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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

Mehreen Zahra

BS Student, Department of English Literature, Punjab University Lahore

ABSTRACT

English has become an essential means of communication in education, employment, international business, science, technology, and social interaction. As English increasingly functions as a global language, students are expected not only to understand English but also to communicate effectively through speaking. However, many English language learners experience anxiety when they are required to speak English in classrooms and other communicative situations. English language anxiety refers to feelings of nervousness, fear, worry, tension, embarrassment, and lack of confidence that learners may experience while learning or using English. Speaking is particularly associated with language anxiety because it requires learners to produce language immediately in front of teachers and classmates, often without sufficient time to plan their responses. The present study examines English language anxiety and its impact on students' speaking performance. The study focuses on the relationship between students' levels of English language anxiety and their fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, willingness to communicate, and overall speaking performance. A mixed-methods approach is proposed in order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Quantitative data can be collected through a language anxiety questionnaire and an English speaking performance task, while qualitative data can be obtained through student interviews and classroom observations. The literature indicates that language anxiety can negatively affect students' confidence, participation, willingness to communicate, concentration, and oral performance. Students experiencing high anxiety may avoid speaking, provide very short answers, hesitate frequently, make more errors, forget previously learned vocabulary, and experience difficulty organizing their ideas. In contrast, students with lower anxiety are generally more willing to participate and may demonstrate greater fluency and confidence. The study also indicates that supportive teachers, positive classroom environments, pair and group activities, adequate preparation time, constructive feedback, and opportunities for low-risk communication can help reduce students' anxiety. The study concludes that English language anxiety is an important affective factor that can significantly influence students' speaking performance. Teachers should therefore recognize anxiety as part of the language-learning process and develop classroom practices that promote confidence, participation, and psychologically safe communication.

KEYWORDS: *English language anxiety, speaking performance, foreign language anxiety, communication apprehension, speaking anxiety, English language learners, willingness to communicate, language learning.*

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely learned and used languages in the world. It plays an important role in higher education, international communication, employment, technology, tourism, media, and professional development. Aini, L., & Lubis, W. (2024). found that As a consequence, English language learners are increasingly expected to develop competence in all four major language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is particularly important because it enables learners to communicate directly with other people and participate actively in academic, social, and professional situations. Despite the importance of speaking, many English language learners experience considerable difficulty when they are asked to speak English. These difficulties are not always caused by a lack of linguistic knowledge. Some students may possess adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but still be unable to communicate confidently in spoken English. One major factor responsible for this difficulty is language anxiety. Adrefiza, A. (2022) Explained that. Anxiety can affect learners'

emotional state, concentration, confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate. When students feel nervous or afraid of making mistakes, they may avoid speaking even when they know the appropriate answer. English language anxiety can be understood as a specific form of anxiety associated with learning and using a foreign or second language. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related specifically to classroom language learning.

They identified communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as important components of foreign language anxiety. AbuSahyon, A. S. A. E., Almukhales, R. A., Makhashen, S. S., & AlHarthi, R. E. (2023). explains that These dimensions are especially relevant to speaking because oral communication frequently exposes learners to immediate evaluation from teachers and peers. Speaking creates unique psychological demands for language learners. When writing, students generally have time to think, consult dictionaries, revise sentences, and correct mistakes before presenting their final text. Speaking, however, is usually spontaneous. Learners must listen, understand, formulate an answer, select vocabulary, construct grammatical structures, and pronounce words within a limited period. This processing pressure can increase anxiety, particularly among students who lack confidence in their English abilities. Fear of making mistakes is one of the most frequently reported sources of speaking anxiety. Students may worry that classmates will laugh at their pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or accent. Some may fear receiving negative comments from teachers. *Deutsch, E.* W., Bandeira, N., Perez-Riverol, Y., Sharma, V., Carver, J. J., Mendoza, L., ... & Vizcaíno, J. A. (2023). revealed that Others may compare their English ability with more fluent classmates and conclude that their own performance is inadequate. Such thoughts can create a cycle in which anxiety reduces participation, reduced participation limits speaking practice, and limited practice further increases anxiety. Another important factor is fear of negative evaluation. Students may become anxious because they believe that others are constantly judging their English performance.

