



# Examining the Impact of Identity on English Speaking Proficiency Among Chinese Undergraduate EFL Learners: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of perezhivanie, a concept encompassing emotional experiences and their personal significance on English-speaking proficiency and speaking anxiety among Chinese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study focuses on the emotional and cognitive dimensions of perezhivanie to understand its dual role in shaping speaking proficiency and anxiety. The study uses a mixed-method approach, involving quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with Chinese EFL learners. In doing so, the factor was analyzed by structure equation modeling (SEM) and a model was proposed. The findings indicate a significant correlation between perezhivanie and speaking proficiency, suggesting that positive emotional experiences and their meaningful integration can enhance language performance. Conversely, perezhivanie was also found influencing speaking anxiety, with negative emotional experiences exacerbating anxiety levels. The study underscores the complex interplay between emotional experiences and language learning outcomes, highlighting the need for pedagogical strategies that address emotional well-being to improve both proficiency and reduce anxiety in EFL contexts. These insights offer valuable implications for educators and policymakers aiming to foster a more supportive and effective language learning environment for Chinese EFL learners.

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**Keywords:** EFL; Speaking Anxiety; Learner's Identity; English Speaking

## Introduction

Psychological factors play a pivotal role in shaping the oral proficiency challenges faced by Chinese EFL learners. Affective variables such as anxiety and self-efficacy have been identified as critical elements influencing speaking performance. High levels of communication apprehension and foreign language anxiety

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can impede fluency and confidence during spoken interactions (Horwitz, 2017). Conversely, self-efficacy beliefs can have a positive impact on learners' willingness to engage in oral communication and their ability to cope with linguistic challenges. Further, the intrinsic interconnection between psychological factors and language learner identity stands as a fundamental aspect within the realm of foreign language acquisition. Psychological dimensions encompassing self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety interact intricately with the formation of language learner identity, delineating one's self-concept within the linguistic community. Language learner identity emerges as a dynamic construct shaped by the interplay between personal attributes and socio-cultural contexts, elucidating an individual's perception of their role as a member of the target language group. Consequently, the negotiation of language learner identity represents a pivotal juncture where internal psychological landscapes and external interactions converge, ultimately steering the trajectory of language acquisition and determining the individual's stance within the cultural milieu they aspire to join.

Over 40 years ago, China's shift to a market economy and the Open Door Policy spurred rapid economic growth. This growth, coupled with the rise of English as the foreign language in international business due to America's economic and cultural influence and the British Empire's legacy, led China to emphasize English as a Foreign Language education. English has become vital in global business, internet communication, international travel, and higher education, (Hu et al., 2022; Musabal & AbdAlgane, 2023). Learning English is crucial for economic survival, especially in emerging economies like China and Brazil. It offers access to better job opportunities, higher education, and broader global understanding, serving as a cultural bridge. The shift towards learning English as a foreign language, the number of Chinese EFL learners over the decades has increased dramatically, from an estimated 100 million learners thirty years ago to the present-day figure of almost 400 million (Carolan, 2022). With this massive increase in the number of learners, ensuring that learners experience effective EFL instruction and develop adequate proficiency in the English language has become more important than ever.

Highlighting how China's decision to shift to a market economy created an impetus to develop proficiency in English (a global and economic lingua franca), Baldi (2016) provides the historical context to the growing interest in English as a language of education and economic development in China; and observes that it was in the late 1970s that Deng Xiaoping (leader of PRC) paved the way for foreign investment, helping China make its transition to a market economy which was possible only through the promotion of the English language as the lever for economic growth. There are two discernible aspects of this need. First is the undeniable importance of English as the language of the international economy, and the second is its key role as the global language of communication. Hence, EFL proficiency emerged as one of the key cornerstones of China's vision for economic growth as well as global leadership.

There is a dearth of studies on the subject of how EFL learner identities are influenced by the challenges of learning an unfamiliar language and how these factors present a key problem for Chinese EFL learners seeking to develop proficiency in a foreign language. This study aims to fill these gaps by systematically investigating the multifaceted influences on English speaking proficiency among Chinese EFL learners, encompassing emotional, identity, experiential, and environmental dimensions. Moreover, the study is based on the premise that the link between anxiety and speaking a foreign language is significantly related to anxiety in speaking foreign or second languages. Many studies have discovered a negative correlation between this anxiety and English speaking; in fact, some academics contend that anxiety is one of the most powerful indicators of success in learning a foreign language. The presence of anxiety during English speaking can have a significant impact on students' ability to adjust to the target environment and ultimately hinder their attainment of educational objectives. The primary focus of research in this field is on the anxiety experienced in the classroom. This study examines how second language anxiety can be conceptualized as a two-dimensional entity that encompasses speaking both within the classroom and in ordinary communicative circumstances outside of the classroom taking anxiety and as a variable. Specifically, the study framed the following research questions

