

## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FACTORS CAUSING ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALOCHISTAN, QUETTA

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### **Abstract**

*Anxiety is the worried state of mind. It can affect the second language learning process. Therefore it has been greatly focused by the researchers all over the world. This study has aimed at exploring the factors that are responsible for foreign language speaking anxiety among the postgraduate students of University of Balochistan, Pakistan. Survey research method, a quantitative research design, was employed in which a questionnaire comprising eighteen items was adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Descriptive and inferential data were performed through SPSS (version, 21). The findings of the study revealed that the postgraduate students of University of Balochistan experienced anxiety due to numerous factors in their EFL classroom. This study has implications on both the fields of English language teaching and learning in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** *English language, speaking anxiety, teacher-centred classroom, inter-language system.*

### **Introduction**

The medium of instruction in Pakistan at intermediate and tertiary level is English. Moreover candidates avail handsome employment opportunities on mastering English language particularly the speaking skill. It is valued as the most important skill, yet it is the neglected skill too in the Pakistani teaching and learning context (Nazir, Bashir and Raja, 2014). Thus students put endless efforts to learn English language well during their study at college and university level. However, despite studying English language for many years, it seems their efforts go in vain as they find themselves not fluent in the target language.

According to Awan, Azher, Anwar and Naz (2010) learning English well has always been a problem for Pakistani students because they are in contact with English language only in teacher-centred classroom. Teachers dominate and learners get fewer opportunities to practice English language. Similarly in the community there are almost no chances to practice it. When it comes to speak English language students hesitate to communicate in the target language. Majority of students feel anxiety when they are asked to communicate in English language.

According to Na (2007) anxiety discourages students and they lose confidence in their potential to learn the foreign language (FL) and they do not participate in language learning activities in EFL classroom. Spolsky (1989) stated that FL students' metacognitive assumption that they are unable to communicate fluently in the target language often leads them to their reluctance and avoidance of extempore communication activity. In the same vein, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argued that speaking anxiety may leave harmful effects on the communication skill of a learner and he or she always apprehends to take part in any spontaneous communication activity in the foreign language. Anxiety may negatively affect learner's motivation and his or her attitude to learn the target language (Young, 1986). Apparently there will be low performance of the learner in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Horowitz & Young, 1986). In a mixed method research, Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) conducted a study on Turkish EFL students. 383 students were selected from preparatory program at a state university. The findings of the quantitative study revealed that the learners experienced speaking anxiety at low level. On the other hand, majority of the students in their interviews reported that they become anxious when they attempt to speak English language. In another study Na (2007) found that foreign language anxiety demotivated students and they lost confidence in their potential to learn foreign language. It led to their avoidance in participation in classroom activities and in giving up learning foreign language. According to Tanveer (2007), "feelings of anxiety, apprehension and nervousness are commonly expressed by second/foreign language learners in learning to speak a second/foreign language and are considered to exert a potentially negative and detrimental effect on communication in the target language" (p. iii).

This study is aimed at exploring the factors responsible for causing English speaking anxiety among foreign language learners. Postgraduate students from Science and Arts departments of University of Balochistan, Pakistan participated in this study. English is the compulsory subject and the medium of instruction at the university. Since English language is regarded the key to success for learners in Pakistan, the findings of this study would benefit students in terms EFL teachers would devise strategies from these results to help learners cope with anxiety that inhibits their speaking skill.

### **Significance of the Study**

Speaking skill has been found as the most anxiety provoking skill when compared with other skills of language (Balemir, 2009; Daly and Price, 1991; Melouah, Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1990). In their study, Koch and Terrell (1991) stated that the majority of the learners reported that they became anxious when they attempted to perform in the oral skits in their language classroom. Similarly students, who have not yet become anxious in other fields of learning, experienced speaking anxiety (Horwitz et. al, 1986). In another study students reported lesser degree of anxiety in reading silently and writing tasks compared to speaking tasks to perform in classroom (Young, 1990). Hence myriad factors have been reported that cause anxiety when second language learners attempt to speak a foreign language in their classroom.

