



Review article

Towards the role of apprehension and anxiety as antecedents of EFL students' burnout

Liping Ren^{a,b}^a Shanghai Institute of Tourism, Shanghai 201418, China^b Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai 201418, China

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ABSTRACT

How students experience the learning process is of great importance because it affects the enthusiasm they feel during this process. Although many studies have been conducted on apprehension, anxiety, and burnout in both teachers and students, few focus on the relationship between these three variables. To this end, the three variables in this review study are first defined. Then, the relationship between EFL learners' apprehension and their anxiety and burnout is discussed. It seems that the more apprehensive and anxious one feels, the more likely they feel burned out. Finally, the implications of this study and suggestions for further studies are presented.

1. Introduction

Language learning is a process through which students' physical and psychological well-being should be raised. However, there are some negative emotions halting students' learning process such as feeling anxious and apprehensive. Since anxiety and apprehension have a considerable role in students' process of learning, studies concentrating on such topics are of crucial importance. Studies conducted before have stressed the paramount role of emotions in the learning process [1–5]. Based on Broaden-and-Build Theory which was put forward by Fredrickson [6], one of the most important theories of Positive Psychology, positive emotions broaden the way a person thinks and acts momentarily, and then as a result of which one's personal and social resources can be built. By comparison, negative emotions act as a deterrent and impact the learning process negatively. Therefore, it is emphasized that anxiety and apprehension cannot facilitate the learning process and students are less likely to enjoy learning and being active in a language class.

Moreover, SLA researchers, for example, Derakhshan [7], Dewaele and MacIntyre [8] advocated a panoramic view of a range of different positive and negative emotions in the L2 teaching context since they may help language learners to grasp more of the foreign language and achieve more in language learning. With the advent of positive psychology in language learning [3,4,9,10] researchers have highlighted that language learning cannot be influenced only by emotions that are negative such as boredom, exhaustion, and anxiety. Nevertheless, both negative and positive emotions can come into question, because they cannot be distinguished in real life [4, 11]. As Gregersen [12] noted, positive psychology allows students to have more flexibility and overcome the challenges they may face in the learning process. Additionally, a friendly educational atmosphere, academic commitment, passion, determination, and hard work to achieve one's goals are principles of positive psychology. Therefore, positive psychology should be emphasized in order to diminish anxiety and apprehension in instructional contexts. To this end, in the current study both apprehension and anxiety have been studied as predictors of burnout which results in students' lack of interest in learning a new language.

E-mail address: renliping@shnu.edu.cn.

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Anxiety is the first notion that has been taken into consideration in the current review research. As pinpointed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope [13], anxiety comprises three features including communication apprehension, feeling anxious while taking a test, and fear of being negatively evaluated. In a study conducted by Ghanizadeh, Goldast and Ghonsooly [14], a scale for measuring teachers' apprehension, STAS, was devised. This research indicated that the extent to which teachers experience apprehension is highly aligned with teachers' self-esteem and identity that they formed for themselves.

Another variable in this study that has been dealt with is apprehension. Two types of apprehension that can be taken into consideration are communication apprehension and evaluation apprehension. The former is about experiencing anxiety through interpersonal relationships with others where there is little control over the communicative situations [15]. Without a shadow of a doubt, as shown by some studies teachers' behavior plays a prominent role in students' anxiety and apprehension [16]. Burnout is the third variable that has been studied in the present review study. Burnout was first developed in the early 1970s. Based on Gold and Bachelor [17], it has been defined as excessive stress under which people might be pressurized in both their social lives and their professions. The three following factors are the components of burnout: emotional exhaustion (boredom owing to academic demands and controversies), depersonalization (having a negative feeling and lack of interest), and reduced personal accomplishment (feeling incompetent due to lack of academic accomplishments) [18]. Due to the fact that throughout the coronavirus pandemic, many students suffer from anxiety, leading to burnout; this article would be of great benefit. No one can think of the consequences of feeling burnout unless they have experienced it. In this respect, knowing the ways on how to reduce the destructive impacts of burnout may help students keep their spirit up and it accelerates the process of learning. Even though anxiety has always been at the center of attention for researchers since it negatively impacts the learning process, its relationship with burnout has not been studied yet to the researcher's best knowledge. Additionally, both anxiety and apprehension in this study are regarded as the causes of burnout to which attention should be paid. To fill this gap, the focus of the present study is concentrated on the association between these three constructs and experimental studies in this field can be conducted to provide reliable results in the future. Simply put, it is worth paying attention to the fact that just some studies have emphasized the importance of student burnout and its importance in relation to students' fear and anxiety in teaching. Teacher burnout has received much attention in the literature, despite the fact that student burnout is just as important [19]. In addition, its dominant role in the motivation and enthusiasm of learners to learn a new language makes it an important research topic. The purpose of this study is therefore to find the relationship between anxiety and apprehension and burnout in EFL learners. Many students have been struggling with anxiety and apprehension and as a result of which they may feel tired; that is the reason they lose their interest in learning a new language. Thus, attention should be drawn to the importance of feeling anxious and apprehensive, contributing to burnout. To this end, three variables were defined and their importance was emphasized. The relationship between anxiety, apprehension, and burnout then has been dealt with, and some implications and more suggestions for avid researchers have been finally raised.

