

The Effects of Family Atmosphere, School Environment, and Self-efficacy on the Learning Outcomes of International High School Students with Different Levels of Anxiety in Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract. With the increasing number of students studying abroad and the majority of them choosing countries where English is the primary language, the anxiety of international school students learning English as a second foreign language (ESL) has drawn attention. Based on the factors that affect anxiety mentioned in most articles, this paper selects family atmosphere, school environment and self-efficacy as three studied factors, and makes chart analysis of the views of students with different anxiety states on the above three factors. The study found that people with low anxiety have higher English standardized scores than those with moderate and high anxiety. Parents' English level has some influences on their kids' English performances, but whether they communicate with their kids using English in daily life has little influence on English learning. Also, there is no significant difference in whether the help provided by the school was beneficial for different anxious students. Finally, students with moderate anxiety have the highest sense of self-efficacy, even higher than students with highest anxiety. This study helps individual international students deeply understand the relationship between anxiety and ESL performance and the role of parents and schools, which can help teachers, parents and schools make better teaching methods.

Keywords: International high school students; anxiety; family atmosphere; school environment; self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

Research indicates that in terms of mental health, depression and anxiety are on the high side of adolescents in China, and there is an increasing trend year by year [1]. However, there is a notable gap in the literature when it comes to exploring anxiety specifically among high school students in China, particularly in relation to their second foreign language learning experiences. Existing studies primarily focus on individuals over 18 years old, and there is a dearth of research that investigates anxiety levels among high school students. Consequently, it is imperative to delve into the anxiety experienced by high school students and identify potential factors that may influence their second language learning outcomes.

The family and school environments are two crucial aspects of high school students' lives that significantly impact their physical and mental health, as well as their overall development. Numerous studies have demonstrated that external factors such as family structure and economic status can influence individuals' mental health literacy [2]. Therefore, understanding the relationship between anxiety and these environmental factors is essential in comprehending the multifaceted nature of anxiety among high school students in the context of second language learning.

In the globalized world, the demand for effective English communication skills has surged, particularly among high school students attending international schools. While some students may be native English speakers, many others are non-native speakers who need to acquire English as a second foreign language. Achieving a standardized English score, such as those obtained in the TOEFL and IELTS exams, is often a prerequisite for college admissions. Consequently, high school students

constantly strive to hone their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to lay a solid foundation for achieving high scores and gaining acceptance into their preferred universities.

However, as time progresses and students encounter various internal and external pressures, some may develop anxiety related to their English language performance. It is imperative to acknowledge and address learning anxiety in the language classroom, as it has been found to have a detrimental impact on language learning and is widely examined in the fields of psychology and education [3]. Language anxiety, particularly in the context of second/foreign language learning, has been shown to interfere with various aspects of learning [4].

The significance of investigating anxiety among international high school students becomes evident when considering the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad. Consequently, it is crucial to explore the factors that affect the English language performance of this cohort of students in international high schools.

While the literature on anxiety related to English as a second foreign language learning among international high school students in China is limited, it is important to recognize the unique nature of the international class system and conduct separate investigations. This study aims to bridge this research gap by focusing on international high school students, thereby supplementing and improving existing knowledge in this area. Additionally, this study will provide new insights into learner anxiety factors and second language learning, contributing to the development of effective teaching strategies and interventions.

The specific objectives of this study are to examine the relationship between secondary language learning anxiety and factors such as family atmosphere, school environment, and self-efficacy among international high school students. By analyzing the differences in these influencing factors among students with varying levels of anxiety, this study seeks to shed light on the dynamics at play within the ESL learning context. Moreover, it aims to offer practical implications for teachers, enabling them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current scenario regarding English learning anxiety among international high school students. Armed with this knowledge, teachers can then implement purposeful teaching interventions that stimulate students' interest, boost their self-confidence in English reading, and help alleviate anxiety, ultimately leading to improved language learning outcomes.

In conclusion, the investigation of anxiety among international high school students in the context of second language learning is of utmost importance. By exploring the relationship between anxiety and factors such as family atmosphere, school environment, and self-efficacy, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. This study aims to fill the existing research gap, contribute to the existing body of knowledge, and provide valuable insights for teachers to effectively support students in their English language learning journey.

2. Literature References

Learning English as a second language (ESL) is a crucial aspect of education for many high school students. However, students' anxiety levels can significantly impact their language learning outcomes. This literature review aims to explore the effects of family atmosphere, school environment, and self-efficacy on the learning outcomes of high school students with different levels of anxiety in learning English as a second language.

