Non-native English Teaching Anxiety in EFL Instructors: A Study in Chongqing and Xi'an Colleges

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Abstract. This study delves into foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA), a notable concern among non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), employing the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (TFLTAS) to assess anxiety levels in 146 college English teachers from language universities in Chongqing and Xi'an. This research, through detailed questionnaires and statistical analysis, aimed to illuminate the extent of FLTA in this specific group. The findings revealed that half of the participants experienced moderate to high teaching anxiety, with an average anxiety level of 68.49, slightly below the concern threshold of 70, suggesting a generally low level of FLTA among the surveyed teachers. Notably, the study found a significant negative correlation (Pearson coefficient of -.215) between teaching experience and anxiety levels, indicating that anxiety decreases with increased teaching experience. These insights have broad implications, emphasizing the need for effective support and professional development for teachers to manage teaching anxiety. The study underscores the benefits of a supportive environment that acknowledges FLTA challenges and promotes strategies for overcoming them. By highlighting the link between experience and reduced anxiety, it suggests that targeted support for novice teachers could be particularly beneficial. Selami's work contributes significantly to understanding FLTA, offering a foundation for future research and interventions to enhance teaching efficacy and improve educational outcomes in the language education field.

Keywords: Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA); Non-native English-speaking Teachers (NNESTs); Teaching Experience; Anxiety Management Strategies; Language Education Outcomes

1   Introduction

The phenomenon of teaching anxiety among non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) has emerged as a significant area of concern within the broader landscape of language education. This introductory analysis delves into the current state and underlying causes of this anxiety, which not only affects the psychological well-being of teachers but also impacts the effectiveness of language teaching and learning pro-

cesses. Teaching anxiety in NNESTs is multifaceted, rooted in a complex interplay of linguistic competence, pedagogical skills, cultural differences, and institutional expectations.

The proficiency in the English language itself stands as a primary source of anxiety for NNESTs. Despite their qualifications and understanding of grammatical structures, non-native teachers often experience self-doubt about their language skills, particularly in terms of pronunciation and idiomatic usage, fearing that their proficiency might not meet the native standards expected by students or educational institutions. This apprehension is exacerbated by the prevalent ideology that native speakers are the ideal language instructors, inadvertently placing NNESTs under immense pressure to demonstrate near-native fluency to gain legitimacy and respect in their teaching roles.

Furthermore, pedagogical challenges contribute significantly to the anxiety levels of NNESTs. The expectation to employ innovative teaching methodologies and effectively engage students in interactive learning experiences demands a high level of pedagogical expertise and creativity. Many NNESTs find themselves wrestling with the adoption of such methodologies, particularly in environments that lack adequate professional development opportunities or where traditional, teacher-centered approaches are the norm. The struggle to bridge pedagogical gaps, coupled with the fear of negative evaluation by students or peers, can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety.

Cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping the teaching anxiety of NNESTs. Teachers working in foreign or multicultural contexts often encounter cultural barriers that affect their teaching dynamics and classroom management strategies. The challenge of navigating cultural differences and expectations, while striving to maintain authority and rapport with students from diverse backgrounds, can be daunting. The fear of misinterpretation or unintentional cultural insensitivity adds another layer of anxiety for NNESTs attempting to foster a positive and inclusive learning environment.

2   Related work

In the scholarly pursuit of understanding the affective dimensions of language education, anxiety has been identified as a crucial psychological abnormality that can significantly influence the pedagogical process. Traditionally conceived as a tense emotional state characterized by apprehension and fear, anxiety arises from anticipated failures, threats, or obstacles that undermine an individual's self-esteem, confidence, and could heighten feelings of failure and guilt. In the specific context of foreign language acquisition, MacIntyre & Gardner (year not provided) articulate language anxiety as the tension and apprehension related to second language contexts, encompassing speaking, listening, and learning [1]. Critically, traditional definitions of language anxiety have been limited by their focus on the learner within the classroom, thus sidelining the teacher's psychological experiences [2]. This oversight is nontrivial, as the emotional states of foreign language teachers—historically dismissed as less con-

sequential 'soft skills'—have been shown to bear significantly on their psychological well-being, teaching behaviors, and the efficacy of student-teacher interactions 3.

Contrary to the undervaluation of such emotional states, evidence suggests that the emotional dynamics of foreign language teachers oscillate between positive and negative polarities, directly impacting their psychological health, teaching choices, and the quality of their interaction with students 4. In recognizing the breadth of impact that teachers' psychological health has on professional development and pedagogical outcomes, Selami (2021) underscored teaching anxiety as a substantive affective state with potential adverse effects on the learning-teaching continuum 5. To empirically explore this, Selami developed the FLTAS instrument, thus enabling a systematic inquiry into the anxiety experienced by foreign language teachers.

