

Research on working state anxiety of novice Chinese teachers

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Abstract: In recent years, the “Chinese language fever” has continued to deepen, ushering in a new development trend. This study focuses on an emerging group - novice Chinese teachers in China, who have significant differences from experienced expatriate Chinese teachers and volunteers in terms of work environment and requirements, and their work anxiety factors are also different. The study found that domestic novice Chinese teachers face academic pressure while taking on teaching tasks, which can lead to anxiety. Through a questionnaire survey, this article analyzes the anxiety emotions of novice Chinese teachers’ working status, explores the influencing factors of anxiety, and proposes corresponding relief strategies.

1. Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of international students have chosen China as their study destination. Taking my own school as an example, in 2023 we received nearly 1,000 foreign students, concentrated in majors such as artificial intelligence and international trade. These international students in China embark on at least two years of academic and life experiences, generating a strong demand for learning Chinese. The major in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL), being the most directly related field to Chinese language teaching, allows its students to teach on campus and become novice Chinese teachers. This study focuses on this emerging group—novice Chinese teachers in China—who have significant differences from experienced expatriate Chinese teachers and volunteers in terms of work environment and requirements, and whose sources and causes of job anxiety also differ. Domestic novice Chinese teachers face academic pressure while also taking on a small amount of teaching tasks, which leads to anxiety.

All schools of psychology have research theories on anxiety. The basic theoretical schools include psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive theory, state-trait anxiety theory, etc. Among them, the state-trait anxiety theory was first proposed by Cattell and later inherited and perfected by Spielberger. In 1966, Spielberger proposed that there are two types of anxiety: state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety is a psychological state of tension and fear that individuals subjectively perceive and experience, accompanied by activation of the autonomic nervous system, and is temporary; trait anxiety, on the other hand, is a relatively stable personality characteristic in terms of anxiety sensitivity, representing a relatively stable tendency towards anxiety with individual

differences [1].

This article aims to explore the job-related anxiety of novice Chinese teachers in China, analyze the root causes of their anxiety, and propose corresponding alleviation strategies.

2. Analysis of the survey results of work status anxiety

2.1. Study subjects

The main subjects of this study are novice international Chinese language teachers. Among these teachers, some are current students majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL), who are undergoing systematic academic training and have not yet completed their studies. Others have already graduated from related fields and possess a certain level of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The commonality among these novice teachers is that they all have experience in teaching Chinese. Although their teaching experience is relatively short, most teachers have been teaching for about a year, which qualifies them as novice teachers.

2.2. Questionnaire statistics and data analysis

Table 1: Survey questionnaire and data statistics.

	Question	Total score	Average score
1	After class, I feel very happy and full of a sense of achievement.	87	4.35
2	I am worried that students may not understand the content of my class.	85	4.25
3	I have a long preparation time before every new class.	82	4.1
4	Before class, I will consider my attire for the day more carefully than usual.	81	4.05
5	I often ask students' Do you understand? 'or' Are there any questions? '.	81	4.05
6	My lesson plan/PPT was prepared in great detail during lesson preparation.	79	3.95
7	I am worried that there may be a lull when students answer questions or engage in language activities.	78	3.9
8	I'm worried that students won't like my class.	78	3.9
9	When preparing lessons, I always try to prepare more multimedia teaching methods such as audio, video, games, etc.	76	3.8
10	I don't want students to ask me questions that I'm not sure about (semantics, grammar, etc.).	73	3.65
11	I am worried that some students in the class may not follow the classroom order.	72	3.6
12	I am worried that I may encounter difficulties during class due to my insufficient proficiency in media language.	72	3.6
13	I am worried that students will ask me to explain Chinese culture, history, and other issues during class.	71	3.55
14	If a student suddenly asks a question, sometimes my mind goes blank.	70	3.5
15	I am worried about being questioned by the teaching supervisor.	66	3.3
16	I am worried that students will see that I am a new teacher.	61	3.05
17	I feel very painful when I think about giving classes to students.	61	3.05
18	My sleep quality was poor the night before class.	52	2.6
19	I often struggle with cross-cultural communication.	52	2.6

A questionnaire titled “Job-Related State Anxiety Survey for Novice Chinese Teachers” was distributed through social media platforms, and a total of 20 valid responses were collected.

The survey results show that among the 20 people, there are 18 females and 2 males. Their ages

range from 18 to 30 years old.

The following questions are designed to investigate the work-related anxiety levels of novice Chinese language teachers. The scoring ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” and 5 represents “Strongly Agree.” There are a total of 20 questions, with a maximum possible score of 100. According to the survey data, the highest score was 85, the lowest score was 59, and the overall scores ranged from 85 to 59. Specifically, 5 people scored 80 or above, 8 people scored between 70 and 79, and 7 people scored between 59 and 69.

According to Table 1, it can be seen that the subjects are generally in a state of anxiety. Questions 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 17, and 18 pertain to pre-class anxiety, while 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 16 are related to in-class anxiety, and question 15 pertains to post-class anxiety. Everyone exhibits a strong sense of achievement during class, yet anxiety arises before, during, and after the class. The primary concerns revolve around students’ classroom performance and teachers’ teaching effectiveness.

