

The Impact of Foreign Language Learning Emotions on the Academic Performance of Chinese French Major Students

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Abstract:

Nowadays, China advocates quality education and emphasizes the importance of emotional factors in language learning. The literature indicates that domestic scholars focus on studying English learners' foreign language learning emotions while paying less attention to minor language learners. Therefore, this study conducts empirical research on the overall situation of foreign language enjoyment and anxiety of Chinese French major students and their correlation with academic achievements. This research finds that Chinese French major students generally have low levels of foreign language anxiety and moderate levels of foreign language enjoyment. There is a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and learning performance and a positive correlation between foreign language enjoyment and it. Among them, foreign language anxiety has a stronger predictive effect on grades than foreign language enjoyment. Therefore, this paper argues that it is significant to explore ways to intervene eliminate anxiety, and improve enjoyment to alleviate the problem.

Keywords: Chinese French major students; foreign language anxiety; foreign language enjoyment; academic achievements

1. Introduction

2024 marks the 60th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between China and France. With the development of globalization and the deepening of communication and cooperation between these two countries over the past 60 years, the number of Chinese French learners has significantly increased, and the number of colleges and universities offering French majors in China has also correspondingly increased. Society's attention to French learning is gradually strengthening.

In language learning, emotional factors have always been a hot topic of discussion. Since the 1940s, research on foreign language anxiety has increased, and Horwitz's theory has been widely recognized. He pointed out that foreign language anxiety is a unique synthesis of self-awareness, beliefs, feelings, and behavior that arises while learning a foreign language [1]. In the 21st century, as positive psychology gradually becomes an independent research field, positive emotions in foreign language learning have also begun to receive attention from the academic community. Foreign language enjoyment is usually considered the most common type [2]. As representatives of two opposing emotions, positive and negative, in language learning, foreign language anxiety and enjoyment also impact academic performance differently. According to the research

of most scholars, both domestically and internationally, there is a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and learning achievements. In contrast, foreign language enjoyment positively correlates with academic performance [3,4]. However, it should be noted that most of the related studies in China focus on the field of English language learning and take English language learners as the subjects of the study.

However, unlike the English majors who have had years of English learning experience, in the undergraduate study stage, most French and other minor language majors do not have the corresponding language foundation before enrollment, making them zero-start learners [5]. Therefore, their emotions regarding foreign language learning should also differ from those of English majors [5]. However, previous scholars often overlook this, and there is a research gap.

This research focuses on minor language learning. Through this survey, the overall situation of foreign language enjoyment and anxiety among current French major students will be understood. The relationship between foreign language enjoyment, foreign language anxiety, and French learning achievements will also be explored. As a result, it is possible to gain a deep understanding of the current characteristics of Chinese French learners' for-

eign language emotions, supplement and improve existing research, and provide a factual basis for reforming minor language teaching in China.

2. Method

To study the overall level of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment among Chinese French major students and the relationship between foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, and their French learning achievements, this research adopts a questionnaire survey method. It selects 100 second year French major students from several universities in Beijing and Tianjin as the subjects. Their language of the college entrance examination is English, and they were zero basic French learners before entering university.

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a questionnaire survey method, and the questionnaire design is based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale. Some adjustments are made according to the actual situations, and the specific scales are as follows.

2.1.1 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

This research is based on the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale compiled by Wang Caikang. It was translated from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. in 1986. It has a high reliability and validity and is currently a widely used measurement tool specifically designed for the psychological feelings of foreign language learners in a specific situation. To adapt to the actual situation of the subjects, all “English” in the original question is replaced with “French”, and the rest is not changed. This scale consists of 33 closed-ended questions. The Likert 5-level scale is used to investigate the level of foreign language classroom anxiety among high school students from four aspects: communication apprehensions, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and foreign language classroom anxiety. The options range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. The higher the score of the participants, the more severe their anxiety situation is. Questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32 are reversed.

2.1.2 Chinese version of Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale

This research is based on the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) made by Li et al., which has a high degree of reliability and validity, good internal consistency, and is an effective tool for measuring foreign language enjoyment in China. At the same time, replace all “English” in the original title with

“French”, and leave the rest unchanged to adapt to the actual situation of this study. This scale consists of 11 closed-ended questions, using the Likert Level 5 scale to investigate the level of foreign language enjoyment among participants from three aspects: Personal foreign language enjoyment, Foreign language enjoyment related to teachers, and Foreign language enjoyment related to the classroom environment. The options range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. The higher the score of the participants, the stronger their sense of pleasure.

