideas that might be immediately lost.

This anxiety can be caused either from the internal or external side. One of the internal factors is lack of confidence. Someone who has high self-confidence will have low communication anxiety (Wahyuni, 2014). Besides, self-esteem also affects communication anxiety. The higher a person's self-esteem is, the lower his communication apprehension is (Daly, 1991). Meanwhile, the external factor includes the fear of negative evaluation from others. This is the second aspect of Chinese learning anxiety (Mean = 24.29). Several studies have shown that students who have fear of negative evaluations have concerns about others' judgments about themselves, are afraid of others' bad judgments, and that there is an expectation that others value themselves negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969). While the lowest aspect is test anxiety (Mean = 23.35). Although it is the lowest aspect of foreign language anxiety, it must also be considered and anticipated because it also affects communication skills. This is in line with the research conducted by Dalkilic (2001) and Huang (2004) stating that most students experience the test anxiety in their speaking class.

The third goal of this research is to investigate some differences in Chinese learning anxiety based on gender, year of study and HSK on the foreign students taking a Chinese language class in Wuhan, China. The results of demographic information research show that there are no significant differences between men and women in each aspect of Chinese language anxiety. This can be due to the fact that both have similarities in responding to certain situations in language class, so there is no significant effect if it is related to gender aspect (Rosenfeld & Berko, 1990). It also can be caused by both male and female students have respectively an awareness of their own performance and show the same signs of anxiety as nervousness and panic in the language class (Rafek, 2009). However, in the anxiety studies, there are generally a number of results showing that there are significant differences related to the anxiety based on the gender (Aydin, 2017; Aydin, 2019; Kaplan & Saddock, 1998; Sadock & Sadock, 2009). Then, the year of study variable shows that there is a significant difference between first-year students to the final level in every aspect of Chinese language anxiety. This difference is due to the experience gained in learning the language. The findings indicate that the longer a person spends time learning Chinese, the lower the anxiety of the language he will experience compared to those who have just learned Chinese.

This finding is in line with the results of Afiqah (2015) who revealed that there is a significant relationship between the length of foreign language learning and language anxiety; the longer a person learns a language, the less anxiety he experiences. Furthermore, the HSK variable (*Han yu Shui ping kao shi*) shows that there are significant differences between non-HSK students to HSK 6 in every aspect of Chinese language anxiety. The students who have higher HSK level tend to have lower language anxiety. This is in line with the results of Liu's (2006) study of EFL students in China. More advanced students tend to be less anxious. Then, Zhao & Whitchurch (2011) found that college-level CFL students in the US were a little bit more anxious than secondary students, but the difference was not significant. Luo (2013) found that the level of proficiency had a significant effect on Chinese Language Learning Anxiety in general and that the level of student anxiety decreased when their level of proficiency increased. The results of this study are also in line with the results of the study concluded by some researchers that the foreign language anxiety is expected to decrease

when the experience and proficiency increase (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986; Desrochers & Gardner, 1981; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Gardner, Smythe & Brunet, 1977; Gardner, Smythe & Clement, 1997; Liu, 2006; Hismanoglu, 2013; Samimy, 1994).

### Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of this study indicate that in every aspect of anxiety in learning the Chinese language is at a moderate level. Then, the most dominant aspect experienced by the students in Chinese anxiety is communication anxiety. The latest findings indicate that there is no significant difference in Chinese language anxiety on the gender variable, while the years of study and HSK variables indicate a significant difference in Chinese language anxiety. Due to few numbers of studies who study the Chinese language learning anxiety, future researchers should then examine the Chinese anxiety in relation to the students' motivation and perceptions of the teachers' behavior in teaching Chinese. Next, the instructors are expected to be able to choose the appropriate teaching strategies so that the students' anxiety can be minimized optimally when attending the Chinese language class. The contribution of counselors or psychologists is expected when the students' anxiety has reached the level of panic.

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