

English Language Anxiety Among Pakistani University Students: Factors and Coping Mechanisms

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English language anxiety is one of the most often experienced barriers faced by university students in Pakistan which keeps them away from making effective academic achievements and real communication. This study seeks out the main reasons and ways that students have been devising to handle English language anxiety. Qualitative research was adopted for the purpose of collecting data using semi-structured interviews with university students from various disciplines. The analysis revealed that language issues, fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, and inadequate exposure contribute significantly toward language anxiety. Additionally, socio-cultural aspects and institutional practices are important in building the students' experiences of learning English. In turn, students adopt different strategies-toward coping self-directed learning, peer support, and maximized exposure to English media and informal conversations-with respect to the challenges faced. It was found that these interventions would need to provide an environment for learning, effective teaching methodologies, and institutional strategies as necessary components that would help students cope better with their anxiety about languages. Understanding causes and disclosing mechanisms would provide a base for educators and policymakers to draw up strategies to build confidence and competence in English among students. The research significantly contributes to the psychological and sociological aspects of language anxiety, and points towards the broader issues of understanding language learning in a multilingual context.

1. Introduction

English has truly become a global lingua franca, and as such, it has engendered an international focus as a tool for communication and, today, education and professional advancement (Rahman, 2008). In Pakistan, English possesses deep significance due to its colonial background and its continued use as an official language with Urdu (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). In Pakistan, higher education predominantly uses English as the medium of instruction, thereby providing a gateway to opportunities of prestige in education and employment (Manan et al., 2021). The paper deals with the multifaceted significance of English in the higher education context of Pakistan and the challenges that language anxiety poses for learners (Akhtar & Kayani, 2024; Akhtar et al., 2020; Anwar et al., 2019).

The study deals with Pakistan's education system, which has been linguistically divided into Urdu-medium public schools and English-medium private institutions, therefore inhibiting their exposure to the opportunity of quality education (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). It has been linked with socioeconomic status which was often get associated with many high-prestige professions and global networks through the use of English (Rahman, 2008). Among all attempts to promote regional languages, English still rules the medium of instruction in higher education, more specifically those in science and international relations (Manan et al., 2021). The aforementioned scenario also raises the question of the implications of English as a medium of instruction on learner identity and academic success in the context (Phulpoto et al., 2024; Oad et al., 2023).

1.1 Importance of English in Higher Education in Pakistan

It is the primary mode of instruction in the majority of universities in Pakistan, thus making it pivotal to the country's higher education system (Manan et al., 2021). It connects to international academic resources as well as the global academic discourse (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Private universities, which are often thought to be in elite circles, so emphasize English proficiency to show precisely how a kind of social and cultural capital is acquired (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Rahman, 2008). And because of this, it tends to form a kind of barrier for students from lower-income families whose previous schooling is inadequate in English (Siddique et al., 2024). Therefore, being proficient in English is no longer just an academic requirement but has also become a determinant of future life chances (Imran & Akhtar, 2023).

1.2 Significance of Language Anxiety

The fear of or anxiety associated with communicating in or learning a second language is commonly termed as language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In Pakistan, in particular; where students are moving from Urdu-medium halls of higher education to the English-medium higher education institutions, language anxiety becomes so pronounced among its stakeholders (Manan et al., 2021). Such consequent academic performance, and may even affect students' confidence, especially when it comes to tackling specific contents in English (Honicke et al., 2023). The aspect of language anxiety needs to be removed to ensure equal educational opportunities access and improve the overall learning outcomes.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the main reasons behind English language anxiety in Pakistani university students. To probe such psychological and social consequences of language anxiety over students' academic performance and their skill of communication.
2. To find out ways for students in coping with anxiety for the English language.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What mainly are the causes or sources of second or foreign language anxiety faced by Pakistani university students?
2. To language anxiety, how does this really affect students' academic performance, communication skills, and confidence in general?
3. What are some coping strategies that students find themselves using to handle their English language anxiety?

2. Literature review

Language anxiety appears as a powerful affective factor in second language acquisition. It can be exhibited in a wide range of feelings-a state of fear, nervousness, or, more generally, apprehension while attempting to speak or learn a second language. Language anxiety, as reported by Hussain et al. (2021), is caused by factors such as self-consciousness, fear of making mistakes, and communication apprehension. According to Horwitz and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety defines: a complex set of self-perceptions, emotions, and behaviors related to the language learning process (Nawaz, et al., 2024). Language anxiety causes interference in language comprehension and production, which results in a lack of confidence and avoidance of communication situations. Recent literature even suggests that, although language anxiety sometimes creates an obstacle to communication, in other instances it can serve as a motivating force through an external drive (Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021).

