

**CLASSROOM ANXIETY AMONG
STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
CHINESE STUDIES, NNAMDI AZIKIWE
UNIVERSITY**

Ebubechukwu Chinazaekpere Gwacham

Department of Chinese Studies
Faculty of Arts Nnamdi azikiwe University Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria
chinazaekpereebubechukwu@gmail.com
+2348137944264

Anas Elochukwu²

Department of Chinese Studies
Faculty of Arts Nnamdi azikiwe University Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria
ae.elochukwu@unizik.edu.ng +234803115795

Abstract

Educational success is mediated by various factors, most notably anxiety, life goals, natural ability, achievement motivation, learning skills, socioeconomic background, environment, etc. This study discusses anxiety, focusing on classroom anxiety among the students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University's department of Chinese Studies. Carried out in 2024, this study discovered that the majority of the students did not feel anxious learning the Chinese language. The integrity of the response should be impugned, considering that

only 42 of about 400 students from the 4 levels in the department of Chinese Studies solicited responded.

Keywords: anxiety, classroom anxiety, educational success, Chinese language.

Introduction

The department of Chinese Studies at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the first full-fledged department of Chinese Studies to be accredited by the Nigerian Universities Commission, was established in 2014. Its curriculum offers both language and non-language courses. Some of the latter are CHS 107: Introduction to Chinese People and Culture, CHS 108: Introduction to Chinese History, CHS 206: Introduction to Chinese Literature, CHS 208: Chinese Civilisation, CHS 305: Chinese Politics and Economy, CHS 306: Chinese Religion and Philosophy, NAU-CHS 313: African Diaspora in China and CHS 403: Sino-African Relations. While the language courses, which constitute about 85% of the curriculum, are taught by both the Chinese lecturers at the Confucius Institute and the local teachers in the department, the non-language courses are all taught by the locals. The graduates of the department, owing to the enviably high rate of language proficiency, have the highest employability rate among the university's graduates. Their attainment which has enhanced the global reputation of both the Institute and the university has come at a high price. One of the major difficulties the students encounter in the

course of mastering the language is anxiety. This challenge, mostly encountered during the first few months of learning the language, is commonly shared by the students of the department. As a result, the authors decided to engage it in their present research work. This work focuses on anxiety in the course of learning a foreign language, to wit the Chinese language.

Unpacking Anxiety

Anxiety is “a feeling of fear, tension, or worry that occurs as a response to real or perceived threats” (Felman, 2024) or “the state of feeling nervous or worried that sth [something] bad is going to happen” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). It is a common emotion that causes physical symptoms such as shaking and sweating (Felman, 2024). When persistent or excessive, it can cause mental disorder (Felman, 2024). According to American Psychiatric Association, it is “a normal reaction to stress... [that] can alert us to dangers and help us prepare and pay attention.”

The commonest type of anxiety among students is classroom anxiety---"a state of unease, nervousness, or worry experienced by a student within a classroom setting, often leading to physical and emotional symptoms. It can manifest in various ways, impacting a student's ability to concentrate, participate, and learn effectively” (AI-generated). Anxiety associated with learning a language is called language anxiety (LA).

According to MacIntyre (1999), this type of anxiety is “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language.” The anxiety experienced in a classroom while learning a foreign language is called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). According to Horwitz et al. (1986),

Many people claim to have a mental block against learning a foreign language, although these same people may be good learners in other situations, strongly motivated, and have a sincere liking for speakers of the target language. What, then, prevents them from achieving their desired goal? In many cases, they may have an anxiety reaction which impedes their ability to perform successfully in a foreign language class...Just as anxiety prevents some people from performing successfully in science or mathematics; many people find foreign language learning, especially in classroom situations, particularly stressful. When anxiety is limited to the language learning situation, it falls into the category of specific anxiety reactions. “Psychologists use the term, ‘specific anxiety reaction’ to differentiate people who are generally anxious in variety situations from those who are anxious only in specific situations” (125).

