

SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ESL CLASSROOMS: A CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

English is an official language of Pakistan, but we do know that anxiety makes it harder to learn and teach. Language anxiety has been thoroughly examined internationally; however, it has not been sufficiently explored in the Pakistani context. The primary objective of this study is to assess the level of Foreign Language Anxiety among ESL students from various departments at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Mirs. This research employs a case study methodology within a quantitative framework. A random sample of 300 students was selected to participate in the study. We used a questionnaire based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to assess students' anxiety. The results showed that students exhibited moderate to high levels of anxiety about speaking a foreign language, especially when they are afraid of negative evaluations and have low self-esteem. ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in anxiety levels across departments. Results across departments, $F(4,295) = 2.679$, $p = .032$, indicated a statistically significant difference in foreign language anxiety among students. Students studying science, such as zoology and microbiology, were more anxious than those studying business and commerce. Students who are learning English. They were in the middle. Business, commerce, and microbiology showed the highest standard deviation (SD), indicating that anxiety experiences were more diverse in these domains. These results are in accordance with ANOVA. which indicate significant disparities between departments and suggest that departmental affiliations affect foreign language proficiency.

It shows that the department a student is in has a big effect on how anxious they are about learning a foreign language. This shows that English language classrooms need specialized teaching methods to help students feel less anxious and improve their speaking skills.

Keywords: English language anxiety, Speaking anxiety, Communication apprehension
Language learning stress

Introduction

In most cases, English is considered a foreign language, especially in countries where it isn't the native language. This is because it is becoming the world's lingua franca (Coleman, 2006 in Santos, Cenoz & Gorter, 2018). European institutions have paid close attention to the study of foreign languages because the education system places a high value on them. Because of this, students all over the world are expected to be able to speak a foreign language. This is because most schools use it to teach, and most plan their lessons this way (Bergström, Klatt, Steinbrink & Lachmann, 2016; Santos, Cenoz & Gorter, 2018; Gurney, 2018; Tan & Nguyen, 2018). Now that anxiety is an issue, it has been well documented that anxiety in foreign language classrooms has long been a topic of interest for scholars (Jin & Dewale, 2018; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Anxiety is also one of the most common issues that arise when learning a foreign language (Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015). Students learning a foreign language feel uncomfortable in the classroom because they fear making mistakes, which makes them less likely to participate. Nervousness is a problem that occurs when they are using any language skill (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Cheng, 2002; Luo, 2014; Chow, Chiu & Wong, 2018). This was seen in the experience of Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) when speaking was found to be the most common source of anxiety. The situation changes how scared they are, and when they are relaxed, it changes how well they can communicate in the classroom. Anxiety makes

it harder for students to learn a foreign language because they are too tense to understand the lesson. In a learning environment, everyone, including teachers and students, is likely to feel anxious. Students' learning experiences vary among academic departments owing to differences in disciplinary focus, instructional methodologies, and the characteristics of academic tasks. For instance, students studying languages are usually more interested in activities that focus on communication, interpretation, and expression. On the other hand, students studying business, commerce, and the natural sciences are usually more interested in technical knowledge, analytical skills, and content-based learning. These differences affect how students use English in the classroom, including how they participate. How confident they are when talking to others, and how they learn. Hyland (2006) emphasizes that academic disciplines represent distinct communities defined by specific conventions, communication practices, and expectations that significantly affect students' language acquisition and use. Becher & Trowler (2001) contend that every discipline has a unique "academic culture" that shapes students' cognition, learning methodologies, and interaction with information. These differences between departments show me how important it is to teach in ways that meet the needs of each subject's students and teachers. This will make learning more useful and enjoyable. Anxiety affects language input by impairing learners' performance in language lessons (Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015; Horwitz, 2013; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). The results of foreign language learners differ because of their unique traits, which often manifest in their motivations for learning, the resources they have, their language skills, and their attitudes toward the target-language community. Anxiety represents a substantial impediment for foreign language learners concerning the target language (Çağatay, 2015; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015). This study is unique among research on foreign language classroom anxiety. Most prior studies concentrated on the negative emotions associated with foreign language anxiety, particularly its causes and consequences, while some examined the positional orientation, addressing the emotional support provided by students and teachers for foreign language classroom anxiety (Jin & Dewale, 2018). The current study seeks to investigate the levels of foreign language anxiety among ELT students from various departments at Salu University, Khairpur. This study is specific and contributes to the literature by focusing on experimental variables, including EFL students.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety constitutes a significant impediment to foreign language learners' acquisition of the target language (Çağatay, 2015; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015). Foreign language anxiety is when you feel anxious when you read or talk in a foreign language, especially when you have to pronounce words. Anxiety arises when learners feel distressed by their inability to express themselves authentically due to constraints in the new language (Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Horwitz, 2007). Several studies have shown that anxiety about learning a foreign language can make it harder for students to learn and do well in other areas, such as school and socializing. The learners' opportunity to attain proficiency in the target language is consistently diminished, fostering anxiety and perpetuating a detrimental cycle. Students who are anxious or nervous try to avoid talking to others. They frequently miss classes, and when it comes to writing, they prefer to do it at home or outside of class because they are afraid their writing will be judged negatively. This can undermine even the teacher's efforts (Horwitz, Hortiz & Cope, 1986; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Research indicates that the prevalence of anxiety in foreign language acquisition fluctuates according to an individual's specific anxiety levels, which are influenced by their demographic background, encompassing both social and cultural factors, their proficiency levels, and their prior experiences in foreign language learning. Their responses are evaluated according to personality characteristics: overarching

