

Measures to Overcome EFL's Reading Anxiety: Based on Self-efficiency and Affective Filter Hypothesis

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Abstract

English is an international language and plays a vital role in our foreign language learning. Massive efforts have been made to improve the quality of English learning and teaching in China. According to the theory of self-efficiency, affective filter hypothesis, and learners' reading anxiety, they relate to each other respectively. Since learning anxiety has become a common issue in language acquisition, it is significance to find out measures to overcome EFL's reading anxiety. By summarizing related literature, the author gives five specific measures for teachers and learners to solve problems they may face when learning language, especially reading.

Keywords

Learning Strategy; EFL; Reading Anxiety; Self-efficiency; Affective Filter Hypothesis.

1. Introduction

In this section, background of the study, purpose and significance of the study would be explicitly narrated.

1.1. Background to the Study

English is an international language and plays a vital role in our foreign language learning. Massive efforts have been made to improve the quality of English learning and teaching in China. The process of foreign language learning is a comprehensive interplay of various factors, including language, cognition, emotion, and social elements. The emotional aspects within foreign language learning are intricate and subtle, dynamically intertwined with individual and environmental factors that collectively influence learners' language acquisition outcomes (Dewaele 2021)[2]. Emotion serves as a crucial component of learners' emotional experiences and plays a significant role in the context of foreign language learning. Throughout the challenging process of acquiring a foreign language, learners inevitably experience various negative emotions, with foreign language anxiety being the most prevalent (Piniel & Albert, 2018). Foreign language anxiety exhibits distinct characteristics, with learners experiencing varying degrees of anxiety during different stages of acquiring different language skills. As an essential avenue for learners to obtain foreign language information, foreign language reading imposes high demands on learners' discourse knowledge, cognitive processing abilities, and cultural sensitivity (Shi & Liu, 2006), thus serving as a significant source of anxiety for learners engaged in foreign language learning.

Foreign language reading, as one of the primary mediums in foreign language teaching activities, plays a crucial role in helping learners understand language patterns, acquire cultural knowledge, and engage in verbal communication (Lu & Liu, 2015). Unlike other foreign language skills, foreign language reading typically requires learners to work independently. It has lower interactivity and social engagement but carries a high cultural load of the target language. This involves a range of complex factors such as language, cognition, and meta-cognition. As a result, learners often experience anxiety when facing challenges in reading (Hamanda & Takaki, 2021). Due to all kinds of challenges EFL confront, it is important to figure

out effective measures to help them overcome their anxiety of learning language, especially reading.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

Since learners' anxiety has become a common problem in language acquisition, especially for English as foreign language learners in their reading, it is crucial to figure out supportive measures to relieve their anxiety.

1.2.1. Purpose of The Study

The study would base on the theory of self-efficiency and affective filtering hypothesis, aiming at summarizing efficient measures by figuring out the relationship between self-efficiency and affective filtering hypothesis and reading anxiety. In order to help teachers pay more attention to students' emotional states and characteristics in English reading teaching, and put forward targeted suggestions for students with different reading levels, so as to help learners relieve English reading anxiety, improve English reading self-efficacy, and finally apply it to all aspects of language learning to improve linguistic competence.

1.2.2. Significance of The Study

Theoretically, the study would integrate views of self-efficiency, affective filtering hypothesis, and reading anxiety to explore the relationship within, which would enrich present theoretical basis. On the other hand, it provides new ideas for the follow-up research on learners' affective factors and second language acquisition.

Practically, the study can provide references for teachers in reading teaching, help them to fully understand the current situation of high school students' English reading self-efficiency and English reading anxiety, and deeply understand the correlation between English reading self-efficiency and English reading anxiety, which is conducive to teachers' purposeful teaching intervention, and stimulate students' interest and self-confidence in English reading. To help them relieve English reading anxiety, so as to promote second language acquisition. At the same time, based on the research results, it can help students enrich the emotional experience of English reading and promote their comprehensive and healthy development of body and mind.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the author would first define the core conception, then elicit several related researches home and abroad.

2.1. Definition of Key Terms

2.1.1. Self-efficiency

The concept of self-efficacy was first introduced by American psychologist Bandura (1977) and has had a wide and profound impact on the field of psychology and sociology. According to Bandura, self-efficacy is a subjective mechanism of action through choice, thinking, motivation, and psychosomatic response processes. According to the mechanism of self-efficacy, the higher the level of general self-efficacy of college students, the greater their effort and resilience, and the more likely they are to look for their own reasons when they fail, and to strengthen their abilities to a certain extent (Gui & Zhou, 2015). Some studies have shown that self-efficacy can influence the innovation ability of college students. Nowadays, the concept of creative self-efficacy is derived from the self-efficacy theory and creativity theory and refers to an individual's evaluation of their ability to produce creative results from specific activities (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). It is how confident people believe they can use skills to accomplish certain creative tasks (C.-J. Wang et al., 2014).