1. What is the impact of Chinese EFL learners' perezhivanie on their English-speaking Proficiency?
2. What is the influence of Chinese EFL learners' perezhivanie on their English-speaking anxiety and culture?
3. How does the perezhivanie influence speaking anxiety and speaking proficiency among Chinese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their culture?
4. How can we model the interactions among perezhivanie, speaking anxiety, and English-speaking proficiency in Chinese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

## Literature Review

A comparative study of challenges faced by university learners in Mainland and Hong Kong Chinese populations highlighted a number of issues which point to the participants' struggles with speaking proficiently in English (Gan et al., 2023). The issues can be broadly categorized under linguistic competence and opportunities to interact in the target language. One of the key issues highlighted by study of Gan et al. (2023)

was that when the participating students spoke in English, they had a tendency to compose what they wanted to say in their mother tongue and then to articulate these thoughts in the target language. Further, with the typical focus of textbooks on academic English within classrooms in both Mainland China and Hong Kong, the learners tended to struggle with conversational English. Gan (2012) reported learners' knowledge of English grammar to be another influential factor leading to the English-speaking anxiety of the participants. The participants also reported a dearth of opportunities to speak in English beyond the classroom. Another difficulty related to EFL speaking revealed by the participants was the difference in psycholinguistic processes between EFL and native speakers which affected their proficiency and fluency in English (Gan, 2012).

These findings are confirmed by more recent research which reports similar challenges faced by university Chinese EFL learners in EFL speaking. For instance, investigating the experiences of Chinese EFL university learners enrolled in an English speaking and listening course, Zeng (2020) found 'that the EFL students' major sources of difficulties are idea, language, and organization'. Similarly, based on analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from eighty-five Chinese learners enrolled at a Thai university, Jiang & Phusawisot (2023) report that the participants faced challenges in EFL speaking related to linguistic, learning environment and psychological factors, with the linguistic factors being the most influential variable amongst these. The linguistic factors include challenges pertaining to vocabulary, grammar, inadequate expressions, sentence organization and poor pronunciation which hinder the participants' fluency and proficiency in the target language. Within the learning environment, the lack of opportunities to use English also obstructed the Chinese EFL learners' proficiency (Jiang et al., 2023).

Researchers in South Korea have looked at resilience and how it affects second language learning motivation, and they've found conflicting findings. Resilience affected second language learners' performance with university students via demotivation from learning the language, rather than motivation to learn the language itself. On the other hand, constructs may have a favorable effect on second language learners' proficiency, according to research with elementary school kids. Explanation of the ever-changing nature of second language acquisition requires a methodical examination of the distinct roles played by constructs and second language motivation in second language acquisition and competency.

Previous research on emotions in language learning has predominantly concentrated on negative aspects like anxiety, which has been extensively studied (Dewaele & Li, 2020; Horwitz, 2017). This narrow focus resulted in a limited grasp of the diverse emotional experiences language learners undergo during second or foreign language acquisition, leaving their emotional motivations not fully understood (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). However, influenced by the recent advancements in Positive Psychology, several researchers are now exploring the influence of positive emotions in language learning (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Oxford, 2015; Pavelescu & Petric, 2018; Pishghadam et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2019). Authorities in the field like Reeve (2006) suggest a more comprehensive approach to emotional aspects in studying second or foreign language learning. They propose that both positive and negative emotions act as dual aspects of the emotional spectrum, jointly fueling the progression of language learning.

In addition, speaking anxiety in the context of Chinese EFL learners refers to the nervousness or apprehension experienced by learners when required to speak in that language, (Hu et al., 2022). This form of anxiety is particularly common among Chinese language foreign learners and can manifest in various ways, impacting their ability to effectively communicate. Key aspects of speaking anxiety in a foreign language include. According to Liu (2006), "learners often worry about being judged negatively by others for their language skills". This fear can stem from concerns about making mistakes, mispronouncing words, or using incorrect grammar, leading to embarrassment or perceived loss of face. However, the standards set out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) framework have been adopted by the Ministry of Education in China to guide and evaluate the English proficiency of Chinese students. A1 and A2 on the CEFR scale represent lower levels of proficiency, indicating that speakers experience struggle with basic conversational skills and may require substantial support to communicate effectively in English. At the B1 and B2 levels, students are expected to demonstrate an ability to engage in more complex conversations as well as to express opinions, and take part in everyday communication tasks, although it is likely that they are still making occasional errors. At the more advanced C1 and C2 levels, students are expected to converse fluently, take part in debates, and comprehend a wide spectrum of accents and dialects. These standards are a good framework for enabling the Ministry of Education to foster an educational environment that facilitates an increase in the EFL speakers' oral proficiency, thus ensuring that they are well-prepared to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized world.

