

## Listening comprehension and anxiety in Chinese university EFL students

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### Abstract

Affective factors such as anxiety, personality, self-confidence, motivation play influential role in learner's language achievement and proficiency (Chen, 2015). The purpose of this study was to investigate the third-year English majors' listening anxiety state, then further identify whether their listening anxiety vary according to their gender, and finally explore the relationship between their listening anxiety and listening achievement. Participants were 272 (41 male and 231 female) English majors learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Data were collected from a Listening Anxiety Questionnaire (LAQ) and the listening comprehension test from the Test for English Majors-4 (TEM-4). The LAQ was adapted from E.K. Horwitz, M.B. Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), covering three aspects of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Descriptive statistical analyses showed that the Chinese EFL university students experienced a moderate level of anxiety ( $M=2.81$ ). Among the three categories of listening anxiety, students experienced test anxiety most ( $M=3.02$ ), followed by communication apprehension ( $M=2.85$ ), and the last was fear of negative evaluation ( $M=2.80$ ). An independent Samples t-test indicated that female students experienced higher levels in terms of overall listening anxiety ( $p \leq .01$ ) and three categories of anxiety ( $p < .05$ ). A Pearson correlation analysis revealed that anxiety and listening achievement were negatively related to each other ( $r = -.35^{**}$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). Finally a multiple regression analysis further revealed that the fear of negative evaluation was a powerful predictor with a Beta value of  $-.35$  in predicting listening achievement, but communication apprehension and test anxiety did not enter the regression model despite their correlation with listening comprehension achievement. It is recommended that educators pay attention to anxiety, and the gender differences should be taken into consideration too.

**Keywords:** *anxiety, EFL, FLCAS, gender, LAQ, listening comprehension achievement*

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### 1. Introduction

The world is currently experiencing such trends as globalization, networking and the creation of a global village. English, as a Lingua Franca (House, 2003) has been widely used in almost every field in the world. Thus, more and more people are beginning to learn English to make communication easier in such a globalized context and we are beginning to realize that most communication in English will occur between non-native speakers of English rather than with native-speakers of English. In this context, a good command of English has become more necessary than ever before. Especially, frequent oral communication between people all over the world places a high requirement on people's English listening and speaking abilities. In addition, the importance of listening for successful second or foreign language acquisition has been underlined by many authors (Ai, 2015; Gilakjani & Sabouri,

2016; Xu, 2011). However, learners perceive listening as the most difficult skill. Graham's (2006) study suggests that listening comprehension is the skill in which students feel they have achieved the least success.

According to Wei and Su (2012), there are about 390 million English learners in China, which represents about one third of the country's 1.3 billion people. Considering the large English learning population, listening and speaking abilities have been highlighted by Chinese government. Students are required to have the ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking. In designing English syllabuses, students' listening and speaking competence should be fully considered (Gao, 2013).

However, in the syllabus design, English listening has not been given the same attention as other skills like reading and writing. For the

English majors in Chinese universities, the English listening course consists of only 2 hours each week, taking up about 15.30% of teaching time for English. Therefore, the learning of English listening skills has become problematic. Students' listening skills and proficiency need to be developed.

Students' poor performance in listening comprehension is complex. Some students attribute this to their own supposed low ability in listening, some attribute this to the difficulty of the listening tasks themselves and listening materials, but little attention has been given to affective factors, such as anxiety, personality, self-confidence, motivation, etc. Therefore, this study aims to focus on students' listening anxiety and investigate its relationship to their listening performance.

## 2. Literature review

Anxiety is a common phenomenon occurring in people's everyday lives, and it affects people in different ways. It may be mild, moderate or excessive, and it may last a short time or be permanent. Anxiety is commonly described by psychologists as "a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Scovel, 1978, p.134). Sdorow (1998) states, "anxiety is a feeling of apprehension accompanied by sympathetic nervous system arousal, which produces increases in sweating, heart rate, and breathing rate" (p. 485). MacIntyre (1999) makes a distinction between three categories of anxiety: trait anxiety (a feature of an individual's personality); situation-specific anxiety (anxiety experienced in a well-defined situation); and state anxiety (apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time).

However, when discussing the effect of anxiety on language learning, one must specifically consider the anxiety generated in second language contexts, and that language anxiety is not a simple transfer from the general sense of anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that foreign language learning anxiety is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128). Besides, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) define foreign language learning anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second

language context, including speaking, listening, reading and writing" (p.284). In summary, listening anxiety, as a kind of situation-specific anxiety, occurring in the listening context, has a great effect on English listening.