2.1.3 The French Achievement Test

This research uses the 2023 TFS-4 (Test for French majors-Band 4) as the French test paper. The test paper is divided into two types: written questions and multiple-choice questions. The written questions include dictation, verb tense filling in the blank, and essay writing. The remaining questions are either three-choice or four-choice multiple-choice questions. This test paper is uniformly set by the state, with appropriate difficulty, and can properly test students’ French learning levels.

2.2 Procedure

In this study, a combined questionnaire is distributed online to the subjects, stipulating that each person can only fill in the questionnaire once, with no withdrawal in the middle and a total time limit of 10 minutes. The questionnaire combines the above two scales to understand their foreign language anxiety and enjoyment levels and collect real quantitative data for the subsequent statistics and analysis.

The students were tested one week after the questionnaire was collected, and their scores were further collected.

3. Result

3.1 Research Results

3.1.1 The overall situation of foreign language anxiety

As shown in Table 1, the overall average value of foreign language anxiety in this study is 82.02, indicating that Chinese French major students have a low level of anxiety during the process of learning French, and their situation is good, which should continue to be maintained. Among them, the average value of fear of negative evaluation is the highest, closely followed by communication anxiety. Classroom anxiety is in third place, and the average value of test anxiety is the lowest. This indicates that negative evaluations and communication mainly cause the foreign language anxiety of these students. Therefore, teachers should consider how to improve the evaluation and feedback mechanisms reasonably and how to better carry out classroom communication activities to alleviate students’

anxiety.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of foreign language anxiety

| Descriptive Analysis | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-----|-----|-------|----------------|--------|
| Items | N of samples | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation | Median |
| communication apprehensions | 100 | 18 | 43 | 27.73 | 6.11 | 27 |
| fear of negative evaluation | 100 | 19 | 47 | 28.19 | 6.09 | 27 |
| test anxiety | 100 | 5 | 13 | 8.26 | 1.762 | 8 |
| foreign language classroom anxiety | 100 | 9 | 37 | 17.84 | 6.522 | 16 |
| Total Value | 100 | 54 | 136 | 82.02 | 18.313 | 78 |

3.1.2 The relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic achievements

To verify the relationship between foreign language anxiety and learning achievements, this study used the French major TFS-4 test scores as a reference. It combined their foreign language anxiety for Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficients between communication apprehensions, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, foreign language

classroom anxiety, and total value of FLA and academic scores are -0.315, -0.423, -0.311, -0.325, and -0.391, respectively. Table 3 shows that the adjustment R^2 in regression analysis of FLA and academic achievements is 0.144. This indicates that for Chinese French major students, there is a negative correlation between FLA and academic achievements, with negative evaluation anxiety having the most significant impact. Foreign language anxiety can explain 14.4% of the changes in their test scores.

Table 2. Correlation analysis between FLA and academic achievements

| Pearson Correlation | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| | Results of TFS-4 |
| communication apprehensions | -0.315** |
| fear of negative evaluation | -0.423** |
| test anxiety | -0.311** |
| foreign language classroom anxiety | -0.325** |
| Total Value | -0.391** |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | |

Table 3. Regression analysis between FLA and academic achievements

| Parameter Estimates (n=100) | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|---------|------------------------|-----------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | p | Collinearity Diagnosis | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | VIF | Tolerance |
| Total Value of FLA | -0.186 | 0.044 | -0.391 | -4.208 | 0.000** | 1 | 1 |
| Adj R ² | 0.144 | | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Results of TFS-4 | | | | | | | |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | | | | | | | |

3.2 Research Results on Foreign Language Enjoyment

3.2.1 The overall situation of foreign language enjoyment

As shown in Table 4, the overall average value of their foreign language enjoyment in this study is 40.67, which is moderate. Therefore, teachers should pay attention

to further improving students' enjoyment of learning. Among them, the average level of personal enjoyment is the highest, showing the highest level of pleasure in that dimension. This indicates that personal factors mainly influence the FLE of Chinese French major students. As a result, teachers should take corresponding measures, focus on allowing students to self-learn, exert personal initiative, and improve the pleasure of French learning.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of foreign language enjoyment

| Descriptive Analysis | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----|-----|-------|----------------|--------|
| Items | N of samples | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation | Median |
| Personal foreign language enjoyment | 100 | 9 | 25 | 18.45 | 4.123 | 19 |
| Foreign language enjoyment related to teachers | 100 | 3 | 15 | 11.18 | 3.273 | 12 |
| Foreign language enjoyment related to the classroom environment | 100 | 3 | 15 | 11.04 | 3.206 | 12 |
| Total Value | 100 | 17 | 53 | 40.67 | 9.289 | 43 |