Questions 2, 5, 13, and 14 all pertain to teaching anxiety arising from teachers’ interaction with students, and this category of teaching anxiety is particularly pronounced. Among these, question 2 boasts the highest average score of 4.25, indicating that teachers’ classroom reactions are significantly influenced by students’ classroom performance. Given that most of the participants are novice teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, they anticipate positive feedback from students in the classroom, and students’ performance directly impacts teachers’ anxiety levels. Students are a primary factor influencing teachers’ teaching anxiety. The subjects are concerned that students may not comprehend the class content, which constitutes uncertainty in teaching effectiveness and also brings certain anxiety to teachers. The teaching effect can only be reflected through timely feedback. If testing and inspection are not timely, teachers will not be able to obtain timely feedback on the teaching effect. This will lead to strong uncertainty, inaccurate grasp of students’ learning situation, doubt of their teaching ability, and affect their further teaching design, which can easily lead to anxiety[2].

Question 8 and 15 belong to the impact of others’ evaluation on teachers’ anxiety. Generally speaking, others’ evaluation includes school authorities, students, and parents. Questions 8 and 15 highlight that student evaluation has a greater impact on teachers. It can be seen that students’ recognition has a certain degree of affirmation for teachers and has a certain alleviating effect on teaching anxiety. Good teacher-student relationships and classroom atmosphere have a positive effect on teachers. Novice teachers are still in the exploratory stage of their teaching behavior and are sensitive to students’ classroom reactions. From the perspective of the teacher career stage, novice teachers are currently in the stage of paying attention to students and paying extra attention to evaluating students’ reactions. However, excessive attention to students may increase teachers’ anxiety levels and affect their teaching behavior and performance.

3. Anxiety influencing factors of novice Chinese teachers

The results of questionnaire surveys and interviews indicate that the occurrence of job anxiety among international Chinese language teacher volunteers is the result of a combination of multiple factors. From both subjective and objective perspectives, professional knowledge and teaching skills, language communication ability, and academic pressure are important factors that affect teachers' job anxiety.

3.1. Professional knowledge and teaching skills

A novice teacher should have sufficient knowledge of Chinese and teaching ability. If these knowledge and abilities are lacking or the teacher lacks confidence in their own knowledge and

abilities, it may lead to damage to the teacher's authority, poor teaching effectiveness, and a low sense of teaching efficacy, which in turn can lead to teaching anxiety. If a teacher lacks knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, they often use the term “habitual expressions” to answer students’ questions in class. This can lead to dissatisfaction among students and ultimately undermine the teacher’s authority. According to the questionnaire survey results, the teachers who participated in the study had a high degree of anxiety about preparing lessons before class. One of the reasons for this is that teachers lack knowledge reserves and need to prepare a large amount of content-related materials in advance. At the same time, the participating teachers also worry about being unable to answer the grammar questions raised by students during class[3].

3.2. Language communication ability

The language used by teachers in the classroom includes both Chinese and English. Chinese is the target language and the most frequently used language by teachers during the teaching process. English or other languages are used as mediums of instruction, mainly to assist teachers in explaining knowledge. Sometimes students also use English to express their ideas in class. Therefore, mastering this medium of instruction can better help teachers with their teaching. However, according to the survey results, the participating teachers generally lack this language proficiency, leading to teaching anxiety. The mean value of the questionnaire item “I worry about encountering difficulties in class due to insufficient proficiency in the medium of instruction” is 3.6, indicating that inadequate English proficiency as a medium of instruction is one of the important reasons for teaching anxiety among the participating teachers.

3.3. Academic pressure

Research studies have shown that extensive teaching practice and experience are beneficial in reducing teachers’ teaching anxiety. A lack of teaching practice hinders novice teachers from understanding the industry and work environment, leading to insufficient teaching abilities and a lack of confidence. However, the most significant reason why novice teachers on campus cannot engage in more teaching practice is academic pressure. As two-year professional master’s students, they face tight schedules and heavy workloads, needing to balance attending classes, completing assignments, and preparing for teaching, which inevitably leads to anxiety.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Enhance one's professional skills and comprehensive qualities

To alleviate teaching anxiety, it is crucial for teachers to enhance their teaching abilities. Teaching anxiety can be categorized into pre-class, in-class, and post-class anxiety. Firstly, international Chinese language teachers often spend a long time preparing lessons, leading to pre-class anxiety, mainly due to a lack of teaching experience. Therefore, we suggest that teachers participate in teaching observations and continuously learn from others; pre-service teachers or students currently in teacher training programs should engage in teaching internships as early as possible to familiarize themselves with lesson preparation processes and methods. Utilizing online platforms and resources effectively can help them develop their own lesson preparation strategies and reduce the pressure associated with preparation. Once they have acquired certain teaching skills, teachers should attempt innovative teaching methods. Research by Jiang Guanqun (2022) has shown that teaching innovation has a significant positive impact on reducing teachers’ anxiety. This is because teaching innovation can effectively enhance teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, which plays

a role in alleviating anxiety.

4.2. Strengthen external communication and exchanges

To unravel the difficulties brought by time-related anxiety, it is essential to start from the teachers themselves [4]. Anxiety, ultimately, is an emotional state originating from within an individual. Teachers should pay closer attention to their own emotional states, promptly identify anxious feelings, and engage in self-counseling. Research has shown that frequent communication and connection with friends and family, maintaining healthy and positive interpersonal relationships, and sustaining an optimistic mindset are conducive to the release of stress. Stress not only needs to be released but also managed. Teachers can express their thoughts and opinions to superiors and institutions, and work together to find solutions to encountered problems. The progress of the Chinese education industry is inseparable from the feedback of teachers[5].

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