This paper employs Selami's TFLTAS (Teachers' Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale) to investigate the anxiety status among university English teachers in China, illuminating not only the theoretical dimensions but also the practical implications for English teaching practice 6. The investigation into the teaching anxiety of non-native English-speaking teachers, with a focus on EFL educators in Chongqing and Xi'an universities, reveals a multifaceted interplay of factors that influence anxiety levels. Among these are the challenges of language proficiency, the variances in cultural and educational contexts, and the pressures of conforming to institutional and student expectations 7. The study accentuates the influence of personal attributes—age, gender, and teaching experience—on anxiety levels and notes how these challenges are further compounded by the intrinsic pressures of teaching in a non-native language. Additionally, institutional systemic issues such as workload and support mechanisms are identified as significant contributors to teaching anxiety 8. The findings advocate for strategic interventions such as tailored teacher training programs, the cultivation of support networks among peers, and curriculum adaptations that align with teachers' competencies and realities. The literature unequivocally calls for more targeted research, particularly that which addresses the distinct educational landscapes of Chongqing and Xi'an, to forge a deeper understanding and devise effective interventions for managing teaching anxiety in these settings.

3   Research Methodology

3.1   Research Questions

English teaching anxiety status of university English teachers and its causes.

3.2   Subjects

This study adopts the method of random sampling to select 146 randomly selected English teachers from universities in Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies, Sichuan International Studies University, Xi'an International Studies University, etc. The respondents are the English teachers of the universities in China 9. A total of 146 respondents were randomly selected from the university English teachers in Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies, Sichuan International Studies University, Xi'an Interna-

tional Studies University, etc. After excluding six invalid questionnaires, a total of 140 valid questionnaires were returned, of which 140 teachers were from language colleges and universities in western China.

3.3   Research Instruments

In the assessment of anxiety levels among university English teachers using the TFLTAS, the instrument developed by Selami in 2020 served as a foundational tool. The scale, with its scope ranging from 27 to 130, was meticulously crafted to quantify the anxiety specific to foreign language teaching contexts, with a greater score correlating to heightened anxiety 10. To ensure relevance to the participants of the study, the term 'foreign language' within the scale was substituted with 'English'. This adaptation aimed to precisely reflect the anxiety states of the subjects, providing a tailored measure of the English teaching anxiety phenomena within the university setting.

3.4   Research design

The methodology of the current study incorporates the application of the TFLTAS, a comprehensive instrument developed by Selami in 2020, to assess foreign language teaching anxiety among university professors 11. Each item on the questionnaire resonates with the frequency of anxiety-related experiences within the academic setting, with the scale ranging from 'Never' to 'Always.' This array of responses allows for a nuanced capture of the educators' emotional states 12. The statistical treatment of the data, facilitated by SPSS software, enabled the extraction of critical values such as the mean, standard deviation, range, and extremities of the scores. This quantitative analysis provides an empirical foundation upon which the prevalence and intensity of English language teaching anxiety can be gauged among the participant educators.

3.5   Results and Analyses

The Teachers' Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (TFLTAS), consisting of 27 items, utilizes a five-point Likert scale to measure the anxiety levels of educators in foreign language teaching contexts. The scale's design allows for a detailed assessment of anxiety, with each question specifically crafted to reflect the various dimensions of anxiety experienced in teaching environments 13. The scoring system is segmented into three categories based on the total score: a score below 70 indicates a state of low or no anxiety, a score between 70 and 98 reflects moderate anxiety, and a score above 98 suggests high anxiety 14. This categorization aids in identifying the intensity of anxiety among educators, enabling a more tailored approach to understanding and addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by teachers in foreign language teaching scenarios.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis of TFLTAS

Numerical value	TFLSA
Number of people	140
Average score	68.49
Standard deviation	10.61
Interval	82
Maximum	109
Minimum	27

The statistical data presented in Table 1, with a range of 82 and the extreme values being 109 and 27, culminates in a mean anxiety score of 68.49 for university English teachers 15. These figures suggest a tendency towards the lower end of the anxiety spectrum among the educators in question, implying that a substantial proportion of these individuals experience minimal to no discernible anxiety in relation to their English language teaching responsibilities. This statistical trend is indicative of a relatively stable emotional state within the teaching cohort, potentially reflecting effective coping mechanisms or a supportive educational environment.

