

Foreign Language Anxiety of EFL Junior Middle School Chinese Students: A Case Study of a Rural School in East China

Wang Min^{1*} and Sumalee Chinokul¹



¹ Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, 12000, Thailand

* Corresponding author: E-mail address: 965825077@qq.com

(Received: August 13, 2023; Revised: September 20, 2023; Accepted: October 3, 2023)

Abstract

The objectives of this study were two folds: 1) to examine the factors and identify the level of the factors affecting the foreign language anxiety of the rural Chinese junior middle school; and 2) to explore anxiety-reducing strategies that should be used by the rural Chinese junior middle school students in this study. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz (1986) was adapted to collect quantitative data from 110 students to identify the level of foreign language anxiety factors, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 students and their parents as well as 4 teachers to explore for anxiety-reducing strategies for the students. The results of the FLCAS questionnaire showed that the English learning anxiety level of rural junior middle school Chinese students was moderate (\bar{X} =3.26), including the level of communication anxiety (\bar{X} =3.26), the level of test anxiety (\bar{X} =3.28), and the level of fear of negative evaluation (\bar{X} =3.24). The results of the semi-structured interviews revealed that the learner-related factors were the most significant, followed by teacher-related factors. The emerging results of qualitative data from the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers in relation to English anxiety-reducing strategies were found; i.e., improving English learning skills, increasing self-regulated learning in English, using effective instructional approach, providing comments and feedbacks to support the students in learning English, and avoiding placing undue focus on English test results.

Keywords: Chinese Rural Junior Middle School, English Anxiety Level, English Anxiety Factors, Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

Introduction

One of the important factors of the junior middle school Chinese students' unsuccessful English language result was foreign language anxiety. Ren [1] found that rural junior middle school students were not quite active participating in classroom using English, and the students were often nervous and unable to speak English. Zhan [2] investigated 305 students and interviewed 18 teachers from Wuhe junior middle school and Duzhai junior middle school in Jingyuan County. With the promotion of quality education, Wang [3] proposed that junior high school English teaching should also pay attention to the research in the field of emotion and focus on students' English learning anxiety. Guo and Liu [4] stipulated that the process of junior middle school English teaching should be with the process of emotional education. Take for example: how teachers cultivate students' interest in learning English of grammar instruction, instead of just emphasizing the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Student-centered emotional education should be a topic worth exploring and English learning anxiety is one of the key factors of learners' affective disorder and should be the target exploring issue

which can have an important impact on learners' academic performance and classroom performance. Therefore, how to alleviate students' English learning anxiety, cultivate students' interest in English learning, and enhance the learning effect has been an urgent problem in middle school English teaching, especially in Chinese rural junior middle school.

Literature Review

Horwitz and Young [5] defined Foreign Language Anxiety as a distinct complex of students' self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to foreign language classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. It is a type of situation-specific anxiety among the three types: trait anxiety--everyday lives' tendency of anxiousness, state anxiety--the onset of anxiety at a particular moment and situation-specific anxiety—a tendency to be anxious in a specific situation [6]. In language learning context, the multifaceted concept of foreign language anxiety involves emotion, cognition, and behavior [7-8] that may lead to an adverse effect on various aspects of foreign language learning [9-12]. Emotional domains of foreign language anxiety such as shyness, fear, worry, upset, and panic are both situational and specific to engaging in foreign language learning [13]. Oxford [8] stipulated that manifested physiological symptoms such as trembling and dry throat may be witnessed when foreign language students feel anxious. Cognitive domains of foreign language anxiety are related to unrealistic beliefs [11, 14], such as excessive precision of utterance [14]. Moreover, self-perceptions are a distinct characteristic of foreign language anxiety and play a critical role in it [15]. Finally, the behavioral domains encompassed in foreign language anxiety can be observed in many situations. They can be seen in avoidance behaviors such as missing class, escaping evaluative situations [13], and diverting eye contact [14]. MacIntyre and Gardner [16], Aida [17], Oxford [18] thought that foreign language anxiety refers to the emotional factors produced in foreign language learning, which emphasize the fear or uneasiness of individuals when expressing themselves in a foreign language or a second language. To identify students who tended to be anxious in a specific situation of foreign language learning, Horwitz [13] designed a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Much evidence has been established that there is a negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and foreign language learning performance. [19-20, 12]

Scholars and teachers believe that the quality of language learning could not only be related to affective factors, but could also depend on the learning context [21] and argued that teachers play a key role in generating and alleviating foreign language anxiety. Teachers should then be responsive to signs of high-anxiety shown by students [22] and develop specific instructional strategies to help students to cope with foreign language anxiety [4].