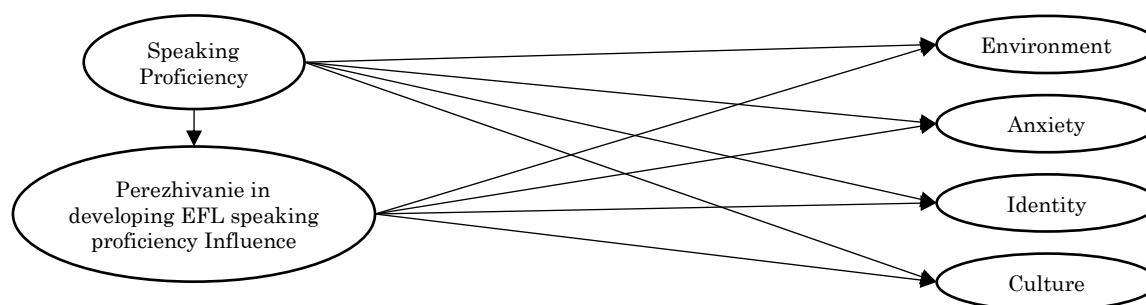
Against this background, this study investigates the anxiety and relation of learners' identity with perezhivanie because Chinese English learners often grapple with the challenge of balancing their deep-rooted cultural identity with the need to adapt to the globalized world. This can impact their English language acquisition in several ways. On one hand, a strong cultural identity can serve as a source of motivation, fostering a sense of pride and determination to excel in English. On the other hand, cultural factors such as Confucian principles emphasizing hierarchy and respect for authority may influence learning styles and classroom dynamics. Anxiety factors play a crucial role in the process of learning English speaking skills and have a role in

the learners' in EFL speaking. Drawing upon earlier research (Mauss et al., 2005; Reeve, 2015), it is found out that emotions comprise a multi-aspect concept which include 'subjective feeling [as well as] biological, purposive, and expressive dimensions' that account for their role in motivation. They add that while 'positive emotions are connected to attitudes, behaviour, and social processes that provide powerful motivations for language learning' negative emotions 'motivate a problem-solving orientation, restricting attention to a narrow range of behavioral options, and [reducing] the ability to build additional resources.

In many Chinese educational settings, there is a high expectation for students to excel in their studies, including English language learning. The pressure to achieve high marks in exams, such as the English section of the Gaokao (China's university entrance examination), can lead to significant anxiety, (Curle et al., 2024). In addition, the cultural emphasis on accuracy and perfection can make students fear making mistakes. This fear can inhibit their willingness to participate in class, speak English aloud, or try new expressions, which are all critical for language acquisition. One of the notable issues for Chinese EFL learners is that in the very process of acquiring/learning a foreign language, they must reconfigure their identities at the interface of two very different languages which are essentially embedded in distinguishable cultures and cognitions (Nematzadeh & Haddad Narafshan, 2020). The last is a particularly important point in the context of the present study. For instance, studies have revealed the influence of cultural differences on the use of courtesy language in English and Chinese (SUN & TIAN, 2017), differences in thinking of Chinese EFL writers when undertaking English writing (Pengsun & Aímiao, 2013) and influence of culture on conventions within Chinese and English discourses (Xue & Han, 2014). These are just some of the studies demonstrating that English and Chinese are embedded in distinguishable cultures and ways of thinking.

## Conceptual Framework

The study uses a conceptual model to focus on the factors influencing the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking proficiency among Chinese learners. Learning a foreign language often involves a degree of stress or anxiety, particularly when it comes to speaking. For Chinese learners, anxiety can stem from fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, or the pressure to achieve high standards. This emotional response can significantly affect their ability to learn and use English effectively. In addition, *perezhivanie* is a concept from Russian psychology, often associated with Vygotsky (1978), which refers to the emotional and cognitive experience of the individual in a specific context. In the context of language learning, it implies how personal experiences, emotions, and the learning environment interact to shape the learner's development of speaking proficiency which is shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1:** Proposed Model of Speaking Proficiency and Factors in Learning.

The model shows how *perezhivanie* operates and functions within a learning context. The model depicts the mechanism of *perezhivanie* in terms of the four key components outlined by Vygotsky (1978). These include the environment, personal characteristics, refractive prism and influence. *perezhivanie*, as an emotional and cognitive experience, deeply affects Chinese EFL learners' ability to acquire and use English, particularly in speaking. This concept encompasses how learners process their language learning experiences, including the emotional responses to successes and failures. If a learner's *perezhivanie* is positive, it can enhance motivation and engagement, leading to improved speaking proficiency. Conversely, negative experiences can hinder confidence and fluency, reducing proficiency.

This model points out that the components of environment and personal characteristics can be considered as the *source* or materials which operate within a learner's *perezhivanie*, whereas the refractive prism serves as the functioning mechanism, and the component of influence depicts the consequences of a *perezhivanie* or in other words the learner's experience of an event. In the context of the present study, the source or materials constituting the environment may consist of the EFL pedagogy, other institutional characteristics and/or and the personal characteristics which may consist of the influence of motivation, emotions, ways of thinking, gender, academic and linguistic background, age or learning experiences, opportunities for using English in and beyond the classroom experienced by the language learner. According to this model, the influence would be the impact of the factors in the environment and personal characteristics on improvements in EFL



speaking skills.

