THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNICATION ANXIETY ON HIGHER SECONDARY ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

The study investigates the impacts of communication anxiety among higher secondary level ESL students in Ghotki, Pakistan, wherein the majority of learners do not speak a native language, other than English, yet, English is a highly significant academic subject. The communication anxiety compromises the capability of the learners to speak without fear, attend classes and the performances of the learners. The main aim was to identify the level of communication anxiety among the ESL students and to explore how the personal, classroom, and cultural-linguistic factors contribute to communication anxiety (self-esteem, introversion, social anxiety, accent and first language). Moreover, the study was to investigate the impact of anxiety on the classroom participation of learners and academic performance, and to elaborate whether there were gender differences in communication anxiety. The quantitative research design involving structured questionnaire was followed where 200 students (100 males and 100 females) of four higher secondary schools were employed in Ghotki. The SPSS was used to analyze data, and it utilized the descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis and t-tests. The results showed that a moderate to high level of communication anxiety was found in 78.5% of the learners. The regression analysis findings have identified the personal factors as a significant predictor of communication anxiety (B = 0.45, p = 0.000) followed by the classroom environment predictors (B = 0.32, p = 0.001) and the cultural- linguistic have been determined as predictors (B = 0.28, p = 0.003). Communication anxiety scales were noted to have poor relationship with academic performance (r = -0.32, p = 0.0025). Also, the levels of anxiety among the female learners were very high as compared to the male learners. Communication anxiety is another issue that contributes greatly to effective English learning in Ghotki. The psychological, social, and cultural aspects of ESL should be considered in order to enhance its performance in similar educational settings.

Keywords: Anxiety, Communication Anxiety, ESL Learners

1. Introduction

The issue of communication anxiety has become a determining factor of affective importance in the field of second language acquisition, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) situations wherein the learner must actively engage in classroom conversations. It has been repeatedly shown that learners with a high degree of communication anxiety are prone to avoiding speaking activities and tasks, oral presentations, as well as interactive classroom activities, thus reducing the opportunities of engaging in a meaningful language practice and advancement (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Yashima et al., 2018; Malik et al., 2021). Communication anxiety is expressed through a fear of negative judgment, lack of self-confidence, physical symptoms, and anxiety in the process of oral communication, which can prevent the readiness of learners to use English (Wang et al., 2022; Xue and Noels, 2025). Such anxiety can be a major barrier to language proficiency development, classroom interaction, and general academic achievement in a classroom, especially in the higher secondary level (Soomro et al., 2019; Afsar et al., 2023).

A combination of personal, classroom- and socio-cultural factors accentuates the effect of communication anxiety. Such personal factors as low self-esteem, introversion, and social

anxiety have been cited to be strong predictors of communication apprehension in ESL learners (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Malik et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). The relationship between the teacher and the students in classrooms, which include the judgment of peers, and feedback practices are decisive determinants in either reducing or enhancing the level of anxiety among learners (Yashima et al., 2018; Soomro et al., 2019). Additionally, the cultural and linguistic factors, including the fear of being discriminated against due to accent, the predominance of the original language, and the conscientious socio-cultural beliefs, also play their role in increasing the level of anxiety, especially in those areas where participation in classrooms is traditionally inhibited (Mulyani, 2018; Younas et al., 2020; Xue and Noels, 2025). All of these aspects combined influence the experiences of learners and define their rates of engagement in the ESL classroom.

Although there is an increasing amount of literature on language anxiety, the empirical studies on communication anxiety in ESL higher secondary students are scarce and the study on communication anxiety among higher secondary students in Ghotki. This gap becomes especially high considering the cultural, linguistic, and educational peculiarities of the region, when students can easily experience a high level of social pressure and lack of exposure to communicative features of the English language (Mulyani, 2018; Younas et al., 2020). The current research fills this gap by exploring the causes and consequences of communication anxiety on the classroom attendance, academic achievement, and the acquisition of language among ESL students in the higher secondary level in Ghotki. This research will be used to quantify the communication anxiety, determine the personal, classroom, and cultural predictors of communication anxiety, and establish the effects of communication anxiety on the academic performance of learners. The importance of the study is that it can potentially enlighten teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers on the emotional barriers that affect ESL learners to guide them towards creating supportive teaching methods and anxiety-relieving language learning classrooms that can support language learning and academic success (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Afsar et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

This study aims to investigate the degree of communication anxiety among higher secondary ESL learners during classroom activities and how such anxiety can be influenced by person-related elements such as self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety, classroom-related issues such as teacher-student interaction and peer judgment, and contextual and linguistic factors such as an emphasis on the first language and accent issues. Additionally, it explores the influence of communication anxiety on both classroom performance and academic performance of learners and in addition delves on whether there are gender differences regarding the experience of communication anxiety in the case of ESL learners. These are the following research questions for this study:

1) To what extent do ESL learners at the higher secondary level in Ghotki experience communication anxiety in classroom settings?
2) How do personal factors (self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety) affect communication anxiety among ESL learners?
3) What role does the classroom environment (teacher-student interaction and peer judgment) play in influencing communication anxiety in ESL learners?
4) How do cultural and linguistic factors (such as native language and accent) contribute to communication anxiety in ESL learners in Ghotki?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Factors Contributing to Communication Anxiety in ESL Learners

The level of communication anxiety among ESL learners is usually rooted in fears and nervousness regarding speaking English to people who encounter a deficiency of their language skills and feel awkward during oral communication, specifically in classroom conditions (Hajiyeva, 2024). Anticipatory anxiety also contributes to the aggravation of this condition as learners fear to be called to talk, which interrupts the state of concentration and productive speaking skills development (Malik et al., 2021). The fear of being judged as a result of not speaking English easily generally causes ESL learners to acquire low fluency and confidence in English (Hanifa, 2018). Other elements that increase anxiety include group tasks, as fear of not understanding and being mocked by peers makes one withdraw, and offer no chance of practicing languages (Alghorbany & Hamzah, 2020). Silence, refusal to participate, or missing oral assessments are the strategies of avoidance typical of the negative impact on developing speaking skills in the long term (Cong & Li, 2022). Anxiety is further supported by physical symptoms such as climbing heart rate, sweating, and a dry throat as well as trembling (Ma, 2022). Long-term tension and the fear of disadvantageous assessment are the symptoms of pre-speaking anxiety that interferes with cognitive processes and fluency, complicating effective communication even more (Pavelescu, 2023).