2. Background

2.1. EFL learners' apprehension

This study is concerned with the association between apprehension, anxiety, and burnout. When feeling apprehensive due to being evaluated and communicating with others, people cannot cope with their anxiety and in the long run, they may feel burnout, leading to impeding them from learning. Therefore, these concepts should be defined. Stress is regarded as a negative experience that threatens teachers' well-being and their self-esteem, and it also hinders the process of learning [20]. Many sources of stress can be found in the educational contexts, for example, internal and external sources of stress which we will discuss below. Two types of apprehension that can be taken into consideration are communication apprehension and evaluation apprehension. The former is about experiencing anxiety through interpersonal relationships with others where there is little control over the communicative situations [15,21]. Moreover, evaluation apprehension is characterized by the amount of ambiguity, novelty, and evaluation experienced by a person through communication. It has been said that the higher the amount of communication apprehension, the less academically successful a person is. It can be taken as an example when a learner does not dare to ask his questions, just because he may negatively be judged by the teacher or other students. They rather ask their questions at the end of the class where there are no other learners by whom the person's knowledge, accent, pronunciation, or grammar are questioned [13]. Therefore, owing to ambiguous people (job interviews) or ambiguous situations (taking tests) one may experience this kind of apprehension [22]. Based on what has been claimed, communication apprehension is more experienced by females rather than males when it comes to giving lectures in an educational context [23]. Lahtinen [24] argued that discussions in groups and giving presentations are two crucial sources of communicative apprehension. The lower the grades, the more negative the attitudes would be and the higher the level of communication apprehension is.

There is a difference between apprehension and anxiety since apprehension has different categories. Apprehension can be classified into three main categories: communication apprehension, writing apprehension, and evaluation apprehension. Student evaluation apprehension has been found to be one of the most important factors in learning contexts which reduces student involvement in the classroom, meaning that when students recognize that they are going to be evaluated for what they do during the class, they feel upset and it affects their participation in classroom activities. Because students are highly concerned about the way they are judged and evaluated by other learners or their teachers. Therefore, it is the number one reason that they shy away from the crowd in the EFL contexts (English as a foreign language). It was found that student evaluation apprehension and academic achievement have been significantly and negatively correlated. Moreover, it was claimed that females are more likely to experience evaluation apprehension than males, and BA students were also indicated to have more evaluation apprehension than their MA counterparts [25].

Writing apprehension is concerned with the amount of which EFL students experience while writing. In a study conducted by Qadir [26], even though almost nearly half of the students felt really apprehensive, most of them experienced a moderate level of apprehension while writing in English and no significant association was found between writing apprehension and other factors like age, gender, academic level, and their socioeconomic status. According to another study carried out by Jalleh, Mahfoodh and Singh [27], Foreign EFL students in Japan may show great fear when communicating in English because of their culture, educational background, attitude toward the role of English in society, and not having opportunities to practice English. Although the students in this study studied English before joining the English immersion program, their language learning experience may not have concentrated on oral communication skills. The study also found that the greatest fear was observed in two communication contexts: group discussions and conversation, perhaps because verbal communication occurs spontaneously in those two communication contexts. According to Agrawal and Krishna [28], using social media lowers the negative impacts of communication apprehension on perceived learning. Likewise, it was also indicated that perceived learning had a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being when students experienced higher levels of psychological stress.