2.1 English Language Anxiety in Pakistani and Global Contexts

In this study shows that in both the Pakistani and global contexts, English language anxiety has received some sizeable attention (Kayani et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020). Commonalities and different challenges in those respects emerge: while Pakistani students prevailing-along-with Urdu in the transition from English medium find additional anxiety triggered as compared to other learners because of minimal preliminary exposure to English (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020), research has figured preconceptions into Pakistani students-anxiety stemming from their lack of confidence, peer pressure, worries about grammar rules, and fear of negative evaluations (Hussain et al., 2021). Moreover, since a greater part of the educational institutions in Pakistan provides emphasis on writing skills rather than on oral proficiency, it results in speaking anxiety (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Language anxiety was shown on a global scale to negatively impact academic performance, social interactions, and learners' willingness to communicate (Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Research studies in Saudi Arabia and China highlight the role of teacher strategies and test anxiety in shaping

the levels of anxiety that students display during language learning (Aldubaikhi 2023; Weng & Liu, 2024). Zheng (2008) identified the learner, the teacher, and the learning process as the primary sources of language anxiety. Similarly, Horwitz et al. (1986) found that test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation contribute a very great deal to language anxiety (Raza & Ahmed, 2017).

2.2 Psychological and Social Implications of Language Anxiety

The Effects of Language Anxiety Psychological and Social So, language anxiety has profound psychological and social implications (Imran et al., 2023). Psychologically, this could lead to low self-esteem, stress, and other physical workings such as trembling and sweating (Hussain et al., 2021). These responses hamper the focus and involvement of students while performing language-learning jobs. Socially anxious learners, for that reason, may die and opt not to have conversations, thus limiting their chances to practice and integrate with cultures (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020). Such avoidance behaviors create a continued cycle of lowered confidence and ascent in language anxiety. In addition, classroom environments significantly relate to anxiety. Supportive environments have the ability to alleviate anxiety, whereas a judgmental or competitive atmosphere enhances it (Aldubaikhi, 2023). Emotional intelligence also contributes to the control of anxiety various studies indicate that it impacts learners' ability to deal with anxiety (Han et al., 2022).

2.3 Krashen's Affective Filter Model and Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Theory

Theoretical frameworks, such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, have become highly popular for comprehending language anxiety and its impact on language acquisition. According to Krashen (1982), every emotional factor that could affect language acquisition-anxiety, motivation, or self-confidence-acts as a "filter" that can facilitate or thwart language acquisition. Confirming this, it has been shown that an elevated level of anxiety raises the filter which prevents learners from acquiring and processing the new linguistic input effectively (Alamer, 2021).

Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Theory deals specifically with the anxieties unique to learning a foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three major sources of anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. These create barriers to language learning: students fear being evaluated negatively for their public speaking skills or for communication in a foreign language, and fear being tested in the foreign language (Azhar, 2024; Azhar et al., 2022).

2.4 Coping Mechanisms Identified in Past Research

Language anxiety management research has discovered various coping strategies. The most frequently used include techniques of self-regulation such as goal setting, positive self-talk, and preparation (McEown et al., 2023). These help the learner manage anxiety through increased confidence and better performance. Collaborative learning environments also reduce anxiety for they give peer support in engendering sensed relatedness and reduction of social isolation (Alamer, 2021). Teacher interventions are key in their own right by creating a supportive atmosphere in

classrooms and offering constructive feedback, while at the same time, they can significantly reduce anxiety levels (Aldubaikhi, 2023). Mindfulness has also been incorporated into foreign language teaching to enable students develop an emotional resilience that enables them face stressful situations such as public speaking and examinations (Weng & Liu, 2024).

2.5 Other Coping Methods

Aside from cognitive and social approaches, students usually utilize different psychological and behavioral methods to cope with language anxiety (Rehan et al., 2024). Various coping mechanisms have been found to help reduce foreign language speech-related stress, especially in public or classroom contexts (Shah et al., 2025; Imran et al., 2023). One of the shared strategies is avoidance behaviors, where students limit direct contact with their audience in order to decrease anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) observed that certain individuals deliberately shun eye contact, restrict contribution, or retreat from speaking situations in order to manage nervousness. Although such strategies might give temporary relief, they can be detrimental to long-term language acquisition by limiting practice opportunities (Kayani et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020).

