

Exploring the Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety in an EFL Classroom: A Study of Public Sector University, Sindh Pakistan

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Abstract

As the English language has got high prestige and has become the means of better employment. Therefore it has become dire need of career oriented youth to learn English. This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of language learners on the causes of language learning anxiety in EFL classroom. Quantitative method was applied in this study. FLCAS scale with some modification was applied and data was collected from undergraduate engineering students. Data was run through SPSS software. The results reveal that test anxiety is the main cause followed by nervousness and fear of negative evaluation as other sources of anxiety. Results also show that motivational intensity of learners is high. Some suggestions and pedagogical implications have been given on the basis of results.

Keywords: Anxiety, EFL learners, perceptions

1. Introduction

In Pakistan English language is given the status of official language and used as medium of instruction in most of the academic institutes. Therefore, educators are confronted with the challenge of addressing the needs of students who do not speak English as their first language.

Most researchers like (Olivares-Cuhat, 2010) agree on the point that learning process is dependent on series of factors: cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive and demographic. Attitudes, motivation and anxiety come under the category of affective factors. The affective factors have strong influence on learners in learning a second language.

According to Krashen (1982) these factors are necessary for second language learning to such an extent that they become the major determinant of learner's receptive ability. Usually, for the

non- native speakers of English, the use the English language becomes major hindrance during communication. As a result most of the second language speakers avoid talking in foreign language. Students while responding to the teachers' questions/queries or discussing on any topic in front of the class, they feel hesitation and find it difficult to speak. Hence they experience anxiety. The present study is an attempt to address the causes of anxiety that L2 learners feel in classrooms.

2. Literature Review

It has become hard in current century to survive by being able to be fitted in the fast moving circle of life. Every person wants to take benefit of his/her knowledge as much as he/she can to be a successful in society. Therefore it is foremost demand of every career oriented young student to learn English and take a solid status in advanced areas. Anxiety has been reported as the common phenomenon by learners and teachers in learning a second or foreign language.

2.1 .1 Language anxiety

Language anxiety is not a new area of research, it has remained at the center of attention of researchers for last three decades of 20th century. Every researcher has defined anxiety in his/her own way. Brown (1993) states anxiety as *the feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and worry*. Language anxiety defined by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) as, An anxiety that a learner experiences in particular situation while speaking in foreign language because of having no command in foreign language. The most common and widely accepted definition of foreign language anxiety is given by Horwitz and Cope.(1986:p. 128)

"A distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process."

Foreign language anxiety has drawn the attention of many researchers in the field of language learning and

teaching. Scovel in 1978 conducted research on general type language anxiety therefore found vague and complex results. Other researchers also used variety of models to find the interrelation between language anxiety and language achievement and consequently came up with unclear puzzling results. Therefore, Scovel (1978) gave a reason to why this ambiguity came in results, he found that it is because of having no authentic or appropriate instrument of measurement in research studies. Horwitz (2001) gave solution to researchers that they should be clear and specify the type of anxiety which they measure.

2.1.2 Different types of anxiety

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) outlined three main approaches of anxiety. The first approach defines language anxiety as Trait anxiety second as state trait and third one as situation specific.

In the field of Psychology anxiety can be observed as a trait anxiety and state anxiety. There also exists the third type anxiety; situation specific .

Trait Anxiety: Anxiety experienced by a person in variety of situations. In other words, when a person feels panic, fear and becomes overwhelmed in general. Spielberger ,(1972)

State Anxiety: According to Spielberger (1996), state anxiety is temporary state of individual whose strength changes time to time. Spielberger, (1983). Feeling of uncomfortableness that an individual experiences at specific time as a response to particular situation. The common reaction and symptoms of such individuals can be perspiration, sweaty palms, increased heart beat, and tension. It can be believed that levels of trait and state anxiety determine learner's general anxiety level because it shows general as well as context specific reactions of anxiety.

Situation-Specific Anxiety: According to Oh (1990) foreign language anxiety can be thought as situation specific anxiety and students develop perceptions, fear and threat and some physiological reactions that are unique to language classroom.

Specific term defines the difference between people who become anxious in general situations and others who may be apprehended in only distinct situations as in language classroom. MacIntyre and Gardner,(1994)

As the foreign language anxiety encounters culture and language of other (native) countries therefore becomes a basis for negative emotional reaction of students towards learning language.(Horwitz).