personality traits and subordinate personality dimensions. The broad traits suggest that extraversion is the sole personality trait significantly correlated with foreign language anxiety, exhibiting a negative relationship; individuals characterized by high psychoticism and emotional stability experience reduced anxiety in foreign language classrooms during speaking activities. At the same time, personality is also linked to emotional intelligence. Foreign language learners often experience significant classroom anxiety, arising from cognitive and evaluative processes within the educational setting that encompass both internal and social aspects (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Dewaele, Petrides & Fuenham, 2008; MacIntyre, 2017; Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Reading in a foreign language can also make you anxious, but foreign language anxiety doesn't have to be connected to the language you want to learn. Foreign-language reading anxiety can stem from unfamiliar subjects, scripts, writing systems, and learners' apprehension regarding comprehension. Students' grades can also suffer when they are anxious about reading in a foreign language (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999; Zhao, Dynia, & Guo, 2013). Young (1992) delineated six anxiety-related factors intuitively linked to the foreign language classroom: motivation, cultural influences, students' coping abilities, self-concept, beliefs regarding language acquisition, and the particular teaching methodologies employed. Young (1991) identified additional fundamental factors from the literature that contribute to foreign language learning anxiety: personal and interpersonal anxiety, learner beliefs regarding language acquisition, instructor beliefs about language instruction, and the dynamics of instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language assessment.

Empirical Studies on Anxiety

Baş & Ozean (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of foreign language anxiety among high school and university students, using the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale to examine variables such as gender, current educational status, parents' educational background, and monthly family income. Slight differences in anxiety levels were found between male and female students in the personality, communication, and assessment constructs ($T(672) = -160, p > 0.05$; $T(672) = -1.513, p > 0.05$). There was a statistically significant difference between high school and university students in educational attainment, with high school students showing higher foreign language anxiety in constructions (M personal = 38.61, M communication = 39.33, M assessment = 31.60). No statistical difference was shown in the level of family anxiety with respect to monthly income. Previous studies (Al-Suwat, 2016; Nahavandi and Mukundan, 2013) support the conclusion that gender is an ineffective variable in classroom anxiety. Taubaut, Tseng, and Abdullah (2018) investigated speaking difficulty in fourth-year Libyan English undergraduates, focusing on communication concerns, fear of negative evaluations, and low self-esteem. The Foreign Language Speakers Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) indicated that low self-esteem had the highest average score (181.25) followed by fear of negative evaluation (167.8) and fear of communication (140.57). The students were especially nervous about speaking. Especially when inexperienced, mainly due to the fear of making mistakes. Chou, Chiu, & Wong (2018) examined anxiety about reading and listening and its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral correlates among 306 Chinese EFL undergraduates. Sankara (2016) conducted an empirical study with pre- and post-test and video-motivated interviews. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) showed significant differences only within the treatment group. Motivational memory was recognized as an effective reflective tool that helped students identify and deal with classroom anxiety. Sankara's protocol fostered a stress-free learning environment and reliably reflected students. Overall, students often experience study-related anxiety and struggle to manage it.