Flca Vis-À-Vis Chinese Language Learning

The students of the department of Chinese Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University grapple with certain challenges specific to the Chinese language. Themost difficult of those challengesis the fact that the Chinese language, unlike the Romance languages, namely Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and Romanian or English or Arabic or Amharic, does not have an alphabet---“a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order used for writing a language” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). As a writing system, the Chinese language is logographic: it uses logograms---a written character that represents a semantic component of a language. (The first letters were invented by ancient Egyptians and were used to facilitate writing Egyptian hieroglyphics). The vast majority of the students who are used to the alphabets of both their native languages (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibibio, Bini, etc.) and English (their country’s official language) find it difficult to understand why Chinese does not have its own alphabet. Until they started learning Chinese, it was unthinkable a language could not have an alphabet.

Data Collection

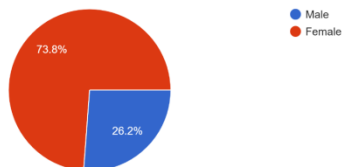
Although both primary and secondary sources were used, almost all the data used in this work were garnered from the questionnaire shared on the respective WhatsApp groups of the 4 student levels

of the department of Chinese Studies, namely 100 level, 200 level, 300 level and 400 level. About 400 students were solicited, but only 42 actually responded. The reason for the staggeringly poor response was either the pervasive apathy among the students for data solicitation from researchers or the fact that the questionnaire was sent out when the students were busy preparing for their examinations. In all probability, the poor response was because of the former. The research work was carried out during May-August 2024. It is regretted that the Continuing Education Programme (CEP) students were inadvertently not included in the work; and there is no gain saying the omission must have impacted the integrity of the work.

Data Presentation

Diag

Gender
42 responses



ram 1: Gender

Diagram 2: Age

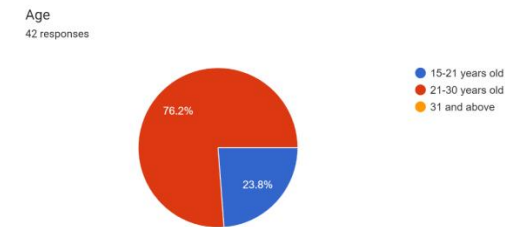


Diagram 3: Level of Study

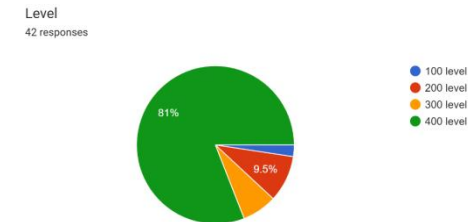


Diagram 4: How long have you studied Chinese?

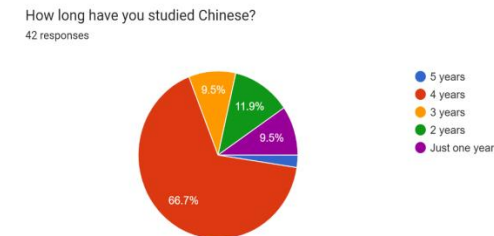
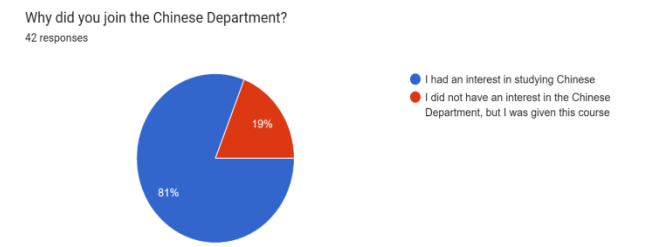


Diagram 5: Why did you choose the department of Chinese Studies?



The respondents were also asked why they had interest in studying Chinese, and those who had no interest too as well as their initial choice of course. These were their responses:

I had no interest in the department Chinese Studies

Why? And which other course did you want to study initially?
Law
Economics
Linguistics
Theatre Arts
Financial Accounting
I never liked Chinese; I wanted to study Public Administration.
I only heard about the department after my admission. I initially wanted to study History and

International Studies.