According to the Azhar, Iqbal and Imran (2025) students can embrace self-regulatory strategies like humor and positive self-talk. Through the redefinition of anxious thoughts in a less serious or more supportive way, students can reduce psychological pressure (Horwitz et al., 1986). For example, comforting oneself with messages like, "It's okay to make mistakes," or using humor to deflect embarrassment assists in the preservation of confidence in speaking tasks (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Physical coping mechanisms have also been found to be effective in dealing with anxiety. Deep breathing exercises are commonly prescribed to manage nervous system reactions, inducing calmness prior to or during speech (Hussain et al., 2021). Motion-based methods, including deliberate hand movement or regulated walking, have also been discovered to decrease tension and improve fluency (Ahmed et al., 2024). These approaches work by channeling nervous energy into physical motion, thus increasing speech fluidity and minimizing mental overload.

According to the Alvi et al. (2015) these coping strategies psychological (e.g., self-talk, humor) or physiological (e.g., breathing, movement) give learners both mental and bodily means to overcome language anxiety. Yet their relative effectiveness can also depend on individuals' preferences and situational constraints, implying that language education might benefit from targeted anxiety-management training for individuals.

2.6 Coping Mechanisms Framework

Research on coping mechanisms regarding foreign language anxiety (FLA) has classified strategies under broad frameworks like preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking and resignation (Rahmah & Azhimia, 2022; Liu & Wang, 2023). The preparation includes thorough practice and familiarity with the language material, which has been shown to cut down on anxiety by boosting learners' confidence in their abilities (Liu & Wang, 2023). Learners who have

undergone extensive preparation, therefore, tend to feel more secure in their language competencies and may less painfully tackle the areas that they find difficult (Feng et al., 2023; Hafeez et al., 2011).

Meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga have all shown to be useful methods in reducing stress and inducing calmness for language learners during the practice (Tran, 2023). It was also assisting learners in coping with the emotional reactions that stressors such as speaking before a class or group discussion create in them. When incorporated into learners' lives, relaxation techniques make it easier for learners to deal with the stresses of language learning, thus reducing anxiety levels as a whole (Haq, 2012).

2.7 Positive Thinking

Positive thinking has emerged as another coping strategy. This strategy encourages students to switch the lens of distorting their ideas about failures to successes and to think about improvement instead of deficiency (Andrea, 2021; Tran, 2023). Research has shown that learners with a positive perspective show lower classroom anxiety and are more active in availing themselves of communication tasks (Fallah et al., 2023). Haq et al. (2020), learners who perceive mistakes as learning opportunities are more resourceful in taking risks when using the language, which is crucial for learning a language.

2.8 Peer Seeking

Peer seeking, or seeking either emotional or academic support from classmates or buddies, has been proven to be a successful strategy to mitigate the social isolation that usually accompanies FLA (Liu & Wang, 2023; Liu & Cheng, 2014). Life experience with a supporting peer group in collaborative learning environments often lessens learners' anxiety related to making mistakes or being judged. When learners feel less socially isolated from their peers, they are less likely to participate in class discussion and language activities.

2.9 Teacher Interventions

Teacher Interventions also have an impact on FLA. Providing a supportive and safe classroom environment for students to freely express themselves was definitely be one major parameter contributing to reducing anxiety (Aldubaikhi, 2023). Constructive feedback, group discussions, and humorous activities can be used by teachers as intervening approaches (Saba, Fatima, Farooq, & Zafar, 2021; Saba, Tabish, & Khan, 2017). Mindfulness is another interesting consideration in the efficacy of interventions for anxiety management. Through mindfulness, the students are taught how to control their thoughts and emotions under high-pressure circumstances like speaking or tests (Weng & Liu, 2024).

