

# English Learning Anxiety, Self-efficacy and Strategies Among Chinese Non-English Majors

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**Abstract:** As a global language, English occupies an important place in the English learning of Chinese university students. The study tried to explore the relationship between English learning anxiety, self-efficacy, and learning strategies among Chinese non-English majors from linguistic and psychological perspectives. The researcher adopted the descriptive research method. Based on the quantitative data collected from Chinese non-English majors, this study investigated the correlation between students' English learning anxiety and self-efficacy and learning anxiety and strategies. The results of the study showed that Chinese non-English majors' current English learning anxiety, self-efficacy, and strategies were at a moderate level. Therefore, this study also proposed a program for English learning anxiety, self-efficacy, and learning strategies of Chinese non-English majors. More cooperative learning models and encouraging teaching activities can be introduced to develop students' positive attribution mindset in English learning. By guiding students in using learning strategies appropriately, improving their level of self-efficacy in English learning and relieving their anxiety in English learning, teachers can help them find suitable English learning methods and achieve enhanced English proficiency.

**Keywords:** English learning; Learning anxiety; Learning self-efficacy; Learning strategies; Non-English majors

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization has promoted interactions between countries, making English an increasingly essential skill. Learning English facilitates cross-border communication, boosts employment prospects, and enhances international influence (Borja et al., 2015). In China, rapid integration into the global economy has elevated English to a primary medium for international interactions and talent development. Consequently, English learning is valued, and education is being reformed. Chinese universities are enhancing English teaching to meet this demand. English is now a core part of university education, with compulsory courses designed to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Non-English major Chinese students face obstacles due to perceiving English as secondary to their mother tongue. Limited interaction with native speakers, resource disparities, and challenges in learning strategies can lead to anxiety and low self-efficacy. Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding. In response, this study investigates the interplay of English learning anxiety, self-efficacy, and strategies among non-English major students, aiming to enhance their English learning quality. The study also contributes to improving English language education and practice, providing guidance for educational policymakers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Learning Anxiety

Emotional factors are essential in language learning, and anxiety plays an important role in it Zhan (2019). Therefore, anxiety, as an emotional factor that affects learning, has received extensive attention from researchers, and related studies have gradually increased. In order to conduct in-depth research on learners' foreign language learning anxiety, Horwitz, E. K. developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which is specifically designed to measure the depth and breadth of learners' foreign language learning anxiety. Through empirical research conducted by many researchers afterwards, it has been confirmed that this scale has reliable validity and reliability and has been widely used in research on foreign language learning anxiety. Many researchers have also used the concepts and structures in the FLCAS as the main theoretical basis and developed scales suitable for localized

research based on factors such as the educational situation and actual conditions of students in different countries. Benefiting from the design of these scales, researchers have conducted a large number of empirical studies on foreign language learning anxiety. MacIntyre (2017)'s research shows that English learning anxiety can motivate students to tap into their potential and perform at their best level in English learning to some extent. However, the negative effects of English learning anxiety are concerning, as it may lead students to give up learning English and, more seriously, cause problems in their mental health.

## **2.2 Learning Self-efficacy**

Based on this very concept, researchers have begun to explore the application of self-efficacy in different domains, including English language learning. English learning self-efficacy refers to the specific manifestation of self-efficacy in the process of learning English. It is a type of self-efficacy in learning and is the learner's subjective judgment of whether they have the ability to complete English learning tasks, reflecting their confidence in learning English. Researchers at home and abroad have different definitions of English self-efficacy. Naruponjirakul (2020) believes that English learning self-efficacy is an individual's evaluation of their confidence in whether they can successfully complete English tasks and achieve learning goals, and it has situational and problem-specific characteristics. Shin, M. H. (2018) point out that English learning self-efficacy is the student's estimation of their own English level. As a mediator, self-efficacy can directly affect motivation. In other words, the meaning of English learning self-efficacy refers to the student's subjective evaluation of their ability to complete English learning, achieve satisfactory results, and avoid learning failures. The research results of Meera & Jumana (2015) indicate that "students with higher self-efficacy have better learning abilities and higher levels of motivation in learning English. They have more firm self-confidence than students with average self-efficacy levels, which enables them to choose a suitable high school major upon graduation from junior high school and achieve certain results."