Another important factor in communication anxiety is the fear of being judged by peers, where learners have fears of being cynsoded to ridicule or make mistakes in pronunciation or any undesirable reactions that will deter them to engage actively in language processes (Wang et al., 2022). Physical signs, including voice shakings and a dry throat not only hinder the delivery of speech, they also provide humiliation, which can cause anxiety in a new speaking situation (Jibeen et al., 2019). The fear of grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation mistakes also prompts students to stutter or limit speaking because they are afraid to be seen as incompetent (Vural, 2019). The personality characteristic of introversion, shyness, and reticence plays a great role in contributing to anxiety because it makes speaking in front of audience and discussing in a classroom experience especially unsettling (Malik et al., 2021). The levels of anxiety also depend on emotional intelligence since learners with low emotional regulation abilities experience difficulty dealing with nervousness and embarrassment when speaking aloud (Andrienko et al., 2020). Classroom feedback climate environment, characterized by negative or critical feedback, may cause anxiety to increase based on reducing self-esteem and reinforcing fear of errors (Su, 2021). Extraversion is observed to experience less anxiety because the levels of comfort are increased in communication, and introvert students are more likely to feel more afraid in the situations of speech (Yashima et al., 2018). The self-concept and perceived language competence of learners have a strong impact on the anxiety levels with a lack of confidence causing a person to avoid communication opportunities (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). The fear of negative assessment also contributes to the development of anxiety and panic in the sense of speaking publicly, which aggravates the state of emotional suffering and deteriorates the desire to engage in oral activities (Suparlan, 2021). The perceived fear of error is one of the most prevalent emotional impediments that inhibit speaking exercises and cycles the anxiety loop (Mulyani, 2018). Low language competence and the anxiety associated with it also contribute to the fact that learners are afraid of being misunderstood and compared negatively with others, and in these situations, a supportive learning environment is necessary (Naibaho, 2022).

2.2 Classroom Environment and Communication Anxiety

The communication with the students influences their communication anxiety decisively, where the supportive, encouraging and understanding teachers establish a low-anxiety atmosphere in the classroom where students feel free to execute risk in these speaking activities (Salbaş & Ekmekci, 2025). The fear of being evaluated negatively makes anxiety levels much higher, as the students think that the peers are too judgmental about their speaking performance,

and the non-anxious peer climate promotes the willingness to talk more freely (Alnefaie, 2024). Being a positive classroom learner, who is empathetic, respected, and engage in constructive feedback, makes learners feel valued and confident and thus minimize anxiety when attending oral classes (Qin, 2022). Classroom peer support helps to create an aspect of belonging and less pressure to achieve excellence, which makes learners cooperate with the speaking exercises more willingly (Li & Dewaele, 2021). Cooperative learning settings decrease anxiety communication levels because the focus is no longer on personal performance but on the collective objective, which enables the learner to view the errors as a learning experience instead of an embarrassment and thus does not compel the learner to focus or give extra attention to the cognitive and behavioral signs of anxiety (Cao & Yu, 2023).

Classrooms with high levels of competitiveness are likely to cause communication anxiety due to the pressure to perform better than other classmates, whereas a classroom with low levels of competitiveness (and high levels of emphasis on individual progress and cooperation) can reduce the effect of anxiety and foster an inclination to communicate (Dewaele & Albakistani, 2024). Teacher feedback can have a serious impact on anxiety, with constructive and non-judgment feedback helping learners to develop a beneficial perspective on mistakes, whereas negative feedback contributes to growing certain fears and avoiding speaking (Li, 2021). The positive and amicable classroom environment helps learners to make linguistic risks and eliminate fear of making linguistic mistakes in English communication (Henning et al., 2019). Classroom social acceptance reduces anxiety as learners feel that they belong to a supportive community, and isolation and competition exacerbate anxiety when a person communicates (Jiang & Dewaele, 2024). Physical classroom setups that facilitate interaction, including flexible seating, group formation, minimize anxiety through the development of a relaxed communicative atmosphere (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). The flexibility, enthusiasm, and approachability of teachers make the process more pleasing and motivating and reduce communication anxiety levels among the learners considerably (Dewaele et al., 2025). The positive attitude of their peers and positive social interaction decrease the level of apprehension and prompt the learners to participate actively in the speaking activity (Underhill et al., 2019). Firm academic relationships and teacher student relationships lead to inclusiveness, trust, which enables the students to overcome anxiety and engage in classroom communication without fear (Amerstorfer et al., 2021).

2.3 Cultural and Linguistic Barriers in ESL

Accent anxiety is one of the typical problems of ESL learners, especially when non-native accents are viewed as signs of language incompetence and learners, in turn, inhibit communication and restrain language growth (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). On the tertiary level, students feel that they cannot participate in conversations as they are not always sure that they can be misunderstood or insulted on the basis of their accent, which diminishes engagement and removes the opportunity to practice speaking (Morady Moghaddam, 2024). Such a stereotype threat also increases the accent-related anxiety when learners think that their accent can provoke some negative evaluation of their smartness or language skills (Bazhouni, 2020). Concentrating too much on native-like pronunciation inhibits fluency and natural conversation since students will focus on the pronunciation accent rather than passing the message (Betancourt, 2024). Strong foreign accents often subject learners to social and academic isolation, which strengthens anxiety and places a restraint on academic achievements (Wetzel et al., 2020). Accent anxiety is aggravated by low self-esteem, which causes more embarrassment and fear of judgment, which would make it withdraw classroom and social interactions (Tan et al., 2021).