Another important insight concerning different types of anxiety exists in the distinction between *facilitating* and *debilitating* anxiety (Scovel, 1978), or what Oxford (1999) called *harmful* and *helpful* anxiety. Facilitating anxiety results in improved performance, while debilitating anxiety leads to poor performance. Scovel (1978, p.139) has noted that facilitating anxiety "motivates the learner to 'fight' the new learning task; it gears the learner emotionally for approach behavior". Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, "motivates the learner to flee the new learning task. It stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behavior".

Studies on anxiety have been conducted by many researchers around the world. Studies by Cui (2011) and Atef-Vahid and Kashani's (2011) focus on high school students' English learning anxiety; Chen's (2015) participants are non-English majors in university; Baharuddin and Rashid's (2014) study in Malaysia and Woodrow's (2006) study in Australia illustrate students' anxiety and its relationship with their oral performance, while Ahmed, Pathan, and Khan's (2017) study conducted in Pakistan explores the factors that cause English speaking anxiety among postgraduate students. In additions, Zhai's (2015) review on anxiety indicates that only a few empirical studies have investigated foreign language listening anxiety, especially in Chinese context. Therefore, more studies need to be done to explore the listening anxiety in Chinese context.

When the gender factor is considered in anxiety, results are inconsistent, and fewer studies are available. Golchi (2012) and Gerencheal's (2016) research reveals that female learners were more anxious than male learners; while Cui (2011) and Elald's (2016) findings show that female students are less anxious in learning English as a foreign language than male students. However, Matsuda and Gobel's (2004) study reported no gender differences in language anxiety among students learning English in Japan. In other words, current research on language anxiety has produced conflicting findings in terms of gender, which indicates that further research

should be undertaken. In particular, little research English majors in Chinese contexts. This gap in the literature leads to the exploration of three main research questions in this study: first, “Do Chinese EFL students experience anxiety in English listening learning? If yes, what is the state of listening anxiety experienced by them?”; second, “Does students’ listening anxiety vary significantly according to their gender? If so, what are the main patterns of variation?”; third, “Does students’ listening anxiety have any relationship with their listening comprehension achievement?”.

### 3. The study

#### 3.1 participants

Participants in the present study were 272 English majors at Guizhou University, Guizhou Province, China. They were foreign language learners of English (EFL learners), and between 18 and 22 years of age, including 41 male and 231 female students. Most of them had been learning English as a foreign language in Chinese schools for about 8 years on average. They were all third-year students, so the participants could be considered to constitute a fairly homogeneous group in terms of their learning history. In addition, to the third-year English majors, they had taken listening courses in the first two years of university study, so they had experience in learning how to listen to English.

#### 3.2 Instruments

There were two main instruments used in the study: a Listening Anxiety Questionnaire (LAQ) and the listening comprehension test from the Test for English Majors-4 (TEM-4):

The instrument used in the present study to measure students’ listening anxiety was adapted from Horwitz et al.’s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was a 5-point rating scale questionnaire, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. It consisted of 33 items covering three aspects of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Since the purpose of the present study was to measure students’ listening anxiety levels, some items have been modified to suit the context. Finally, a 5-point rating scale Listening Anxiety Questionnaire (LAQ) with 30 items was used in the present study. It ranged from ‘never or almost

is available on listening anxiety and gender among never true of me’, valued as 1; ‘usually not true of me’, valued as 2; ‘somewhat true of me’, valued as 3; ‘usually true of me’, valued as 4; to ‘always or almost always true of me’ valued as 5. The total scores of these 30 items revealed the degree of participants’ anxiety in listening English. The higher the score, the higher the listening anxiety experienced by the students.

To check whether the questionnaire items could measure what they were designed for, i.e. content validity, an Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) approach was used. Three experts judged each item through the use of a 3-point scale (1= relevant, 0= uncertain, -1= irrelevant). The value of IOC in the LAQ was .80 >.50, which meant all the items in the questionnaire were acceptable for the study, according to Brown (1996). To check the internal consistency of all items of the questionnaire, Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Coefficient was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The Alpha coefficient of .88 ( $\geq 0.70$ ) was an acceptable, higher index of reliability according to Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma (2003).