2.1. Anxiety and Reading Performance

Foreign language reading anxiety is characterized by negative emotions that distract readers' attention, hindering the comprehension process [5]. This reading anxiety can significantly impact on language learning outcomes. Students who perceive reading materials as difficult or face unfamiliar language and cultural backgrounds may experience increasing anxiety levels. SaitoY and Horwitz et al. also

found that heightened reading anxiety negatively affects reading comprehension and overall performance [5].

2.2. Parental Education and Language Learning

Parental education plays a vital role in academic achievement, particularly in linguistic and cognitive abilities. Children with parents who have a higher level of education tend to have better language skills and academic success [6]. Parental involvement, including the utilization of native languages in the home, can positively impact vocabulary development. Also, levels of parental involvement in their adolescents' education are mediated by parents' construction of their role [7]. Some researchers believe that family cultural capital originates from cultural accumulation within family members and influences individuals in a subtle way. Sun Yinlian. On one hand, believes that cultural capital is accumulated through communication and practice within family members and has specific social resources (education, cultural goods and skills, etc.) [8]. Zhou Lin and Sun Xiaoxue, on the other hand, pointed out that cultural capital is the accumulation of the hobbies and interests of the parents in the family that influence individuals imperceptibly through the communication among family members [9]. Both two studies have explored the influence of family background on children's educational level or academic achievement, and both found that family background plays an important role in children's educational attainment and academic achievement.

2.3. School Environment and Language Learning

The school environment significantly influences language learning outcomes. A positive and inclusive environment promotes student engagement and reduces anxiety levels [10]. Conversely, a stressful or unsupportive school environment can exacerbate anxiety and hinder language learning progress. In addition, in terms of school environment and student learning, many studies have found that the better students perceive school atmosphere, the higher their academic achievement will be [11]. Moreover, a good school environment can also help students stimulate learning motivation, improve learning engagement and school happiness, and promote academic performance [12].

2.4. Self-Efficacy and Language Learning

Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to succeed, plays a crucial role in language learning outcomes. Bandura defines self-efficacy as an individual's judgment of their capabilities in performing specific tasks. In the context of language learning, self-efficacy influences students' cognition, emotions, and motivation, ultimately affecting their academic performance. Learning self-efficacy, specifically in English reading, has been linked to English achievement. In abroad, Naseri Mahdie and Elaheh Zaferanieh selected English majors as research objects to explore the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension achievement of Iranian English learners [13]. The results show that there is a significant positive correlation between the pairwise variables. Maryam Habibian and Samsilah Roslan selected graduate students as research objects, and the results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between readers' self-efficacy and reading comprehension performance [14]. Dona Rahma Fitri E. also reached the same result, that is, the higher the level of reading self-efficacy of learners, the higher their reading comprehension ability and achievement [15]. Consequently, the author also believes that self-efficacy is related to English learning performance among Chinese students.

3. Method

This research selects high school students from Chinese international schools as the research object. A total of 60 questionnaires were answered online, 42 questionnaires were distributed offline, 40 were recovered on-site, and 99 effective questionnaires were finally sorted out, with an effective rate of 97.05%. The author chooses international high school students as the research object of this study because they have experienced more English learning courses and access to English resources than traditional Chinese high school students, and have a clearer understanding of their English ability

through international standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. In addition, since international high school students with English as a second foreign language face pressure to standardize their grades at the start in high school, more students can participate in the questionnaire. In view of the above two points, the author believes that it is reasonable to investigate the anxiety of students in international schools who use English as a second foreign language.

To measure the data, the study first divided students to three different level of anxiety, which are high-anxious group, medium-anxious group, and low-anxious group. The research is aimed to find the effects of family atmosphere, school environment and self-efficacy as three factors on the learning outcomes of high school students with different levels of anxiety in learning English as a second language. For measurements of self-efficiency, the author chooses The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES). The scale was compiled by Schwarzer et al., the Chinese version was translated and revised by Wang Caikang et al., and its reliability and validity were analyzed [16]. The results show that GSES has good reliability, its internal consistency coefficient Cronbach $\alpha=0.87$, retest reliability $r=0.83(p<0.001)$ [16].

4. Results

Based on the collection of questionnaires, the author will use the graphical statistical table to analyze the influencing factors one by one and make descriptive statistical analysis to understand the overall situation of these factors on English learning and English reading anxiety of high school students respectively. 26 students were classified as having high anxiety, 59 students were separated in medium-anxious group, and the rest 14 students were classified as low-anxious group.

Finally, the author proposes a general theoretical guide for the improvement of senior high school English through a comparative analysis of the findings of this study and the results of the existing literature. In addition, the author summarizes the shortcomings and future directions of this study to provide reference for future research.