Diversion in the accents of ESL classrooms may decrease the anxiety by exposing the learners to the different accents or may cause anxiety by favoring the native-like accents at the expense

of the learners with a strong accent (Cao & Yu, 2023). Negative views about stereotypes in non-native accents increase anxiety as they promote fear of being negatively evaluated instead of competence in language proficiency (Kim et al., 2019). The fear of accent usually reduces the willingness of a learner to engage in activities involving language, as motivation to sound like a native prevails over communications and performance (Xue & Noels, 2025). Such language barriers as regional dialects and colloquialism as well as differences in accents also may lead to solitude and mental strain among learners who have to adjust to new linguistic settings (Bhatti & Alzahrani, 2023). The prejudice of non-native accent in society has an effect on both social and professional estimation, whereby the learner will not speak out of fear of facing discrimination (Montgomery & Zhang, 2018). The impact of psychological barriers due to their accents and proficiency is tremendous in the cases of rural or non-English speaking background learners with an influence on language learning and sense of belonging (Soomro et al., 2023). The presence of cultural variations in linguistic communicative conventions further promotes anxiety because it enhances the fear of being misconstrued and social exclusion in a foreign language setting (Alisoy, 2024). The insecurity caused by stereotypes about accent and the level of language proficiency prevents social integration and deters being useful to interact with host communities (Nymeyer et al., 2022).

2.4 Impact of Communication Anxiety on ESL Learners' Classroom Participation & Academic Performance

In Pakistan, communication anxiety has been denoted as a significant obstacle to classroom engagement among ESL learners because students are afraid of making an error and receive a negative evaluation, which deteriorates participation in oral discussions and, consequently, language growth and achievement (Abbasi et al., 2020). Anxiety about speaking has been found to decrease the confidence level of learners and their engagement in the classroom by a significant margin, which results in poor academic success because learners are unable to participate in oral activities (Afsar et al., 2023). Students with the high level of anxiety avoid the opportunities to speak, which leads to the stagnation of language proficiency and higher risks of academic failure in ESL classes (Ali et al., 2020). Pronunciation, grammar, and fluency levels of fear have been stated as a potent inhibitory factor in oral participation, thus adversely affecting the language and academic growth rates (Soomro et al., 2019). The teacher behavior is an essential factor, as anxiety-inducing teaching methods are associated with critical and unsupportive instructions, and supportive ones promote attendance and academic performance (Ahmed et al., 2024). The anxiety is also enhanced by fear of being negatively judged by others, and the learners become afraid of communication in the classroom due to presumed poor speaking ability (Fareed et al., 2025).

Task-based language teaching has also been demonstrated to improve communication anxiety through its ability to avail structured and interactive speaking opportunities, which improve confidence, participation and academic achievement (Sarwar et al., 2025). Violating peer hesitation and fear of rejection are also the significant contributions to anxiety since learners who fear to be interrupted in a group discussion will be more inclined to remain silent, restricting speaking practice and academic development (Sartaj & Shah, 2020). Avoidance behaviors have been associated with high communication anxiety and have a negative impact on performance during oral evaluation and academic performance (Khalid & Shahbaz, 2021). Learner anxiety also destroys their motivation levels because fear of committing mistakes leads to avoid the language activities, thereby negating practice and success (Malik & Pervaiz, 2023). Teacher feedback was also discovered to reduce anxiety and arousing participation but worsened disengagement and fear in case of its negative aspects (Khan & Mohammed, 2024). Presentation anxiety restricts the speaking practice and is associated with depreciating language competence and academic performance because of being afraid of being judged by others

(Basit et al., 2019). Peer and teacher emotional and social support decreases anxiety and improves classroom engagement and withdrawal and low grades (Kalsoom et al., 2020). Anxiety about writing also contributes to communication apprehension because it has an adverse impact on performance in written assignments and tests (Wahid et al., 2023). The negative evaluation causes fear and limits the contributions in the classroom and limits learning opportunities which leads to low academic achievement (Abbasi et al., 2019). The language problems with pronunciation and fluency make oral communication anxiety-inducing and prevent language development and academic performance (Afzal, 2018). Classrooms with evaluative orientations increase anxiety when it comes to oral assessments, which has adverse impacts related to performance and interest (Bukhari et al., 2022). The differences between genders in communication anxiety have also been identified as higher among female learners, as their anxiety is caused by society and culture which result in lower participation levels and poor performance rates (Bukhari, 2022).

2.5 Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis

Communication anxiety in ESL learners in Pakistan can only be comprehensively explained in the combined theoretical prism explaining the reluctance of learners to engage in classroom interaction and why they eventually perform poorly in school. Communication Apprehension Theory explicates the fact that fear or anxiety related to actual or potential acts of communication is a leading hindrance to oral participation especially in the ESL learning contexts whereby learners are compelled to deliver in a non-native language (McCroskey, 1977). This fear is expressed in the pattern of avoiding speaking activities, hesitation to participate in discussions, and low involvement in oral exams in the classrooms in Pakistan, which directly limit the language practice and skill progress (Khalid & Shahbaz, 2021). Linguistic fear leads to less frequent linguistic risk taking when learners have fears about failing their communication in English; thus, making them interact less, causing an arrest in language proficiency which eventually converts to poor academic achievement (Afsar et al., 2023). This theory closely corresponds with the current research as it describes the role of communication anxiety as a fundamental predictor of less participation in the classroom and poor performance among higher secondary ESL students in Ghotki.

