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Effect of Foreign Language Anxiety on Attitude, Desire, and Self-Competence of University Students

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Abstract

Globally, English has been considered a strong means of communication. In non-English speaking countries, the majority of universities are requiring students to prove their English proficiency when entering or graduating from universities. The most influential factors as limited exposure to English speaking in the universities and the high demands of the universities are creating English language anxiety among university students. By considering these facts, the current study investigated the effect of foreign language anxiety on the attitude, desire, and self-competence of University students. A total of 268 male and female students from two private universities in Lahore were selected randomly. A foreign language anxiety test by Horwitz et al. (1986) was administered among all students. Students showed varied responses in all subscales. Generally, in all subscales, females showed more anxiety in all subscales. Based on findings, it is recommended to decrease foreign language anxiety by changing the classroom environment is a more important and impressively more troublesome assignment. As long as in a second language classroom where assessment in student



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performance is prioritized, language stress will be enhanced. Instructors might create student reinforcement teaching strategies and closely monitor the classroom climate to fix multiple sources of learner anxiety.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, attitude, desire to speak, self-competence

1. Introduction

The significance of the English language is worldwide accepted for global conjunction of varied societies. It is a global language so we cannot deny the scope and need of the language. However, over the last 40 years, in the language and communication domain, globally, scholars and researchers emphasized most crucial challenge is foreign language anxiety. (Chen & Chang 2004). Gardner (1987) states that in learning a foreign language an individual is stimulated by different psychological factors. These psychological factors are motivation, learners' attitude, self-image, and self-esteem. Foreign language anxiety can either facilitate or hinder the processing or reception of learning a second language.

In addition to variables that are related to students, there are numerous other outside factors that contribute to language anxiety, such as inadequate support from teachers, learners' insensitive personalities, and lack of individualized attention. Siyli & Kafes (2015); Day & Gu (2013). Ellis (2015) noted that a learner's anxiety level may increase as a result of their lack of linguistic understanding. The results of an interview with 30 Turkish EFL students in 2013 by Kayaoglu and Saglanel demonstrated that the learners' linguistic problems are language modules such as listening, writing, speaking, and accent perfection. Students' anxiety levels rise for a variety of reasons, including uninteresting activities, a lack of cooperation, poor teaching techniques, and a very demanding and constrained classroom environment (Zia & Norrihan, 2015).

According to McCroskey (2015), a major hurdle in speaking a foreign language is probable critical feedback from peers that limits their confidence and increases hesitancy to interact in communication.

As Horwitz (1986) points out that foreign language anxiety is the major obstacle in getting command of a foreign language despite other factors such as individual learner's attitude and motivation. However, Zhang, (2001) states that foreign language anxiety is not only one deliberating factor to restricts a learner from achieving his academic targets, but it may serve as a motivational stimulator in language learning.

Woodrow (2006) argued that worldwide, for the last decades, foreign language anxiety is considered a significant issue. To put it another way, language anxiety is taken as

psychological trauma that affects how the target language is understood and acquired. Previous studies revealed that language anxiety can impede the attitude and speed of learning a foreign language. Language learners frequently encounter multiple problems while studying a foreign language.

Timina (2015) considered one of the big reasons for anxiety and depression among students is second language acquisition. Language anxiety, according to Waseem & Jibeen, (2013) is a multi-layered technique that encompasses students' attitudes, and motivation to speak a second language. He went on to say that "the level of tension and anxiousness is directly associated to second language modules, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, and learning" is an entirely different experience of anxiety that prevents learners to get their linguistic outcomes. Saltan (2003) argued, that the majority of university students face mental and emotional challenges in speaking a foreign language. This obstructs their learning, preventing them from speaking proficient English.

Most importantly the prominent factor in impeding the motivation of students to speak or express their views in a foreign language is language anxiety (Zheng 2008). In the Pakistani context, in a general foreign language classroom, due to negative attitudes, feelings of embarrassment, fear, or reluctance students avoid classes or participation in class discussions

Öztürk (2009) explained the dependence of foreign languages on multiple psychological factors such as self-confidence, communication style, different backgrounds, social status, individual learning styles, and mother tongue. Mehmoodzadeh, (2012) describes hesitation to speak the English language as one of the most common reasons among learners. The teacher has to play an important role in bridging the gap between language anxiety and instructional strategies. Dialectic and interactive teaching strategies can incorporate dialect uneasiness so one can manipulate the strain and anxiety of their speaking in their learning contexts. Moreover, Öztürk (2009) highlighted a bond between foreign language anxiety and time frame while learning English regardless of age and gender. It is the teacher's expertise to create a collaborative environment to initiate foreign language learning in a more productive way and to minimize speaking nervousness among learners. (Gkonou, 2011)

Horwitz et al. (1986) regarded second language stress as "a quirky assumption of stress, uneasiness, fear-related with the arousal of the automated nervous response or sensory stimulation". He argued that through different findings of past studies frequently impulses by the majority of dialect learners have an inverse effect on (L2) language learning, and it was considered a prominent negative variable in the student's psyche during learning a second language. Among many language experts, Horwitz et.al (1986)

described that language anxiety has both positive and negative effects on self-confidence, communication level, and desire to speak among students. Those who want to involve globally in higher-order communication struggle hard to achieve their speaking level best as they don't want to hinder their prosperity only due to language obstacles. Anxiety has negative effects on those who are already in low self-esteem and fear to speak a second language. Resultantly, they will avoid facing foreign language contexts and will skip classes and group work.