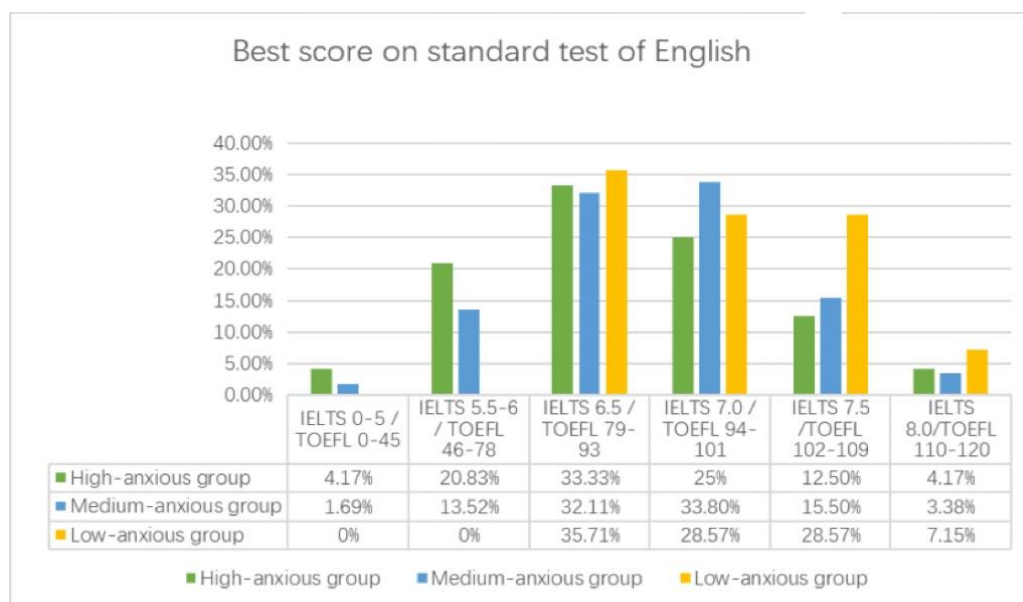


Figure 1. Best score on standard test of English from three groups

The high-anxious group consists of 25% of students who score below IELTS 6.0 or TOEFL 78. In the medium-anxious group, this percentage decreases to 15.21%, which is nearly half of the percentage in the high-anxious group. However, the low-anxious group shows no students with scores below IELTS 6.0 or TOEFL 78, indicating that students with low anxiety levels do not have low scores. These findings suggest that there is a higher proportion of students with relatively low scores who experience a high level of anxiety (See Figure 1).

In the high-anxious group, 58.33% of students have scores ranging from IELTS 6.5 to IELTS 7.0 (TOEFL 79-101). The medium-anxious group has 65.91% of students falling within this score range, while the low-anxious group has 64.28%. All three percentages are higher than half of the total proportion and have differences of less than 6%. This indicates that students within this score range do not exhibit significant differences in their levels of anxiety.

When score higher than IETLS 7.5 (TOEFL 102), low-anxious group has significant higher proportion than those of medium and high-anxious group, which suggests low-anxious group acquire high score, comparing to high and medium-anxious group.

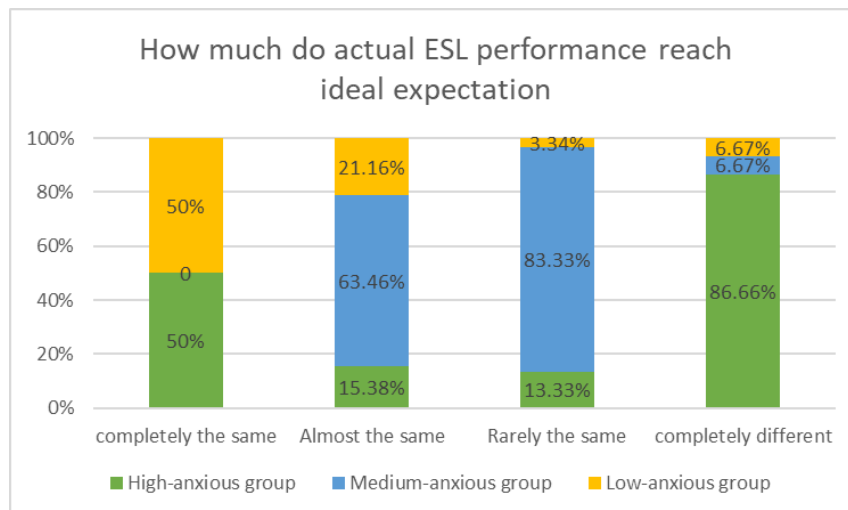


Figure 2. The extend of how actual ESL performance reach ideal expectation

Among students who believe that they have completely reached their ideal expectation in ESL performance, 50% students are from high-anxious group while another 50% come from low-anxious group. Students who vote “almost the same” and “rarely the same” are mostly medium-anxious group, and both two percentages of low-anxious group are lower than those of high-anxious group. Students believe in that they perform English completely different are mostly high-anxious students (See Figure 2).