## Research Methodology

### *Research Design*

The study uses the mixed method approach which is both qualitative and quantitative and adopts the dialectic-historical methodology propounded by Vygotsky (1978) who sought to analyze the process and not just the phenomenon or thing so as to disclose “the real causal-dynamic connection and relation”. Such a methodology was argued to maintain “the unity of intellect and affect, the unity of human and environment, and the unity of language and thought” (Li, 2019) given the integration and inseparability of an individual’s past and the present and historical situatedness of his or her existence (Vygotsky, 1978). In simple words, the methodology propounded by Vygotsky called for studying a phenomenon as it developed historically. Such a method allows researchers to study the processes and relations governing the phenomenon (e.g. its ‘becoming’), keeping an eye on the past as well as the present, rather than viewing it as something fixed or static (Moretti et al., 2016). In line with the above, the current study seeks to reveal the dialectic relations evident in learners’ ability to speak at the intersection of mind and self and environment as well as to probe the temporal and historical situatedness of their language learning experiences. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) tell us that research investigations are always mediated “by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied”. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), these beliefs and world views (or paradigms) can be categorized in terms of what reality is (ontology), how knowledge can be known (epistemology) and what values (axiology) is reflected in paradigm. These assumptions underpin how researchers design their studies.

### *Research Instrument*

A questionnaire was adapted from the findings of two key studies which have earlier investigated EFL learners’ perezhivanie (Li, 2017; Tian & McCafferty, 2022) The questionnaire contained an invitation to participate in the main study if the survey respondents experienced emotional identity challenges and were willing to participate in the research. The questionnaire items focused on participants’ English language learning histories and background, their language-learning experiences, their feelings and perception, with a particular focus on their understanding of themselves as language learners and shifting their identity as EFL speakers.

### *Sample of the Study*

The sample comprised 303 Chinese nationals who had pursued English language learning course in their education; and now who are fluent speakers of the English language. It was also required that these participants could narrate their language-learning experiences until they become accomplished EFL speakers. There were 140 male and 163 female participants, 133 of them were in 20-25 years age group and 170 participants were in the 25-30 years age group.

### *Data Analysis*

The study uses Smart PLS, a co-variance-based SEM, to predict the connection between variables in the research model (Ringle et al., 2015). The study follows the two-step procedure outlined to test its hypotheses: first, a measurement model was developed to evaluate convergent and discriminant validity, and second, the structural model was put to the test by employing a bootstrapping technique (Hair et al., 2019). The research utilizes single-source data, in which the dependent and independent variables were responded to concurrently; therefore, procedural and statistical procedures is applied to solve common method variance (CMV) difficulties (Ngah et al., 2022).

## Results and Discussion

Smart PLS 3.3.9’s structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the correlation between different variables. The PLS-SEM research design is a stable, versatile, and advanced tool for creating a significant statistical model, and the PLS-SEM role helped achieve the intended goal (Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2021). Ringle et al. (2015) suggest that PLS-SEM may enable SEM findings with practically any level of structural complexity, including higher-order structures, which reduce multicollinearity problems. Using factor loadings, SEM calculates the model’s discriminant, convergent, and average variance for each construct (Al-Gahtani, 2016). Multivariate analytic approaches may investigate various relationships between variables in the conceptual model. Table 1 depicts the study constructs’ mean scores, standard deviation, excess kurtosis, and skewness values. It has been proven that all of the scales employed in this inquiry determine the mean scores, standard deviation, excess kurtosis, and skewness values were consistently “reliable” and produced satisfactory results.