I had an interest in studying Chinese

Why?

Because I love to learn languages especially when it concerns an international one.

For better job opportunities.

It was the only lucrative course I knew.

I was offered the course. In fact, I had never heard about the course.

No reason whatsoever. I just love it.

I love things about Chinese.

Because I like the language and I want to learn it.

It's my passion.

Because it's a course of interest to me.

It will be useful in future.

Because I love Chinese culture.

China is poised to have global dominance; so why not be part of it ?

It is because studying Chinese gives you a lot of good job opportunities.

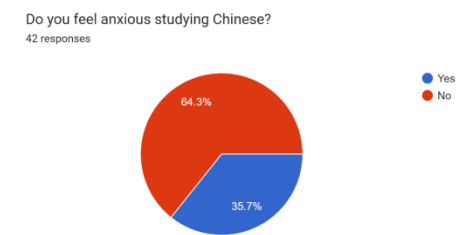
I became interested after hearing about it from a

friend.
For business purposes.
Because I have a flair for the course.
Because I found out that it will help me earn more money.
Because I saw the opportunities Chinese language speakers have.
I love the language and would love to be a translator and also for business purposes.
Learning the language can get very nice jobs; and it can help you start a nice business in China without problems.
Because that is not what I wanted.
I made up my mind to study Chinese, because I learned that one can earn big if they study Chinese.
Because proficiency in the language is a monetary skill.
Was not familiar with it as a course to study.
To learn the language and travel to China for business.
I don't have interest in Chinese.
I wanted to learn more.

Classroom Anxiety

This section shows the responses of the students concerning classroom anxiety.

Diagram 6: Do you feel anxious studying Chinese?



The above diagram shows the percentage of anxious and non-anxious students. 64.3% respondents do not feel anxious studying Chinese, while 35.7% respondents feel anxious studying Chinese.

There were additional questions to the above question, which was a section for the respondents who indicated that they experienced anxiety studying Chinese. The following were the responses:

I feel anxious studying Chinese.

Why? How does it affect your learning?

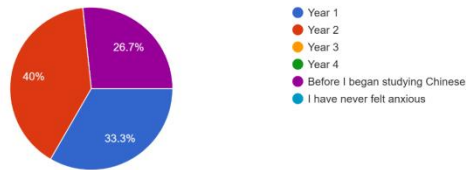
I don't even know.

The more anxious I feel, the more I feel pressured.

I am always scared to ask or answer questions in class and it makes me to become worried during presentation.
Yes, a lot.
Positively.
The character and tone are off-putting.
Because I'm always scared to learn and that makes me lack confidence in myself.
It enhances my knowledge.
Badly.
I was scared the express myself.
By challenging, it has improved me.
I was feeling I might not be able to learn enough.
I can't really tell.
I feel anxious in the sense that the course can be difficult to study; also the speed at which the Chinese lectors teach makes me anxious and always causes difficulty in retaining some of what has been learnt.
Yes, I do feel anxious.

Diagram 7: When did you start feeling anxious about learning Chinese?

When did you start feeling anxious about learning Chinese?
15 responses



33.3% of the respondents indicated that they started feeling anxious from their first year, 40% from their second year; while 26.7% started feeling anxious even before they started studying the language.

How long have you felt anxious about studying Chinese?

I have always felt anxious.
For about 2 years now.
1 year
Since my second year
Not up to 4 months now

Diagram 8: Do you experience anxiety when learning from the Chinese teachers or Nigerian teachers, or both?