These findings suggest that high-anxious students exhibit more extreme views regarding their performance, either aligning completely with their expectations or deviating completely from them. For medium-anxious students, they think that they have average ESL performance, not fully meeting expectations but also not completely inconsistent. The low-anxious group feels that they have achieved a close-to-ideal status in performing English.

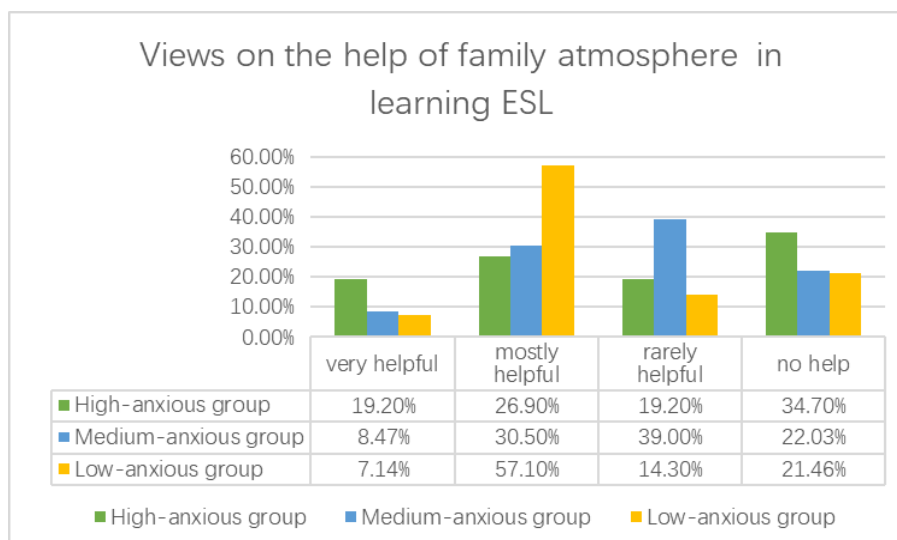


Figure 3. Views on help of family atmosphere in learning ESL

Individuals with high levels of anxiety tend to have the highest percentage of belief in the helpfulness of their family. This may be attributed to the fact that the higher the level of anxiety, the more the individual perceives their family atmosphere as helpful. However, within the high-anxious group as a whole, 53.9% of students still believe that their family is rarely or not helpful at all. In contrast, the majority of students (61.03%) in the medium-anxious group choose "rarely helpful" or "no help" as their perception. Among low-anxious individuals, 64.24% believe that their family is very helpful or mostly helpful, which accounts for over half of the remaining respondents (see Figure 3).

The data suggests that higher anxiety levels are associated with a stronger belief in the helpfulness of one's family. This suggests that individuals with high levels of anxiety may rely more on their family for support and assistance, but the relationship between anxiety and perceived family support is not absolute and can vary among individuals. While in group of "mostly helpful", low-anxious group has the highest proportion. This implies families of students with higher standardized English test grade provide help to their ESL learning while lowering their anxiety level (see Figure 4).