2.2. EFL learners' anxiety

One of the most researched areas in the last two decades in learning a language is anxiety since it acts as a deterrent to language learning [29]. Some students are negatively engaged in classes in that they have self-talk and they overthink the activities leading to them having poor performance [30]. Horwitz is one of the key figures conducting some paramount studies in the field of anxiety which adversely affects EFL students' performance. As pinpointed by Horwitz et al. [13], anxiety comprises three features including communication apprehension, feeling anxious while taking a test, and fear of being negatively evaluated. Based on them, anxiety can be expressed in these situations during the class: when EFL students find it difficult to convey their complicated messages in a second or foreign language, when they feel overwhelmed taking turns in role-play activities, and when they forget the newly-learned materials such as grammatical structures and vocabulary. EFL anxious students are said to study more than their less anxious counterparts because they are worried about failing in their attempts to communicate or convey their messages well in the class or to be judged by others throughout this process. However, the received results of those students do not show any sign of making more effort.

In order to discover anxious university students and measure their anxiety, a scale was developed by Horwitz titled "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" to measure students' anxiety. In a Japanese context, both Aida [31] and Kitano [32] represented that there was an inadvertent correlation between a fair amount of anxiety and students' performance. It was also found that experienced students are less likely to feel anxious. Furthermore, females showed a higher level of anxiety in comparison to males according to the questionnaire they answered. A study, conducted by Liu [33], in a Chinese context among undergraduates, who were studying different majors excluding English, showed that students felt anxious while speaking English and those students with higher proficiency levels were less anxious. In addition, a high level of anxiety was found when students were supposed to answer the questions asked by their teacher and when they were expected to give a presentation on their own, while less anxiety could be experienced when students worked in pairs. It was also discovered that students' anxiety could be lowered when they were more exposed to oral English. Many studies revealed that anxiety can fluctuate considering some other important factors such as gender, age, the year in which one studies, how motivated the students are, and the strategies used [8,34–37]. According to a study conducted in a Turkish university by Çağatay [38], foreign language speaking anxiety is found to be higher in females rather than males. A stunning point in this study is that this type of anxiety increases when EFL learners communicate with native speakers. Another study done by Subasi [34] indicated the main antecedents of anxiety such as personal problems, their prior experiences, the way teachers treat their students, and the strategies utilized by the teachers. Without a shadow of a doubt, as shown by some studies teachers' behavior plays a prominent role in students' anxiety and apprehension [16]. All in all, the disparity between apprehension and anxiety is that the former refers to when a person expects the outcome of the events fearfully, while anxiety refers to when a person feels mentally nervous about unsure occurrences. Although anxiety has been arguably said to be a negative predictor of language learning, some have provided an alternative and solid view that is supported by cumulative evidence [35–39]. As Alamer and Lee [35] indicated, L2 early accomplishments lead to students feeling anxious, meaning that anxiety is always within them and does not allow them to feel successful despite the fact that before it was believed that the opposite might be true. Therefore, these two constructs are negatively correlated. Likewise, Ganschow et al. [37], showed that native language skills such as vocabulary, reading, and spelling were negatively correlated with anxiety. It means that the amount of anxiety is a good predictor of L2 proficiency. Similarly, findings in a study carried out by Sparks et al. [39], show that the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale is not a predictor for measuring anxiety for language learning; however, it is highly likely to predict students' levels of L1 skill, L2 aptitude, and L2 achievement which means that if they are more anxious, they may not be talented enough to grasp the new language.