Table 2. Clinical Assessment Scores and Percentages by Severity Level

	Number of people	Average score	Standard deviation	Percentage (%)
Severe	8	102.75	3.96	5.71%
Moderate	62	79.34	7.39	44.29%
Mild	70	54.96	9.70	50%

As can be seen from Table 2, out of 140 subjects, 8 subjects (5.71 per cent of the total) had scores higher than 98, which is high anxiety, 62 subjects (44.29 per cent of the total) had scores between 70 and 98, which is moderate anxiety, and 70 subjects (50 per cent) had scores lower than 70, which is low anxiety or no anxiety 16. Horwitz (1996) argues that foreign language teachers who teach a non-native language and are also foreign language learners are likely to experience foreign language anxiety. However, the results of this study showed that half of the subjects had low or no anxiety. This result can be attributed to the fact that the data collected in this study included all teachers as subjects and spanned a wide range of teaching ages, rather than studying only new teachers. In statistics, the median can divide the set of values into equal upper and lower parts, and can reflect the medium level and concentrated trend of values. Calculations revealed that the median teaching age of the 140 teachers in this study was at 1.5, and the overall low teaching age of the subject teachers coincided with Pigge & Marso's study (Pigge & Marso, 1990)17, in which teachers' instructional anxiety decreases as their teaching experience increases, i.e., teachers with more years of teaching experience experience lower anxiety than those with fewer years of teaching experience 18. The same phenomenon exists in the present study, where teachers' teaching age may affect teachers' foreign language anxiety.

Therefore, this study applied a correlation analysis between both teaching age and anxiety level and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation Between Teaching Age and Anxiety Level Among Educators

		Teaching Age (TA)	Anxiety Level (AL)
TA	Pearson relation	1	-.215*
	Si g.(2-tailed)		.011
	N	140	140
AL	Pearson relation	-.215*	1
	Si g.(2-tailed)	.011	
	N	140	140

The Pearson correlation coefficient provides a measure of the strength of linear association between two variables. Using SPSS software to analyze the data, the results indicate that teachers' teaching age showed a significant negative correlation with foreign language anxiety 19. The Pearson's correlation coefficient was -.215. Sig. (2-tailed) was .011. This indicates that the longer the teacher's teaching experience, the lower the level of foreign language anxiety.

4   Conclusion

In the field of foreign language teaching, the concept of teacher anxiety has emerged as an increasingly significant topic of inquiry. While earlier research predominantly addressed student-related foreign language anxiety, the stress and anxiety experienced by educators have not been extensively explored. Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship recognizes the profound impact of teacher anxiety on both the teaching process and student learning outcomes. Utilizing the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (FLTAS), the current study elucidates that teachers' anxiety can largely be attributed to a constellation of factors including the perceived disinterest of students, challenges in managing instructional time, and teachers' self-assessment of their linguistic competencies. These findings underscore the necessity of adopting a more holistic approach to language education research, one that duly acknowledges and addresses the affective concerns of language educators, alongside those of learners.
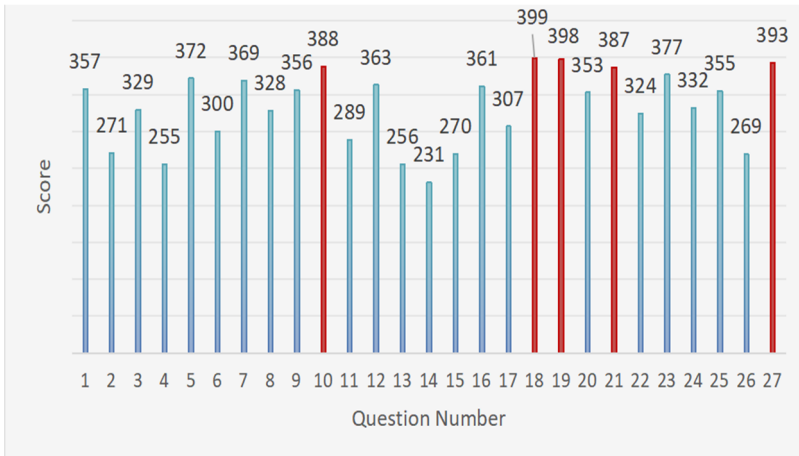
Fig. 1. TFLAS questionnaire score summary

Teacher anxiety in the language classroom, as illustrated in Figure 1, is a multifaceted issue with implications that extend beyond the individual educator to the students and the learning environment. While the majority of teachers may not have high levels of anxiety, nearly half have moderate anxiety, suggesting that the effects of anxiety are widespread and far-reaching. Teachers' emotional states characterised by anxiety subtly but significantly permeate their teaching behaviours, potentially reducing student engagement and amplifying their language learning anxiety. Research has shown that teachers with higher levels of anxiety are less effective in managing student learning, which may result in an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning.