2.10 Emotional Intelligence and FLA

Research works focus on the contribution of emotional intelligence (EI) to lessening FLA. Individuals with higher EI can manage their anxiety better as they can control their emotions and may even have the ability to motivate themselves when the going gets tough (Fatima, Khan &

Kousar, 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2021). Emotionally intelligent speaking is not only a decent tool for managing anxiety; it is also better for speaking more confidence in the target language. Classrooms, interventions that promote emotional intelligence by self-reflection and peer feedback activities have proven to be able to lower anxiety among students significantly (Ghanadi & Ketabi, 2014; Liu & Cheng, 2014).

3. Methodology

The research design is exploratory, as it aimed at probing those factors that made Pakistani university students anxious about using the English language and the coping strategies they employ. Looking at research that talks little about what students go through in terms of anxiety related to using English in academic settings, an exploratory research design would be appropriate. It would also help bring to the surface themes and ideas in relation to language anxiety that were not touched upon sufficiently in literature. This equally lays a basis for collecting exploratory data which can be furthered into theory and model development for decreasing students' anxiety from English.

3.1 Data Collection

The data were collected by semi-structured interview from university students of various disciplines in Pakistan then around 15-20 different students were picked up who were from different backgrounds and levels of proficiency in languages. These subjects had different experiences regarding the anxiety that they had in using the English language from feeling anxious about speaking or even writing to having fears of making mistakes while in the classroom. It provides for an open discussion around important themes among other things such as source of language anxiety, personal experiences, and coping strategies-in an attempt for a semi-structured format. Such a format would allow for the researcher to investigate deep into the experiences of individuals-providing a rich data set.

3.2 Sampling Method

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for their direct experience of the English language anxiety in their academic lives. The participants were then selected based on self-reported experiences of language anxiety in a university context. This sampling approach ensures a high relevance of the data to the understanding of causes and strategies related to English language anxiety. By choosing those students from different disciplines, the present study aimed at obtaining as wide a variety of experiences as possible, thereby ensuring that the results would reflect the different challenges of university students in Pakistan.

4.2 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed thematically, which identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes. The researcher using this means could categorize responses that were commonly regarded as factors causing language anxiety, accusing others for societal pressure, an unproven ability to carry out the language, or fear of being judged. Thematic analysis also

facilitated identifying students' coping strategies, including preference for peer support, self-reflection, and physical relaxation. This allowed the researcher to understand better the student's experience and management of English language anxiety and helped determine some interventions aimed at alleviating anxiety in academic settings.

4.3 Finding and Discussion

The contributions of the studies and the interviews of students that informed the findings regarding factors resulting in English language anxiety (ELA) and ways of coping were diverse. The phenomenon of English language anxiety has been proven to affect all learners across different academic settings and cultures, impacting their ability to communicate and their overall language acquisition at large.

4.4 Factors Contributing to English Language Anxiety

4.4.1 Linguistic Difficulties (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation)

By far, the most significant cause of anxiety in learning English is the linguistic difficulty caused by grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. Stress often arises from the inability to communicate one's thoughts clearly or fear of being made a fool of in public (DiKmen, 2021). Studies have indicated that learners who perceive themselves as lacking proficiency in these areas tended to have elevated anxiety levels in effect with their performance in both written and oral communication (Daymiel et al., 2022). "When I speak, I always feel nervous because I am so afraid of messing up my pronunciation, especially in front of the class. I worry about sounding wrong and getting judged," said one of the students in the interview (Ansari et al., 2024; Akhtar, et al., 2021).

4.4.2 Fear of Negative Evaluation (Peer Pressure, Teacher Criticism)

Fear of evaluation, including negative evaluation that comes with peer pressure and teacher criticism, is another source of ELA. Such fear leads students to avoid situations in which speaking is required and makes them less involved in language learning (Zheng, 2008). Perceptions have aggravated anxiety situations, that is, when performing in public with attention being paid to the language being used such as in tests or public speaking, as reported by Zulkiflee and Nimehchisalem (2022). For instance, one of the peers remarked, "I find public speaking very hard, especially in front of peers, as it scares me of what people think about me when I do mistakes." Even my teacher's look sometimes makes me anxious."