2.3. The relationship between EFL students' apprehension and anxiety, and burnout

There should be a pleasure while one is studying English and negative factors such as apprehension and anxiety increase the risk of burnout and feeling tired. Hardly ever should hearts be appeased to resume learning, but by reducing the level of anxiety and apprehension. As mentioned above, when a student savors learning a language for its own sake, without needing any external pressures, he is intrinsically motivated which contributes to a reduction in feeling burnout. In contrast, when a student is bewilderingly anxious and apprehensive, he cannot fully focus his attention on what he is supposed to learn; thus, he is highly likely to be susceptible to feeling burnout and exhaustion. On the other hand, shame which makes students anxious throughout the class was positively correlated with burnout, meaning that all those above-mentioned repressed feelings, linked with shame, can profusely affect burnout

and makes students liable to lose their interest in learning a new language [40].

Furthermore, both apprehension and anxiety impede the learning process in that students cannot fully comprehend what has been taught; therefore, from this aspect, learning a foreign or second language can be thought of as stressful. Both anxiety and apprehension are radical factors for students because the less anxious and apprehensive they feel, the more comprehensible the subject-matter would be for them, the more they enjoy the process of learning, and as a consequence of which the less burnout they feel for there would not be any boredom behind the EFL learners' learning process. In spite of the fact that there is no robust evidence to show that those new learners who are poorly motivated about advancing their knowledge are highly prone to experience more anxiety and apprehensiveness because there is nothing to assure them about the amount to which they can improve their language, there is a widespread agreement among EFL teachers that this hypothesis might be true. When students are about to start learning a language, they should be intrinsically motivated not to put an end to their learning process, and they are more likely to experience anxiety and apprehension when they fail to achieve their goals, such as not learning the subject as they are supposed to learn, having difficulty understanding some grammatical issues, not pronouncing the vocabularies properly and not observing the intonation rules about which they may feel embarrassed, making grammatical mistakes while communicating with the class or giving presentations, and not being confident enough to express their ideas during the class. While those advanced students who are good at language can feel less apprehensive because they are not worried about their improvement, so they do not feel as anxious and apprehensive as inexperienced learners are. Likewise, they do not feel tired as soon as they run into a problem.

From a personal point of view, since students' character is shaped through the learning process, not feeling anxious or burnout enables them to build a strong personality through which self-esteem and confidence can be expressed. There is no doubt that decision-making strategies, problem-solving skills, and stress-coping strategies are highly relevant to how students put effort into practice learning a second or foreign language. Since they have endeavored throughout this process to tackle the problems faced while learning a language. That is the reason why the educational context can be viewed as a microcosm of society and real life. So, from a psychological point of view, if the students learn how to soothe themselves and reduce their anxiety about making a mistake and encountering difficulties, we can hope that they will be responsible members of society in the future.

Both anxiety and apprehension as well as burnout profusely affect the amount of resilience and buoyancy. EFL students in this regard are unlikely to cope with difficult circumstances and feel happy after they have faced difficulty. All these factors inevitably influence the way EFL students learn a language which sometimes causes irreparable damage to their character. Recently, the whole world has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result anxiety, apprehension, and burnout are tremendously affected by this situation in which people are less hopeful about their future, due highly to the fact that they are confined to their houses. More anxiety, boredom, and burnout can be found among people. In a recent study carried out by Derakhshan et al. [41], it has been shown how students feel bored while online classes and various types of activities through which students feel tired have been discovered and categorized. The activities that cause boredom in students were classified into ten groups in this research. All these activities were said to be either demanding or non-engaging. Out of which, passive listening and reading attracted the least interest among students. Accordingly, if the activities in classes, both online and face-to-face, have an engaging nature, EFL students feel less bored and in the long run, they will not feel burnout. When it comes to learning a foreign or second language, it should be taken into account that it is not an abstract skill of vocabulary memorization and grammar, instead, the learners should learn how to cope with the ambiguities within a new culture [42]. So ambiguity tolerance is the key to success which means the extent to which a person can tolerate novel experiences facing a new culture and language. The more the EFL learners can encounter the obscure items in a new language, the less anxious they feel, and the more they enjoy the process of learning.