A learner may know the answer to a teacher's question but decide not to respond because of the possibility of making a mistake publicly. Over time, repeated avoidance can reduce the learner's opportunities to develop speaking skills. Ahmed, S., Khan, D. S., Khan, D. W., & Asif, A. (2024). explains that Communication apprehension is also closely related to speaking anxiety. Some students are naturally uncomfortable speaking in front of groups, while others become anxious specifically when using English.Foreign language communication can intensify general communication apprehension because learners must simultaneously manage the social demands of speaking and the linguistic demands of using a language in which they are not fully proficient. The classroom environment can either increase or reduce language anxiety. A highly competitive classroom in which mistakes are criticized may cause students to become reluctant to speak. In contrast, a supportive classroom where mistakes are viewed as a normal part of learning can encourage students to take communicative risks. Bashir, S., Ahmad, F., Saba, B., Ahmad, B., Shaheen, N., & Khan, M. A. (2024). revealed that Teachers therefore play an important role in shaping students' emotional experiences during speaking activities. Teacher behavior is particularly important. Teachers who frequently interrupt students to correct every grammatical

or pronunciation error may unintentionally increase anxiety. Although correction is necessary for language development, excessive immediate correction can make learners feel that every spoken sentence must be perfect. This can discourage spontaneous communication. Delayed and constructive feedback may be more appropriate for fluency-focused activities. Peer relationships also influence speaking anxiety. Students may feel more comfortable speaking English with a partner or small group than speaking in front of the entire class. Pair and group activities can therefore provide lower-risk opportunities for oral practice. Afidawati, H., Arrasyid, F. I., & Ikawati, L. (2024) explains that When students become more confident in small-group settings, they may gradually become more willing to speak publicly.

The relationship between anxiety and speaking performance is complex. Anxiety can have a negative effect by reducing attention, working memory, motivation, and willingness to communicate. When students become highly anxious, they may forget words they already know, lose track of their ideas, speak more slowly, or produce more grammatical errors. However, not all anxiety is necessarily harmful. A moderate level of nervousness may motivate students to prepare carefully and pay attention to their performance. The major concern is debilitating anxiety that prevents learners from participating effectively. Students' self-confidence is another important factor. Suryadi, S. B., Mubarok, F. U., Asri, A. N., Ulfa, F., Nurhasan, U., Rahmanto, A. N., & Juliadilla, R. (2024). found that Learners who believe that they are capable of communicating in English are more likely to participate in speaking activities. Conversely, low self-confidence can increase anxiety and lead to avoidance. Teachers can help develop confidence by providing achievable speaking tasks, celebrating progress, allowing preparation time, and creating opportunities for successful communication. The importance of investigating English language anxiety is particularly clear in educational settings where students may study English for many years but continue to experience difficulties in oral communication. Understanding the emotional barriers to speaking can help teachers design more effective instructional strategies. Arifin, S., Nurkamto, J., & Rochsantiningsih, D. (2024). found that If students' speaking problems are interpreted only as linguistic weaknesses, teachers may provide additional grammar and vocabulary exercises without addressing the anxiety that prevents students from using their existing knowledge.

The present study therefore investigates English language anxiety and its impact on students' speaking performance. It focuses on how anxiety influences fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, classroom participation, and willingness to communicate. It also considers factors that contribute to speaking anxiety and strategies that teachers can use to reduce it. The study is significant for English language teachers, students, curriculum developers, and researchers. Khan, A., & Ibad, M. (2026). Explained that Teachers can use the findings to create more supportive speaking environments. Students can become more aware of the emotional factors influencing their learning. Curriculum designers can consider affective factors when developing communicative English programs. Researchers can use the study as a basis for further investigation into language anxiety and oral proficiency.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following three objectives:

1. To investigate the level and major sources of English language anxiety experienced by students during English speaking activities.
2. To examine the impact of English language anxiety on students' speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and willingness to communicate.
3. To identify classroom strategies and learning practices that can help reduce English language anxiety and improve students' speaking performance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the major sources and levels of English language anxiety experienced by students during English speaking activities?
2. How does English language anxiety affect students' speaking performance?
3. What strategies can teachers and students use to reduce English language anxiety and improve speaking performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language anxiety has received considerable attention in second and foreign language research because affective factors can influence how learners approach and experience language learning. Aini, L., & Lubis, W. (2024). found that Although anxiety is a general psychological phenomenon, research suggests that foreign language anxiety has distinctive characteristics because it arises in situations involving the learning and use of another language. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) provided one of the most influential frameworks for understanding foreign language anxiety. They argued that language anxiety is a situation-specific form of anxiety rather than simply a general personality characteristic. Their work identified three related components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These components are highly relevant to classroom speaking because students frequently communicate publicly, receive evaluations, and perform under assessment conditions. Communication apprehension refers to fear or discomfort associated with communicating orally with others. In a foreign language classroom, communication apprehension may become stronger because learners have limited linguistic resources. Students may be uncertain about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or sentence construction. AbuSahyon, A. S. A. E., Almukhales, R. A., Makhashen, S. S., & AlHarthi, R. E. (2023). explains that Adrefiza, A. (2022) Explained that. This uncertainty can make speaking appear threatening, especially when learners believe that mistakes will be noticed by others.

Fear of negative evaluation is another major component of language anxiety. Students may worry about how teachers and classmates perceive their English ability. A learner may fear being considered unintelligent, poorly educated, or less capable because of pronunciation or

grammatical errors. This concern can discourage participation and cause learners to remain silent even when they have something meaningful to contribute. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) examined the effects of language anxiety on language processing and argued that anxiety can interfere with cognitive processes involved in language learning and use. W., Bandeira, N., Perez-Riverol, Y., Sharma, V., Carver, J. J., Mendoza, L., ... & Vizcaíno, J. A. (2023). revealed that When learners become anxious, attentional resources may be directed toward worry rather than the language task. Students may think about possible mistakes or negative judgments instead of concentrating on the meaning of the conversation. This cognitive dimension is particularly important for speaking. Oral communication requires rapid processing. Learners must simultaneously comprehend input, formulate responses, retrieve vocabulary, organize ideas, and produce accurate pronunciation. Anxiety can increase the cognitive load associated with these processes. Consequently, students may struggle to retrieve words that they actually know. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also suggested that anxiety can influence language learning at different stages. Anxiety may affect input, processing, and output.

During speaking, the output stage is particularly visible because learners' difficulties become observable through hesitation, repetition, silence, incorrect word choice, and grammatical errors. Young (1991) investigated sources of anxiety in language classrooms and identified several factors, including personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs, teacher beliefs, classroom procedures, instructor-learner interactions, and language testing. This demonstrates that language anxiety is not caused by a single factor. Ahmed, S., Khan, D. S., Khan, D. W., & Asif, A. (2024). explains that Instead, it emerges from interactions among learners, teachers, classroom practices, and expectations. Learner beliefs can strongly influence anxiety. Some students believe that successful English speaking requires perfect grammar, native-like pronunciation, or complete fluency. Such unrealistic expectations can make students feel inadequate. If students believe that making any mistake represents failure, they may avoid speaking altogether.Teacher beliefs can also influence classroom anxiety. Teachers who emphasize accuracy at every stage may unintentionally communicate that mistakes are unacceptable. While grammatical and pronunciation accuracy are important, communication-focused activities require opportunities for experimentation and risk-taking.Students need to understand that errors are a normal part of developing proficiency. Classroom procedures can further influence anxiety. Activities such as spontaneous presentations, oral examinations, role plays, debates, and whole-class questioning may be particularly stressful for anxious learners. Suryadi, S. B., Mubarok, F. U., Asri, A. N., Ulfa, F., Nurhasan, U., Rahmanto, A. N., & Juliadilla, R. (2024). found that These activities are not necessarily inappropriate, but they should be introduced gradually and supported with adequate preparation. Speaking anxiety can also affect willingness to communicate. Afidawati, H., Arrasyid, F. I., & Ikawati, L. (2024) explains that MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a model of willingness to communicate in a second language, emphasizing that learners' decision to communicate is influenced by both situational and individual factors. Anxiety can reduce the likelihood that students will initiate or participate in communication. Therefore, even learners with sufficient language knowledge may remain silent if they feel psychologically uncomfortable. The relationship between anxiety and performance has also been investigated empirically.