In Pakistani institutes, English as a second language becomes a challenge for both teachers and students. In Pakistani public and private elementary institutes, different instructional methods are used to teach English. There is limited use of English in our public elementary schools. There are a number of deliberating factors such as teacher competence, curriculum, and classroom context in promoting English language learning in public schools. Teachers usually speak in their national or mother tongue which demotivates students to communicate in English. In response, students cannot communicate in English easily. They become anxious, frustrated, and socially isolated while responding to their teachers and peers. They show less motivation and poor self-esteem in their English classroom.

On the other hand, in private schools, English language learning is different in all aspects. Private schools are also divided into two main extremes, elite and mediocre. Mediocre schools are providing English as a compulsory subject and not promoting it as a language. Students only rote memorize the English syllabus to pass the examination and are less motivated in communication. In elite schools, the situation is comparatively better. In these schools, teachers communicating in communicate with their students in the English language. Their curriculum mostly promotes the English language. But the situation becomes serious when many students of these institutions do not communicate in English outside of their classrooms. They feel more relaxed and comfortable talking in their mother language. They don't exhibit motivation and attitude to learn or speak English in their social context, rather they only use English to achieve their academic purposes (Mehmoodzadeh 2012).

Despite the attention of government and private organizations in promoting English as a medium of instruction in our public and private institutions, our students are still facing anxiety, depression, and a lack of motivation in learning and speak English in their classrooms. Learning the English language consists of both cognitive as well as affective psychological measures. Anxiety is mostly associated with the affective domain of behavior that inhibits the language learning process of a learner. Moreover, the foreign language learning process includes both internal and external factors. In external factors, teaching quality, classroom environment, curriculum, and administrative policies serve a major role.

Attitude on the other hand is a disposition to proceed in achieving specific goals. Smith, (2003) considers attitude as a response to a situation that can be both positive and negative in varying amounts. Those students who are highly motivated show a positive attitude towards English language learning. For developing a positive attitude among students toward second language learning, we need to provide a foreign language context that is difficult to develop in a non-English country like Pakistan

Research studies investigating students' attitudes and anxieties about learning a significant language yielded inconsistent results when investigating these variables with gender and demographic variables. According to Liu and Jackson's research (2008) speaking anxiety was present among 547 Chinese ESL university students due to dread of peer criticism, classroom behavior problems brought on by a negative judgment of oneself, and final failure.

Boonkit (2010) concluded one of his studies that male students are highly foreign language anxious than females. A few studies have shown that women are less anxious than male students when learning a foreign language as Bunrueng (2008) shared that female students proved to be less anxious than male students in foreign language classrooms. So the literature revealed variation in scores in second language anxiety in genders.

The results of the various studies mentioned above showed multiple findings on gender differences in second language acquisition. Research has yielded different results in different situations. Against this background, the present study explored language anxiety and the attitude of Pakistani students toward learning a second language.

1.1 Research Questions

- Is there a difference of opinion in subscales of foreign language speaking anxiety among university students?
- Is there a gender difference in foreign speaking language anxiety?

2. Method

A survey design was used in the study. Through a foreign language speaking anxiety questionnaire opinions of two private university students were assessed.

2.1 Participants

A total of 268 students, male (40.29 %, female 59.70 %) with ages ranging from 20-26 (70.21 %, 29.23%) from two private universities in Lahore were selected randomly.

2.2 Instrument

A foreign language anxiety test by Horwitz et al. (1986) was administered among all students. The instrument was addressed including subscales such as the attitude toward learning a foreign language, past and present foreign language learning experiences, desire to learn a foreign language, and self-competence. Students were expected to choose one option among strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The reliability of the scale with an alpha coefficient was .93. There were a total of 61 items in a foreign language anxiety test including all subscales. A foreign language anxiety test by Horwitz et al. (1986) was administered among all students in person.

3. Results

R.Q 1: Is there a difference of opinion in subscales of foreign language speaking anxiety among university students?