2.1.2. Reading Anxiety

The concept of foreign language (FL) reading anxiety evolved from a study by Saito et al. (1999), in which the researchers proposed unfamiliar scripts or writing systems as the major source of FL reading anxiety. Studies that have significant relevance to the present study are reviewed in this part. First, this chapter begins with the larger concept of anxiety and then moves to the foreign language anxiety in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of foreign language reading anxiety, and the concept of cognitive load comes next. Second, the types of anxiety and cognitive load are introduced respectively. Third, previous studies on FL reading anxiety are reviewed, including the sources and measurements of FL reading anxiety as well as relevant empirical studies on FL reading anxiety and reading performance. Finally, this part reviews previous research on cognitive load, including the factors affecting cognitive load and its measurement as well as the empirical studies on cognitive load and reading performance.

2.1.3. Affective Filtering Hypothesis

The Affective Filter of Affective Filter Hypothesis which was initially proposed by Dulay and Burt is a block that prevents the entry of understandable language from reaching the mental apparatus of language acquisition, thereby preventing the acquisition of language. Krashen proposed the whole affective filtering hypothesis stating that an environment with a large amount of comprehensible input does not guarantee that students will learn the target language well. The process of filtering is as follows: input-filtering-mental language organ-acquisition ability. Thus, filtering is the first obstacle for the input to reach the mental language organ. In other words, the emotional factor plays a facilitating or hindering role in SLA. Krashen also identified three key variables that affect the motivation, confidence and anxiety of the Affective Filter. High motivation, high self-esteem and low anxiety could alleviate the affective filter of students that will contribute to acquisition. Conversely, it hinders student's second language acquisition. Ehrman has done research by tracking two years of 16 good language learners of extrovert introvert as cases. We found that two groups have different preference on some learning strategies, which have a certain trend of change in the course of two years of college English learning, so as to find out some different characteristics of the excellent language learners with extroverted/ introverted personality.

2.2. Related Studies Home and Abroad

2.2.1. Study at Home

The results of the correlation research on English reading self-efficacy and English reading anxiety among domestic learners indicate a significant negative relationship between the two variables. Pan Cunlu (2012) conducted an analysis from a macro perspective, which also revealed a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and anxiety in English reading. Many scholars have studied this relationship from a micro perspective, such as Luo Yanna (2016), who found that high levels of English reading self-efficacy were negatively correlated with English reading anxiety among students. This finding was consistent with previous studies (Lu Now, 2018; Deng Xin, 2021). Furthermore, Lu Now (2018) investigated gender differences in these affective variables and found no significant difference in either English reading self-efficacy or anxiety.

2.2.2. Study Abroad

There is a certain degree of controversy among foreign scholars regarding the correlation between reading self-efficacy and reading anxiety in English language. Karahan Berna Ürün (2018) conducted a study with fifth-grade students as research subjects to explore the correlation between reading anxiety and reading self-efficacy, and the results indicated a significant positive correlation between reading anxiety and perceived reading self-efficacy. However, Ni Luh Putu and Devi Trisnayanti et al. (2020) selected vocational high school

students as research subjects using cluster sampling method to investigate the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading anxiety, with results showing a negative correlation between them. This finding is consistent with the research result obtained by Marhaeni N N R (2020), which also demonstrated a negative correlation between reading self-efficacy and reading anxiety.

3. Measures Taken to Reduce Reading Anxiety

In this section, the author would summarize some measures taken to reduce learners' reading anxiety, aiming to give practical suggestions for their further study.

Firstly, to guide students to understand English reading anxiety correctly, reading anxiety is not an exception, nor should they regard themselves as different or have low self-esteem.

Secondly, to create a relaxed and pleasant reading atmosphere, teachers should get rid of the traditional teaching mode and listen to the real voice of students in study and life, so as to reduce students' emotional filtering and relieve their anxiety in English reading.

Thirdly, to release English reading anxiety through independent cooperative learning. In the process of cooperative learning, students can apply their strengths to complete tasks together, and anxiety will be significantly reduced.

Fourthly, when examining students' learning results, timely provide feedback to students, inform students of what needs to be adjusted, do not criticize students too much, but give affirmation to their outstanding areas, and improve students' reading confidence.

Finally, based on the relevant theory of learning, teachers should strengthen their own psychology for students in need of psychological counseling in a timely manner.

4. Conclusion

This paper is a review paper on Measures to overcome EFL reading Anxiety: Based on the self-efficacy and Affective Filtering hypothesis, which mainly explores how to solve the common reading anxiety problem of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the reading process through theoretical analysis and practical measures. English as an international language occupies an important position in foreign language learning in our country, but the emotional factors such as anxiety in the process of language learning have a significant impact on the learning effect. As an important aspect of language learning, reading often causes learners' anxiety due to various challenges. Based on the theories of self-efficiency and affective filtering hypothesis, this paper discusses the effective measures to solve EFL reading anxiety, help learners reduce anxiety, improve self-efficacy, and improve the overall language learning ability.

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