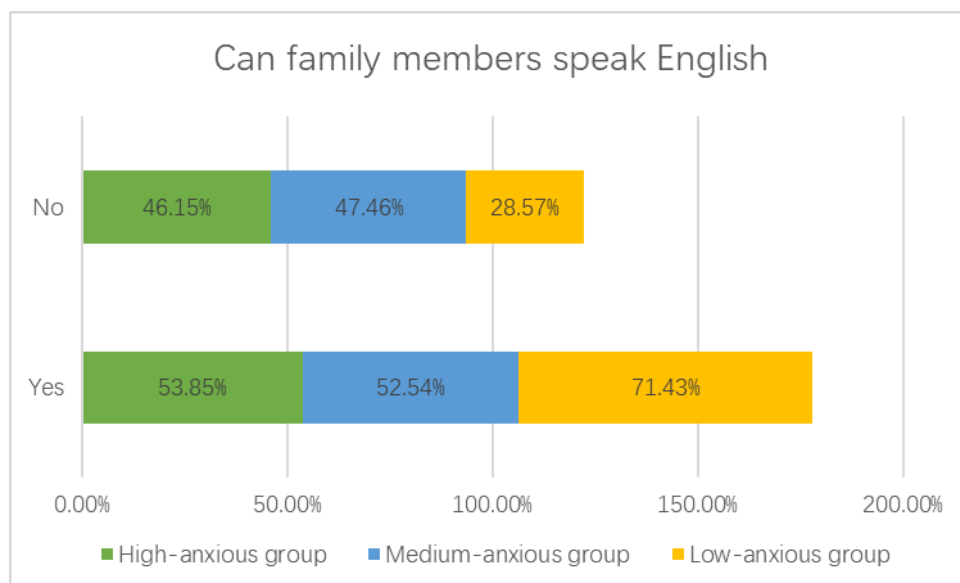


Figure 4. Family ability on English

The difference (1.31%) in the percentage of English-speaking families is minimal between the high-anxious and medium-anxious groups, with almost half portion unable to speak English in both groups. However, the low-anxious group has a lower percentage (28.57%) of families unable to speak English compared to the previous groups. This suggests that the presence of English-speaking family members may contribute to lower anxiety levels (see Figure 4).

The data indicates a potential correlation. It is possible that having a family member who can speak English may provide a supportive environment, facilitating communication and acquiring useful resources that could contribute to lower anxiety levels.

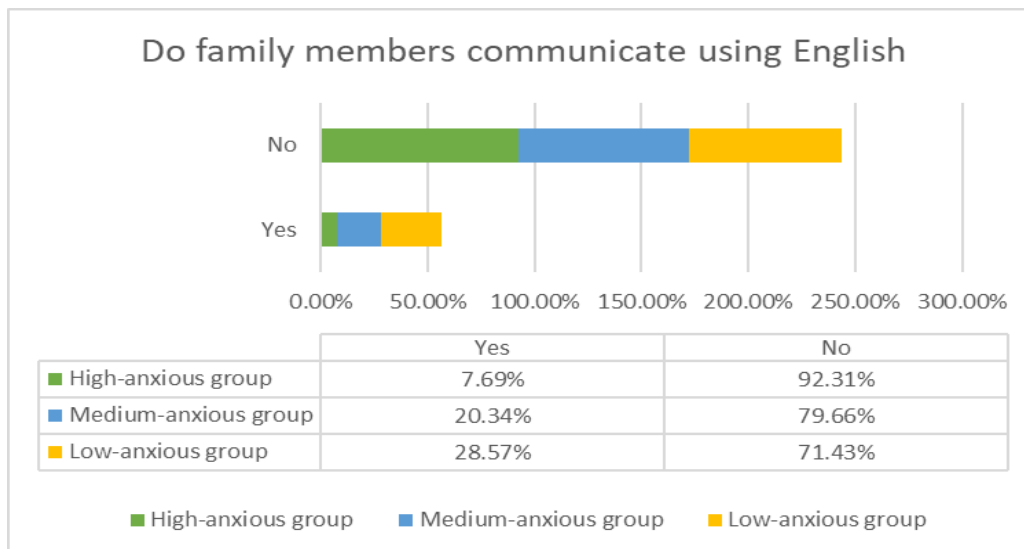


Figure 5. English language use by family members

High-anxious group has only 7.69% families communicate using English. Medium-anxious group has 20.34% families communicate in English, which is 12.65% more than those in high-anxious group. For low-anxious group, an increase of 8.23% in family members who talk in English, but still far from half the proportion. Comparing with the above diagram, though the proportion of individuals with low anxiety is higher in the group of family members who can speak English, the proportion of individuals with low anxiety is smaller in the group of parents who frequently used English for communication. This implies that the anxiety level may not be influenced by second-language communication in family (see Figure 5).