The second instrument was the listening comprehension test from the TEM-4, which was used to measure participants’ listening ability. The TEM-4 assesses the language performance of English majors and is administered by the National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education (NACFLT) in China. The test consists of two levels: Test for English Majors Grade four (TEM-4) and Test for English Majors Grade eight (TEM-8). The former is administered at the end of the 2nd year, and the latter is conducted at the end of the 4th year of the undergraduate program. Since participants were all year three English majors, the listening comprehension section of a retired TEM-4 (2013) was used to judge the listening proficiency of the participants. In the TEM-4 listening test, there were 30 questions in all, including three sections: conversations, passages, and news broadcasts.

#### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

In order to collect data, each of the subjects needed to have two measurements, one of LAQ and one of listening test. Before the LAQ was administered, the participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the

LAQ. They were also informed that their affect their course grades. Then, the participants completed the questionnaire without discussion with others. After that, the listening test was conducted, and all the data were processed using SPSS 16.0.

#### 4. Results

The results are presented from the overall anxiety to each anxiety items, that is, data for each research question are analyzed at three levels: the overall anxiety situation, three categories of anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation), and the individual anxiety item.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of students' anxiety level

Anxiety	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Communication apprehension	272	1.00	4.45	2.85	.76
Test Anxiety	272	1.00	5.00	3.02	.76
Fear of negative evaluation	272	1.20	4.60	2.80	.75

As described in Table 1, among the three categories of listening anxiety, students reported that they experienced test anxiety most (M=3.02), followed by communication apprehension (M=2.85), and last was fear of negative evaluation (M=2.80).

Regarding the individual anxiety items experienced by students, descriptive statistics for each item of listening anxiety are partially shown in Table 2 below:

As shown in Table 2, students' higher

responses would be confidential and would not

4.1 Answer to research question 1 (Do Chinese EFL students experience anxiety in English listening learning? If yes, what is the state of listening anxiety experienced by them?)

In answer to research question 1, students' average score for the LAQ were applied to indicate students' anxiety levels. The overall mean score of students' listening anxiety was 2.81 (M=2.81), which indicated that Chinese EFL students experienced anxiety at a moderate level. A further analysis of the results regarding the three categories of listening anxiety is shown in Table 1 below:

level of anxiety appeared in 6 out of 30 items. Students reported that when taking exams, and listening to fast English speech (item 1, 2, 3), they reported that they felt more anxious (M=3.57, M=3.54, M=3.53 respectively). When asked to answer questions without preparation (item 4, M=3.51), and facing difficult sentences (item 5, M=3.43), they felt anxious also. In addition, teachers' comments on their listening performances caused anxiety too (item 6, M=3.33).

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of students' anxiety level of each items

Anxiety	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
1. I feel worried during the listening exams, because I seldom have time to think about the materials I have heard.	1	5	3.57	1.13
2. I would be very nervous in the English listening test, if the listening material were spoken only once.	1	5	3.54	1.14
3. I always worry I can't completely understand when listening to fast spoken English.	1	5	3.53	1.23
4. I get worried when asked to answer questions without prior preparation.	1	5	3.51	1.15
5. I feel upset about complex sentence structures in the listening tests.	1	5	3.43	1.14
6. I always pay great attention to teachers' comments on my listening performance.	1	5	3.33	1.10

4.2 Answer to research question 2 (Does students' listening anxiety vary significantly according to their gender? If so, what are the main patterns of variation?)

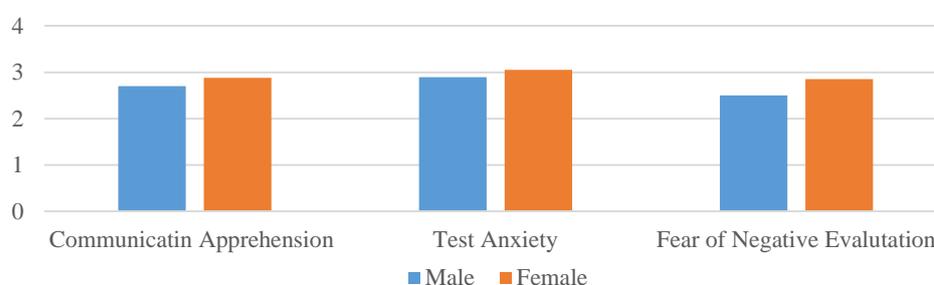
In answer to research question 2, an Independent Samples t-test was employed, and Table 3 shows the results:

**Table 3** T-test for gender differences in anxiety

Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig (2-tailed)	Variation pattern	Effect size Cohen's d	Comment
Male	41	2.52	.69	.01	Female>male	.48	moderate
Female	231	2.86	.73				

Table 3 presents the results of gender differences in listening anxiety. It revealed a significant difference in the scores for males (M=2.52) and females (M=2.86) on anxiety with a p-value of .01 ( $p=.01 \leq .01$ ). This indicated that, as a whole, in listening anxiety, female students

reported experiencing significantly higher levels of listening anxiety than male students. In addition, the effect size further tells the extent of the difference, or the magnitude of the difference. Cohen's effect size value ( $d=.48$ ) suggested a moderate practical significance.



