

Foreign Language Anxiety in Sociocultural Context: Stories of Four University EFL Learners in China

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Abstract—Drawing on sociocultural theory, this study explored the foreign language anxiety of four English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students in China and how their anxiety emerges in the sociocultural context that they live in. Ethnographic data were collected online in three ways, namely, observations, a written task and semi-structured interviews. The study found that all four participants reported that they experienced anxiety during their English learning and a distinction was identified in the intensity of their emotions, which was considered closely related to their different sociocultural contexts. The study emphasized the impact of the sociocultural context on the emotions of EFL learners and their language learning process.

Keywords—China, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), foreign language anxiety, sociocultural context

I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the abnormal emotions, also known as psychological abnormalities. It is generally believed that anxiety refers to “the emotional state of nervousness and fear caused by the failure of an individual to achieve the goal or overcome the threat of obstacles, which causes his or her self-esteem and self-confidence to be frustrated or increases the sense of failure” [1]. Similarly, when people have difficulty solving some tricky problems or fail to communicate with others fluently in a language that is not their mother tongue during foreign language learning, they may probably experience negative emotions. In the field of linguistics, this negative feeling is known as Foreign Learning (FL) anxiety, which is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” [2]. Swain [3] analyzed language learners’ narratives and collaborative dialogues and found that language learning was not only a cognitive, but also an emotional process. Horwitz designed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which is a self-reported measure of students’ anxiety in the FL classroom. After the presence of the scale, innumerable quantitative studies have been conducted in this field to examine the sources of FL anxiety and how this negative emotion affects FL learners and their FL performance [4–6]. However, when the quantitative research reached its peak, little qualitative research was conducted to investigate the same phenomenon. Moreover, studies focusing on emotions in language learning in sociocultural context are far more under-researched [7]. According to Mercer and Williams [8], the contextual dimension plays an important role in anxiety, since “the self cannot be conceptualized as being abstracted and separated from contexts”; rather, it shapes and is shaped

by broader social realities [9].

Globalization requires a fluent communication between different countries and districts to ensure the running of a series of economic and cultural activities. During this progress, English as a lingua franca has important communicative function. As China nowadays is always playing a critical role in the rapid development of globalization, a great multitude of fluent English speakers is in urgent demand. Given the significance of English for Chinese talent cultivation, a growing number of studies have been conducted to figure out the factors influencing FL learning [10, 11]. Many of them suggest that Chinese students have been experiencing FL anxiety, which causes a great impact on English learning, including the FL classroom anxiety of Chinese high school students [12–14] and foreign language anxiety of non-English major university students in China [15]. However, few have put much effort into FL anxiety of Chinese English learners in the sociocultural context, particularly the context in relation to individual learning experiences [16].

Therefore, taking four Chinese university students as samples, the present study investigates FL anxiety as it emerges in individual learners’ experiences taking into account the complex interplay between the individual and the social. By examining the FL anxiety with the consideration of its contextualization, the study indicates the sources of FL anxiety and provides implications for Chinese pedagogical practice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study draws on sociocultural theory, which views emotions especially anxiety as socially mediated, and on previous research that has shown the relational nature of emotions. Imai [17] argued that “language is viewed not just as representation but as the very experience of emotion that emerges in the socially and culturally established, intersubjective worlds between people”. Swain’s [3] study of L2 learners’ collaborative dialogue shows that emotions are not an individual’s inner, private reactions but rather interpersonal events, whose meanings are derived socially and culturally, internalized from interactions with others. Although studies such as Imai [17] and Swain’s [3] provide valuable insights into how emotions emerge in collaborative learning, they do not specifically focus on any specific emotion and its origin in the language learning experiences of students. Pavelescu and Petri [7] work on positive emotions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the sociocultural context. The qualitative research done by them emphasized language learners’ complexity and uniqueness, pointing to

the importance of viewing students as sociocultural beings who shape and are shaped by their surrounding environment in intricate, idiosyncratic and perhaps even unpredictable ways. Although there are qualitative studies available on positive emotions and their origin from the students' language learning experiences, those which probe into negative emotions like anxiety by focusing on learners' language learning experiences from a sociocultural perspective are quite rare, let alone in a Chinese context [16].