4.4.3 Self-perceived proficiency and low self-esteem

Poor self-perceived ability may well be products of low self-esteem. These was always result in what an adult refers to as the dread of a foreign language: such learners truly believe that they possess insufficient ability in English, which causes them to avoid it altogether unless the situation calls for it; even then, they usually refrain from speaking (Khan & Hassan, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2019). More likely, they associate this with total feelings of anxiety in opposition, as noted by Hennebry-Leung and Gao (2022). The more such learners doubt their

ability, the less motivated they become, and it is with less motivation that negative experiences about have to suffer through learning a foreign language (Ahmad et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). This cycle produces fear with the concomitant desire of escape. Align with the study of Ali et al. (2019) a somewhat disinterested interviewee said: "In fact, I'm even afraid to speak English, mostly in class. I feel like my English is not good enough, so I usually stay quiet rather than attempt talking."

4.4 Limited Exposure to the Daily Use of English

Then there is also a lot of perceived anxiety contributed by limited exposure to English in real life, where students find it hard to put such a language into practice outside the classroom. For instance, students who have really lacked such exposure may be left feeling totally unprepared or even totally inadequate when faced with real communicative tasks (Cheng, 2002). This is what usually makes learner anxiety since when they are put into a real-world situation, the learner does not know how to get their message across effectively. Another student puts it this way: "No one speaks English at home, so I'm unprepared when I want to speak to someone in English, I just freeze because I don't get the practice."

4.5 Academic Pressure Situation and Performance Expectations

The pressure in subjects such as English, and also having high performance expectations increases anxiety towards the English language. Many are under the high grades pressure in English classes or institutional standards. This even worsens the pressure and anchors further the fear of failure; hence, people avoid engaging in any activity related to language learning (Trang, 2011). A student stated, "The pressure gives me a lot of nervousness to excel in English exams because if I did badly, it would seem to others that I was quite dumb too."

4.6 Socio-Cultural Barriers and Institutional Hurdles

Socio-cultural barriers and institutional challenges further aggravate the situation regarding language anxiety. In a multicultural or multilingual educational environment, students could feel isolated or completely alienated, especially when they belong to a non-English-speaking background (Sarfraz et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2021; Sarfraz et al., 2018). These socio-cultural contexts undermine the confidence which the students may possess for their language skills and instead add to their anxiety levels when it comes to participation in any forms of English-based academic or social activity (Hamid & Idrus, 2021). A student explained, "Sometimes, I feel that I do not belong in class because my classmates are better fluent, and I can hardly keep pace with them. I feel that there is judgment about my accent."

4.7 Coping Mechanisms that Students Have Adopted

4.7.1 Self-Directed Learning (Reading, Writing, and Practicing English Independently)

Self-directed learning has been revealed to be one of the very important coping mechanisms applied by students trying to cope with English language anxiety. Many students in fact carry out independent reading, writing, and language practice outside of educational situations,

which serves as a means of reducing anxiety through improving students' confidence and skills (Tasan et al., 2021). It liberates students from the feeling of helplessness and dependency on others for progress in the language (Raja et al., 2021; Sarfraz et al., 2018). One respondent said, "I try reading English books at home and write short stories. It helps me practice it without pressure; I can make mistakes and nobody judges."

4.7.2 Peer Support and Collaborative Learning

Peer support and collaborative learning provide critical approaches for handling language anxiety. Students often feel a sense of comfort when working with peers who bear similar burdens (Ahmad et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). This situation creates an environment with much-needed support for practicing and learning without the fear of judgment (Liu & Cheng, 2014). Collaborative learning thus acts to decrease anxiety by instilling among learners a sense of community and shared learning experiences so they could learn from each other in a less threatening atmosphere (Sarfraz et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2021). A student explained: "Working with my classmates on group projects has really helped me get over some of my fears. We all learn from each other, and I feel more comfortable making mistakes."

4.7.3 Exposure to English Media (Movies, Books, Podcasts)

Exposure to English media, including movies, books, and podcasts, is yet another effective strategy. Learning English for students in an informal environment allows them to hear the language in different contexts, improving their listening and comprehension skills while reducing focus on anxiety associated with language use (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Therefore, exposure to media represents a less stressful way to introduce oneself to the language, thus helping in boosting their confidence. One interviewee said, "I watch English movies with subtitles, which makes me feel less anxious because I can understand the context, thus helping me improve my vocabulary."

4.7.4 Informal English Conversations

Informal English conversations are a practical way of reducing language anxiety. Conversations of this nature can occur among friends, family, or fellow students in the casual environment wherein learners can practice speaking without the stare of life-long labels or pressure from formal assessments (Hafeez et al., 2024; Irshad et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2019). Studies have shown that such encounters are helpful for growing fluency and confidence, which lessens the intimidation one feels about learning the language, hence English (Ho & Truong, 2022). Student: "I often chat with my friends in English during breaks. It's not about perfect grammar but just getting the words out, which helps me feel more relaxed."