**Figure 1** Patterns of anxiety

Figure 1 shows that, both male and female followed the same tendency of anxiety. Both of them reported that they experienced most anxiety in tests, followed by communication

apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Among all the three categories of anxiety, female students tended to feel more anxious than their male counterparts.

**Table 4** Anxiety items showing significant variation according to students' gender

Statement	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size Cohen's d
1. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English listening class.	Male	41	2.85	1.15	.05	.33
	Female	231	3.23	1.16		
2. I would probably feel uncomfortable around native speakers of English.	Male	41	2.24	1.09	.02	.37
	Female	231	2.73	1.19		
3. I'm tense and nervous using English in group discussions.	Male	41	1.93	.85	.04	.58
	Female	231	2.29	1.07		
4. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English listening class.	Male	41	2.20	1.03	.01	.33
	Female	231	2.64	1.06		
5. I'm afraid that my listening teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	Male	41	1.88	.93	.00	.37
	Female	231	2.47	1.09		
6. I'm afraid that the teacher will criticize me when performing listening tasks.	Male	41	2.02	.99	.00	.58
	Female	231	2.65	1.22		

Table 4 indicates that significant gender differences appeared in 6 out of the 30 items. Female students reported higher levels of anxiety than male students. When female students didn't understand what the teacher was saying (item 1), they tended to feel more anxious

( $M=3.23 > M=2.85$ ,  $p=.05 \leq .05$ ). Female students' higher levels of anxiety also happened when the female students talked with native speakers of English ( $M=2.73 > M=2.24$ ,  $p=.02 < .05$ ) and talked in front of groups ( $M=2.29 > M=1.93$ ,  $p=.04 < .05$ ). In English class, female students reported higher

levels of anxiety in answering questions voluntarily ( $M=2.64 > M=2.20$ ,  $p=.01 < .05$ ). In addition, female students were more anxious about teachers' corrections and criticism (item 5 and 6). Moreover, the effect size of Cohen's  $d$  value indicated the magnitude of difference. Among these 6 items, almost all the Cohen's  $d$  values (from .33 to .58) suggested a moderate practical significance, especially for items 5 and 6, Cohen's  $d$  values of .58 and .57 respectively, suggested a moderate to high practical significance. That is, especially when facing teachers' corrections and criticism, female students felt more anxious than male students.

4.3 Answer to research question 3 (Does students' listening anxiety have any relationship with their listening comprehension achievement?)

To answer research question 3, a Pearson correlation analysis was first run to examine whether the participants' overall anxiety was correlated with their listening comprehension achievement. As demonstrated in Table 5, anxiety and listening comprehension achievement were significantly and negatively correlated ( $r=-.35^{**}$ ,  $p=.00$ ). This means that the students who were more anxious tended to score lower on the listening comprehension test, whereas students who were less anxious were likely to get higher scores.

**Table 5** Correlation between anxiety and listening comprehension achievement

Anxiety	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	Listening Comprehension Achievement
Overall anxiety	.00	-.35**
Communication apprehension	.00	-.26**
Test anxiety	.00	-.30**
Fear of negative evaluation	.00	-.35**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

All three categories of anxiety were also negatively correlated with listening achievement. Among them, fear of negative evaluation held the highest correlation with listening achievement at a significance level of .00 ( $r= -.35$ ), test anxiety ranked second ( $r= -.30$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and communication apprehension was last ( $r=-.26$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Although the results produced by the Pearson analysis demonstrated that anxiety had a negative correlation with listening achievement, it is not possible to say whether the three variables had any predictive value for listening achievement. Therefore, a multiple regression

analysis was conducted.

As displayed in the Tables 6, and 7, fear of negative evaluation entered the regression model by the stepwise method, accounting for 12.0% of the variance in listening achievement, with an  $F$  value of 36.75 and a significance level of .00. The model, therefore, had statistical significance since the probability level of the  $F$  value was much smaller than .01. Results in Table 7 demonstrated that fear of negative evaluation was a powerful negative predictor with a Beta value of -.35.