However, many researchers have identified the relation between FL anxiety and the individual and interpersonal factors during one's learning experiences. "Anxiety stemming from interpersonal issues in the language learning context has been related to social anxiety surfacing from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings, which may contribute to language anxiety" [18]. To be concrete, Bailey further contended that competitiveness can lead to anxiety when language learners compare themselves to others or to an idealized self-image. "Peer pressure in language learning always results in two emotions: self-confidence when the language learners do better than others and anxiety or frustration when it's the other way round" [19]. "Instructor beliefs about language teaching" [19] are a further source of language. The social context that the instructor establishes in the classroom can have tremendous implications for the learners. Anxieties related to instructor-learner interactions are also reported in the study. "A harsh manner of correcting student errors is often cited as provoking anxiety" [19]. To Summarize, learners do not begin their language learning experiences with language anxiety. If they experience anxiety, it is most likely state anxiety. Language anxiety occurs only after attitudes and emotions regarding the language learning experience have been formed [20], which are inseparably linked to a sociocultural context. In the work of Pavelescu and Petri [7], the emotion of love for English also appeared to be linked to the caring support offered by family members, which expanded the understanding of the social sources of the emotion of learning English.

As this brief review shows, anxiety in language learning represents a popular research topic, raising multiple questions for further research. It is unknown whether Chinese EFL learners are experiencing the same level of FL anxiety and whether the sociocultural context would lead to their level of FL anxiety. If their anxiety is linked to the sociocultural context, it is required to further explore how anxiety emerges in relation to the learning experiences of the students. Therefore, the present study addresses the gap in qualitative research on FL anxiety in sociocultural context through an in-depth exploration of four Chinese university students' anxiety in their English learning. Research in this area is particularly necessary with regard to university students, who require an effective way to deal with the negative emotion in EFL learning and improve their English performance so as to apply for a decent profession in the near future.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Questions and Objectives*

Given the great impact of anxiety on the English learning

[14] and the power of a sociocultural context that can cause complex learning emotions [21], the present study aims to gain insights into Chinese university students' anxiety of English language learning anxiety and the ways in which the anxiety arises in the learners' sociocultural context. Therefore, it intends to benefit not only students but also Chinese teacher trainers and educational program designers, and enhance the quality of the existing EFL education in China. The research questions are as follows:

To what extent do Chinese university students experience foreign language anxiety in their English language learning?

How does the foreign language anxiety emerge in relation to the learners' sociocultural context?

B. *Method*

The entire study was based on a network ethnography, or netnography, which is "an adaptation of ethnography and ethnographic methods applied to researching digital/online communities" [22]. Originating from the field of anthropology during the 19th century, ethnography is a research methodology that focuses on the study of people's beliefs, perspectives, and lived experiences, typically occurring in natural settings where researchers immerse themselves for an extended period of time. Since the beginnings of applied linguistics, and within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in particular, ethnography has permeated numerous sub-disciplines, featuring as a key methodology for understanding various issues related to learner and teacher identity [23, 24], learning emotion and motivation [7, 25] and more. Though ethnography is typically associated with its central methods of participant observations and field notes, the continued proliferation of technology across the globe is changing what it means to be an ethnographer and to conduct ethnographic research in a digitized era. For example, there are now numerous communities online in which teaching and learning of the second language (L2) occur regularly. Such communities include not only those within formal academic settings, but also on online platforms and social media such as Sina Weibo, Tencent QQ and WeChat. To understand these emerging digital landscapes and the L2 learning, cultures, and practices that exist within them, over the past several years, a growing number of SLA researchers such as Isbell [26] have begun to conduct netnographies, which is a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media. As digital access to the internet continues to expand, these communities are also expanding, providing exciting new frontiers that were unavailable to SLA researchers as little as two to three decades ago.

To improve their English performance, countless Chinese students at different levels have set up English support group chats on WeChat and QQ, some of which contain more than 100 members, while others are fewer. To figure out the research questions, the researcher of this study found out and participated in such a group established by university students on WeChat, where there were in total 23 members who were students aged 18-20 from different universities in China. In daily time, members in the group would practice English by communicating around a given topic in English.

In addition, they would also brainstorm solutions to the problems encountered during English learning. Through a two-month online interaction with these EFL learners, netnographic research was completed.

C. Participants

Four sophomores participated in the study. Privacy was respected, and the participation was voluntary. Permission to observe their chats was obtained and all names presented in the study are pseudonyms to protect the participants' privacy. Background information is shown in Table 1. Four students have English classes in their curriculum during the third semester of their university life and all had passed the CET-4, one of the most authoritative English tests in China for all Chinese university students. According to the rules of CET-4, a score above 425 is considered a pass, while a score above 550 is considered outstanding. Therefore, Meng and Xu were high-achieving EFL learners, both of whom scored high in CET-4. The other two participants, Wang and Li, were described as average learners. One of the main reasons for choosing the four participants was that they had shown anxious feelings about English learning when talking in the group. Another reason was that most of them came from different majors, which was helpful in avoiding the research data problems caused by single samples.