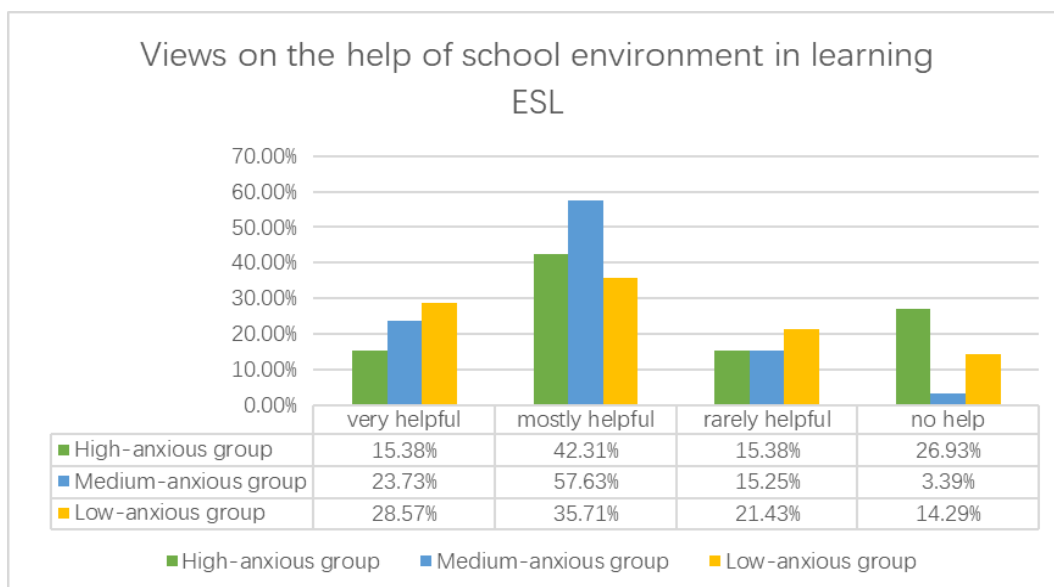


Figure 6. Views on help of school environment in learning ESL

The low-anxious group has the highest percentage (28.57%) of students who believe the school is very helpful. Students who perceive the school environment as mostly helpful are primarily from the medium-anxious group. Conversely, high-anxious students make up the majority of those who perceive the school as rarely helpful or not helpful at all. This suggests that the level of anxiety appears to be associated with students' perceptions of school helpfulness: Students with lower levels of anxiety are more likely to have a positive perception of the school environment. The medium-anxious group also recognizes the school's positive impact on their English education, although not to the same extent as the low-anxious group. Conversely, high-anxious students may struggle to see the benefits and support provided by the school due to their higher anxiety levels (see Figure 6).

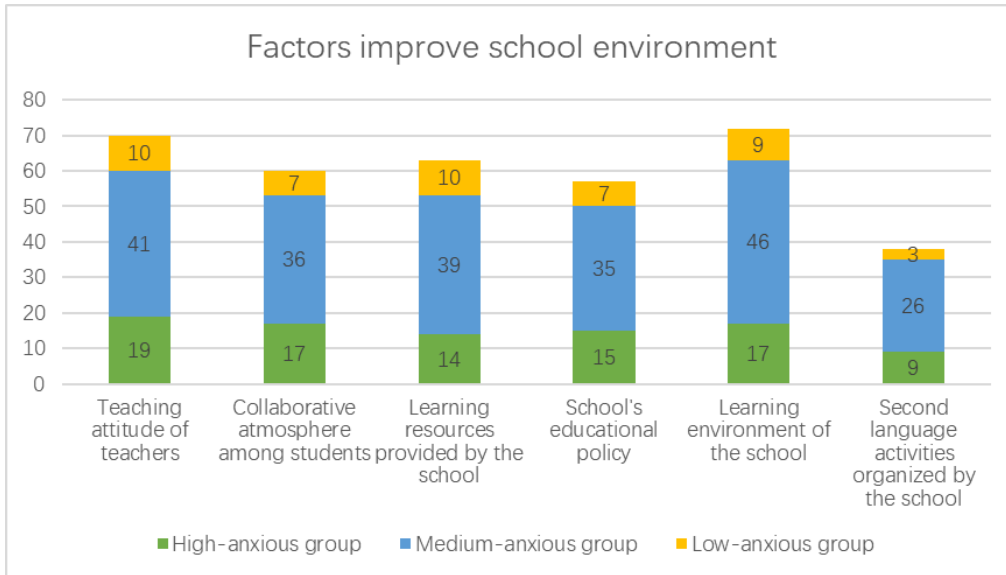


Figure 7. Vote on factors improving school environment

In the high-anxious group, three important factors identified for improving the school environment are "teaching attitude," "collaborative atmosphere among students," and the "learning environment of the school." The medium-anxious group primarily emphasizes the significance of the "learning environment of the school" and also considers "teaching attitude" important. The low-anxious group believes that "teaching attitude," "learning resources," and the "learning environment" are significant factors (see Figure 7).

Despite these differences, all three groups agree that "second language activities organized by the school" is the least helpful factor. Conversely, the "learning environment of the school" receives the highest number of votes from all three groups, indicating it is considered the most helpful factor for students to improve their English skills.