## **2.3 Learning Self-efficacy**

English learning strategies refer to the corresponding behaviors, methods, and procedures that individuals consciously and purposefully adopt in learning foreign languages in order to achieve learning goals and improve their proficiency in the target language. It includes both the application of external learning methods and skills, as well as a series of systematic rules for planning, arranging, monitoring, executing, and evaluating internally. Oxford believes that learning strategies can be identified and quantified, and based on the classification of language learning strategies, he has developed a scale to evaluate students' level of language learning strategy use. This scale is still the most important and widely used measurement tool for evaluating students' language learning strategies, and has been translated into more than 20 languages and applied in many parts of the world (Guo et al., 2018). However, the popularity of strategy scales has caused Oxford himself to be concerned, and he reminds researchers to pay attention to the ambiguity of measurement concepts and the divergence in defining strategy concepts, as well as the effectiveness of strategy scales and the comparability of research Oxford (2009). Since the rise of correlational research, researchers have conducted a large amount of research on language learning strategies. Understanding and using English learning strategies can help improve students' learning effectiveness, achieve achievement and joy, reduce learning anxiety, and inspire students' confidence in learning English.

## **3. Research Design**

This study used both descriptive and quantitative research methods. Quantitative research is a methodical methodology employed to gather, analyze, and interpret numerical data in order to address research enquiries and validate hypotheses. According to Rubin and Babbie (2016), quantitative research has four major advantages. This makes it possible to collect and analyse large amounts of data quickly and easily. Due to the benefits of the quantitative research method, a large sample questionnaire survey was conducted for the three variables in this study. By analyzing and comparing the frequency of the survey results, weighted mean, correlation, and other indicators, the similarities, and differences between Chinese non-English majors in the three variables of English learning anxiety, self-efficacy, and strategies were elucidated in detail. In this study, the descriptive method was also used to describe the significant relationships between the three variables when they were classified according to their profile, as well as between the variables themselves.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The respondents were freshman and sophomore non-English majors from three universities in Henan Province, China. They were balanced in terms of grade and major groupings, and female respondents were in the majority. In terms of English learning anxiety, speaking anxiety was the highest, indicating that speaking English to communicate makes students most anxious; Listening anxiety was the second highest, indicating that not understanding what others are saying makes most students uneasy and affects

their learning. Regarding English learning self-efficacy, self-efficacy in reading scored the highest, indicating that the students had a high level of self-efficacy in reading ability and skills. Self-efficacy in listening scored the lowest, indicating that students lacked self-efficacy in listening skills and abilities. As to English learning strategies, compensation strategies were the most frequently used, indicating that students can recognize their learning difficulties and try to solve them through different methods. Affective strategies and cognitive strategies were less frequently used, indicating that students lacked the necessary cognitive and affective skills.

The students' responses show differences in three variables when grouped according to profiles. When grouped by gender, there were significant response differences in the three variables of English learning anxiety, self-efficacy and learning strategies. When grouped by sex, only self-efficacy showed some differences, and there were almost no differences in English Learning Anxiety and Learning Strategies. When grouped by year level, there were some response differences in all three variables of English learning anxiety, self-efficacy and learning strategies. In addition, there were highly significant correlations among the three variables of English learning anxiety, self-efficacy and learning strategies. There were highly significant correlations between English learning strategies and self-efficacy, indicating that the higher the self-efficacy, the more effective the use of learning strategies, and vice versa. There were highly significant correlations between ELL strategies and learning anxiety, indicating that the use of language learning strategies can reduce anxiety, and that low-anxiety individuals were able to pay more attention to the use of language strategies. There were highly significant correlations between English learning self-efficacy and learning anxiety, suggesting that the two are closely related. Students who can use learning strategies well have high EFL self-efficacy and low anxiety.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 Universities may establish learning support centers, provide psychological counseling services, etc., to provide students with a more supportive learning environment and more effective learning support, such as to promote the reduction of anxiety, increase self-efficacy, and better use of learning strategies to achieve better learning outcomes in English learning.

5.2 English supervisors may consider adopting the proposed English program and then conducting a post-test. In addition, they may discuss, evaluate, and improve the program to help EFL learners make better use of learning strategies, increase their level of self-efficacy in English language learning, alleviate their anxiety in English language learning, and enrich the research literature in this area.

5.3 English teachers may help students gain a higher sense of self-efficacy in English learning by teaching them about social psychology. English teachers may also establish a regular English learning assessment mechanism to evaluate students' English proficiency, learning strategies and self-efficacy, and provide students with personalized learning feedback and guidance.

5.4 Student union may establish a learning exchange platform to encourage students to share their learning experiences and strategies with each other and help each other to improve their learning ability. The student union may also organize cross-cultural exchange activities, English corners, English competitions, etc., to stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning English, and to improve their cross-cultural communication skills and language proficiency.

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