**Table 6** Multiple regression: Model summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	Sig.
1	.35	.12	.12	.12	36.75	.00

a. Predictors: (Constant), fear of negative evaluation

b. Dependent Variable: students' listening scores

**Table 7** Multiple regression: Coefficients

Model	B	$\beta$	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	20.67		28.50	.00
Fear of negative evaluation	-1.52	-.35	-6.06	.00

**Table 8** Multiple regression: Excluded variable

Model	$\beta$ In	t	Collinearity Statistics	
			Tolerance	VIF
1 Communication apprehension	-.03	-.39	.50	2.02
Test anxiety	-.13	-1.70	.57	1.75

Table 8 shows that the variables communication apprehension and test anxiety were excluded from the model. This meant that communication apprehension and test anxiety were not predictors of listening achievement. Therefore, among these three variables, only fear of negative evaluation made a negatively significant contribution to the prediction of listening proficiency.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Chinese EFL students' anxiety

According to the data mentioned above, Chinese students' anxiety was obvious. Most of them experienced some degree of listening anxiety. Among the three categories, the most anxiety reported was test anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. In addition, they also felt anxious when facing fast spoken English, difficult sentences, and answering questions without preparation. A possible explanation may have to do with the Chinese education system. First, the traditional exam-oriented education system still dominates. Although some educational reforms have occurred in the past two decades, and experts proposed a shift from "examination-oriented education" to "quality education" (Liang, 2005), the exam-oriented education system is still popular because of its long history. For students, they had to experience different kinds of tests before finally succeeding. This traditional exam-oriented education system might explain why students reported that they felt most anxious in tests.

Second, the "Grammar-translation" teaching method still dominates the Chinese class, which put too much emphasis on students' grammar and translation skills, and ignored students' communicative competence. Then students lacked in communication ability, and feared communication. In class, teachers were the only authorities, and students should obey the teacher. Accuracy was the priority in teaching, and students always sought to avoid mistakes while learning. This phenomenon might explain

why students felt nervous when communicating and feared teachers' criticisms.

### 5.2 Gender differences in anxiety

Regarding gender differences in anxiety, it is interesting to note that the female students experienced significantly higher levels of listening anxiety than the male students both in general and in each category. These findings added new evidence to the findings of Golchi (2012), Park and French (2013), and Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool, and Ploisawaschai (2009). Golchi (2012), for instance, reported that for Iranian learners, female learners were more anxious than male learners in learning English listening. The research finding was however not congruent with the results of others (Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010; Cui, 2011; Kitano, 2001).

The conflicting findings for gender differences in language anxiety could be partially attributed to socio-cultural views on anxiety (Park & French, 2013). In terms of socio-cultural views on anxiety, the results of previous studies were different from each other because the studies were conducted by participants from different socio-cultural contexts. In this study, the female students were more anxious than their male counterpart, especially when speaking with native speakers of English, talking in front of groups, answering questions voluntarily, and facing teachers' criticisms. The explanation for this might be because the female participants were brought up in China, a conventionally male dominant society, in which females shied away from social interaction. Other researchers joined this view, contending that it is important to keep cultural differences in mind when considering language anxiety and language teaching (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Zhang, 2001).

In terms of education, women in ancient times remained at an educational disadvantage. They could not make choices on their own in receiving education and finding jobs, and their lives were pre-arranged. They were taught to be perfect housewives dealing with some needlework at home. People in traditional society firmly held

the belief that “innocence is virtue for women”. Such educational unfairness in Chinese history might also explain why female students feel anxious during learning.

### 5.3 Correlation between anxiety and listening comprehension achievement

A significant negative correlation between overall listening anxiety and listening achievement of  $-.35$  ( $p=.00$ ) indicated that anxiety played an important role in students' listening comprehension. The less anxious students felt, the more likely they were to obtain higher scores on the listening comprehension test. This finding was quite consistent with previous studies which showed that students with higher levels of anxiety performed poorly compared to less anxious students (Awan et al., 2010; Cakici, 2016; Horwitz, 2001).

A possible explanation for the negative correlation between anxiety and listening achievement might be because of anxiety's bad effect on the listening process. Listening is a process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli, involving information encoding, storage, and retrieval. In educational settings, Tobias (1986) has found that anxiety may impair the ability to take in information, process it, and retrieve it. MacIntyre (1995) also stated that language learning was a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students.