However, Yu-Fen Yang et al. [23] raised two issues of the related research: 1) the effectiveness of the foreign language anxiety-reducing strategies proposed by these studies on the rigorous of the nature of the research design as these studies have rarely been tested and verified in a natural classroom environment; and 2) most of these studies are investigations carried out by different researchers in their respective fields and the foreign language anxiety-coping strategies that their suggested strategies seem to be fragmented and lack systematic approach and analysis. Yet, the findings were still questionable to apply in specific foreign language context as foreign language anxiety affects EFL learners from the perspective of cultural differences [24]. Al-Saraj [25] maintains that "cultural norms dictate expected behaviors for students in a classroom". For this current research the foreign language anxiety and foreign language anxiety-reducing strategies tried to address the shortcomings of the research by 1) studying with the group of Chinese junior middle school EFL students in a school in a rural area so as to address the culture norms specific to this group, 2) focusing the measure of language anxiety by clearly defined and generated in the language classroom context and only related to foreign language learning to include three dimensions of Horwitz [13] in the study: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, and 3) involving the use and verifying foreign language anxiety-reducing strategies from many perspectives: students and their parents as well as the teachers.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the factors and identify the level of the factors affecting the foreign language anxiety of the rural Chinese junior middle school.
2. To explore anxiety-reducing strategies that should be used by the rural Chinese junior middle school students in this study.

Research Methodology

The research design of this study was a mixed method that combined questionnaire and interview. According to the technique of random sampling, students in three classes as the sample group of the questionnaire. The students' English learning anxiety levels were tested through the modified version of Horwitz's FLCAS. They were interviewed based on several items with high anxiety levels in order to analyze factors of communication anxiety, factors of test anxiety and factors of fear of negative evaluation. Finally, semi-structured interviews with English teachers and students together with their parents were used to explore the reducing-anxiety strategies of students' English learning.

Participants

The research populations were 350 students in three grade levels: Grade 7, Grade 8 and Grade 9 from a rural junior middle school in Jiangsu Province of China. There are three classes in each grade, with 37-42 students in each class. The samples were recruited by a random class from each level of which the number was 110 students in total. The research samples of the interview were 9 volunteer students together with their parents and 4 English teachers. The researcher used stratified sampling technique to recruit the teachers and students for the interview. A total of 9 volunteer students together with their parents from the three classes that had done the questionnaire were recruited according to the students' English learning anxiety level, and 3 volunteers were interviewed in each class. The school administrators granted permission for data collection based on the scheme.

Research Instruments

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

The questionnaire on English learning anxiety of rural junior middle school students based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was adapted from Horwitz [13]. It consisted of three dimensions: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, with a total of 40 items and was prepared in a Chinese version. The adapted FLCAS were validated by content validity and reliability. For content validity, three experts in foreign language teaching were invited to evaluate and comment on the content and language used in the scale. The item of objective congruent index was 0.9. Comments were revised in the items before piloting. Cronbach's Alpha was then calculated to verify the reliability of the questionnaire in each dimension. The results were proved that each dimension and the total questionnaire was reliable. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the three dimensions: Communication anxiety, Test anxiety, and Fear of negative evaluation were 0.862, 0.833, and 0.894, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the total items of the questionnaire was 0.874.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview questions were divided into 2 forms: 1) students' and parents' interview and 2) teachers' interview. Each version contained 7 questions to elicit students' anxiety causes and the solution the students may need. The language was in Chinese to ensure language was not the obstacle for the interviewees' understanding. Content validity check was applied by inviting the same three experts who commented and evaluated the FLCAS and both forms were approved at the level of 0.9. The interviews were piloted to ensure that the language and the administration of the interview were manageable and acceptable.

Research ethical consideration

Before the data collection, research ethical clearance has been approved by the Ethics Review Board of Rangsit University. All the data collection steps were carefully and strictly performed based on the procedures to ensure that all the participants were ethically treated in the study.

Data Collection

The data collection was conducted in two steps: 1) the questionnaires were distributed offline to all the 110 students; and 2) one week after the completion of the questionnaire data, 9 students together with their parents and 4 English teachers were interviewed. The interviews were conducted randomly via face-to-face at their convenient time.

Data Analysis

The data analysis includes the quantitative data analysis of the questionnaire and the qualitative analysis of the interview was explained based on each of the research purposes below.