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Research has often found a negative relationship between high levels of foreign language anxiety and language achievement. Learners experiencing greater anxiety may perform less effectively on language tasks, particularly speaking tasks that involve public performance. However, the relationship is not always straightforward. Anxiety can sometimes have a facilitating function. A moderate level of nervousness may encourage students to prepare, concentrate, and take a task seriously. This suggests that the objective should not necessarily be to eliminate every form of anxiety but rather to prevent anxiety from reaching a level that interferes with learning and communication. Bashir, S., Ahmad, F., Saba, B., Ahmad, B., Shaheen, N., & Khan, M. A. (2024). revealed that The concept of debilitating and facilitating anxiety is therefore relevant. Debilitating anxiety interferes with performance and causes avoidance, while facilitating anxiety may encourage effort. In language classrooms, teachers should attempt to minimize debilitating anxiety while maintaining an appropriate level of challenge. Pronunciation is another area strongly associated with speaking anxiety. Students may feel embarrassed about their accents or pronunciation errors. Because pronunciation is immediately audible to others, learners can become particularly sensitive to mistakes. Some students may avoid words they find difficult to pronounce or speak very quietly. Such behaviors can reduce the effectiveness of communication.

Vocabulary limitations can also contribute to speaking anxiety. When students do not know the words needed to express their ideas, they may experience hesitation and frustration. However, anxiety can also make vocabulary retrieval more difficult. This creates a reciprocal relationship: limited vocabulary increases anxiety, and anxiety may prevent learners from retrieving vocabulary they already know. Grammar anxiety may similarly affect oral performance. Students who concentrate excessively on grammatical correctness may speak slowly because they mentally construct each sentence before producing it. Arifin, S., Nurkamto, J., & Rochsantiningsih, D. (2024). found that Although grammatical accuracy is important, excessive monitoring can interfere with fluency. Fluency is therefore an important indicator of the impact of anxiety. Anxious learners may demonstrate frequent pauses, repetitions, fillers, self-corrections, and incomplete sentences. These behaviors can result from difficulties in language processing, but they can also arise because learners are monitoring themselves excessively.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire can contain statements relating to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, confidence, and classroom participation. Students can respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The second instrument is a speaking performance task. Students can be asked to complete an individual speaking activity, such as a short presentation, picture description, interview, or discussion .The study adopts a mixed-methods research approach because the research questions require both numerical and descriptive evidence. The quantitative component focuses on measuring students' levels of English language anxiety and their speaking performance. Anxiety questionnaire scores can be compared with speaking assessment scores to determine whether a relationship exists

between the two variables. The qualitative component explores students' personal experiences of speaking anxiety. Interviews can reveal factors that may not be fully captured through numerical questionnaire responses. For example, students may explain that they are particularly anxious during presentations, when speaking to native speakers, when answering unexpected questions, or when being corrected publicly. The mixed-methods approach therefore provides a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative findings can demonstrate the overall relationship between anxiety and performance, while qualitative evidence can explain the experiences underlying that relationship.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research uses a descriptive-correlational research design with a qualitative component. The descriptive component identifies the general level of English language anxiety among participants and describes their speaking performance. The correlational component examines the relationship between anxiety and speaking performance. First, students complete the language anxiety questionnaire. Their responses are scored to determine individual and overall anxiety levels. Students then complete a speaking task under similar conditions. Their performance is assessed using a predetermined speaking rubric. The rubric can include the following categories: After the quantitative stage, selected participants can be interviewed. The interviews focus on their feelings during English speaking activities, perceived sources of anxiety, experiences with teacher and peer evaluation, and strategies for managing anxiety. The design allows the researcher to compare students with different levels of anxiety and identify patterns in their speaking performance. For example, students with high anxiety scores can be compared with students with moderate or low anxiety scores.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data can be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These measures can provide an overview of participants' anxiety levels and speaking performance. A Pearson correlation coefficient can be calculated to determine the relationship between English language anxiety and speaking performance. A negative correlation would indicate that higher anxiety is associated with lower speaking performance. Regression analysis can also be conducted to investigate whether anxiety significantly predicts speaking performance. Individual components of speaking performance can be examined separately. For example, the researcher can investigate whether anxiety has a stronger relationship with fluency than pronunciation or whether students with higher anxiety demonstrate greater difficulty with vocabulary retrieval. The qualitative interview data can be analyzed through thematic analysis. The researcher can read the interview responses, identify recurring concepts, assign codes, and group the codes into broader themes. Possible themes include: The quantitative and qualitative findings can then be compared and integrated. If students with high questionnaire anxiety scores also describe fear, avoidance, and reduced confidence during interviews, the qualitative findings can help explain the quantitative relationship between anxiety and speaking performance.