In addition, students' anxiety might have a negative influence on their emotion and behaviors, and finally lead to bad performance in academic achievement. Na (2007, p.30) joined this view and asserted that "Usually, high anxiety can make learners get discouraged, lose faith in their abilities, escape from participating in classroom activities, and even give up the effort to learn a language well. Therefore, the learners with high anxiety often get low achievement and low achievement makes them more anxious about learning".

## 6. Pedagogical implications, limitations and recommendations for further research

Pedagogical implications can be generated from the findings of this study, and some practical implications for EFL teaching and

learning for Chinese university students are proposed as follows. First, the findings reinforce and enrich the existing Input Hypothesis theory and Affective Filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) stating that only when learners have high motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety can they accept comprehensible input and acquire the target language. Thus, affective variables like anxiety, motivation, self-confidence are important factors and should be taken into consideration in language learning.

Second, the findings in this study lend support to the idea that EFL teachers in the classroom should deal with anxiety-provoking situations carefully. In Chinese classrooms, normally teachers dominate and students usually feel oppressed in the presence of the teacher. The controlled and dominated atmosphere of the English classroom discourages students from participating in classroom activities which further affects their learning process and performance. Therefore, teachers should help students reduce listening anxiety and build up self-confidence. For example, teachers can help students by bringing them into discussions, ensuring that teaching goals are appropriate and attainable, helping students recognize that they can be successful. During the process, teachers should be tolerant of students' mistakes and not correct every error the students makes.

Third, considering female students have higher anxiety when listening, improving females' engagement in listening activities is essential. For instance, while engaging in listening activities, teachers should increase opportunities for female students and encourage them to share their views with others based on their comprehension of the listening materials. All this could be done in a friendly, relaxed, helpful and harmonious atmosphere.

This study provides insights to better understanding listening anxiety. However, some aspects need taking into consideration in future research. First, other variables like participants' language-learning experience, fields of study, ethnicity are factors worth investigating, which will probably provide diverse findings. Second, not only questionnaire, but also multiple instruments such as interviews and classroom observation may provide more detailed information. Apart from that, the relatively small sample size might somewhat prevent

generalization of the findings to other contexts, so a larger scale investigation is suggested for future research. Finally, teachers' attitudes towards students' anxiety are also of great importance, so collecting data from the perspective of teachers is recommended for future research.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of this study lead to a conclusion that sheds light on an issue of listening development. The research findings can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the Chinese EFL university students experienced a moderate level of anxiety overall ( $M=2.81$ ). Among the three categories of listening anxiety, students reported that they experienced test anxiety most ( $M=3.02$ ), followed by communication apprehension ( $M=2.85$ ), and the last was fear of negative evaluation ( $M=2.80$ ). Regarding the individual anxiety items experienced by students, students reported higher levels of anxiety in terms of taking exams ( $M=3.57$ ,  $M=3.54$ ), listening to fast spoken English ( $M=3.53$ ), being asked to answer questions without preparation ( $M=3.51$ ), facing difficult sentences ( $M=3.43$ ), and facing teachers' comments ( $M=3.33$ ).

Secondly, female students experienced higher levels in terms of overall listening anxiety and three categories of anxiety. Both male and female students reported that they experienced most anxiety in tests, followed by communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Besides, significant gender differences appeared in 6 out of the 30 items. Female students were more anxious when they didn't understand what the teacher was saying, talking with native speakers of English, talking in front of groups, answering questions voluntarily, and facing teachers' corrections and criticisms.

Finally, anxiety and listening achievement were closely related to each other ( $r=-.35^{**}$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and anxiety was crucial in English majors' EFL listening. All three categories were also negatively correlated with listening achievement. Among them, fear of negative evaluation held the highest correlation with listening achievement at a significance level of .00 ( $r=-.35$ ), and the test anxiety ranked second ( $r=.30$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and communication apprehension was last ( $r=.26$ ,  $p=.00$ ). The fear of negative evaluation was a powerful predictor with a Beta value of  $-.35$  in predicting listening achievement,

but communication apprehension and test anxiety did not enter the regression model despite their correlation with listening comprehension achievement.

All in all, the significant negative correlations among listening anxiety and listening comprehension lend support to the premise that increased anxiety adversely affects student performance. The effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation. However, the study of listening anxiety is still at an exploratory stage in China, and more theoretical and empirical studies should be performed. In particular, the conflicting findings of gender differences in listening anxiety suggest that further research should be conducted.

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