The effect of EFL teacher apprehension and teacher burnout on learners' academic achievement has once been studied. It emphasized the significance of teacher burnout on learners' academic accomplishment. Learners' academic accomplishments are affected by not having enough L2 knowledge, differences in culture, and problems with managing classes [43]. So anxiety and apprehension cannot be considered just for students since both of which are of paramount importance when it comes to teachers. Another study shows the intervening impact of EFL teachers' anxiety on the correlations between their perfectionism and burnout levels. In comparison to other components of burnout, perfectionism significantly affects depersonalization. In addition, the association between perfectionism and emotional exhaustion would be meaningful when anxiety arises [44]. As a result, perfectionism can be perceived as negative sometimes since it negatively impacts their enthusiasm towards teaching and anxiety stops them from feeling energetic.

2.4. EFL learners' burnout

The notion of burnout was first introduced in the early 1970s. Based on Gold [17], it has been defined as excessive stress under which people might be pressured in both their social lives and their professions. The three following factors are the components of burnout: emotional exhaustion (boredom owing to academic demands and controversies), depersonalization (having a negative feeling and lack of interest), and reduced personal accomplishment (feeling incompetent due to lack of academic accomplishments) [18]. Once Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) with 15 items was developed to measure students' burnout [45]. In terms of educational contexts, burnout can be experienced by students because they may fail at coping effectively with the sources of stress faced during the class [46,47], to name a few, taking exams, being diligent to achieve the possible outcomes, putting effort into practice to doing homework, overcrowded classes, and not being supported efficiently throughout this process [48]. Both psychological and physical well-being in learners have been affected by burnout [49]. For instance, Yang and Farn [50] discovered that lack of interest and engagement in learners' studies, not attending the class regularly, not acquiring the academic materials, and not feeling worthy and valued are associated with feeling burnout. The results of a study done by Karami and Fallah [51] revealed that burnout is

negatively influenced by teacher affective support and intrinsic motivation, while it is positively affected by shame. Teacher affective support is concerned with encouraging students while making effort, caring about their well-being, showing sympathy, setting high anticipations, valuing what ideas students hold, listening carefully to students with ardor, expressing equal attitudes towards students, and respecting them [52]. Students with intrinsic motivation have been said to be highly likely to work hard and as a result of which fatigue and emotional exhaustion can be felt less. Those students who are extrinsically motivated and are affected by external factors, however, do not show spontaneous behaviors [53]. Research also demonstrates that, as opposed to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is more efficacious in diminishing negative psychological attitudes and behaviors, such as burnout [54]. In other words, when a student enjoys learning a language for the sake of language itself, without requiring any external pressures, he is intrinsically motivated, leading to a reduction in feeling burnout. Shame, on the other hand, is associated with the following factors felt by a person: feeling inferior and worthless, their self-image is damaged, having confusing thoughts, and feeling unable to talk [40]. All these feelings, contributing to shame, cause a person to be more vulnerable to feel burnout since there might be pent-up emotions that have been suppressed for a long and as a consequence, they have turned into burnout. Students' intrinsic motivation, hence, should be enhanced and negative emotions should be reduced in them in order to control burnout. If not, language education can be paralyzed, meaning that nothing can be learned in such a context. Academic burnout also is viewed as students' feeling exhausted because of high demands of studying (exhaustion), bearing a pessimistic approach to their homework, teachers or peers (cynicism), and having a feeling of incompetency or a sense of lack of accomplishment as a student (inefficacy) [55]. From the perspective of positive psychology, commitment is considered the opposite of burnout [56]. In addition, academic commitment means vitality (high energy levels and perseverance in learning, planned learning effort and perseverance in the face of obstacles), commitment (meaning, meaning, passion, excitement, inspiration, and challenges) to be strong. involved in the work) and immersion (completely and happily immersed in the study) [55]. Based on Li, Zhang and Jiang [57], not only burnout is a language-specific phenomenon, but it is also dependent on the context considering the educational area. Vaezi and Fallah [58] showed that there was a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and burnout. Furthermore, an important relationship was found between the types of personality and emotional intelligence and three burnout dimensions. It was shown that the best predictors for emotional exhaustion were neuroticism and extraversion, for depersonalization was the intrapersonal scale of emotional intelligence and agreeableness, and for personal accomplishment were interpersonal scale and conscientiousness [59].