The explanatory strength of this framework is further enhanced by the Social Anxiety Theory and the Cognitive-Affective Model of Anxiety that refers to the emotional and cognitive aspects of language anxiety. Social Anxiety Theory emphasizes the importance of fear of negative assessment as a crucial factor that prevents ESL learners speaking especially when they think that they may be negatively evaluated and the teacher will note them or the peer evaluates them (Heimberg et al., 2014). In Pakistan, students tend to internalize the fear of accent, sound production, and linguistic proficiency, which makes them avoid classroom communication and decreases the confidence regarding group work (Bukhari et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2020). In addition to that, the Cognitive-Affective Model of Anxiety provides the interaction of self-perceived linguistic inadequacy of learners and affective responses including fear and discomfort that forms a loop of anxiety and avoidance that inhibits participation and negatively affects academic performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Students with low confidence in their language skills have an increased likelihood of developing anxiety during the speaking experience, which constrains interaction and leads to worse outcomes in the language learning situations (Soomro et al., 2019; Kalsoom et al., 2020). Collectively, these theories contribute to a credible premise on the current study as they illustrate the combined influence of psychological, social, and cognitive in impending the occurrence of communication anxiety, classroom attendance, and academic achievement among ESL students in Pakistan.
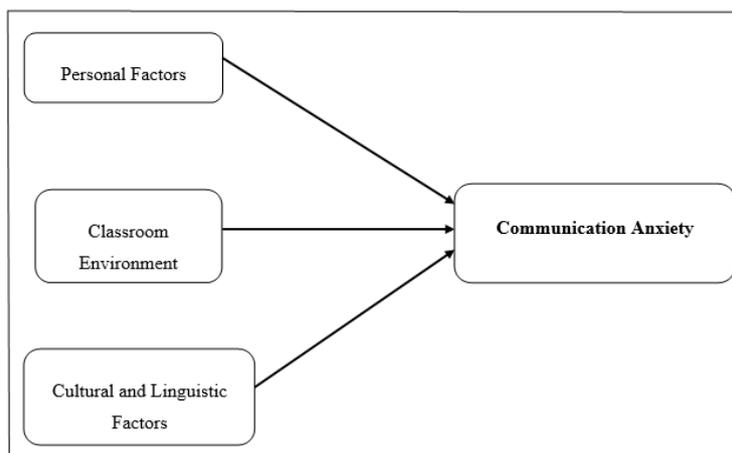
Figure 1. Research Framework

H₁: Communication anxiety positively relates to ESL learners' classroom participation.

H₂: Personal factors significantly predict communication anxiety.

H₃: Classroom environment factors significantly affect communication anxiety.

H₄: Cultural and linguistic factors significantly contribute to communication anxiety.

H₅: Communication anxiety significantly negatively affects academic performance.

H₆: There is a significant difference in communication anxiety levels between male and female learners.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, a quantitative research method was used to investigate the influence of communication anxiety on ESL students in the higher secondary level in Ghotki, Pakistan. To measure the levels of communication anxiety and provide statistical analysis of its dependence on classroom participation and academic results, a quantitative design was believed to be the right type of study to include. This study was conducted under a hypothesis-testing design, so it was possible to use the inferential statistical methods to establish patterns, relationships and factors predictive of communication anxiety. Independent variables included personal factors, classroom settings and cultural-linguistic influences, whereas dependent outcomes were communication anxiety and academic performance. Such a design facilitated the objective evaluation of the anxiety manifestations within EML classrooms and its impact on engagement and performance of learners.

The study population included ESL students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 in both public and private institutions of higher learning in Ghotki. Participants were also chosen using a purposive sampling method since they were directly involved in ESL learning and would tend to feel the anxiety of communication within the classroom. This sampling technique was appropriate since it helped the researcher narrow on learners that had characteristic features of interest as such the data obtained would directly address the objectives of the study. Four educational institutions were selected to take a total sample of 200 students and they were equally split in terms of gender so as to provide a chance of comparing gender difference in communication anxiety. Despite the non-random computation of the sample, the sample gave a comprehensive and contextually similar representation of ESL learners in the higher secondary level within Ghotki.

A structured questionnaire was administered to gather data that were required to evaluate the communication anxiety and communication anxiety relevant factors among ESL learners. The instrument was used to collect demographic data and measure communication anxiety with such indicators as communication apprehension, fear of negative rating, self-confidence, and physical signs of anxiety. It also investigated the factors pertaining to individual factors, classroom environment variables and cultural-linguistic influences based on accent and socio-

cultural background. A five-point Likert scale was used to record the responses so that people could indicate different levels of agreement. Data were analyzed in SPSS to summarize demographic characteristics and levels of anxiety with descriptive statistics whereas inferential statistics were taken to test the hypothesis. The relationships between communication anxiety and academic performance were analyzed with the help of correlation and regression; inferential tests were conducted to investigate gender differences. This analytic process fostered a procedural appreciation of the interaction between communication anxiety and classroom contribution and percentile performances of ESL students within the educational setting of the study.

4. Results

The distribution of the respondents according to their gender is shown in the very first figure (Figure 1), which shows that there is almost equal representation of both male and female learners of ESL which makes effective comparison of the components of communication anxiety between two genders. Figure 2 is a representation of the age distribution with most of the participants representing the age bracket of typical higher secondary age distribution, hence developmental relevance to classroom communication anxiety. Figure 3 illustrates the academic level of the participants by ensuring that the entire respondents were learning in Grade 11 or Grade 12, in accordance with the target population in the study. Figure 4 indicates the representative aspect of institutions, and it shows equal representation of different schools and colleges in Ghotki which improves the contextual validity of the results on communication anxiety and academic performance.
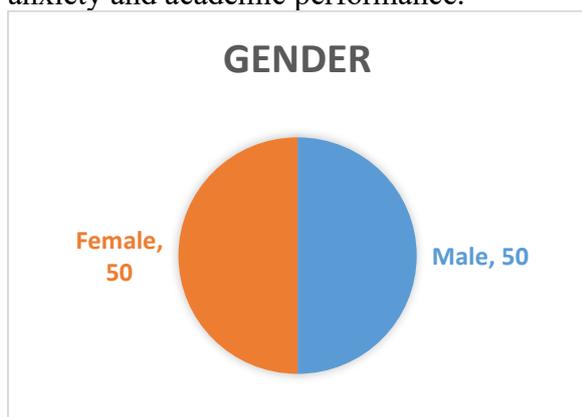