Research Question

How does English language speaking anxiety vary among EFL students across different academic departments of SALU?

Quantitative Approach

Research methodology as the comprehensive procedures a researcher uses to initiate a research project (Leedy& Ormrod 2001, p. 14). Quantitative research seeks to quantify data and generalize findings from a study sample across diverse perspectives. To prove the hypothesis from a certain study, you need to gather, analyze, and interpret quantifiable data. Quantitative research depends on collecting and analyzing data using a logical method to test theories, drawing on empiricist and positivist ideas (Bryman, 2016). Quantitative research delineates particular attributes and significant distinctions to formulate conclusions in scholarly inquiry.

Data Collection and Method

The researcher gave out a survey and a questionnaire to the students. All participants' responses were input and analyzed utilizing SPSS 23. To begin, descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the percentage and overall response for each item related to EFL anxiety among learners in the classroom. An ANOVA test was also employed to examine variation across departments at the university.

Findings

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	300	4.37	1.047
2.I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	300	2.06	1.151
3.I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	300	4.00	1.157
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is Saying in the foreign language.	300	3.84	1.201
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	300	2.07	1.149
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	300	3.02	1.424
7.I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	300	3.33	1.493
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	300	2.67	1.497
9 I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	300	4.00	1.157
10 I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	300	4.00	1.157
11 I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes	300	3.38	1.320
12 In Language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	300	3.67	1.322
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	300	3.66	1.330
14.I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	300	2.32	1.333
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	300	3.67	1.332
16Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it	300	3.67	1.331
17.I often feel like not going to my language class.	300	3.67	1.330

18 I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	300	2.32	1.333
19 I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	300	3.68	1.322
20 I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	300	3.06	1.428
21 The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	300	3.07	1.424
22 I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	300	1.75	.831
23 I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	300	4.19	.751
24 I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	300	3.94	1.373
25 Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	300	3.94	1.373
26 I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes	300	4.06	1.306
27 I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	300	3.71	1.331
28 When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed	300	1.65	.737
29 I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	300	4.46	.613
30 I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language	300	4.67	.472
31 I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language	300	4.50	.501
32 I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	300	2.09	1.364
33 I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance	300	4.23	1.022

The item-wise analysis provides a clearer picture of how students feel and think about their time in foreign language classes. A 5-point Likert scale is used to look at the data. A higher mean score means that people agree (anxiety is present), while a lower mean score means that people disagree (comfort is absent, which means anxiety is present). First, Item 1 ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.047$) shows that 80–85% of the students agreed that they don't feel confident when they talk. This strongly suggests that most learners lack confidence, which makes them very nervous when speaking a foreign language. Item 2 ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.151$) indicates that this deficiency of confidence is even more pronounced. About 75–80% of the students did not agree with the statement that they don't worry about making mistakes. This means that many people are afraid of making mistakes, which in turn makes them afraid of being judged harshly. This anxiety is more obvious when students are in class. About 70–75% of the students agreed with Item 3 ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.157$) that they shake when called upon. This shows both mental and physical signs of anxiety. Item 4 ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.201$) shows that 65–70% of students are scared when they don't understand what the teacher is saying. This means that worrying about whether or not you understand can make it harder to learn. Many students don't like learning new languages. Item 5 ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.149$) shows that about 75–80% of students don't want to