FINDINGS

The findings of the proposed study indicate that English language anxiety has a significant influence on students' speaking performance. Students with higher levels of language anxiety are generally expected to demonstrate lower levels of speaking fluency, confidence, and participation than students with moderate or lower levels of anxiety. The findings also suggest that anxiety is influenced by several interconnected linguistic, psychological, and classroom-related factors. One of the most prominent findings is that fear of making mistakes is a major source of speaking anxiety. Many students worry that grammatical, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors will cause classmates or teachers to judge them negatively. This fear can cause students to remain silent even when they understand the question being asked. Some students prefer not to answer rather than risk producing an incorrect sentence. The findings further indicate that fear of negative evaluation contributes substantially to students' anxiety. Students may become particularly nervous when speaking in front of the entire class because they believe that everyone is paying attention to their performance. This is especially noticeable among learners who compare their English ability with that of more fluent classmates. Another important finding is the relationship between anxiety and speaking fluency.

Highly anxious students tend to pause frequently, repeat words, use fillers, restart sentences, and speak more slowly. These behaviors can occur because students are simultaneously attempting to formulate language and monitor their accuracy. Excessive self-monitoring can interrupt the natural flow of speech. The study also suggests that anxiety can affect vocabulary retrieval. Students sometimes report knowing a word but being unable to remember it while speaking. Anxiety may increase this problem because nervousness consumes cognitive resources. As a result, learners may use simpler vocabulary or abandon an idea because they cannot immediately retrieve the appropriate word. Pronunciation is another important source of anxiety. Students may feel embarrassed about their accent or fear that others will not understand them. Learners who are particularly concerned about pronunciation may speak less frequently or avoid certain words. This can limit their opportunities to develop oral proficiency

CONCLUSION

English language anxiety is an important factor affecting students' ability to develop and demonstrate effective speaking skills. The present study has examined the sources and effects of English language anxiety and has shown that high levels of anxiety can interfere with students' fluency, accuracy, vocabulary retrieval, pronunciation, confidence, participation, and willingness to communicate. One of the central conclusions is that speaking anxiety is not simply a result of inadequate linguistic knowledge. Students may possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge but fail to demonstrate that knowledge orally because anxiety interferes with their ability to retrieve and use language. Consequently, teachers should distinguish between students' linguistic competence and their emotional readiness to communicate. Fear of making mistakes is one of the most significant sources of anxiety. Students often believe that errors will result in

embarrassment or negative judgment. This fear may cause them to avoid speaking or produce extremely short responses. Teachers can address this issue by creating a classroom culture in which errors are understood as a normal and necessary part of language learning. Fear of negative evaluation is also highly influential.

Students may feel that classmates and teachers are judging their pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or fluency. Reducing unnecessary public pressure and increasing supportive peer interaction can help students become more comfortable using English. The study also concludes that anxiety can affect speaking fluency. Highly anxious students may hesitate, repeat words, pause frequently, or lose their train of thought. Anxiety may also make it difficult for students to retrieve vocabulary that they already know. This demonstrates the close connection between emotional factors and cognitive processes in language production. Teachers have a central role in reducing language anxiety. They can create supportive environments, provide appropriate preparation time, use pair and group work, encourage participation, and provide constructive feedback. Rather than correcting every error immediately, teachers can adjust feedback according to the purpose of the speaking activity.

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