Figure 1. Gender
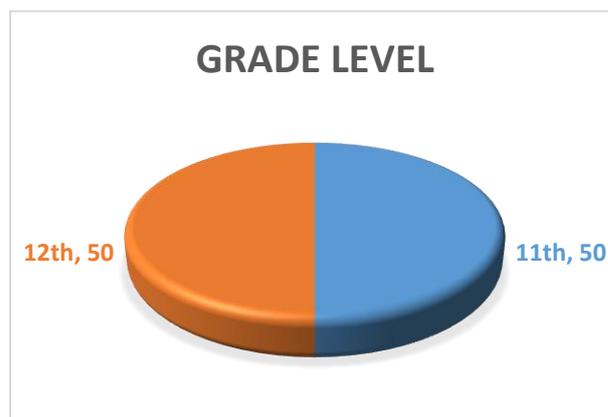
Figure 2. Students' Grade Level

Figure 3. Student's Age

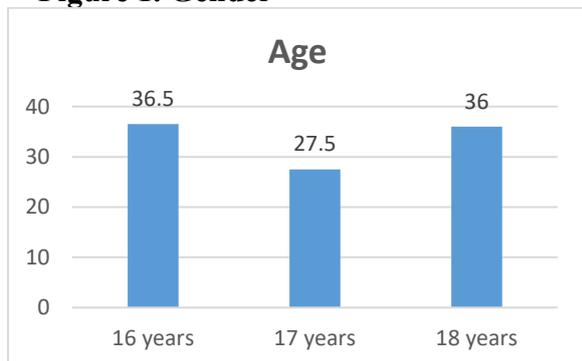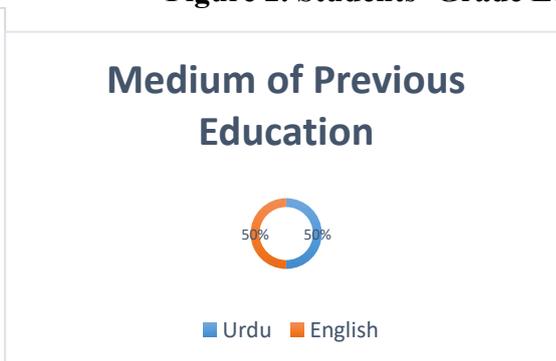Figure 4. Medium of Previous Education

Table 1 demonstrates that communication anxiety is moderate to high in the group of ESL learners in terms of the higher secondary level in Ghotki where the mean score on all of the items is in the range of 3.27 to 3.55. A very high percentage of the respondents assented and agreed strongly that they experience nervousness, tension, and anxiety when asked to speak

English, especially among their peer or during group work. The fear of errors and anticipatory anxiety prior to speaking were also very high which marks avoidance tendencies and discomfort. The results demonstrate that the problem of communication anxiety is widespread and relevant among the participants in the classroom among the study population.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Communication Anxiety

Statement	SD (f,%)	D (f,%)	N (f,%)	A (f,%)	SA (f,%)	Mean	SD
I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class.	27 (13.5%)	31 (15.5%)	28 (14.0%)	60 (30.0%)	54 (27.0%)	3.42	1.38
I get anxious when I know I will be asked to speak English.	29 (14.5%)	31 (15.5%)	34 (17.0%)	52 (26.0%)	54 (27.0%)	3.35	1.40
I find it difficult to start conversations in English during class.	28 (14.0%)	27 (13.5%)	31 (15.5%)	58 (29.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.44	1.39
Speaking English during group activities makes me uncomfortable.	30 (15.0%)	24 (12.0%)	32 (16.0%)	53 (26.5%)	61 (30.5%)	3.46	1.42
I avoid situations where I might have to speak English in front of others.	26 (13.0%)	32 (16.0%)	28 (14.0%)	64 (32.0%)	50 (25.0%)	3.40	1.36
I feel physically uncomfortable when speaking English in front of others.	32 (16.0%)	30 (15.0%)	26 (13.0%)	56 (28.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.37	1.44
I experience anxiety before I have to speak English in class.	31 (15.5%)	32 (16.0%)	35 (17.5%)	46 (23.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.32	1.43
I feel tense when I am expected to speak English in front of my peers.	23 (11.5%)	24 (12.0%)	34 (17.0%)	58 (29.0%)	61 (30.5%)	3.55	1.34
I often experience a dry throat or shaky voice when speaking English.	28 (14.0%)	31 (15.5%)	40 (20.0%)	49 (24.5%)	52 (26.0%)	3.33	1.38
I fear making mistakes when speaking English in front of others.	36 (18.0%)	32 (16.0%)	29 (14.5%)	49 (24.5%)	54 (27.0%)	3.27	1.46

Table 2 demonstrated the personal factors were a significant source of communication anxiety among ESL learners; mean scores ranged between 3.4 and 3.8, which reflects the overall high agreement of this study. A significant percentage of students indicated low self-esteem, introversion, social anxiety, and confidence during English speech, both in and out of the classroom. Consistency on items based on avoidance of social interaction and public speaking is high indicating that the individual has strong withdrawal behavior. The results indicate that individual psychological aspects are a major cause of amplifying communication anxiety among ESL higher secondary learners in Ghotki.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Personal Factors