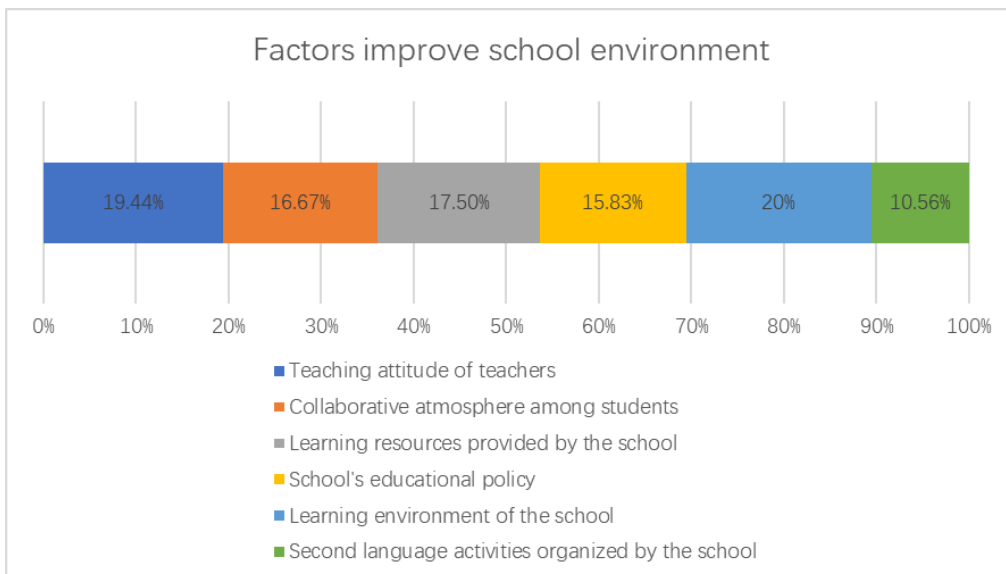


Figure 8. Vote on factors improving school environment

Among the mentioned school environmental factors, the "learning environment" has the largest portion, closely followed by the "teaching attitude of teachers" with a difference of only 0.56%. The factors of "collaborative atmosphere among students," "learning resources provided by the school," and "school's educational policy" have similar proportions, approximately $16.5\% \pm 1\%$. Conversely, "second language activities organized by the school" is considered the least helpful factor in improving the school environment (see Figure 8).

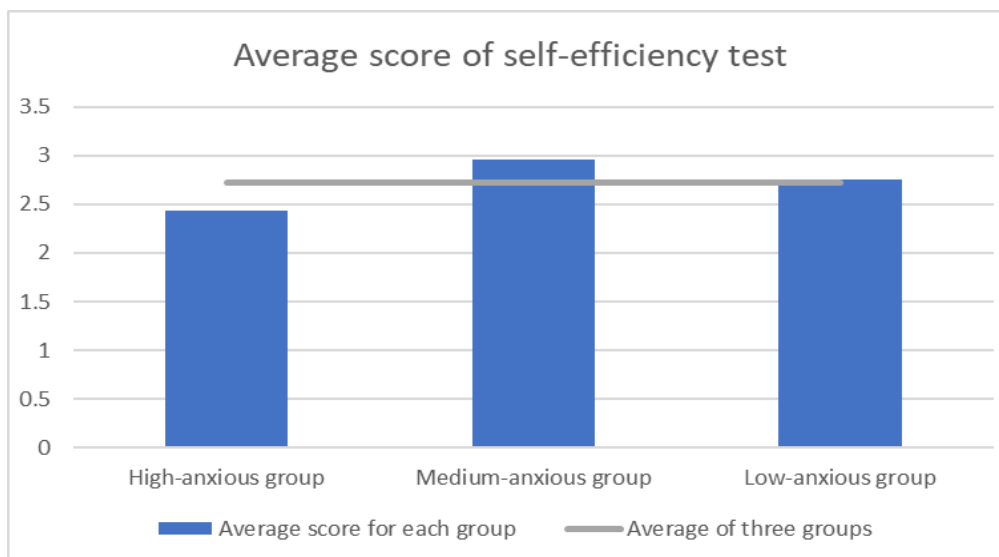


Figure 9. Average score of self-efficiency test

Self-efficacy levels seem to be associated with anxiety levels. The medium-anxious group, which likely has moderate anxiety levels, achieves the highest score in the self-efficacy test. The low-anxious group, with lower anxiety levels, follows closely in second place. Conversely, the high-anxious group, characterized by higher anxiety levels, obtains the lowest score in the test. Comparing with previous information, low-anxious group has higher academic performance in ESL, while high-anxious group has the least. This suggests that anxiety levels may influence individuals' beliefs in their abilities in learning English (see Figure 9).