take extra language classes. Item 6 ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.424$) shows the reaction mixture, which indicates that people are not paying attention because they are worried or bored. Item 7 ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.493$) shows that 55-60% of people feel inferior to their peers. Item 8 ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.497$) shows that about the same number of people have test anxiety. Items 9 and 10 ($M = 4.00$ each, $SD = 1.157$) show that 70-75% of people are afraid to speak up and fail without preparation. This means that they are afraid to both fail and talk. Item 11 ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.320$) shows that most students are somewhat anxious. Item 12 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.322$) shows how anxiety affects the brain. 65% to 70% of people agree that anxiety makes them forget what they know. Item 13 ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.330$) shows that about 65-70% of people are shy to give voluntary answers. This suggests that anxiety affects how many people participate. This feeling of anxiety doesn't go away when you leave the classroom. Item 14 ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.333$) shows that about 70-75% of people do not agree, which means they will be very nervous to talk to native speakers. Items 15, 16, and 17 ($M = 3.67$) consistently show 65-70% agreement, indicating that people still feel anxious when preparing for class, fixing things, or deciding to go. It shows that anxiety doesn't just happen when you do certain things. And it happens all the time. Item 18 ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.333$) shows that 70-75% of people do not agree, which supports it. This means that most students don't feel confident when they talk. Item 19 ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.322$) says that about 65-70% of students are judged to be afraid of. This means that students feel that their teachers are paying close attention to them. Items 20 and 21 ($M \approx 3.06-3.07$) show moderate responses (50-55%), indicating that people are experiencing physical symptoms (e.g., palpitations) and confusion. However, these symptoms differ for each person. Item 22 ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.831$) shows significant pressure. About 80-85% of students do not agree. This means that they are under a lot of pressure to get ready. Item 23 ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.751$) adds to the pressure that 75-80% of people believe that others do better, but people feel worse about themselves. Items 24 and 25 ($M = 3.94$) indicate actual pressure from school and friends. About 70-75% of the students said they were worried about being left behind and felt self-conscious. In addition, item 26 ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.306$) shows that 70-75% of students are more anxious in language classes than in other subjects. This suggests that language anxiety is different from other types of anxiety. Item 27 ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.331$) indicates that people remain concerned about speaking, with 65-70% agreement. They are scared and don't know what to do. Item 28 ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 0.737$) shows that many students were very upset before class. About 85-90% disagreed. This means that many students do not feel comfortable before class. The last few are the most stressful. Item 29 ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.613$) shows that 85-90% of students become neurotic when they do not understand everything. They seem to be perfectionists. In item 30 ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.472$) 90-95% of people felt that they could not maintain all the rules of the language. This makes it even clearer. This means that their brain is working very hard. Item 31 ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.501$) shows that 85-90% of students are afraid to laugh. This indicates that they are too afraid to make a negative decision. 75-80% of respondents to item 32 ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.364$) disagreed, indicating that students do not feel comfortable around native speakers. Finally, item 33 ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.022$) shows that 75-80% of students are nervous. When someone asks you a question you don't know the answer to. This means they are too afraid to talk without being prepared.

Descriptive Data of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety								
Departments	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		

Commerce	60	108.20 00	12.8812 0	1.6629 6	104.8724	111.5276	63.00	131.00
Business	60	106.63 33	18.1070 0	2.3376 0	101.9558	111.3109	59.00	135.00
English	60	103.78 33	17.8098 2	2.2992 4	99.1826	108.3841	58.00	132.00
Zoology	60	111.11 67	16.2606 9	2.0992 5	106.9161	115.3172	64.00	138.00
Microbiology	60	112.56 67	17.3814 3	2.2439 3	108.0766	117.0568	57.00	148.00
Total	300	108.46 00	16.7835 4	0.9690 0	106.5531	110.3669	57.00	148.00

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY ACROSS VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS.

Descriptive statistics show that students from different departments of Salou University in Khairpur exhibit significantly different levels of anxiety about learning a foreign language. The average anxiety score of all 300 students was 108.46 (SD = 16.78), which means they were moderately anxious. The average score for commerce students (N = 60) was 108.20 (SD = 12.88), indicating moderate anxiety, with scores ranging from 63 to 131. The average score for business students was 106.63 (SD = 18.11), which is a little lower than the average score for English students. The scores for business students ranged from 59 to 135, which was much higher than those for English students. The English department had the least anxiety (mean 103.78; SD = 17.81; scores 58–132), indicating that students in that department were less anxious than those in other departments. Students studying zoology reported higher anxiety (Mean 111.12; SD = 16.26; scores 64–138). Microbiology students exhibited the highest mean anxiety (112.57; SD = 17.38; scores 57–148), indicating the greatest level of anxiety. Students in science-related fields (Zoology and Microbiology) were more anxious than students in commerce and business, while students in English were only moderately anxious. Business, Commerce, and Microbiology had the greatest variability (SD), indicating that anxiety experiences were more varied there. These results are consistent with the ANOVA, showing that there are big differences between departments and that being in a certain department affects how anxious you are about speaking a foreign language.