Table 1. Participants' background information

Participant	Age	Major	Foreign languages known	Score of CET-4
Meng	20	Accounting	English	574
Wang	19	Law	English	518
Li	19	Chemistry	English	465
Xu	18	Law	English	601

D. Instruments

The study adopted three instruments in the research: observations, a written task and semi-structured interviews. "Ethnography often relies on participant observations as the primary data source" [22]. As this ethnographic research is conducted on the Internet, the ethnographer completed the observations from the perspective of a witness. Not only was live chat collected as the observation data, but chat history which was considered as online traces [22] was also included. Language learning histories were included in the study since "writing language learning histories gives learners the opportunity to describe their own language learning experiences and express their feelings about those experiences" [27]. Therefore, a written task was used to acquire participants' language learning stories. The written language learning histories were obtained in English. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants online because it can "help the interviewer to reword questions, provide prompts, adjust language, clarify points when necessary and answer questions, if any, from participants" [28]. The topics discussed in the interview were intensely related to what had been observed in the WeChat group. In the 30-minute interviews, students were encouraged to speak English, but interviewees were also made aware that they could resort to their first language whenever they felt like doing so.

E. Data Collection

The data were collected in three ways, namely, observations, a written task, and semi-structured interviews. First, by observing the live chat of the participants and their chat history in the WeChat group, the researcher recorded the negative emotions they expressed when talking about the issues they met in English learning and their sociocultural sources of anxiety in the course of English study. Then after a two-month observation, four participants were asked to complete a written task in which they talked about their language learning stories. It is a critical way to obtain data on participants' English learning trajectories, including past emotions especially anxiety and memories of these emotions from the past to the present. Aside from the written task, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which covered a concrete exploration of the language learning history, negative feelings especially anxiety towards learning English, autonomy, and contextual factors. Notes were taken on computer during the interview to ensure that critical words like "anxiety", "nervous" were not missed. In addition, observation was applied throughout the study to assist the data collection.

F. Data Analysis

The study used content analysis, in which coding was guided by the research questions and informed by sociocultural theory in that attention was paid to the ways in which emotion was influenced by social relationships in the context of learners [29]. Although the focus was on anxiety, emotions about English learning were identified based on their salience in the participants' reports on their learning experiences and the content of the interviews. Subsequently, the initial major code "Core Anxious Emotions" was divided into three codes: distress, anxiety, and nervousness. In line with the dictionary, "distressed" is interpreted as "extremely anxious" while hardly any distinction exists between anxiety and nervousness [30]. However, when Chinese EFL learners use the term "being nervous" to express their feeling, it always refers to temporary anxiety, not as stable and intense as anxiety. Therefore, nervousness and anxiety in the context of this study were presented as two codes. However, the statement like "I always feel very nervous when conducting English presentations publicly" was coded as an expression of anxiety. Thus, the study did not code verbal expressions of anxiety mechanically based on the language the participant used, but rather by taking into consideration the criteria above as well as the co-text of the discourse.

The specific criteria used to distinguish between distress, anxiety, and nervousness are the following (see Table 2): the relative intensity of the anxious emotion expressed (differentiating between the strong emotion of distress and the less intense feeling of nervousness), its relative duration and stability (with distress and anxiety being stable in contrast to more transient nervousness), and the presence of specific contextual factors influencing the anxious emotion towards English (with nervousness being linked to contextual factors, in contrast to the overall negative emotion of distress about English).

Table 2. Coding anxious emotions

Anxious emotion	Intensity of emotion	Duration/stability of emotion	Contextual factors influencing the emotion
Distress	High	High	No specific factors; overall negative emotion about learning English
Anxiety	Medium-High	High	Emotion tied to specific contextual factors
Nervousness	Medium	Low	Emotion tied to specific contextual factors

IV. FINDINGS

The following sections report on the core anxious emotion identified in each learner’s English learning experience. Anxiety towards English essentially emerged in the learners’ interactions with family members, teachers, and classmates. Their accounts revealed the highly important role of interactions and social relationships in the construction of emotions and the ways in which these interactions impacted learning.