The five major effects of anxiety that it has on the life of learner in learning foreign language proposed by MacIntyre are:

1. Learner's academic performance; High anxious student show low academic performance.
2. Learner's social life. ; The learners mostly stay away from communication with people in society.
3. Learner's cognitive level. It becomes difficult for learner to grasp the knowledge.
4. Learner's communication output. It is lessened in learner because of having limited knowledge.
5. Learner's personality (temperament and identity) is also affected by language anxiety.

Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed a Foreign language classroom anxiety scale to explore L2 anxiety. They made a claim that anxiety effects on the learning of learners in the classroom. On the basis of performance Horwitz (1986) introduced three types of anxiety.

1. Communication apprehension, 2. Test anxiety and 3. Fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension is the fear, dread or nervousness that an individual feels while having communication with people.

Test anxiety is second type of performance anxiety, it emerges in learners from fear of failing in exams. Third type, fear of negative evaluation can be defined as the fear of being negatively evaluated by others.

In Chinese context Wei in (2013,2014) conducted a research to know the level of foreign language anxiety in Chinese learners of Bouyei college. He used FLCAS as a research tool. His results show that learners experience anxiety at moderate level in all three types of anxiety; fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test anxiety.

In Pakistani context research is done in this area that reveals variety of aspects. The Pakistani researchers like (Adeel,2011;Mari et al, 2012 ;Waseem & Jibeen 2013;Gopang, 2015) have developed a track for new researchers to proceed the research work on the same line in different contexts. Gopang et al.(2015) conducted research in Lasbela University. The results of his study showed no significant difference of student's anxiety level in five different disciplines. There was also no clear difference in the anxiety experienced by male and female students.

The present study addresses the following questions

- *What are the perceptions of learners about language class anxiety in the context of English language learning?*
- *What are the causes of language learning anxiety in EFL classroom?*

3. Methodolog

Quantitative methodology has been used in the present study.

3.1 Participants

The informants involved in this research were the firstyear engineering students belonging to different fields of MUET Jamshoro. The researcher adopted random sampling to ensure whole population. The number of students participated in this study was ($n=140$).

3.2 Research Instrument

The researcher used FLCAS scale designed by Horwitz (1986). This scale consists of 33 items but for the present study there were selected 20 items. The items were 3,4,6,9,10,12,13,15,16,17,20,21,23,24,25,26,27,30,31,33. Of these four items linked to communication apprehension; (9,20,24,and 27), Seven items for Fear of negative evaluation;(3, 10, 13, 25, 30, 31, and 33).One item associated with test anxiety;(21), two were for self perceived proficiency;(4 and 15), one item related to comparison,(23), three of these relate to nervousness (12,16,26) and two items associated with motivational intensity (6and 17).Responses to items of FLCAS were collected using 5-point Likert scale

ranging from 1)=SA "Strongly agree" 2)=A "Agree" 3)=N "neither agree nor disagree,"
 4)=D "Disagree" to 5)=SD"Strongly Disagree."

4. Data collection procedure

As the random sampling was followed in this research, therefore the researcher visited departments at pre-arranged class time and accompanied to the target class by one of the teacher. Students were informed about the purpose and importance of research and were allowed free to take part voluntarily in the research. Participants took 10 to15 minutes to fill the questionnaire

5. Data analysis

The data was analyzed and results were interpreted by percent and frequency ratings in SPSS software.

6. Results

1. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	37	26.4	26.4	26.4
Agree	49	35.0	35.0	61.4
neither agree nor disagree	25	17.9	17.9	79.3
Disagree	20	14.3	14.3	93.6
strongly disagree	9	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

The results of above statement show that 61% of students agreed that they start to panic when speak without preparation in class.

2. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	22	15.7	15.7	15.7
Agree	46	32.9	32.9	48.6
neither agree nor disagree	26	18.6	18.6	67.1
Disagree	32	22.9	22.9	90.0
strongly disagree	14	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

47% of students agree to the above statement related to communication apprehension indicate that they feel dread when called in language class.

3. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	25	17.9	17.9	17.9
Agree	37	26.4	26.4	44.3
neither agree nor disagree	25	17.9	17.9	62.1
Disagree	30	21.4	21.4	83.6
strongly disagree	23	16.4	16.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

37% disagreed. The other statement related to communication apprehension . The results show that 43% of students agree to it.

4. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	27	19.3	19.3	19.3
Agree	34	24.3	24.3	43.6
neither agree nor disagree	36	25.7	25.7	69.3
Disagree	31	22.1	22.1	91.4
strongly disagree	12	8.6	8.6	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

30% disagreed. While giving response to above statement 43percent of students agreed to statement related communication apprehension showing that they feel anxiety in communication apprehension.

5.I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	12	8.6	8.6	8.6
Agree	48	34.3	34.3	42.9
neither agree nor disagree	26	18.6	18.6	61.4
Disagree	32	22.9	22.9	84.3
strongly disagree	22	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

In response to above statement 42% of students agreed while 37% of students disagreed whereas 18 % of students remained undecided.

6.I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	32	22.9	22.9	22.9
Agree	23	16.4	16.4	39.3
neither agree nor disagree	24	17.1	17.1	56.4
Disagree	39	27.9	27.9	84.3
strongly disagree	22	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

While giving response to the above statement 38% of students agreed to statement 43% of students disagreed. While 17% of students remained undecided.

7. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	20	14.3	14.3	14.3
Agree	32	22.9	22.9	37.1
neither agree nor disagree	29	20.7	20.7	57.9
Disagree	41	29.3	29.3	87.1
strongly disagree	18	12.9	12.9	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

36% agreed that they feel awkward while giving answers voluntarily in the class and 41% disagreed to the statement.

8. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	12	8.6	8.6	8.6
Agree	39	27.9	27.9	36.4
neither agree nor disagree	41	29.3	29.3	65.7
Disagree	27	19.3	19.3	85.0
strongly disagree	21	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

35% agreed, and 34% disagreed. Half percent of students denied they don't worry for quick moving of language class, whereas half percent of students agreed that they worry and feel anxiety.

9. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	26	18.6	18.6	18.6
Agree	40	28.6	28.6	47.1
neither agree nor disagree	37	26.4	26.4	73.6
Disagree	29	20.7	20.7	94.3
strongly disagree	8	5.7	5.7	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Majority of students overwhelm for learning foreign language rules. While 25% of students disagreed.

10. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	32	22.9	22.9	22.9
Agree	27	19.3	19.3	42.1
neither agree nor disagree	19	13.6	13.6	55.7
Disagree	32	22.9	22.9	78.6
strongly disagree	30	21.4	21.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

41% agreed, and 43% disagreed. Most of the students fear from being negatively evaluated by the other students of classroom.

11. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	26	18.6	18.6	18.6
Agree	52	37.1	37.1	55.7
neither agree nor disagree	26	18.6	18.6	74.3
Disagree	30	21.4	21.4	95.7
strongly disagree	6	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

55% agreed and 25% disagreed. More than half of the students become anxious when teacher asks questions to their unprepared responses.

12. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	24	17.1	17.1	17.1
Agree	47	33.6	33.6	50.7
neither agree nor disagree	30	21.4	21.4	72.1
disagree	30	21.4	21.4	93.6
strongly disagree	9	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

50% agreed and 27% disagreed. Half of the students agreed that they worry when they don't understand that what teacher corrects.

13. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	19	13.6	13.6	13.6
agree	31	22.1	22.1	35.7
neither agree nor disagree	37	26.4	26.4	62.1
disagree	36	25.7	25.7	87.9
strongly disagree	17	12.1	12.1	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

37% of students can understand what teacher says them in foreign language and therefore don't feel fear while 35% of students become frightened.

14. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	18	12.9	12.9	12.9
agree	37	26.4	26.4	39.3
neither agree nor disagree	17	12.1	12.1	51.4
Disagree	46	32.9	32.9	84.3
strongly disagree	22	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Almost half of the students can overcome the nervousness while 38% of students get nervous and forget the things which they know in language class.

15. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	34	24.3	24.3	24.3
Agree	23	16.4	16.4	40.7
neither agree nor disagree	33	23.6	23.6	64.3
Disagree	25	17.9	17.9	82.1
strongly disagree	25	17.9	17.9	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

30 percent of students agreed that they feel anxious in language class whereas 34% of the students disagree to the above statement.

16. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	19	13.6	13.6	13.6
agree	26	18.6	18.6	32.1
neither agree nor disagree	21	15.0	15.0	47.1
disagree	37	26.4	26.4	73.6
strongly disagree	37	26.4	26.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

A major range of students; 52 % disagreed to the above statement while 31% of students responses show that they feel nervous in language class.

17. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	17	12.1	12.1	12.1
Agree	40	28.6	28.6	40.7
neither agree nor disagree	26	18.6	18.6	59.3
Disagree	33	23.6	23.6	82.9
strongly disagree	24	17.1	17.1	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

40% of the students agreed and the equal number of students also disagreed, while about 20% of students remained undecided.

18. I often feel like not going to my language class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	9	6.4	6.4	6.4
Agree	29	20.7	20.7	27.1
neither agree nor disagree	37	26.4	26.4	53.6
Disagree	42	30.0	30.0	83.6
strongly disagree	23	16.4	16.4	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

In response to above question related to motivational intensity results show that about half of the students are motivated to attend the class while 26% of students are demotivated.

19. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	13	9.3	9.3	9.3
Agree	34	24.3	24.3	33.6
neither agree nor disagree	25	17.9	17.9	51.4
Disagree	34	24.3	24.3	75.7
strongly disagree	34	24.3	24.3	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Majority of students disagreed to this statement showing that they can overcome the test anxiety when they study more for the test. While 33% of students say that the test increases their anxiety even I thy study more.

20. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	24	17.1	17.1	17.1
Agree	35	25.0	25.0	42.1
neither agree nor disagree	26	18.6	18.6	60.7
Disagree	28	20.0	20.0	80.7
strongly disagree	27	19.3	19.3	100.0
Total	140	100.0	100.0	

This statement is related to comparison of self language proficiency to other students that shows that 42% agreed 39% of students disagreed. It means there was no major difference in the opinion of students.

Table 1

	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Average percent
Motivational intensity	140	1.00	5.00	33%
Nervousness	140	1.00	5.00	33%
Fear of negative evaluation	140	1.00	5.00	41.8%
Self perceived proficiency	140	1.00	5.00	42.5%
Communication apprehension	140	1.00	5.00	48.5%

8. Discussion

The above table shows the average % of the causes. The findings reveal consistency with earlier studies. This study is not quite similar to them but shows somehow related results on language learning anxiety. Communication apprehension was found as the main cause, followed by fear of negative evaluation and self perceived proficiency. Bhatti,(2016) found communication

apprehension as the main cause of language anxiety by college students. However the motivation level of students is high. There are two types of anxiety one is instrumental motivation ; to do something /learning for reward or punishment and other is integrative motivation, where individual is internally urged to learn or do something. It is his/her personal willingness to do something. In the present study students were instrumentally motivated, learning to get reward or avoid punishment. According to students' perceptions completion of English course work by securing high marks insures their proficiency level. Students learn English to get good marks and become fluent speaker to hire good jobs. This result matches with earlier studies (Jabeen,2011, Shahbaz,2012, Rastegar and Karami, 2015).Students also had given combined responses to self perceived proficiency and communication apprehension as the main source to provoke anxiety. Mari ,(2016) found test anxiety is experienced by undergraduate students at moderate level. The findings reveal that greater number of learners don't feel test anxiety at higher level. Nervousness has also been observed in students along with communication apprehension. The main goal of English language classroom is communication so learners have been observed as more anxious in language class in contrast to other classes. As the anxiety level increases while communicating with people of target language or society. In Pakistan English language has got high value so the learner baffles when communicating with other people. It may be due to syllabusThe use of listening and speaking skills is highly recommended to overcome communication apprehension.

9. Implications

The present study is valuable and influential even for the respondents because by knowing their anxiety level new, authentic and reliable measures can be taken to reduce the anxiety level of students. Teachers and course designers come to know at which point they have to increase the focus or attention. This study enhances our understanding about language anxiety from learner's perspective and brings a greater amount of awareness for researchers in research area.

10. Recommendation

As the language anxiety is experienced by learners irrespective of their level ability and gender. Teacher and students both need to cooperate each other in decreasing the devastatingdamaging influence of anxiety. Teachers should devise the activities to decrease the nervousness and increase the confidence level of students to actively participate in language class. The more emphasis should be given on enhancing the practice in speaking and listening skills. The use of authentic material is also a form of good help because learners can learn more effectively when doing it practically in their real life situations.

11. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the causes of anxiety among engineering undergraduate students. The respondents of this study were first year students who learn English as a subject in their syllabus currently. Results were used to see any significant difference at commonly occurring causes of anxiety experienced by students.

It can be stated that language anxiety can be overcome, if teachers apply the new modern and authentic approaches of language teaching that focus on minimizing anxiety and create the most affective and productive environment of classrooms for learning a language.

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