According to most learners experience anxiety due to their particular accent, similarly many learners become anxious when they could make only small talks in the target language due to the fact that they lacked word power. In the same vein, grammatical rules also contribute in learners' experiencing anxiety at the time of

attempting to speak in their classroom (MacIntyre, 1995). Among classroom-related anxiety, teachers' corrective habit, lack of empathy, ambiguous class schedule and syllabi etc. may lead students to anxiety in the target language (Appleby, 1990). Beside teacher-induced anxiety, peer factor can be a source to induce anxiety among the second language learners in FL classroom. Allwright and Bailey (1991) discussed that learners often experience peer pressure as their better performance in the target language can earn them appreciation of the teacher which leads to the resentment of their peers in FL classroom. MacIntyre (1999) considered multicultural environment another important factor to increase anxiety level among the learners of foreign language.

Past studies have attributed many causes to foreign language speaking anxiety. Vogely (1998) conducted a study on Spanish-learning university students and found that poor pronunciation, different accents, fast speech pace, and too soft voice are the sources that cause listening anxiety. She concluded that when a listener does not understand what he or she hears, becomes anxious. In another study Lee (1997) found that learners become anxious when they do not comprehend every word and idea given in a text. In reading comprehension, they are given paragraphs to read and to answer the given questions. This arouses frustration in them as written passages may not give the readers complete idea of the context of the text. At university, when students find themselves surrounded by fellow experts with better language skills in the target language, they feel an atmosphere of competition and emotionally challenging around them. This complicity produces a fear among the students and it leads to the frustration and discomfort for the learners of a language (Tóth et al, 2011). In his study Dalkilic (2001) described an interviewee who had reported that he was not disturbed when he spoke in Turkish in his class, but in his language course, he had to speak English, a different language from his own native language. Speaking English in his class, made him feel anxious.

Based on the review of the existing literature on FL speaking anxiety, this study formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the causes that are responsible for English speaking anxiety among postgraduate students of University of Balochistan, Pakistan?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference in English speaking anxiety causes across gender?

### **Method**

This study used survey research method. According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009), "survey research involves collecting data to test hypotheses or to answer questions about people's opinions on some topic or issue," (p. 183).

### **Instrument**

This study modified a questionnaire on foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). The questionnaire used only 18 items out of 33 of the scale; since they solely emphasized on foreign language speaking anxiety (Mehmoodzadeh, 2012). The items were based on three concepts: inter-language phonology, inter-language grammar and inter-language meaning system. These concepts focus on different aspects of the language, for example, inter-language phonology focuses on the phonological and phonetic aspects of the language, inter-language grammar emphasizes on the syntactic aspects of the language, whereas inter-language meaning system deals with the semantic and pragmatic

aspects of the language. Cronbach Alpha test was computed for these items which was  $\alpha=0.80$ . The questionnaire used five-points Likert-Scale.

Table 1. Distribution of the 18 items on the concepts based on the FLA factors

Concepts based on the FLA factors	No. of items in the Questionnaire
Inter-language Phonology	1,4,7,10,13,16
Inter-language Grammar	2,5,8,11,14,17
Iner-language Meaning System	3,6,9,12,15,18

### Participants

240 (120 male and 120 female) students from different disciplines of the University of Balochistan, UoB, participated in this study. They were studying 'Functional English Language' as compulsory subject in their course of study.

### Sample

The participants were selected through convenience sampling method. According to Ross (2005), "the main assumption associated with convenience sampling is that the members of target population are homogenous. That is, that there would be no difference in the research results obtained from a random sample, a nearby sample, a co-operative sample, or a sample gathered in some inaccessible part of the population" (p. 7).

### Procedure

Before data collection formal consent from the heads of the departments was sought. Later the researcher informed the participants about the nature of the research study. In addition, it was assured to them that their individual identity would not be revealed in the publication of the study. The questionnaire was then distributed among the participants to fill it up and return after completion. It was done in the presence of the researcher.