Anxiety emerged as the predominant anxious emotion experienced by Meng, Wang, and Li in their English language learning experiences, while nervousness was found to be the primary anxious emotion in the language learning experiences of Xu.

A. Meng’s Core Anxious Emotion: Anxiety

Meng started learning English when she was in grade three. She was very fond of this subject and performed very well in class. Nevertheless, her anxiety about English learning appeared gradually since she entered middle school:

“When I went to middle school, my parents paid special attention to my English test score. This made me care too much about every English test. However, the more anxious I was before the test, the less satisfactory my test scores would be, which in turn would make me more anxious in the next test, thus forming a vicious cycle.”

According to her written language learning history, despite the good foundation Meng had laid in English since primary school, anxiety would always keep her from being at her best when it came to exams. In the WeChat group, Meng once enlisted the help of the other members on her pre-exam nervousness. She exclaimed that she could not fall asleep the night before the English final exam because she was too anxious. Meng also reported that her anxiety was from her parents during the interview:

M.: I have to relax myself for a long time before every English test, I am afraid of disappointing my parents.

I.: Did your parents blame you for not doing well on your English test?

M.: Yes, my mother always thinks I am not working hard enough.

I.: Do you still worry about being blamed when you are now in college?

M.: Yes.

Although Meng would sometimes complain about her lack of ability to memorize English words and specific grammar rules, it was observed that the main anxiety of Meng over English learning was derived from the interaction with her family members.

B. Wang’s Core Anxious Emotion: Anxiety

Anxiety was the core anxious emotion of English learning

revealed in Wang’s account. Such a negative emotion was found to reach its peak when she was in high school. She elaborated on the main source of anxiety at that time:

“My high school English teacher spoke so fast that I couldn’t keep up with the pace if I wanted to take notes in detail. As a result, I spent too much time reviewing the things taught by the teacher after class.”

Thus, the time spent studying English thus occupied Wang’s study time for other subjects. The problem of an unbalanced allocation of learning time made her feel like a headache. More importantly, failing to keep up with the English class little by little aggravated her “anxiety” and “fear” of English learning:

“I was very worried and anxious when I found that I had missed not a few key points in class. Sadly, I began to fear English class.”

This anxiety began to become less salient after she went to university, but the emotion did not disappear. She was concerned about the anxiety of the English class from time to time:

W.: Things taught by the teacher are presented on PPT (slides). She will read either textbook or the content on PPT in class. It is a little boring. We don’t think the teacher knows how much we really understood in class.

I.: Besides PPT, would your teacher make use of any other tool to assist her teaching in class?

W.: Yes, but seldom.

The written language learning history and interview taken into consideration, and the English learning experiences of Wang demonstrate a close link between her anxiety and things happening in the English class from high school to university. To put it more concretely, the pace of teaching and the methods adopted by the teacher are deemed the main sources of Wang’s FL anxiety.

C. Li’s Core Anxious Emotion: Anxiety

Li’s core anxious emotion was also reflected as anxiety. But different from the other two cases, the proportion of “being distressed” was much higher than theirs in the records of their written history. As a result, the anxiety about FL experienced by Li was the most intense. Similar to the previous case, Li’s anxiety was derived from the English class.

Born in a small village, Li spent 6 years learning in a primary school in her hometown, where English was not included until the sixth grade. Unfortunately, the late exposure to English made Li a low-achieving English learner in middle school. She highlighted the English class as the most “painful” time:

“The teacher randomly asked us questions in class, and my answers were usually wrong. Then my classmates all laughed. I know they did not do it on purpose, but it embarrassed me.”

The uneasy class atmosphere directly led to her sense of resistance to English learning. In addition to that, Li’s relationship with the English teacher increased her anxiety.

I.: What did the teacher do when you answered the questions incorrectly?

L.: She criticized me publicly if she thought the question was too easy to answer incorrectly.

However, Li's anxiety about English was alleviated to some extent in the following years, which she thought should be attributed to another high school English teacher, who was considerate and patient. The encounter with this teacher almost became the turning point in Li's English learning experience:

L.: She never yelled at me if I couldn't answer the questions. And she patiently explained those unknown questions to me after class.

I.: Did she ease your anxiety about English?

L.: Sure.

In conclusion, this student's emotion of anxiety appeared to be shaped by interactions with teachers and classmates, significant roles in English classes. A tense classroom atmosphere was proved to be the leading cause of Li's anxiety over English learning.