**Table.1:** Mean, Standard Deviation, Kurtosis, and Skewness of the Study Constructs.

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
Speaking Proficiency 1	3.854	1.1	-0.357	-0.728
Speaking Proficiency 2	3.904	1.071	-0.195	-0.784
Speaking Proficiency 3	3.927	1.077	-0.316	-0.765
Speaking Proficiency 4	3.884	1.087	-0.178	-0.809
Speaking Proficiency 5	3.825	1.103	-0.068	-0.807
Speaking Proficiency 6	3.725	1.177	-0.146	-0.8
Speaking Proficiency 7	3.854	1.103	-0.175	-0.794
Speaking Proficiency 8	3.765	1.128	-0.226	-0.779
Speaking Proficiency 9	3.719	1.17	-0.417	-0.685
Speaking Proficiency 10	3.791	1.145	-0.248	-0.768
Speaking Proficiency 11	3.666	1.187	-0.494	-0.655
Speaking Proficiency 12	3.788	1.119	-0.509	-0.642
Speaking Proficiency 13	3.825	1.234	-0.474	-0.8
Speaking Proficiency 14	3.52	1.247	-0.764	-0.504
Speaking Proficiency 15	3.719	1.198	-0.345	-0.745
Environment 1	4.755	1.274	0.052	-0.962
Environment 2	4.745	1.225	0.476	-1.001
Environment 3	4.672	1.254	0.662	-1.064
Environment 4	4.49	1.339	0.045	-0.823
Anxiety 1	5.099	1.108	1.4	-1.341
Anxiety 2	5.132	1.102	1.267	-1.354
Anxiety 3	4.864	1.187	0.574	-1.097
Anxiety 4	5.06	1.158	1.877	-1.429
Anxiety 5	4.884	1.129	0.846	-1.075
Identity 1	5.036	1.202	1.157	-1.334
Identity 2	4.791	1.168	0.152	-0.929
Identity 3	4.954	1.121	0.287	-1.029
Identity 4	4.901	1.186	0.628	-1.098
Culture 1	3.967	1.732	-1.095	-0.537
Culture 2	3.576	1.799	-1.423	-0.131
Culture 3	3.821	1.759	-1.267	-0.349
Perezhivanie 1	5.52	1.558	0.804	-1.206
Perezhivanie 2	5.517	1.543	0.807	-1.21
Perezhivanie 3	5.421	1.526	0.066	-0.941
Perezhivanie 4	4.788	1.269	0.446	-1.071
Perezhivanie 5	5.424	1.58	0.165	-1.009
Perezhivanie 6	5.212	1.612	-0.355	-0.753
Perezhivanie 7	5.361	1.569	0.041	-0.927
Perezhivanie 8	5.513	1.55	0.191	-1.041
Perezhivanie 9	5.47	1.517	0.311	-0.972
Perezhivanie 10	5.507	1.575	0.32	-1.077
Perezhivanie 11	5.497	1.544	0.347	-1.063
Perezhivanie 12	5.434	1.531	0.489	-1.056
Perezhivanie 13	5.381	1.423	0.051	-0.853
Perezhivanie 14	5.281	1.579	-0.195	-0.852
Perezhivanie 15	5.076	1.647	-0.526	-0.65
Perezhivanie 16	5.46	1.569	0.332	-1.07

*Measurement Model Assessment***Table 2:** Multivariate Analysis.

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Anxiety	0.883	0.884	0.914	0.681
Culture	0.883	0.941	0.926	0.806
Environment	0.805	0.818	0.872	0.631
Identity	0.887	0.888	0.922	0.747
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence	0.963	0.965	0.967	0.649
Speaking Proficiency	0.949	0.949	0.954	0.581

The survey's reliability was assessed using alpha values. According to (She et al., 2021), the established

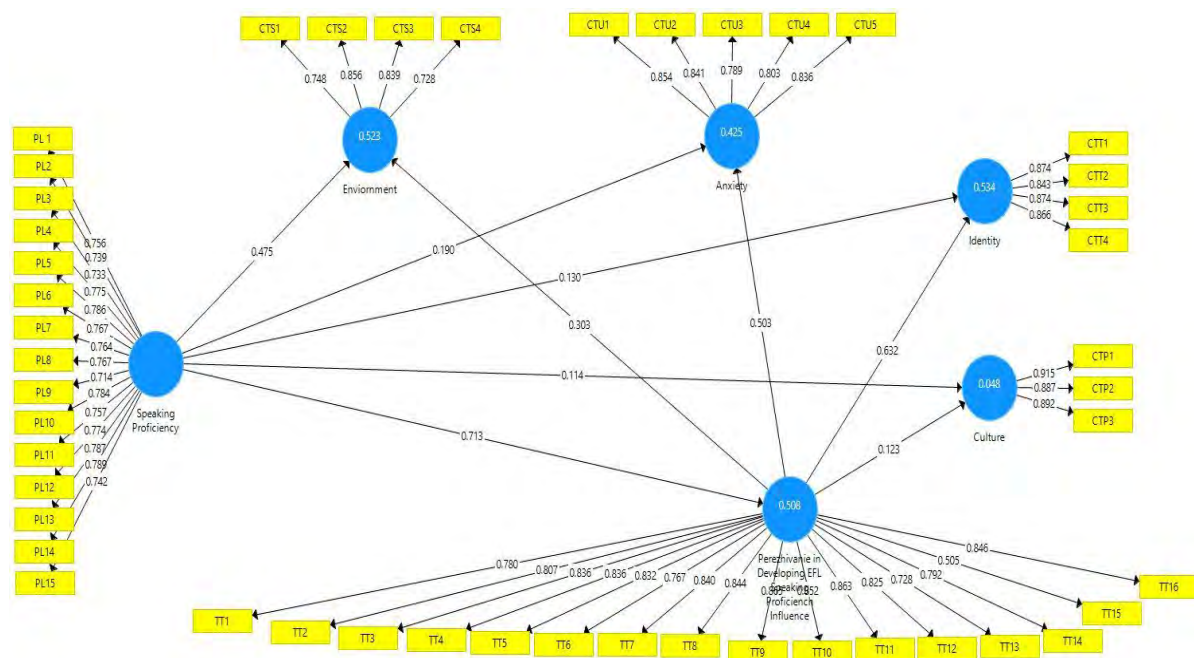
alpha value for assessing dependability is more than 0.7, and each component is deemed reliable based on the standard and Cronbach alpha values (ranging from 0.805 to 0.963). Composite reliability (CR) values were obtained (ranging from 0.872 to 0.967). Loading levels consistently surpassed 0.6 in this investigation. The extracted average variance (AVE) is 0.5. The square root of each construct's AVE should be more significant than its link with other constructs for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE values in this investigation were more effective than the average range (from 0.581 to 0.806). These statistical findings of investigation are shown in Table 2.