3.2.2 The relationship between foreign language enjoyment and academic achievements

This study uses the French major's TFS-4 exam test scores as a reference and conducts Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis based on their foreign language enjoyment. As shown in Table 5, the correlation coefficients between personal foreign language enjoyment, foreign language enjoyment related to teachers

and classroom environment, and the total value of FLE and academic achievements are 0.213, 0.131, 0.125, and 0.184, respectively. Table 6 shows that the adjustment R² in regression analysis of FLE and academic achievements is 0.024. This indicates that there is a weak positive correlation between FLE and academic achievements for Chinese French major students, and FLE can only explain 2.4% of the change in their test scores.

Table 5. Correlation analysis between FLE and academic achievements

| Pearson Correlation | |
|---|------------------|
| | Results of TFS-4 |
| Personal foreign language enjoyment | 0.213* |
| Foreign language enjoyment related to teachers | 0.131 |
| Foreign language enjoyment related to the classroom environment | 0.125 |
| Total Value | 0.184 |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | |

Table 6. Regression analysis between FLE and academic achievements

| Parameter Estimates (n=100) | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|------------------------|-----------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | p | Collinearity Diagnosis | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | VIF | Tolerance |
| Total value of FLE | 0.172 | 0.093 | 0.184 | 1.851 | 0.067 | 1 | 1 |
| Adj R ² | 0.024 | | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Results of TFS-4 | | | | | | | |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | | | | | | | |

4. Discussion

4.1 Impact and Cause Analysis

4.1.1 Overall level of foreign language anxiety

The 100 surveyed Chinese French major students suffer from a low level of FLA. This is because, similar to the ability assessment of students in other majors, passing the TFS-4 test is a practical requirement for French major students to graduate and find a job, and usually, the higher the score, the greater the advantage. Therefore, students often feel anxious to pursue higher scores while learning French [6]. However, because most students majoring in French in universities are zero foundation learners, their French learning time is relatively short, and their sense of novelty and heat can outweigh negative emotions such as anxiety. At the same time, French and English have mutually influenced each other in their formation and development process, belonging to the Indo-European languages. There are many similarities in language composition, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and other aspects [7]. Therefore, at the beginning of study, French is not hard for students who have learned English for many years, and they can gradually make more progress in the later stage, which also alleviates their anxiety to a certain extent.

In the four dimensions, participants are most concerned about negative evaluations because they have run through the entire process of learning French. Whether it is homework exercises, exam tests, or practical applications, students will directly or indirectly get feedback from others and may face negative evaluations. Therefore, they pay high attention to this and have a high level of anxiety. Exam anxiety is relatively low due to the relatively small number of exams in university and the fact that the TFS-4 exam still leans towards exam-oriented education, with written exams as the main focus and relatively single exam content. With careful preparation, most students can pass the test. At the same time, the minds of college students are relatively mature. They have clear goals and self-regulation abilities, hold a more proper attitude towards exams, and no longer experience significant emotional fluctuations simply due to a test.

4.1.2 Overall level of foreign language enjoyment

Regarding FLE, Chinese French major students enjoy moderate pleasure in learning a foreign language, with personal enjoyment significantly higher than other dimensions. This is because the learning mode of universities differs from that of middle and high schools, and the language acquisition process has its particularity. University learning relies more on students' self-awareness, while language learning is not limited to the classroom but requires learners to accumulate and practice outside of

class. Therefore, personal factors have a greater impact on learners' enjoyment. Teachers no longer strictly supervise, nor do they conduct frequent exams and tests. Students are less subjected to external mandatory pressure, have ample time for independent learning, and can improve according to their situations. They need to explore the joy of learning French internally and experience a higher level of FLE.

4.1.3 The Relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, and Academic Achievements

Regarding the relationship between FLA, FLE, and academic achievements among these students, foreign language anxiety negatively correlates with academic performance. It has a negative predictive effect on it, while foreign language enjoyment is positively correlated with academic performance, its correlation is significantly weaker than that of foreign language anxiety. Foreign language enjoyment only has a weak predictive effect on learning performance.