Table 1 Data analysis Scale

Research Objective 1. To examine the factor and identify the level of the foreign language anxiety factors affecting the rural Chinese junior middle school students.	Research Instrument: Questionnaire and interview
	Type of the data collection: Quantitative and qualitative data
	Data analysis/ interpretation: Descriptive analysis for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data to identify the level of foreign language anxiety factor that the students have; e.g., communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The interpretation of English anxiety level Likert Scale criteria was set as follows: Lowest 1.00-1.49; Low 1.50 -2.49; Moderate 2.50 -3.49; High 3.50-4. 49; Highest 4.50-5.00. Content analysis was coded and analyzed using Lichtman's 3 Cs Model (2013) [26], which consists of three major steps: Codes' Categories---Concepts.
Research Objective 2. To explore the anxiety-reducing strategies suggested for the rural Chinese junior middle school students	Research Instrument: Semi-structured interview
	Type of the data collection: qualitative data
	Data analysis/ interpretation: Content analysis for qualitative data to explore anxiety-reducing strategies for the students. Content analysis was coded and analyzed using Lichtman 's 3 Cs Model (2013) [26].

Research Results

The research findings are presented based on the research objectives as follows:

Research Result 1. The factors and the level of the factors affecting the foreign language anxiety of the rural junior Chinese middle school.

This section used questionnaire and some questions from semi-structured interviews to obtain the results of the study. Firstly, to understand the level of English learning anxiety among Chinese rural junior middle school students based on the questionnaire. Secondly, combining interviews to confirm students’ anxiety factors.

Result of English Learning Anxiety Level

This is a descriptive analysis of English learning anxiety levels of Chinese rural junior middle school students. See table 2 for detail.

Table 2 Descriptive Analysis of English Learning Anxiety

Dimensions	N	Max	Min	Mean	S. D
Test anxiety	110	5	1.40	3.28	0.783
Communication anxiety	110	5	1.60	3.26	0.746
Fear of negative evaluation	110	5	1.13	3.24	0.821
Overall anxiety	110	4.83	1.85	3.26	0.676

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean value for students’ English learning anxiety was 3.26, standard deviation was 0.676. The data results showed that the students’ English learning anxiety level is at the moderate level according to the criteria developed in this study. The mean value of the sub-dimensions of the English learning anxiety were all at moderate level and were ranked from the highest to the lowest: test anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, with the mean of 3.28, 3.26, and 3.24, respectively.

The detailed of each questionnaire item for the English learning anxiety dimension, test anxiety, and negative evaluation are displayed in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 Below:

From Table 3 above, the statements in the communication anxiety dimension rated at high level are those of questions 5, 7, 10, and 13. Interestingly, the question 10 statement: “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.” were also mentioned by the students in the interview question as follows:

“I would be anxious and nervous when I was suddenly called up by the teacher to answer a question when I was unprepared.” (Student 7)

“I want the teacher to talk about the problem first, then express his or her thoughts, and then point out the reason for my mistake.” (Student 1)

“My English foundation is not good and I cannot catch up with teacher's lecture.”
(Student 8)

Based on the statement in question 18: “After taking English test, I always feel worried that my scores will be criticized by the teacher.” which is the only statement rated as a high level of English Test Anxiety Dimension in Table 4, the students revealed their feeling towards this aspect as follows:

“The main source of anxiety is the teacher, because the teacher will criticize you for lowering your test scores.” (Student 1)

“I was mainly afraid of being criticized by my teacher because I did not do well in English and I was afraid of being despised and criticized by my teacher for having too low a score.” (Student 4)

“If I couldn't answer the teacher's questions or what he had said or emphasized, I would be criticized in public, and of course, I didn't review my English knowledge often enough.” (Student 5)

“I feel stupid, I always fail in exams, and I worry about being ridiculed by my teachers.”
(Student 9).

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis of Communication Anxiety Dimension

Communication Anxiety Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English class.	1	5	3.45	1.089	Moderate level
2. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	1	5	3.03	1.295	Moderate level
3. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	1	5	2.93	1.304	Moderate level
4. When I communicate with other students in English, I often feel fear.	1	5	2.66	1.329	Moderate level
5. I think other students speak English better than me.	1	5	3.62	1.271	High level
6. I am more nervous in English class than in other classes	1	5	2.80	1.276	Moderate level
7. In English class, I often feel nervous when I am appointed as a group presenter.	1	5	3.62	1.256	High level
8. In English class, I feel uneasy when I don't understand an important part when the teacher is teaching.	1	5	3.11	1.229	Moderate level

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis of Communication Anxiety Dimension (continue)

Communication Anxiety Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
9. In English class, I feel psychological panic because the teacher doesn't give me enough time to think and answer the questions.	1	5	3.25	1.302	Moderate level
10. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	1	5	3.55	1.186	High level
11. In English class, I can get nervous easily and forget what I know.	1	5	3.19	1.398	Moderate level
12. I feel embarrassed when I have to volunteer to answer the questions in my English class.	1	5	3.33	1.382	Moderate level
13. I feel nervous when I have to speak English with native speakers.	1	5	3.78	1.350	High level
14. I get nervous while I am speaking in English class.	1	5	3.36	1.202	Moderate level
15. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.	1	5	3.16	1.245	Moderate level
Total communication anxiety	1.60	5	3.26	0.746	Moderate level