Statement	SD (f,%)	D (f,%)	N (f,%)	A (f,%)	SA (f,%)	Mean	SD

Statement	SD (f,%)	D (f,%)	N (f,%)	A (f,%)	SA (f,%)	Mean	SD
I feel anxious in social situations even when I am not speaking English.	5 (2.5%)	15 (7.5%)	30 (15.0%)	35 (17.5%)	115 (57.5%)	3.6	1.0
I tend to avoid social interactions where I might need to speak.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	25 (12.5%)	30 (15.0%)	119 (59.5%)	3.7	1.1
I often feel unsure of myself in social situations.	7 (3.5%)	20 (10.0%)	28 (14.0%)	25 (12.5%)	120 (60.0%)	3.6	1.2
I get nervous meeting new people, especially when I have to speak English.	6 (3.0%)	14 (7.0%)	33 (16.5%)	32 (16.0%)	115 (57.5%)	3.7	1.1
I struggle with low self-esteem when speaking English in front of others.	9 (4.5%)	21 (10.5%)	25 (12.5%)	25 (12.5%)	120 (60.0%)	3.8	1.0
I am introverted and prefer to keep to myself rather than engage in group activities.	7 (3.5%)	15 (7.5%)	32 (16.0%)	30 (15.0%)	116 (58.0%)	3.5	1.1
I feel anxious when I need to express myself in English, even outside the classroom.	10 (5.0%)	18 (9.0%)	27 (13.5%)	30 (15.0%)	115 (57.5%)	3.4	1.2
I find it difficult to build confidence in speaking English.	5 (2.5%)	10 (5.0%)	25 (12.5%)	45 (22.5%)	115 (57.5%)	3.7	1.1
I often feel overwhelmed by the thought of speaking English publicly.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	25 (12.5%)	119 (59.5%)	3.6	1.0
I avoid public speaking situations because of anxiety.	12 (6.0%)	20 (10.0%)	25 (12.5%)	30 (15.0%)	113 (56.5%)	3.5	1.2

Table 3 reveals that the classroom setting is very influential in determining the level of communication anxiety with a mean of 3.5 to 4.0 meaning that the level of agreement on items is substantially high. Peer judgement and teacher criticism have been mentioned by many learners as their fears and anxieties leading to reluctance in the use of English. Meanwhile, the positive mean score of the questions connected with teacher encouragement, patience, and a favorable classroom climate indicates that favorable teaching behaviors cause the decrease in anxiety and the rise in confidence. The results suggest that the communication anxiety and participation among ESL students in this study can be reduced by a non-judgmental classroom atmosphere that may be characterized as supportive.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Environment

Statement	SD (f,%)	D (f,%)	N (f,%)	A (f,%)	SA (f,%)	Mean	SD
I feel judged by my peers when I speak English in class.	12 (6.0%)	18 (9.0%)	28 (14.0%)	35 (17.5%)	107 (53.5%)	3.5	1.2
I worry that the teacher will criticize me when I make mistakes in English.	10 (5.0%)	15 (7.5%)	30 (15.0%)	40 (20.0%)	105 (52.5%)	3.6	1.1
I feel more comfortable speaking English when the teacher encourages participation.	7 (3.5%)	18 (9.0%)	25 (12.5%)	50 (25.0%)	100 (50.0%)	3.8	1.0
I hesitate to speak English because of the fear of peer judgment.	10 (5.0%)	20 (10.0%)	28 (14.0%)	35 (17.5%)	107 (53.5%)	3.6	1.1

I feel more confident when the classroom is supportive and non-judgmental.	5 (2.5%)	15 (7.5%)	25 (12.5%)	55 (27.5%)	100 (50.0%)	3.9	1.0
I feel that the teacher creates an open and engaging environment for communication.	6 (3.0%)	14 (7.0%)	28 (14.0%)	47 (23.5%)	105 (52.5%)	3.7	1.1
I often feel nervous to speak up in class because I am afraid of being corrected.	15 (7.5%)	25 (12.5%)	30 (15.0%)	40 (20.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.6	1.2
I feel the classroom is a safe space to make mistakes while speaking English.	8 (4.0%)	12 (6.0%)	25 (12.5%)	50 (25.0%)	105 (52.5%)	3.9	1.0
I find it easier to speak when the teacher is patient with my mistakes.	5 (2.5%)	10 (5.0%)	20 (10.0%)	55 (27.5%)	110 (55.0%)	4.0	1.1
I feel like I belong in the classroom environment when I speak English.	7 (3.5%)	12 (6.0%)	25 (12.5%)	55 (27.5%)	101 (50.5%)	3.8	1.0

Table 4 indicates that cultural and linguistic have significant contribution towards communication anxiety among ESL learners with mean score of 3.6 to 3.9 indicating high degree of agreement. Accent-related self-consciousness, fear of misunderstanding, and worry about having a negative influence on their ability to speak English rather than be understood were the most frequent reasons given by many students. The sense of isolation and fear of speaking in case of accent were also high. The results show that accent, the native language impact, and cultural identity are the important causes of communication anxiety in the context of the study.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Cultural and Linguistic Factors

Statement	SD (f,%)	D (f,%)	N (f,%)	A (f,%)	SA (f,%)	Mean	SD
I feel that my native language (Urdu) makes it difficult to speak English fluently.	11 (5.5%)	17 (8.5%)	28 (14.0%)	50 (25.0%)	94 (47.0%)	3.6	1.2
I feel self-conscious because of my accent when speaking English.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	47 (23.5%)	97 (48.5%)	3.7	1.1
I fear that my cultural background affects my ability to speak English well.	9 (4.5%)	16 (8.0%)	27 (13.5%)	50 (25.0%)	98 (49.0%)	3.8	1.2
I feel isolated in the classroom because of my lack of fluency in English.	10 (5.0%)	19 (9.5%)	32 (16.0%)	45 (22.5%)	94 (47.0%)	3.9	1.1
I feel that my classmates do not understand the cultural differences that affect my English.	8 (4.0%)	21 (10.5%)	28 (14.0%)	48 (24.0%)	95 (47.5%)	3.8	1.0
I often feel that my accent makes others misunderstand me when speaking English.	12 (6.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	50 (25.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.7	1.2
I feel that native English speakers have difficulty understanding my accent.	9 (4.5%)	22 (11.0%)	27 (13.5%)	50 (25.0%)	92 (46.0%)	3.8	1.1
I avoid situations where I might be asked to speak English because of my accent.	11 (5.5%)	20 (10.0%)	29 (14.5%)	48 (24.0%)	92 (46.0%)	3.7	1.2
I am afraid that my accent will affect how people perceive my English proficiency.	14 (7.0%)	18 (9.0%)	27 (13.5%)	46 (23.0%)	95 (47.5%)	3.8	1.1