4.7.5 Most Helpful Teachers

Searching for advice from teachers isn't necessarily adopting or mentoring of conditions which are simply drawn from some perspectives (Ahmad et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). A teacher who offers vital remarks together with emotional assurance can relieve anxiety

along with creating a more conducive, supportive atmosphere of learning (Edmondson et al., 2016). By publicizing the phenomenal strategies of learning language and becoming good role models to the students, mentors can substantially improve students' confidence during the learning process in acquiring a language (Fatima et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2021). One of the students said, "My teacher has been so supportive always encouraging me to keep trying; having someone believe in me really helps reduce anxiety."

4.7.6 Institutional Support (Language Clubs, Remedial Programs, Workshops)

Clubs, remedial retention programs, and workshops may be classified as types of institutional support that allow students to effectively cope with language anxieties. Not only does such a program advertise additional avenues for students to practice their English in a supportive environment, but anxiety about making mistakes might disappear and the overall proficiency be enhanced (Khodadady, 2013). Such resources possess a certain identity and belongingness to which many languages learners' resort when faced with anxiety (Hafeez et al., 2024; Irshad et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2019). To quote a learner: "The language club at my university is a great resource. It gives me a safe place to practice without judgment, and it's been one of the most effective ways I've overcome my anxiety."

4.8 Implications and Recommendations

The resolution of the English Language Anxiety (ELA) in the educational sector requires a joint effort from the educators, institutions, and policymakers involved, particularly in Pakistani universities. The key recommendations outlined in this section focus mainly on the psycho-social implications of the educator-institution-student interaction that influence language anxiety and the learning experience practical suggestions for educators and institutions, curriculum design and implementation, psychological support, and finally, suggestions for research directions.

4.9 Practical Suggestions for Educators and Institutions

One of the most important theoretical suggestions for educators is to create a non-threatening supportive classroom environment that promotes active participation (Fatima, Khan & Kousar, 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2021). The findings of the present study have shown that language learners tend to experience increased anxiety when they feel their errors are being negatively judged. Thus, the educator should focus on positive comments and constructive feedback, not just on correcting errors. Informal conversation in small collaborative working activities in English would alleviate anxiety since students was be working together (Niazi et al., 2024). By providing an environment that values communication over perfect grammar, the teacher was allowing students to feel less uncomfortable communicating in the language.

Students' language learning journey largely depends on being supported by the institutions. Language clubs, informal language practice sessions, and remedial programs should be established to give students supplementary chances to practice low-pressure conversational contexts of the English language, which in turn would alleviate anxiety (Hussain et al., 2021). Counseling services and workshops specifically designed for language anxiety could also provide students with skills

to deal with the anxiety-causing situations in developing language competency. There should be an atmosphere within the institution that gives students the courage to seek help without any form of ridicule.

4.10 Curriculum Design Aimed at Alleviating Language Anxiety

Curriculum design is essential in addressing EAL. A curriculum guaranteeing anxiety reduction should assure linguistic competence and equally focus on building confidence in using the language (Khan, & Hassan, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2019). Content-based language instruction has proved beneficial in that it uses subjects with which the students are familiar to teach the language in a way that becomes meaningful and less fearful for them (Hinkel & Finch, 2006). CBI allows students to use that language in the context of the real world without the pressure that comes from limiting their focus to grammar or vocabulary. This has been shown to maintain active participation in the learning process and encourages a chilled environment (Azhar, 2024; Azhar et al., 2022).

Flexibility in the assessment system, for example; formative with summative tests, should help lessen students' fears and afford them the opportunities to present their competences in a less threatening way. An active member giving feedback on the students' learning journey that is provided regularly instead of just being the source of high-stake exams was foster students' sense of achievement and build up their self-confidence with regard to English language proficiency (Azhar, 2024; Azhar et al., 2022).

4.11 Psychological Support and Confidence-Building Strategies

Psychological support and confidence-building are fundamental components in fixing the issue of language anxiety. As aforementioned by Hussain et al. (2021), students with little self-confidence in their language abilities are often more anxious and this may interfere with school achievement and language learning. Thus, universities must implement psychological support systems, such as counseling services, that specifically deal with language anxiety. Counseling could help students create ways of coping and strategies to deal with their incessant anxiety, hence increasing their overall learning experience in ways beyond expectations (Khan, & Hassan, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2019).