### Data Analysis

To answer the first research question of the study, the SPSS (version, 21) was used to perform the descriptive statistics that is the means, and standard deviation were computed to determine the causes of English speaking anxiety among the participants. Similarly, in order to find out if there is any statistical significant difference among the male and female participants regarding speaking anxiety, Samples Independent t-test was also run in SPSS (version, 21).

### Findings of the Study

The findings of the first research question included the results of the descriptive statistics on three constructs of English speaking anxiety. Below is the illustration of the descriptive results on the three constructs:

Table 2. Items related to anxiety factors concerning Inter-language phonology

Items	Mean	St. Deviation
I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class	3.40	1.80
I keep thinking that the other students have better English accents than I do.	2.78	1.09
I never feel ashamed when other students are hearing my English accent in my language class.	3.21	1.04

The more I try to speak English fluently in the class the more disappointed I get.	3.85*	0.91
It worries me when I cannot speak English with a good accent in my language class	3.21	1.07
I always feel that the other students will laugh at my accent as I speak English in class.	3.55**	1.02

Note. \*the highest and \*\* second highest

In the table 2, it was observed that the majority of the participants ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=0.91$ ) ascribed their anxiety to the factor that they became anxious when they attempted to speak English fluently but they were disappointed. Another important factor was noted that the participants ( $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) reported that they experienced anxiety in their FL classroom when their peers laughed at their accent in speaking English language.

Table 3. Items related to anxiety factors concerning Inter-language grammar

Items	Mean	St. Deviation
I usually feel comfortable when using grammar in my speaking in my language class.	3.42	1.08
In my language class, it disturbs me when I cannot speak English very much because of my grammar.	3.79**	0.96
I would be worried failing to use correct grammar in my speaking in my language class.	3.90*	0.80
I wonder why some people feel very self-conscious when teacher corrects their grammatical mistakes.	3.38	0.99
When I want to use correct grammar to speak English in the class, I get so nervous that I forget what to say.	3.82	0.94
It frightens me when I cannot speak English without any grammatical mistakes in the class	3.61	0.98

Note. \*the highest and \*\* second highest

Table 3 illustrates that many participants ( $M=3.90$ ,  $SD=0.824$ ) felt anxiety due to their apprehension to use grammar incorrectly at the time of speaking English in their language class. Similarly, students ( $M=3.79$ ,  $SD=0.97$ ) also reported that they experienced anxiety due to fact that grammar inhibited them from speaking English in their language classroom. This study was conducted in the context where Grammar Translation Method is overwhelmingly used to teach English language and there is great emphasis on learning and using grammar rules.

Table 4. Items related to anxiety factors concerning Inter-language meaning system

Items	Mean	St. Deviation
I become confused when the teacher does not understand what I mean in English.	3.89**	0.88
I feel fear when I am not sure of saying something that makes sense in English.	3.73	0.90
I can feel my heart beating when the teacher asks	4.03*	0.77



me the question; “what do you mean?”		
While speaking in my language class, I feel afraid when I translate word by word the expressions from my native language into English language.	3.76	0.95
In my language class, I feel pressured when I use English sentences not heard before	3.85	1.04
I do not feel afraid when the teacher does not understand what I mean in English.	3.44	1.08

Note. \*the highest and \*\* second highest

Table 4 indicates that a considerable number of the participants ( $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=0.77$ ) stated that they became worried when they failed to convey their queries to their teacher regarding particular issues in English language class. Following the majority, students ( $M=3.89$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ) also exhibited apprehension on their incomprehensible responses to their FL teachers in their language classroom.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for overall constructs of inter-language system

Constructs	Mean	St. Deviation
Inter-language phonology	20.00	2.76
Inter-language grammar	21.91	2.35
Inter-language meaning system	22.98	2.66

Table 5 exhibited the scores for overall constructs of inter-language system in which inter-language phonology was  $M=20.00$ ,  $SD=2.76$ ; inter-language grammar was  $M=21.91$ ,  $SD=2.35$ , and inter-language meaning system was measured  $M=22.98$ ,  $SD=2.66$ . These results are shown in the given graph:

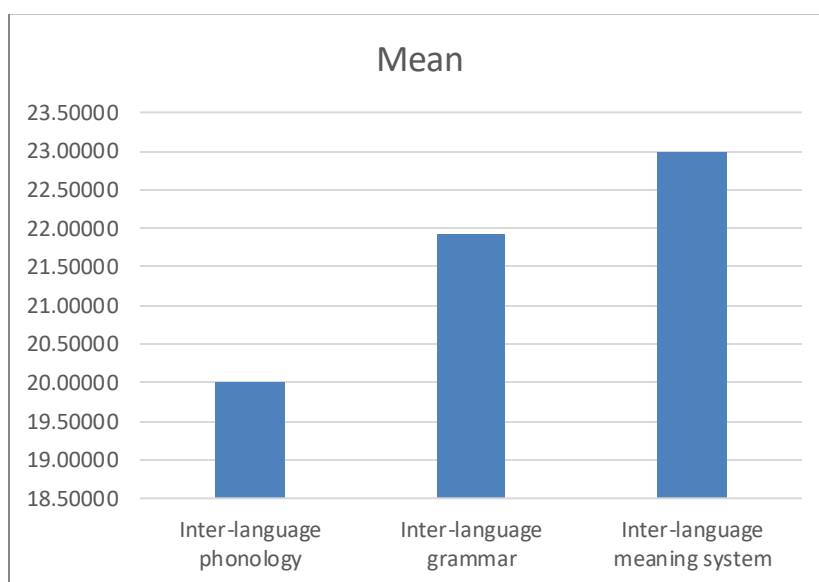


Fig 5.1 presents a comparison among the constructs of inter-language system. It clearly indicates that the participants exhibited highest degree of anxiety against the

items of the questionnaire related to the inter-language meaning system ( $M=22.98$ ,  $SD=2.66$ ).

The findings of the second research question comprised the results of the Samples Independent t-test that computed the possible statistical significant difference across gender for English speaking anxiety factors among students. Table 5 presents the results of the Samples Independent t-test.

Table 6. Samples Independent t-test results for Speaking Anxiety across Gender

Speaking Anxiety Constructs	Gender	Mean	SD	T	Df	p
Inter-language Phonology	Male	20.19	2.68	-1.05	238	0.29
	Female	19.81	2.83			
Inter-language Grammar	Male	21.81	2.44	0.63	238	0.53
	Female	22.00	2.25			
Inter-language Meaning system	Male	22.80	2.73	1.02	238	0.31
	Female	23.15	2.58			

Table 6 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference for foreign language speaking anxiety factors among male and female participants of the study.

### Discussion

The inclusive findings of the study show that the students at tertiary feel foreign language classroom anxiety due to myriad factors. Moreover, the results of the first research question indicate that the inter-language meaning system emerged as the major factor that contributed to the highest degree of foreign language classroom anxiety among the postgraduate students of the University of Balochistan, Pakistan. Their ambiguous sentences could not convey their meaning to their instructors when they attempted to speak in their foreign language classroom. Similar findings were reported by previous studies (Alrabai, 2015; Mehmoodzadeh, 2012; Liu, 2006; Price, 1991; Young, 1990). Students' anxiety in this regard can be minimized by making smaller groups of learners in their FL classroom speaking activities (Young, 1990).

Following inter-language meaning system, inter-language grammar emerged as the second anxiety provoking factor among the postgraduate students of the University of Balochistan, Pakistan. This is in line with the findings of the previous research studies (Awan et al, 2010; Alsowat, 2016). According to Woodrow (2006) the fear of committing grammatical errors can be handled if teachers support and motivate foreign language learners during their classroom interactions.

The findings of the second research question indicate that there was no statistical significant difference for English speaking anxiety between the male and female students of the University of Balochistan, Pakistan. The possible reason for this similarity might be the background they share together. This finding is supported by the previous research studies of (Chiang, 2012; Waseem & Jibeen, 2013).

### Conclusions

Thus “anxiety may affect the quality of an individual’s communication or willingness to communicate” (Young 1991, p. 58) It is anxious students following their wrong self-perceptions of their inadequacies in the target language do not concentrate upon their tasks and thus their performance in the target language declines.

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