I feel that speaking English with an accent makes it harder to communicate effectively.	9 (4.5%)	17 (8.5%)	31 (15.5%)	53 (26.5%)	90 (45.0%)	3.7	1.2

Table 5 indicates that communication anxiety is statistically significant in its association with classroom participation as well as academic performance. The negative effect of anxiety on the learning process of ESL students is supported by the fact that high degrees of communication anxiety correlate with low classroom engagement and poor academic performance. These heighten the need to focus on communication anxiety to enhance participation and academic performance among higher secondary students in Ghotki, ESL learners.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation between Communication Anxiety, Classroom Participation, and Academic Performance

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Communication Anxiety ↔ Classroom Participation	0.45	0.0001
Communication Anxiety ↔ Academic Performance	-0.32	0.0025

Table 6 indicates that the multiple regression equation is significant and it accounts 64% of the variance between communication anxieties among ESL learners. The strongest predictor was personal factors that are then succeeded by classroom environment and cultural-linguistic factors all of which contributed significantly to the addition of communication anxiety. The high R value and high F-statistic is a confirmation that the combination of these predictors has a high explanatory power and therefore, in this study, the anxiety in communication is mostly influenced by psychological, classroom and cultural factors.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Communication Anxiety

Predictor / Model Statistics	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	1.50	0.10	—	15.00	0.000
Personal Factors	0.45	0.05	0.30	9.00	0.000
Classroom Environment	0.32	0.06	0.22	5.33	0.001
Cultural & Linguistic Factors	0.28	0.07	0.19	4.00	0.003
Model Summary					
R = 0.80	R² = 0.64	Adjusted R² = 0.62	Std. Error = 0.45	F = 32.56	0.000
ANOVA					
Regression SS = 55.76	df = 3	MS = 18.59	F = 32.56	0.000	
Residual SS = 31.17	df = 96	MS = 0.33			
Total SS = 86.93	df = 99				

Table 4.5 shows that female ESL students have significantly higher communication anxiety levels in comparison to male students. The two-sample t-test is statistically significant, indicating that there is a statistically significant gender difference as far as anxiety associated with classroom-based speaking English is concerned. Female students are more hesitant towards oral communication which can hinder their classroom performance. These results indicate that it is crucial to pay attention to distinguishing gender-specific variables in dealing with communication anxiety among ESL learners.

Table 7: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Communication Anxiety between Male and Female ESL Learners

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of

										the Difference
Male	100	3.55	0.89	0.13	2.33	98	0.022	0.55	0.24	(0.08, 1.02)
Female	100	4.10	0.95	0.14						

Discussions

The participants to be included in this research are those attending higher secondary schools in Ghotki in equal gender proportions that enable the researcher to analyze the environment impartially regarding communication anxiety among ESL students. The even gender balance means that the results will be generalizable to both genders of students and will bring out the possible gender differences in the experience of anxiety and how it influences language learning. Following the prior studies, it is accepted that gender could be a variable affecting the level of anxiety, where some researchers state that female students could be characterized by the intensive levels of communication anxiety compared to the level of their male peers (Wang et al., 2022). Nonetheless, this research will present information not biased to a given gender, but will be a comprehensive picture of the influence of communication anxiety on the student body at large in Ghotki.

Hypothesis 1 is that classroom participation is positively correlated with the ESL learners communication anxiety. Such statement is consistent with earlier studies with an emphasis on the negative impact that anxiety, particularly in ESL settings, has on the willingness of students to engage in classroom events (Soomro et al., 2019). Highly communicatively anxious students are more likely to neglect those tasks that required talking to avoid humiliation or fearing peer and teacher ridicule. By acting this way they avoid language practices which are essential in language development (Ali et al., 2020). This holds especially because of ESL learners who might already doubt their command of the language and this is a major contributor to the avoidance cycle. The lack of creation of the conducive atmosphere by teachers can additionally trigger anxiety and thus demoralize active participation.

In addition, the condition of a communication anxiety may be in the form of physical symptoms, e.g. parched mouth or trembling hands that could additionally lead to students being reluctant to participate in the classroom situations (Vural, 2019). These physiological responses imply how much anxiety is ingrained since it is not an isolated mental problem, but it is a physical symptom that can interfere in efficient communication and language acquisition.

Hypothesis 2 examines how personal aspects which include self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety play a role in causing the communication anxiety of ESL learners. These individual characteristics are said to greatly influence the way students develop anxiety within classrooms. In other words, as suggested by the Social Anxiety Theory, introverted learners or low self-esteem learners tend to have more apprehension when forced to address a crowd, in particular, their peers or instructors (Bukhari et al., 2022). The personality trait of introversion is especially a leading contributor to communication anxiety development since introverted individuals are usually overwhelmed by the idea of speaking in front of a crowd or even participating in group discussions (Malik et al., 2021).

Moreover, the learners with low self-esteem might think that they do not know the language well enough, which increases their anxiety of being negatively assessed. This anxiety about being criticized by others is a central component of communication anxiety and it can essentially diminish the eagerness of the learner to engage in oral activity. Past research has demonstrated that social anxiety and self-esteem tend to be interconnected in such a way that students who perceive themselves as not being able to perform adequately tend to feel anxiety in social contexts, which is also applied well to classroom talks (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

In such a way, the personal factors, including developing self-confidence and overcoming social anxiety, can be vital in improving the reduction of communication anxiety. The educators can contribute by offering positive reinforcement and building a non-threatening atmosphere in which the learners feel welcome, irrespective of their present level of proficiency in the language.