In addition to counseling, the language teaching should involve many more confidence-building activities. Completion of these activities would be such things as giving presentations, debating, having group discussions, or telling stories, which would allow students opportunities to practice speaking in an orderly but comfortable environment. When everyone gets an opportunity to receive applause and positive feedback for their spirited contributions, they become confident in their strengths (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022). Teachers could also encourage students to keep language assimilation journals or to engage in other types of reflection that would allow them to follow their own progress and see improvement. Such a process builds a sense of growth or achievement and the ability to focus on success rather than deficiencies within a society (Hafeez et al., 2024; Irshad et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2019).

The introduction of mindfulness techniques and relaxation exercises may also harness the energy of anxiety and stress. Simple breathing or meditation prior to speaking tasks may lessen anxiety for performing students. Teachers might design strategies that include these practices within their classrooms or encourage students to use them prior to tests and oral presentations.

4.12 Summary of Key Findings

Anxiety concerning the English language was studied, along with coping mechanisms used by Pakistani university students, in the main objectives of this present study. The study, in the findings, uncovered a host of factors that contributed to the development of anxiety regarding the English language; some common syndromes being linguistic problems, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and limited exposure to the language outside the classroom.

Linguistic problems were one of the major reasons for students' anxiety; linguistic problems stand for such common areas of anxiety generation as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Many students reported being distressed and frightened when they spoke English alone because they were not proficient in grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. According to Hussain et al. (2021), students often, under the duress of inability to express themselves, develop a fear of making mistakes; hence this barometer extends to fears of classroom ridicule. These fears begin to interfere with the learning process whilst becoming constant companions in the background of the learning experience, where outright non-participation is often the students' response.

Another significant factor contributing to ELA was the fear of negative evaluation, especially in relation to peer pressure and teacher criticism. This fear is particularly strong among students who are in the habit of picturing language learning as performance in which one has been constantly evaluated and judged by peers and instructors (Niazi et al., 2024). Thus, many associated anxieties with speaking practice in front of others whereby they would feel judged upon by their accentedness or grammatical mistakes. Such fear, as added by Ahmed et al. (2024), was highlighted when students were to speak in formal academic settings such as presentations or oral exams. Self-confidence was another critical factor influencing ELA. Most of the students reported their anxiety was exacerbated by an overall poor self-confidence concerning English-speaking current English ability. Referring to Hussain et al. (2021), students with decreased self-confidence concerning their language proficiency tended to veer away from English in speaking or discussing, which definitely worsened their anxiety. The low self-confidence, in large, was due to experiences concerning failure and criticism in the past, leading to a circle of self-doubt and avoidance. Limited exposure to English was further associated with ELA. Many Pakistanis do not have the chance to practice the English language in everyday real-life situations because, at home, they are mainly exposed to their native languages. Such limited exposure means that English is not developed as a global language where people are accustomed to informal uses in social interactions or media consumption, hence leaving them almost unprepared with higher anxiety when it comes to speaking English in academic or social settings (Kayani et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020).

The study also revealed that both internal and external performance and academic pressures add to anxiety. Like most students, Pakistani students were known to have to live with high expectations from their parents and teachers about their performance in examinations, and this pressure was more evident with regard to language subjects (Hussain et al., 2021). Academic pressure makes the student suffer because he or she might feel that he or she is overwhelmed from outside. So, he/she would try to avoid punishment, which is usually stress and the fear of failure.

A range of coping strategies was reported by the students for dealing with the aforementioned ELA: self-directed learning through peer support, exposure to English media, or guidance from teachers and mentors. Self-directed learning like reading books in English, watching English movies English speaking with friends did help the students improve their proficiency and lessen the anxiety associated with it, they said. Another important strategy was peer support and collaborative learning, where working alongside others in a safe environment meant that the students could practice talking without fear of judgment (Niazi et al., 2024).

4.13 Disciplinary Contribution of the Study within Language Learning

The study makes a significant contribution to the field of language learning per se, focusing the lights of specific factors by which English language anxiety operates among university students in Pakistan. Although it is true that previous studies explored language anxiety in different sectors of education, this study is one of the inaugural studies directed toward Pakistani universities, offering a reasonable picture of cultural, institutional, and linguistic factors or aspects that contribute to such anxiety.