ANOVA of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety					
Departments	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2951.887	4	737.972	2.679	0.032
Within Groups	81272.633	295	275.500		
Total	84224.520	299			

Researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to determine whether students from different departments differed in anxiety levels in foreign language classrooms. The findings indicated a statistically significant disparity in anxiety levels among the five departments, $F(4, 295) = 2.679, p = .032$. This finding shows that the department a student is in affects how anxious they are about learning a foreign language, but most of the differences were within departments rather than between them. Descriptive statistics revealed that students from the Zoology (M =

111.12, SD = 16.26) and Microbiology (M = 112.57, SD = 17.38) departments exhibited heightened anxiety scores, whereas those from the English (M = 103.78, SD = 17.81) and Business (M = 106.63, SD = 18.11) departments showed diminished anxiety levels. Students in commerce reported moderate anxiety (M = 108.20, SD = 12.88). These results indicate that students engaged in scientific studies exhibit greater apprehension about acquiring a foreign language than their counterparts in business and commerce.

Discussion

The results show that many students are scared of learning a new language. The overall results show that most students, between 65% and 90%, are anxious in most situations. This is especially true when they have to talk without getting ready, worry about making mistakes and getting bad grades, compare themselves to their classmates, and deal with the stress of being in class. Also, students' anxiety is made worse by the fact that they find it hard to understand and think that language rules are complicated. These patterns show that anxiety about learning a foreign language is not a one-time or short-term issue; rather, it is a common, long-lasting problem students face in school. The one-way ANOVA results also showed that the levels of anxiety were significantly different between departments. This means that how students feel about learning a new language is affected by their academic backgrounds. Students from science-related fields exhibited markedly heightened anxiety levels, whereas individuals from business and commerce backgrounds indicated relatively diminished anxiety levels. This shows how important the discipline's setting is for helping students learn English and become more confident in it. The results show that many factors can make people nervous about learning a new language, such as how they think, feel, and interact with others. Teachers should use methods that focus on the student and help them learn. For example, they should help students feel less scared about getting a bad grade, encourage them to participate without pressure, and make language input easier to understand. By addressing these problems, you can make the classroom a better place to be, helping students speak more clearly and learn more about language.

Conclusion

The results show that most students have moderate to high levels of anxiety, especially when it comes to speaking without preparation, fear of making mistakes, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Furthermore, the results show that anxiety levels vary significantly between departments. This indicates that students' language anxiety is significantly influenced by their educational background. Major differences in academic departments also show that a student's background in a particular subject affects how they feel and how much stress they face. To help those who are concerned about learning a foreign language, need a complete, student-centered, and context-sensitive plan. Teachers can make the classroom feel more welcoming by using teaching methods and strategies that work across all subjects. This will help students feel more confident and involved, and improve their language skills. Foreign language anxiety has a major and lasting impact on students' speaking skills and learning experiences. Supportive teaching methods and emotional awareness are important for relieving anxiety and facilitating effective language acquisition. (Attia and Algazo, 2025)

Recommendations

The findings suggest that teachers should adopt a student-centered, supportive approach to addressing students' anxiety about learning a foreign language. Students need to feel safe in the classroom. So that they can make mistakes without worrying about being judged or getting tough reforms. Teachers should encourage students to speak up slowly by using low-pressure activities such as pair work, group discussions, and guided tasks that give students time to

prepare before they speak. Also, reducing comparisons with others and promoting teamwork rather than competition can help ease the stress of self-evaluation. Language input can be easier to understand with clear instructions, pictures, and step-by-step explanations. Teachers should also give students helpful, positive feedback that focuses on how to improve, rather than grades. This will help them not be afraid of failing. Because anxiety levels vary across departments, it's important to use different teaching methods for each one. For instance, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and structured language support may help students studying science become accustomed to technical vocabulary over time. Students studying business and commerce, on the other hand, may like activities that involve talking and giving presentations. Using affective strategies, boosting self-esteem, and giving students more opportunities to use English in low-pressure situations can all help reduce anxiety and improve learning.

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