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis of English Test Anxiety Dimension

English Test Anxiety Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1. When I take an English test, I usually get so nervous that my palms sweat and my heart rate increases	1	5	3.04	1.270	Moderate level
2. I am worried about the consequences of failing my English class.	1	5	3.44	1.289	Moderate level
3. After taking English test, I always feel worried that my scores will be criticized by the teacher.	1	5	3.51	1.131	High level
4. Some quizzes in English class will also make me nervous.	1	5	3.21	1.150	Moderate level

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis of English Test Anxiety Dimension (continue)

English Test Anxiety Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
5. After taking English test, I always feel worried that my classmates will make fun of my test score result.	1	5	3.07	1.276	Moderate level
6. Although I am well prepared for every English exam, I still feel anxious.	1	5	3.34	1.251	Moderate level
7. During taking English test, I sometimes feel so nervous that I might make some mistakes in answering the questions.	1	5	2.96	1.263	Moderate level
8. Before taking English test, I always feel worried that I cannot do well in the test.	1	5	3.41	1.273	Moderate level
9. When I take an English test, I always feel worried that I am not able to finish answering all the questions.	1	5	3.43	1.252	Moderate level
10. I always worry that my English test scores will decline and be criticized by my parents.	1	5	3.43	1.230	Moderate level
Total Test anxiety	1.40	5	3.28		Moderate level

Table 5 Descriptive Analysis of Negative Evaluation Anxiety Dimension

Negative Evaluation Anxiety	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I'm worried about making mistakes in English class.	1	5	3.20	1.187	Moderate level
2. I always think that all students are better at English than me.	1	5	3.32	1.180	Moderate level
3. I don't think I am talented in English learning.	1	5	3.49	1.305	Moderate level
4. I am worry that my English teacher will correct every mistake of mine.	1	5	2.98	1.271	Moderate level
5. I often feel ashamed when I still don't understand the mistakes that have been corrected by my English teacher.	1	5	3.14	1.230	Moderate level
6. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English class.	1	5	3.27	1.354	Moderate level

Table 5 Descriptive Analysis of Negative Evaluation Anxiety Dimension (continue)

Negative Evaluation Anxiety	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
7. I often feel scared when my English teacher corrects my mistakes.	1	5	3.08	1.307	Moderate level
8. I always feel my heart beating fast when I have a feeling that I might be called by my English teacher to answer the questions.	1	5	3.51	1.393	High level
9. When I express my ideas in English, I always worry about being laughed at by other students.	1	5	3.19	1.324	Moderate level
10. In English class, I usually don't take the initiative to answer some uncertain questions.	1	5	3.62	1.285	High level
11. In English class, I often ducked and avoid making eye contact with teacher in order not to be called.	1	5	3.15	1.347	Moderate level
12. Although I have prepared and reviewed before English class, I still feel panic during learning English in classroom.	1	5	3.02	1.278	Moderate level
13. When I make mistakes in English class, I'm afraid the teacher will criticize me directly in the classroom.	1	5	3.10	1.270	Moderate level
14. I'm always worried that I can't keep up with the progress of English.	1	5	3.31	1.269	Moderate level
15. Learning English makes me feel a lot of pressure.	1	5	3.22	1.404	Moderate level
Total negative evaluation anxiety	1.13	5	3.24	0.821	Moderate level

Statement in question 33: “I always feel my heart beating fast when I have a feeling that I might be called by my English teacher to answer the questions,” which rated as high level for Negative Evaluation Anxiety in Table 5, the students shared similar ideas.

“Direct criticism from the teacher will only make me more nervous the next time I answer a question. I wish the teacher could not criticize me seriously, but talk about the problem before giving the correct answer, and slowly guide us to find out the correct answer and tell us the reason of the error, so that we can deepen our memory of the correct answer.” (Student 6)

And the statement from question 35 in Table 5: “In English class, I usually don’t take the initiative to answer some uncertain questions,” can be substantiated by students 3 and 9 as in their statements below:

“I hope the teacher will communicate with me more and help me figure out the meaning of the words and the text.” (Student 3)

“I wish my teacher could encourage me more, slow down the pace of the lecture and create a relaxed classroom atmosphere for us.” (Student 9)

Analysis of Factors Involved with English Learning Anxiety

To explore further on analyzing the factors involved with English learning anxiety, the mean score of the items representing high levels with the mean≥3.50 from each dimension were the focus points of follow-up interviews with the 9 students. The list consisted of seven items: 1) communication anxiety: Q5, Q7, Q10, Q13; 2) test anxiety: Q18; and 3) fear of negative evaluation: Q33, Q35.