The findings of the study strongly mark the need for a more holistic perspective in the teaching of languages, which was address not only the skills in linguistics but the emotional and psychological barriers experienced by learners with regards to language learning. This piece of research was further contributed to the argument that language education should not merely be confined to teaching grammar and vocabulary but also towards devising strategies to mitigate anxiety and boost the students' confidence levels. Study, on the other hand, accentuates the importance of a supportive and non-threatening learning environment wherein students feel safe to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

Besides presenting bottlenecks as well as coping mechanisms of students, this study also gives big importance to educators and institutions that seek to provide greater support to their students in reducing their language anxiety. Findings endorse practical interventions, including informal practice opportunities, psychological support, and anxiety-reducing activities into the curriculum, to alleviate the effects of ELA on language learning.

4.14 Final Reflections on Attending to Anxiety towards Learning the English Language in Pakistani Universities

Addressing ELA in Pakistani universities needs the cooperation of stakeholders. The educators have a significant role to play in creating an environment where students can freely use English without proper settings. Effective implementation of communicative language teaching

approaches: those that emphasize learners' interaction and fluency over accuracy provides students enough motivation for risk-taking language learning.

Apart from that, Curriculum designing can be made in such a way as to look into the students' emotional and psychological aspects of language learning. Content-based instruction using subject matter for teaching language skills with collaborative learning activities offers an opportunity for students to experience a less testing situation (Hinkel & Finch, 2006). Other methods may include assigning mindfulness exercises and relaxation techniques for anxiety control in language classes.

Institutions should strengthen their support systems for students by improving or enhancing language clubs, remedial programs, and counseling services. In addition, organize mass workshops on stress management and language anxiety to enable students to cope with the pressures of language learning experiences. Furthermore, a culture of inclusion and diversity should be promoted in academic institutions to reduce the socio-cultural barriers contributing to ELA to create a wholesome supportive learning environment for all students.

Future studies must continue developing creative solutions to reduce ELA in higher educational institutions in Pakistan. Research on teacher education, specific coping strategies, and institutional support systems are some topics that need to be explored instead of dwelling on the topic of ELA. These findings were informing policy and practice in language education.

5. Conclusion

This study examined English language anxiety (ELA) with particular reference to recognition of major factors causing anxiety, coping mechanisms adopted by the students, and recommendations for reducing this anxiety in all other forms in the context of language learning. ELA is a well-documented phenomenon affecting language learners' capabilities to perform in second language (L2) contexts effectively. This study worked into English language anxiety with a lot of variables to see how students in Pakistan experience English language anxiety, and how it affects their academic and personal lives both qualitatively and quantitatively. The following two sections summarize finds, attempts to give justification to these findings by providing various considerations in contribution to language study, and present some final thoughts on addressing ELA in Pakistani universities.

5.1 Future Research Directions

New research into innovative means of addressing ELA, particularly in the context of the universities in Pakistan, should continue. Research may seek to explore the long-term effects of some specific interventions designed to reduce language anxiety, such as peer tutoring programs, language workshops, and mindfulness-based practices. Longitudinal studies would measure both the lasting effects of language anxiety intervention upon language proficiency and anxiety variables among students.

Another avenue for future research entails looking at how contextual variables, including public versus private university status, may affect students' perceptions of ELA. Such considerations can help to design more-situated interventions. Also, future studies might study how culture and socio-economic conditions affect students' experiences concerning language anxiety across different areas of Pakistan.

There should also be research on how well digital tools and online resources can help reduce language anxiety. In the context of growing online learning and digital language platforms, it would certainly be worthwhile to look at how technology can be used to provide students with opportunities for low-stakes language practice and for increasing their comfort level with English (Reich, 2022). Platforms like language exchange programs, virtual reality environments, or social media-based learning groups may provide such a low-anxiety space for students to practice their language skills without feeling judged by others in a face-to-face context.

Teacher training and professional development are other serious matters for research. Studies are needed to explore how training in identification and alleviation of language anxiety specifically may improve teachers' effectiveness in better helping students. This could include embedding psychological ways of viewing language learning in teacher education programs so that future teachers will learn how to create danger-free environments for their respective students.

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