# An Empirical Study on the Correlation between College Teachers' Foreign Language Anxiety and Students' Achievement

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**Abstract:** Most studies of foreign language anxiety are focused on students, and few of them have taken the effects of teachers' foreign language anxiety into consideration. Therefore, the author conducted a research on the correlation between college teachers' foreign language anxiety and students' achievement in order to find out the relationship between them.

**Keywords:** teacher foreign language anxiety; student achievement; correlation

## 1. Introduction

For recent years, foreign language anxiety has been largely studied. But most of these studies centered on foreign language students, and few of them ever took foreign language teachers under consideration. Horwitz (1996) argued that many foreign language teachers still experienced foreign language anxiety and that this anxiety could have negative consequences for language teaching. In China, so far as the author knows, few people have ever conducted research on the relationship between teacher foreign language anxiety and student achievement. Therefore, the current study addressed the issues of college English teacher foreign language anxiety, and its correlation with student achievement represented by their scores in Test for English Majors-4 (TEM-4) in order to enhance the teaching effect of foreign language instruction.

## 2. Why are Teachers Inclined to Have Foreign Language Anxiety?

Horwitz (1996) listed three reasons why foreign language teachers still perceive foreign language anxiety. Firstly, motivation and ego-investment play substantial roles in it. (Oxford, in press) "Language teachers are not simply strongly motivated to speak their target language very well, they have invested considerable time, effort, and emotional energy in language learning." "Importantly, they present themselves to the world as high-level speakers of a particular language" and "teachers of any subject matter are expected to be experts in that area and language teachers like any other teachers, have some knowledge gaps in their teaching specialty. But while a mathematics or history teacher can prepare the material ne-

cessary to a specific lesson, language teachers must always be ready to speak the language in front of the class" fluently and accurately. "Thus, there is the possibility of mistakes and vocabulary lapses at every moment of every class." The second reason was attributed to "the common but unfortunate stereotype that only 'fluency' in a second language has any value." After all, many foreign language teachers are not native speakers and few of them have the access or time to a target language community to achieve such a level. "Language teachers who pursue an idealized level of proficiency are likely to experience anxiety over their own levels of competency no matter how accomplished they are as second language speakers." Lastly, "it is likely that language teachers encountered many anxiety-inducing experiences in their own language learning". Vande Berg (1993) points out that discussions of foreign language anxiety have centered almost entirely on beginning and intermediate language learners to the exclusion of advanced language learners.

### 2.1. The effects of teachers' foreign language anxiety

In all likelihood, teachers who suffer higher levels of foreign language anxiety will tend to use the target language less in the classroom. In addition, foreign language anxiety can inhibit a teacher's ability to effectively present the target language, interact with students, and serve as a positive role model as a language learners. Besides, a perception of "teacher's discomfort in speaking the foreign language" is not likely to "foster their own feelings of target language confidence". (Horwitz, 1996) Since a negative relationship between teachers' foreign language anxiety and effective foreign language instruction has been concluded by Horwitz, and students are target population of teachers' instruction, then what is

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the relationship between teacher foreign language anxiety and student achievement. That is what the author aims to find out in the study.

## 3. The Investigation of Foreign language anxiety of 98 Target Teachers and the Correlation Between it and Students' Achievement

The author adopted an empirical method by employing Horwitz's Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (TFLAS) to determine the ninety-eight teacher participants' anxiety level, in Tianjin Foreign Studies University. Statistics Package for Social Science 13.0 was used for data analysis and the results showed that no one experienced high level's anxiety. 12.22% of them reported moderate anxiety, and 87.78% experienced little or no anxiety, with the mean of TFLAS is 43.07 which was lower than 54, suggesting that most college English teachers experienced little or no foreign language anxiety. On the other hand, students' scores in TEM-4 were applied to stand for their academic achievement. A correlational study was done between the teachers' anxiety scores and students' TEM-4 grades, and an insignificant moderate negative correlation ($r=-.314$, $p>.05$) was found between them, which meant that there was an insignificantly moderate negative correlation between teacher foreign language anxiety and student achievement. Although the correlation between teacher foreign language anxiety and student achievement was not significant, this study is still of pedagogical significance in that it has drawn people's attention to foreign language teachers' emotional states and it proves that teacher foreign language anxiety serves as a debilitative factor to themselves and their students.

## 4. The limitations of This Study:

There are several limitations in this study. Firstly, the sample size was too small to reflect the universal situation. All the participants were from the English Department of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, which limited the generalization of the research results. Further study needs to be done to fulfill a thorough examination of the correlation between teacher foreign language anxiety and student achievement not only from different departments but also from various universities. Secondly, in this study the author merely employed Horwitz's TFLAS to determine teachers' anxiety level, which was far from enough to completely reveal the foreign language anxiety situation of the instructor participants. Class observations and interviews are suggested to strengthen the validity of investigated results of teacher foreign language anxiety.

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