From the semi-structured interviews, content analysis was coded and analyzed using Lichtman’s 3 Cs Mode, which consists of three major steps: Codes, Categories, and Concepts. The students reported factors causing their anxiety English learning based on the three dimensions: communication anxiety, English test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The codes, categories and concepts were analyzed related to the learner, teacher, and other factors. The emerging data from the student-related factors are EFL learning skills (10 or 22.22%), EFL learning attitudes (9 or 20%) and psychological related issues (4 or 8.89%). The results from teacher-related factors included teaching behaviors (19 or 42.25%). The last factor involved the parents’ high expectations of the students’ English performance (3 or 6.6%).

The emerging data which is interesting to state here is the identification of the source of anxiety:

Table 6 Sources of English Language Anxiety Reported by the Students

Source of anxiety	Frequency
1. Teachers	21 (42.22%)
2. Students themselves	23 (51.11%)
3. Parents	3 (6.67%)
Total	45 (100%)

The results of Table 6 seem to reflect that these students feel that the students may need help to improve their self-esteem and they need help on anxiety-reducing strategies.

RESEARCH RESULTS 2. Anxiety-reducing strategies suggested for the rural junior Chinese middle school students in this study.

Nine students, together with their parents, and 4 teachers were voluntarily recruited to participate in the interview. Based on content analysis of 7 questions from semi-structured interviews, the researcher obtained strategies to reduce English learning anxiety from the perspective of students, parents and teachers. Content analysis was coded and analyzed using Lichtman’s 3 Cs Model (2013), which consists of three major steps: Codes, Categories, and Concepts and the results of the content analysis of anxiety-reducing strategies are as follows:

From the students’ perspectives

From the codes, categories and concepts in table 7 below there are two emerging themes based on the concepts: students’ anxiety- reducing strategies by improving English learning skills and increasing self-regulated learning in English. Within these two main anxiety-reduction strategies, students suggested: 1) they should improve EFL learning skills through memorizing words (4 or 28.57%); reading the text thoroughly (3 or 21.43%); improving basic English skills (3 or 21.43%), and mastering grammar rules (1 or 7.14%); and 2) they should increase self-regulation in learning English by setting up study goal to improve English test scores (2 or 14.29%) and improving self-confidence (1 or 7.14%).

Table 7 The concepts: students’ anxiety- reducing strategies from the students’ perspectives

Codes/ Keywords	Categories	Concepts
Memorizing words	Memorizing words (4 or 28.57%)	Students’ anxiety- reducing strategies by improving English learning skills
Reading the text well, reading the text thoroughly	Reading the text thoroughly (3 or 21.43%)	
Improving my basic English skills, improve my English performance	Improving basic skills (3 or 21.43%)	
Figuring out the grammar rules my teacher has taught me	Mastering grammar rules (1 or 7.14%)	
Setting up study goal to improve my English test scores	Setting goals to improve English test scores (2 or 14.29%)	Students’ anxiety- reducing strategies by increasing self-regulated learning in English
Improving my confidence	Improving self-confidence (1 or 7.14%)	
Total	14 (100%)	

From the parents’ perspectives

The emerging themes of English reducing-anxiety strategies based on the parents’ interview data (see details in table 8 below) are: parents’ anxiety-reducing strategies by giving encouragement and care about their children English learning, not criticizing harshly on children English learning outcome, and avoiding placing undue focus on English test results. Based on these three emerging themes, the parents thought that they may need give more encouragement and care about their children’s learning (5 or 45.46%), should not criticizing harshly about their children’s English learning outcomes (4 or 36.36%), and avoid placing undue focus on English test results of their children (2 or 18.18 %).

Table 8 The concepts: students’ anxiety- reducing strategies from the parents’ perspectives

Codes/ Keywords	Categories/ frequencies	Concepts
Encourage, treat gently, care about children’s learning	Giving more encouragement and care about the students’ learning (5 or 45.46%)	Parents’ anxiety-reducing strategies by giving encouragement and care about their children English learning
Criticize harshly, scold at me	Criticizing harshly about the students’ English learning outcomes (4 or 36.36%)	Parents’ anxiety-reducing strategies by not criticizing harshly on children English learning outcome.
Too much emphasis on test scores	Avoiding placing undue focus on English test results (2 or 18.18 %)	Parents’ anxiety-reducing strategies by avoiding placing undue focus on English test results.
Total	11 (100%)	