D. Xu's Core Anxious Emotion: Nervousness

Among these four cases, Xu was presented as the least anxious about English learning. She had excelled in English since childhood and loved English classes very much. But after going to university, Xu began to experience mild anxiety when learning English:

"In the public English class, students are asked to take turns to making a five-minute public presentation, which will be credited to grades. Many of my classmates have excellent English speaking ability, while I have such a funny accent that I feel nervous about speaking out in English publicly."

From Xu's written language learning history, it is evident that she had less confidence in her English pronunciation and intonation compared to his written English. Moreover, when asked about how the teacher and classmates reacted to her presentation, Xu stated that it was their behavior that abashed her further:

X.: I could hear them sniggering and whispering while I was talking...

I.: Oh, that's embarrassing. Did your teacher comment on your presentation?

X.: Yes, he said it was better for me to do more practice to rectify my pronunciation. That's also why I join this group. I desire to improve my oral English.

As described above, Xu was anxious about learning English due to her diffidence in her ability at first. But the peer-orientation study and critiques from the teacher exacerbate her nervousness and anxiety. To sum up, the anxious emotion of Xu over English learning was ascribed to both personal and contextual factors.

V. DISCUSSION

Under the framework of sociocultural theory, human thinking or mental activity is seen as having an external or social origin, and language is viewed as a tool that is used for social purposes [31]. The paper explored four Chinese university students' anxiety in their English language learning experiences over two months through observations, a written task, and interviews. What's more, the research further investigated how the FL anxiety emerges in relation to the learners' sociocultural context.

First, the findings demonstrated that for all participants,

anxiety was often the overarching negative emotional reaction that they experienced when learning English. Although the four learners reported experiencing anxious emotions in language learning, a distinction was identified in the intensity and stability of their anxiety. Three participants expressed strong and stable anxiety about English, whereas the other one experienced nervousness in her English language learning. Specifically, Meng explicitly showed her anxiety before and during English exams. And anxiety over English class was discovered in Wang, Li and Xu's cases. In Pavelescu and Petri's work [7], the intensity and stability of positive emotions in language learning also vary a lot when it comes to different participants. It was interpreted that the comparison of the different cases provided some possible answers, such as the encouragement to learn English provided by family members and the student-initiated participation in out-of-class English activities. Similarly, anxiety at different levels suffered by participants in this study was believed to be closely related to reaction of family members and participation in the English class. The duration and intensity of negative interaction and feedback from family members, teachers and peers in one's English learning experience is inclined to result in different levels of anxious emotion [32–34]. For example, it was proved that the more democratic the parents' education mode is, the lower the anxiety children will have towards English learning [35]. Furthermore, Xue [36] once proved that English anxiety and English achievements are negatively correlated through the Pearson correlation coefficient. Therefore, it seems reasonable that average learners Li and Wang in the present study experienced stronger anxiety than high-achieving EFL learners Xu.

Secondly, studying emotions in isolation has its limitations, the main one being that they "do not emerge in a vacuum but are context-dependent" [7]. Therefore, the data thus further presented that the emergence of the anxiety of participants was firmly linked to various sociocultural factors. For Meng, the pressure from the interactions with family members became the major interpersonal source of her FL anxiety. For Wang, English classes, particularly English teachers, played a crucial role in her English learning experiences. Poor adaptation to the pace of the teaching and monotonous teaching methods largely resulted in her FL anxiety. The case of Li demonstrated the significance of English classes and teachers, too, as in her learning experiences there was a distinct contrast of emotion when interacting with teachers and classmates. When embarrassed by her English teachers and her classmates in middle school, Li began to show anxiety and resistance to English learning. Nonetheless, Li experienced less FL anxiety and was more willing to have English classes in her high school owing to the pleasant interaction with another patient English teacher. Peer relationships and instructor-learner interaction were the principal sociocultural sources of Li's FL anxiety. The anxiety about FL experienced by Xu was revealed to be the result of a combination of personal and interpersonal factors. In light of her report, the lack of confidence in oral English was transformed into nervousness towards presenting in public in the class context. In general, FL anxiety was impacted by the sociocultural context to varying degrees. And anxiety about English learning mainly emerged in