The items of FLCAS (see Table 1 in Appendix) reflected a difference of opinions of students of both private universities in all subscales. These responses showed differences in percentages with options of strongly agree, agreed, disagree, and strongly disagree. In subscale 1, students showed agreement and disagreement in different items of foreign language speaking attitudes such as item 4 “I feel confident while I am speaking English” only 15% showed agreement while 52 % showed disagreement that reflecting their high language anxiety and low confidence. In another item no 5, “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English “41% of students presented high speaking anxiety by accepting the fact. 49 % of students confirmed their nervousness in item no 7,” I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English”. In most items, students affirmed the idea with a high percentage by getting scared, panic, low confidence, shame, and embarrassment feelings while speaking English either in a class, with a teacher, or with their friends or classmates. It depicted their high anxiety and negative attitude towards speaking a foreign language publically. In the second subscale, foreign language classroom speaking anxiety, the majority of students showed stress while speaking English in a class or publically. Anxious students showed fear of being humiliated or embarrassed in the presence of people. They reported for example “I feel nervous speaking English in front of the entire class, (43%), and “I feel tense when I have to speak English with a classmate in a pair” (48%).

In the third subscale, perceived foreign language speaking self-competence, students reflected their opinions with different percentages. Most students showed high anxiety with a high percentage and low self-competence. Among all students, 63% showed disagreement with the statement “I can order food in English in a restaurant”, 70%

disagreed that they can talk about their hobbies in English, and in item 4, 61 % agreed about not having skills for public speaking in English, in item 5, 53 % revealed anxiety in describing street address to others. In the fourth subscale “desire to speak English”, students reflected very low motivation in learning and using the English language either for personal use or for communication with others. They showed little interest in making a connection with foreign countries.

In the fifth subscale “Past English Classroom Experiences” students shared negative feelings about their past interactions with the English language. Anxious students described “I enjoyed doing pair work in my high school English classes” (10%), and “I did enjoyable and interesting activities in my high school English classes” (14%). They expressed the least interest in English language class and revealed high language anxiety in meeting people for English conversation. Resultantly, they will skip their language classes to be targeted among their fellows.

Similarly, in the last subscale “current English Classroom Perception” anxious students expressed high anxiety in attending their classes and communicating with teachers and classmates. They reflected “I feel comfortable in my current English class” (11%), “I enjoy speaking in English with classmates in my current English class” (16%), and “The current English class atmosphere is good” (10%). These consequences proposed that anxious university students feel helpless to cope with second language anxiety. They expressed high negative intensity towards learning, participating, and communicating the English language among people.

RQ 2: Is there a gender difference in foreign speaking language anxiety?

Table 2: Gender difference of students among subscales respectively foreign language speaking attitude, foreign language speaking Anxiety, speaking self-competence, Desire, experience, and perception of foreign language anxiety

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
FSL	Female	108	3.0218	.64826
	Male	160	3.0765	.65585
SA	Female	108	2.9604	.96708
	Male	160	2.9523	.88627
SC	Female	108	3.7479	.70708

	Male	160	3.5438	.76683
Desire	Female	108	3.8837	.70590
	Male	160	3.8132	.78383
Experience	Female	108	3.8542	.66923
	Male	160	3.6891	.79082
	Female	160	3.6891	.79082
	Male	108	3.6821	.69205

Table 2 is describing gender difference scores in all subscales of foreign language anxiety. The results showed no significant difference between both genders among all subscales. However, there is a slight difference in the mean score of genders on all scales. Overall females look more anxious than males in all subscales.

4. Discussion

The findings of the current study expressed extreme feelings of anxiety in university students toward English language learning due to multiple factors such as the attitude toward learning a foreign language, past and present foreign language learning experiences, desire to learn a foreign language, and self-competence. Anxious students revealed their language anxiety in all subscales of the foreign language anxiety questionnaire. Results reported that most students showed a negative attitude towards learning the English language. They expressed low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in communication, presentations, and learning the English language. Al-Hebaish (2012) discovered that a lack of self-confidence leads to a drop in interest over time as the student doubts his abilities, does not attempt, or fails and gives up. Motivation is affected by accomplishments that are interlinked with hard work later in success. Diaz Bringas and Hernández (2001) and Ushioda (2008) regarded that motivation correlates with the teacher's role in engaging students in language learning. Gutiérrez-Ramrez and Landeros-Falcón (2010) stressed the importance of positive attitude in developing linguistic abilities. As Kormos and Csisér (2008) and Ushioda (2008) pointed out that the English language instead is a globally accepted language with native and non-native speakers alike having access to a larger world. Ordorica (2010), presented similar findings by describing the attitude of non-English students to become global masters by learning the English language.

Results communicated that learners expressed anxiety about speaking with foreign language instructors because they were fearful about making grammatical mistakes. Speaking anxiety, which Melough (2013) calls "one of the most important affective variables that drive foreign language learning skills. Teachers should provide reinforcement and inspiration to these pupils in order to engage them in classroom learning without fear of making grammatical blunders (Woodrow, 2006). There are multiple factors responsible for English language anxiety such as background, motivation, attitude, previous experiences, and willingness to learn a foreign language (Dalkiliç, 2001).