3. Implications

In the current study, the association between EFL students' apprehension and anxiety as well as their burnout has been discussed. Burnout can be felt due to a high level of anxiety and apprehension; as a result, efforts should be made to provide a learning ambiance where positive attributes are accentuated. It should be emphasized that these two variables show a high correlation, meaning that arise in one leads to an increase in another. It has been concluded that burnout can be influenced by anxiety and apprehension. In addition, this study can be very important for authorities who work hard to strengthen the educational infrastructure, because they can organize seminars and workshops for teachers to train them to teach in such a way that students experience less anxiety and fear, and as a result, the risk of burnout decreases. Teachers will also find this study useful because their well-being depends largely on the well-being of their students. The less anxious and fearful the EFL students are, the more energetic the teachers feel to convey their message to the whole class. Last but not least, it can greatly benefit the students themselves, who sometimes suffer from anxiety and exhaustion and may not realize how much their emotions can be considered a factor in their learning. Each variable in this research plays an important role in increasing students' knowledge, and students can feel motivated to learn better. It is also very likely that EFL teachers are committed to what they teach and to the materials and teaching methods they use to deliver their messages. Because they see problems as a solution, not as obstacles that can interfere with focus. To do so, two points should delicately be considered; first of all for the educational system to be strengthened, a competitive educational environment should be lowered because in such an atmosphere students are more likely to be evaluated by their peers and teachers. Instead, communication should be practiced in both real-life situations and classroom activities so that students would feel less anxious and apprehensive.

4. Future directions

There are some studies on which enthusiastic researchers can work. First, the antecedents of feeling apprehensive and anxious can be explored in studies. It would be of crucial significance to see if it is rooted in the family background or it stems from the learning environment or personal attributes. In other words, care should be given to the fact that first and foremost these are the antecedents of both anxiety and apprehension that need to be taken into consideration because after they have been discovered, it will be easier to ask the EFL students to have a new outlook on the way they learn English. To this end, some studies, especially longitudinal ones that can be more valid, should be conducted to analyze these reasons.

Second, most studies carried out have concentrated on quantitative, retrospective, and self-reported data, although some longitudinal studies based on introspective data and diaries should be conducted. In addition, it should be emphasized that most studies use a random sample, which reduces generalizability; thus, nonrandom sampling can be used to examine treatment effects on these constructs. Third, there should be more new research on different types of transmission, because most of the research in this area is outdated as far as the researcher knows. It should be given the importance that the relevance between burnout and some other factors such as perfectionism, resilience, and all types of intelligence can be dealt with so as to find a way to reduce burnout in EFL contexts. Next, it is sometimes taken for granted that the negative emotions experienced by EFL learners affect their approach to their life. Either a positive or negative outlook on life can be formed whether students experience a friendly learning ambiance or not. Consequently,

conducting such studies seems a pressing need. Moreover, one of the concepts which can be related to burnout is emotioncy. Emotioncy is a mixture of emotion and frequency of senses. It means sense-induced emotions can relativize cognition. According to emotioncy, individuals can be evolved (hearing and seeing something) and involved (direct experience of something). It seems that the level of emotioncy can affect burnout. The higher the level of emotioncy, the less probable burnout might be. Hence, the relationship between emotioncy and burnout can be more discussed in further studies. Finally, the point should not also be neglected that because learning a new language is not a linear process and it is so elaborate, it is associated with anxiety and apprehension, leading to burnout; therefore, efforts should be made by the new researchers on the fact that how this intricate process can be facilitated and be covered in a shorter time span so as not to cause students to feel burnout. The shorter the courses, the longer the attention and concentration span will be. As a consequence, when students are focused, they are less likely to feel burnout.

5. Conclusion

This research was conducted to review the role of apprehension and anxiety as antecedents of EFL students' burnout. In the current study, the association between EFL students' apprehension and anxiety as well as their burnout has been discussed because after they have been discovered, it will be easier to ask the EFL students to have a new outlook on the way they learn English. Moreover, there should be more new research on different types of transmission, because most of the research in this area is outdated as far as the researcher knows. For instance, emotioncy is a mixture of emotion and frequency of senses. According to emotioncy, individuals can be evolved (hearing and seeing something) and involved (direct experience of something). Hence, the relationship between emotioncy and burnout can be more discussed in further studies.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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