From the teachers’ perspective

The emerging themes from the coded data based on the teachers’ interviews are: teachers’ strategies of using effective instructional approach, and providing comments and feedbacks to support the students in learning English (Appendix 3). Teachers reported that the anxiety-reducing strategies could be done through:

- 1) Teachers’ strategies of using effective instructional approach

These English anxiety-reducing strategies can be done by applying effective instructional approach by a) using interesting teaching techniques and assignments in class (15 or 24.19%), b) applying effective instructional approach providing example and explaining more about how to arrive at answers (13 or 20.97%), c) communicating and interacting more with the students (6 or 9.68%), d) giving enough time to think and answer the question (5 or 8.06%), creating a good atmosphere in class (3 or 4.84%), e) mastering strong English teaching skills (2 or 3.23%), and f) being patient (1 or 1.61 %).

- 2) Teachers' strategies of providing comments and feedbacks to support the students in learning English

These English anxiety-reducing strategies can be done by a) not discriminating (5 or 1.61 8.06%), b) not criticizing the students' answers harshly in class (5 or 8.06%), c) being gentle (3 or 4.84%), d) not being too serious about students' grades (3 or 4.84%), and e) not forcing students to answer questions (1 or 1.61%).

Table 9 The concepts: students' anxiety- reducing strategies from the teachers' perspectives

Codes/Keywords	Categories/ frequencies	Concepts
Arrange group discussions and presentation, apply active way of teaching and active lecture style, use games, pictures and videos to support teaching	Applying effective instructional approach by using interesting teaching techniques and assignments in class (15 or 24.19%)	Teachers' strategies of using effective instructional approach
Talking about the problem before giving the correct answer, slowly guide us to find out the correct answer, tell us the reason for the error, giving examples, encourage me more by slowing down the pace of teaching	Applying effective instructional approach providing example and explaining more about how to arrive at answers (13 or 20.97%)	
Talk to us more, communicate with us more, get along with us like a friend, frequent interaction and chatting with us.	Communicating and interacting more with the students (6 or 9.68%)	
Give us enough thinking time to answer the questions, enough time for us to finish our assignments	Giving enough time to think and answer the question (5 or 8.06%)	
Creating relaxed, flexible, lively classroom atmosphere	Creating a good atmosphere in class (3 or 4.84%)	
The teacher must have strong English teaching ability.	Mastering strong English teaching skills (2 or 3.23%).	
Being patient with us	Being patient (1 or 1.61 %),	

Table 9 The concepts: students’ anxiety- reducing strategies from the teachers’ perspectives
(continue)

Codes/Keywords	Categories/ frequencies	Concepts
Do not discriminate against students who have low English scores, do not deny me	Not discriminating (5 or 8.06%)	Teachers’ strategies of providing comments and feedbacks to support the students in learning English.
Do not always criticize me seriously, do not criticize me right away before giving the correct answer.	Not criticizing the students’ answers harshly in class (5 or 8.06%)	
The teachers should be gentle with us.	Being gentle (3 or 4.84%),	
English teachers should not overemphasize grades.	Not being too serious about students’ grades (3 or 4.84%)	
Do not force us to answer the questions we cannot answer.	Not forcing students to answer questions (1 or 1.61%)	
Total	62 (100%)	

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

1. The factors and the levels of English language anxiety for rural Chinese junior middle school in this study

The factors for English language anxiety for rural Chinese junior high school in this study were communication anxiety, English test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation and the level of the overall students’ English learning anxiety level is at the moderate level (\bar{X} = 3.26, S.D = 0.676). The anxiety factors were found to be student-related factors, teacher-related factors, and other factors; i.e., language environment in class, tensions by parents’ expectation and tension of failure of communication in front of public. The frequencies of the sources of the English language anxiety were listed from the students themselves (44.5%), the teachers (22.2%), and the parents (33.3%), respectively.

2. The reducing-anxiety of English learning anxiety for rural Chinese junior middle school in this study

Reducing-anxiety strategies were sought from the prospectives of the students—how they should improve their English language learning skills and learning attitudes, parents—how they should be more flexible in their children’s expectations and teachers—how they should support their students and continue improving ways of their professional development.

Discussion

1. The overall students' level of English learning anxiety was at a moderate level with some specific sub-dimension rated as high level were similar to the research studies conducted by Tang [27], Zhan [2], and Zhao [28]. This may be explained from the qualitative data reported by the students in this study the students seem to be aware of the causes and the factors involved in their own English language anxiety when they could identify the sources of their anxiety and could explain how the sources affect their anxiety. The students could suggest how they themselves, their parents and the teachers may help alleviate their tensions. Some students admitted that they used to set goals for their English language learning but they did not set goal for the course. Some did not even think of setting goals for their English learning.