### Discriminate Validity

Discriminant validity (DV) was utilized to analyze and characterize unrelated constructs. DV additionally verifies all measurements relating to component dissimilarity. DV includes analyzing non-statistically related components while determining measure correspondence. The DV of a factor may be computed using its AVE. The DV demonstrated that the square root of each concept and AVE was bigger than its relationship to other constructs (Table 3 & Figure 2).

**Table.3: Discriminant Validity.**

	Anxiety	Culture	Environment	Identity	Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence	Speaking Proficiency
Anxiety	0.825					
Culture	0.027	0.898				
Environment	0.57	0.323	0.795			
Identity	0.801	0.026	0.581	0.864		
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence	0.638	0.204	0.642	0.725	0.805	
Speaking Proficiency	0.548	0.202	0.691	0.581	0.713	0.763



**Figure 2: PLS-SEM.**

### Structural Equation Model

The Structural Equation Modeling component of Smart PLS 3.2.9 was used to verify all hypotheses (Chin, 2010). Model fitness was determined by calculating the standardized root-mean-square-residual (SRMR), a standardized-residuals index that evaluates model fitness, along with the chi-square and normed fit indices (NFI). (Brown, 2015; Chen, 2007) both provide supporting evidence. To get the SRMR value, we compared the dependence on the expected matrices' covariance. Results with an SRMR of 0.08 or less are permitted for use. An SRMR of 0.067 is anticipated, which is a respectable level of model fit. According to Table 4, the NFI is 0.775, and the chi (2) value is 2771.927 (See Table 4).

Table 4: Model Fit Summary.

	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.067
d_ULS	5.090
d_G	1.802
Chi-Square	2771.927
NFI	0.775

Note: SRMR = Standardized-root-mean-square-residual, d\_ULS = Unweighted least squares discrepancy, d\_G = Geodesic discrepancy, X<sup>2</sup> = Chi-square, NFI = Normed fit index.

Bootstrapping

To establish the significance of the hypotheses, the standard beta was used, and the beta value reveals how different variables may vary. The standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) value for each connection was calculated using the predicted research model (Table 5). If beta ( $\beta$ ) values are extensive and substantial, the relevance of endogenous latent variables will be deemed critical. T-statistics were used to assess the significance of each path's beta value. The bootstrapping approach was utilized to establish the importance of the beta ( $\beta$ ) value and investigate the relevance of presumed linkages. The proposed structural model connections and ( $\beta$ ) statistics are shown in (Table 5, Figure 2). The smart-PLS-bootstrapping research variable t-values display the research variables' smart-PLS-bootstrapping t-values.

Table 5: Standard Beta, T-statistics and P-values

	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence -> Anxiety	0.503	0.081	6.209	0.00
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence -> Culture	0.123	0.087	1.412	0.159
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence -> Enviornment	0.303	0.084	3.592	0.00
Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence -> Identity	0.632	0.078	8.126	0.00
Speaking Proficiency -> Anxiety	0.19	0.078	2.444	0.015
Speaking Proficiency -> Culture	0.114	0.093	1.233	0.218
Speaking Proficiency -> Environment	0.475	0.08	5.956	0.00
Speaking Proficiency -> Identity	0.13	0.081	1.607	0.109
Speaking Proficiency -> Perezhivanie in Developing EFL Speaking Proficiency Influence	0.713	0.046	15.658	0.00