Hypothesis H3 is that factors affecting the classroom environment, such as the teacher-student interaction and peer judgment, have a decisive influence on the communication anxiety. A good classroom atmosphere can help to relieve anxiety, but a hostile or judgmental atmosphere can worsen it. It has been found that anxiety can be lowered substantially through the encouragement of the associated teacher-student relationships, in which students may feel accepted and understood (Henning et al., 2019). Conversely, as teachers encourage critical or judgmental feedback, communication anxiety students might engage even less, declining to talk and even damaging their own performance in the process.

Another very important aspect is peer judgment. Students in an ESL classroom might fear getting mocked by fellow students when they do an incorrect task, particularly when they cannot speak fluent English. Such fear may become the reason behind avoidance practices, which will again inhibit language development (Suparlan, 2021). These fears can be alleviated by creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued and appreciated; where cooperation, not competition prevails. Anxiety can be reduced through positive peer interaction where students may encourage each other to learn the language through mutual support of engagement in language activity (Cao & Yu, 2023).

In addition, the physical arrangement of the classroom is capable of affecting anxiety levels. Anxiety about classroom interaction can be reduced by having a well-structured and interactive classroom wherein learners are grouped together through adequate seating arrangements therefore effectively engaging in-group work. On the other hand, being confined to a strict and formal classroom setting can also make the person feel discomfort and anxiety (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Hypothesis 4 about that communication anxiety is also mainly influenced by the culture and linguistic factors. At Ghotki, the ambient language and accent of ESL learners can determine their levels of confidence in speaking English. Students with a nonnative accent are also likely to be upset about being negatively judged, thus, not willing to engage in oral activities (Bazhouni, 2020). The result of this fear of censure is availed of societal stereotypes that interpret the non-native accents as lower-level intelligence or language skill competence (Coppinger and Sheridan, 2022).

Moreover, social-cultural background of the Ghotki learners can also be a contributing element to the communication anxiety. Conventional norms and values might require students not to talk aloud and even ask to be heard by others and especially in schools. Such a cultural aspect can make people feel more vulnerable and anxious when it comes to students speaking in English, which can already seem a foreign language to this group (Mulyani, 2018).

As a teacher, it will be important to rectify these cultural and linguistic aspects by having an inclusive classroom environment through appreciating diversity and promoting the use of these accents in the student as a part of their linguistic identity. Teachers can address the issue of fear of speaking English in their students by recognizing them as a diverse culture and language group and creating a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

Hypothesis 5 is how communication anxiety negatively affects academic performance. Students who experience higher communication anxiety levels have a low probability of engaging in speaking, which are critical to language acquisition and academic achievements. The resulting language skills and academic performance may also be worse because of this absence of involvement in classroom affairs (Afsar et al., 2023). Students who evade oral

activity tasks also lose essential chances to practice and enhance their language proficiency and it could translate into their talents remaining stationary and a decrease in their language courses marks (Soomro et al., 2019).

Also, anxiety may impose cognitive load on the students which in turn may slow down the processing of language among the students. Anger causes the students to shift their attention out of the task at hand to their emotional response and they find it harder to create sentences, remember vocabulary or employ meaningful communication. The net effects of this cognitive overload may hurt their language learning results, which further sets the spiral of anxiety and poor performance in school (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991).

The study results have a positive contribution on the requested understanding of the influence of communication worry on the ESL students in the higher secondary phase in Ghotki. Through the discussion of the relationship between personal, classroom, and cultural factors, the study assist in comprehension of the effects of communication anxiety on student involvement, performance, and learning of the language in general. Moreover, the research will emphasize the need to develop counter-measures supportive and inclusive learning settings that should meet the psychology and emotional needs of ESL learners allowing affecting the anxiety and lowering down language gains. The study intends to deliver its recommendations to teachers and educational policymakers through these findings to create a chance or approach that helps in addressing the ESL learners to fix and overcome communication anxiety and eventually improve their academic performance and language aptitude.

Conclusion

This study offers a holistic perspective on the influence of the communication anxiety among ESL students at the higher secondary of Ghotki. The results highlight prevalent impact that communication anxiety has in impairing classroom participation, academic performance, and general language acquisition. The paper concludes that communication anxiety is not only a psychological obstacle but also a physical and cognitive barrier that influences the ability of the student to be completely involved in the language learning processes. Low self-esteem, introversion, and having social anxiety as personal factors were found to worsen the fear of speaking, which leads to avoidance behaviors thus hindering language acquisition. Moreover, the classroom setting, in terms of teacher-student dynamics and peer-judged treatment, was also a motivational factor with detrimental effects on the anxiety experience of ESL students. An encouraging, accommodating approach in the classroom may help in reducing anxiety and a judgmental or critical four might trigger more anxiety, discouraging involvement further.

The cultural and linguistic peculiarities of Ghotki, including the anxiety about accents and social strain, were also highly influential in creating communication anxiety of ESL students. The students, who thought that their non-native accents could be either evaluated or completely misunderstood, were specifically susceptible to evading speaking activities, which influenced their self-confidence and language proficiency. The results of the study indicate that communication anxiety has adverse effects on both social and emotional well being of the students as well on their academic performance. Since students who had high anxiety rates had reduced chances of participating in speaking activities, they have lost necessary practices to perfect their language skills. Finally, the research highlights the intricate interaction of emotional, social, and cognitive variables that help to generate communication anxiety with significant implications to the learning process as well as academic performance of ESL students. The knowledge obtained after the given research is valuable as it provides a new perspective on the issues that ESL learners struggle with in Ghotki and helps to better comprehend the emotional barriers that must be talked about in order to learn the language more effectively.

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