Based on the findings of the combined quantitative and qualitative data, the English learning anxiety factors of Chinese rural junior middle school students were divided into learner-related, teacher-related, family-related, and background-related factors, the most significant of which were student-related factors. Karen Moni et al. [29] proposed that EFL learning ability was the main anxiety factor among student-related factors. The low English proficiency, limited English basic skills, inability to keep up with lectures, and poor vocabulary and grammar were the main problems of the [30]. In addition, students' fear of low scores, lack of confidence, and high expectations were also frequently mentioned in this study, and the importance of these factors was similarly proposed by Chinese researchers. (Huo, 2009; Guo & Xu, 2014) [31-32]. Finally, students' psychological factors, such as low self-esteem, fear of losing face, and fear of being ridiculed by classmates for low scores were also identified as important anxiety factors in this study, which is consistent with previous findings [31, 33].

2. Reducing-anxiety strategies were sought from the perspectives of the students—how they should improve their English language learning skills and learning attitudes, parents—how they should be more flexible in their children's expectation and teachers—how they should support their students and continue improving ways of their professional development.

The results of qualitative data from the students' perspectives reveal two anxiety- reducing strategies emerge: students' anxiety- reducing strategies by improving English learning skills and increasing self-regulated learning in English. From the parents' perspectives, three issues were listed: parents' anxiety-reducing strategies by a) giving encouragement and care about their children English learning, b) not criticizing harshly on children English learning outcome, and c) avoiding placing undue focus on English test results. The emerging themes from the coded data based on the teachers' interviews are: teachers' strategies of using effective

instructional approach, and providing comments and feedbacks to support the students in learning English.

One of the reducing-anxiety strategies which the students have raised is the more relaxing classroom environment which students can feel that the teachers care about them and their learning. The teachers also share this point that they should create a relaxed and active classroom atmosphere and establish a close teacher-student relationship to help reduce students' English learning anxiety. This finding is consistent with the opinion of some researchers that a relaxed classroom atmosphere can stimulate students' interest and motivation, and that teachers' various teaching methods and styles can make can add appeal to the classroom [34-35].

Many students rated the statement in the questionnaire item 18: "After taking English test, I always feel worried that my scores will be criticized by the teacher as high ($\bar{x} = 3.51$ S.D.= 1.131). In the interview, teachers also agreed that positive feedback and evaluation by them in the classroom can help to reduce students' anxiety about learning English. For this issue, Zhang [12] suggested that teachers should insist on positive feedback to cultivate students' self-confidence. Zhao [28] and Tang [27] stipulated that teachers should still smile when commenting, which can reduce students' embarrassment and avoid direct negative comments. Ren [1] and Yang [34] proposed that English teachers need to give positive feedback to students to increase their motivation to learn English. In addition, students and teachers share the same view that the teachers should use appropriate methods of error correction. The students in this study reported their tension of negative feedback provision. The teachers, in their interview, mentioned that English teachers' gently correcting errors can reduce students' English learning anxiety.

The students mentioned their tension can be from the teachers' and their parents' excessive emphasis on their English test scores. From the teachers' side, the teachers reported in the interview that they should not place excessive emphasis on test scores, and teachers should cultivate positive attitudes toward students' perception of test failure. The results of this study are the same as the recommendations of previous studies in which Yang [34] and Li [36] suggested that teachers should correct their attitudes towards exams. Zhao [28] suggested that teachers should not only help students to correctly perceive failure in English exams, but also help them to cultivate a correct perception of success and failure to reduce students' test anxiety. From the parents' side, they revealed that they should be more flexible and do not set too high expectations on their children's grades and scores.

References

- [1] Ren, X. J. (2019). *A study on the teachers' questioning and students' foreign language anxiety in junior middle school English class*. [Unpublished Master's Thesis, Jiangxi Normal University].
- [2] Zhan, W. R. (2021). *Analysis and Countermeasures of English classroom silence of rural junior middle school students -- taking two rural middle schools in Jingyuan County, Gansu Province as an example*. [Unpublished Master's Thesis, Xi'an Foreign Studies University].
- [3] Wang, Q. (2015). A Study on the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and classroom atmosphere. *Journal of Northwest University*, 6, 32-35.
- [4] Guo, Y., Xu, J., & Liu, X. (2018). English language learners' use of self-regulatory strategies for foreign language anxiety in China. *System*, 76, 49-61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.05.001>
- [5] Horwitz, E. K., & Young, D. (1991). *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- [6] Horwitz, E. (2017). On the misreading of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and the need to balance anxiety research and the experiences of anxious language learners. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele. *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications*, pp. 31-47. Multilingual Matters.
- [7] Horwitz, E.K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-126.
- [8] Oxford, R. L. (2017). Anxious language learners can change their minds: Ideas and strategies from traditional psychology and positive psychology. In Gkonou, C., Daubney, M., & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications*. pp. 179-199. Multilingual Matters.
- [9] Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2020). The foreign language classroom anxiety scale and academic achievement: An overview of the prevailing literature and a meta-analysis. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning*, 2, 26-56.
- [10] Horwitz, E. K. (2010). Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching*, 43(2), 154-167. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480999036X>
- [11] MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An overview of language anxiety research and trends in its development. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J. M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 11-30). Multilingual Matters.