5. Discussion

According to data analysis above, students with higher-anxiety level tend to score lower in standard language test. This result is aligned with the study of Yao Tianqian in 2015 [17]. The study indicates that students with high levels of anxiety have lower scores, while students with low levels of anxiety have better scores. This could be due to students with high-anxiety have low rates in vocabulary learning [18]. Also, according to the perspective of Eysenck, worry and other task-irrelevant cognition related with anxiety can negatively affect performance; the major reason could be that the task-irrelevant information competes with task-relevant information for space in the processing system [19].

In addition, students live under family that its members are able to speak atmosphere experience lower-level anxiety. This is in accordance with the study by Chen Linlin [20]. As for school environment, anxious level could affect students' attitude toward school. Different school environments will produce different interpersonal interactions, which can have an impact on students' cognitive, social and psychological development [21]. Also, Huang Youqiang found in his research that students who perceived the school atmosphere more positively would show less academic burnout [11]. The academic burnout occurs when an individual perceives academic stress, this perception can directly affect the adolescent's behavioral system and produce burnout behaviors. After feeling academic stress, adolescents may react negatively to this stress if they assess it as a threat, which, in turn, may lead to academic burnout [22]. So according to suggestions from the present study, school should put attention in improving "collaborative atmosphere among students," "learning resources provided by the school," and "school's educational policy" in order to build a better school climate to increase students' efficiency. Here are suggestions on teacher perspective. Chinese international high school already set large classes, but still, the common goal of class teaching is "trying best to make everyone in same pace". Therefore, teachers should choose reading materials and design reading tasks according to students with moderate reading level. If the reading material is too long, students with weak foundation will become less confident,

resulting in negative emotions of fear and depression, which will lead to lower reading performance [23].

For self-efficiency, students with highest anxious level score lowest; however, middle anxious level students score highest score instead of those with low-anxious. This is related to the study by Shi Lili [24], which shows that when reading English papers, if students do not feel anxious, their self-efficiency on reading gets higher, and getting high score; conversely, after students feel anxious, their reading self-efficiency level will decrease, which will affect their understanding of the reading materials. According to control-value theory (CVT), students who experience lower self-efficacy in dealing with learning tasks feel more negative and less positive academic emotions, possibly further weakening their learning engagement [25]. This can also cause their reading performance unsatisfactory. However, as for the reason why highest score in self-efficiency is not low-anxious group, a group gets higher score in standard tests, here are several possible reasons. First, students may have higher standard for being success in ESL learning, and therefore, they may not satisfy with current situation although public believes it is a good score, so they doubt their ability and get low score in self-efficiency test. Second, comparison and competitive pressure for them can lead to feeling of insecure about their own abilities and doubt whether they are good enough, which reduces their self-efficiency.

For students with weak reading foundation, they often develop bad reading habits when doing daily reading exercises, such as looking up the Chinese meaning of each new word, and then doing exercises. They pay too much attention to the details of reading materials, while ignoring the important content and structure of the text, which leads to their insufficient understanding of the materials, doubts about their reading ability, and suffering from reading anxiety, which ultimately leads to poor reading performance. These inappropriate reading styles can be a cause of anxiety. These educations in turn affect reading performance.

The effects of family atmosphere, school environment, and self-efficacy on the learning outcomes of high school students with different levels of anxiety in learning English as a second language are crucial considerations for educators. It is essential to create a supportive and inclusive environment that caters to the unique needs of ESL students, promotes self-efficiency, and provides effective support mechanisms.

6. Conclusion

In line with the factors commonly associated with anxiety, this study focuses on family atmosphere, school environment, and self-efficacy as the key factors of investigation. Through a chart analysis of students' perspectives across different anxiety levels, the study reveals several noteworthy findings. The study firstly finds that individuals with low anxiety levels tend to achieve higher standardized English scores compared to those with moderate and high anxiety, which suggests that anxiety has a negative impact on English language proficiency among international school students. It is also found that while parents' English level may have some impact, the daily use of English as a means of communication between parents and children had limited influence on English learning outcomes. Furthermore, interestingly, there is no clear evidence indicating whether schools provided useful assistance to students. Additional interventions and support mechanisms may be necessary to alleviate anxiety and enhance learning outcomes. Lastly, the study examined self-efficacy in relation to anxiety levels. Surprisingly, students with moderate anxiety exhibited the highest sense of self-efficacy, even surpassing students with the highest anxiety levels. This finding suggests that moderate anxiety may be associated with a sense of motivation and confidence, potentially driving students to overcome challenges and perform well in English language learning. Understanding the factors that contribute to language anxiety and its impact on language learning outcomes is crucial for educators, family members, and other stakeholders involved in supporting international high school students in learning ESL.

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