interactions with family members, teachers, and classmates. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted in different countries. For example, Aida [32] found that teachers' intolerance was one of the sources of FL anxiety of Japanese university students. Yang [35] found that for junior high school students in China, the poor family English learning environment and the urge of parents to improve students' English learning were positively correlated with their English learning anxiety. The judgement of peers, particularly their reactions to speech errors, was discovered to cause FL anxiety among pupils in British secondary schools [37]. Additionally, the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, whose works provided the guiding principles underlying the sociocultural theory, observed that, in early stages, children must rely on interpersonal interaction with their caregivers to address problems and carry out tasks or activities, as they lack the internal strategic resources necessary to do so alone [38]. The process of relying on a caregiver or a generally more skilled individual to carry out a task or activity is called other-regulation [31]. It should be emphasized is that even when skilled individuals are faced with a cognitively difficult task or activity, they may rely on other individuals or objects in the surrounding environment. It interprets why many high-achieving EFL learners such as Meng and Xu in this study could not shun FL anxiety under the influence of negative social interactions in their English learning experience.

Furthermore, an interesting finding was that FL anxiety did not become a complete obstacle in participants' English learning, but sometimes a motivation for working hard at this ability. Just as Xu stated in the interview, the anxiety over her oral English experienced in class was the main reason why she participated in an English support group. Hence, this discovery could be taken as evidence for a future study on the positive effect of FL anxiety at a low level in the sociocultural context.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study concentrated on the topic of FL anxiety by investigating whether Chinese university students experience such an emotion in their English language learning and how it emerges in relation to the learners' sociocultural context. All participants in the research were observed to have experienced or were experiencing FL anxiety to different degrees, which was closely connected to the sociocultural factors of the learner on the basis of the English learning experiences. "The language learning self is like a jigsaw puzzle and understanding the self involves understanding how the pieces fit together" [8]. From a sociocultural perspective, we should always acknowledge that the surrounding environment of language learners is never negligible due to the complexity and uniqueness of each learner as a sociocultural being. By exploring the FL anxiety of Chinese university students in the sociocultural context, the study enriched and expanded the research on emotions in foreign language learning.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

The contents of the journal are peer-reviewed and archival. The journal *International Journal of Languages, Literature*

and *Linguistics* publishes scholarly articles of archival value as well as tutorial expositions and critical reviews of classical subjects and topics of current interest.

In the present study, it is suggested that the emotions of English learning would be impacted by various factors, both personal and sociocultural. And "foreign language learning is not a simple process of input, absorption and output, but a complex task influenced by the learners' cognitive ability and mental state" [39]. Therefore, in Chinese society, we should view foreign language learners as complex social beings and take steps to regulate their FL anxiety so as to boost their English learning efficiency.

In terms of family factors, rational and advanced ideas on family education are indispensable. Some parents have high expectations for their children and constantly instill a sense of competition in them. Under the circumstance that the expectation of university students is relatively fixed, the higher the expectations of the parents, the more students are afraid of not being able to achieve the expectations of the parents, thus aggravating the psychological burden of the students and leading to the generation or aggravation of anxiety over study. Therefore, parents must follow the law of growth of children and eliminate the scores in the process of foreign languages. It is important to reduce students' anxiety about English learning, especially English tests, and cultivate their interest in foreign languages through the efforts of family members.

When it comes to class factors, English teachers are regarded a critical role in English learning experiences of students. Questioning in class is an effective means of stimulating learning motivation, which can arouse the students' enthusiasm for learning. Nonetheless, before questioning, teachers should know the right way to do it. The teacher should have a good grasp of the difficulty of the question. For underachievers, it is better to ask some easy questions to enhance their self-confidence. When students fail to answer the question, the teacher should comfort and encourage them to overcome their psychological barrier.

In addition, peer correction and evaluation should be avoided as much as possible in an English class, which "may probably arouse students' anxiety about English learning" [39]. One of the best ways to reduce your anxiety is to let students correct their own mistakes under the scaffold instruction of the teacher.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Several limitations and future research directions deserve comment. Above all, it is necessary to recognize that there were only female participants in the present study. To select the most typical samples from the 23-member WeChat group to conduct the ethnography, gender was not taken into account, which researchers should pay more attention to in the future study. Second, due to a time limit, the research was based on materials and data for merely two months, far from enough for a comprehensive and concrete ethnography. Finally, the sources of FL anxiety examined in the study were those related to the immediate context such as interactions with family members and teachers. However, macro-social factors including cultural differences between the target language and the native language ought to be considered;

therefore, it remains to be explored in future research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ruiqi Peng conducted the research, analyzed the data, and wrote the paper; Fei Liu reviewed the paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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