In coping with foreign language anxiety, teachers can adopt multiple strategies such as token economy, scaffolding, rewards games, and feedback ceremonies to help pupils cope with their anxiety. Many foreign language learners, according to Mak (2011), are scared of sarcastic feedback from teachers and peers bullying.

Findings also presented no significant difference in anxiety among males and females. Male and females reported similar attitudes and motivations in learning a foreign language (Gkonou, 2011).

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the effect of anxiety on the perception, attitude, and self-competence of university students. Findings revealed negative effects of anxiety in learning and practicing foreign languages among university students. They expressed high language anxiety and low morale and attitude due to committing mistakes, facing humiliation in front of a language teacher and their fellows, classroom context, past language learning experiences, and behavior and teaching strategies of the teacher. There was found minimum gender difference among students in learning the English language. It is suggested to improve the English language classroom context. Teachers must be very much passionate about motivating students in language learning. He should be persuasive rather than a fault finder.

6. Future implications

Many academics throughout the world have been concerned about lowering anxiety's impact on students. The results of the current study explored the negative effects of foreign language anxiety on students due to a variety of problems that must be tackled by higher education administration by taking appropriate actions in providing proper coaching to learn a foreign language. A language teacher should develop a conducive and fearless context of the classroom for the appreciation of students. Moreover,

teachers should work as a facilitator in teaching language and make fearless language classrooms to persuade critical thinking among university students.

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Appendix

Foreign language anxiety test by Horwitz et al. (1986)

	Foreign language speaking attitude	N	S Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	S Disagree
1	I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English.	268	13%	18%	21%	29%	16
2	I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation in advance.		13%	18%	19%	31%	16%
3	In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.		13%	25%	19%	24%	17%
4	I feel confident while I am speaking English.		3%	12%	30%	35%	17%
5	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English.		12%	29%	21%	26%	9%
6	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English		19%	30%	17%	22%	10%
7	I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance.		16%	33%	25%	16%	7%
8	I have no fear of speaking English		6%	19%	24%	32%	17%
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on.		8%	21%	28%	28%	13%

Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety . . .

10	I feel relaxed while I am speaking English.		4%	24%	25%	28%	16%
11	It embarrasses me to volunteer to go out first to speak English		10%	32%	23%	22%	11%
12	I face the prospect of speaking English with confidence.		5%	17%	30%	32%	13%
13	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am speaking English.		12%	27%	22%	26%	10%
14	I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English		9%	30%	25%	23%	10%
15	I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English.		14%	37%	16%	23%	7%
16	I have trouble coordinating my movements while I am speaking English		13%	28%	24%	25%	8%
17	Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious		8%	26%	24%	24%	15%

Foreign Language Classroom Speaking Anxiety

No	Items	S A	A	N	D	SD
1	I'm worried that other students in class speak English better than I do.	11%	23%	23%	28%	12%
2	I feel nervous speaking English in front of the entire class.	11%	26%	27%	26%	8%
3	I'm worried that my partner speaks better English than I do.	13%	31%	22%	24%	7%

4	I start to panic when I speak in English with a classmate in a pair.	14%	34%	17%	24%	7%
5	I'm worried about making mistakes while speaking English.	8%	26%	20%	30%	14%
6	I feel nervous when I can't express my opinion in English	8%	24%	19%	29%	17%
7	I'm afraid my partner will laugh when I speak English with a classmate in a pair.	11%	33%	20%	23%	11%
8	I'm worried about making mistakes when I speak English with a partner.	9%	30%	21%	31%	7%
9	I feel tense when I have to speak English with a classmate in a pair	11%	37%	19%	21%	9%
10	I'm afraid that others in a group discussion will laugh if I speak English.	14%	35%	18%	25%	6%
11	I can feel my heart pounding when it's my turn to speak	10%	27%	19%	29%	13%

Perceived Foreign Language Speaking Self-Competence**Table 2**

1	I can order food in English in a restaurant.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2	I can introduce myself in English during pair work to a classmate	6%	15%	14%	39%	24%
3	I can talk about my hobbies in English during pair work with a classmate	3%	10%	16%	43%	27%
4	I can give an English speech to a group of my classmates	3%	12%	20%	40%	21%

Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety . . .

5	I can give an English presentation as part of a group in front of my class.	4%	14%	19%	38%	22%
6	I can easily join in a conversation with a group of native English speakers	2%	15%	27%	35%	18%
7	I can give street directions in English to a foreigner.	4%	15%	26%	36%	17%
8	I can give an individual speech in English in front of my class	4%	13%	24%	41%	15%
9	I can talk about my hobbies in English during pair work with a classmate.	2%	9%	16%	43%	27%