According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, emotional factors can somewhat affect learners' foreign language acquisition. When learners experience higher levels of foreign language classroom anxiety, the language comprehensibility input is hindered, making it difficult for language to be internalized smoothly, thereby affecting language acquisition efficiency [8]. Learners in a positive emotional atmosphere, such as enjoyment, will use their second language more frequently and accumulate more learning experiences, directly affecting their language acquisition [9]. At the same time, foreign language enjoyment can complement and organically combine with critical thinking ability, which has a positive correlation and can promote improving learning achievements [10].

The correlation and predictive degree of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment on French grades are not completely consistent with each other. Therefore, it can be seen that FLA and FLE have their independence, and they are not the positive and negative sides of the same coin but belong to different dimensions [11]. The conclusion of this research can also verify the control-value theory, according to which foreign language anxiety is a high arousal negative outcome emotion. In contrast, foreign language enjoyment is a high arousal positive process emotion. For a long time, Chinese education has been exam-oriented. Even after entering university, admission to graduate programs and evaluations for excellence still focus on students' scores. Therefore, students tend to focus on results and neglect the process when learning foreign languages. As a result, academic performance is more closely related to result-oriented anxiety [12].

4.2 Suggestions

According to research findings, to further improve the learning achievements of Chinese French major students and enhance their French proficiency, it is necessary to pay attention to their foreign language learning emotions and the impact of these emotions on their academic performance. They need to alleviate foreign language anxiety and enhance foreign language enjoyment.

This research finds that negative evaluations mainly cause foreign language anxiety among Chinese French major students. Therefore, teachers can first adjust the feedback mechanism of students' performance. For example, classroom questioning and homework should follow language learning rules, from easy to difficult, and the difficulty should correspond to the student's language level. Besides, students should be given time to think and prepare to avoid fear and resistance [13]. In using feedback language, it is important to avoid being overly rigid and not directly giving negative evaluations to students. Instead, it is better to encourage and provide appropriate prompts to guide students to identify and correct their mistakes.

What's more, it is significant to explore the highlights of students and provide positive evaluations to enhance their confidence [14]. In addition, moderate adjustments should be made to assess students' French achievements. It should not be limited to written exams only. Attention should also be paid to students' communication skills, giving them more oral practice chances to improve their oral ability, help them build confidence, and alleviate negative foreign language learning emotions such as communication anxiety.

Regarding foreign language enjoyment, the priority should be to focus on personal factors, explore students' internal motivations, and encourage them to take the initiative. For example, besides imparting basic knowledge, teachers should also focus on cultivating students' self-learning ability, helping them master learning methods and skills and truly experience the fun of learning French. Secondly, teachers should maintain a positive and upward attitude, infecting students with their teaching enthusiasm in the classroom and promoting the generation of positive emotions among students [15]. At the same time, they should engage in friendly communication and exchange with students outside of class, maintain good relationships with students, and help students improve the level of foreign language enjoyment related to teachers. In addition, a pleasant foreign language environment is also very important. Teachers should fully understand students' interests, design corresponding courses according to the actual situation of the class, and try to add certain activities or games in the classroom. In this way, they can mobilize the enthusiasm of the whole class and create a relaxing and

pleasant learning atmosphere for students to achieve better learning results.

5. Conclusion

This research finds that Chinese French major students generally have low levels of foreign language anxiety and moderate levels of foreign language enjoyment. There is a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and learning performance and a positive correlation between foreign language enjoyment and it. Among them, foreign language anxiety has a stronger predictive effect on grades than foreign language enjoyment. At the same time, this study also analyses the reasons for forming these two different foreign language learning emotions among Chinese French major students and explores the methods of intervention and elimination of anxiety and improvement of enjoyment.

For example, some adjustments should be made to the feedback mechanism for students' performance. It can help them improve their oral ability, build confidence, and alleviate negative foreign language learning emotions such as communication anxiety.

Regarding FLE, emphasis should be placed on individual factors. Teachers should focus on cultivating students' autonomous learning abilities and teaching them more about learning methods and skills. Besides, teachers themselves should maintain a positive attitude.

The article explores the research on the foreign language learning emotions of French major students in China and proposes suggestions for the reform of minor language curriculum teaching. Hopefully, this will arouse more researchers and foreign language educators to pay attention to the foreign language learning emotions of French and other minor language learners and jointly seek effective methods to improve student learning achievements.

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