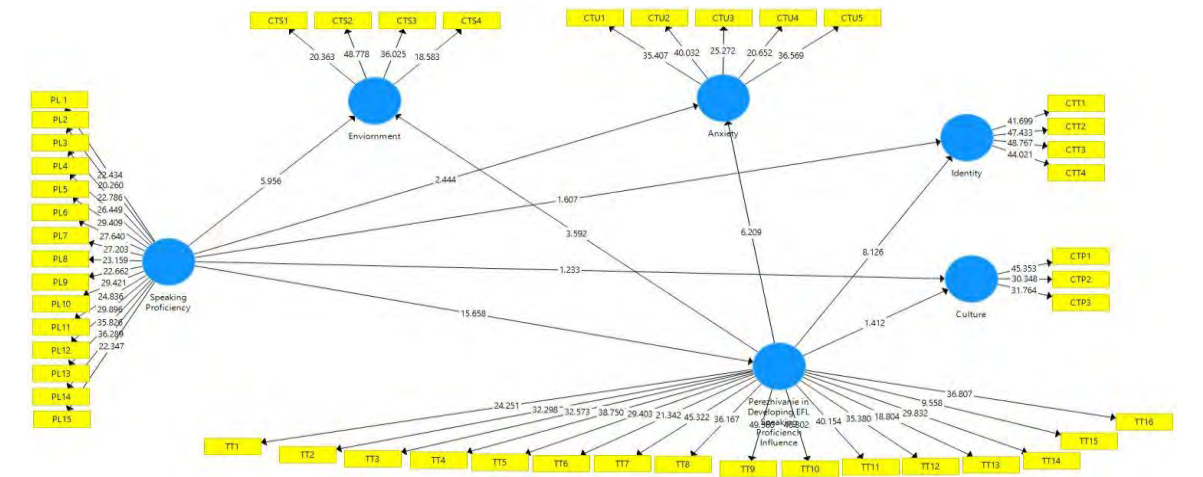


Figure 2: Bootstrapping.

Discussion

With its provenance in cultural-historical psychology theorizations made by Vygotsky and fellow researchers (Lantolf, 2006), Sociocultural Theory (SCT) emerged as an explanation of how human minds develop and advance through interactions transpiring in social encounters and learning a language. The philosophical genesis of sociocultural theory can be traced back to Kantian and Hegelian dialectics as well Marxian and Engel's thoughts on sociology as well as economics. In contrast to conventional psychological



theorizations which have sought to maintain a separation between thought and feelings, proponents of sociocultural theory have advocated the integration of cognition and emotion in understanding human mental functioning (Qin et al., 2022). According to the advocates of SCT, the concept of *perezhivanie* which pertains to 'how an individual is aware of, interprets, and affectively relates to a certain event that serves as the linchpin of such proposed integration. In essence, *Perezhivanie* offers a lens for understanding how individuals are influenced by their socio-cultural environments, social relations as well as social activities (Vygotsky, 1978). In particular, the influences arise from those relationships and activities which engender inner affective turmoil and give rise to critical *perezhivaniya* (in the plural) instantiating across the span of thought, feelings and social environment and across the temporal continuum (Qin et al., 2022).

According to Vygotsky (1978), human cognition and advance mental functions evolve in response to social interactions and relationships which allow individuals to negotiate and coconstruct meaning. Social connections and cultural artefacts perform a pivotal role in giving rise to distinctive forms of human thinking (Lantolf, 2006). It is argued that such interactions within which human learning transpired are shaped not only by the social and cultural histories of respective individual but also by the social and cultural milieu in which they occur (Vygotsky, 1978). Key concepts related to sociocultural theory in relation to learning are the Zone of Proximal Development and mediation. Sociocultural concepts frequently used in research concerning EAL learners are the ZPD and mediation. Proposed by Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development represents the gap between the learner's developmental level when undertaking independent problem solving and the degree of potential learning attainable with the help of expert others. The ZPD has had wide-ranging influence on Western educational psychology, according to Lantolf (2006). This is because it provides a good framework for evaluating whether tasks can be achieved and the support required by learners to move beyond existing levels of development (Kaibao & Afzaal, 2024). ZPD helps to get a clearer understanding of the role of social interactions in the learning and development of second languages from a sociocultural point of view.

Under the ZPD, individuals are able to attain higher and better performance in terms of their internal development if they collaborate with people who are more capable. Second language learning is restricted to internal psychological processes of linguistic information and concepts when the learner is working alone. When the second language learners are cut off from native speakers and the target society's environment, the number of information sources, observable external operations, and meaningful input and output in the environment are drastically reduced. This has a negative impact on the learners' ability to develop a second language as well as their perception and interpretation of both themselves and the outside world while interacting with others. According to Zuengler & Miller (2006), ZPD can be described as "the concept of what a person can do while working in collaboration with others (more) against what he or she could have accomplished without collaboration with others (less)" (p. 39). Inarguably, while interacting and working together with people who were born and raised in the country where English is the native language is an efficient way to build skills and tactics linked to linguistic, cultural, and social knowledge, if the second language is not being learnt in the target language setting, then the ZPD must be exploited in attainable ways within the EFL learners' educational setting.

This brings us to the concept of mediation. Mediation has been defined as a notion that acknowledges the influence of symbolic artifacts (e.g., language), material artifacts as well as technologies on human beings. According to Fahim & Haghani (2012), we may understand mediation through the following analogy:

*As human beings use physical tools to make changes in their environment, and consequently upgrade the conditions of their lives, they also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate their relationships with the people in their surroundings and thus change the nature of their relations with them*

According to Vygotsky (1978), development transpires in relation to mediation by such artifacts. Lantolf & Swain (2019) note that although ZPD and mediation are useful notions for understanding learner development, a key limitation is that they tend to view advanced mental functions (for instance, language development) as a primarily cognitive activity. Whereas recent studies in Second Language Acquisition for example, (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Bigelow, 2019) have pointed out that feelings and emotions are inextricably linked with language learner identity and language development. With these insights flagging the clear need for SLA studies to take into account how feelings, language learner identity and language development intersect, Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie* has emerged as a useful heuristic for inquiring into such intersections.