- [12] Zhang, X. (2019). Foreign language anxiety and foreign language performance: A meta-analysis. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(4), 763–781. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12590>.
- [13] Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02026.x>
- [14] Young, D.J. (1991). Creating a low anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75, 426-439.
- [15] Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Bailey, P., & Daley, C. E. (1999). Factors associated with foreign language anxiety. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 20, 217-239.
- [16] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1993). The effects of induced anxiety on three stages of cognitive processing in computerized vocabulary learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16, 1-17.
- [17] Aida, Y. (1994). Construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students of Japanese. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(2), 155-168.
- [18] Oxford, R. L. (1999). Anxiety and the language learner: new insights. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Effect in Language Learning*. pp. 58-67. Cambridge University Press.
- [19] Hu, X., Zhang, X., & McGeown, S. (2021). Foreign language anxiety and achievement: A study of primary school students learning English in China. *Language teaching Research*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211032332>
- [20] Teimouri, Y., Goetze, J., & Plonsky, L. (2019). Second language anxiety and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 41(2), 363-387. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263118000311>
- [21] Wei, C.-W., Kao, H.-Y., Lu, H.-H., & Liu, Y. C. (2018). The effects of competitive gaming scenarios and personalized assistance strategies on English vocabulary learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 21(3), 146-158.
- [22] Gregersen, T. S. (2005). Nonverbal cues: Clues to the detection of foreign language anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals*, 38(3), 388-400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2005.tb02225.x>
- [23] Yu-Fen Yang, Wen-Min Hsieh, Wing-Kwong Wong, Yi-Chun Hong & Siao-Cing Lai (2022): Reducing students' foreign language anxiety to improve English vocabulary learning in an online simulation game, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2022.2039203
- [24] Alnuzaili, E. S., & Uddin, N. (2020). Dealing with anxiety in foreign language learning classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(2), 269-273. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1102.15>

- [25] Al-Saraj, T. M. (2014). Foreign language anxiety in female Arabs learning English: Case studies. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(3), 257-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2013.837911>
- [26] Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. SAGE Publications.
- [27] Tang, Y. (2021). *A survey of English learning anxiety of rural junior middle school students -- Taking Three Rural Middle Schools in Hechuan district as an example*. [Unpublished Master's Thesis, Nanning Normal University].
- [28] Zhao, L. L. (2019). *Research on the condition and countermeasures of rural junior middle school students' English learning anxiety——Take eight rural junior middle schools in Songyuan for example*. [Unpublished Master's Thesis, Yanbian University].
- [29] Tran, T. T. T., Baldauf, R. B., & Moni, K. (2013). Foreign Language Anxiety: Understanding Its Sources and Effects from Insiders' Perspectives. *The journal of Asia TEFL*, 10(1), 95-131.
- [30] Jin, Z. Q., & Yu, C. Y. (2009). Investigation on the current situation of English Classroom Anxiety of students in the first grade of high school and its teaching implications. *Journal of Modern education science: general education research*, 4, 47-48.
- [31] Huo, W. H. (2009). Gender differences in foreign language learning anxiety in the 21st century. *Journal of Modern Education Management*, 5, 66-68.
- [32] Guo, Y., & Xu, J. F. (2014). A study on English learning anxiety of non-English majors. *Foreign Language World Journal*, 4, 2-11.
- [33] Lin, Y. W., & Wu, Y. J. (2010). The influence of class assignment on English learning anxiety. *Education Research Monthly*, 8(2), 64-66.
- [34] Yang, X. Y. (2013). *An empirical study on English learning anxiety in rural middle schools*. [Unpublished Master's Thesis, Hunan University].
- [35] Liu, F. (2020). *The study on the current situation and strategies of rural junior high school students' speaking anxiety in English classes* (Master thesis's, Gannan Normal University). https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=1s280mv0pf6r0gr0450n0ps03y612476&site=xueshu_se&hitarticle=1
- [36] Li, H. (2015). Causal relationship between College Students' English writing anxiety and writing achievement: evidence from follow-up studies. *Foreign language journal*, 3, 68-75.