Do you experience anxiety when learning from native Chinese teachers or Nigerian teachers, or when learning from both?
15 responses

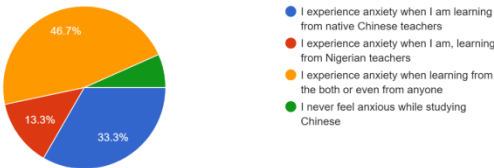


Diagram 8 shows that 46.7% of the respondents experienced anxiety when learning Chinese from Nigerian teachers, as well as the native speakers (i.e. the Chinese teachers) or from even anyone. 33.3% experienced anxiety when learning Chinese from native Chinese teachers. 13.3% experienced anxiety when learning from Nigerian teachers. 6.7% indicated they never felt anxious studying Chinese.

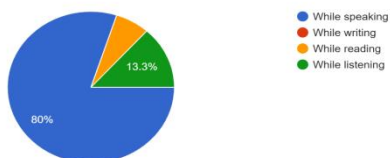
Why do you feel anxious while learning from any of the aforementioned?

I don't know.
I feel pressured to excel.
I am always scared to speak Chinese, to avoid my coursemates laughing at me.
They speak a lot, so I don't understand what they

say.
I feel the Nigerian teachers can't substitute for native speakers.
I feel like I will never be able to learn it.
I don't know.
Because of fear.
I feared the teachers might insult me if I don't answer correctly, which really helped me to want to learn more in the long run.
I aim to be perfect.
Our female Chinese teacher is too fast and sometimes finds it difficult translating into English. This makes it difficult for me to grasp some of the things she teaches.

Diagram 9: When do you feel most anxious in your study of the Chinese language?

When you feel most anxious in your study of the Chinese language?
 15 responses



80% of the respondents indicated that they felt anxious while speaking, 13.3% while listening, and 6.7% while reading Chinese.

I don't feel anxious studying Chinese.

Why? (29 responses)
No reason.
I just always have a feeling that I can do it.
Good things take time. I am patiently going through the rigors of learning.
I can do it.
I'm bold.
I was not forced into it. It is what I want to study.
I have a flair for the language and this has helped me.
I believe with hard work, concentration, determination and God's grace and mercy, I will be successful.
Nothing to feel anxious about.
I am trying to learn it.
I have realised the course is interesting and has prospects.
It's fun learning studying the language.

I love the language.
I chose the course of my own volition.
I enjoy learning it.
It's a nice course.
There's no need to be anxious.
I really believe I can do it.
I know the course will pay off.

Summary of Findings

The following findings are the findings of this study. Firstly, most of the students in the department of Chinese Studies had an interest in studying the Chinese language. Secondly, classroom anxiety did exist in the department, but it is important to note that the percentage of those who did not experience anxiety was higher than for those who did experience it. Thirdly, anxiety negatively affected the progress of those students who said they experienced it. For example, when asked how feeling anxious affected their learning, the response was "The more anxious I feel, the more pressured I feel." Another response was "I am always scared to ask or answer questions in class; and it makes me to become worried during presentation." Fourthly, it was discovered that most of the students surveyed felt anxious when learning Chinese from both Nigerian

teachers and Chinese teachers. A student mentioned that he felt anxious learning from the Chinese teachers, because the teacher spoke too fast, which made him find it difficult to grasp or understand what she taught. Another mentioned that he felt anxious while learning Chinese, because he always felt pressured to excel in class. It was also mentioned by another student that he felt anxious while learning from his Nigerian teacher, because he did not pronounce words accurately. Lastly, the students felt more anxious while speaking Chinese than when speaking their other languages---English or the mother tongues.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to find out if classroom anxiety existed in the department of Chinese Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The study proved, despite the exiguous response from the informants, proved that there was classroom anxiety among the study population. There should be serious reservations about the high negative response to the question in diagram 6: **Do you feel anxious studying Chinese?** 64.3% answered in the negative, while 35.7% answered in the affirmative. The phenomenon under the microscope in this study is the commonest form of anxiety among the students of the department, level of study notwithstanding. It is a grave impediment for Chinese language study at the students. Most respondents averred they did not feel anxious learning the Chinese language. Their

number (42) was paltry and, therefore, could not be considered representative of the entire student population of the department.

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