In addition, anxiety may inadvertently lead teachers to adopt more traditional and less innovative teaching methods, thereby limiting the development and application of more creative and effective teaching strategies. As Horwitz emphasises, recognising and addressing language teaching anxiety is crucial to mitigating its effects and enhancing the teaching-learning paradigm. Measures such as accurate identification of anxiety, strategic assignment of tasks, and professional development can help mitigate the negative effects of teacher anxiety. Regular skills upgrading training and psychological support services are also crucial in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence and promoting their psychological well-being.

However, current research on teacher anxiety is not without limitations. Reliance on self-reported data introduces subjectivity and emphasises the need for more objective methods of observation. In addition, the predominance of studies that address specific regional or institutional contexts limits the generalisability of findings, suggesting the need for cross-cultural and diverse comparative research. Teacher anxiety is influenced by a variety of factors, including teaching and learning environments and task demands, suggesting that future research should cover a wider range of variables. Expanding the scope of the study to include different cultural and regional contexts would greatly enrich the understanding of this complex phenomenon and inform more effective interventions.

5   Discussion

The issue of teaching anxiety among non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) is a multifaceted phenomenon that has garnered significant attention in the field of language education. This discussion aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the current state of teaching anxiety experienced by NNESTs and the complex web of factors contributing to it. In doing so, it seeks to uncover the layers of challenges these educators face, which not only impact their personal well-being but also the effectiveness of their teaching and, consequently, the learning outcomes of their students.

At the heart of NNESTs' anxiety lies the concern over linguistic competence. Despite often possessing extensive knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, many NNESTs harbor insecurities about their language proficiency, particularly in areas such as pronunciation and the use of idiomatic expressions. These insecurities are magnified by the prevalent perception that native speakers represent the gold standard of language proficiency and pedagogy. This belief system not only undermines the confidence of NNESTs but also imposes an unrealistic benchmark for them to strive for, igniting fears of judgment from both students and colleagues.

Pedagogical challenges further exacerbate the anxiety levels of NNESTs. The expectation to implement engaging, student-centered teaching methodologies and to adapt to the dynamic needs of learners requires a high level of pedagogical skill and flexibility. Many NNESTs find themselves in educational contexts that either do not provide sufficient professional development opportunities or still favor traditional, lecture-based approaches. The pressure to bridge this methodological divide, coupled with concerns over student engagement and feedback, contributes significantly to their anxiety.

Cultural differences present another layer of complexity for NNESTs, particularly those teaching in environments vastly different from their own cultural backgrounds. The challenge of navigating these differences, managing classroom dynamics, and establishing a rapport with students from diverse cultural backgrounds can be daunting. Anxiety arises not only from the fear of cultural misinterpretation or offense but also from the pressure to maintain authority and respect in a culturally sensitive manner.

Institutional pressures add to the anxiety experienced by NNESTs. The increasing emphasis on standardized testing and the quantification of educational outcomes places undue stress on teachers to demonstrate success through student performance metrics. For NNESTs, this often translates into an added pressure to validate their effectiveness in comparison to their native-speaking peers, overshadowing the unique perspectives and strengths they bring to the classroom, such as an empathetic understanding of the language learning process and the ability to explicitly teach complex grammatical structures from a learner's viewpoint.

The cumulative effect of these factors on NNESTs' teaching anxiety is profound. It not only affects their self-esteem and job satisfaction but also influences their instructional strategies and interactions with students. To mitigate this anxiety, it is imperative for educational institutions and policymakers to recognize and address the diverse challenges faced by NNESTs. This includes providing robust professional develop-

ment programs, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for linguistic diversity, and reassessing the metrics by which teacher effectiveness is measured.

Ultimately, reducing the teaching anxiety of NNESTs requires a concerted effort to shift the narrative around non-native English teaching. By valuing the unique contributions of NNESTs, acknowledging the richness of their experiences, and providing supportive environments for professional growth, the field of language education can move towards a more equitable and effective practice. This discussion not only highlights the pressing need to address the issue of teaching anxiety among NNESTs but also underscores the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape for all teachers and learners.

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