Anxiety and Speaking English as a Second Language There has been a lot of research on anxiety related to second or foreign languages within the last 20 years. According to this research, worry hinders the process of learning a language, (Barbara et al., 2024). The anxiety related to learning and speaking a foreign language is not like other types of anxiety. Early studies on speaking anxiety in language acquisition made use of data from educational research. These investigations, however, yielded certain findings. Moreover, another research suggests that anxiety related to speaking a foreign language is too particular to be adequately measured by general anxiety measures (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). There is a claim that anxiety may be impacted by residing in a setting where the target language is also used for daily communication. According to Leibert, anxiety reactions can be classified as indicating emotionality or worry. Emotionality encompasses both behavioral and speaking responses, such as fidgeting and stammering. Physiological reactions include blushing

and a racing heartbeat. Concern pertains to mental responses, including negative self-talk or extraneous thoughts related to the activity at hand (Naveh-Benjamin, 1991; Zeidner, 1998). Moreover, English education in China has traditionally focused more on reading and writing skills, with less emphasis on speaking and listening. This imbalance can leave students feeling unprepared for oral communication, increasing anxiety when they need to speak English, especially in front of peers or in evaluative situations. The EFL learning environment in China is often highly test-oriented, focusing on grammatical rules and vocabulary memorization for the purpose of passing exams. This can limit students' exposure to practical, conversational English and increase anxiety when they encounter real-life English usage outside the classroom setting. These factors can significantly influence a learner's ability to acquire, retain, and use the language effectively.

There is a growing need for in-depth research on the impact of positive emotions to enhance understanding of the language learning process. However, as literature suggests, foreign language learning is not a simple process. Indeed, it is a complex undertaking which is mediated by many Influences arising from a host of psychological, environmental, and social factors (Sari, 2022). Psychological factors which can be categorized into affective and cognitive factors play a pivotal role in influencing the EFL learners' success in learning the target language. Amongst the psychological factors related to emotions or affect, Martos (2006) points out self-esteem (how language learners feel about themselves), motivation (desire to act in a certain way), attitudes (how language learners feel about the target language, its culture, teachers, peers and the class) and empathy (understanding the perspective of interactants) as some key variables influencing foreign language learning. Sari (2022) points out that psychological factors such as 'anxiety, shyness, lack of self-confidence, and lack of motivation' are the 'leading root cause of students' antipathy to speaking'.

Anxiety creates several problems for Chinese learners when it comes to speaking English, (Hu et al., 2022). These problems are often rooted in psychological, linguistic, and cultural factors: According to Hu et al. (2022), anxiety is a key problem for many learners and embarrassment or judgment from making mistakes. This anxiety is heightened in cultures that place a high value on accuracy and saving face, which is common in Chinese culture. This anxiety can lead learners to speak less, avoid participating in conversations, or freeze up when they are required to speak. Abdullah et al. (2021) add that foreign language anxiety can affect learners' oral performance by negatively influencing their 'personality, optimism, communicative skills', making them fearful of making mistakes and hesitant about communicating in the target language. Language learner anxiety stands as a pivotal factor that can significantly influence speaking proficiency within the sphere of second language acquisition. Anxiety, characterized by feelings of apprehension and unease, can exert a notable impact on learners' ability to engage in effective spoken interactions. High levels of language anxiety have been associated with reduced speaking proficiency, as learners may experience difficulties in organizing their thoughts, articulating ideas, and maintaining coherent discourse (Horwitz, 2017). Furthermore, anxiety can hinder the development of fluency, impeding learners' natural and spontaneous expression. As anxiety levels increase, learners may avoid or withdraw from speaking situations altogether, thereby limiting opportunities for practice and hindering their progress

## Conclusion

This study explored the impact of Chinese EL learners' perezhivanie on their English-speaking Proficiency, and to explore the influence of Chinese EFL learners' perezhivanie on their English-speaking anxiety. The study used Smart PLS 3.3.9's structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the correlations between different variables. The results of the study highlight the significance of perezhivanie on the English proficiency. The results further show that the PLS-SEM research design is a stable, versatile, and advanced tool for creating a significant statistical model, and the PLS-SEM role helps achieve the intended goal (Yavuzalp et al., 2021). In addition, the results of the study highlight the influence of psychological factors including self-confidence, motivation, and language anxiety, intricately influence the development of EFL speaking skills, they also impact the construction of language learner identity. To sum up, the model of the study suggested that language learner identity, as a complex construct, is profoundly shaped by these psychological underpinnings, impacting how learners perceive themselves within the linguistic community they seek to assimilate (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). However, language anxiety can act as a formidable barrier, impeding the fluency and self-expression of EFL learners in spoken interactions. Thus, the amalgamation of these psychological dimensions forms a symbiotic relationship that not only shapes EFL speaking proficiency but also molds the intricate tapestry of language learner identity, positioning learners within the context of their language learning journey.

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